GENDERED SOCIAL IMAGINARIES IN THE TURKISH
HUMANITARIAN FIELD: THE STRATEGIES OF SYRIAN
REFUGEE WOMEN TO REACH AID

A Ph.D Dissertation

by
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Ankara

December 2022

Dedicated to the memory of my Dhonbe, Kaafa and Marindhaththa

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FIELD: THE STRATEGIES OF SYRIAN REFUGEE WOMEN TO REACH AID

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
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by

AMINATH NISHA ZADHY

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in
quality, as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science.

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Tahire Erman
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I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in
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ABSTRACT

GENDERED SOCIAL IMAGINARIES IN THE TURKISH HUMANITARIAN

FIELD: THE STRATEGIES OF SYRIAN REFUGEE WOMEN TO REACH AID

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Ph.D, Department of Political Science and Public Administration

Supervisor: Associate Professor Dr Tahire Erman

December 2022

This dissertation investigates how Syrian refugee women in Ankara cope with their systematically enforced dependency on humanitarian aid. It uses gendered social imaginary as the theoretical framework. With the initial premise that refugeehood is a gendered experience where gender is a logic of organising humanitarian aid, it demonstrates how actors in the humanitarian field deploy *gendered templates* at both organisational and interpersonal levels. Paying particular attention to the interactions between humanitarian aid workers and refugee women sheds light on how gendered social imaginaries are drawn from templates emerging from discursive constructions that delineate deservingness categories in the humanitarian field. While female vulnerability predominantly associated with refugee women is a vital template guiding humanitarian enactments, the study exposes how refugee women have to simultaneously contend with contrasting gendered templates that act as barriers to their access to aid, leading them to rationalise specific behaviour in response and deploy specific strategies as they attempt to

conform to the role of the ideal humanitarian subject. In the field study, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 20 refugee women and aid workers were conducted, complemented by participant observation in multiple sites in Ankara where Syrian refugees are concentrated. The data from the field study further illustrated the significance of humanitarian aid practices along the formal-informal axis when examined at three levels – the national, the district and the neighbourhood.

ÖZET

Türkiye'de İnsani Yardım Sahasında Cinsiyetlendirilmiş Toplumsal Kurgular: Suriyeli Mülteci Kadınların Yardıma Ulaşma Stratejileri

Zadhy, Aminath Nisha

Doktora, Siyaset Bilimi ve Kamu Yönetimi Bölümü

Tez Yöneticisi: Doç. Dr. Tahire Erman

Aralık 2022

Bu çalışma, Ankara'da yaşayan Suriyeli mülteci kadınların sistemsel olarak insani yardıma bağlı kalmaya mecbur bırakılmakla nasıl başa çıktıklarını incelemektedir. Cinsiyetlendirilmiş toplumsal kurgular, çalışmanın teorik çerçevesi olarak kullanılmıştır. Bu çalışma, öncelikle mülteciliğin cinsiyetlendirilmiş bir tecrübe olduğu ve cinsiyetin insani yardımı düzenlemek için kullanılan bir araç olduğu görüşüne dayanarak, insani yardım sahasındaki aktörlerin cinsiyet şemalarını hem kurumsal hem de kişiler arası şekillerde nasıl kullandıklarını göstermektedir. İnsani yardım çalışanları ile yardım alan kadın mülteciler arasındaki etkileşime özellikle dikkat çekilmesi, insani yardım sahasında hak ediş kategorilerini belirleyen söylemsel yapılardan doğan kalıplardan nasıl cinsiyetlendirilmiş toplumsal kurgular çıkarıldığına ışık tutmaktadır. Özellikle mülteci kadınlarla bağdaştırılan kadın savunmasızlığı insani yardım hareketlerini yönlendiren elzem bir kalıpken, bu çalışma mülteci kadınların insani yardıma erişimlerinin önünde engel teşkil eden çelişkili cinsiyetlendirilmiş kalıplarla nasıl mücadele ettiklerini, buna

cevaben de insani yardım alan ideal kişi rolüne uyum sağlamaya çalışırken birtakım davranışları rasyonalize etmeye ve bazı stratejileri uygulamaya yöneldiklerini açığa çıkarmaktadır. Alan araştırmasında, Ankara'da Suriye'li mültecilerin yoğun olduğu birçok bölgede 20 mülteci kadın ve insani yardım çalışanı ile derin kapsamlı, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılmış, bu görüşmeler katılımcı gözlemleri ile tamamlanmıştır. Alan araştırmasından elde edilen veriler; ulus, bölge ve mahalle olmak üzere üç farklı düzeyde incelendiğinde formel-enformel eksende insani yardım uygulamalarının önemini daha da net bir şekilde gözler önüne sermiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Suriyeli mülteci kadınlar, insani yardım, cinsiyetlendirilmiş toplumsal kurgu, sivil toplum kuruluşları, Türkiye*

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encouraged me to begin my PhD here in Turkey and has been my bulha in shiny armour, fighting away hordes of my doubts, fears and insecurities. We have laughed and cried our way through Ankara and I hope we continue to do so elsewhere in the world too.

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I have an eternal debt of love and gratitude to my partner Ahmet Emre Çepoğlu, whose touches are here and there on my thesis. Out of all the wonderful supportive things you did, the best was making my writing desk ergonomic and getting me a second monitor. This thesis is all the better for having its author write it while comfortable.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

An encounter with a refugee would have been difficult ten years ago in Turkey. Their invisibility is not only due to the complication of their status in a country that has not ratified the additional protocols of the Geneva Convention but also because Turkey was more of a transit route to the historied and far more expansive refugee governance regimes in Europe. My first encounter was with displaced Congolese in Istanbul when I was part of the surveying team for a project of the Middle East and Africa research and policymaking centre at Kadir Has University in 2012. The events unfolding in Syria were yet to register as one that would change the refugee protection landscape in Turkey. As I was exploring the dynamics of migration and displacement of Africans who wound up in Turkey, I was slowly becoming conscious of the differences in mobility and the immobility faced by different people worldwide. By 2014, the concern for Syrian refugees was at a fever pitch; interest in the African migrants was replaced with more urgent calls to examine the provision of protection for the "guests" from next-door neighbour Syria.

This interest was coupled with the steady stream of Turkmen refugees who were fleeing Iraq and the threats of the Islamic State that burgeoned seemingly out of nowhere.

Iraqi and Syrian refugee communities were far more visible than refugees from Africa, such as Somalian and Congolese refugees or refugees from Asia, such as the long-displaced Afghan refugees. When my friends reached out to me, requesting that I provide tutoring for refugee students, the Turkmen refugees had a storehouse that had been converted into a warehouse for aid materials ranging from clothes to toys to food aid provided for them by well-wishers. In one of these warehouses, I began my attempts to tutor extremely energetic Turkmen students bored with their enclosure in a foreign country and separated from formal education for close to a year due to their forced displacement. By 2015, I also found myself similarly positioned as a tutor to Syrian refugee students in Altindag Municipality. By then, the complexity of the issue in both Syria and Iraq was being established, and for the first time, refugee families had to face the newly minted legislative and administrative machinery that was the cornerstone of refugee governance in Turkey. Policymaking, overhauling systems and implementations were a slow process, the welcome from the Turkish public was slowly faltering, and schools, youth centres, and other civil society spaces that had extended a spontaneous welcome to the displaced families were slowly closing off to the refugees. This was when far more organised support for refugee families emerged under the strict auspices of the government. The international aid efforts became streamlined as their partnership with the Turkish government clarified, and they managed to funnel funds to local NGOs under the government's tight control. Humanitarian projects funded by the European Union were being approved and implemented by government-approved organisations such as the

Association for Solidarity with Asylum seekers and Migrants (ASAM) and the Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay). The nature of humanitarian aid changed as it became professionalised and widened in scope.

Increasingly, I interacted with humanitarian activities organised by local and international humanitarian organisations. My vantage point in the lives of refugee students and often their mothers allowed me to observe specific patterns of behaviour as humanitarian experts engaged with humanitarian subjects, which stimulated my academic interest. The elementary observation I had was that refugee women and men engaged with the humanitarian aid providers in markedly different ways. Humanitarian aid providers engaged differently and made different demands of the refugee families depending on their origin. An incident that remained with me was when we, as an informal group of university students, attempted to fundraise for an event for refugee students. We met with an affiliate of the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) to discuss the prospects of being funded. The discussion was one of empathy and agreement that the refugee students were fast turning into the "lost" generation due to delayed access to formal education, uneven access to healthcare, secure shelter and other facets of normalcy in childhood. Within the discussion, the idea of an art therapy session came up, and curiously the affiliate insisted that they would require the participating girls to be unveiled. A little taken aback, we said we do not make demands on how they dress.

What is the source of such demands by people in positions of authority and power for people who have lost everything, I thought. What are other curious conditions entailed when humanitarian protection is offered? Are faith-based organisations less likely to make demands on how refugee children present themselves? Soon after, I found myself in

Sihhiye at a centre run by a group of churches based in Turkey. The church supported an outfit run by a Christian Iraqi woman who had been displaced twice. She supervised refugee women who were sewing bags that were being sold abroad. "Is this a humanitarian aid project?" I asked. "The church recognises the humanitarian plight of these people, and we are offering them jobs so they can be on their own feet." answers the refugee woman, separating herself from the refugee plight. I offered to get her in touch with some of the Syrian mothers who also needed such support. "Impossible. They will not commute and come to Sihhiye. The mothers will have to travel on their own; they do not usually want to leave their children, especially if they are from Halep / Aleppo. Are they from Halep?" she asks. "I do not know," I said because my geography was inadequate, and I could not fathom how it mattered. Yet it did.

Humanitarianism in practice looks different from how it is in theory, which should not surprise me. Discussing this point in the case of humanitarian intervention into conflict zones, Fassin argues that humanitarian actions are based on what he calls the "politics of life", which attempts "evaluations of human beings and the meaning of their existence" in order to decide who is worth saving:

> ...it takes as its object the defense of causes, which presupposes not only leaving other causes aside but also producing public representations of human beings to be defended (Fassin, 2007: 501).

Away from the urgent nature of life or death in a conflict zone, the humanitarian process takes on a more mundane cast. Even so, complex evaluations and presuppositions take place from large entities to small-scale outfits to even informal groups of students who organise to assist a group of the most vulnerable people in the world. What complexities drive this decision-making, and how can I capture the configurations that govern this

process for different people? How does this impact refugee women who were my main point of contact and the target of so much speculation within the humanitarian aid effort, whether by professional policymakers with the EU concerned by veiled young girls or even a refugee woman herself in a position of humanitarian authority?

1.1 The context and main thesis

In 2011 when the "Syrian Revolution" devolved into intense warfare, it created the largest forced migration since the Second World War. The initial open border policy of Turkey means that 20% of the Syrian population was able to find some measure of safety in Turkey, with close to 4 million Syrian refugees currently registered and an additional 500 000 to 700 000 Syrian refugees who are not registered (Belanger and Saracoglu, 2020; Kivilcim, 2016; Williams et al., 2020). According to UNHCR (2016 as cited in Yıldız and Uzgören, 2016), 77% of Syrian refugees are women and children, and 90 per cent of the total population of Syrian refugees live in urban areas and outside of camps. With the 350 000 non-Syrian refugees and asylum seekers currently living in Turkey, these statistics effectively classify Turkey as a country of transition for displaced people and a noteworthy host country and, thus, a humanitarian hub (Coşkun and Eski, 2020). The onset of warfare in Syria coincided with attempts inside Turkey to overhaul the legal framework to assert greater control over migration into Turkey. However, it can be argued that the external factor of the conflict in Syria shaped the implementation of the legal framework in significant ways.

Turkey's migration policy has historically been geared towards including migration flows of those who claim Turkish descent and are thus *"muhacir"*(Coşkun and Eski, 2020). This

means that the forced displacement of Turkic Greeks and the Turkic Bulgarians were treated as the return of ethnic Turks under the Settlement Law of 1934 rather than an issue of refugee protection and asylum. Policies on migration had not solidified into legislation, and this was even more so for policies governing refugees and asylum seekers. The impetus for legislation that addressed refugees and asylum seekers was seeded in the late 1980s in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution and subsequent instability in the Middle East, Africa and Southeast Asia, which resulted in the Asylum Regulation in 1994, the first legislation in Turkey aimed at standardising the process of providing legal protection for displaced people. The concerns driving the production of this piece of legislation was national security rather than refugee protection, made evident by how much of it was aimed at bringing refugee status determination under the control of the Turkish government rather than the UNHCR, which was deemed to be failing to arrange for the resettlement in third countries of those persons officially recognised as refugees (Kirişçi, 2012).

Turkey's current refugee protection and asylum regime are regulated by the Law of Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), the most comprehensive piece of legislation created in Turkey, which came into force after the arrival of Syrian refugees in 2011. Between 2011 and 2014, Turkey's refugee protection regime was carried out ad hoc, often reactive to domestic and international politics, creating inconsistencies in the legal status and ambiguities about the rights of the new arrivals. In acknowledgement of the presence of Syrian refugees, the Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR) was created owing greatly to the partial ratification of the 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Additional Protocols, which inserts a geographical limitation to refugee protection. The

geographical limitations mean that only those who flee conflict in European countries would be recognised as refugees. Thus, the TPR is a group-based *temporary* protection for Syrian citizens that ensures non-refoulment and grants social assistance in or outside the camps (Yıldız and Uzgören, 2016). Both the LFIP and the TPR are implemented by the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), a civil institution massive in scope, which was established in 2015.

The legal framework that has shaped the asylum system has significantly contributed to the structural features of the Turkish refugee protection regime. It creates a legally enshrined differentiated system that acknowledges displacement only as a temporary condition which prevents a rights-based regime of refugee protection. Non-Syrian asylum claimants can be recognised by the Turkish government as refugees and thus can access international protection and resettlement though it is a cumbersome and fraught process. This avenue is largely restricted to Syrians. Moreover, both LFIP and TPR consider women in terms of their marital status to displaced men who are automatically in the political category that triggers legal protection (Kivilcim, 2016). The security framework which continues to shape the bureaucracy internalises the discourses of criminalisation and practices of control. Arriving refugees must register with the governate of the satellite cities they are designated to stay at and with DDGM, which has taken over the registration of refugees from UNHCR. Failure to register concurrently with both authorities jeopardises refugee claims and access to services and relief aid (Williams et al., 2020). The temporality angle prevents Syrians from accessing economic rights, although limited work permits were allowed under a new regulation in 2016. Access to social services is tied to their area of residence, but the grey zone of informality in the governing of

migration and asylum means that these social services are unevenly provided in the different areas in which the Syrian families are dispersed.

The humanitarian space in the Turkish refugee governance regime is also impacted by the structural features introduced by the LFIP and TR. UNHCR in Turkey is limited to providing policy and technical advice to the Turkish government for refugee registration, camp management, and voluntary repatriation. ASAM, established in 1995 under close cooperation with UNHCR, performs an intermediary role between refugee groups, Turkish authorities and national and international NGOs and is currently the implementing partner of UNHCR. This makes ASAM a vital organisation for distributing humanitarian aid (ASAM also is the registering partner for resettlement for UNHCR, which has had to step away from that role). DDGM carries out the registration of Syrians and assigns them to satellite cities as well as being involved in refugee status determination since the protection of Syrians is legally defined under the authority of the Turkish government (Yıldız and Uzgören, 2016). Registration with DDGM also enables Syrian refugees to access humanitarian aid provided by the Turkish Red Crescent or by government social assistance offices and solidarity foundations.

1.2 The state of the humanitarian field

The so-called Syrian crisis has led to the rapid proliferation of humanitarian organisations in Turkey, but the defining characteristic of the Turkish civil sphere is the state's overt presence and the international organisation's passivity. Not only are international humanitarian organisations treated with scepticism and distrust, but they are also largely constrained by the bureaucracy. This leaves space for local humanitarian organisations, yet their survival depends on their alliance with the Turkish state, meaning that the state

controls refugee protection and humanitarian aid provision. Under the LFIP, the central administration is concerned with issues of entry, visa, residence procedures, and managing work permits, while issues of social integration, cultural services, social work, education, and vocation education are seen as local government issues under the governorship (Valilik) and municipality (Belediye). This means there must be some level of cooperation between government organs and humanitarian organisations.

Despite the broad division of the refugee protection action, the local governments' mandate is far too vague and lacks a framework for funding, making for a weak structure for the appropriate refugee protection to be carried out. Firstly, municipal funding is allocated without consideration for the Syrian population who might be attempting to access services from that municipality (Coşkun and Uçar, 2018). The lack of any reference to the Syrians, who are meant to be provided with social services that would lead to their survival, means that the local government is rather incapacitated. The weak welfare regime of Turkey is further weakened when it comes to providing statutory services to people. Despite this lack of a clear role for the local government, there have been attempts to foster close cooperation with the civil society organisations which are often conservative organisations with close links to local and central governments. Danış and Nazlı (2019) referred to the relations between the state and civil society as a faithful alliance due to the propensity for the rising NGOs to be faith-based pro-government NGOs. Thus, the state looms large in the humanitarian process not because they direct local governments through regulations and funding but through informal affiliations with civil society organisations. We see a humanitarian space populated by social assistance and solidarity foundations that are informal in structure and semi-autonomous

governmental foundations operating alongside the provincial governates to provide relief aid. Larger organisations such as the Turkish Red Crescent and ASAM are active in providing social services such as psychosocial support.

This faith-based nature of refugee protection facilitates a protection based on everyday moral acts and sidelines the advocacy of refugee protection based on it being a right. While Coşkun and Uçar (2018) highlight instances where some municipalities could carry out a rights-based approach as they cooperate with non-governmental organisations on the ground, the general gist of the Turkish refugee protection regime is based on a moral approach. This is further highlighted by the work done by Atasü-Topcuoğlu (2020), who observed that the social workers providing social services subsume relief aid for refugee families into their work and do not consider the services they provided the Syrians as a fulfilment of a right nor do they consider it to be related to refugee protection.

It is against this background of the multifaceted relationship between state and non-state institutions and the retrenchment of the international humanitarian organisations, although not the dependency on international funding, that this study attempts to problematise the enactment of humanitarianism and look into how refugeehood is experienced, particularly by refugee women and how they mobilize their agency in response to their constructions in the humanitarian field. Refugee women are highlighted due to the focused attention on them and their construction as the de-politicised and de-historicised recipient of aid which goes hand in hand with the moral duty approach that is the characteristic of the Turkish refugee protection regime.

1.3 Research question and main arguments

Migration as a gendered process (Askol, 2009; Kofman et al., 2000) has been taken up by refugee scholars who have focused on the differentiated experiences of disempowerment of men and women through their displacement journey and refugeehood to highlight the immense cost of conflict but also to foreground the complexities of the refugee protection regimes which contribute to the perpetuation and production of gender disparities (Baines, 2017; Indra, 1987; Malkki, 2006; Olivius, 2016; Parrs, 2018; Rathgeber, 1990). The gender mainstreaming policies that were aimed at addressing gender disparity by including gender as a critical focus point at every stage of policymaking in every field and internalised into refugee protection in the 1990s is seen as a significant development that led to the gendered nature of the humanitarian space (Baines, 2017). I use the term *humanitarian field* to refer to the immediate operational site where humanitarian assistance is provided. With the initial premise that refugeehood is gendered within the gendered nature of the humanitarian space, the following questions emerge.

Research question 1

What explains the gendered nature of the humanitarian field?

Argument

Actors in the humanitarian field deploy *gendered social imaginaries* to enact humanitarianism. These gendered social imaginaries are constructed at both organisational and interpersonal levels, including interactions between humanitarian aid workers and female refugee recipients. Such gendered social imaginaries animate efforts

such as gender mainstreaming in the humanitarian space and contribute to a gendered refugee process.

Research Question 2

How do gendered social imaginaries in the humanitarian field contribute to refugee women's strategies?

Argument

The production and perpetuation of gendered social imaginaries at organisational and interpersonal levels impact how female refugees strategise and rationalise behaviour in seeking aid. Since gender is a logic of organising relief aid through gendered social imaginaries, it shapes how refugee women understand themselves and constructs their sense of self. This is most evident in the case of urban refugee women whose survival and, therefore, their life revolves around seeking aid for themselves and their families.

Research Question 3

How do informal practices that exist in the humanitarian field draw from and contribute to gendered social imaginaries.?

Argument

Informal practices that are part of the humanitarian processes due to the temporariness of the refugee protection regime allow gendered social imaginaries to thrive. They become a crucial platform that allows for rationalising the differentiated experiences of refugeehood.

There are multiple challenges to the notion that humanitarian aid is an impartial and neutral process that results in the direct assistance of refugee communities (Abild, 2010; Fassin, 2007; Mills, 2013; Olivius, 2016; Slim, 2003). By centring gender as a critical lens, we can identify humanitarianism as a mechanism contributing to the gendered experiences of refugeehood. This study will also rest on two crucial concepts that make up its theoretical framework: social imaginaries as an overarching theory to explain the stories, narratives and intersubjective understandings that lend coherence and thus stabilises such subject formations and in/formality as a concept that captures the interlinked nature of formality and informality characterising the humanitarian field and providing the environment within which the gendered social imaginaries thrive in.

1.4   Significance

Refugee studies have gone a long way towards bringing a gendered perspective, but it needs to be brought into dialogue with scholars in humanitarianism to appraise the position of humanitarianism in refugee protection. I hope this study will contribute towards unpacking the gendered nature of humanitarianism, going beyond discussing the consequences and focusing on how refugee protection and humanitarianism are what it is. Explorations of gendered social imaginaries entail a meso-level analysis which looks at the *interactions* between macro-level social imaginaries (generated in the humanitarian space constituted by multiple stakeholders) and the micro-level social imaginaries (generated in the humanitarian field amongst (female) refugee recipients and humanitarian aid workers). Combining the study of institutional practices and the study of situated accounts will allow for the acknowledgement of agency and its embeddedness in

discursive and societal structures, exploring their interrelatedness rather than engaging in an agency vs structure debate.

Aside from problematising humanitarianism, this study will contribute to a broader understanding of refugee women. As has been mentioned, a gender perspective focuses on the consequences of gender on refugee women due to its deployment in the refugee protection regime. Less has been said about who they are and who they become during the attending processes of refugeehood through their agentive responses to their gendered constructions. This is where the question of female subjectivities and refugee selfhood becomes essential. By addressing this gap and focusing on the women themselves, I hope to contribute to understanding strategies deployed by refugee women. In a practical sense, I hope this can contribute to abandoning the totalising perspectives about refugees that are common not only in the humanitarian space but also in the broader public and academia.

Social imaginaries theories have increasingly gained currency as an explanatory tool to discuss broad social and political phenomena (Patomäki and Steger, 2010), but it has not been used to analyse refugee protection. By focusing on the organisational and interpersonal interactions in humanitarianism, I hope to contribute an example of a social imaginary in practice and add to the conceptualisation of social imaginaries. Thus far, social imaginaries are conceptualised as "situated in a paradigmatic level" and "characterised by a high level of inarticulacy"(Alma and Vanheeswijck, 2018: 3), but it is deployed through everyday practices. I hope to expand on the incremental power of social imaginaries by focusing on how it underlies everyday practices.

1.5   Plan of the dissertation

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical framework of this study. A detailed literature review will expand on the relevant concepts in humanitarianism and establish an understanding of social imaginaries by drawing on the theoretical discussions of Castoriadis and Taylor. The concept of in/formality as a platform upon which gendered social imaginaries are deployed is explored using its conceptualizations by Smart et al. (2016) and Waibel and McFarlane. This chapter will discuss how these disparate theories can be linked in the present case study and their significance.

Chapter 3 provides the methodological framework of this study. The study is designed as a qualitative case study inquiry and will combine an interpretive approach with a critical theory approach. The first section of the chapter reflects on the methodological paradigms to establish the footing on which this research rests and link it to the theoretical framework. The second section focuses on the methods that would go into the case study design: in-depth interviews and participant observation. The final section tackles issues of ethics and establishes the ethical framework of this study

Chapter 4 provides detailed background on the Turkish refugee protection and humanitarian enactment context. This first part of the chapter discusses macro-dynamics, such as nation-state formation, as a crucial feature of early Turkish migration management and its refugee protection policies and humanitarian aid provision. Security concerns then marked the emergence of the comprehensive migration management legislation, significantly impacting the provision of humanitarian aid. I also highlight the looming presence of the state as it characterises the humanitarian field, discuss the retrenchment of

international humanitarian organizations and present the local dimension of the civil sphere that is in close alliance with the state, especially in its faith-based humanitarian engagements. I conclude by discussing the various constructions of refugees in Turkey, particularly refugee women, which animates the Turkish humanitarian field.

Chapter 5 is predominantly based on interviews and will focus on how social imaginaries permeate the humanitarian field and emerge in the interpersonal interactions between refugee women and aid agents. It tracks how social imaginaries provide coherence to organised humanitarian action and rationalises specific strategies for refugee women.

Chapter 6 will be based on field observations, countless conversations and interviews to establish how the humanitarian field is populated with different types of humanitarian organisations. It highlights the presence of hybrid practices of formality and informality at three levels; namely (1) professionalised Turkish aid organisations at the national level; (2) local organisations at the district level where we find foundations (*vakıf*) and associations (*dernek*) – the two primary forms of civil society organisations in Turkey which take on the task of providing the bulk of the material assistance to refugee families; and finally what is labelled as (3) 'one-man humanitarian operations' at the neighbourhood level in which a male organizer organizes loose and informal networks of donors and singlehandedly take on the massive work of relief assistance.

Chapter 7 is the final chapter which will highlight links and breaks, opportunities and constraints in refugee protection and comments on the (re)production of female subjectivities within the humanitarian field through gendered social imaginaries.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This dissertation explores the gendered nature of humanitarian space and introduces the concept of gendered social imaginaries to understand how gender is deployed in enacting humanitarianism. Several scholars of humanitarianism have maintained that contrary to the claims of being based on principles of human rights; the humanitarian space is not a neutral, apolitical space where the action is impartial (Fassin, 2007; Mills, 2013; Slim, 2003). Furthermore, refugeehood is gendered in that refugee men and women have different experiences due to gender differences (Baines, 2017; Hyndman, 2000; Hyndman & Giles, 2011; D. M. Indra, 1999; Malkki, 2006). This is further accentuated due to the introduction of gender mainstreaming policies into the humanitarian field (Pollack & Hafner-Burton, 2010). In the dissertation, the humanitarian field is defined as the physical site where aid relief is dispensed within which gendered social imaginaries are deployed. It is differentiated from the humanitarian space, the socially negotiated space that includes *the political, strategic and ideational aspects* of humanitarianism, as Mills (2013) formulated in his broadened definition.

The theory of social imaginaries sheds light on how the humanitarian field is based on gendered constructions within the refugee protection regime. Explorations of gendered social imaginaries require observing the micro-level interactions generated in the humanitarian field between refugee women and humanitarian aid agents to make sense of their behaviour on the field. This is combined with the concept of in/formality, which highlights the existence of hybrid practices of humanitarianism shaped by and reinforcing gendered social imaginaries, shaping refugee women's situated experiences. Observing the interaction between gendered social imaginaries and the in/formal practices of the humanitarian field allows for the acknowledgement of refugee women's agency as well as its embeddedness in discursive and societal structures. This chapter provides the dissertation's theoretical framework, focusing first on the gendered nature of humanitarianism, especially in the urban context, to contextualize how gendered social imaginaries can emerge and how it can be a useful lens to understand gendered practices. This is followed by how in/formalities as a concept capture the hybridity in the humanitarian field.

2.1   The humanitarian field within the humanitarian space

Classical humanitarianism is presumed to rest on principles such as humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality, which are embedded in the definitions and practices of many humanitarian organizations. This assumption is challenged by the recent trends within the humanitarian field, where organizations acknowledge the contradictions between humanitarian theory and humanitarian praxis. Heralded as 'the rise of new humanitarianism'(Fox, 2001), organizations embrace a political voice and moral justifications for humanitarian action, particularly interventions, and oppose neutrality as

an impossible ideal (Barnett, 2005; Fox, 2001). Slim (2003:1) argues that humanitarianism has always been a "political project in a political world", and inevitably so. New humanitarianism is the stance of organizations such as Doctors Without Borders, which is evident in the politically charged messaging they offer when providing medical assistance in conflict zones and other locations in which they operate.

A strictly spatial understanding of a humanitarian space envisions it as a physical operating zones /environment where principle-based, apolitical humanitarian actions occur. The limitation of such a spatial understanding is that it foregrounds exceptional spaces, such as refugee camps, that are physically fixed and delineated. To avoid this spatial bias, Mills (2013: 610) took multiple elements operating in the humanitarian field together and coupled them with a Bordieuan understanding of social space to propose the definition of humanitarian space as a "physical, ideational, political and strategic environment". The physical aspect of the humanitarian space can be referred to as the humanitarian field, which is the immediate site where those in need are located and where the physical protection and/or relief aid is distributed. The political and strategic environment refers to the broader context of refugee governance where policy-making and humanitarian enactment occur through collusions, challenges, transformation and compromise amongst interested stakeholders from states, international organizations, local actors and refugee communities.

Meanwhile, the ideational aspect shapes humanitarian action through organizational processes, discourses, local and global interactions, and encounters between refugee beneficiaries and humanitarian aid agents, which is particularly important for this dissertation. This ideational aspect is not separated from the physical, political and

strategic environment but regulates and provides a framework of logic to define humanitarian action and its enactment. Simultaneously, the ideational aspect of the humanitarian space is impacted by the physical, political and strategic environment that constitutes the total humanitarian space. Furthermore, all these aspects interact with each other towards the material creation of the humanitarian space via design, spatial relations and technology.

The concern of this dissertation is not the broader humanitarian space within which geopolitics and international humanitarian enactments shape and impact the local humanitarian enactments. Instead, this research focuses on the gendered understandings stemming from humanitarian ideations which are deployed in the contemporary enactments in the humanitarian field, especially in an urban context that is purposefully managed and regulated to police displaced people under the purview of a state which is interested in containing refugees as temporary guests despite the longevity of refugee encampment (Agier, 2002; Fábos & Kibreab, 2007; Gill, 2010). In focusing on the gendered constructions that shape the humanitarian field, we move beyond the pitfalls of a strictly spatial focus of humanitarianism which makes sense since the contemporary context of urban refugeehood is expansive, situated in a porous physicality and producing encounters through multiple avenues of ideations, politics and strategies between an increased variety of actors; the state agencies, local and international humanitarian organizations and importantly, citizen humanitarian actors.

2.2 The urban context of the humanitarian field

Scholarly discussions about the humanitarian field in an urban context began to take shape fairly recently owing to the fact that primary actors, including the states, were resistant to legitimizing it (Crawford, 2022). Even as late as 1997, the UNHCR affirmed its position on continued restrictions on assisting refugees in urban areas, only acknowledging the inevitability of urban refugees in 2009 (Darling, 2017). This shift towards acceptance comes in the face of protracted conflict and the dearth of the three durable solutions of integration, resettlement and voluntary repatriation, leaving little choice but turn institutional and policy attention to the urban humanitarian field.

Scholars of asylum and refugee geographies would point to the consistency of urban refugee settlement at the fringes of the city, far from city centres and often cropping up in rural areas. The physically demarcated spatial features characterizing refugee camps are no longer operational, with refugee communities co-existing with citizens creating a far more contested arena. Citizens also become participants in humanitarian actions, providing aid relief in often informal networks and organizations. Thus, it becomes a socially negotiated arena with refugees interacting with citizens, aid organizations and state presence to claim their rights to protection and dignity. The humanitarian field becomes one of heterogeneity as all actors collude with and challenge each other even while the state tries to regulate the activities of the civil sphere (Baban et al., 2017). The expansion of the humanitarian field in urban settings and the increased acquiescence to the new category of urban refugees at national and international policy levels mean that the city represents a site of autonomy and opportunity which does not exist in a demarcated humanitarian area such as refugee camps.

In addition to expanding the list of actors, the urban context of the humanitarian field is increasingly characterized by a neoliberal tendency that seeks and legitimizes market-based solutions to refugee protection in the urban space through self-reliance policies (Bhagat, 2020). This is accompanied by the retrenchment of the welfare state (Peck and Tickell, 2002) and the entrenchment of the policing of refugee communities and border practices (Darling, 2017). Neoliberal solutions to refugee protection also complicate the humanitarian aspect of protection. As Darling (2016: 232) argues, "the framing of asylum seekers as a burden emerges as a discursive and symbolic achievement of neoliberal politics". Neoliberal encroachment into the humanitarian field prioritizes the ability of refugee beneficiaries to provide themselves with food and shelter security and to support themselves for their medical and educational needs, transferring the humanitarian responsibility primarily onto the refugees themselves. This neoliberal policy of self reliance, according to Bhagat (2022), resolves the tension that emerges when states seek to fulfil humanitarian obligations and accepts refugees but also give into xenophobic populism and exclude refugees from a right over resources. One way of promoting this self-reliance is entrepreneurship supported by vocational and business training programs and devolution of responsibility to financial institutions that provide mobile cash transfers and grants, credit schemes, and micro-financing (Bhagat and Roderick, 2020). The guiding principle is that refugees with skills, capacity and agency would lead to refugees with economic self-reliance. Central to the process is the idea that refugee dependency on humanitarian aid is negative. The rhetoric of self-reliance elevates it to become the moral character of the "deserving" refugee.

2.3 The Gendered nature of the humanitarian field

Understanding how gender became entrenched in the international and local refugee protection regimes requires a look at the history of how feminist theories which problematized gender-blind institutionalism impacted international policy circles in the development and humanitarian field. Scholars mark the dissemination of their critique as an essential process that led to humanitarian aid being made conditional on adherence to gender equality as a principle of human rights. This subsequently introduced the gender mainstreaming policies of the 1990s (Baines, 2017; Barnett, 2005). Within two decades, gender mainstreaming would become a strategic tool to tackle gender inequality by embedding gender-sensitive practices and norms into structures and processes (Daly, 2005; Pollack & Hafner-Burton, 2010). Despite the lofty goal of gender mainstreaming policies, what was generated in practice is a specific coding of refugees, focusing on women and predominantly constructing them as helpless, apolitical victims of circumstances.

In hyper-focusing on refugee women, gender mainstreaming policies have been criticized for institutionalizing a new form of gender bias in refugee protection regimes and the humanitarian field, which adds to the old bias of assuming refugee persons to be male by default and designing male-centric policies (Hyndman and De Alwis, 2004; Hyndman and Giles, 2011; Olivius, 2016). Making refugee women a "universal humanitarian subject" depoliticized and de-historicized corresponds to the need to make humanitarian assistance nonpolitical to appease most donor states (Malkki, 2006). In the absence of historical and political context and within a mainstreaming framework, gender became nothing more than a "knowable set of relationships in humanitarian situations", which led to the

"creation of intelligibility of agency without necessarily linking the complications of local histories, cultures and conflicts to their consideration" (Hyndman (2000:74-75).

Although gender mainstreaming has lost its buzz within the past decade, its legacy remains in how international humanitarian organizations such as UNHCR continue to represent refugee women as subjects of humanitarianism (Allwood, 2013; Beveridge et al., 2000; Meier & Celis, 2011). Refugee protection that is women-first due to their construction as the universal victim sits in tension with the recent rise in neoliberal tendencies and the proliferation of the rhetoric of the entrepreneurial woman couched in discussions of empowering refugee women. It pays no heed to the cultures where women are deeply embedded in their families and, at the same time, ignores the empowerment they experience through this social embeddedness.

2.4   The gendered constructions of refugee women's deservingness

While top-down politics play a key role in the emergence of the gendered nature of the humanitarian field, bottom-up processes that often discuss refugee deservingness also contribute. Within refugee studies, there is growing recognition that deservingness is being discursively framed according to specific criteria: whether refugees have control over their fate (Holmes and Castañeda 2016), their attitudes of gratitude and docility (Iqbal et al., 2021), their potential to repay to society (Hetz 2022), identity (Kissová 2018; Za kariás and Feischmidt 2021) and their level of need (Thiess 2022). These five criteria draw from the CARIN (Control, Attitude, Reciprocity, Identity and Need) typology discussed by Van Oorschot (2006) within the welfare deservingness scholarship. Our focus is far more on understanding the framing of refugee deservingness through gendered templates,

which we suggest permeates both institutional frameworks and shapes interactions at the interpersonal level.

Scholars have made a number of important critiques linking the construction of vulnerability and subsequent production of deservingness in humanitarianism to social constructs that are gendered, racialised and ageist (Allsopp 2017; Lupieri 2022; Papada 2021). A line of thought woven into this academic work alludes to the "institutional fractioning" of the label 'refugee' as cautioned by Zetter (2007), which the entwinement of the humanitarian care and migration control mechanisms are contributing to (Pallister-Wilkins 2020). Humanitarian *care* is increasingly underpinned by discourses justifying a hierarchical construction of deservingness that "essentialise notions of vulnerability, victimhood and dependency" (Palillo 2022, 322), leading to the inclusion of some and the exclusion of others (Lupieri 2022; Sözer 2019) and exposing refugees to different forms of *control* (Malakasis and Sahraoui 2020; Ticktin 2011).

Scholars have addressed the de-politicised and de-historicised representations of refugees, drawing particular attention to how it shapes an understanding of refugee women (Barnett 2011; Darling 2016; Malkki 1996). The predominant image of the refugee as a lone racialised woman surrounded by her children (Johnson 2011) taps into our broad understanding of the family and the role of women in it and triggers concerns about 'womenandchildren' (Enloe 1993). Rigid gender divisions adopted throughout the world require husbands and fathers to provide financial support through wage/income-earning while women, as wives and mothers, maintain the household and care for children. Notions of motherhood as women's natural state and nurturing as something innately feminine generate an unquestioned expectation about the woman's physical location in

the domestic sphere (Parr 2019). This male breadwinner/female homemaker family arrangement has strong normative and prescriptive power and is deeply entrenched in the humanitarian field where aid organisations ascribe their aid provisions as of interest solely to the refugee women (Hyndman 2000).

This stands in contrast to the treatment of refugee men, with Allsopp (2017) problematising their portrayal as 'militarised', with their fatherhood under suspicion and even as young men, with their youth cast as a threat. As Palillo (2022, 331) rightly recognised, 'refugee men are [placed] at the bottom of any hierarchy of deservingness' in the humanitarian field. Women with socio-economic subservience, greater responsibility to provide domestic labour and conforming to their gender role as homemakers are perceived as non-threatening and, therefore, more deserving (Hyndman and Giles 2011).

This is all the more so since refugee women occupy a 'feminised subject position' (Turner 2019, 597), coded as subservient and resilient, allowing humanitarian organisations to build their fundraising around them, whereas men −even in their displacement and refugeehood− are envisioned as power holders. When humanitarian fundraising becomes an overriding purpose, organisations rationalise the preponderance of refugee women in the humanitarian field (Rajaram 2002) and produce simplistic representations of women as nothing more than passive conduits for aid (Baines 2017). It generates a hierarchy with aid workers having the authority to speak on behalf of the refugee women (Hyndman 2000). With this authority, aid agents reinforce the conditions of dependency as refugee families increasingly turn to them for alternative ways of survival when dysfunctional service provisions fail them. For refugee men and women, the humanitarian field becomes an arena within which they express their gender as they cope with a new gender dynamic

where women are at the forefront in delivering aid and men are often ignored, if not outright suspected, as partners (Olivius 2016). Much as traditional gender division has "female dependency inscribed into the model" (Lewis 2001, 135), refugee contexts also have female dependency inscribed into it, but this time on the aid provision system. This female dependency does not seem problematic within a framework of women seen as deserving due to their coded vulnerability, passiveness and docility. The theoretical recognition of such gendered constructions is important to put together the puzzle of how gendered social imaginaries animate the humanitarian field

2.5   Gendered social imaginaries in the humanitarian field

While race, caste, religion, sexuality, nationality and class all intersect to produce different refugee experiences, I argue that gender is the crucial producer of particular vulnerabilities and disparities due to the gendered nature of the humanitarian space. The theory of social imaginary developed by Castoriadis (1975) and Taylor (1989) is the theoretical bridge that connects the multiple understandings of gender in the humanitarian field to the experiences of refugeehood. "Social imaginaries", argues Taylor (2002):

> … are the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations (p. 106).

Gendered social imaginaries can be taken as a crucial constituent of the ideational aspect of the humanitarian space, permeating its institutional framework and impacting interactions, particularly between humanitarian aid workers and refugees, resulting in women more than men becoming "unequally located in structures of interpretation, representation, decision making, policy generation and program delivery"(Indra,

1999:18). Based on the post-Heideggerian hermeneutical turn, this theory explains how an object (in this case the phenomenon of humanitarian aid) can be experienced differently as they are interpreted differently by different individuals according to their subjective understandings. It identifies the humanitarian practices as shaped by constructions, making humanitarian enactments meaningful through intersubjective and socio-historical meaning-making processes. Social imaginaries not only shape the humanitarian practices but the meaning-making processes involved also allow us to understand and rationalize events such as violent conflict, protracted displacements, and humanitarian action.

2.6   Social imaginaries as a theory

The point of departure for Castoriadis and Taylor is that human actions cannot be explained as pre-determined. The conceptualization attempts to probe what animates an individual and how this individual-level animation can lead to collective social behaviour and the institution of society itself. For Castoriadis, all social institutions possess a crucial imaginary where the institution's functionality is linked to its symbolic formulation. He calls this the social imaginary, which he broadly defines as how society views itself and views the world, which goes on to be "part of its truth or its reflected reality (Castoriadis, 1997: 39). Thus, the understanding of social institutions should be done not in terms of its functionality, but in fact, both institution and function should be understood by the symbolic meanings attached to them which turns them into meaningful objects emerging through intersubjective interactions and rooted in already established cultural and socio-historical understandings.

Taylor echoes this notion and sums it up as follows; "Humans operated with a social imaginary well before they ever got into the business of theorizing about

themselves"(Taylor, 2002: 108). Like Castoriadis, Taylor understood social imaginary to inform the reality and actions of masses of individuals, not just specific privileged subsets. Thus, society is constructed through the collective agency of social individuals embedded in a social surrounding and carrying out social practices. Social imaginary is the understanding that informs us of our expectations of each other and indicates to us how things should be and how things are. In that sense, the imaginary stops becoming a medium of distortion as is traditionally understood; instead, it becomes a structure of logic that gives coherence to chaos. Referring to the elemental and all-encompassing creativity of the social imaginary, Castoriadis (1997) says that it provides "a specific orientation to every institutional system…the basis for articulating what does matter and what does not (p. 145). However, this should not detract from the position of the individual in the production of social imaginaries, who becomes invested in institutions and the individual-level utilization by the masses to make sense of their world. Instead of reducing the social imaginary to institutional representation, according to Gaonkar (2002), its existence should be understood as imaginary in a double sense, as institutional representations and a way through which individuals imagine the world that they live.

Due to the vastness of this phenomenon of the social imaginary, it can seem like this theory refers to anything and everything. A close reading of the foremost thinkers on this concept reveals identifiable features. Firstly, a social imaginary provides us with self-understanding whereby we as individuals understand who we are. Such self-understanding comes into being through interpretations based on the templates provided by the social imaginary. Understanding the world we live in is a continuous process of interpreting events we face, and self-understanding is the reactive conclusions we reach about

ourselves through interpreting this. Self-understandings are necessary for preference formulation and making choices about our actions (Carnevale, 2013). Secondly, the social imaginary that supplies us with our self-understandings is also rooted in the social context "in a historical time and a geographical space" (Andersson, 2010: 10). This means that events, norms, practices, processes, interactions and any such object of interest are invested with meaning in relation to and with reference to historical and localized social systems of meaning. Thirdly, Taylor (2004), by comparing the social imaginary with "background information", establishes that the social imaginary is more than the latter in that it is a widened understanding of who we are in relation to each other: "how we stand to each other, how we got to where we are, how we relate to others groups.."(p. 25). This intersubjectivity means that social imaginaries come to be shared by a large group due to the production of common understandings and common practices with shared legitimacy.

These three properties of the social imaginary also establish the link between the social imaginary and the actions that it begets. Taylor elucidates this by saying, "If the understanding makes the practice possible, then…it is the practice that largely carries the understanding."(Taylor, 2004, p. 25). According to ten Kate's (2018) reading of Taylor:

> They are not even something we have but something we do. They become real in and through lived practices that exceed the level of cognitive frameworks like a grand ideological narrative (p. 124)

Far more than Castoriadis, Taylor pays attention to the everyday hermeneutic role of social imaginaries as it legitimizes common practices, establishes norms, and emphasises the historical-cultural roots of the social. He sees common everyday practices invested with symbolic expression, shared and perpetuated by the masses, as an essential aspect of the interpretation and deployment of history and culture over time in what he calls the "long

march". The auto-alterations that occur during this process of interplay give rise to a "fertile cluster of cultural forms, symbolic expressions and institutional practices" (Taylor, 2002, p. 11). To emphasize the everyday hermeneutics, Taylor, in his account of the modern imaginary, draws attention to the socializing spaces within the public sphere marking out coffee houses, salons, and cafes within which people congregate and everyday discourses transmit representations of the self in the form of symbols, myths, legends and other collectively shared significations; language thus becomes crucial. This occurs even in virtual platforms, with collective meaning-making occurring through social media, where world-making has intensified and deepened to levels even Taylor could not have imagined. The evolving meaning-making and understanding that occurs due to social imaginaries allows us to grasp the norms underlying social practices and expands or constrains the realm of possibility and realizability of ways of living. Our actions make sense because our understanding, informed by social imaginaries, contextualizes the actions by defining how and where we stand in relation to others and positioning us in the worldview that we construct through interpreting the social and historical knowledge available to us.
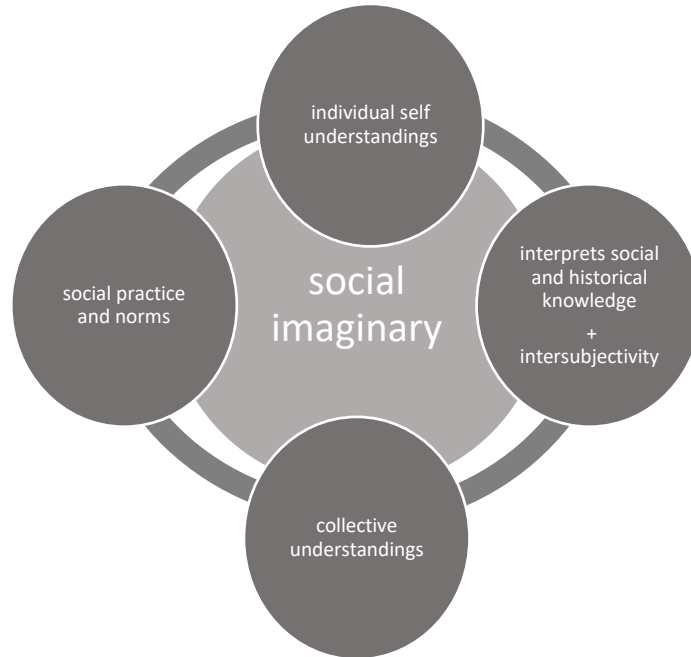
Figure 1: Social Imaginary is in the fluid middle space, serving as a background template for individual self-understandings that are achieved through the interpretation of social and historical knowledge as well as the intersubjective interactions that generates shared or collective understandings and culminating in social practices that further perpetuates the social imaginary

2.7 In/formalities in the humanitarian field

Having established the main theoretical concepts of the humanitarian field, which is attended by ideational processes that produce and are shaped by gendered social imaginaries, we can now turn to how such gendered social imaginaries thrive in the humanitarian field. Here I turn to the notion of in/formalities which I argue attends refugee protection for urban refugees and the civil sphere, which has become the key component in delivering humanitarian aid in the urban context (Feischmidt et al., 2019; Crawford, 2022). The construction of urban refugees as 'spontaneous' groups that are displaying a flagrant disregard for the ideals of the nation-state through their mobility into the interior of the nation, primarily cities, often rationalize their encounters with informality: "'the

presence in cities of mobile, self-directed refugees. . . violate[s] the idea that displaced people must be helpless and dependent'(Marfleet, 2006: 42). Predominantly located in cities, urban refugees navigate a socially negotiated arena of contestations and challenges as they attempt to claim their right to livelihood and dignity (Crawford, 2022). One characteristic of their refugeehood in urban sites is the informal practices they encounter in multiple spheres, from the informal economy to informal housing.

Research on informal job markets illustrates how refugees are employed for labour-intensive tasks under precarious conditions (Akgündüz & Torun, 2020), predominantly in the informal market (Altındağ et al., 2020). In contrast to the notion of refugees being drawn into informal employment, de Beer and Tumaine (2020) demonstrate that they can also display some agency by marketing their innovative potential while seeking economic self-sufficiency.

Elsewhere Glorius et al. (2016) discuss informal housing practices such as squatting amongst refugees, while on the other hand, Fawaz et al. (2022) recognize that it is not only refugees who engage in informal housing practices; such practices also emerge when resources and hitherto incongruent local actors come together to solve–and benefit from–the housing needs of refugees in urban sites. That informal practices create both precarity and opportunities is evident: in the informal economy, they bring some agency to refugees (Hilton, 2011), but they also create the conditions of exploitation and marginalisation (Haysom and El Sarraj, 2012); and in informal housing, they provide affordability but has insecurity baked into the system as unfair evictions, and inadequate conditions and infrastructure are unavoidable (Fawaz, 2017; Baban et al., 2021; Balkan et al., 2018; Ilcan et al., 2018).

2.8   Conceptualizing in/formalities in the civil sphere

Taking the cue from recent scholarly forays into discussing informality in the governance of refugee camps (Sandri, 2018) and border crossing (Kallio et al., 2019), this research moves its analytical gaze beyond the employment and housing markets and focus on the sphere of civil society in general and humanitarian aid distribution in particular. Recognized in the multi-governance approach (Kahraman and Tanıyıcı, 2018) as a viable response to the 'refugee crisis', civil society includes a heterogeneous set of actors (Lewis, 2019) and thus challenges our understanding of organized humanitarian enactment. The noticeable rise of citizen volunteers and spontaneous grassroots humanitarianism at border cities (Fechter and Schwittay, 2019), particularly the spirit of volunteerism enacted due to the movement of refugees and migrants into Europe since 2015 (Guribye and Mydland, 2018), all contributing to a citizen initiative for global solidarity (Haaland and Wallevik, 2019), has challenged our understanding of organized humanitarian enactment. Of particular note is the rise of faith-based humanitarianism, both organized and spontaneous, establishing themselves as sources of material and spiritual support for many refugees who seek to mitigate and understand their suffering through a spiritual lens (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011; Mavelli and Wilson, 2016). Despite the significance of such actors in the humanitarian field, the way they are structured – informally or formally, or in-between – is overlooked.

The suggestion by Smart et al. (2016) to adopt the term in/formality is helpful in this context as it captures the interlinked nature of formality and informality. Foregoing an understanding of formality as linked to the state and involving codification and rigidity, and informality as 'a lack of, or reconstitution of, state power' (Waibel 2009 cited in

McFarlane and Waibel, 2016: 16), I seek to highlight how both are intertwined. This allows us to frame how unstructured practices can occur within structured hierarchies, fissures between rules can allow for unruly behaviour, and predictable flows of actions have unpredictable interactions nested within. Moving away from a discrete definition of informality as unofficial and illegal ways of acting and being – a definition which dominates discussions of housing or employment where informality is due to a lack of legal title deeds or due to unregistered economic activities– we move beyond the state-organization relationship. Instead, such a conceptualization of in/formality captures how the formal (regulated, coded, scripted, procedural and inflexible) is intertwined with the informal (unregulated, uncoded, unscripted, spontaneous and flexible), allowing the exploration of how humanitarian practices unfold in ways and purposes that has little to do with the agenda of the state. Discourses, narratives, stories, and assumptions that are internalised or externalised, become crucial to rationalise in/formalities in practices, providing the rationale for how and why distribution activities are carried out. Such discursive techniques can be considered the crucibles carrying in/formalities allowing us to understand how they can be rationalised through a gendered social imaginary.

2.9   Conclusion

This chapter provides the two key concepts that make up the theoretical framework of this study: social imaginaries and in/formalities. It highlights the importance of gender in the make-up of the humanitarian space that lends to the emergence of gendered social imaginaries as it is rationalised in the many practices in the humanitarian field. It also establishes in/formalities as a concept that allows for the analysis of the particular context of Turkey, where informal practices are intertwined with formal procedures. This provides

theoretical weight for a discussion on how gendered social imaginaries thrive through in/formalities. The study's urban context is crucial to the theoretical formulation, with refugees finding themselves in a heterogenous humanitarian field. Urban refugee experiences are markedly different from the experiences of those in exceptional humanitarian spaces precisely because their encounters with humanitarianism are fragmented, contested and hard-pressed.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Scholars studying refugeehood from different fields acknowledge that it is gendered, starting with initial escape from conflict, journey across borders, camp life, urban settlement, status confirmation, resettlement, or repatriation. Scholarship utilises a gender perspective to discuss the discursive representations of refugees and how they are strategic representations, emphasising refugee women to attract funds (Baines, 2017; J. Hyndman, 2000; Johnson, 2011; Malkki, 2006; Rajaram, 2002). The analytical focus is on refugee lives, particularly women whose agency is constantly challenged within refugee protection regimes. This research will focus, instead, on the gendered nature of the humanitarian field itself. Gender becomes a critical lens due to the multiplicities of understandings in the humanitarian space that create multiple subjectivities along gendered lines, making the refugee protection regime and the refugee experience highly gendered. This chapter will expand on the methodology utilised to answer the question of how gendered social imaginaries interact *with the informal practices in the humanitarian*

field and contribute to the refugee women's strategies that can (re)produce or challenge gender inequalities.

The open-ended and dynamic aspects of a qualitative research design make it an appropriate choice for research into refugee protection regimes and the humanitarian space, which has had to contend with criticisms due to its inadvertent overreliance on quantification in the process of refugee protection (Baines, 2017; Hyndman, 2000). The present inquiry combines an interpretive approach with a critical theory approach and tackles the puzzle by adopting a case study research design. The first section of this chapter will reflect on the methodological paradigms which would establish the footing on which this research will rest and how the theoretical framework can be connected. The second section will focus on the methods that went into the case study design, paying attention to how they answer the research question and fit into the theoretical framework guiding the research. The final section presents the issue of ethics that cropped up and establishes the ethical framework that guided decision-making during the data collection, analysis and reporting stages.

3.1 Reflections on methodological paradigms

Both interpretive and critical theory approaches guided this research inquiry. Firstly, an interpretive approach (also called constructivism by Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) emphasises the subjective and localised experiences of the individuals and examines realities as (co)constructions. The ontological importance of subjectivity and contextuality in attempting to understand the social world makes it appropriate for the theory of social imaginaries. An interpretivist researcher considers research an "interactive process shaped by personal history, biography, gender, social class, race and ethnicity and those of the

people in the setting" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011: 45) and seeks a deep and detailed understanding of social phenomena without disregarding their position in the social phenomena.

The hermeneutic methodology accompanying an interpretivist approach was combined with a critical theory approach in this research. Influential scholars (Baines, 2017; Bigo, 2001; J. Hyndman, 2000; Isin, 2012; Nyers, 2013; Zolberg, 2009) have discussed the conditions within the refugee protection regime and the humanitarian space related to race, religion, social class and gender, which manifest as hierarchies, inequalities and injustices. Such power asymmetries are frequently concealed by the humanitarian language permeating the refugee protection regimes in international and local contexts. They point further inquiry towards an analysis of the structural and historical aspects of how the humanitarian space has been shaped by social, political, cultural, ethnic, economic and gender-related values. A critical theory paradigm, with its rejection of the notion of knowledge as neutral, positioned the research to problematise how knowledge contributes to the subordination of refugee women and men, how specific knowledge advances certain political and moral positions within structures that protects the nation-state and how that interacts with the individual subjective experiences of reality (Bhavnani et al., 2014).

This research inquiry was also informed by feminist methodologies closely associated with the epistemology and aims of a critical theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Refugee studies are indebted to feminist scholarship for much of the conceptual framework that has had a transformative influence in the policymaking shaping current refugee regimes. They continue to borrow from feminist theories to interrogate ongoing humanitarian praxis in refugee protection regimes by examining the gendered contexts of refugee

women, which explores how new gender inequalities are generated and old gender hierarchies are perpetuated within refugee camps, refugee (im)mobility, protection, integration and repatriation. This dissertation adopted feminist methodology to place "gender at the centre of inquiry" (Marshall & Rossman, 2014: 27).

Feminist methodologies are guided by an explicit concern for the condition of women and other marginalised people within a coercive gender hierarchy and challenge androcentric bias through methodological techniques which privilege accounts of women as an under-utilised source of knowledge (Spencer et al., 2014). It underscores how research itself constructs and produces knowledge rather than capturing it. The feminist methodology is also premised on the idea that events and processes have multiple meanings. It also acknowledges the role of values, biases and assumptions that shape research, starting from the epistemological level and warns against a dismissive attitude towards such biases and assumptions(Cosgrove & McHugh, 2002). Brooks & Hesse-Biber (2013: 14) advise researchers that instead of "dismissing human emotions and subjectivities, unique lived experiences, and world views as contaminants or barriers in the quest for knowledge, [researchers] might embrace these elements to gain new insight and understandings or, in other words, new knowledge". The implications of adopting such a feminist methodology will be further explicated in the methods section

3.2   Theoretical framework: Connecting paradigm to concepts

If the interpretive and critical theory approaches make up the paradigmatic building blocks of this research design, then the theoretical framework that was key to solving the puzzle is social constructionism. Social constructionism, with its multidisciplinary appeal, sees the world as being socially constructed through everyday social interactions of people,

mainly through discourses, and holds that individuals understand the world through their own perceptions of reality, using templates which are historically and culturally specific (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 2015; Parker, 1998). Such a theoretical framework anchored the research design to an interpretive paradigmatic approach and calls for methods that would mine multiple perspectives and in-depth descriptions, to foster comprehension of the different realities perceived differently by different individuals.

The theory of social imaginary developed by Castoriadis (1975) and Taylor (1989), which falls within the social constructionism literature, is the theoretical bridge that connects the multiple understandings of gender within the institutional framework of the humanitarian space to the experiences of (female) refugeehood. Through this theory, humanitarianism is understood not only as something based on ethical principles and legal precepts but as a construction that is made into a meaningful object out of intersubjective and culturally established meaning, through which events such as conflicts and displacement are understood and dealt with. I also expand on the conceptualisations of Smart et al. (2016) and McFarlane and Waibel (2016) on the intertwined nature of informal practices and formal procedures to discuss the spatial and discursive techniques underpinned by gendered social imaginaries.

Humanitarianism encompasses two types of actions that can impact refugeehood: relief protection and legal protection. This research is interested in relief protection in the urban setting, which provides goods and services necessary to enable minimal human dignity for refugee beneficiaries by humanitarian actors, including the state and local and international humanitarian organisations. Refugee camps, as a more defined arena of the humanitarian space, have been treated to greater academic scrutiny than the urban settings

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of refugee communities (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2010; Hyndman 1996; Agier 2002; Grabska 2011). The refugee agency in the urban humanitarian field is a more subtle form of agency operating through everyday practices. I argue that relief protection guided by gendered social imaginaries targets women (and children) as the most vulnerable beneficiaries and marks it as an arena of strategic negotiation, challenges and co-option.

3.3   Methods for data collection and analysis

This research is interested in gendered social imaginaries: how these draw from top-down interactions of state and global entities and then how they are deployed in the interactions with refugees who also participate in the co-construction of these imaginaries, and finally, what the consequences of such gendered imaginaries of humanitarian aid are in terms of how it significantly shapes the lives of refugee women.

Two methods were employed to uncover gendered social imaginaries and how they are deployed through humanitarian interactions, and how refugee beneficiaries, especially refugee women, respond through co-option, manipulation and negotiations, leading to (re)productions and/or challenges to gender inequalities. Interviews with refugee women and aid workers accounted for how such gendered social imaginaries come into force within the local context. Participant observation allowed me to observe humanitarianism in action and how gendered imaginaries shape interactions at the ground level. Exploring the discursive practices in humanitarian organisations, assessing the intersection of local and international humanitarian actions and the mandates that each brings to the urban humanitarian field and observing the techniques rationalised within the informal practices of the humanitarian field indicated how gender becomes a humanitarian logic of practice through the construction of social imaginaries.

3.3.1. Case study inquiry

To explicate the question of gendered social imaginaries in a refugee context, this dissertation took the form of a case-based inquiry. A case study inquiry is used to delve deep into a multifaceted issue to reveal underlying sources of the complexities in a social and political phenomenon from multiple perspectives (Simons, 2009, 2014; Yin, 2009). A case is defined by the temporal and spatial boundaries set around a context from which data can be collected to provide an in-depth description of situated practices and processes, which can then be analysed to explain how they are connected to larger structures and processes. (Burawoy, 1998) states, "the idea is to extract the general from the unique, to move from the micro to the macro and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future" (p. 5).

Syrian refugees living in multiple districts of the municipality of Altındağ, Ankara, and the humanitarian organisations that cater to these urban refugees are taken as the constitutes of the case study. Studying the instances of gendered social imaginary by linking theory to real-life context made it a descriptive case study of a theoretical construct per definition. It allowed me to find significant themes that define the concepts of the research question and link them to each other so that there can be an analytical understanding of how they work in relation to one another. Thus, it can also be typified as an instrumental case, defined by (Stake, 1995) as one where the case study provides insight into a broader social phenomenon; in other words, they become instrumental in understanding something else.

3.3.2. The site of the research and accessibility

The study explores multiple neighbourhoods and districts belonging to the municipality of Altındağ in Ankara, the capital city of Turkey. Ankara is home to 97 295 refugees, with a sizeable concentration in Önder. It is a site that is cut off from city centres but has facilities affiliated with the Turkish Red Crescent and has two branches of the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM), marking it as a vital spot for humanitarian action. In the case study, interviews were conducted with the refugees living in four districts of Ankara and aid agents from one specific organisation actively providing humanitarian aid assistance.

Accessing the site

My first engagement with refugee families in Ankara began in 2015 with meeting a community of Iraqi Turkmen refugees living in the district of Mamak on a trip to donate clothes. One of the community leaders requested that I arrange language lessons for the refugee children. Turkey's new immigration and asylum laws were just being implemented, and the refugee families were looking for ways for the newly arriving children to have some structure in their lives. I organised weekly language lessons for the Turkmen students and would go on to assist other such informal initiatives in the district of Kecioren and then finally in Onder. I have also been able to organise fundraising for families, observe events related to projects by humanitarian organisations and advocate for families at schools, solidarity foundations and community centres.

During a one-year tenure as the co-coordinator of the refugee aid project of the student volunteer organisation in Bilkent (TDP-UYP), I also worked closely with the Turkish Red

Crescent to arrange relief aid for families during Ramadan. I have also supervised student volunteers from the university as they participated in psycho-social support events for refugee children under the auspices of ASAM. My engagements with these humanitarian activities inspired me to think deeply about how refugee families and humanitarian workers interact. It introduced me to the stories of volunteer students and humanitarian professionals, indicating the persistence of specific themes. Similarly, I noticed the differences in how refugee families responded, indicating a complexity at play that goes beyond their role as passive recipients of humanitarian aid.

Access to vulnerable communities is subjected to gatekeeping, so it was an incredible stroke of luck for me to be invited to a position of authority and trust. However, that access is subject to many things. The districts in Altindag are seeing rapid gentrification and uneasy coexistence between Syrian and Turkish families. My exit and entry into the area are viewed with suspicion and even challenged by Turkish neighbours who are wary of foreign encroachment, especially since the attempted coup in 2016, which was a moment of intense trauma for Turkish and Syrian families. While inter-communal antagonism makes me more welcome amongst refugee families due to their desire for allyship, it can make for furtive trips under watchful Turkish eyes. The pandemic context also made access tricky since Syrian families were subjected to extra surveillance due to xenophobic fears that they might not be following public health orders. As much as such antagonism curtails humanitarian action, it also curtails research activities.

3.3.3. Interview

Interviews (see appendix A) were conducted by carefully considering the research question and highlighting the importance of conversational spontaneity and free interaction between researcher and participant. Qualitative interviews should be a tool to capture multiplicities, complexities, ambiguities and overlaps in the experiences of multiple participants of the same phenomenon. This study draws on the data collected from 20 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with refugee and aid workers (16 refugee women, one refugee man, two female and one male aid worker). Preliminary data exposed the inclination within the humanitarian field to favour single mothers who were widowed or divorced. In focusing on the condition of such women within a coercive gender hierarchy, I sought to apply feminist methodologies (Spencer et al. 2014), which allowed me to approach the participants on their terms to discuss their relationship to the humanitarian field. To ensure confidentiality, I did not openly confirm which participants I would contact from the list I compiled through the snowballing method and instead, with a focus on diversity, reached out to them individually. All participants were informed of the aim of the study and assured of its voluntary nature and conditions of confidentiality. Due to the public sensitivity surrounding the topic of refugee protection in Turkey, all participants felt safer by providing verbal consent only. All the names of the participants of this research have been changed for protection reasons in this write-up, and some information about their situation has been slightly altered to enhance anonymity further. Audio recordings during interviews were taken only after explicit permission.

The long friendship between myself and many of the refugee women through private humanitarian work allowed the interviewing to be an intimate and informal process.

Interviews were done through active listening and open-ended and probing questions to go beyond descriptions of lived experiences to uncover the "how" of situated interactions between refugees and humanitarian agents and the social constructions at play which shape encounters and relationships. In practice, this meant the flexibility to adapt, not only to the realities of life as a refugee but to the realities of life as a refugee woman. Semi- and unstructured interviewing methods allowed them to speak freely, a luxury they might not be frequently afforded. Studies reveal that even during asylum claims, where refugee women are often the spokesperson for families, they often have to adhere to scripts to avoid either penalisation or rejection (Ghorashi et al., 2018) as such broad, open-ended questions that devolve control and allow for free-flowing, unrestricted speech led to the most relevant data.

The interviews were conducted with a non-Syrian Arabic-to-English interpreter, Sarah (pseudonym), recruited based on previous collaborations to provide aid. Our working history lent to fluid communication between the researcher and the interpreter, further enhanced by her job in aid projects carried out by humanitarian organisations, making her an informative third party to the research. Multiple social visits before the interviews ensured familiarity between the refugee women and us so they would feel at ease during interview sessions at their homes. The formal interviews lasted three to four hours; some extended into informal conversations through lunches and teas and lasted eight hours. Keeping in mind the predominant domestic duty of childcare, we brought educational materials, food, and toys for the children and requested their presence elsewhere. The nature of childcaring is not simple, so we paused interviewing whenever mothers had to attend to their duties. When the conversation was light-hearted, and children were in the

vicinity, we interacted with them to distract them, breaking the formality of the interviewing, and making it dynamic and flexible.

The interviews with aid workers depended on the testimonials of refugee women. To privilege their accounts of humanitarian enactment, I requested that they provide us with sources of the humanitarian aid they depend on. Thus it steered the analytical attention from many mainstream organisations to the smaller ones embedded in the neighbourhood. My access to the humanitarian aid workers was somewhat limited by this bottom-up approach where I accompanied refugee women who were more often than not filtered at the organisation's doorsteps. This was particularly evident in the case of more structured and professionalised aid organisations where they refused participation. In that sense, my experience as a researcher also mirrored the experiences of refugee women who are often far more detached from professionalised organisations.

I had better luck with the less professionalised organisations, such as the vakıf, where I could interview two aid workers and converse with multiple volunteers. Our interviews were also semi-structured, carried out in Turkish and lasted two hours each, followed by more casual conversations. The fact that the female aid workers acted as gatekeepers to prevent me from speaking to male aid workers also assisted my analysis. It indicated to me how male aid workers are hierarchically positioned in a way that prevents them from being approached. Again, my experience as a researcher mirrored that of refugee women.

.3.4. Participant observation

For this research, participant observation was utilised primarily to develop a holistic understanding of the humanitarian field by closely examining the encounters that occur in

aid contexts between humanitarian agents and refugees. Participant observation is a flexible tool, and according to Musante and DeWalt (2010), it can be both a data collection tool and an analytical tool when carefully incorporated into the research design. In that sense, data generated from participant observation added nuance to the analysis of the data collected from the interviews. It was instrumental in exploring the settled ways of acting and habitual behaviour (Desjarlais, 1992), which shed light on the links between the humanitarian practices on the ground shaped by gendered social imaginaries. Moreover, participant observation allowed me to zoom out, whereas interviewing zoomed in and positioned the research in the wider context uncovering links between actions and/or processes that have not yet been considered in this research. The concept of in/formalities as a crucial factor in humanitarian interactions emerged by observing informal practices that could not have been analytically recognised through interviews alone.

As mentioned, I requested input from the refugee women in the research to identify the sites of participant observations. This allowed me to observe them setting off on their aid-seeking quests from their homes, through the urban terrain and to encounters in the operational field of humanitarian organisations. Participant observation consists of social skills, and in order to make informal social skills into a research tool, there is a need for the process to be systematic. I prepared a sheet with guiding points based on the key questions of how refugees and humanitarian agents engage with each other and highlighted the concept I hoped to capture in action (see appendix B).

I had assumed that as a researcher, I would engage in moderate participation, which Musante and DeWalt (2010) identify as being present at the scene of action, identifiable as a researcher but without seeking out interactions. It is a state of being more than a

spectator but less than what ethnography has traditionally been about. Often, encounters between refugees and humanitarian aid workers are negotiations and generate an atmosphere where refugees appeal to bystanders to garner legitimacy. This issue cropped up several times as I was identified closely with the refugee women I accompanied and was often asked to intervene to validate their personal history. If the point of entry into the site had been through a humanitarian agent, this complication would not have occurred since they will attempt to limit challenges to their authority in what is, in actuality, their place of work. Since several factors tip the balance between observation and participation, I made explicit the degree of participation I can engage in with the refugee women, which was usually translation and maintained an attitude that allowed adaptability.

Since participant observation relies heavily on the researcher to record their observation in a naturalistic setting, usually outside the researcher's control, it was essential to have a solid plan to capture data. The day-to-day events were recorded chronologically, including interactions, behaviour, and overheard conversations to make up the bulk of the record. They were initially captured as jot notes on a mobile device, preferably on the phone, and on note-taking apps, which were backed to a cloud to prevent its loss. The reason for this was two-fold: to minimise the impact on the flow of activities in the setting and to minimise the loss of data due to incoherent note-taking. Names were omitted, and only initials were used in these notes.

The jot notes were later expanded into field notes proper with descriptive details and structural coding, which later assisted in analysis. Attention was paid to maximising the details, including physical context, people involved, non-verbal communication and verbatim quotes. Impressions, thoughts and concerns also accompanied them. Field notes

as analysis emerged then (Musante & DeWalt, 2010). Engaging with the jotted notes was an activity of iteration as well because they because reading and re-reading them facilitated my immersion.

3.4   Ethical considerations

Social research often considers the potential benefits of pursuing knowledge far more than the costs. Ethical dilemmas are often considered procedurally at the behest of ethics committees and only to fulfil the minimum requirements of committees or other formal rules and regulations to enforce accountability around academia. They can be treated as administrative inconveniences and as hindrances to the advancement of understanding social life. This can be a considerable oversight, especially in the case of qualitative research, which can produce what Guillemin & Gillam (2004) calls issues of "ethics in practice". Qualitative research occurs in naturalistic settings, often operates with an emergent design, and is dynamic and interactional. All of these qualities generate specific ethical issues. This is demonstrated in the examples of early ethnography and anthropological research, which has had to account for its role in profoundly destabilising global social forces such as colonialism and imperialism (Trainour, 2014)

Qualitative research also tends to produce a certain type of knowledge about vulnerable people, often providing insights into power imbalances which are corrected by feminist methodologies that acknowledges how the research itself can operate in the same grid of power asymmetries. As van Liempt & Bilger (2012) highlight, qualitative research asks for a research relationship. This applies in the case of migrants and especially in the case of refugees and asylum seekers who fit Moore & Miller's (1999) definition of vulnerable people: "stigmatised, excluded and have[ing] limited control over their lives to maintain

independence and self-determination" (p. 1034). Research on refugees should be conducted with the acknowledgement that legal and social forces govern refugee lives, and research can be an intrusion into their lives and can have a negative impact, either immediately or even later if research shapes policies. Qualitative research should break down mistrust as much as it cares about building trust (van Liempt & Bilger, 2012).

3.5   Ethical framework of care

Questions of access, harm prevention, the autonomy of participants and reciprocity used to be seen as ancillary matters, but in qualitative research, they should be central questions. The critical axiology of this research required the adoption of a deontological approach and an ethical framework of care. The concept of the ethical framework of care owes a lot to feminist writers who criticised the tendencies of an overriding aim to produce knowledge which they claim led to the abstraction of ethical principles and keeping it as a fringe component of research inquiry (Hesse-Biber, 2013; Miller et al., 2012).

Identifying this ethical framework provided a model which assisted me in negotiating around unforeseen issues which might arise. It also safeguarded decision-making from inconsistent and individualistic moral frameworks. It offered means of thinking about moral behaviour and marked out the criteria against which I should consider what is right and wrong (Wiles, 2012). An ethical framework of care holds that ethical decisions should be made based on compassion and prioritising the ways which would benefit the individual or group under scrutiny.

This meant that solutions to ethical dilemmas were generated through contextualised reasoning and situational ethical positions rather than based on abstract universal rules. It

firmly grounded feminist concepts of relationality, positionality and reflexivity and goes beyond the principalist approach embedded in ethics committee guidelines where the emphasis is on general concerns such as honesty, academic integrity, respect for the autonomy of research participants, seeking justice, beneficence and non-maleficence.

As part of my ethical framework of care, I linked my participants to donors who would assist them with crucial concerns that shaped their refugeehood. Discussions about the access to education curtailed by the pandemic conditions prompted me to organise internet connections for several families by talking to their neighbours and offering to pay half of the bills. In this, I was assisted by the tremendous financial contribution of my social network and individual stakeholders interested in helping. I also attempted to assist one refugee woman in finding rentals that would allow her to be within the zoning requirements that would not harm her access to institutionalised forms of assistance such as cash transfers. In this, I was less successful, a fact that I discussed honestly and openly with my participants. I continue my relationships with them to this day through WhatsApp and maintain a policy of sharing updates on my research journey and honesty about what help I can facilitate for them as my circumstances and network shift.

Scholars like Hammersley (2011), Taylor (2015) and Trainour (2014) criticise the tendency to overdo morality within such an ethical framework. They warn against the inclination to consider researching endeavours as a venue to promote social justice and emancipation as a primary concern. They worry that this will hinder the pursuit of knowledge and limit it. However, it does not have to be one or the other. Combining ethics of care but carefully considering the methodological implications of working within such an ethical framework and how it impacts the process of "answering a set of factual

questions," which Trainour (2014: 70) claims is the ultimate research goal, will benefit research immensely. Expressing care through material assistance fostered incredible trust, allowing me to uncover many sensitive topics that might have been held in secrecy within the community. The research question of this inquiry is premised on the notion that knowledge production is not inherently beneficial; it can perpetuate existing inequalities and add new forms of inequalities, especially in the praxis of refugee protection. Not centring the needs of the most vulnerable participants of this research inquiry, actively and consciously, would be a contradiction.

Closely related to the central theoretical concerns of this research is the question of my own position in the humanitarian imaginary. What gendered templates did I come to the field with, and what presumptions were conveyed through research activities such as interviewing and further interactions triggered by the notion of my duty of care? As was mentioned, research is in itself a process of knowledge *construction*. What was I contributing to the social imaginary I was theorising is animating the humanitarian field? Self-reflexivity seems far more crucial in a project such as this.

My interactions with many participants began through tutoring for their children making the children's education a source of interest to me. In the course of unravelling the humanitarian subjectification of the mothers through aid dependency, I, on occasion, projected a lack of interest in the extremely important issue of educating the children. Carrying with me the worries generated by the public discourse on child marriages of Syrian girls and child labour of Syrian boys, I often projected a lack of parental concerns on these issues. Sarah, the communicative bridge between myself and the participants, proved invaluable in instances where I was probing intrusively about the educational plans

for Syrian children. Refugee parents and the presumptions of their irresponsibility towards their children are discussed in many different ways, in how they give birth recklessly, in how they do not prioritise the health of their children when looking for housing, in fathers abandoning pregnant mothers to seek a better life in Europe and in how mothers use pregnancies to entrap Turkish men. In a similar vein, I also projected onto the mothers' irresponsibility when the system fails the young children rather than the parents. The parents are only reacting to the conditions of poverty they find themselves in. It was a rude awakening when one of the mothers shared the intrusive probing questions of the aid workers about her children, and they felt familiarly like my own.

3.6   Conclusion

This chapter attempts to specify a methodology that will answer the puzzle of the inquiry and develop a conceptual framework with methods informed by theory. It also attempts to anticipate the ethical concerns that arise throughout the research process. An interpretivists paradigm best serves this inquiry to delineate the social imaginaries in the humanitarian space, while a critical theory paradigm pushes the inquiry to uncover the power relations embedded in the humanitarian field through gendered social imaginaries. This research utilised two methods: interviewing and participant observation, underpinned by feminist considerations. Hence ethical decision-making was informed by the feminist ethics of care framework, which makes issues of power, positionality and reflexivity paramount in research.

CHAPTER 4

TURKISH CONTEXT

Disembarking from a *dolmuş* onto the main street of the district in *Altındağ*, my translator Sarah and I rushed to keep pace with the bustle of the street and quickly moved through the flow of pedestrians and crossed the congested road to a narrower calmer street. While the main road was lined with furniture stores with large windows displaying the artistry, the side streets housed the actual workshops, most of which employed Syrian refugee men and boys for the hard labour of furniture making, often at a lower wage rate than the minimum wage. Loud honks of heavy vehicles moving products are always heard as much a mainstay of the district as the lingering smell of the coal-burning heaters, although we were in Spring and the heaters must have been out of use for some months.

We walked the short distance past the vakif, the Turkish patisserie and a grocery store to the little park where we promised the women we would meet them. We aimed to accompany them on their visits to aid distribution centres so we could assist with translating. We expected two women, but we knew they would come with more and be accompanied by children. "Arabic time", Sarah laughed as she took out her phone to call one.

While she was busy, I took in the bustling scenes. The district should have been familiar to me since I have been visiting for two years, but the swiftness of the urban renewal project meant our eyes had to adjust to a new landscape each time we visited. Slowly I became aware of a man at a distance observing us with a mild look. Accustomed to stares since I was easily identifiable as a foreigner, I quickly dismissed him and turned to my friend to learn where the women were. "She is waiting for the younger daughter to come so she can lock them in the house. Let me call the other one.." Sarah started explaining and then trailed off. Behind me, the man approached us. "Good morning," he stated. "Good morning. How can I help you?" I replied, used to being approached by curious people. "What are you doing here?"

> "I am meeting my friends."
>
> "For what purpose?"
>
> I paused at this deviation from the usual script that I am used to, which always led to questions about where I was from. "I will meet my friends. Why do you ask?" I ask with a frozen smile. "Why I ask? Because I am a citizen of the Republic of Turkey, it is my right and my duty to ask..because we know there are people like the Syrians brought in here to create trouble for us... and we know who brings them...and we should ask people who are not citizens why they are here", dropping his mild manners and with a hardened look, he replied.
>
> "We were not sent here. We are just university students..." I began keenly aware of the interpreter's hand on my back and the urgency in the Arabic she spoke to our interlocutors. "Show me your university ID", the man interrupts. "No. I am uncomfortable sharing such information with a man I do not know. Have a good day, sir,"
>
> We walked away and rushed into the grocery store, where the employees were familiar with us. It was the early days of Spring in 2017. The violence of the attempted coup in Turkey marked the previous summer. We had experienced relatively mildly the echoes of the insecurity it triggered.
>
> <div align="right">Field Notes 2017</div>

This is pertinent in the case of refugees since its usage is incredibly marginal in Turkish migration management. Thus, the starting point of any discussion about the refugee protection regime in Turkey is the continued maintenance of the geographic limitation in the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Geneva Convention). Stemming from anxieties about maintaining a homogenous nation of Muslim Turks and a preoccupation with how migration movements can better serve the development needs of the country (İçduygu and Aksel, 2013), this defining feature of Turkish refugee protection was maintained through successive global events such as the decolonial process and conflicts from neighbouring countries and regions. This geographical limitation was applied to accommodate the 1926 and 1934 Laws on Settlement (Law No. 8850 and 2510), which stipulates that only people of a Turkish ethnic background can settle permanently in Turkey (Öztürk, 2017; Ülker, 2008). Thus, at the time, references to migrants did not acknowledge whether they were forced or not. With the implementation of the Geneva Convention, the Turkish policy makers were fully conscious of forced migrants, but they

were far more concerned about how it might impact Turkey's nation-building and subsequent development rather than a protection regime in line with an international system.

Withstanding pressures to lift the geographical limitations as Turkey turned into a transit state in a geographic hotspot through which streams of people fled conflict in the 1980s and the 1990s, the Turkish migration regime introduced the Asylum Legislation in 1994. This lent Turkish refugee protection its second defining feature. In the absence of a comprehensive migration management framework, the piecemeal legislation which began with the 1994 Asylum Regulation planted the seeds of national security concerns. Prompted by the significance of the flow of Iranians fleeing regime change at the time, the design and implementation of the 1994 Asylum Regulation indicated the awareness amongst Turkish policy makers that recognition of asylum seekers and their management needed to be brought under state mandate, hinting at the future of securitising that would deepen in the subsequent decades (Kirişçi, 2000). By empowering the Turkish foreigners police to oversee procedures for non-European asylum seekers in parallel to the UNHCR refugee status determination process (Baban et al., 2021) discarded the Turkish passiveness in the face of the stream of people coming from Iran, Iraq, Tunisia and further from Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka (Kirişçi, 2000; Suter, 2013).

Discussing such securitising of migration management, Kirişçi (2012) highlighted how Turkey challenged the UNHCR as Turkey's newfound determination to be an active participant in the management of the movement of the people through its territories put it further out of sync with the ideals that the Geneva Convention attempts to establish. The emphasis on the security dimension on migration regulation was reinforced through

Turkey's vocation to gain membership into the European Union when Turkish policymakers pursued legal and institutional reforms to bring Turkey's migration management in line with the European Union vision (Memisoglu and Ilgit, 2017). Forgoing an ethnoreligious migration policy, they introduced the 2006 Law on Settlement (İçduygu and Aksel, 2013) and further efforts to Europeanize migration management; it sought to take control of irregular migration, human trafficking and smuggling (Tolay, 2012). While Kirişçi (2012: 64) commented on the "slow but sure process of socialisation of Turkey into the norms and rules of an international refugee regime", the securitisation notions characterising European Union migration management manifested in the work that began in 2008 to put together the most comprehensive piece of legislation to regulate migration and migration and asylum policies to date: The Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP).

This gigantic task was shouldered by the Bureau for the Development and Implementation of Asylum and Migration Legislation and Strengthening the Administrative Capacity" (also known as Turkish Asylum and Migration Bureau) under the Ministry of Interior in 2008 (Soykan, 2012) to meet the NAAP (National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis and the Action Plan on Asylum and Migration). While international and local civil society and UN agencies were invited to the consultation process, the final product bears the marks of the crisis moment, which was the Syrian conflict triggering the most significant movement of people into Turkey, converting Turkey fully into a refugee-hosting country.

4.1 The Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) and the Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR)

The LFIP was the first in-dept attempt at the codification of migration management and refugee protection. By retaining the spatial limitation of the Geneva Convention, the LFIP continued Turkey's tradition of a two-tiered apparatus, the distinction becoming markedly obvious with the open-door policy for Syrians fleeing conflict (Şimşek and Çorabatır, 2016). The LFIP institutionalised a conditional refugee status or subsidiary temporary protection for the majority of the non-European Asylum seekers and with the Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR) that was later added in 2014, marked Syrians as a special category establishing their status as different from the other displaced arrivals. It acknowledges the massive number of people on the move coming from Syria and blanketly provides them with temporary protection taking into account that individual assessment was impossible (Qureshi, 2019). To carry out the mandate of both the LFIP and the TPR, the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) was established in 2014 and took over from the Directorate of Security, indicating how seriously the Turkish government was set to approach migration management. Further consolidating its authority, the Turkish government empowered the DDGM and Disaster and Emergency Management (AFAD) for registration process rather than the UNHCR, which was retained only in logistical support.

TPR establishes the procedures for temporary protection (Articles 17–25), affirms the right to remain in Turkey (Article 25), and extends access to social services (Articles 26–31) as well as employment permits (Article 29) (Baban et al., 2021). Under TPR, Syrians were required to solve the issue of housing, a heavy task in a foreign country with a

different language. While some Syrians continue in the camps set up under the administration of AFAD, the majority of Syrians are urban refugees. Camps allow for easier access to services. However, its significant insecurity, especially for women and children, pushes many to seek self-settlement in urban areas. Self-settlement means that finding housing is the responsibility of the refugee which they can do within the city where they have their registration.

Under TPR, education access was broadly allowed for Syrian students, an issue of concern raised by the alarm over the 'lost generation' of children whose interrupted education could marginalise them further in their displacement. A Ministry of National Education circular on foreigners' access to education issued in 2014 mandated Syrian children's enrolment in Turkish state schools. Provisions were also made for temporary education centres with free language or vocational training courses (Yıldız & Uzgören, 2016). With the circular on health services for people under temporary protection released by the Turkish Ministry of Health, Syrians are also ensured free medical treatment from state hospitals for primary and emergency health issues, with patients in need of tertiary care often transferred to private or public university hospitals and expenses such as consultation, hospitalisations and surgical care covered (Tahirbegolli et al., 2016). Furthermore, refugee health clinics that are staffed with translators have cropped up, with 50 health centres in 13 cities working with community health centres to meet the need of the refugees (Ekmekci, 2017). The TPR was further augmented with the 2016 regulation on work permits, creating the pathway to formal employment on paper. Syrian refugees under 'temporary protection' can process their application after six months of registration, and if employed with a working permit, they are entitled to payment that cannot be less

than the minimum wage (İçduygu & Şimşek, 2016). Employers must apply on behalf of the refugee worker, prove that no qualified Turkish citizen was available for employment and adhere to a 10% limit on foreigners working in the company, pay an application fee of 378.70 lira (as of 2021) as well as commit to paying social insurance (Baban et al. 2021; Üstübici et al. 2021).

Syrian families granted temporary protection are also provided financial support from a cash transfer program extending them the Kızılaykart (debit card) under the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) program, which is implemented by Kızılay (Turkish Red Crescent) and financed by the European Union. As of August 2022, it provides 230 TL per person under temporary protection in a household and provides consistent financial assistance that allows Syrian families some agency in terms of spending for necessities. Linked to their registration as under temporary protection, it requires an official residence address to activate it, and each household is provided with one card which receives the payment for the number of people in that household. In order to emphasise the importance of educating Syrian children, the Conditional Cash Transfer of Education Program is also activated through the Kızılaykart, where students from kindergarten to the 12th grade are financially supported for regular attendance to school, adding to what the household can receive (Turkish Red Crescent, 2020).

4.2 Temporary protection in practice

Temporary protection as a tool for regulating displaced people is not new in Turkey and was deployed at varying levels starting from the 1980s (Kirişçi, 2000). Increasingly used as a state response to massive movements, temporary protection is a policy alongside

others such as offshore processing, safe zones and reception/detention centres that are largely exclusionary (Watson, 2011). It establishes limits to the international obligation of the hosting country while also taking advantage of the moral optics evoked through a discursive dispensation of 'protection'. Temporary protection is a political intervention weakening what is offered in the Geneva Convention and instead becomes a label and a categorisation that soothes the moral consciousness while offering the bare minimum of protection (Thomaz, 2018). That the protection offered for Syrians under TPR was tenuous is evident in how the Turkish government retains the authority to terminate the temporary protection (a decision that the Council of Ministers can take). By also refusing to set a duration, the TPR further underlined the beholden state of the Syrians, with the UNHCR highlighting the TPR as a short-term solution (Baban et al., 2021). Seeing as it continues indefinitely, the TPR institutionalises temporariness to the detriment of Syrians who have to live in limbo.

This state of limbo is characterised by confusion, ambiguity and fear that stems from how the implementation process of the TPR is chaotic and marked by reactive changes. The disjointed service provision, from registration to social services, was already in disarray before the adoption of the TPR as actors on the ground were making do with their little resources and infrastructure. The TPR seems to have bureaucratised this disjointed state of affair, adding further red tape, made even worse because the rights of the Syrians under TPR was not communicated efficiently to the Syrians themselves nor to the actors who were to provide them with services. Baban et al.(2021) document this by highlighting the changes in procedures in registration alone, with registration cards deemed suddenly invalid when another registration process is introduced. Based on trial and error, the

process tested the Syrian refugee community already battered by their harrowing war experiences.

Several loopholes also mark the social services granted through temporary protection as access is built into the identity card, which is in and by itself linked to a place of residence. While the TPR initially had not subjected the Syrians to a satellite system of refugee registration where refugees had to be granted permission to travel from city to city, in 2016, the Turkish government curtailed this freedom, requiring them to take permission before they could travel following the EU Turkey statement of 2015. This enforces immobility which is ensured through the registration system that uses social services to police the Syrian refugees. Syrians who move beyond the city they are registered to without permission are cut off from the services they can receive.

The government monitoring districts within the cities where they can find a home creates further precarity. Districts deemed as filling the quota of Syrians under temporary protection can suddenly become invalid as an acceptable residential address; thus, when Syrian families move from one insecure housing to the other, as is often the case, they might be unable to use the available housing in their registration, impacting the usage of the Kizilaykart, the only consistent source of financial support. The requirements, such as an official residential address in the province that families are registered to, impede universal provision when many refugee families suffer from shelter insecurity which uproots them from inhospitable provinces. In other cases, they may be unable to provide addresses recognised as residential since many can only afford informal housing with no legal status (Cetinoglu and Yilmaz, 2021). Even with the Kizilaykart, 79% of households benefitting from cash transfers continue to struggle with food insecurity (Turkish Red

Crescent, 2022). Shelter insecurity is left mainly as a burden for the refugees to solve through negotiating with informal housing, which can be the only affordable option. Often, the living conditions of the Syrian refugees are abysmal as they rent makeshift rooms in decaying structures and old basements. This housing insecurity is compounded when it is linked to service inconsistency in a loop that refugees are not equipped to escape.

Furthermore, the framing of access to health care, education and employment is considered a social service rather than a right, weakening the claim that can be made for these and impacting their access. While the legislative framing of Syrian people as under temporary protection provides them with more concrete rights compared to what they were provided on their initial arrival in 2011 when they were discursively labelled as guests, it is essential to remember that the keyword is 'temporary'. Access to health care and education is impacted by how little the Syrians were informed of the systems in place. Language barrier and strain on the system, and the lack of resources and trained staff in education and health care exacerbated their marginalisation. Lack of official information on their rights means that different places apply different rules and regulations. Despite the measures put into place by the government, there are reports of urban refugees encountering difficulties in gaining access to hospitals, health services, schools and education (Kirisci, 2014). Regarding health care alone, the TPR does not offer protection for those with chronic diseases who require continuous treatment and who were naturally a sizeable portion of a population displaced due to violent conflict leaving many incredibly vulnerable.

The work permit that was a pathway to formal employment is nullified in practice due to its uncompromising nature that depends on the efforts and money of disinterested employers who can apply on behalf of refugees. This pushes refugees into informal employment without social protection that is temporary and inconsistent, subject to exploitation and poor pay compared to their Turkish counterparts, as well as no recourse to contest their exploitation. Even in cases where employers wish to employ a highly-skilled Syrian worker, there is a lack of clear information on how to go about it ((Yıldız & Uzgören, 2016). While this drives Syrian men into the informal economy at severe risk (Üstübici and Karadağ 2020), in sectors such as construction, restaurants and textiles, where they are severely underpaid (Caro 2020), the effect on Syrian women is direr with only 15% of working age Syrian women employed, usually in domestic work (Turkish Red Crescent, 2021).

In addition to these pitfalls, Syrians under temporary protection must contend with the curtailment of their access to international protection and the pressures to be internally immobile. Contingent on the EU-Turkish agreement of 2015, Turkey closed their borders and moved to regulate the Syrian population with new border mandates. By 2018, registrations of new arrivals were halted, and temporary protection of Syrians was voided if they exited the country and returned from a third country. Refugee policies remain reactive to domestic and international politics, as demonstrated by the EU-Turkish Agreement (Ataç et al., 2017). Arguing that Turkey leveraged the large population of Syrians within its borders, Tsourapas (2019) considered Turkey's management of the refugee as a rentier project where the EU-Turkey deal led to the alignment of Turkey with the EU externalisation policies to contain the Syrians in the borders (Memisoglu & Ilgit,

2017). Such foreign policies align Turkey with the EU's attempts to sacrifice humanitarian obligations for national security and the EU's preoccupation with limiting their burden to protect. This new alignment contrast with the government's stance at the beginning of the refugee movement. Right from the beginning, the arrival of Syrians became a powerful political tool to demonstrate the moral superiority of the ruling government both locally and internationally. Refering to the hybriditiy of Turkish migration management, Genç et al. (2019) point at Turkey's own interest within the region as a strong rationale for the trajectory of the refugee protection regime in ways that produce precarity for refugees. However, what remains unchanged is Turkey's inability to acknowledge the protracted nature of the refugee situation and its adamant refusal to design policies that would address this prolonged uncertainty. Instead, through the LFIP and the TPR, Turkey institutionalises the temporariness of the Syrian's protection and maintains parameters that can change according to international and domestic push and pulls. As Biehl (2015: 59) highlights, "indefinite waiting, imperfect knowledge, and the volatility of legal status" create a "powerful governing effect, serving to contain, demobilise, and criminalise" those under temporary protection. The production of vulnerability in the Turkish refugee production further entrenches them as a humanitarian subject instead of a political subject with rights (Yıldız and Uzgören, 2016)

4.3   The Humanitarian space in Turkey

The civil sphere is a key global component in delivering humanitarian aid, especially in the urban context (Feischmidt et al., 2019; Crawford, 2022). Recognised in the multi-governance approach (Kahraman and Tanıyıcı, 2018) as a viable response to the 'refugee crisis', civil society includes a heterogeneous set of actors (Lewis, 2019). The noticeable

rise of citizen volunteers and spontaneous grassroots humanitarianism at border cities (Fechter and Schwittay, 2019), particularly the spirit of volunteerism enacted due to the movement of refugees and migrants into Europe since 2015 (Guribye and Mydland, 2018), all contributing to a citizen initiative for global solidarity (Haaland and Wallevik, 2019), has challenged our understanding of organised humanitarian enactment. Of particular note also is the rise of faith-based humanitarianism, both organised and spontaneous, establishing themselves as sources of material and spiritual support for many refugees who seek to mitigate and understand their suffering through a spiritual lens (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011; Mavelli and Wilson, 2016). Schack and Witcher (2021) noted that civil society responding to refugee movements is a broad category, and like them, I also utilise Edwards's (2015) encompassing definition.

Turkey's humanitarian response to displaced people's plights is shaped by the humanitarian space within which multiple actors collude, negotiate and contest, chief of which is the Turkish state which looms large. Civil society organisations with an agenda addressing refugee issues include state-affiliated organisations, non-state organisations with political inclinations, rights-based and faith-based groups, informal volunteer organisations and networks of locals and foreigners as formal and informal Syrian-led organisations. This diversity hints at the multiplicity of agendas and spheres of interest, sometimes in opposition to each other but often overlapping. Even though there has been significant decentralisation and devolution of responsibility, the Turkish state retains control through indirect means, creating a legislative framework that both constrains and empowers the heterogeneity of the civil sphere that takes up the burden of the humanitarian response (Memisoglu and Ilgit, 2017). The role of the UNHCR is

demonstrative of this, with the Turkish migration management limiting their involvement in the current crisis to a consultation role, providing policy and technical advice and as an administrative conduit through with funding can be dispersed (UNHCR, 2015 cited in Yıldız and Uzgören, 2016). This contrasts with the active role of the UNHCR in the establishment of migrant rights in Turkey, notably in how actively it participated in the inauguration of the Turkish NGO, the Association of Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM).

Another limitation accompanies this constraint on the UNHCR, which is on other external actors, such as intra-governmental agencies and international non-governmental organisations, a retrenchment triggered by Turkish legislation and state scepticism of their motives (Aras and Duman, 2019). In the initial phases, they were crucial partners to the government agencies such as AFAD Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency and NGOs such as ASAM to provide services in areas such as health, shelter, education and necessities such as food and cloths (Aras and Duman, 2019). As the number of Syrians moving through the initially-permeable border ballooned, tensions emerged when international NGOs preferred to deliver funding through civil society organisations rather than the government (Memisoglu and Ilgit, 2017). Severe pushback from the government resulted in some of the most active organisations, such as International Medical Corp and Mercy Corp, being shut down under allegations of suspected collaborations with Syrian Kurds (Aras and Duman, 2019). Their withdrawal created a vacuum, especially in light of the scale of the movement of displaced people and the fact that the refugee protection regime was taking shape as they were moving out (Aras and Duman, 2019).

Nevertheless, some of these INGOs have been able to pair up with local NGOs to provide protection services (Kirişci, 2014). The Turkish civil sphere's engagement with refugees heavily benefits from funding from international agencies such as European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), GIZ (Die Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), as well as essential collaborations with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). Where the international humanitarian organisations have had to contend with leaving the Turkish humanitarian field, such collaboration with local NGOs allows them to be indirectly active. However, reports highlight the difficulties in engagement between local and international civil society due to a lack of capacity and platforms for engagement (Mackreath and Sağnıç, 2017).

The trickling down of the 'right-based' humanitarian agenda is evident as a response to the unprecedented movement of Syrian refugees into Turkey, remarkably changing the landscape of the Turkish civil sphere (Mackreath and Sağnıç, 2017). Many civil society organisations offer a mix of services, but whether the focus should be on providing aid provisions and social services or advocacy and integration, efforts are always under ongoing deliberation. What is clear is that despite the increased leaning towards long-term solutions that can be generated through a rights-based advocacy approach, the Turkish civil society has more experience with service provision than advocacy (Mackreath and Sağnıç, 2017).

This is evident even at the local government level, where municipalities prioritise social services as their fixed responsibility towards refugee protection. However, such services are inconsistent as municipalities cannot create a strong mandate since their

responsibilities are ambiguously communicated due to the reluctance of the state to delegate autonomy to municipalities. Thus, although municipalities implement refugee protection programs (often according to ideological lines dividing them between faith-based and rights-based approaches), they cannot impact the issue at hand (Coşkun and Uçar, 2018). More often than not, social services that refugees are entitled to are carried out in an ad hoc process stemming from the central government's transmission of the temporariness of the refugee issue. Local governments cannot respond to the needs of the refugees as their rights are ambiguously communicated and subject to changes. The reluctance of the state to delegate autonomy to municipalities (Lowndes and Polat, 2020) furthermore impeded any flow of funding and mandate, preventing the creation of any solid infrastructure that can allow the local governments to roll out full fledge protection programs. Thus, municipalities implement refugee protection programs, often according to ideological lines dividing them between faith-based and rights-based approaches (Betts et al., 2021; Coşkun and Uçar, 2018). Their resources and reach are often insufficient for the task at hand.

As the state relies on the civil sphere to carry out its duties, it is invested in shaping the Turkish civil sphere in its image. A lack of regulation, transparency, and the empowerment of faith-based organisations, many of which are founded by civil servants themselves, serve this purpose (Danış and Nazlı, 2019; Göçmen, 2014). Further complexity is introduced when we consider the increasing mobilisation of individuals organising themselves as informal civic volunteers in loose networks, embedding themselves in the aid architecture. Such individual acts of humanitarian work, drawing on Islamic fraternity and charity, have thrived as a post-coup atmosphere of suspicion and purges has eroded

more structured civil sphere organisations. They act as the middlemen, directly connecting donating individuals to the needy. Faith-based organisations thus become de-facto aid providers in the vacuum, acting as "auxiliary agent[s] alongside the state, taking over its duties vis-a-vis the refugee" (Danış and Nazlı, 2019: 145).

4.4 Representations of refugees

The refugeehood experiences of Syrians are not only shaped by the structural features of the temporary protection regime they find themselves in. They are discursively framed, politicised by policymakers and political leaders, constructed by humanitarian experts and service providers and stereotyped by the public. Therefore, their constructions also contribute to how they can live under temporary protection as people make sense of their 'foreign presence' in Turkey.

In highlighting the construction of Syrian refugee men and women in Turkish public discourse and the mainstream media to unravel the ideas shaping their construction in the humanitarian field, I identify how the representation of Syrian refugee men and women in Turkey broadly mirrors the dichotomised understanding elsewhere. Women are cast as vulnerable, men as threatening and Syrian refugees as a whole are seen as a burden (Efe 2019; Narlı et al. 2020). Their 'othering' contributes significantly to the halting of their integration into Turkish society, constructed as a threat to the economic stability, a reason for loss of social status and a danger to the homogenous fabric of Turkish society. Writing specifically about Syrian women in Turkey, Yamaner (2021) demonstrates the gendered racialisation they are subject to, drawing attention to the Turkish preoccupation with Syrian women's (veiled) appearances, high-maintenance grooming habits, their fertility

rates and presumptions about their feminine subservience all of which are deemed desirable to Turkish grooms, costing Turkish brides and threatening the Turkish family. Ascription of unattached Syrian women with templates of 'homewrecker' and 'seductress' where they are presumed to deliberately target Turkish men through easy acquiescence to unregistered marriages or polygamy, obscures the gendered vulnerabilities they face (Narlı et al., 2020). Moral outrage about unregistered and polygamous marriages does not consider that Syrian refugee families struggle to obtain legal documents necessary for a registered marriage, nor does it take into account their material existence where their state of uprootedness has demolished economic prospects and familial networks (Suerbaum, 2020). Marriages are a coping mechanism for refugee women (Aksu Kargın, 2018). Pinpointing the fluidity of the gender experiences of Syrian brides and Turkish grooms in intermarriages, often met with societal derision, Akyuz and Tursun (2019) suggest that such marriages allow refugee women to castoff a refugee identity and seek the autonomy robbed from them through displacement.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the evolution of the Turkish refugee protection regime, which is greatly marked by the limitation it imposes on the Geneva Convention and the securitization inclinations that are embedded in the most comprehensive migration management legislation that has been introduced in Turkey. As such, the LFIP and the TPR are framed by scholars as responsive to domestic and international politics rather than the protection of refugees. I also highlight how in the temporariness that is institutionalised, refugee protection falters in practice. This protection is further weakened when we take into consideration the Turkish civil sphere, which is far more in tandem

with the government's vision of humanitarianism and impacted by the lack of engagement

with international humanitarian organisations.

CHAPTER 5 [1]

GENDERED SOCIAL IMAGINARIES IN THE

HUMANITARIAN FIELD

> I do not think I would consider myself '*multeci'* (refugee) because it means I am treated better than I am. I would say I am temporarily protected because that is the truth. Even though I have fled war, I will not be protected forever. It is almost nothing. What is a 'multeci' life*,* and what is my life?

Asiya sat in the living room of her dilapidated home, peering thoughtfully at Sarah, who translated her answer to me in English. When Asiya made eye contact with me at the end of Sarah's translation, I nodded in acceptance, and she smiled and gestured at the Syrian coffee she had made for us. The interview with Asiya was in its third hour, and while the flow of our back and forth lacked agility since we also had to have Sarah translate for us, it was smooth and was not tiresome. Asiya had known me and my accompanying translator Sarah for some years now, so she was used to the three-way communication that

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[1] Sections from this chapter have been published as an article in the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, entitled "Confronting gendered constructions of refugee deservingness and representations: Syrian refugee women strategising for humanitarian aid in Turkey" (Zadhy & Erman, 2022)

often characterised my interactions with the members of the Syrian refugee community in the district. While we had socialised on several occasions in group settings, this was the first time I sat down with Asiya one-on-one and had a deep conversation about her new life in Turkey and what the displacement meant for her and her family.

Prior knowledge of the precarity experienced by the refugee families in the area and knowing Asiya's situation meant that her refusal of the label '*multeci*' made sense to me. Temporariness was very much the dominating theme of the lives of refugee families in Turkey, and Asiya's situation at the time was an excellent example of it. Our interview began with her sharing the news that the home she had been living in for two years would be demolished, requiring her to find a new home to rent. The district she lives in is filled with refugee families renting houses called '*gecekondu*' with dubious land deeds that were set to be cleared out under a massive urban renewal project already underway when she first arrived in the district. Informal housing has been an essential source of shelter for the Turkish poor living in the district, even though living conditions were barely fit for dignified or healthy living (Erman, 2017). For the incoming refugee families, *gecekondu* provided the base means of survival. However, the precarity of the shelter afforded by such housing increased due to the urban renewal project, which created an ever-changing urban landscape for the Syrian communities attempting to survive urban refugeehood shuttling from one *gecekondu* to the next as eviction notices at each rental hounded them. Their shelter was always dubious, constantly on the verge of being lost – temporary.

Tightening the noose further for refugee families were the zoning restrictions increasingly levied on specific districts forbidding refugee families from settling there as a specific quota was reached. Renting and settling in a zone that had reached this quota meant

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refugee families lost access to the *Kızılaykart*, the only stable financial source for most families. After having escaped eviction notices for the past two years, Asiya now needed to find a new place to rent that would allow her to evade the restricting zoning policies that had rent within her financial means. However, neither the LFIP nor the TPR provides infrastructure that addresses refugees' housing issues.

As has been referenced in previous chapters, the deficiency of the support system in Turkish refugee governance and the lack of a more robust show of support by the Turkish civil society, particularly the humanitarian aid organisations, is due to how the Turkish humanitarian landscape is shaped by the legislative framework establishing refugee protection. "Show me an NGO that can help me solve this problem", Asiya challenged me at the start of the interview when I told her that I was interested in how aid organisations helped her. "They think it is enough to give us a box of food...pasta, oil and four different kinds of olives...these are helpful, of course... but four different kinds of olives cannot help us if we are living on the streets", Asiya stated later in a soft voice, laced with bitterness.

Asiya's despair is also due to the timing of the eviction notice. Her husband had just taken an arduous journey from the shores of Turkey and ended up in a refugee camp in Asiya's narration of the situation. The journey had exhausted the older man, and when he could call Asiya on Whatsapp, he sounded hoarse and weak to her ears. Asiya was reluctant to discuss too much about her husband's journey. The fact that he exited the country meant that he would lose his temporary protection triggering a host of bureaucratic complications that might threaten Asiya's access to the cash card, which was registered to her household under her husband's name. Effectively, Asiya was now a single woman and head of her

household and how she navigated the discussions of her husband, who had hitherto been a recurring character in our prior interactions, indicated her preference that he now be treated as non-existent. This choice, I came to learn, was as much to protect her husband as it was to establish her vulnerability as a single mother with children, which renders her deserving of far more legislative protection (Kivilcim 2016, 200).

This process of attempting to cater to the understanding of female vulnerability against the background of refugee precarity forms the crux of this chapter. It highlights how the multiple notions, ideas, narratives and discourses contribute towards a cohesive understanding –a gendered social imaginary– that guides refugee women such as Asiya and the humanitarian agents they seek out, lending coherence to the humanitarian interaction between the two. Analysis at this interpersonal level exposes how gendered social imaginary becomes "real in and through lived practices", as ten Kate (2018: 124) proposed. The dissertation is premised on the idea that the temporariness in the Turkish refugee governance creates the condition for refugee families to become dependent on aid as they are largely left to fend for themselves. With policies that do not prioritise their integration and weak social support mechanisms, they have no choice except to depend on humanitarian organisations. While refugee families struggle with multiple different concerns, the service provision inclination of humanitarian actors means that refugee families are far more likely to receive material aid in the form of food, clothes, and cleaning products. The type of resolution that Asiya is looking for is simply unavailable at humanitarian organisations. Instead, she has to make do with aid distribution which is the most consistent form of refugee support.

5.1   Gendered templates and gendered imaginaries in the Turkish humanitarian field

As Carnevale (2013) understood, social imaginary produces specific self-understanding through the interpretation of experiences: refugee men and women interpret their gendered experiences of responsibilisation, marginalisation and degradation to reach an understanding about themselves and act upon these self-understandings contributing to the gendered nature of the humanitarian practices. To refer to it as a practice rather than a process allows an emphasis on how gendered humanitarian enactment is flexible, uncoded and spur-of-the-moment behaviour guided by gendered templates – the gendered social imaginary. In contrast, a process is procedural, predictable and a deliberate attempt to leave little room for ambiguity. What does humanitarian enactment informed by gendered constructions look like in practice?

5.1.1. Refugee men marginalised in the humanitarian field

Let us begin with this blunt statement of an aid worker: 'When a man comes in, I get disturbed. Go get employed. What is their [the man's] business at an aid organisation?'. Humanitarian enactment takes for granted that refugee men would thrive without 'humanitarian care' (Turner 2019, 611), particularly in the job market. Assumptions about Turkish men's laziness and notions that they are devoid of domestic responsibility to their households (Efe, 2019) lead to the presumption that they need to be propelled into the breadwinner role. Asif, the young refugee man with two wives, insisted on participating in the research after the conclusion of the interview with his first wife. He was at pains to communicate how such expectations about refugee men getting employment ignored the reality of the sporadically available work that was usually labour-intensive and informal,

exposing refugee men to inconsistent payment, bodily harm and on multiple documented occasions to death with no one held responsible. A point pricking his pride further was how he was reduced to unskilled labour when he was training to be a journalist back in Syria. Having lost his path to his desired career, he still expressed eagerness to work, even if the work was informal so that he could avoid depending as much on humanitarian aid organisations.

In contrast, one of the first things refugee women do as they settle in Ankara finds their way to distribution centres to register for aid. "By the time my husband and I came here, my mother was already here for six months, and through her, I was immediately able to go to the aid distribution centres to register for aid. She knew all the places and everyone", Asif's first wife, Raudha, shared. The eagerness with which refugee networks directed newly arriving families to aid distribution centres indicates how they are essential sites for refugee families. Upon commenting on how it is usually filled with refugee women of all ages, accompanied by children, Raudha said, "My husband came with me all the way up the street, but he didn't feel comfortable coming in. It was already full of women". Another participant, Haleema, observed:

> It's difficult for a man to go and ask for help, isn't it? Our men are used to working...back in Syria...to earn money, using their dignity. Not asking for help. But that's not a reality for my husband even though he has certificates... so we as mothers have to go and ask for aid...we as mothers, we have to feed our children.

These comments underline how refugee women respond to the aid worker's marginalisation of refugee men from the humanitarian field. It is an instance of rationalisation, where they draw from their refugee experiences in Turkey and a male breadwinner/female homemaker culture in Syria. Without delving too much into why the aid agents are rejecting refugee men, Raudha and her fellow participants are linking the

refugee men's lack of access to the distribution centres to a matter of the refugee men's pride.

Indeed male pride is important in a structurally feminised humanitarian field. When the gendered division of work and care is disrupted, refugee men become frustrated at being barred from expressing their gender through their role as providers, a complex experience also discussed by Suerbaum (2020) about Syrian refugee men in the Egyptian context. In discussing the process of seeking aid, Asif described his alienation from the humanitarian field: 'Whenever I go to any organisation, I feel like I am facing an army. When you ask them what kind of aid they provide, you can feel their eyes on you, making you feel weak.' Asif's emasculation when he presents his need in the humanitarian field is underlined by inferring weakness in himself and projecting this inference on the aid agents who he feels are judging him for his weakness. The hostility to refugee men in aid distribution centres is thus viscerally felt and experienced as violence in Asif's account. Such strong sentiments from people displaced due to violent conflict demonstrate the continuation of violence to their sense of dignity, if not their very person. Humiliated by the treatment in the field and the sense of inadequacy, men such as Asif retreat from the humanitarian field in a move that relieves them of their duties. Asif continued, 'I cannot prevent my wive's from going, but I have decided that *I* will never go to a distribution centre and ask them for help.' By withdrawing, he maintains his masculine pride, challenged by aid agents who dismiss him and the sense of inferiority he experiences. However, in responsibilising his wives with seeking aid, he essentially conforms to the notion that the distribution centres are a place for women only.

Refugee women also rationalise the absolution of refugee men. Nadha, a mother of four, defended her husband's refusal to accompany her inside aid distribution centres, portraying him as a strong family provider before the war and pointing out that Turkey had turned him timid. Responding to the construction of the humanitarian field as a woman's domain, refugee women deploy gendered expectations to rationalise themselves as better equipped in humanitarian encounters: 'They[men] are not patient like us. I can stay calm; even if someone screams at me, I will tolerate it...but my husband will get into a fight...' Such statements effectively normalise an environment of abuse and highlight how passivity presumed to be an inherently feminine trait, is necessary for their resilience. The social imaginary of refugee women as the preeminent actor who should concern themselves with homemaking and whose natural disposition makes them the better fit for aid distribution pulls them into the humanitarian field. All the reported instances reveal how refugee men, women and aid workers justify the particular state of the humanitarian field.

Another point of note is the neoliberal presumption that refugees with skills, capacity, and agency would produce economic self-reliance. This emerges strongly from the discussion with the aid worker, refugee men and women. Such neoliberal understandings transfer humanitarian responsibility to the refugees, especially the refugee men. Refugee families are made explicitly aware of the gendered expectation that self-reliant men should support them. Interviews with refugee women provide insight into how these notions are reinforced through practice. They reported instances where support for refugee families is withdrawn simply at the sight of a man interacting with the family, irrespective of relationships. One widowed refugee mother, Reham, narrated how aid workers who

visited her to assess her level of vulnerability promptly rescinded their financial assistance after noticing a working-age nephew visiting her during their visit:

> They saw him on the balcony, he was smoking a cigarette and he was on looking at his phone. He had gone to the balcony when he realised that people from the organisation were coming. They immediately changed when they saw him...his cigarettes...his phone. But this is my nephew...I told them.. they didn't answer me... He does not have a job, and even if he does, he has to care for his mother and father. If he marries, he will care for his own family. How can he support his old widowed aunt?

Aid organisations also do not look beyond the man's presence in the family to ascertain if the man is employable. A refugee mother to two boys, Hawla claimed she had never received consistent aid from aid organisations as she had a husband and a son of working age. Suggesting that aid organisations are not sensitive to the widely reported mental health deterioration among refugees, she revealed that both the father and the son were diagnosed with schizophrenia. Another young refugee mother, Rawan, remarked that the aid provision process fails even though her husband was visibly disabled: 'They asked me about my husband, and I told them he was in a wheelchair and could not work. They offered to visit us, but we are still waiting.' Powerfully animated by the idea of Syrian men as irresponsible, lazy and seeking hand-outs, such instances invalidate disabilities and entrench the notion that the men are failing as providers. Furthermore, it is a cohesive fit to the gendered social imaginary of refugee men who shirks their responsibility making refugee women all the more important as the vulnerable subjects who are the ideal recipients of aid.

5.1.2. Presumption of refugee women's innate vulnerability

As discussed in previous chapters, refugee women as the visible face of refugees emerged in the 1990s, which saw mass refugee displacement from the global South. This expectation is operationalised when refugee women are invited to prove their vulnerability through the narration of victimhood. Refugee women have to rely on the stories they can tell of their neediness and how helpless they are at fulfilling their needs. Such performances have already been noted as part and parcel of humanitarian enactment where a "politics of pity" is invoked to access aid (Wagner, 2018). Rajaram (2002) also referred to the power hierarchy that emerges as refugee women voice their tragedies in "a plaintive and helpless manner" while "humanitarian experts voice authority and solutions" (p:261). Participants in this study also commented on how they appealed by expressing their desperation. "They can see it in my eyes and my face, how desperate I am", one woman explained, "men cannot show themselves to be that desperate". Appeals from women are evaluated positively since aid organisations presuppose victimhood and vulnerability as suitable traits of refugee women. Although men also experience the same desperation, it is perceived as out of their character to express it. "They listen with more attention to my wife...to any woman, especially if they are beautiful and can speak well", Asif expanded:

> I don't mean anything by this, but to be honest, if Sarah [gesturing to the translator] and my wife goes and ask for help, by looking at them and by listening to them speak, the arab men who usually translate in those places will be quicker to listen to Sarah than my wife. Sarah speaks well and can communicate.

While awkward for the translator to hear and translate this, the opinion of Asif was illustrative of how refugees take for granted the hierarchies in place often undergirded by gendered connotations. Not only are men unwelcome in the humanitarian field, but refugee

women who are pretty or can express themselves have widely acknowledged advantages. Asif's point about Arab men who act as third parties in their capacity as translators in humanitarian enactments is also premised on notions about their gendered biases and partiality towards a specific type of women. It was not enough for women to be pretty or in desperate conditions (almost all of the women who visit the humanitarian field are in genuinely desperate conditions). However, women who were also articulate and could express their desperation captured people's attention in such positions of power. Here the imaginary of a vulnerable woman whose ability to convey her vulnerability finds a dialogical counterpart in the sense of saviourship of the humanitarian agent (if male translators of Arab origins who are also often refugees themselves can be cast in that role). Thus, refugee women's vulnerability is an important part of the gendered template that exists in the humanitarian field as it allows aid agents to construct themselves in opposition to such vulnerability as authoritative figures who can help refugee women out of their dire predicament.

Rajaram (2002) argues that aid workers with assumed expertise often bureaucratise knowledge about refugees turning them into statistics to create a veneer of objectivity which better serves the purpose of advocacy and fundraising, without which the organisations themselves cannot be sustained. As Baines (2004) noted, fundraising efforts relied on the representation of refugee women as vulnerable subjects. She criticised this general representation where women become nothing more than passive conduits for aid. What emerges is a hierarchy with aid workers having the authority to speak on behalf of the refugee women, often reproducing western prerogatives to advocate and raise funds (Hyndman, 2000). Women with socio-economic subservience and greater responsibility

to provide domestic labour fitting the male breadwinner/female homemaker model are perceived as non-threatening and immobile refugees. The gendered narrative of "good refugee" and "bad refugee" sees women as the preferred refugee precisely because their presumed vulnerability renders them without agency and mobility (Hyndman & Giles, 2011).

While performing femininity and vulnerability, refugee women often face internal struggles about the morality of their performance as they attempt to fit into the templates of feminine vulnerability. Salma, a refugee mother of 8 children who was unregistered, making her the most vulnerable participant in this study, highlighted her unease when her words did not match her exact reality. 'I say I have no money, which might be *ayip* (shameful) because I actually do have a 10 lira note or a 20 [opens her wallet to show]. So yes, perhaps it is *ayip* to say I have nothing but…', she trails off, unable to precisely express the dissonance she feels at using exaggerated language for a purposeful performance. Such instances of reflection on their engagement with aid workers indicate that refugee women know how much their self-advocacy relies on performance. In Salma's specific case, the extent of how far she had fallen in between the cracks of refugee protection did not prevent her from feeling shame at this. Despite the genuine reality of her poverty and destitution, she was prone to questioning her own deservingness, facing, as she often did, instances where refugee families had to prove themselves so often.

5.1.3. Female refugee widows as the deserving refugee

As discussed above, a gendered social imaginary in the humanitarian field does not preclude the constant questioning of the validity of refugee petitions. Women burdened

with proving validity must rely on their ability to adhere to gendered templates to access aid. Protracted refugee crises have created a strain on the humanitarian machinery, producing differentiated categories of vulnerabilities by aid organisations that use it as shorthand to prioritise certain groups. One such category that emerges is widowed refugee mothers (and divorced refugee mothers to a lesser degree). Married refugee women consistently narrated how aid organisations ignored their economic disadvantage in favour of widowed women. "If you are a widow or divorced, they are much more likely to help you...they always question you to find out if you have a husband or not", informed one of the participants. According to another:

> More than one aid organisation right from the first moment will say that their aid is for widowed women and orphans...Even Turkish people [who come to the neighbourhood]. They specifically ask for widows and orphans so that they can be helped.

While widows, especially older widowed women, are increasingly recognised by the UN agencies as at 'risk of multi-dimensional poverty, loneliness and isolation' (UN Women 2019) and increasing emphasis is put on the importance of empowering widows and female-headed households (UNHCR 2020), these globally institutionalising norms take on a different cast when they are translated into local humanitarian practices. Local aid organisations internalise patterns of globally institutionalised concerns about the genuine vulnerabilities of refugee widows and single mothers in conjunction with local assumptions and understandings about widows and single unattached women in vulnerable situations. This colours their engagement as they prioritise them as a particular category of concern at the local level. Concerns about single mothers quickly turn into entrenched norms at all levels because of the ubiquity of the idea that a woman alone is vulnerable. In the Turkish context, widowed mothers are treated with special reverence

due to the esteemed position of *şehit* (martyrs) in Islamic understanding and the meaning bestowed upon the women who had a relationship with the martyr. The status of war widows is very much established by the Prophetic practice of marriage with widows of martyred Muslim soldiers (Hatina and Litvak 2016). Widows of men martyred due to war become the focal point as Islamic traditions discourage mourning the martyrs who died. Instead, they are to be celebrated as they are believed to have attained the highest levels in the afterlife, and part of honouring them is to honour the wives they leave behind (Cook 2007). Discourses about refugee widowhood are also context-dependent, and understanding how it produces the hierarchical relationship of victim and saviour requires us to look into the Turkish context, where meaning is attached to the duty of the man to sacrifice in defence of his country with his death viewed as a sacrosanct expression of patriotism. Ideas about widows of martyred men feed off notions about the patriotic duty revered in Turkish society, turning it into a status that is insulated from the scorn levied against the refugee men who survived displacement (Sözer 2019). Widowed women are ideal refugees because they are partners of idealised masculinity.

While not all widowed women from Syria become widows due to martyrdom, the idea of *şehit* families evokes an uncontested duty of care, compounded by Islamic notions of protecting *yetim* (orphans). Understood not only as the duty of other Muslims but also the duty of the widowed mother, Ozkaleli (2021) discussed how widowed refugee mothers in Turkey understood their elevated duties as 'pious mothering' due to the construction of widowhood as a state tying them to their orphaned children. Thus, widowed refugee mothers are constructed in relation to the martyrdom of their husbands or their orphaned

children, both of which afford them a privileged position in the Turkish humanitarian imaginary.

Refugee women reported mixed feelings about this prioritisation. "Thank god, Im not a widow and I still have my family with me...but most places I went to told me that they only served widows and orphans. This feels unfair", described Asiya. Another one described how much better off her widowed friend was:

> She is getting money, her bills and rent are paid.. she gets aid boxes.. her children are even taken on picnics...one time I saw my friend selling the aid, she received because it is far beyond what she needed. I am not angry...but I can say I felt jealous... some of these aids are things I need for my children...at least baby formula and diapers...I feel we are not given equal chances even though our situation is desperate too."

The preoccupation of single women, particularly widowed women, also draws on the gendered notion that women alone are vulnerable while women with men in their lives can be taken care of by their spouses. The change in status is particularly evident in women who came to Turkey as widows and remarried. This was the case with Asif's second wife, Rafia, who came to Turkey with her sickly child after losing her husband in Syria. After struggling as a single mother for a long time, she agreed to marry Asif, a childhood friend from the same hometown whom she constantly called on to assist her in the foreign country.

> It was not appropriate for him to come and help me all the time, and he was not my relative. I had no one else here, and I needed assistance with my son. He had to have heart surgery. So I agreed to marry Asif to make it easier for us. I was more optimistic when I was a widow...as I said before, if I didn't remarry, my life would have been better. Previously aid organisations would call me every month and inform me that they were holding aid boxes and financial contributions that had come to my name. Now that they know Im married, they don't call me. If I go, I will receive something once every three times.

The same story played out in a reversed case of married women turned widows. Shafaqa lost her husband to a heart attack and spoke of how she had been visiting nearby aid organisations to seek financial assistance with medical expenses for her ailing husband with no success until his passing away.

> My husband went first, but they didn't really trust him even though he went with a prescription. Maybe they think we would have sold the medication. I visited as well, but I couldn't succeed either. Then my husband collapsed and died. The same *vakif* sent an aid worker after they heard about the death and offered us financial assistance. I couldn't meet them because I was in mourning, and we weren't supposed to mix with men during this period....in truth, I did not want to accept at first, but my family...my brother... told me that I should accept in the name of my orphaned children.

Shafaqa's heart-rending story does not end with the tragic story of a young husband driven to early death in a health crisis that could have been prevented. She was also pregnant at the time of her husband's passing, making her immensely more valuable in the eyes of humanitarian agents. Breaking down to softly weep at several instances during the interview, Shafaqa narrated how the difficult pregnancy ended with more trauma as she went into premature labour. The health care she needed for her frail newborn was under threat as in a state of grief and lacking support, she failed to register for the birth certificate, which in turn generated a delayed health care response. Shafaqa knew the power of her husband's tragic passing and the story of her newborn. As a widow with such a story, all her expenses are being taken care of by various private donors directed by the *vakif*. She continues to receive monthly assistance without fail, having the ability to share the groceries and coal she receives with her brother's family, who live some distance away in another district. Her story strengthens the narrative about the premier position of widows and orphans in the humanitarian field. That struggling families are distanced, but those same families are embraced when they transform into households of widowed mothers

and orphans, underscoring how humanitarian aid distribution rewards female vulnerability. Despite the material advantages they receive, widowed refugee women still feel ambivalent about their position. Looking at her newborn child, whom she says she still expects would not survive his health condition, Shafaga mused:

> I know people think that widows get much help as refugees, and it's true. We are very much dependent on it.. but you know I am uncomfortable with it...these people aren't helping me because of some great love for me or because they think I deserve it... They don't think it is my right. They are doing it out of pity. I would not say I like their looks of pity, as though I am less than anything.

Despite the belated efforts of the local humanitarian organisation, Shafaqa feels the sting of their help as it is directed by their sense of pity rather than their sense of duty of protection and care. It had cost her her husband and the health of her child. Her feelings of dissatisfaction in the interactions with humanitarian aid workers indicated her awareness of how she is perceived: as abject and dependent on the kindness of aid providers.

5.2   Refugee women's strategies in response to humanitarian practices

Constructions about women's role as a homemaker in the family, essentialising presumptions about refugee women's innate vulnerability, and context-specific tropes about deserving refugees constitute the gendered social imaginary in the Turkish humanitarian field. Refugee women at the forefront of seeking aid have to deploy specific strategies in their attempts to access aid which is often a co-option of the templates of a gendered social imaginary. These strategies demonstrate how agency is embedded in discursive and societal structures existing in interrelatedness. The existing gendered social imaginary affords them specific rationalisation of behaviours; they demonstrate their

creativity in strategies within this space. At the same time, the gendered social imaginary can also limit their potential, and it is only through challenging specific tropes or subverting them that they are able to move beyond such limits.

5.2.1. Refugee women's strategies to reach the place of aid distribution: navigating urban terrains and language barriers

Collective refugee agency emerges strongly in moments where refugee women collect information amongst family and friends and how they navigate the city to reach distribution and support centres. As is practise amongst other refugee and diaspora communities, Syrian communities also largely support each other through networks (Griffiths et al., 2005). Refugee women described approaching Syrian shopkeepers at a *bakkal* (corner shop), choosing Syrian drivers who informally taxi mostly Syrian clients, and organising in groups so that they can split the cost amongst themselves.

> It is not for ease that we go in groups; usually, the older women go together... my friends of the same age and I...we usually go together. We can support each other together. We are familiar with each other's situations.

By going in groups, the women work together to navigate the language barriers and collude to fill in the blanks when one woman's vocabulary fails her. These strategies indicate the necessity of networking to reach aid as efficiently and effectively as possible. The information-seeking, disseminating, and coordinating in groups is largely a responsibility left to women, making aid-seeking the predominant topic of conversation amongst refugee women.

Reaching aid is costly in terms of money and time because aid distribution centres are often located outside their neighbourhood. If they cannot form groups to split the taxi fare

cost, they are forced into complicated travels with public transportation in unfamiliar urban terrain. For instance, two of the refugee support centres were located out of the way, and all the participants had to take at least two buses. Along the way, they encounter difficulties due to their lack of familiarity with public transportation, as a participant complained.

> Travelling is so tricky. Taking the buses... Right now I have a fine because once I went with my daughter and my travel card didn't have money. I used her card without thinking, and that's why they fined me...because she is a student and I am an adult. The bus driver reported us. I didn't know.

The refugee support centres are also located in neighbourhoods with a higher socio-economic profile where refugee presence would be conspicuous. Refugee women expressed feeling out of place, not knowing whom to ask for directions, and feeling like they were being watched. Reaching the place of aid distribution becomes a considerable ordeal, especially since the participants admitted that they rarely needed to go outside back in Syria. Disrupting schooling and allowing their children to accompany them on their solitary excursions to seek aid is a way of protecting themselves, although many refugee mothers also complained of difficulty finding childcare options amongst relatives or neighbours. Often enough, refugee women also confided that they hoped the children accompanying them could induce generosity.

Participant observations at different aid organisations indicated how arrival in a group helped refugee women. As they reported, often a case is described by multiple women, each adding details to help the petitioning woman. Even in the presence of translators, refugee women sought the direct attention of attending aid workers, making their collective effort to scale the language barrier important. "I always make sure I am going

with Naeema; her Turkish is better, she is more used to these things," Salma said, laughing. She continued:

> Naeema is interesting because she also worked in the government as a secretary before she came here. She knows these things. When I am alone with these people, I fight them. Sometimes I am frustrated with how they treat us, and I can also shout back. I have done so on some occasions, especially with how some male aid workers are. But Naeema will go, and she will nicely tell the women worker, and somehow it gets fixed.

In addition to the language skills, Salma here admits that she needs the help of her friend so that she sticks to the script of a docile, vulnerable woman who can induce the sympathy of aid agents, indicating that they collectively keep each other in line as they all vie for the attention of aid organisations.

For many women, the threat to their reputation is also a predominant concern. By approaching aid distribution centres as an entourage, women hide in numbers, attempting to safeguard against negative experiences in public and contravening negative stereotypes. Such stereotypes draw from narratives of their availability as sexual partners and wives that abound in Turkish public discourse, where refugee women's attempts at marital security with Turkish men often are caricatured as attempts to seduce them. Moving in groups allows them to guard themselves against public encroachment and draw courage when facing aid agents.

5.2.2. Refugee women's strategies in the humanitarian field: accessing aid through intimate relationships

In contrast to the preoccupation of the women to portray chasteness while they are on the way to aid distribution centres, on the field, encounters with male aid workers take on a charged turn where there is scope for interactions to lead to sexual transactions (something

the participants claimed to have only observed but never participated in). As Raudha described:

> If you just laugh in a specific tone...and speak of things you need with a certain delicacy...you can just use your voice...or your eyes...then you might get guaranteed access to aid.

Asif had already pointed out that Turkish aid workers and Arab-speaking male translators participate in differentiating among the refugee women. "If you are beautiful enough, he will fight your case for you", he remarked. Within the conservative constraints of the Syrian refugee community, refugee women often make subtle choices that can elevate their position in the eyes of the male workers they meet in distribution centres. However, since aid distribution centres often base their work on notions of *hayir* (faith-inspired charity), women must balance Muslim decorum with the necessity to win favour. Explicit expressions of sexual interest are discarded in favour of something more implicit. Most veiled Syrian women utilise their bodies as interfaces to express their sexuality in ways that can seem understated to some. Their strategies to win favour might also not lead directly to intimate relations with men who can grant them aid as favours. Subtle implications of the possibility of something intimate can also sometimes be enough. By delicately testing the boundaries of what is allowed and forbidden, refugee women maintain continued access to aid assistance from month to month.

Relationships of various intimacies between refugee women and male aid workers present a dilemma for most of the refugee women. While they acknowledge the dangers posed to them by male aid workers, they do not disregard the agency of the women who strategise towards attaining aid. "Some women are making use of their situation with aid workers, and the aid workers are also making use of the situation", Raudha shrugged. They are also

aware that they are being objectified in the humanitarian field. The second wife, Rafia, also expressed her contradictory feelings about them:

> I feel no respect for such women...but sometimes, it is not their fault. Maybe we can say...women... have to use their beauty. They know it will work. They can do this as much as they want...but [they should know] this life comes to an end.

Such sentiments expose the anxieties surrounding the courses of action available for refugee women forced into relations of dependency on aid. Representation of Syrian refugee men and women in Turkey broadly mirrors the dichotomised understanding elsewhere, with women cast as vulnerable, men as threatening and Syrian refugees as a whole seen as a burden (Efe 2019; Narlı et al. 2020). However, writing specifically about Syrian women in Turkey, Yamaner (2021) demonstrates the gendered racialisation they are subject to, drawing attention to the Turkish preoccupation with Syrian women's (veiled) appearances, high-maintenance grooming habits, their fertility rates and presumptions about their feminine subservience all of which are deemed desirable to Turkish grooms, costing Turkish brides and threatening the Turkish family.

Ascription of unattached Syrian women with templates of 'homewrecker' and 'seductress' where they are presumed to deliberately target Turkish men through easy acquiescence to unregistered marriages or polygamy, obscures the gendered vulnerabilities they face (Narlı et al. 2020). Moral outrage about unregistered and polygamous marriages does not consider that Syrian refugee families struggle to obtain legal documents necessary for a registered marriage, nor does it take into account their material existence where their state of uprootedness has demolished economic prospects and familial networks (Suerbaum 2020). Marriages are a coping mechanism for refugee women (Aksu Kargın 2018).

Pinpointing the fluidity of the gender experiences of Syrian brides and Turkish grooms in intermarriages, often met with societal derision, Akyuz and Tursun (2019) suggest that such marriages allow refugee women to castoff a refugee identity and seek the autonomy robbed from them through displacement.

Many women have to toe a delicate line to prevent their full ostracising from their community and further alienation from their host community. The rise of marriage between Syrian women and Turkish men has been the subject of public discourse, where Turkish men are reviled for taking advantage of Syrian women in need, and Syrian women are represented as threats to the Turkish family (Narlı et al., 2020). One of the aid workers interviewed also made veiled inferences when she suggested that Syrian women were less conservative than expected. Another Turkish volunteer at the same organisation, surrounded by Syrian women helping her make a Turkish dish to sell, laughed when asked about her thoughts on Syrian women and said, "They always give birth to children, don't they? I understand that children are a blessing from Allah, but in the situation, they are in, it seems a difficult thing to understand". These statements tap into assumptions, especially within faith-based organisations, about the religiosity of the people who deserve to be aided and, on the other hand, a preoccupation with the fertility of Syrian women. While ideas about family planning as an important tool for protecting vulnerable and at-risk groups widely circulate, Syrian women are cast as reckless in how they get pregnant. This recklessness is seen as troubling due to their socio-economic standing. Instead of discussing the ways to strengthen the protection of refugee families, the aid agents, both workers and volunteers, cannot think beyond how refugee women need to be constrained regarding reproduction. It hints at the internalised notions about refugee women's

sexuality that are found threatening and their ability to utilise it to ask for resources. Such notions held by aid agents indicate the other end of the line that refugee women must toe as they balance safety and their standing with their community.

5.2.3. Refugee strategies in everyday life: rendering their men invisible

The marginalisation of refugee men in the humanitarian field pushes refugee women, whether married, widowed or divorced, to render the males in their lives invisible. As a woman on the field in a private capacity and later as a researcher, refugee women were always the more accessible contact points. Refugee men always remained occupied elsewhere in the house or stayed out of the house during most meetings among the women. While this was perhaps a matter of courtesy, their absence is a calculated strategy for humanitarian encounters that move out of the distribution centres and encroaches into the private sphere. Asiya's tale at the beginning of this chapter is a case in point. With her husband's exit from the country, Asiya was free to take on the identity of an unattached woman. Her reticence in sharing too many details about her husband is accompanied by an easily expressed worry about the single-parent responsibility she now has to shoulder. While she must worry about her husband, there is a sense of relief at not having him around, and this is explained by how much easier it is for women who are unattached, widowed, separated or divorced to access aid.

According to Naeema, some women pretend they are widows, discarding their husbands' IDs in the list of members in the household. Asif's second wife, Rafiya, who had remarried after losing her husband in Syria, shared her frequent thoughts about using her dead husband's death certificate to access aid for herself, her orphaned child and the three

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toddlers from her marriage with Asif. Another participant Shaufa talked about an instance where she was visited by aid agents who had mistakenly listed her as widowed. They came to visit her and observe the scope of her vulnerability. " I thought about not correcting them because, as you know, I am married. I thought it was not my lie if they made a mistake...but in the end, I felt guilty at the thought of taking for myself the aid meant for orphans", she explained. Several other participants commented on how private donors were usually more interested in caring for and assisting widowed women and orphans, often providing not only relief aid but organising field trips and picnics for the children. This is corroborated by aid workers who established that most private financial donations were explicitly made to assist orphans or *şehit* (martyr) families.

Refugee women not only omit to mention the presence of men in their lives, but they also arrange for men not to be present during house visits by aid workers from organisations and donors. "Sometimes the husbands know and agree to do this, but other times the husbands do not know, and she will tell him to leave the house for an hour or so with the excuse that female relatives or friends were visiting", revealed Raudha. Thus, refugee women have to operate furtive lives to access aid marked out for widows. The marginalisation of men in the humanitarian field also carries into their domicile, impacting the relations between husbands and wives. This was the case for Asiya, who discussed her mixed feelings about her husband:

> He has changed since coming to Turkey. He is discouraged and depressed all the time. This country had drained him. He demanded we go back with him to Syria after he was the one who pushed us to come here. He is old, and no one wants to give him a job... he is struggling physically..and also to speak and connect with people because of the language...I am tired of not having a dependable husband. I depend on my eldest son far more. Otherwise, I am alone. My son would tell me he would help me take care of the family and not bother my father because he could not do it anymore. He cannot understand. My son understands me.

The demands of refugeehood thus fracture marital relations as refugee men and women experience the fraying of gender relations. When a humanitarian imaginary that rewards unattached women is imposed on refugee families, and refugee men cannot cope with the new requirements imposed on them, marital relations begin to feel redundant, as expressed by Asiya.

5.3   Tensions shaping female refugeehood

The empirical data presented above gives us a clearer picture of how gendered humanitarian practices based on templates of a gendered social imaginary led to a dependency relationship between refugee women and humanitarian aid workers. The following section will discuss the implications for refugee women and their families. The highlighted strategies by refugee women to navigate the humanitarian field gives lie to the notion of refugee women as passive and helpless. However, the consequences of the gendered nature of the humanitarian field can be seen in how aid-seeking is often seen as taxing labour for refugee women, in the tension experienced between the traditional model of married women and the refugee model rewarding widowhood and finally in how their vulnerabilities temper the agency they experience, illustrated below.

5.3.1. Tensions between breadwinning and homemaking: humanitarian aid seeking as labour

Refugee women find themselves doubly burdened as seeking aid is carried out in tandem with their duties as homemakers and child rearers. While they chose humanitarian aid as an alternative to informal employment, it is evident that power discrepancies are similarly reproduced in the humanitarian field. The participants' testimonials allow us to define aid-

seeking as labour as they attempt the complex arrays of meticulous planning, coordination of actions and their efforts in implementing them to ensure that aid assistance from multiple organisations can see them through the months. Furthermore, humanitarian aid provision itself can be deemed an industry that provides salaried jobs for aid workers. In this framing, refugee women are labouring for the aid they receive in exchange for their humanitarian performance, while aid workers depend on their existence to continue their humanitarian careers. One aid worker admitted that they preferred the repatriation of Syrian families and their humanitarian work to Syria instead of continuing it in Turkey. Such statements indicate the inability to reimagine their work without continued refugee dependency, strengthening the thesis that aid dependency is systematically perpetuated.

Neither aid organisations nor refugee men understand that the increased responsibilisation means increased labour as women juggle arrangements with multiple sources of aid to supplement the monthly cash from the *Kızılaykart*. Refugee women must maintain domestic work, child-rearing, and sometimes elderly care, and additionally, they must regularly travel to distribution centres to seek information, advocate and register for aid, or pick them up. Irregular and inconsistent aid provision means they must constantly look for news about new aid distribution events. Each new opportunity means they have to come up with an arsenal of documents that would corroborate their narration of need. Thus, they become procurers, bookkeepers, teachers and caretakers to their children, cooks, and domestic labourers.

Even when refugee women attempt informal employment, their labour and aspiration for employment are rendered invisible by the one-dimensional understandings of aid organisations. One aid worker commented that Syrian women refused employment

because they were "almost obsessive about mothering their children at home". However, this discounts the demands of the informal jobs available to refugee women. Rawan, the young mother whose husband was disabled, worked for a time at a glove manufacturing factory and spoke about how they were held against their will to meet daily quotas and how the working environment impaired her posture and eyesight and induced an asthma attack. Other participants defied assumptions about their lack of interest in employment and openly discussed their aspirations for jobs they enjoyed. Asiya spoke longingly of when she was designing and sewing clothing for brides in her hometown in Aleppo. Raudha invited me to view the Avon cosmetics collection she was selling. "I am not doing it to make money," she confided, "I just want to show myself that I can also do these things, that I have interests other than being a wife and mother". Such aspirations are the basis upon which entrepreneurship workshops are organised by some advocacy organisations that see such activities as ways of capacity building amongst refugee women. Nevertheless, activities underpinning neoliberal understandings do not translate into real job opportunities. Instead, refugee women have to seek humanitarian aid as a breadwinning strategy where ironically, there is the reproduction of the notion that women are solely homemakers.

In feminising the humanitarian field and converting it into an arena for refugee women to labour in, gendered expectations about the role of women as the primary homemaker persists. "Of course, aid seeking is better...in the end, you gain almost nothing [in informal employment], and to come back home only to find the house is also in a mess because of my absence.", despaired Asiya. When aid-seeking proves more advantageous than engaging in informal employment and capacity building does not materialise into actual

dignified employment, they see no choice except to co-opt the gendered template that reduces them to homemakers and mothers when in reality, their aid pursuit makes them into the breadwinner.

5.3.2. Tension between traditional model of married women and refugee model rewarding widowhood

Coupled with the fact that aid organisations rely heavily on the refugee narratives of helplessness and neediness, refugee women also feel compelled to move out of familiar gendered roles and enter into new gendered roles, but this time with aid organisations— these new gender relations impact both their familial relations and their standing in the displaced Syrian community. Refugee women recognise the humanitarian field's antipathy for the men in their lives, whether a husband, son, brother or nephew, because of the entrenched notion that men should support their families as breadwinners. As seen above, married refugee women discussed how their marital status made them the least acceptable candidates for aid relief. Therefore, most refugee women in stable marriages are distant from the humanitarian field. One of the participants complained, "It tires me, going there and talking about my situation. Having them visit me to see my situation and my children's needs. In the end, they will see my husband, and they will not assist us".

The proclivity of the humanitarian field to choose widows and single women as the premium target of aid also impact decisions about relationships that refugee women choose for themselves. They find themselves calculating the benefits of remarrying and having a partner versus remaining single and maintaining their access to aid. Such decisions are not easy since many Syrian refugee women are marginalised if they continue

being unmarried, especially with orphans. They are targets of suspicion and harassment from Syrian and Turkish men. Ameena, who was a widow with three young children, fled a smaller city in Turkey to come to Ankara because a male neighbour was harassing her. She had already filed a complaint and petitioned for legal protection but expressed despair at the pressures she felt at being victim-blamed for the harassment because she was refusing marriage. Shaufa, who debated taking advantage of the mistake of aid workers identifying her as a widow, separated from her husband as she could not continue tolerating his drunken abuse. Yet she gave in to pressures to invite her abusive husband into her home again because she felt that his presence would offer protection from gossip and encroachment from other men. Shafaqa, who tragically lost her husband, spoke of her inability to walk outside without her children because she felt she could be targeted as an unmarried widow. These pressures aside, access to aid means that refugee women cannot easily choose to marry either. Rafiya, the mother who regrets remarrying Asif, who was seemingly a good friend and partner, was clear about how it impacted her life. Navigating such contrasting pressures coming from within the Syrian community and the humanitarian field requires delicacy on the part of refugee women

5.3.3. Tension between agency and vulnerability

By assuming the breadwinning role through pursuing aid, refugee women find themselves also assuming authority. Asiya discussed how she felt that she had been essentially the head of the household since her arrival in Turkey. "I am making household decisions, going out for groceries, managing the *Kızılaykart*, and influencing my eldest son as well", she said. Such newfound influence allowed her the authority to forbid her eldest son from marrying although he was of marriable age.

> Of course, I want him to have his own family. That is what all parents dream of. But I have to be realistic. I told him that he cant think about such things. He was my sole supporter. Since his father rarely finds a job and struggles to keep it, he is actually the only one bringing in a salary.

It also allowed her to influence her husband to take the treacherous road across the Turkish border into Greece in the summer of 2021:

> I told my husband that we had fled to Turkey from Syria because he said so. Not only that, he tried to convince us that we should return back to Syria after he couldn't tolerate the conditions in Turkey. He even left us for a time and returned to Syria, where he saw with his own eyes how bad the situation is. Allah showed the path for us. Everything happens for a reason. When he returned, I told him, there would be no more talk about returning to Syria. I told him we should find a way to flee to Europe

She felt she could not have pursued these authoritative decisions had she been back in Syria. Not all refugee women felt that these authoritative positions were desirable. Ameena, who insisted on not marrying again, talked about how to maintain her autonomy, she had to be both a man and woman at the same time to her family and the outside world. "I am some type of a monster now", she mused, "I have to be more than a mother. I have to be a father too [within her family]. I have to show I am not a woman even if I am not a man [to prevent unwanted male attention]". Other women discussed the mental exhaustion they felt in navigating the humanitarian field, where they always have to portray a certain level of vulnerability to retain their eligibility. "I cannot be in a better position than this. I have to thank god for what little I have and be cautious not to get more than that", one woman expressed. Thus, refugee women have to temper their autonomy with vulnerability since there are limits to how much they are supported.

5.4   Conclusion

Taylor argues that the consideration of the bottom-up schematisation of the mass along with the elite, top-down transmission centre the "the way ordinary people imagine their social surroundings" through images, stories and legends which they communicate to each other (Taylor, 1989: 23). The above finding, demonstrate how narratives about Syrian refugee women that are transmitted in policy and public discourse embed in the interpersonal interactions at the ground level, transforming the humanitarian field into one that marked by gendered imaginaries. Refugee women are constructed with templates of being homemakers and vulnerable. Their widowhood is discussed with reference to Turkish reverence towards martyrdom. Refugee men are marginalised, and templates of the ideal masculinity justify this marginalisation.

The empirical data demonstrates how refugee women co-construct the gendered social imaginary. First, they accept their homemaker status and rationalise the absolution of men from any aid-seeking responsibility. They also co-opt templates of vulnerable and helpless women and templates sexualising them to gain access to aid. Aid workers who encounter such interactions feel validated to discuss them in gendered tones.

A gendered social imaginary permeates institutional frameworks and further shapes interactions between the often-male humanitarian aid agents and refugee women "unequally located in structures of interpretation, representation, decision making, policy generation and program delivery" (Indra, 1999: 18). Interactions with aid agents demonstrate how aid organisations, by way of aid agents, are structurally embedded actors whose gendered enactments make women the focus of aid provision, turning them into

the primary agents through which the dependency on aid is perpetuated, contributing to the gendered inequalities they experience during refugeehood. Refugee women's agency emerges in the face of the structural barriers they face through the strategies that refugee women devise in response to such gendered interactions that allow them to circumvent their vulnerabilities, defying their superficial constructions as passive.

CHAPTER 6 [2]

IN/FORMALITIES IN THE TURKISH HUMANITARIAN FIELD

Having established the humanitarian field as animated by a gendered social imaginary, this chapter focuses on the conditions that allow such an imaginary to thrive and gain such power and currency. As social imaginaries are theorised as inevitable since stories, narrations and discourses lending reason and coherence to social actions will always be part of human interactions, there is no escaping the social imaginary. However, what conditions enable a specific gendered humanitarian imaginary to emerge in the Turkish context? Empirical data that emerged during the field study led us to closely analyse at finer scales and focus on the hybrid practices of formality and informality at three levels; namely (1) professionalised Turkish aid organisations at the national level; (2) local organisations at the district level where we find foundations (*vakıf*) and associations

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[2] Sections from this chapter is drawn from an article under review in *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, entitled "Spaces of in/formality in the Turkish humanitarian field: Spatial and discursive practices impacting refugee women" (Erman & Zadhy, forthcoming)

(*dernek*) – the two primary forms of civil society organisations in Turkey which take on the task of providing the bulk of the material assistance to refugee families; and finally what is labelled as (3) 'one-man humanitarian operations' at the neighbourhood level in which a male organizer coordinates loose and informal networks of donors and singlehandedly takes on the massive work of relief assistance. This chapter seeks to establish that the hybridity of practices along the formal and informal axis allows a gendered social imaginary to take such a strong hold.

As was discussed in Chapter Four, the structural conditions that define the status of refugees in Turkey and the specific nature of the Turkish civil sphere pave the way for the modalities of in/formality to emerge as critical characteristics in aid distribution. Below is a broader discussion of the organisational attributes, which sheds light on how the in/formalities that occur in the aid organisations justify and are justified by gendered discursive techniques rationalising the paradoxes in praxis. This chapter illustrates that when informalities crop up in these contexts, often undetected and free from formal control or at times observed and tolerated (Altrock, 2016), they serve the interest of the organisations far more than the refugees. These organizations differ not only in terms of in/formality in practice but also their very location: the more formal they are, the more they are far flung from the reach of refugees.

Following the conceptualisation of in/formalities in Chapter Two, we can start by identifying how in/formal practices of aid distribution aim at producing the *proper image,* responding both to the need to project legitimacy for private donors and the desire to control and discipline aid seekers, mainly refugee women. Necessary for tracing gendered social imaginaries, discourses are investigated as a crucial modality of in/formalities, a

mediating factor underpinning humanitarian practices and providing the rationale for how and why distribution activities are carried out. Attaining legitimacy becomes a critical concern for aid agents as aid distribution increasingly becomes localized. The usage of discursive techniques enabled by in/formalities in practice is rationalised by and reproduces a gendered social imaginary; legitimacy is reformulated in the vacuum created when the sources of legitimacy become divorced from the state. Instead, as illustrated in the field study, legitimacy is attained through on-the-ground spatial techniques coupled with gendered discourses which thrive in hybrid practices of formality and informality.

6.1   In/formalities in professionalised aid organisations

Embedded in the international humanitarian network, the professionalized organisations under observation often balanced advocacy, research and service provision to refugee families. Following the recent inclination towards professionalising in the humanitarian field (Barnett, 2011), they frame humanitarian expertise as specialised knowledge, transforming humanitarian work into a career. Professionalised humanitarian organisations have complex hierarchies with deep layers of institutionalisation to project their legitimacy and authority (James, 2016). Having to depend on international funding, existing and emergent aid organisations in Ankara are keen to cater to the conditions of quality control and transparency of the often-western funding bodies. Although professionalizing circumscribes the potential for uncoded and unscripted behaviour, subtle interactions and enactments mark the tendency towards informal practices, as highlighted below.

6.1.1. Observation of the professionalised organisations

Professionalised aid organisations such as *İltica ve Göç Araştırma Merkezi* / Refugee and Migration Research Center (IGAM), *Mülteci Destek Derneği* / Refugee Support Association (MÜDEM), or *Deniz Feneri Derneği* often offer assistance through refugee support centres or offices rather than distribution centres. This self-professed distinction from distributing relief aid implies a broadness to their agenda. Support centres that were visited were far from where refugee families typically lived, requiring two buses and one and a half hours and located in upper-middle-class districts. In their trips to these far-flung centres, the refugee women noted how they found the vicinity disorienting, filled with boutique shops and cafes amongst residential apartment buildings, significantly different from the slum settings that refugee families live in.

6.1.2. Gendered discourses and in/formalities in practices

The professional organisations we visited routinely announced collaborations with western funding bodies, such as German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) and the World Bank, and projects with multiple agencies, such as UNICEF, WFP, Save the Children or the Malala Fund. Affiliating so closely with western organizations requires them to discursively align themselves with the international refugee protection agenda and technocratic practices to carry out this agenda. The central discourse of professionalised organisations is nested in the purpose of facilitating smoother harmonisation - the preferred language in Turkish refugee governance. The preoccupation with refugee women underlines the internationally institutionalised norm that gender is a critical component that must be addressed to provide refugee protection (Schnable et al., 2021).

It structures the activities of national and local refugee protection organisations towards a specific type: leadership workshops, entrepreneurship workshops, psychosocial support or educational activities for children and youth, which target young and educated women with the potential to be entrepreneurs.

Such targeted images of refugee women as self-reliant agents that can transcend their material conditions by sheer guts carry over from neoliberal understanding interacting with gendered templates. This is conveyed by Naeema, who was introduced in the previous chapter. Naeema was an active woman with three children who divorced her husband before arriving in Turkey with her children. In Turkey, it was not immediately clear if she was married or in a relationship with another Syrian man but what is clear is that she lived alone and took lots of initiative with various professionalised organisations to make sure that she could support her family.

> I dislike staying at home. I get up early and do all my housework, and then I have off to do various things because otherwise, I will rot. My children are very independent, and they, especially my daughter, can take care of themselves. I only have to worry about Abdul Saeed, the youngest.

Naeema further explained how she filled her time.

> What do I do? Some months ago, I participated with some friends in a project with ASAM. They invited Turkish people and Syrians. They gave us lessons [workshops] and then asked us to come up with business ideas. We presented an idea to have our own bakery, where we make Syrian baked goods. As you know, our desserts are great, and they are also not unfamiliar to this country. So we think we have a great opportunity. But nothing came of it. In the end, the project was awarded to a Turkish group. I do not understand. This is my dream. To bake. I am great at it and quick.

Naeema's experience with such initiatives of professionalised organisations was expected. Often refugee women struggle to cope with the format of such projects that are designed

to make them compete for resources and prove their entrepreneurship spirit. However, most refugee women are mothers aged out of education and employment prospects when they sought refuge and starting at a disadvantage. Not only do such programs fail to consider such handicaps in the program designs, but they also do not acknowledge that without tackling everyday concerns, such as food and shelter, refugee women cannot pursue the aspirational goals that the organisations favoured. In servicing a specific subset of women, they harness refugee women's potential for the purpose of entrepreneurship and rationalise exclusion.

Asiya, who was troubled by the imminent eviction of her family from the informal housing they were renting, was advised to seek assistance in one such support centre by a friend who noticed the websites and social media activities of professionalized organizations such as IGAM and MÜDEM which were filled with announcements of events and messages of solidarity and hope. While their locations and contact details are openly provided, the spectacle of welcome does not hold up when refugee women attempt to access these places. This is encapsulated in Asiya's travels, where an essential element, a nameplate of the centre, was hidden, pushing her through inconvenient and confusing detours in the unfamiliar urban setting. Upon protesting to the aid agent who met Asiya at the doorsteps, we were informed that the support centre was an administrative hub organizing for other branches in other cities, a fact that was hardly communicated online. Discouraged, Asiya left the premise, apologising profusely for having wasted time since it took us an hour to reach even in the private transportation procured to ease our travels.

In other instances, spatial arrangements reveal the capacity to create a barrier that regulates incoming refugee petitioners, even in the centres with glass storefronts that otherwise

signal transparency. They illustrate organizational responses to notions of refugees as "influx", "waves", "sweeping masses" (Efe, 2019). Incoming refugee women are subjected to a filtering process by staff at the reception area or sometimes right at the doorsteps before they are taken in. Holding refugee women in a small space, often on their feet, imposes limits on how they can express themselves before they are granted access further inside – a space for a permitted few.

Another observed instance of refugee women greeted at the reception area with a small card of instructions (a protocol introduced during pandemic conditions and retained) preemptively curtailing conversation forcefully drove home the point that it is the humanitarian organization rather than the refugee women who dictate the interactions with aid agents. Practices emerging through everyday occurrence become informal codes of conduct, such as when refugee petitioners are invariably subjected to filtering at the doorsteps, and they can also be formalized, culminating in a card of instructions. Both these arrangements limit informal, spontaneous interactions, ensuring that refugee women and aid agents adhere to a set script; the overriding concern is the spatial regulation of refugee women within the humanitarian field while simultaneously portraying an image of a warm welcome. Such spatial regulations are gendered in that they recognize the ability of refugee women particularly to elicit sympathy, and thus can be framed as an attempt to minimize their capacity to do so.

In the day-to-day practices of such professionalised organisations, the refugee women were met with well-trained legal advisors familiar with the legal infrastructures. Sunata and Tosun (2019) argued that professional NGOs with exclusive training and skilled people kept services limited, ostensibly to maintain the quality of their services. The

barriers to these skilled and trained individuals, as discussed above, bear out the notion that trained staff served the purposes of legitimacy that would garner funding rather than serving the purpose of refugee assistance. The encounters are scripted, tightly controlled, and geared toward assisting information dissemination. Caseworkers, fluent in the complexities of the legal system, assisted by equally fluent translators, responded to the harried, worried petitioning of the women with detached kindness: firmly correcting misinformation, deflecting complaints, and limiting the consultation to a transfer of information about recourses. There is little space for the women to express their worries or frustrations about issues ranging from divorce procedures, accessing medical services and requests to shift permitted residency from one city to the other.

The experts disseminating information to refugee women inevitably create a hierarchy of power. While the narrow scope of the interaction (in terms of space and time) often minimises negative impacts such as humiliation, the detached style of interactions alienates refugee women as their appeals are reduced to facts about their circumstances, removing their ability to talk meaningfully about their hardships. While accompanying Asiya, she began by expressing doubt, and in having gone, she felt more confident that such organisations were less interested in providing aid relief. Often refugee women came away with information but no workable solution. The rigidness they encountered in these organisations made them feel isolated, unable to express how they were incapacitated from finding and implementing solutions independently. In the lack of the dearly needed material support, most refugee women turn away from such barren organizations and pivot to faith-based organisations. Below is an in-depth look at how in/formality operates in one such organization: a *vakıf*.

6.2 In/formalities in the vakıf

Almost all the participants highlighted local foundations (*vakıf*) and associations (*dernek*) as vital humanitarian actors that profoundly impacted their everyday lives, proving a great source of support for the day-to-day needs of refugee families when all else failed. Unlike the professionalised character of large organisations, they prove to be spaces where in/formalities – vividly visible and utilising gendered social imaginaries– are essential to the organisation's functioning and distribution process.

6.2.1. Observations in the vakıf

The ever-resourceful Naeema facilitated entry into this space. She was uniquely positioned in the *vakıf* as a 'refugee volunteer' who was also paid-in-kind with first-in-line access to the aid in the *vakıf*. Her duties were facilitating communication between the refugees (predominantly women) and helping maintain the place. In her maintenance tasks, she was assisted by two other refugee women who were also in the ambiguous position of 'refugee volunteers', and from what can be observed, they were always kept busy with ironing clothes in the laundry room or making food in the kitchen that was meant to be sold. The presence of these women in between employment and beneficiaries indicated the paradoxical nature of the practices of the *vakıf*.

The *vakıf* is located in a slum neighbourhood of the district of Altındağ, making it easily accessible to refugee families. By no accident, the site looked like a poorly lit shop with a warehouse-type architecture providing storage of clothes, shoes, and accessories; they were often sold at lower prices even though many articles of clothing were donated. Rooms at the back as a laundromat and another as a kitchen and storage for groceries such as meat, oil, and grains indicated the *vakıf*'s primary objective of aid distribution. The

entire structure was open, and refugee women and often children could freely roam about upon entry which is a marked contrast to how refugee women were spatially organised in professional organizations. While the iron door remained symbolically shut, refugee women, once inside, had autonomy.

6.2.2. Gendered Discourses and in/formalities in practices

The *vakıf* projected its Islamic underpinning through dressing, interactions, and posters lining the walls. Women, invariably veiled, often came to visit the veiled administrative staff as donors or volunteers, wishing them '*hayırlı işler'* ('God bless your working day') and marking me out by wishing me a good day as I was a non-veiled volunteer in the space. The male humanitarian figurehead was constantly referred to as *hoca,* visibly denoting his status as a religious leader by donning a kufi cap, much like an *imam*. Activities rotated around prayer times on a day-to-day basis, and religious occasions and festivals were celebrated through social events reinforcing the spirit of Islamic charity.

Informality is preferred in tasks such as knowledge production about refugees, spearheaded by the *hoca,* who is embedded in informal networks and establishes himself as an expert. The legitimacy of the *vakıf* is pinned on the personhood of the *hoca.* Talks with the female aid workers revealed that he was providing humanitarian aid assistance even before the arrival of Syrian refugees in conflict zones from Syria to Sudan, both as a personal endeavour and within professionalized contexts. The prominence of the *hoca* indicated the gendered understandings of a male figurehead who can legitimize the efforts of ground-level humanitarianism. His association and respectable position in a conservative network often translate into financial support from individual donors within this network and also lead to formal state recognition.

His position in the *vakıf* contrasts with how the *vakıf* almost always received refugee women, and the staff comprised mainly women. Two female aid workers ran the day-to-day business of the *vakıf*, but the *hoca* had both financial control and decision-making authority overriding the female aid workers. In the *vakıf*, by virtue of his gender, the *hoca* is placed in a position of deference by the women –female aid workers, female volunteers and female seekers of aid.

This was apparent when during the visit to the *vakıf*, the conversation with a female aid worker was cut short by his arrival as it was evident that he was intimidating to everyone on the site. In subsequent conversations, refugee women indicated that his attitude towards them was often cold and distant, perhaps prizing the value of minimal interaction between men and women in Islam. Naeema shared that the refugee women who volunteered in the *vakıf* often received scolding from him. Thus, despite being a figurehead, he acted to create an intimidating distance between himself and the people he sought to assist.

The humanitarian discourse of civil society organizations in Turkey often aligns with the narrative of solidarity with Syrians based on religion, underscored by a shared history under the Ottoman empire (Lowndes and Polat, 2020). In the *vakıf*, faith-based discourse attesting to helping Muslim brothers and sisters in need becomes a legitimizing tool that validates the existence of networks enabling informal donation collection and distribution practices. Faith provides rigidity and structure and is the basis of reasonable action and codes of conduct, contrasting with professionalized organizations, where formalized codes of conduct are based on liberal human rights principles. In the *vakıf*, the faith-based formalizing process still leaves vast room for informal faith-based practices. For example, the flow of financial contributions from donors is carried out without transparent record

keeping and no accountability on how it is distributed, legitimized by the Islamic precept '*Bir elin verdiğini öbür el görmez*' (one hand should not know what the other hand has given). Subsequently, the interaction between the aid agents and the refugee becomes an important deciding factor: the performance of religiosity or victimhood embedded in the fluidity of the interaction is crucial to access aid.

The importance of gender in such interactions is evident in how aid workers are often more lenient towards refugee women than refugee men, particularly widowed refugees. In other instances, the arbitrariness of such encounters shines through: a refugee woman who newly discovered the vakıf was told to depend on a young Syrian boy to translate for her in the tense atmosphere of a crowded administrative office to a distracted aid agent. During the unsatisfactory exchange, the boy, with his minimal command of the language, failed to convey the woman's desperation, who subsequently left empty-handed. Again, what is important is the gendered process of narrating helplessness that refugee women are seen as well equipped for. The asymmetric power configuration is further illustrated by reports that aid agents acted as if the money came from their own pockets.

The *vakıf* uses discourses on charity and almsgiving amongst faith-based networks to solicit donations. Using personal stories of refugee women, particularly widowed refugee mothers, the *vakıf* takes advantage of the privileged position of the ideal refugee, which stems from the Islamic understandings about the duty owed to a widow of a martyr coupled with Turkish notions of patriotism, coding the martyrs as exceptionally brave and worthy, of being honoured (Sözer, 2019). 'Giving our names and how many children we have helps them tell our stories. They also ask for our photos, especially the photos of children,' a participant offered. These are instances of how a specifically gendered

imaginary is transmitted widely and captures an audience beyond the physical site of aid distribution. The extra task of obtaining the image of women and children is helpful in private WhatsApp groups of people interested in donating. Such usage of images of women and children taps into the trope of vulnerability and helplessness associated with refugees (Johnson, 2011) and is justified through the rhetoric of how it facilitates Islamic charity. While similarly practised in professionalized organizations, the *vakıf* nevertheless dismisses concerns such as privacy and feelings of being exposed and objectified and holds on to its de facto ownership of images and data. That refugee women feel this invasion of their privacy is evident in how uncomfortable they are when asked to pose for a photo, often hiding behind children. The contradictory feelings produced through such practices deepen when they know that by placing themself on the donors' radar, they have a higher chance of accessing aid, an impossibility in the case of professionalized organizations. Thus, it proves to be a chance for them to co-opt a specific imaginary of themselves. Within the in/formal spaces of the *vakıf*, through images or narrations, refugee women can rise to the occasion of negotiating access to relief aid, opening up some space for their agency, however abusive the process might be.

In such a setting lacking the type of codes of conduct, clearly-established mandates and an organisational hierarchy as seen in professionalised organisations, the regulations of conduct marked by gender hierarchy intersecting with religious authority become the norm, producing an image of austerity and spirituality and constraining the women −workers, volunteers and aid seekers − within the bounds of Islamic behaviour. Within this hybrid setting, formal procedures, such as a registration of the organisation, pave the way for highly irregular practices such as having refugee volunteers. Despite how busy

the refugee volunteers were, the female aid workers expressed a dismissive attitude in discussing their position in the organisation: "They are around because they get to know about the aid we get and distribute...they do not do much, except help around the kitchen and clean the place. Naeema translates sometimes".

This statement belied what was observed. For instance, the administrative staff were compiling a list of refugee children to invite to an '*ifthar*' (breaking of fast), and while one aid worker noted down the names of attendees, it was Naeema who was calling the families, informing them of the details and passing on details of their availability to the staff. She was the essential bridge between the staff and the refugee recipients. To dismiss her crucial work as a translator when the whole event would have failed without the logistical support she provided as 'help around the kitchen' indicates the gendered association of the refugee women with kitchen or cleaning work rather than the less mundane organisational work. It indicates a refusal to see the refugee volunteer as possessing anything more than their homemaking abilities. This minimisation of Naeema's contribution to the coordination of the event indicates an inability to imagine refugee women leading managerial work and providing actual valuable support to the organisation's running. Islamic charity would seem to be wasted on women as resourceful as Naeema, so there is an inclination towards dismissing and devaluing her.

Naeema's agentive behaviour is further demonstrated by her gatekeeping, where she co-opts and deploys the discourses of deservingness to guide the *vakıf* in their aid distribution and demonstrate that they can provide for the correct recipients. In explaining her duties as a 'fact-finder' for the *vakıf,* informing them about the refugee women who come asking for aid, Naeema had this to say:

> I ask around about them...where they stay—the address. If I know someone in that area whom I trust, I ask them about the woman... whether this detail is correct...if her neighbours confirm, then only will I help her...I take my time asking many people to be sure.

Naeema gathers significant authority by embedding herself into the aid infrastructure. In our talk, she indicated that she favours women she identifies as honest and pious women in need, indicating again the importance of the interpersonal relationship refugee women need to foster, not only with aid agents but also with other women such as Naeema in authority positions. Through her, the *vakıf* embeds in the refugee community, but her ambiguous position as neither employed nor entirely volunteer alludes to her precarity.

6.3   In/formalities in 'one-man humanitarian operations.'

Societal norms reifying widowed women in the Turkish socio-cultural context have led to a focused interest in assisting refugee widows and orphans, attracting many individual enactments of humanitarianism in the civil sphere. Such enactments exist in tandem with refugee-led aid efforts labelled the "shadows of the shadow state" at the periphery of the refugee governance system (Benson, 2022). However, while refugee-led grassroots organizations have come under scholarly scrutiny, the existence of local humanitarian efforts carried out by a single person has escaped notice. Entirely detached from the state and firmly embedded in refugee communities through locating themselves in refugee neighbourhoods, what can be labelled the 'one-man humanitarian operations' can be of particular interest in the discussion about how informality brings in heterogeneity in the humanitarian field, especially as it intersects with religiosity and gender that produces and relies on gendered social imaginaries.

6.3.1. Observations of 'one-man humanitarian operations'

Spatial arrangements materialize the specific type of neighbourhood-based and disciplining humanitarianism favoured in the two instances of 'one-man humanitarian operations' that cropped up during research. These operations were housed in cheap and spacy storage areas on the ground floor of a building, differentiated it from random everyday acts of assisting refugee families and the under-resourced efforts of refugee-led organizations. Lacking any nameplates and couched in anonymity, it would escape notice if not for crowds of women who gather in the area to register their names and collect aid.

Having a designated area of operation is not only for logistics; it allows the 'one-man humanitarian operations' to claim structure and project a level of professionalism and authority: the Turkish man Faruk, in charge of these operations, asserts his professionalism by establishing something akin to an office. This information is given to me by Salma, whose underaged son sometimes assists Faruk in his work for some allowance. The attempt to emulate the offices of a registered NGO is also evident in how rules of conduct are vigorously enforced to counteract the informality of the operation. The large groups of refugee women it draws are at times rudely lined into queues and allowed into the building one by one, their names, addresses and household details recorded in Excel sheets, creating a humanitarian database in the hands of an unregistered operator.

Faruk's diligence may be for practical reasons, but this quickly turns into efficiency in policing refugee families as he becomes privy to who has access to what food and when and decide on what help they can get. Regulations of behaviour mimic those enforced in professionalized organizations as discussed above, but what is different is that it is decided

singularly by the one man in control of a personal aid operation and not by the bureaucracy of the professional organization.

Moving his regulatory presence outside operational sites by embedding himself in the neighbourhood, he can also expand the scope of surveillance and control over refugee women. Women described Faruk as approaching them on the street and striking up conversations. Such encounters convert the entire neighbourhood into a humanitarian field as refugee women have to be on standby to express their needs at any moment. It grants Faruk the power to catch women unprepared and deepen his control. Such an expansive level of control impacts the ability of refugee women to relate to their new surroundings in any other way except in their role as gendered humanitarian subjects.

6.3.2. Gendered discourses and in/formalities in practice

That 'one-man humanitarian operations' explicitly targeted refugee women, especially widowed or divorced ones, was immediately made evident through the discussions with refugee women and aid agents at the neighbouring *vakıf*. The lack of needy or disabled men on the site corroborates this, prompting questions on how this explicit interest in refugee women is rationalized. Reports from refugee women indicated that he draws strongly from Islamic discourses of protecting widows and single women, underlining the lack of a male figure to protect and shelter them, naturalizing and reinforcing women's dependency on men. Referring to the many allegations of sexual misconduct between the man and refugee women, Salma reported him telling her that: 'A Syrian woman's honour is worth only one BIM card (debit card with money).'

Such an explicit reference to women marking them out as sexual objects had to be reconciled by the generosity Faruk to refugee women – if they are favoured. One divorced

participant, Zeinab, described how much more helpful Fauk was compared to the *vakıf*: 'I am only able to offer you hospitality in my home because of him. He provided the furniture, the coal to heat the place, the rent, everything. Without him, we would be on the street.' Strong sentiments describing his efforts as though they are his personal generosity indicate the high regard generated through his work, legitimizing his place in the Syrian refugee community. It also taps into the social imaginary of the benevolent man who acts as the saviour of women who are victims of their circumstances. However, the aid distribution depends on the ties between the man and local businesses: 'The large grocery shop in the neighbourhood donates foodstuff to Syrian refugees, usually those close to expiring,' Salma offered. Collaboration between large grocery stores and various civil society organizations is a norm. However, in this case, this is an entirely informal entity that is not registered, a norm in practice carried out as wholly informal.

Moreover, other participants discussed how his corner shop flourished because Syrian refugees were constantly buying from him, which initially led him to become more invested in the Syrian community. According to their narrations, this humanitarian interest deepened when Faruk married a Syrian widow with multiple orphans. The reification of Faruk by several women aligns with the tropes of a benevolent saviour who emerges as a moral figure in whom the refugee families can find safety in. This contrasts with the complaints of several other women who provided accounts of verbal and sexual harassment in the makeshift operational sites of the man, where they were humiliated or inappropriately touched, with one account describing his transgressions as follows:

> I was with him because he said I could pick out some furniture. The place is small and cramped; I don't know why he did not wait outside...I felt him touch my shoulder. I thought it was an accident, but he moved around behind me and touched

my lower back and hip as if to push me forward. This is not appropriate touching. I pulled back and left.

The refugee woman expressed her frustration at the incident because she had hoped to receive monthly assistance from him. Instead, she suspects he only allowed her assistance every other month because she was cold to him. It is clear from such accounts of interpersonal interactions that performances of victimhood and religiosity, as in the *vakıf,* are ineffective. Instead, sexual availability becomes a key strategy to gain favour.

Widowed and divorced women were also utilized for their fundraising appeal. Highlighting this, Naeema reported how much he relied on the widows:

> He has lists with names, and he would say, I have this many widowed women asking me for help and this many orphaned children. He uses their names. He would bring donors straight to the houses of widowed women and children to demonstrate their needs.

Salma, one of the participants most reliant on Faruk, shared, "He calls and asks if we are home. they [a first-time donor] will come and see our circumstances and give us the money directly. If they donate again, then it goes straight to him". As discussed above, the ability to question women anywhere and enter their homes invests in men such as Faruk, unchecked power and an immense hold over the refugee family, which is entirely unrecognized even as the refugee families are used for fundraising purposes.

6.4   Conclusion

This chapter provides the empirical findings that direct our analytical gaze towards three different types of aid organizations: professionalized aid organizations, often operating at the national level, the *vakıf,* which operates at the district level and finally, the 'one-man humanitarian operations', which is embedded at the neighbourhood level. By decentering state strategies in refugee governance and protection and highlighting civil society as

crucial actors, it demonstrates in/formality in its interlinkedness, bringing into relief how uncoded, unscripted and fluid interactions, discourses, and behaviours are embedded practices in coded, scripted and rigid humanitarian procedures. Gendered discourses and practices drawn from such discourses are important evidence of social imaginaries, and in/formalities are understood as the platform upon which interpersonal interactions between refugees and aid workers are deployed on. By analyzing refugee women's encounters with in/formalities, a more sophisticated understanding of the co-constructive aspect of (re)producing gendered social imaginaries emerges, which alludes to the rationalizing power of the specific imaginary at work, emerging forcefully and decisively to render alternative ways of humanitarian engagement as moot.

The empirical data also points to the reformulation of legitimacy, which becomes crucial to veil the informality of humanitarian activities. Using the term legitimacy without questioning it can lead us to think it is connected with state validation. However, legitimacy is blurred in the humanitarian field and dispersed, decentralized, and unhooked from the state. Thus, legitimacy stops being about legal frameworks and becomes a bottom-up validation extended to informal humanitarian enactments empowering them almost as much as a legal framework.

Gendered notions structure humanitarian practices to regulate, control and discipline refugee women on the one hand and to cast themselves in the image of the appropriate middleman to dispense aid on the other hand. The legitimacy granted through image-making allows the organizations, especially the *vakıf* and the 'one-man humanitarian operations', to capture the financial contributions of private donors in their informal networks. Gendered discourses create commonalities between private donors and aid

agents, generating and sustaining a symbiotic relationship where the donors, through the aid organisations, become the saviours of helpless, vulnerable women.

The findings highlight the importance of a critical reading of humanitarian enactments at different levels and of problematizing humanitarian practices where hybridity is under-researched even though it serves to (re)produce vulnerabilities, especially for refugee women who are an over-researched group (Sukarieh and Tannock, 2013).

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This study began with an interest in how the actors in the humanitarian field differentiated their responses to refugees who are also similarly vulnerable. The curiosity about how vulnerable people, all of whom escaped tragic events of violence and displacement, can be subjected to hierarchies and classified into categories of deservingness, burdened with assumptions and subjected to demands levied onto them by people in positions to help them was invigorated by a personal knowledge of how such experiences primarily mark refugee women. It produced three research questions. The initial question was on how gender continues to be the prime logic of organising humanitarian assistance, namely, what could explain the gendered nature of the humanitarian field. The second question is how this gendered nature shapes the responses of refugee women. The third and final question emerged organically as the research progressed and focused on how informal practices contribute to the gendered nature of the humanitarian field. In this concluding chapter, the answers to these questions will be summarised. These answers are established

by anchoring the empirical evidence to the theory of social imaginaries to explain why gender is so powerful in humanitarian contexts.

7.1   Gendered social imaginaries in humanitarian interactions

The employment of a gender perspective introduced to the study of forced migration exposed the gendered construction of the humanitarian subject in the body and experiences of refugee women (Baines, 2017; Barnett, 2005; Daly, 2005; Pollack & Hafner-Burton, 2010). While a gender perspective can convey the hidden consequences of the current refugee protection regime, especially concerning issues such as the feminisation of asylum (Hyndman & Giles, 2011), it stops short of explaining how the (re)production of the gendered nature of humanitarianism.

The line of thought presented by Baines (2004) in her feminist political-economy account of the evolution of the UNHCR does an excellent service in providing the necessary insight into how historical structures provided opportunities and constraints on the adoption of gender and the integration of its different understandings in refugee protection and humanitarian aid. Her analysis highlights the agenda setting and policy making at a systemic level through the interactions amongst states, international and supra-national organisations, transnational networks and institutions governing these entities. This is crucial to understanding how contemporary humanitarianism's gendered nature is rooted in social and historical structures. What is missing from her account is how the gendered nature of the humanitarian field as it exists in urban settings owes just as much to the meaning-making that is diffused through "practices and struggle of actors engaged in relationships with each other and the institutions in which they are involved" (Whitwort,1994: 65). This brings the analytical focus onto actors such as the humanitarian

agent on the field and the refugees who are not only passive recipients but have to seek and petition for aid actively.

Through refugee women's experiences, this dissertation attempts to analyse, at this ground-level focus, the interpersonal and intersubjective interactions rationalised through everyday meaning-making and everyday practices of humanitarian aid assistance. The central argument of the thesis is that the humanitarian field, as it is currently structured, is lent coherence through the gendered social imaginary deployed on the interface of everyday encounters. This specific social imaginary animates the strategic, political and even physical environment of the humanitarian space but also the social area of the humanitarian field. It emerges from the top-down socio-historical factors: the feminist turn in strategic policymaking leading to efforts such as gender mainstreaming pushed into the core of international refugee protection as it is into the international development initiatives. A budding social imaginary is transported through international organisations and diffused through local contexts creating fertile space for the gendered imaginary to bloom.

As theorists of social imaginaries highlight, social behaviour crystallises as an imaginary when ordinary people engage in its perpetuation and (re)production. Gender understandings sourced from each person's culture, personal identities, and culture-specific assumptions about each other contribute templates that interact and transform any top-down gendered social imaginary. In the humanitarian field, refugees and humanitarian aid workers are the key actors who contribute to this dynamic process. Both refugee women and humanitarian aid workers come to the field accompanied by templates that instruct them on how to make sense of themselves and each other, and it is through their

intersubjective, interpersonal, everyday interaction that a gendered social imaginary truly holds.

The potential of a social imaginary to be reshaped and reformed at varying degrees depends on the power relations among the actors actively (re)producing it. The breadth of the power differentials evident between refugee women and humanitarian aid agents demonstrates why refugee women are privileged in this investigation. While the empirical data evocatively conveys the vulnerability of refugee men whose sense of masculinity is shattered in refugeehood due to stigmatisation and marginalisation, refugee men are better positioned to access resources, albeit in a narrow scope, through the labour market, whether formal or informal. On the other hand, refugee women are the primary subject of humanitarian aid. In highlighting the co-constructive roles of humanitarian workers and refugee women in (re)producing gendered social imaginaries, we reach the empirics on how the power differentials between the co-constructors impact social imaginaries. A gendered social imaginary limits the humanitarian field to a 'gender logic' in organising itself. It is crucial to discuss this issue of power in how people imagine each other and the world they collectively inhabit since this power formulation actualises the imaginary to impact lives in different ways. As the present dissertation has attempted to demonstrate, it structures choices of behaviour, allows the dismissal of contradictions and paradoxes, renders an otherwise irrational strategy as rational, and justifies what might otherwise not be seen as just. At various points, actors rely on the gendered imaginary to justify the power differentials. Interestingly in the case of refugee women, they even go as far as to justify potential abuse towards themselves because they reason that they possess an intrinsic aptitude to cope with it.

7.2 Refugee women's strategies shaped by gendered imaginaries

Rather than national and ethnic identity, refugee women understand their position as humanitarian subjects at a position of powerlessness and liminality (Turner 1969), where they struggle with a discontinued reality. They are stuck in an in-between period with a past characterised by order and predictability and a future characterised by disorder and unpredictability. The humanitarian field is one in which they find themselves in a permanent crisis, which impacts and shapes their sense of selfhood.

How can we make sense of how refugee women perceive themselves in this state of permanent crisis? Is there space for refugee women to challenge the imposition of essentialised labels and subjectification, capturing the complexity of the marginalisation and liminality that they experience? The findings of this research have also shown that gendered social imaginaries mark the humanitarian field as an arena of strategic negotiation, challenges and co-option. Although refugee women are viewed as entirely blank, refugee resilience and agency can come through as they shape their behaviours according to their new understandings of themselves in the new context of refugeehood. Multiple templates of a gendered social imaginary crop up between actors in the humanitarian space and demonstrates how refugee women are multifaceted and active protagonists in the refugee narration of the world, even though they are constructed as passive subjects in the eyes of humanitarian actors. It also indicates how they could internalise new gender roles even as they experience transformations of gender relations and maintain older gender hierarchies.

Key gendered understandings in the humanitarian field that contributes to the gendered social imaginary emphasise the woman's role as homemakers in the family, refugees

represented as victimised women, and constructions of refugee widows as the preferred category of refugees. Gendered attitudes toward refugee men and women emerging from such a social imaginary transform humanitarian aid distribution into a gendered practice, with refugee men withdrawing from the humanitarian field and refugee women left to narrate victimhood and prove vulnerability in pursuit of aid. It rationalises the notion that refugee women should be the permitted representatives to advocate for their families and bring in the necessary aid to sustain the survival of their families. Encounters in the humanitarian field push refugee men and women to internalise the same notions and conform accordingly. As mentioned, while the behaviour of refugee women in the humanitarian field demonstrates some agency, it also makes leeway for abuse through intimacy as women are forced into asymmetric relationships with aid providers.

Although most of the participants in this study had little experience working in the informal economy, they were still adamant that they could not cope with it and saw seeking humanitarian aid as an alternative to informal employment. However, considering the complexity of the task of pursuing aid and the sophistication with which refugee women tackle it, their pursuit of humanitarian aid can be framed as a form of labour which satisfies their guiding templates as mothers and homemakers. The many reports of the refugee women indeed portrayed the aid-seeking process as mentally and physically demanding, with marginally better returns than those received from employment. None of the refugee women considered the humanitarian process as one where they enjoyed rights and support. The atmosphere of constant competition, living from month to month, aid assistance to aid assistance creates a need to be on the constant lookout and becomes an additional burden on women who still have to continue with their domestic duties. At the

same time, since humanitarian aid can be the only support they receive in the current environment where job opportunities are severely curtailed for refugee men, the pursuit of humanitarian aid transforms women into breadwinners. Furthermore, the marginalisation of refugee men means that refugee women have to abandon familiar relationships sanctioned by their community and replace them with new relationships with aid workers where gender asymmetries continue to be reproduced.

Strategic manoeuvres of pretending to be unattached, refraining from remarriage and engaging in intimate relations of some sort with aid workers are all limited strategies possible for refugee women within a world that is coloured by a gendered social imaginary. They all pertain to their gender roles. Thus, while refugee women indeed deploy strategies, their strategies are limited by the entrenched gendered imaginary. The question of agency thus becomes complicated because while the refugee women are more than passive participants of the humanitarian enactments, they are still sticking to a specific social imaginary which makes sense of their world. The scholarly celebration of refugee agency should thus consider that being an agentive actor does not immediately confer some revolutionary ability. Instead, agency is about flexing within the constraints of the social world only as much as it can confer some benefits to the actors. Indeed, refugee women pointed out how they strived to temper any signs of their agency with overt signs of their vulnerability since agentive refugee women can hardly fit into the deservingness categories delineated by the gendered social imaginary. Refugee women enjoy some authority due to the prominence placed on them by virtue of their gender in the humanitarian field. However, they often have to maintain their agency within their

constructions as permanently vulnerable, victimised and fit for presumed feminine roles such as homemaking and child-rearing.

7.3   In/formalities as the platform for gendered imaginaries

How social imaginaries thrive in the hybridity that occurs in the urban humanitarian context is an important insight contributed by this research. In/formalities is a crucial modality through which humanitarian practices push refugee women into new relations embedded with domination and subjugation on gendered and racialised terms in their refugee journey (Hyndman & Giles, 2011). First, aside from decentering state strategies in refugee governance and protection and highlighting civil society as crucial actors, it discusses in/formality in its interlinkedness, bringing into relief how uncoded, unscripted and fluid interactions, discourses, and behaviours are embedded practices in coded, scripted and rigid humanitarian procedures paving the way for the entrenchment of gendered social imaginaries. The symbiotic interactions of gendered social imaginaries and in/formalities directly contribute to the endurance of the gendered nature of humanitarianism.

In analysing the in/formality of humanitarian efforts, it becomes clear that producing legitimacy is crucial to belie the informality of their activities. Empirical evidence points to how legitimacy is blurred, dispersed, and decentralised in the humanitarian field. Deploying spatial arrangements underpinned by gendered discourses allows humanitarian practices to regulate, control and discipline refugees on the one hand and, on the other hand, to create the proper image of an aid distribution centre that can cater to the ideals of donors (individuals in the more informal efforts). Gendered discourses underpinning the informal practices of aid agents also seek to project legitimacy, justifying their existence

and practices, and creating an alliance between private donors and aid agents, generating and sustaining a symbiotic relationship. Thus, legitimacy stops being about legal frameworks and becomes a bottom-up validation extended to informal humanitarian enactments empowering them almost as much as a legal framework. Often this bottom-up process depends on gendered templates of needy refugee women, contributing practices such as asking for and sharing images of needy refugee women surrounded by their helpless children, preferably widowed and orphaned. Refugee women engage with such opportunities as a strategy for receiving aid, veiling their strategising behind images of their children, reinforcing notions of helplessness, innocence and vulnerability through which donors are moved to support them financially.

The empirical findings also illustrate the need to critically analyse the heterogeneity of actors who become prominent organisers of aid distribution, strategically utilising and reformulating the gendered social imaginary to benefit from it as the state withdraws from direct engagement with the humanitarian field, at times purposefully. With professionalised organisations becoming increasingly compromised due to their alignment with the donor culture, grassroots efforts outside the control of centralised bodies, including state and international aid organisations, become the more significant source of aid. It is of paramount importance to spotlight actors such as the 'one-man humanitarian operators' who are entirely divorced from state control and consider how they are thriving on the fringes of the humanitarian field, creating and maintaining networks of donors, surveilling and exerting discipline on refugee communities, particularly by way of women in the name of humanitarianism. More than professionalised organisations or *vakif,* their informal practices depend on essentialising

templates that justify exploitations. They benefit from social imaginaries that cast them in the role of saviours, with refugee women reifying them and their efforts as free-floating aid actors who embed in the aid architecture. Coupled with expectations of gratitude from refugees that make up the gendered social imaginary of the ideal refugee woman, the abject poverty of their conditions often pushes them to justify the transgressions of such aid agents. Humanitarian interactions leaning towards informality on the axis, such as in the case of the vakif or the 'one-man humanitarian operations', are characterised by unpredictability and arbitrariness. It illustrates the lack of checks on the decision-making power of aid agents. Faith-based humanitarianism thrives in informal contexts, basing its humanitarian practices on gendered connotations and religiosity. While such aid distribution efforts purport to act in solidarity and assist vulnerable refugee families through an Islamic ideological framing, implicit goals are uncovered through the analytical lens of gender. Multiple asymmetries of power between the aid giver and the aid receiver are reproduced when the latter is conditioned by being poor, a woman and a refugee. Within 'one-man humanitarian operations', Islamic charity and male power interact to produce new power constellations with spatial technique and faith-based discourses cloaking exploitative practices that compound the gendered vulnerability of refugee women. Practices occur in different ways in professionalised organisations, leaving little scope for refugee women to engage with the aid agents, causing them to feel distanced from aid relief mentally and physically. Their strict codes of conduct prefer the neoliberal social imaginary of a self-resilient refugee woman, and they gear their activities towards a specific category of women, primarily those who are interested in and capable of setting up their businesses, frustrating the women in the study whose needs are more primary

This chapter closes with a call for scholars in humanitarianism and forced displacement to more rigorously approach the negotiation of displaced people confronting social imaginaries embedded in the in/formal practices of the humanitarian field. While the thesis has been preoccupied with gender, social imaginaries can manifest with several other themes. This research has encountered some of these in the form of neoliberal subjectivities and faith-based humanitarian reasoning, which seem to intersect with a gendered social imaginary. Refugee masculinities is another avenue for scholarly work, observing how refugee men encounter specific masculine imaginaries thriving under in/formal conditions. Refugee men's agency is severely curtailed owing greatly to their racialised constructions. As observed in this research, they also have to contend with a neoliberal inclination in humanitarian protection, which is not likely to abate despite the vocal scholarly criticisms against it. Thus, there is much to explore in how they become agentive in refugee regimes that trap them between masculine imaginaries and neoliberal expectations of refugeehood.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Warm up

1. Tell me about your daily life in Önder. What do you do everyday?

    Probe: When do you wake up? What do you do then?

2. Tell me about your family?

    Probe a: How many? Father alive? Brothers?

    Probe b: Who makes decisions for the family?

3. What are challenges and opportunities you have been facing?

Seeking aid

4. Tell me about your experiences in seeking humanitarian aid.

    Probe a. What kind of relief aid do you get for the family?

    Probe b: From where? How often?

    Probe c: How do you find out about relief aid programs?

5. What do you think of the help you get from the organizations?

    Probe a: Is it an ease, discomfort, anxiety inducing?

Probe b: What are the difficulties you face as you seek relief aid?

Probe c: What are the conveniences you face as you seek relief aid?

6. How does the process of asking for aid impacted the way you think about humanitarian aid?

Probe a: How would you define this aid? Is it charity? Or your right?

Encounters

7. Describe your encounters with aid workers from NGOs.

Probe a. Do you meet the same people?

Probe b. Are they your friends, family friends?

Probe c. Turkish, Arabic?

8. Describe your encounters with aid workers. How do you feel about the aid workers as they assist you?

a. Are you comfortable while getting aid from an aid worker?

b. What is distressing about your encounters with the aid workers?

c. What is comforting about your encounters with the aid workers?

d. In general, is it reassuring? Helpful? Or is it confrontational?

e. Do you have to convince them or demonstrate your need?

f. Do they ask you to share personal information? Are you comfortable when they   ask personal questions?

g. What is an information you share the most? In other words, what is a story you have to retell a lot?

h. What information are you most afraid of sharing with them?

j. Do you have informal communications? Do you have to text them later or talk to them on the phone? One person or the same person?

9. Describe one encounter which you really assisted you.

   a. Is there a visit that you remember to be very easy and helpful?

10. Describe one encounter which really hindered you.

   a. Is there a visit that you remember to be very difficult?

11. In general, how do the aid workers think about those coming to get the aid?

   a. Do they judge?

   b. If so, does this impact the way you interact with them to receive aid?

12. How do you feel about the place where you seek help?

   a. Is it confusing a process? Translators? Who helps you?

b. Do you have to go to a faraway place? How do you travel to the office of the organization?

c. Do you go with kids, is it open and child friendly? Is it accessible?

d. Do you wait for long, is it comfortable with seating? Do you have to wait outside? Queues? Do you have to return several times?

Strategizing

13. How do you prepare for an encounter with an aid worker?

a. Do you try to give a specific image to the aid worker?

b. How do you present yourself?

c. Do you dress formally or informally?

14. Are there certain ways of communicating with the aid worker to successfully receive aid assistance? What is the most effective or efficient way?

a. Do you go alone or with a male guardian? Or in a group? Or with older woman? Why?

b. Do you attempt to speak Turkish or with the translators there? Why? Does it make a difference?

c. Do you practice what to say? Do you discuss with the family? Do you discuss with others in the community?

15. What are your most successful strategies?

d. Are you ever sure you will receive aid before you go?

e. Do you think about preparations to be successful?

f. Is it easier with women aid workers? Or with male aid workers? Younger or older? Do you approach them accordingly if you can?

g. Do you think knowing someone working there is helpful? Do you try to find out someone who might know someone who works there or not? Can you reach these people?

16. Do you think a woman can ask for help and get it easier?

a. How do you think it will be different for you to ask for assistance if you were male?

Construction of self

17. Now that you are a refugee how has your opinion about yourself changed?

a. Do you think there is a change in how you see yourself since coming to Turkey?

18. How does the process of asking for aid impact the way you think of yourself?

a. Does it make you feel positively or negatively about yourself?

19. How does it feel to be a woman as you seek humanitarian aid?

a. How has your sense of responsibility changed since you were displaced and through your journey to semi settlement in Ankara?

20. Do you think getting aid properly would change the way you plan for your future?

21. Do you feeling like you are safe, that you belong and have a future?

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION SHEET

Date and time:

Place:

	Refugees (r1)	Aid workers (a1)	Translators (t1)	Group behaviours/interactions (frequencies & durations)
Participant				
Setting (relating				
Activities				
Emotions and nonverbal cues				
Demographic				
Conversation topics				
Quotes in Turkish or Arabic				
Researcher reflection				

Description of setting:

Conceptual frameworks:

Conceptual framework	Description of concept	Observations (timestamps)
Gendering	Instances of where gender is crucial	
template: saviour subject	The authority to save	
Template: vulnerable subject	Performing helplessness to prove worthiness	
Template: us vs them	Overwhelmed, territorial, resentful. Who is excluded, othered.	
strategies	Point of contacts where self constructs (frequencies)	
SM: faith	Usage to justify or take comfort	
Formal Humanitarian procedures	guidelines rules, mores, organizational rules and more	
Informal humanitarian practice	Spontaneous , unscripted	