

The Gender Dimension of Refugeehood

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In the literature, the gender dimension of refugeehood is primarily associated with the female experience. Since the 1970s, UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations have been trying to recognize the special needs of refugee women. However, policies focused on the **vulnerability** of refugee women with regard to sexual and gender-based violence, primarily in the camps, have been formed only during the last thirty years. In 1985, UNHCR adopted its first resolution on refugee women, in 1991 it issued a guide with specific instructions on how to treat refugee women, and finally in 2008 it included the following in its mission: "UNHCR [has] the responsibility to promote gender equality and work towards the elimination of violence against women and girls of concern as integral parts of our protection mandate" (for information on UNHCR documents and more broadly on historical trends, cf. Bhabha 2004).

Despite this, numerous reports from the field demonstrate that, in practice, the protection of women (including girls) depends on the personal views and biases of humanitarian workers and social services, as they define vulnerable groups (women, children, LGBT persons) and what is gender-based violence (violence in the family, wife beating, forced marriages, rape) from situation to situation. On the other hand, the introduction of the gender aspect into the research of refugee experience, as well as into concrete humanitarian aid, has become another form of binary categorizations which already existed in understandings of migration – such as whether it is legal or illegal, regular or irregular, etc. (for information on taxonomy and binary categorization of mobility, cf. Gerard 2014: 1-27). In addition, the separation of the gender category contributed to an essentialized and universalizing image of "women as victims": passive, dependent on male members of their community, without access to rights and almost inseparable from children (Grabska 2011). The feminization of vulnerability has in turn shaped the image of the "ideal refugee woman" (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2010) and "gender performativity" (Nasser-Eddin 2017) in creating the ideal refugee image. This creation is not politically neutral, as argued by Doreen Indra (1987), but is linked to the image of refugees we construct, which is deeply political and related to our notions of gender roles.

Thus, researchers, policy makers and humanitarian workers are faced with the question of how to cover and adequately respond to the specific female refugee experience without unwittingly resorting to stereotypes, without generalizing that the experience of a single refugee woman represents the experience of all refugee women (cf., e.g., Crawley 2001 for information on gender experiences and representations of female asylum seekers).

One of the approaches in the ethnographic research of refugees is personally oriented ethnography, with the goal to affirm the gender dimension as a constitutive element of migration, a dimension that often shapes and determines the practices of "survival" in the conditions of "abnormal everyday life". The research questions include how gender shapes the refugee experience, but also how it affects the "performativity" of gender, how gender affects decision-making, from the decision to undergo the journey to a series of decisions that women make during transit, especially in the circumstances of the complete **securitization** of migration and penalization of refugees (Gerard 2014). Women's aspirations and perceptions of the future are examined, their preparedness to survive the present and at what cost, how gender shapes the experience of space, movement, changing environments and cultures, as well as family relationships (cf., e.g., Kisić 2019). Some researchers with a feminist background are often interested in whether the narratives of refugee women show that emigration and the refugee experience, in addition to having devastating consequences for individuals and families, also create opportunities for (re)building and (re)negotiating gender and other social relations (Grabska 2011; for information on ambivalent views on the emancipation of refugee women cf., e.g., Dremel 2018). The feminist aspect of researching the gender dimension of refugeehood tries to take into account, in addition to gender, other identities such as race, class or age, as well as cultural, political and economic differences, and even those of time and geography in the context of the duration of migration and places where migrations occur (for information on the feminist approach and intersectional analysis cf., e.g., Carastathis et al. 2018).

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