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H.S. Batainah and M.A. de Percy

Women, Peace and Security:

What can participation mean for Syrian women?

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Introduction

Calls to include women in peace and security negotiations and post-conflict peacebuilding are ongoing even as research continues to demonstrate the ways in which women are excluded from meaningful participation in these processes. Two-thirds of the global refugee population are women and children. Many view women's participation in post-conflict rebuilding as both desirable and necessary (True et al.,2021). However, despite this, displaced women are largely ignored.

This paper – the third in a series of three – is part of a research project on Syrian refugee women in transition. It draws on fieldwork conducted in Jordan, Lebanon and Australia in 2018 and 2019 and incorporates research on the Syrian diaspora in Australia.

Between November 2018 and November 2019, the primary author conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 100 Syrian women in Jordan and Lebanon – host countries for large numbers of Syrian refugees (along with many Palestinian and Iraqi refugees) – and in Australia. The women were between the ages of 18 and 63; most were in their 30s and 40s. The primary author also interviewed people working with Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon.

Based on these firsthand accounts, we sought to understand the factors that help or hinder Syrian women's participation in peace negotiations and peacebuilding. We also sought to understand the status of Syrian women refugees and how this can inform their political participation in a post-conflict Syria. This paper has a particular focus on Syrian women in Australia, whose experiences in their new context present new challenges for participation.

There are tremendous opportunities to include women at all levels in humanitarian interventions, prevention and resolution of armed conflict, creation and maintenance of peace and security, and post-conflict peacebuilding both closer to home and further afield. It is widely acknowledged that conflict and post-conflict resolutions will not succeed if women are not included in negotiations and peacebuilding initiatives (Coomaraswamy, 2015 and True et al., 2021). The expectation that women should be included in brokering peace is based on indications that 'when women are included in peace processes, there is a 35 percent increase in the probability that a peace agreement will last 15 years or more' (Lindborg, 2017). When women are deliberately excluded from formal talks there are profound negative consequences for the implementation and success of peace negotiations (Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002b). However, understanding the barriers to participation requires asking questions about women's lives and our time with Syrian women revealed the extent of the diversity in lived experience that is often overlooked.

Agency, and ultimately meaningful participation, is about the ability to envisage futures, aim for goals and arrive at mechanisms to fulfill one's objectives (Donald et al., 2017) and operates within a broader context of safety and security (Segrave et al, 2021). However, refugee women continue to be misunderstood and marginalised, and continue to have less agency

than is their right. While the sources of refugee women's marginalisation are layered, generally, they can be identified at the point where an individual woman's agency meets with structural and institutional constraints. Local context and agency are important considerations in implementing the United Nations Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, and while the WPS agenda is not a focus of Australian domestic policy, the underlying principles can be important for refugee women in Australia with links to the wider diaspora. This paper sets out the ways in which Syrian refugee women in Jordan, Lebanon and Australia share many overlapping experiences even as their local contexts change and how understanding the women's contexts can help highlight the ways in which positioning the Women, Peace and Security agenda as part of Australia's foreign policy continues to ignore the ways in which Syrian refugee women in Australia continue to be impacted by many of the challenges they faced prior to coming to Australia .

Women, Peace and Security

The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) was passed in 2000.

The central premise of the WPS agenda is that men and women experience conflict differently and that approaches to understanding the factors in conflict and subsequent peacebuilding rest on assumptions about the perpetrators and victims of conflict. When women are viewed simply as victims of conflict they are not recognised as capable of peacebuilding.

Since UNSCR 1325 passed, various other UN resolutions and the rhetoric concerning outside intervention in places like Afghanistan and Iraq have included references to the status and role of women. Women's vulnerability during armed conflict is highlighted by the general research by the UN and other inter-government and non-government organisations (Tripp, 2015). However, other researchers have found that the status of women in peacetime is also an indicator of the relative stability of states and the relationships between states (Caprioli, 2005; Hudson and Brinton, 2007). As a result, there is tension between the vulnerability/empowerment framework used by the humanitarian sector and the political/policy framework advanced by feminist researchers and others working in this area. There is also a problematic tendency to situate emergency humanitarian activities outside ongoing political situations. We encountered these and other issues in our research as outlined below.

Key findings

- Women are continuously excluded from meaningful participation, even by UN and EU bodies and other signatories to UNSCR 1325. However, the continued presence of the WPS agenda at multiple levels and in multiple institutions and countries keeps it meaningful and keeps women's participation a key focus.
- Women's participation is directly related to the context in which they live and their need to be involved in remedying the sources of injustices that have affected them. Their own context dictates the agenda for participation. Meaningful participation would devolve power to those who need to be heard.

- There is marked diversity in the global Syrian refugee population. This is ignored in narratives about refugees more broadly and in the politics of refugee settlement. The concept and practice of diaspora and ethnic community politics in Australia, particularly in the WPS National Action Plans, often discount this diversity.
- Women already participate in a variety of ways, whether their participation is formally acknowledged or not. The continued classification of many women's activities as informal belies various forms of cultural capital that can strengthen their agency and therefore their scope for meaningful participation.
- Gendered norms and political agendas continue to hamper participation. Women who are the beneficiaries of policies designed to bring about change are subjected to personal risk associated with the local context unless there is also substantial structural change.
- Participation can be targeted at different institutional levels and can be bottom-up - through agenda-based participation to include unheard voices and those affected by policy outcomes – and top-down - to increase the diversity of those invited to participate.
- Country context matters in relation to women's opportunities to exercise their own agency. However, fear and insecurity accompany refugees in all contexts. Obligations to feel grateful for any assistance and to succeed diminish refugees' ability to question religious and cultural observance, examine structural barriers to attaining livelihoods, engage in political activism to advance their rights and pursue other forms of participation.
- Country context can hamper one's sense of political subjectivity – for example, whether one can identify as an Australian while maintaining an active interest and advancing changes in the politics of one's country of origin.
- The WPS agenda has the potential to be a meaningful platform for Syrian refugee women but only outside Australia. While WPS is not a focus of Australian domestic policy, positioning this agenda as only pertaining to the security sector and foreign policy diminishes its credibility and global purchase. It disconnects issues facing women refugees from other broader gender issues and becomes another process through which to stigmatise refugee women's experience. Information from the participants in our research suggests that the refugee identity accompanies first-generation refugees even after they resettle and attain citizenship in the resettlement country. This means that a broader application of the WPS agenda which links it with national policies on women is needed.

Syrian conflict and refugee crisis

In large sections of Syria, the level of armed conflict has reduced. This has prompted many to assume that the resolution of the Syrian refugee crisis is imminent and post-conflict rebuilding can take place. The international community wants to initiate post-conflict peacebuilding in Syria as soon as

possible, as part of its humanitarian and containment strategies. Only 1% of Syrian refugees are resettled in third-country placements (UNHCR, 2020a) and millions of Syrians continue to live in neighbouring countries. There are currently 6.2 million people displaced in Syria and it is described as 'the biggest internally displaced population in the world' (UNHCR, 2021).

Political negotiations between different groups have taken place since 2017. However, matters have been further complicated by constant tensions between political actors (the Syrian government, the Syrian opposition, Russia, Iran and Turkey), along with threats to the region from political strife in Lebanon and from COVID-19 (United Nations, 2020a). The conflict in Syria remains ongoing at the time of writing, with Russia supporting Syrian government troops and Turkey supporting an opposition faction. The most recent humanitarian disasterin Idlib in Syria's north-west, started during the COVID-19 pandemic and the current situation in Daraa, in Syria's south-west, continues to threaten civilians and further displace citizens.

Focusing on the ever-increasing statistics of death and displacement presents only one picture of the dire situation faced by the Syrian people and implies a sense of powerlessness. The numbers tell us that neither the humanitarian model of crisis management nor the current development model are adequate to contribute to meaningful peacebuilding outcomes.

While necessary efforts to meet the minimum humanitarian needs of Syrian refugees are ongoing, there has been little advancement in understanding the long-term consequences for refugees living in precarious conditions, under pressure to conform to new political and social contexts and survive without substantial legal rights and dwindling donor support. As the primary author of this paper witnessed in 2019 at the European Union and United Nations Brussels conference on 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region', the Syrian people, knowing that they are powerless to act alone, are waiting for a political solution to end the conflict.

There are seemingly few formal opportunities for women to participate in conflict resolution activities. But many Syrians inside and outside Syria are working toward ameliorating the chaos and lawlessness by seizing opportunities in different forums such as UN and NGO conferences. Members of the Syrian diaspora all over the world have participated at all levels and in all sectors to advance their various causes. This includes Syrian-run civil society – non-government and community-based – organisations in host countries. It also includes political networks, such as the Syrian Women's Network, lobbying for transitional justice (redress for victims and for constitutional change). Much of what links the activities of these groups together is that they are part of global civil society initiatives and are led by members of the Syrian diaspora. It is therefore helpful to look at how Syrians in the diaspora are helped or hindered in their ability to participate in initiatives that advance their causes.

Research on Syrian refugees cannot ignore the global discourse on Islam, terrorism and women's identity in the Middle East. The Middle East continues to be framed, in both popular and policy discourse, as a security hotspot. Forced migration from the region has fuelled damaging conceptions that link irregular migration with national security and threats to sovereignty, framing

refugee issues as security issues. In all three countries explored in this study, this 'securitisation' of refugees goes beyond policing the border and depicts non-nationals in ways that affect their physical and emotional safety as well as setting the structural limitations for their participation in general.

Syrian refugee women

More than half of displaced Syrians are women. One aim of this research project was to develop locally nuanced knowledge of the circumstances in which Syrian refugee women currently live and to consider ways in which ordinary women might participate in peace processes and ultimately contribute to a post-conflict Syrian society.

There is a global deficit in creating spaces for meaningful participation for women, which UNSCR 1325 acknowledges (Coomaraswamy, 2015). However, the power to institutionalise and fund the advancement of women's inclusion remains mostly a normative aspiration of the WPS agenda. With this in mind, and in order to understand what participation means for Syrian women in transition, it is helpful to understand Syrian women in both their local and wider contexts and in both the public and private realms.

Identity

Our research project was designed to capture Syrian women's personal narratives as a way of understanding how ordinary Syrian women are living through extraordinary experiences and the structural influences on their lives. The 'victim' discourse (Turner, 2016) that permeates descriptions of and attitudes towards refugees can obscure different ways women participate.

Syrian refugee women experience intersecting identities (Hunt and Rygiel, 2007) that are more expansive than the sum of their parts and certainly include more than the refugee label. Their subjective experiences as mothers, wives, widows, sisters and daughters within gender structures dovetail with religious identities and professional, social, economic and class disparities, as well as political identities that are presently viewed as highly problematic.

The securitisation of the region, together with the securitisation of people movement and forced migration, means that women from the Middle East continue to be viewed either as hapless victims of scheming terrorists or as suspicious co-conspirators in the perpetuation of barbaric, anti-feminist religious practices. Syrian refugee women, together with other migrant women, are captured by the wider discourse on islamophobia and the place of women (Rajina, 2021).

While all the women interviewed for this research come from Syria, they have widely differing characteristics that are unique to their own biographies and their own experiences of transition as refugees. As our research confirms and as Moghadam (2010:2) attests, 'There is no archetypical Middle Eastern women but rather women in quite diverse socioeconomic and cultural arrangements'. Of course, this also applies to refugee women. As Moghadam (2010:2) explains:

> *Women are likewise divided ideologically and politically. Some women activists have aligned themselves with liberal or left-wing organisations; others have lent their support to Islamist/fundamentalist groups. Some women reject religion as*

patriarchal; others wish to reclaim religion for themselves or to identify feminist aspects of it. Some women reject traditions and time-honoured customs; others find identity, solace and strength in them. More research is needed to determine whether social background shapes and can predict political and ideological affiliations but, in general, women's social positions have implications for their consciousness and activism.

Aspirations and activism

Highlighting the diversity among women helps dispel any myths about women as a coherent and known entity and raises questions about the mechanisms and structures that help or hinder them to achieve their aims and aspirations.

Women and women's organisations in the Middle East have been actively challenging the norms and laws that hold women back and have made great (albeit uneven) strides in many countries. Organisations in civil society have tirelessly worked to reform the various personal status laws, combat sexual and gender-based violence and attempt to increase women's political participation (Moghadam, 2010). They have also acted as a bridge between the universal rights advanced by international non-government organisations (NGOs) and national rights that affect women's major life events such as sexual assault, marriage, family planning, divorce, death and inheritance. This includes identifying the specific challenges that refugees encounter and attempting to incorporate them into the national agendas of host countries such as Lebanon and Jordan.

Women with Middle Eastern roots living in the West, including Australia, have been at the forefront of combating racism and discrimination since well before September 11, 2001, and especially since then. An entire generation of women has matured in a political and social environment that negatively focuses on Middle Eastern women and associates the Middle East with a narrowly defined Islam.

The direct association of terrorism, Islam and women's subjugation, well before the emergence of ISIS/ISIL/Da'esh, has fuelled what many call Islamophobia, a discourse characterised by negative evaluation of Islam and Muslims, resulting in acts of racism and discrimination towards Muslims by ordinary citizens and by government policies, especially as tied to refugee and immigration affairs (Dunn et al., 2021). Women have been a central focus of Islamophobia as a result of, for example, the politicisation of Islamic dress (Rajina, 2021) and the double bind of having to defend their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons as well as pushing for their own rights in the male-dominated sphere of multicultural affairs.

Syrian women can and do participate to help end the conflict in Syria and to act in ways that help rebuild their communities wherever they are in the world even as formal opportunities for participation continue to be elusive (O'Keefe, 2020). This includes those who have settled in Australia as part of the Syrian diaspora caused by the conflict in Syria. Both their current leadership and activities and emerging pathways to participation can be actively enhanced within the remit of the WPS agenda.

Women, Peace and Security: Why translation matters

UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security recognises that war and conflict impact women and girls in ways that had not previously gained serious recognition. The WPS agenda draws its strength from evidence gathered by the international community – comprising the UN agencies, funds and programs; UN member states; scholars; and local and international NGOs that responded to the call - to consider the effects of conflict on gender and the inclusion of women in peacebuilding.

The WPS agenda has three focal points:

- It highlights the inordinate impact of violent conflict and war on women and girls.
- It highlights the ways in which women already engage in aspects of conflict resolution and post-conflict activities, and ways to engender more engagement by women in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peacemaking, peacebuilding, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction. It stresses the importance of women's participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.
- It calls for gender perspectives to be incorporated in all UN peace and security efforts and through the creation and implementation of WPS National Action Plans. Parties engaged in conflict must take special measures to protect women and girls from all forms of gender-based violence, especially rape and other forms of sexual violence that are particularly widespread during times of violent conflict.

UNSCR 1325 has four key pillars:

- Participation,
- Protection,
- Prevention, and Peacebuilding and Recovery (sometimes identified as 'Relief and Recovery').

Since its inception in 2000 the WPS agenda has continued to evolve, as have the various approaches to its implementation in different countries. The most valuable aspects of the agenda – also its greatest weaknesses – are its institution-backed power and its global reach. It was designed to originate from the top down and therefore operationalised with institutions in mind.

Implementation

WPS has been mainstreamed in various UN bodies. At the same time many states, at different stages of political, social and economic development, have committed varying degrees of political and economic resources to fulfil different aspects of the agenda. The overarching aims of WPS centre on mainstreaming a gender perspective in all aspects of governance. In the process, how WPS is understood normatively has been translated differently by different institutions, and therefore implementation has varied dramatically depending on country context (Coomaraswamy, 2015 and True et al., 2021). Understanding how the WPS agenda operates in different

contexts translates to understanding how these contexts impact on the operational aspects of the agenda. This entails understanding the layered local context and the way women experience it. Factors include religion, culture, law, societal organisation, economic conditions and political context and whether the agenda is part of national policy or,as in Australia's case, only part of its foreign policy

Historically, societal change is instigated from within the domain of civil society (Coser 1957). However, the WPS agenda views states and institutions as having a primary role in creating conditions where women-centred policies are funded and supported to attempt to initiate change. Institutionalising WPS can create or reclaim spaces where agendas about how to enact change can be developed.

National Action Plans are a mandated policy instrument that demonstrate commitment to the WPS agenda. The creation of National Action Plans (and the dialogue generated between government entities and civil society organisations as a result) and the collaboration/dialogue between states in relation to policy transfer and policy learning has made the WPS agenda effective in shedding light on how the gender perspective has been missing in conflict and peacebuilding. Broadly, the creation of National Action Plans by various states has prompted a consultative approach where multiple government departments, armed forces and civil society organisations converge to create locally specific and therefore more meaningful plans. Close inspection of individual National Action Plans reflects the locally driven preoccupations of each nation-state.

Country and regional context

Country-specific and regional contexts matter for the implementation of the WPS agenda – not least because of the cultural preconditions, the institutional arrangements and the politics of gender but also because of the focused attention and interventions of the international community. The 'WPS as a foreign affairs' agenda of many donor countries translates to fervent activity by way of short-term projects and initiatives aimed at fulfilling specific policy objectives which may not encompass the needs of the ultimate beneficiaries. It continues to be the case that there is a distinct absence of women's participation in the Middle East, and women have been routinely prevented from participating – and often undermined or ignored – in these processes (United Nations Security Council, 2012; see also WILPF, 2020).

The WPS agenda is an effective mechanism in general and has created a policy language through which policy designers, makers, implementers and evaluators can act. However, the implementation and funding aspects of the agenda have become politicised and used as a vehicle to advance specific interests in ways which often obscure its intended purpose. For example, many sub-agendas, including a feminist agenda (rejected by many states including Jordan), have piggybacked on the WPS agenda, making it less clear what WPS is and what it is not.

Not all WPS pillars receive equal levels of support and funding. There has been a considerable resource focus on the 'Protection' pillar and less on

'Peacebuilding and Recovery', 'Prevention' and 'Participation'. Conversely, states have primarily focused on aspects of participation such as setting targets for increasing the number of women in the security sector and providing gender training for government and military personnel (Coomaraswamy, 2015:28). For example, in the Jordanian context, the primary author was informed that the focus on the security sector was relatively straightforward however in negotiating the parameters of the WPS agenda in Jordan equity for women is tolerated but not equality.

Participation has arguably been the least developed and least implemented of the four pillars (True et al., 2021), partly as a result of its broad definition and partly as a result of the general global stagnation in efforts to include more women in positions of power and influence (Dilli et al., 2019). Evaluation of the participation pillar has also focused on the numbers of women participating in certain forums in the public realm, not on more expansive reflections of participation. It is clear to both researchers and practitioners that the four pillars are indivisible and dovetail in ways that make it difficult to create meaningful evaluation measures for the success of the implementation of the WPS agenda (Coomaraswamy, 2015).

Australia, Lebanon and Jordan

How the WPS agenda is translated can also be ascertained through the ways in which countries direct their WPS policies. Australia, like many other donor countries, has an outward-looking agenda (Lee-Koo, 2018 and True et al.,2021) which positions the WPS agenda in the Foreign Affairs portfolio and centres commitment and resources in the foreign policy and security sectors. While Australia's new National Action Plan has a broader scope and includes a whole of government approach it is not clear if and how its implementation will translate to overlap with relevant national policies (True et al.,2021 and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2021). In Australia's foreign policy the Middle East continues to be an important area for the implementation of WPS principles, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, little attention is paid to what WPS might mean for domestic policies even as Australia resettles refugees from conflict-affected areas (Lee-Koo, 2018).

Lebanon and Jordan both have a mixed approach to the WPS agenda. Their approach reflects their state-specific preoccupations and their obligations to donor countries. Our interviews with practitioners in the field from government organisations in Jordan and Lebanon indicate that resources from donor funds are directed to agencies and departments central to the state's development agenda, such as the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Interior, as well as to the security sector. Funds and programs are directed to improving conditions for vulnerable local women, increasing the number of women in the security sector, and attempting to change cultural barriers to women's rights.

In line with their domestic challenges, both Jordan's and Lebanon's current WPS National Action Plans include Syrian women. However, in keeping with the state focus of these plans, this is limited to identifying Syrian women as refugees, not as part of an expansive framing that includes the Syrian diaspora or how Syrian women can meaningfully participate in peace processes.

Women's participation in peacebuilding

One of the primary expectations of the WPS agenda is that, given the opportunity, women can and should be included in the resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding post-conflict. Women's participation is seen to strengthen the peacebuilding process in multiple ways, including by broadening social justice issues and encouraging inclusion and consensus as a major strategy (Conciliation Resources, 2013; Coomaraswamy, 2015).

Broadly, women are expected to participate by being invited to discussions at different levels. In these contexts, women are expected to be willing and available to work within existing institutional arrangements to effect change to increase their own equality:

> *Women have always participated in peace negotiations and peacebuilding, but always at the informal level and rarely visible to the formal peacemakers and keepers of peace.* (Coomaraswamy, 2015:40)

However, women are still largely excluded from peace and security negotiations and receive less attention in post-conflict agreements, disarmament, and reconstruction negotiations (United Nations, 2002; Lindborg, 2017; see also WILPF, 2020). While there has been an increase in the inclusion of women in the text of peace agreements, this has not been complemented by an increase in women's participation in formal peacebuilding processes (O'Keefe, 2020).

Participation continues to be understood in quantitative terms. It is widely recognised that a critical mass of women in a decision-making space can improve their ability to influence a process and to incorporate women's rights. Research suggests that a minimum of 30% representation should be guaranteed for women in all local, national, and international peace processes (Moosa et al., 2013:470).

Barriers to participation

Research by the UN consistently points to the barriers to inclusion and suggests that factors such as access to funding and leadership training, as well as inviting women to participate, are key to dismantling barriers. However, formal peace processes continue to be dominated by male elites and to exclude, marginalise or overlook women's contributions, needs and views.

How women interact in the public sphere and how individuals see themselves in relation to institutions and authority figures depends on their socio-cultural, religious, political and socio-economic characteristics. Participation in nation-states that grant little to no political freedom for citizens would differ markedly from participation in political environments where the risk is significantly ameliorated by substantial legal frameworks. However, societal norms and other restrictive mechanisms do not have to manifest legally in order to impinge on agency and the ability for vulnerable women to participate in shaping their own futures. Setting particular agendas on behalf of groups can be sufficient to shape the outcomes in reduced and therefore limiting ways.

A variety of factors are cited as challenging women's ability to take part in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction in ways that are deliberate and meaningful. Primary factors include structural inequalities and lack of political will to include women in peacebuilding. Research also indicates that women are excluded from peacebuilding processes for reasons such as their inexperience of formal political engagement and because of public perceptions that men are the sole enactors of violence and therefore should determine the peace, while women are ineffectual or passive victims (Domingo et al., 2013). Assumptions about participation barriers have particular policy outcomes:

> *At a technical level, this has meant that a great deal of donor money has been poured into women's programmes that attempt to develop political leadership for women in formal processes... The present programmes put forward by the international community tend to be extremely narrow: just to bring a female body to the table with some technical expertise* (Coomaraswamy, 2015:40).

The lack of women's participation has been made abundantly clear (O'Keefe, 2020); however, very little attention has been paid to defining meaningful participation, its prerequisites and the structural barriers which prevent it. Many of the obstacles to women's participation suggested in the research look to either individual explanations or institutional limitations, without delving into context. While it is true that more attention should be given to gender roles, norms and stereotypes and to the social construction of gender and its impact on peacebuilding efforts, there are also differences among women in their perceptions of how to successfully build peace and where to direct their efforts.

Agency

Discussions of participation sometimes refer to women's agency however without understanding women's context and their agency participation remains a hollow concept and practice (Costa-Pinto, 2007). Like participation, however, agency is rarely defined clearly. The following definition is useful:

> *Following Kabeer (1999), we define agency as the 'ability to define one's goals and act on them'. This stems from Sen's (1985) capabilities approach, which defines '"agency freedom" as the freedom to achieve whatever the person, as a responsible agent, decides he or she should achieve'. The individual may not actually act, or create an underlying shift in power relation, but is able, through direct decision-making processes or indirect means, to step out of routine behaviours and try to change her environment or outcomes. Following Sen (1999), these can span economic, social, and political actions; empirically (and from a policy perspective) these actions would vary across contexts. Agency can also be exercised at the individual, household, and community levels (Donald et al., 2017:3).*

The authors of this definition explain:

> *... agency requires the understanding of three concepts: (1) the person's ability to set goals in accordance with their values regarding a particular issue or decision, (2) whether they perceive themselves as able to achieve these goals, and (3) whether they are able to act towards achieving these goals* (Donald et al, 2017:3).

This understanding of agency recognises that there will be variations between individuals of the same gender as a result of intersecting factors. Agency is therefore central to participation at the individual level. This is why programs should recognise and address the multifaceted barriers to women's full and equal participation in decision-making: societal norms and attitudes; violence against women; women's multiple productive and reproductive roles; perceived educational barriers; poverty and lack of control over finances; and restrictions on freedom of movement (Moosa et al., 2013:470; Segrave et al. 2021).

Refugees and the Women, Peace and Security agenda

Surprisingly there has been very little focus on refugees in the WPS agenda, even as refugee women and girls are deemed to be among the most vulnerable. Almost two-thirds of the Syrian refugee population are women and children (UNHCR, 2020a), and many women and girls are taking on non-traditional roles and responsibilities as a result of conflict, changed financial circumstances and family dynamics.

Our fieldwork in Jordan and Lebanon indicates that the WPS agenda and the policies created to implement aspects of it impact on Syrian refugee women both directly through funding and programs directly aimed at local and refugee women through donor support of WPS agenda initiatives, and indirectly through the wider policy rhetoric of targeting women and girls as vulnerable populations. However, many practitioners working with refugee women, did not know about UNSCR 1325.

In relation to Syrian women refugees there are further challenges to defining 'success' in the implementation of the WPS pillars, especially as the normative frameworks underlying the WPS agenda are broadened – for example, by defining security not simply in relation to the absence of physical violence: 'It means absence of fear but also absence of want. It also implies active agency, to be allowed to participate in the decisions that are made on your behalf' (Coomaraswamy 2015:24).

Refugee women's participation

Our fieldwork revealed that women's grassroots organisations and locally-led women's rights movements and their initiatives work to bolster confidence for both local women and refugees. Research has shown that women affected by conflict have the will, the expertise and the contextual knowledge to build bridges, negotiate disputes and rebuild communities (Moosa et al., 2013:470 and True et al. 2021). The potential for displaced women to aid in peacebuilding processes remains untapped, and the leap from connecting women's agency and empowerment with access to negotiating peace has yet to be made.

It is important to include displaced people in peacebuilding processes even if they have rarely been consulted or represented in the past (Koser, 2009). Often their singular circumstances and their relationship with their own nation-state requires consideration. While refugees have not been a central focus of the WPS agenda for Syrian women in particular, the failure or weakness of Syria as a nation-state and the uncertainty of a safe and secure future challenge the norms associated with citizenship and political

participation that are often taken for granted in developed nations.

Exclusion from formal peacebuilding initiatives can further marginalise displaced people. Displaced people also encounter numerous challenges that impede their contribution to the peace process, such as a lack of education, political skills, active and meaningful local networks, resources and influence to represent themselves, and a lack of legitimate leaders who could represent them. Refugee women and girls are often represented particularly in statistical data used as sources of evidence for advocacy and policy but refugee women and girls are also the category of people most vulnerable to being categorised and aggregated through stereotyping, and assumptions which create conditions of invisibility and lead to investments in initiatives that are not necessarily congruent with individuals' choices or their conditions. Indeed, our own research confirmed Ferris' (2019:506–507) findings, in that:

> *Refugees and displaced women are not a homogenous group and often experience multiple forms of discrimination as gender intersects with race, age, civil status, socioeconomic status, disabilities and so on.*

Syrian women in Australia

Syrian women's migration experiences differ according to where in Syria they come from, the circumstances in which they fled and how they left. Many chose their destination with family members or other opportunities, including economic and education opportunities, in mind; some were led; and some ended up in host countries and third-country settlements through happenstance. We met one Syrian woman at the EU/UN conference in Brussels, which she was attending at the invitation of UN Women. She sought asylum in Belgium immediately after the conference, as her family application for third-country settlement through the UNHCR was rejected in Jordan.

Although the details differ, Syrian women refugees have many shared experiences. There are limited ways to exit Syria and there are limited asylum destinations which do not entail tremendous risk. A wish that many of the interviewees in Jordan and Lebanon expressed was to be resettled in a third country.

Opportunities for resettlement in third countries are notoriously scarce. According to the UNHCR. only 0.25% of refugees worldwide were resettled in 2019 (UNHCR, 2020a). Refugees do not self-select for resettlement; rather, the UNHCR identifies vulnerable cases to be considered. They must be in at least one of the following categories:

- people with medical needs
- women and girls at risk
- children at risk
- survivors of violence and torture

Only refugees living in host countries are resettled; displaced or vulnerable people within Syria are not considered for resettlement. Entire families are not considered either – including parents and siblings of married applicants.

The women we interviewed in Lebanon who were accepted for resettlement and the Syrian women we interviewed in Australia told us that the resettlement process can take many months, if not years, and can be traumatic – made worse by rumours about hardship and discrimination in settlement countries; fears about language, religious and cultural mismatch; and fears about separation of families. One of our interviewees in Lebanon was hoping to be reunited with her family in Australia but her applications had been repeatedly rejected.

The Australian Government prioritised refugees from 'persecuted minorities' who had fled to Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Accordingly, those selected for settlement in Australia came either from the UNHCR camps or from urban communities in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey (Porter and Seselja, 2017). All but one of the interviewees in Australia had come to Australia from Lebanon. They had experienced many of the same conditions as the Syrian women still in Lebanon. All of them described their experiences in Lebanon as extremely traumatic.

Refugee settlement in Australia

Australian policy on refugees and asylum seekers has attracted much condemnation, not least by the United Nations in 2018, particularly in relation to offshore detention (OHCHR, 2018). However, the government-supported services available for refugees within the community are considered some of the best in the world (Collins et al, 2019). This dichotomy impacts the ways our Syrian respondents understand their refugee identity. One of the women we interviewed expressed it in this way:

> *When I first came, I was ok about being called a refugee but then I started to know how people felt about refugees and I started hating it* (Sarah, 23, Melbourne).

Asylum seekers considered to have reached Australia illegally (by boat) are taken into detention however, asylum seekers reaching Australia by plane are usually allowed to live in the community while waiting for the outcome (Refugee Council, 2021 p.5). Those accepted through the Refugee and Humanitarian Programs arrive on a variety of visas. The three main types of visas for recent Syrian arrivals to Australia are Refugee Visa (Subclass 200), Global Special Humanitarian Visa) subclass 202) and Woman at Risk Visa (subclass 204) (Collins et al., 2019 and Department of Home Affairs 2021).

- All of these visas have the same benefits in that they allow refugees to become permanent residents and the visa allows holders to live, work, study, access Medicare (national health benefits scheme), attend English language classes, access certain social security payments, apply for citizenship and propose family members to come to Australia. Visa and travel fees for the Refugee Visa and the Women at Risk Visa are paid for by the Australian government.
- The Global Special Humanitarian Visa requires applicants to prove violation of human rights and visa fees are waived unless applications are proposed through the Community Support Program however travel costs are not covered by the government.

- The Women at risk visa specifies that the applicant must be female, be outside Australia and their home country, not have 'the protection of a male relative', and be 'in danger of victimisation, harassment or serious abuse because of [her] gender' (Department of Home Affairs 2021). They need to be referred by the UNHCR to the Australian Government.

The visa requirements indicate some of the difficulties and preconditions associated with being granted a humanitarian visa and resettled in Australia and the process can take months if not year. The system creates particular dynamics between beneficiaries and those granting access to opportunities for safe haven. All the Syrian women taking part in our research felt the need to express their gratitude to their host states. However, they also expressed feelings of guilt and discomfort at about being unable to advance their needs within the system. Legal status and visa conditions can compound refugees' vulnerabilities and limit their feelings of agency until they attain full citizenship.

Major challenges for Syrian women in Australia

The Syrian women we interviewed in Australia had shared many of the same experiences of hardship during their time in transition as the Syrian women we interviewed in Lebanon. They also faced many of the same challenges on arriving in Australia as other recent arrivals from conflict zones (Pittaway and Pittaway, n.d.). Immediate settlement concerns include navigating the new environment and adjusting to new norms and expectations in a new political, cultural and economic context. A number of hurdles faced by newly arrived Syrian refugees are beyond the scope of an individual to remedy. The following are some of the challenges the women shared with us:

- Employment. Access is limited by lack of language proficiency and the difficulty of gaining recognition of qualifications and work experience. The women suggested that this is an issue that especially affects men as they are traditionally viewed as the primary breadwinners.
- Men's mental and emotional health. This has a heavy impact on the home environment. Many women reported that they wanted to stay in Australia, but their husbands wanted to go back to Syria.
- Mental health of the entire family. Lack of English language proficiency, despite English language classes, partly because of the ease of speaking Arabic or Assyrian in the community.
- Cultural and social expectations in the new context, including ambivalence about gender relations (different norms, traditions and expectations). For example, women are given more power in Australia but do not have 'authority'. Men feel the loss of power as a result of their economic disempowerment and the loss of their social roles.
- Growing distance between parents and their children in terms of cultural expectations and language.
- Resisting or adjusting to new norms in gender relations and new modes of power – for example questioning patriarchal structures within the Assyrian community in Australia:

> *In the church committee they are all men, there are no women and you don't know why … it's a focus for the community and we should be represented there…* (Sarah, 23, Melbourne).

- Politics of religious interpretation and modes of community policing of adherence to cultural and social norms.
- Fear of multiculturalism and mixing – including issues of interpersonal sectarian politics from Syria.
- Australian policies, discourse and attitudes towards refugees.
- Maintaining ongoing connections to family and friends in Syria.

For the women we interviewed, these challenges dictated their preoccupations and their current and future opportunities for participation. Not all of the women experienced them equally. However, there was a consensus that they did not have a clear process or avenue to discuss many of these difficulties outside the private realm or in informal community gatherings.

Identity and diaspora

Recent research indicates that the vast majority of Syrian refugees in Australia identify as Assyrian (Collins et al., 2019) – a minority ethnic and religious group living in Iraq and Syria. This is in line with our own findings. The majority of our interviewees in Australia came originally from north-east Syria and identified as Assyrian. The Assyrian community in Syria has suffered from conflict on a number of fronts, including the Kurdish armed conflict and the activities of ISIS/ISIL/Da'esh.

Most recent Syrian arrivals in Australia arrived on a Global Special Humanitarian Visa (Collins et al., 2019). This reflects the fact that the Assyrian community in Australia is actively engaged with helping Assyrians to come to Australia.

Like other political and social categories, the meaning of diaspora depends on context. Usually, the politics of a particular society help to form and cement formal group identities around religious or ethnic markers. Australia has a history of creating such categories (Tabar et al., 2010).

The word 'diaspora' has reappeared recently in refugee policy literature and in Australia's foreign policy strategy (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2017). The word itself has a long history and was used to denote ethnic and religious minorities in multicultural societies – most notably the Jewish diaspora in the aftermath of World War II. However, it usually denotes 'ethnic' communities with ties to another nation-state or an as yet legally unrecognised homeland. This type of connection is also labelled 'long-distance nationalism' (Schiller, 2005:570, cited in Noble and Idriss, 2020).

Syrians (meaning people from 'greater Syria', including modern-day Lebanon) have settled in Australia since Federation (Collins et al., 2019). Recently arrived Syrians have settled in Australia's major cities close to already established members of their religious and ethnic communities. The diversity within the Syrian population both inside and outside Syria has been widely documented (Yahya et al., 2018; World Bank, 2020). While the

majority of recent arrivals from Syria identify as Assyrian, other major groups identify as Syrian-Arab, Armenian and Kurdish (Collins et al., 2019).

Our research indicates that the conflict in Syria has both exposed many enduring cleavages in society and created new challenges. Political, ethnic and religious diversity existed before the conflict and continues in the activities and aspirations of those who seek to shape Syria post-conflict. The absence of formal democratic politics before the conflict is not an indication that diverse political activities and aspirations did not and do not continue to exist (Yahya, 2020).

The Assyrian community in Australia is a clear illustration of this point. While they hold Iraqi and/or Syrian citizenship, members of the Assyrian community also identify as belonging to the wider Assyrian diaspora and refer to their homeland in modern-day Iraq, Syria and Lebanon as 'occupied Assyria' – as expressed by one of our Assyrian interviewees in Australia. Like other minority groups, members of the community are politically active and engage in activities to gain recognition.

What does participation mean for Syrian women?

Much of what Syrian women must contend with in their daily lives will inform their personal agendas and the way they define their goals and act on them individually and collectively. Many of the aspects that restrict their participation cannot be remedied at the individual level. However, it is necessary to study the structural barriers from the individual perspective in order to appreciate the inherent complexity. We identify three factors that influence Syrian women's ability to participate: political space and the limiting nature of the security paradigm; resources; and risk.

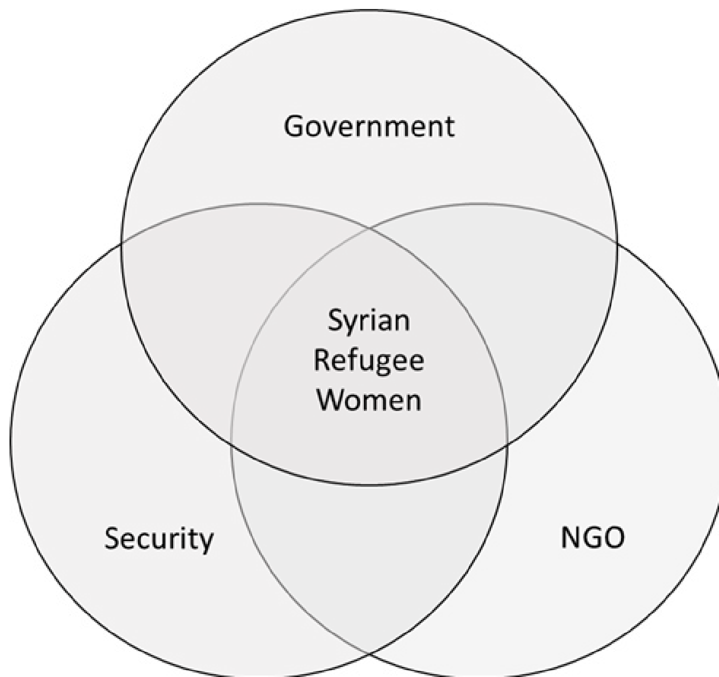
Paying attention to women's various identities, contexts and structural limitations has proven essential to understanding participation. Intersecting identity categories include age, race, sex, class, education and religion. A multi-context, intersectional framework highlights the structural inequalities which hinder access to formal mechanisms for participation. Whether in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon or Australia, Syrian women continue to face the same or similar barriers to participation, even though the cultural, social and political contexts can be vastly different.

Understanding the layered nature of contextual factors helps shed light on where the similarities and differences might exist in relation to participation. Participation can occur at three different levels: global/international, national/local, and individual. Global and national institutional structures and their policies and practices can be sites for participation. At the national/local level, domestic policies, organisations and civil society groups can be sites for participation. At the individual level, political subjectivity, belonging and personal interactions and relationships can be sites for contesting and negotiating barriers to participation. Refugee women can be clearly traced through these multiple levels and the overall structures that help or hinder their individual and collective agency.

Political space and security

Participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction presents challenges for women in their own country, let alone vulnerable non-nationals. Our research on Syrian women in transition indicates that the barriers to inclusion in these processes are largely the same for refugee women as for other women in conflict and post-conflict environments. However, there are at least three additional factors that greatly impinge upon Syrian refugee women's agency and ability to shape their environments: the size of the refugee population, the securitisation of the refugee population, and the lack of international political will to reach a political resolution in Syria.

The securitisation of refugees is reflected in multiple sectors in all three countries, not only in state policies on refugees but also in the way the WPS agenda is conceptualised and implemented. Our research indicates that Syrian refugee women are at the crossroads of three primary sectors implementing aspects of the WPS agenda: the government, security, and NGO sectors, as shown in Figure 1.



Our research indicates that, as a result of their legal status, Syrian refugee women are caught up in the state security sector first and foremost. This sector impacts them in at least three key ways:

- as non-nationals subject to policing by the state (for their status and civil documentation and for a variety of offences including breaching residency permits or visa conditions, political activity, and criminal and civil misconduct)

- in their interactions with the armed forces at borders or checkpoints, in camps or in public spaces
- as part of the global discourse on the 'refugee crisis' and the securitisation of people movement.

The state security concept reflects a particular understanding of 'security' which centres on national security and does not take into account human security. This means that the politicisation of refugees as a security issue can result in international acceptance of ways of dealing with the 'refugee problem' such as detention as deterrence and repatriation.

The other two sectors – the NGO or humanitarian sector (which also encompasses civil society) and the government sector (which includes government departments, government-funded entities and semi-government not-for-profit organisations) – directly link the WPS agenda with vulnerable women through donor funds and resultant activities and programs to help women.

The focus on state security in Australia has direct and indirect consequences for the lives of newly arrived and established refugees. In Australia there is an expectation that new migrants will assimilate into the wider culture. Any ongoing ties to the homeland (see Batainah, 2008) in substantial ways are viewed as 'suspect' (Noble and Idriss, 2020).

Many of the Syrian women we interviewed had suffered directly as a result of having a family member kidnapped by armed militias in Syria and were therefore traumatised. At the same time they were living in suburbs on the outskirts of Melbourne that are often portrayed as hotbeds of Islamic fundamentalism in Australia. One Assyrian woman pushed back on the discourse that included her community among suspect communities from the Middle East, but also told us that she did not want her daughters to socially mingle with Muslims in the community. Such situations can hinder women's participation in any meaningful sense either as Australians or as members of the diaspora. Antagonism between different diaspora communities is another issue that homogenous stereotyping overlooks.

Resources

The theory of social capital refers to the privileges linked to different types of capital in different contexts (Lin, 1999). While the literature on refugee women highlights economic capital and economic empowerment, social and cultural capital are also important but are often unrecognised in relation to helping women to access avenues for participation.

The accepted narrative presents refugees and former refugees as offering nothing of value and therefore often characterises refugees and former refugees as a burden on host communities. In addition, because the resettlement criteria for refugees target the most vulnerable, the idea that a refugee might have access to resources contradicts the popular narrative which focuses on the basic humanitarian model for refugees. This narrative pays insufficient attention to the different types of resources and how they can be mobilised in a new context. Limited understanding of potential for different types of capital and the ways in which different resources can be

mobilised in the new context tends to feed into the anti-refugee discourse which in turn intensifies feelings of inferiority and alienation experienced by refugees settling in Australia

Social and cultural capital can be viewed as linking the private and public realms in ways that mirror the experiences of women. While social capital and cultural capital are usually regarded as synonymous within the nation-state, refugees may have social capital resulting from wealth or education but not have cultural capital in the host country. For example, a Syrian Muslim in a Christian area (or vice versa) in Lebanon may not be able to use their social capital because of the different stratification of Lebanese society (see Bourdieu, 1986). The same applies in the Australian context where English language proficiency is seen as a key determinant in successful participation in society.

Economic capital and sensitivity to the idea of being a burden on society were a concern for all the Syrian refugees involved in this study. Economic opportunities and access to sustainable livelihoods is a primary factor in refugee wellbeing, especially in places where refugees cannot fully access the job market (Olliff, 2019). This is as much a concern for Syrian women from refugee backgrounds in Australia as it is for Syrians in Jordan and Lebanon (albeit under vastly different conditions).

Other types of capital receive less attention than economic capital. In our research we asked about social and cultural capital by asking what resources the women had access to. From their answers we identified the following types of social and cultural capital:

- Close kinship ties and networks. This includes dispersed family members in different locations who send remittances, sponsor immigration, retrieve personal documentation, and act as local sources for news on home, property, family and changes in the situation in Syria.
- Ethnic capital in settlement countries, including Australia. Closely related national, linguistic or religious communities provide resources to new members.
- Customs, traditions and filial obligations. This includes intergenerational living, aged care, childcare and pooling of financial resources in order to withstand economic shocks.
- Online activism and social networks, and various ways to politically and socially organise.
- Active religious, political and civil society organisations and affiliations. Religious organisations led by migrants and former refugees actively engage in helping refugees seek protection outside their town or country.
- Gender-specific social settings – women's networks in the private sphere and men's networks in the public sphere.

The different types of capital (see Bourdieu, 1986) are usually identified as either connected to the public sphere and therefore contributing to the wellbeing of society as a whole or connected to the private sphere. Capital

linked to the private sphere is often unacknowledged, misunderstood or seen as disqualifying individuals from accessing aid.

For example, middle-class refugees with resources who are not yet in poverty have the same limited options for durable solutions as others but are not seriously considered in need of help until their financial resources – including remittances from family members living in other countries – are spent. Given the ‘universalising blanket’ approach to refugee issues, people may hide their individual financial resources in fear of disqualification from refugee status or assistance.

At the same time tertiary qualifications – normally a valuable form of capital – are not recognised in host countries. Refugees are prevented from engaging in all occupations requiring a university degree in Jordan and Lebanon, and barriers to employment in Australia are high (Refugee Council, 2019).

Social capital is not usually formally acknowledged or taken into consideration. Acknowledging the ways in which social capital can be used in multicultural societies means identifying resources more broadly than they have been considered previously. An obstacle to meaningful activation of refugees’ social capital is its lack of acceptance by host country institutions. Host country policies preferencing refugee integration can misidentify or punish particular types of social capital, for example networks, especially given current fears relating to radicalisation. This too can result in people hiding resources. Refugee women with social capital may otherwise be willing to participate in peace processes but do not as a result of attitudes towards their access to capital.

Risk

The WPS agenda both looks to ameliorate risk for women and suggests that not including women in peace negotiations and post-conflict peacebuilding poses a risk to peace and to the welfare of women more broadly. However, there is evidence from our research that attempting to reduce risk from within the vulnerability/empowerment framework can result in women’s powers being artificially bolstered in rhetoric without the necessary structural changes occurring.

The increase in violence against women during and after conflict and the obstacles to obtaining justice for these crimes has been well documented (Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002a). Women in conflict and post-conflict societies are regularly denied justice, and the question of how to prevent abuse and gendered violence remains a major issue. There is a culture of silence around gender-based violence and access to aftercare. The repercussions of silence can be catastrophic, and lack of attention to specific cultural contexts can put women at further risk.

Women’s rights advocates and woman-led NGOs are counteracting these obstacles through offering support to women and constructing an international legal framework. However, our time in the field yielded too many examples of half-measures to help women access their rights. Our interviews with woman-led NGOs in Lebanon revealed that Syrian women experiencing domestic violence are helped to seek temporary protection and shelter for short periods of time, only to return to the family home shortly after. Women

are largely blamed for crimes committed against them and risk retribution for seeking justice. Women who attempt to assert their aspirations as wives or daughters are at risk of physical and psychological retaliation from members of the family. As a result, many feel they need to conform to the demands of their male relatives.

The idea of solidarity among women (whether it is women in general or women refugees) in order to advance the WPS agenda is highly problematic and risks ignoring deeply entrenched differences among women and potentially overemphasising minority experiences to compensate. Questions about which women should participate and how they can participate have caused contention. As a result, the participation process itself has become the primary focus, rather than enabling participation in its broadest form.

Women will participate in ways that reflect their individual experiences and preoccupations. This can be problematic. In the same way that the hijab's political significance has increased risk for women in the public sphere, women from ethnic backgrounds risk becoming the public face of minority causes. Women who have been individually opposed to social/cultural/religious norms and have pushed for change can and do become targets. Research indicates that underlying issues of discrimination, domination, and physical, social and legal security, particularly with regard to gender, are often addressed as secondary or not addressed at all (Bell and O'Rourke, 2007:25).

Where should change come from?

Returning to the three sectors (see Figure 1) that intersect with the WPS agenda for Syrian refugee women, an important question is who should plant the seeds of change, and where.

Pressing issues have been ignored. One of these is whether the humanitarian sector, broadly understood, can create conditions to rectify gender inequality (through funds, programs and materials presented to refugee women) which is a key strategy for countries like Australia where the WPS agenda is part of its foreign policy. Another is whether national governments should be relied upon to define the WPS agenda in expansive and substantial ways – including changing laws that are clearly against the best interests of women and gender equality and understanding WPS as an agenda that should transcend national boundaries.

In addition to the key findings presented at the beginning of this paper, our research suggests that policymakers and practitioners should consider the following factors:

- **Understanding the national government in context**. This includes the government's role in creating/maintaining gender equality/inequality and its ability to actively rectify gender inequality in policies. This requires looking beyond institutional arrangements and policy documents such as WPS National Action Plans and looking to include women in a variety of contexts including women in the diaspora.

- **The extent of political power**. The creation and implementation of a context-specific WPS agenda and an actionable National Action Plan requires strong 'champions' and particularly strong leadership to actualise the agenda in meaningful ways. The role of local champion carries both risk and reward. One risk is that the champion is viewed as a destabilising force, particularly if they are seen as the agent of change in heavily patriarchal social and political contexts. Failure to clearly highlight the ways in which risk is identified and managed will limit the number of champions that could otherwise be involved in actualising the agenda.
- **Funding control and agenda setting by donors and NGOs**. What other agendas are NGOs pursuing? To what extent is the WPS agenda being implemented, deliberately or otherwise, in conflict with the NGO's agenda? Funding programs on the basis of the relevant local knowledge and expertise of NGOs may result in programs for women being continuously misapplied and exhausted – for example, leadership and empowerment training programs that lack sensitivity to their applicability in everyday life.

Conclusion

The key findings of this paper and the issues it identifies represent our observations of the evidence we have gleaned through our fieldwork with Syrian women in and out of refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon, key personnel from NGOs, and Syrian refugee women who have resettled in Australia.

The most important observation is that collapsing the identity of Syrian refugee women as a homogenous group is not helpful in understanding what supports or hinders their participation in peace processes for a post-conflict Syria.

Further, positioning the WPS agenda as only pertaining to the security sector diminishes the agenda's credibility in terms of enabling Syrian refugee women to participate in peace processes. This is because it avoids global gender issues and becomes yet another way to 'other' refugee women, rather than enabling them to meaningfully participate in processes that would potentially achieve better national security and international peace outcomes.

Understanding refugee women in the wider context and those in the Australian domestic context, may enable women in the Syrian diaspora to play an important role in a post-conflict Syria if given the opportunity.

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