NGOs helping Syrian refugee women in Turkey:
courage and uncertainty at a crossroads

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Abstract

Turkey has been on the spotlight for the last months for countless reasons. Certainly, the country is found in a delicate situation, hosting over 3.000.000 refugees and going through a de-democratization process accelerated by a state of emergency which threats human rights and political and civil freedoms.

Against this background, this master's thesis tries to elucidate how these two phenomena speak to each other, how they mutually get influenced and affected. Concretely, I look into NGOs that help Syrian refugee women, the obstacles they encounter and the strategies they use to cope with these. As well, it aims to disclose the implications for Syrian refugee women. All this is done by carrying out a grounded theory methodology, which is applied buiding upon in-depth interviews to NGO's workers. Interviewing NGO workers has been crucial to understand the impact of de-democratization policies on their work and on the Syrian refugee women.

In fact, findings point out that the current political environment in Turkey is extremely detrimental to NGOs which work to help Syrian refugee women. The many constrains they face due tot the legal limitations and the curtailment of freedoms of speech and association lead to a shrinking operational space. Consequently, their response to the Syrian refugee women is affected. Likewise, the de-democratization process has a bad effect on Syrian refugee women's rights and living conditions mostly due to an intense legal violence which is exacerbated by the logics of exception.

In short, this paper contributes in providing an accurate picture of the intersection of such different dynamics and their implications on NGOs and the refugees.

1 Introduction

Turkey has been entangled in a very complicated political and humanitarian situation for the last few years. In November 2015, Turkey's government was hit by a coup d'état by a faction of the military forces. Even though it did not succeed, it led to a declaration of an emergency state, which was prolonged in April 2017 "until the country achieved welfare and peace" (Kingsley, P. in The New York Times, May 21, 2017). The emergency state involved, among other matters, a set of Emergency decree laws that aimed at ensuring the national security (Amnesty International, November 2016). As a result, over 1,495 NGOs –many of them addressing women's rights- were permanently closed due to suspicions of having relations with organisations that threaten the national security - as Fetullahist Terrorist Organization (FETÖ), Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) or Islamic State (IS)- (Cetingulec, Tulay in Al monitor, 21 November 2016). In addition, some laws involving children's and women's rights have been changed. In November 2016, a Turkish Constitutional Court ruled to annul a provision that considered all sexual acts against children under the age of 15 as sexual abuse, and as a consequence, lowering the age of consent (Hurriyet Daily News, 20 November 2016). Slowly but dramatically, Turkey has been through a process of de-democratization (Diamond, 2015; Öktem and Akkoyunlu, 2016). One of the most revealing aspect of this process has been the pressures on non-governmental organisations and the attack on women's and girl's liberties and rights (Cetingulec, Tulay in Al monitor, 21 November 2016).

Meanwhile, 3 million Syrian refugees – 46.8% of them women - have arrived in Turkey since 2012 (UNCHR, 2017). Thanks to an "Open Door Policy" every Syrian fleeing the war was allowed to stay in the country (Zahed, S. in The New Turkey.com, 16 January 2017). However, many of them sought for protection in Europe, risking their lives on boats provided by smugglers (Doctors without borders, 2017). Given this situation, the European Union and Turkey issued a statement, the so-called EU-Turkey deal, in March 2016. This deal aimed to stop refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to crossing from Turkey to Greece by returning the majority of them to Turkey (Ibid.). The measure was widely criticised because Turkey was not considered to be a safe country (Ibid.).

Building upon this, Turkey has to face numerous obstacles to provide Syrian children education, employment opportunities for adults and free access to justice and social services (Women's refugee commission, 2016). Within such a fragile situation, Syrian refugee women and girls need special attention, being the most vulnerable community (CTDC, 2016). They do not only encounter discrimination to be refugees but their gender shape their experiences in war and in exile.

Early marriages and sexual harassment are only some of the human rights violations that they suffer (Ibid.)

In the wake of this delicate and complex situation, this paper focuses on the impact of the above-mentioned dynamics on NGOs working with Syrian refugee women in Turkey, the kind of pressures they face and the strategies they resort to counter or accommodate in an increasing hostile environment. Moreover, I am interested to analyse the potential implications on the same Syrian refugee women.

This Master's thesis is motivated by my interest in investigating the role that NGOs play in Turkey within the humanitarian response to refugee women and especially, seeking to disclose how an increasing offensive against them affects their work and in consequence, the many human beings whom they help. To approach the topic, I followed grounded theory research, an inductive process that consisted of interviewing humanitarian workers, NGO workers and experts on the topic in order to adjust the scope of the study. It was after hearing the interviewees' concerns and needs that I could narrow down the object of study and raise the following research question:

How has the de-democratization process in Turkey affected non-governmental organisations' response to meet Syrian refugee women's needs?

Sub-questions:

– *What are the main obstacles and constraints that NGOs working with Syrian refugee women currently face?*
– *Which strategies do they use to deal with a hostile environment?*
– *What are the potential implications for the Syrian refugee women?*

2 Theoretical approaches

This section provides three lenses to examine the object of study. First, from the de-democratization and illiberal democracies theories, second from theories on non-governmental organisations dealing with hostile environments and third, from the point of view of gender and forced migrations. Theories will be used to compare my own findings and complement my interpretations of the studied phenomenon, since I follow a grounded theory research.

2.1 Illiberal democracies and hybrid regimes

The political system in Turkey is in on-going change and according to several authors, shifting towards an authoritarian system (Diamond, 2002; Öktem & Akkoyunlu, 2016). Here it lies the necessity to examine scholarship on illiberal and hybrid regimes.

Democracy is by no means an easy reality to talk about. The boundaries between political systems are increasingly ambiguous. When does an electoral democracy begin? When does it end up being an electoral authoritarianism? There has been a growth in the number of regimes that are neither clearly democratic nor conventionally authoritarian (Diamond, 2002). Since the last century, full democracy has been widely understood as a liberal democracy, meaning a political system marked not only by free and fair elections - the inescapable sine qua non - but also by the rule of law, a separation of powers, and the protection of basic liberties of speech, assembly, religion, and property (Zakaria, 1997). Scholar Sylvia Chan analyses the concept of 'liberal democracy' and argues that liberalism is about the conditions of life and involves the entrenchment of liberties, whereas democracy is about how political power is constituted and involves instituting the 'rule of rules' and agreeing to the rules of political competitions and sharing power (Chan, 2002:37). "While liberalism is concerned about limiting arbitrariness and the abuse of power, democracy is about setting the rules for popular decision-making" (Chan, 2002:39). Chan recalls the philosopher John Stuart Mill (Mill, 1997) to argue about the role of liberalism in a democratic system. According to Mill, popular sovereignty is meaningless without rules that organise and protect public debate.

Scholar Fareeh Zakaria, points out that "democratically elected regimes, often ones that have been re-elected or reaffirmed through referenda, are routinely ignoring constitutional limits on their power and depriving their citizens of basic rights and freedoms" (Zakaria, 1997:22). Thus, the *liberal* component is left out of the equation. This kind of political system is not called full or liberal

democracy anymore but *illiberal democracy* (Zakaria, 1997), *partial democracy* (Freedom House), *hybrid*, *pseudodemocracy*, *semidemocratic* or *electoral democracy* (Diamond, 2002). In most of the cases, the government may be elected but political liberties are limited. There may be military involvement in political affairs and/or economic life, endemic corruption and a lack of independent media, too. While civil and political liberties might exist, they just do so on paper, since liberties are violated and repressed on a daily basis (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014). Therefore, a signal feature of partially democratic regimes is a gap between the *de jure* – the legislation - and the *de facto* – actual actions that the government undertake - (Ibid.). This type of regime combines democratic and non-democratic elements becoming as a consequence, hybrid regimes (Diamond, 2002). Diamond elaborates on this, saying that "such hybrid regimes are quite deliberately *pseudodemocratic* meaning that formally democratic political institutions, such as multiparty electoral competition, masks (often, in part, to legitimate) the reality of authoritarian domination." (Ibid: 24). Moreover, such systems created aggressive political discourses that mobilize the nation against some elites and divide the remaining world into friends and enemies (Öktem and Akkoyunlu, 2016).

These kinds of regimes lack an open, free, and fair arena of contestation so that the ruling party can be removed if it is no longer wanted by a majority of the electorate. While an opposition victory is not impossible in a hybrid regime, it requires a very high level of opposition mobilization, unity, skill, and involvement (Diamond, 2002). Illiberal democracies also require international observation and intervention to delegitimate possible electoral manipulations and frauds (Diamond, 2002). When does an illiberal democracy – or electoral democracy - turn into an electoral authoritarianism? According to Diamond, we must particularly look at the freedom, fairness, inclusiveness, and meaningfulness of elections to find an answer to this question (Ibid.). Judgments about whether elections have been free and fair are extremely complicated. However, the frequency with which the validations by international observer missions of elections in ambiguous or electoral authoritarian regimes are criticized as superficial, premature, and politically driven is an important signal (Diamond, 2002). According to Diamond, "elections are "free" when the legal barriers to entry into the political arena are low, when there is substantial freedom for candidates and supporters of different political parties to campaign and solicit votes, and when voters experience little or no coercion in exercising their electoral choices" (Diamond, 2002:28).

All in all, the above-introduced approaches represent a useful tool to understand better the complexity of the current political dynamics in Turkey.

2.2 NGOs in hostile environments

In this paper, I build upon the initial premise which links an increasing shrinking operational space for NGOs in Turkey with a de-democratization process. Therefore, in this section I will look at scholarship on NGOs embedded in hostile environments.

To begin with, NGOs are not-for-profit, non-state organisations that have a degree of bureaucratic infrastructure, an office, a number of paid staff, volunteers and a public purpose. Their activities and goals differ, but all seek to work for a common interest (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014). One of the features of illiberal or partial democracies involves criminalisation and backlash on non-governmental organisations as well as shrinking political space for non-state actors (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014). As a result, in this sort of regime, non-governmental organisation and civil society groups are limited in their performance.

Scholars Chris Van der Borgh and Carolijn Terwindt have pointed out three major patterns that are linked to the increasing pressures on non-governmental organisation: the War on Terror; the securitisation of aid and the backlashes on civil society (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012). Firstly, counter-terrorism measures and policies issued after any terrorist attacks have been held responsible for pressures on legitimate organisations (Ibid.). NGOs that are engaged in dialogue with guerrilla fighters or provide services to ethnic minority groups, have been accused of aiding insurgents and possible terrorists. As Borgh and Terwindt claim, "in the absence of international consensus on the definition of terrorism, many countries have terrorism statutes that define acts of terrorism in broad terms and, thus, provide the authorities with leeway to criminalise particular actors"(Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012:1071).

The second phenomenon draws on the securitisation of aid, "the process in which development aid is increasingly linked to geopolitical interests or security concerns of donating countries" (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012:1067). Due to the discourse that links poverty to potential radicalisation and violence, donor policies are increasingly driven by concerns at home (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012). That is to say, donors might seek to use the data they gather for other political reason, for instance, tracking potential radicals linked to terrorists groups.

Thirdly, the backlash on the civil society may also explain the increasing pressure on NGOs. NGOs have been sometimes pictured as conflictive, self-interested, co-opted, or misguided (Ibid.). Various actors, including governments, local communities and international organisations, have become suspicious of NGOs and start to question whether these actors actually represent the legitimate interests of society, as they claim to do. One of the harshest backlashes on civil society is

the illiberal NGO legislation, which consist on hindering NGOs' permission to work or to carry out specific projects (Ibid.).

All in all, these three premises illustrate that restrictions on NGOs' work might be used to justify protection regulations against terrorism or radicalisation as well as seeking to restrict citizens' right to protest, assembly and reunion. However, only by analysing the local context and the particular characteristics of the affected organisations, it is possible to understand the reasons why some entities face more constrains than others in the same country and how can they change the various limitations. For that reason, scholars Van der Borgh and Terwindt focus on the different challenges and threats that NGOs face depending on the political context. According to them, NGOs' operational space – meaning the capacity to function as an organisation and to perform the key tasks of the organisation – may be affected by three main factors: the features of the local political field; the particular mix of pressures confronted by NGOs; and the characteristics, goals, and style of operation of the NGOs themselves (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014). Together these factors can explain the variation within the same political context, where different NGOs will face more or different constraints (Ibid.).

/ Features of the local political field
Regarding the local political context, it involves the state capacity and the type of regime. For each NGO, the room for manoeuvre will be different, even within the same country. Hence, "there is not a national context that is experienced in the same way by all NGOs" (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014: 1069). The operational space will depend on the existence of political and civil liberties – the level of democracy - and the particular characteristics or the strength of the state – its capacity- are important variables (Ibid). These two variables will shape NGOs' room for manoeuvre. Despite the increasing difficulties to label political systems, we can find strong or weak democracies and strong or weak authoritarian states. On the one hand, if the state is strong, with clearly defined civil and political rights, based on the rule of law and a state's capacity to defend these rights, NGOs will usually be protected by such legal frameworks. In such political environments, NGOs may establish working relations with state agencies in order to reach consensus on particular topics. They may as well play a political role and operate in the public sphere (Ibid.). On the other hand, if it is a strong and authoritarian state and the government has a clear willingness and capacity to control the public sphere, NGOs may be restricted in their work – by different measures. However, in weak states, (both authoritarian and democratic ones), political and civil liberties, the state capacity (or willingness) to make rules, defend the public sphere or defend NGOs can be limited (Ibid.).

Despite the fact that Universal Freedoms of Association, Assembly and Expression are essential rights for NGOs, these are especially under pressure when the NGO's aim is to influence public policy and challenge existing political realities and the people in power (Van Tuijl, 1997). Van Tuijl argues that, "the more NGOs are contesting the status quo, the higher the risk that they will suffer from a violation of their fundamental rights […] commonly conducted by governments who are exercising their span of control over the political process, and limiting NGOs' rights beyond what is acceptable under international standards." (Van Tuijl, 1997:1) Therefore, the political space of NGOs is above all determined in the national arena, although, as specified in the beginning of this section, different NGOs within the same national arena may face different constraints (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014).

/Types of pressures on NGOs

The political space of NGOs is about the possibilities and capacities to function as organisations and perform their key tasks in a certain political context (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014). Borgh and Terwindt stress that political spaces are never a given, and that these are different for each NGO (Ibid.). As NGOs operate within a political context – sometimes providing services substituting the state's role – they may become involved in some forms of public politics (Ibid.). A distinction can be made between "*de jure*" and "*de facto*" space (Ibid.:35). "*De jure*" space refers to the possibilities that organisations have in accordance with international human rights conventions and international law principles of protection. On one hand, when an organisation experiences restrictions in its operational activities, its right of speech and advocacy, its efforts to contact other organisations, its capacity to mobilise resources or its right to protection by the state, this means it faces constraints in "de jure" space. On the other hand, "de facto" political space of NGOs corresponds with the daily reality and the possibilities to carry out its activities in the social and political context (Ibid).

Van der Borgh and Terwindt distinguish five different kinds of restrictive actions and pressures that NGOs can go through: physical harassment; criminalisation, prosecution and investigation – for example being on a terrorist list; administrative restrictions – for example legislation that limits NGOs' space; stigmatisation and participation under pressure – also called co-optation - (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014). Paying attention to the characteristics of NGOs, it is possible to understand why some types of NGOs face more pressures that others. Borg and Terwindt argue that service-oriented NGOs are generally more allowed and even welcomed than claims-making organisations - which might challenge government policies or structures (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014).

Meanwhile, Van Tuijl draws on three main policies that the government may undertake to obstruct NGOs' work. The first way is challenging the credibility of NGOs and/or their interventions: it is about misrepresenting what the NGOs and their project really want. This might involve accusing NGOs of seeking to endanger stability – the destabilisation argument, seeking to hurt national interests – the national argument, "the hidden political agenda argument" which consists of accusing NGOs of political affiliation, either to a domestic or international power structure (Van Tuijl, 1997). The second strategy is to challenge the legality of an NGO or its interventions. This strategy is based on leaving grey areas that allow for different interpretations of regulations, or limit NGOs' role to community development and prohibiting any activity on lobbying or advocating (Van Tuijl, 1997). Thirdly, by challenging the NGO's operational space, the government might require permissions, registrations or certifications for any activity or project that the organisation wants to be engaged with. This strategy might also consist in intervening in the internal governance of an NGO and targeting an individual in order to intimidate the whole organisation (Ibid.). The government might even close down a complete organisation, in using legal or regulatory frameworks as a control method. It is necessary to note that the grade of independence of the judiciary will shape the government actions regarding the use of regulatory framework as well as, the creation of new rules that help to deal with specific situations (Van Tuijl, 1997).

/Countering the pressures

NGOs are not passive agents using space or being restricted in this space. NGOs have agency and as a consequence, they try to avoid or address restrictions. As to how NGOs cope with such pressures and restrictions and respond to them, Borgh and Terwindt have analysed four patterns: proactive or reactive strategies and individual or collective responses (2014). The authors point out that individual responses might be generally reactive and adaptive, looking for ways to keep their space and continue their tasks, whereas collective responses tend to be more proactive, claiming political space and holding accountable those responsible for the pressures. Individual reactive responses might be split into three types: security measures, withdrawals and adaptations. First, security measures might be taken when the NGO worries about physical harassment. Second, NGOs may decide to stop a part of its activities, and therefore withdraw from specific projects or regions, or avoiding to address certain issues. Finally, adapting to the situation by changing their approach, area, language or style is a very common individual strategy, according to Borgh and Terviwndt.

In this line, Van Tuijl explores NGOs' pro-active strategies when challenging a certain limiting regulatory framework in the national political context. He divides the proactive strategies into three types: claiming for unconstitutionality, using international standards or coalition building. The first, resorts to say that the pressure or hostile policy is unconstitutional because it contradicts the

basic rights. The second, uses international standards, for instance the general principles of limitation, international charter on human and people's rights, Istanbul Convention, CEDAW, etc. as an instruments to counteract (Van Tuijl, 1997). The third is based on building coalitions among national NGOs, to face authority restrictions jointly. Building relationships with the government or specific more friendly local authorities are also pro-active strategy to counter a disabled environment. Moreover, calling for foreign interventions, or asking for more involvement from those INGOs that are already providing support to the local NGOs in terms of claiming for national freedom for NGOs is also a well-established strategy (Van Tuijl, 1997). Being part of networks –either nationally or internationally – or having strong linkages with international actors might not be necessarily helpful for preventing pressures, but it is a strategy that is worth taking it into account Ibid.).

Summing up, scholarship on NGOs working in hostile or restrictive environments provide with explanations and arguments about the causes, characteristics and outcomes of pressures on NGOs, which I further use to compare and complement my own grounded analyses. The main ideas will be summarised as follows:
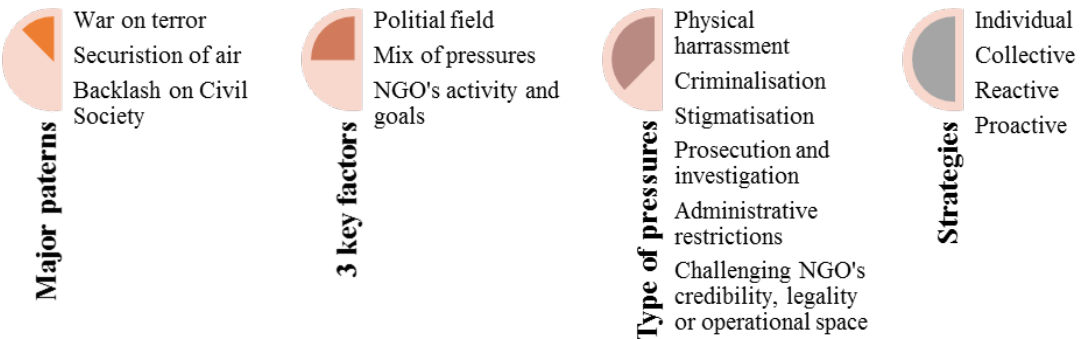

Figure 1 Summary of the chapter

2.3 Gendering refugee experiences

The aim of this subsection is to describe forced migration contexts with a gender perspective to further provide an analytical tool to use in the case of Syrian refugee women in Turkey. However, let me start by clearing up the differences between "refugees", "displaced people", "asylum seekers", "trafficked persons", and "forced migrants", because the language of displacement may be confusing.

According to international humanitarian law, "refugees" are those people that seek refuge in another country, therefore, crossing internationally recognised state borders (Giles, 2012). In addition to that, the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees states that they are people who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted, is outside the country of their nationality and are unable or unwilling to return (Ibid.) Status as refugee under the Convention gives a refugee access to humanitarian emergency resources, that is to say, food, housing, health services, some education, an identity card and protection. Unlike refugees, internally displaced people are those who seek refuge elsewhere in their own country (Giles, 2012). As they stay in their home countries, they are not covered by the UN Refugee Convention (Ibid.). The term "asylum seekers" refers to individuals who are outside their home countries seeking Convention refugee status and whose status has not been yet officially granted (Ibid.). In order to obtain the refugee status, the individual has to go through a (often long) legal procedure which will determine if she or he meets the criteria to be called refugee (ibid.).

In a war context, especially women, girls and boys may be victims of human trafficking. Being forced or deceived into migrating to a place where they work in very bad conditions as sex workers, domestic workers or experiencing other oppressive forms employments (Giles, 2012). Finally, forced migrants is a broader concept to designate those people who move elsewhere due to circumstance like war, conflict, natural disasters, famine etc. (Ibid.) Although I use the term "refugee" to talk about the Syrian forced migrants in Turkey, some might be asylum seekers and not refugees per se yet.

Women's and girl's roots of vulnerability in forced migration contexts

Following an old tendency to talk and research in genderless universal forced migration contexts, little by little feminist scholarship has evolved into engendering forced migration studies (Doreen, 1999). As pioneer anthropologist Indra Doreen states, "gender is a cultural artefact, a key relational dimension of human activity and thought – activity and thought informed by cultural and individual

notions of men and women" (Doreen, 1999: 2). In addition, gender varies from place to place and over time (Colson in Indra Doreen 1999). Thus, how people respond to forced migration will be gendered, but it will, as well, vary, given different cultural and individual notions, too (Ibid.).

Feminist scholars started researching gendered relations of exile around 1980. They wanted to end the genderless approach that was being used in the 1951 Convention on Refugees, which gave no attention to gender-based violence within such contexts. Besides, they wanted to fight the conception of refugee women as in need of protection and attached to their households and their children (Giles, 2012). Doreen argues that engendering forced migration research is about disaggregating everything by gender: concepts, methods, theories and policies, to be able to gain a better and deeper understanding of the political context. Such processes of deconstruction will allow one to make more effective and appropriate social actions, humanitarian responses, etc. (Doreen, 1999) A feminist approach to humanitarian crises is therefore crucial, according to Giles. However, gender never stands alone as a factor structuring power. A gender focus has to go along with an intersectional analysis in which history, location and politics are integrated and a multiplicity of refugee's identities is taken into account (Giles, 2012). Hence, an in-depth knowledge of individual women and men – taking into consideration situation, diversity, gender etc. - who are forced migrants should be a priority. This may help to tailor humanitarian programs that are more likely to hear and meet refugee's needs (Doreen, 1999). Just like women and men experience the violence of war differently (Cohn, Giles, Doreen), women's experience of war and their relations to war are also extremely diverse (Cohn, 2012).

According to scholar Wenona Giles, the gendered experiences of women and girls before the war affect what happen to them during and afterwards, in exile (Giles, 2012). Carol Cohn argues that "in most societies there is a taken-for-granted belief that there are (only) two sexes, and that one's seemingly "natural" and self-evident membership in either group (sex) bring with it a vast array of meanings, options and constraints (gender) beyond that which biology itself dictates" (Cohn, 2012: 7). The imputed features, capacities, strengths and weaknesses shape the relations between the sexes and the kind of work each does, the activity each engages in, the authority each can access or cannot and the kinds of power each has or does not have (Cohn, 2012). All these social arrangements intersect with other social structures such as race, caste, religion, age and ethnicity (Ibid.).

This prior situation might pose gender-specific challenges for women when escaping and seeking for refuge elsewhere, particularly if they do not have enough financial resources. Women may have to engage in survival sex or prostitution in return for food, shelter or protection. (Giles, 2012). Gender relations in the household may change, too. In case men are absent, women may have

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to replace men as workers on the farm, in the factory and in other traditionally masculine activities (Ibid.). Such change in gender roles challenges the traditional expectations and place women at risk of several forms of violence, since such changes raise women's status in their household and community (Giles, 2012). Hence, gender relations of displaced or refugee women's and girl's prior to the war are at the root of the vulnerability and violence and after, this might worsen due to the changing roles by becoming the breadwinners and family mainstays (Ibid.). Furthermore, according to Giles, men's loss of self-esteem and frustration may increase women's exposure to domestic and sexual violence (Giles, 2012).

Gender and security scholar, Carol Cohn, stresses that "women's and men's vulnerabilities cannot be understood without a multi-layered gender analysis, an analysis than moves us away from the careless ontological assumption about women as a "naturally" vulnerable group to a clear-eyed assessment of the manifold ways in which gender as it intersects and inflects through other structures of power, plays out in embodied lives, and shapes their lives in different ways" (Cohn, 2012: 28). That is to say, refugee women and men are not a monolith and their experiences during war and exile are different depending on a very long range of factors.

To sum up, wearing gender lenses is decisive in any context of social intervention, but in the case of humanitarian response it is of the highest importance. Indeed, gender plays a big role in how refugees experience war and exile. But it is important to not overlook other categories which may shape as well their living conditions and needs in exile. Class, religion, sexual orientation and age are just some of the other factors that have to be taken into consideration in order to comprehend and address refugees' needs better.

As my premise is that the de-democratization process in Turkey affects Syrian refugee women, I have disclosed some of the main ideas that can help understand refugees' experiences and most usual obstacles.

3 Research philosophy, methodology and methods

Research philosophy

My research philosophy draws on a constructivist or constructionism ontological position and it builds upon an interpretative epistemological paradigm (Bryman, 2012). Constructivist ontology is grounded on the idea that social phenomena are created from perceptions and consequent actions of

those social actors concerned with their existence (Ibid.). Social phenomena are produced by social interaction and are in constant state of revision (Ibid.). Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that there is no objective, pre-existing truth waiting to be discovered (Bryman, 2012). The researcher always presents a specific version of social reality, rather than one that can be regarded as definitive (Ibid.). Epistemologically, the interpretative or subjectivist paradigm studies social issues that requires understanding of the social world that people live in (Ibid.). Hence, it pays attention on the experience and interpretation (Ibid).

Methodology

The methodology that I have followed to answer my research questions is in line with the above ontological and epistemological orientations. It draws on the standpoint knowledge and the grounded theory research methodology.

First, I follow **standpoint knowledge** premises – also called point of view epistemology or situated knowledges – by Donna Haraway, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa and Chandra Mohanty. Standpoint knowledge stress the relevance of an embodied objectivity – meaning that the experience of the subject varies vis-a-vis his/her location - and this constitutes his or her point of departure (Haraway, 1988). In view of the research philosophy of this paper, it would not be coherent to talk about democracy, activism, gender or forced migration from a single point of view, as many realities coexist and the role of the researcher is to welcome this subjective reality. For this reason, situated knowledges provide a suitable theory to embrace the object of study and escape from universalism, androcentrism, orientalism and racism, standpoint knowledge theory provides a system to embrace the diversity of experiences lived by women as an opposition to the single story, in order words, a doctrine of embodied objectivity (Haraway, 1988). Thus, situating a knowledge entails all personal experiences involved in political, social, and historical processes that women have been through, including the condition of domination under men (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2003).

Postcolonial feminist Chandra Mohanty, states that "everything must be theorized and interpreted within specific societies, both in order to understand it better, as well as in order to effectively organize to change it" (Mohanty, 1988:67). With that, Mohanty stresses the importance of not falling into the trap of biding women as group based on their common dependencies and oppressions but, instead, analysing and interpreting experiences embedded in a specific time, place and context.

Following, I integrate a **grounded theory research,** an analytical approach that **"**develops a well-integrated set of concepts which provide a thorough theoretical explanation of a social phenomenon

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under study" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990:5). According to scholars Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, the purpose of this type of theory contributes towards closing the gap between theory and empirical research. To do that, theory is generated by grounded systematized data. Using this methodology, theory may be generated initially from the data or, if existing (grounded) theories may be elaborated and modified as incoming data is played against them. Generating theory and doing social research are two parts of the same process (Glaser, 1978 in Corbin & Strauss, 1999). In light of such process, the theory evolves during actual research and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection (Ibid.). Therefore, it involves weaving back and forth between data and theory (Bryman, 2012). A key feature of this analytic approach is a general method of comparative analysis.

Grounded theory is an inductive methodology which builds upon the principle of change. Since phenomena are not conceived of as static but as on-going changing in response to evolving conditions, an important component of the method is to build change, through process, into the method (Corbin & Strauss, 1999). As a result, knowledge is linked closely with time and place (Corbin & Strauss, 1999). Grounded theory, seeks not only to uncover relevant conditions, but also to determine how the actors respond to changing conditions and to the consequences of their actions (Ibid.).

Choice of theories

My methodological approaches are complemented by a combination of three different theories to study the empirical field of NGOs working with Syrian refugee women. Although my methodology is based on grounded theory and so I seek to draw patterns from my inductive procedure, it has been interesting to compare and discuss the findings with existing scholarship. My choice of theories is made up of three different literature trends. First, illiberal democracy theories have been selected to understand the political and institutional features and the policies that have been lately enacted in Turkey. Second, to examine the constraints and obstacles that NGOS face as well as their strategies in order to counter those, I apply Chris Van der Borgh & Carolijn Terwindt's analytical framework on NGOs' working conditions in partial democracies, along with the contributions of Peter Van Tuijl. Third, I use Indra Doreen and Wenona Giles' work on gender and refugee studies to shed light on the specific and different experiences that refugee women go through.

Methods

To collect the data I have used two qualitative research methods, literature review and interviews. First, a review of existing literature shows that little is known about how de-democratization can affect civil society, and more specifically, non-governmental organisations. However, literature on NGOs' increasing shrinking political space emerged linked to the research on partial or illiberal democracies. Research specifically on Turkey is more focused on the general political and social situation and the ongoing shift towards an authoritarian regime. For instance, I have used Turkish local newspapers articles as well as foreign media articles along with reports on the situation of Syrian refugee women in Turkey after the EU-Turkey deal by the Women's Refugee Commission (research institute), Amnesty International (advocacy NGO) and academic articles written by a number of researchers like Larry Diamond, Kerem Öktem and Karabekir Akkoyunlu and Şenay Özden among others.

Since it is very recent matter and research related to Syrian refugees in Turkey it is being profoundly restricted in the last years (Kayaoglu, Barin, Al Monitor May 27, 2015), there is not much literature paying attention on the severe consequences for NGOs and their social action as well as the implication on refugee women. In the wake of this gap, I resort to collecting my own data through interviews. Using interviews I seek "to understand the world from the subject's points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations" (Kvale, 2006:481). Qualitative depth interviews are in light of feminist standpoint knowledge which places emphasis on experiences and subjectivity and on reciprocity of researcher and researched (Kvale, 2006).

I began this research journey interviewing experts on the broad topic I had in mind: Syrian refugee women in Turkey. This means I didn't inquiry specific questions and I was not driven by a theoretical background. Concrete, I started interviewing experts, journalists and humanitarian workers through video conference in April 2017 until June 2017. In the first interviews, I noticed that the NGO workers were seriously affected by the environment of hostility and uncertainty in Turkey, mostly due to the State of emergency. The political context was harshly affecting their working conditions and, as a consequence, their motivation to work as well. As this issue seemed worth investigating it became the problem formulation and point of departure of the thesis. From that point on, I kept digging in other topics that arose. The inductive approach led me to narrow down the scope of the study and determine a more specific problem. Once narrowed down, I looked for existing theories and literature that could help me discuss my findings.

The interviews have been in-depth semi-structured, with open questions which sought to uncover two main topics: the current situation regarding the NGOs' working conditions in Turkey and the women refugees' living conditions and rights. As I was not based in Turkey, interviews have been computer-assisted as I used Skype to establish the conversation. Finally, from April to July 2017, I undertook conversations with 7 individuals who currently work in non-governmental organisations and think tanks related to humanitarian work, refugees and/or women's rights. As in grounded theory the research process is highly important, I want to shed light on some of the issues I faced during the interviewing period. For instance, the power imbalance within the interview dialogue has been one of the challenges that I encountered. To minimise it, I exposed clearly beforehand my research goals and I avoided having a "hidden agenda" (Kvale, 2006:84) of the potential topics to discuss and I tried to avoid the "monopoly of interpretation" that I could have as an interviewer (Kvale, 2006: 485) and therefore I tried to give my interpretations back to my interviewee for validation, to be sure it was a consensual knowledge. Despite my evident instrumental use of the interviewee, I tried to create a good and equal environment.

Following, I briefly introduce the interviewees and their profiles.

- Nuran Kızılkan Farina, head of Education and Health programs in Mavi Kalem Social Asistance & Charity Association, based in Istanbul. Mavi Kalem works for children and women and more recently has undertaken programs for refugee women and girls.
- Ezgi Emre is a Community-based protection program manager at Hayata Destek/Support to life (STL) based in the Eastern part of Turkey and Istanbul. STL is one of the biggest humanitarian NGOs in Turkey and is now managing numerous community centres dedicated to refugees across Turkey.
- Shady Zahed, a researcher at Ankara-based think tank SETA, and writer at The New Turkey was my third interlocutor. Zahed is researching the topic of NGOs in Turkey. Besides, he has taken part in the creation of a school for refugee children in Ankara and is involved in education plans for refugee children.
- Gizem Bilim is a project manager in Flying Broom, an important women's empowerment NGO located in Ankara and operating throughout Turkey. Flying Broom engages in many projects to boost women's political participation, fight against gender discrimination and early marriage, among others.
- Duygu Eseçe is a social worker at ASAM, the first-founded and most important refugee and asylum seeker NGO in Turkey. Created in 1993, ASAM is an UNCHR partner and also a partner of many other UN agencies.

- Rahfa H. Saad is a financial and entrepreneurship teacher as well as translator at Small Projects Istanbul (SPI). She help Syrian women develop their own businesses. SPI was founded a few years ago to help Syrian and North African refugees living in Istanbul.

The profiles of the selected sample share some special characteristics which make them suitable for my research. They all have worked directly with the refugees in different parts of Turkey and in different areas of work, either in the emergency aid services, the asylum seeker procedures or related to refugee's integration in the Turkish society.

Data analysis

In order to analyse the data from the interviews and the other existing literature that I have consulted, I resorted to **coding**. In order to carry out the coding I used a qualitative data analysis software which helped me to draw patterns and trends of the object of study in an easy and visual way.

In grounded theory research, coding has three phases: open, axial, and selective processes which might be all used within the same research project (Corbin & Strauss, 2012). In this light, I first followed an open-coding process, comparing events and actions, looking for similarities and differences and making questions. As a result I came up with denoted concepts as well as *in vivo concepts*, which reflect actors' deep concerns (Corbin & Strauss, 1999:5). Indeed, in vivo concepts use the actual words of research participants rather than being named by the analyst as in the case of the denoted (Corbin & Strauss, 2012). Following, I grouped conceptually similar events, actions and interactions into categories and subcategories therefore forming the sampling for theoretical grounds (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, 2012). Then, I continued with axial coding by using the conditional/consequential matrix, which helps analyse the context (conditions that give rise to problems to which individuals respond by means of action/interaction/) and the process (ongoing responses – in form of action, interaction, or emotion - to problems or circumstances arising out of the context) (Corbin and Strauss, 1990. At this stage, I integrated broader conditions affecting the phenomenon into the analysis. Finally, I resorted to selective coding by which I unified categories under a core one and I developed categories that needed further description (Corbin & Strauss, 2012).

According to grounded theorist Corbin and Strauss, coding has to be enhanced with theoretical sensitivity –meaning wearing lenses to detect issues of class, gender, race and power, among others (Corbin & Strauss, 2012). For Corbin and Strauss, it means to be able to walk in the participants' shoes. As well, it is important to bear in mind that interpretations are temporally limited. First, they are provisional as their nature allows for endless elaboration and second, they are limited in time, as theories are embedded in a historical context and conditions change (Ibid.).

4 Analyses

In this chapter I try to elucidate why NGOs in Turkey are dwelling in a complicated place, which constrains and pressures they face and how they respond to them. Finally, I seek to disclose the implications of such phenomenon on the Syrian women refugees living in Turkey.

4.1 We are living in a kind of tyranny. Who is going to speak out in our name?

In Ezgi Emre words, Turks are living under a sort of tyranny. Why? Along these lines, I present an analysis of the political dynamics in Turkey for the last few years (2011-2017), drawing special attention to the current situation in 2017. Therefore I first draw patterns of the most relevant circumstances or problems which represent threats to the NGOs' work from the socio, political, and historical conditions of the context in which the NGOs are embedded.

Since 2011, the situation in Turkey has been in almost constant turmoil. Scholar Larry Diamond states that Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) "has been gradually eroding democratic pluralism and freedom in the country" (Diamond, 2015: 145). In power since 2002, AKP has consolidated its own political hegemony, extending partisan control over the judiciary and the bureaucracy, arresting journalists and intimidating dissenters in the press and academia (Diamond 2015). In this light, Gizem Bilim, project assistant at Flying Broom NGO, argues,

> "AKP is in power for many years, at first they looked soft, light, not radical or extremist Islamic. But slowly, they turned into more conservative and less democratic. The turning point was in 2013 when the Occupy Gezi Park. A lot of people realised that they were not comfortable about the Government. One of the issues that were being protesting was related to the restriction on abortion."

Bilim comments on the shifting process that the government of Erdogan Recep Tayyip has been forging for the last few years and she especially points out the Gezi park protests in 2013, when the first signs of undemocratic attitudes started to be evident, according to her. Although the protests were initially prompted by the government's decision to build a shopping mall and a replica of Ottoman military barracks in the park, they turned into a massive protest against the Turkey's prime minister Erdogan assaults on the secular basis of the Turkish Republic as well as on the civil, journalistic and political liberties (Benhabib, Seyla in The New York Times, June 3 2013). Women's rights were also at risk, as Erdogan revised the free access to abortion and introduced measures to restrict such right. Turkish academicians Kerem Öktem and Karabekir Akkoyunlu agree with such

point, which they indeed qualify as the drift toward authoritarianism as civil rights restrictions start to be widespread (Öktem & Akkoyunlu, 2016).

All in all, these characteristics could fit the numerous literature on illiberal democracies and share the Zakaria's definition that talks about "democratically elected regimes which are routinely ignoring constitutional limits on their power and depriving their citizens of basic rights and freedoms" (Zakaria:1999). Yet, this is not the usual illiberal democratic regime but a country that is immersed in a de-democratization process. After the Gezi Park protests, Turkey's politics were marked by a sense of "accelerating escalation, inter-elite conflict and a war on institutions" (Öktem & Akkoyunlu, 2016:471). The most visible episode of this escalation is the coup attempt of 15 July 2016, by a faction of the armed forces. The Hizmet network around the charismatic preacher Fethullah Gülen is accused by the government to hold responsibility (Ibid.). In the aftermath, the government enacts a state of emergency which gives the power to issue executive decrees with little scrutiny by the Parliament or the courts (Amnesty, 2017). Under these circumstances, there are some existing illiberal dynamics which get worse from this point on – a weak rule of law becomes almost absent - and others that emerge according to the "logics of exception" – massive detentions, for instance- (Öktem & Akkoyunlu, 2016:471). Such **logics of exception accelerate the de-democratization process** and affects, among others, the separation of powers and civil and political rights and freedoms. In the following figure, there is a representation of the main layers that conform the de-democratization process boosted by the logics of the state of emergency.
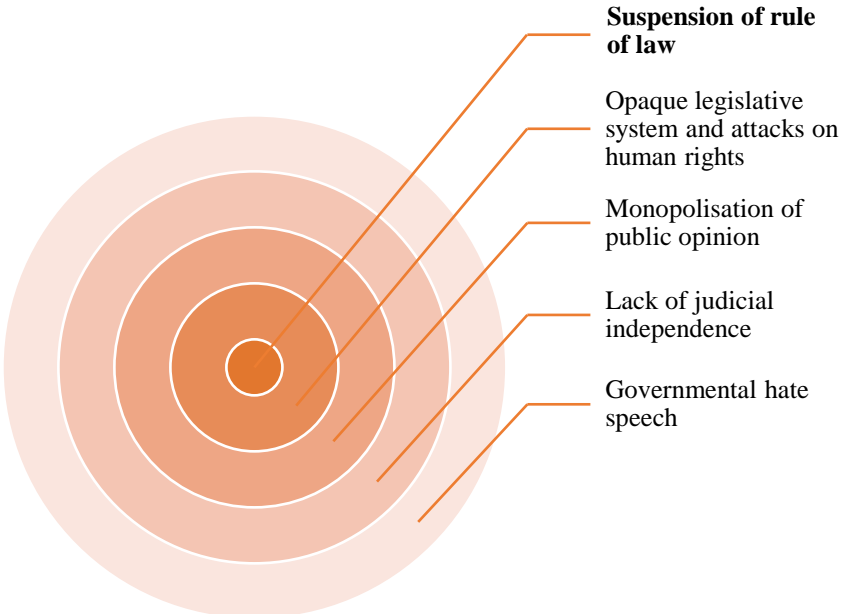

Suspension of rule of law

Opaque legislative system and attacks on human rights

Monopolisation of public opinion

Lack of judicial independence

Governmental hate speech

Figure 2 Layers of the de-democratization process in Turkey

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The **suspension of rule of law** is the core dynamic which permeates in all the government's areas, namely the executive, the legislative and the judicial branch and leads to unlawful crackdown against political dissent throughout Turkey. Under this premise, the government carried out a post-coup purge which in July 2017 involved around 134.194 public employees suspended, 47.000 people kept in custody, 32000 in prison waiting for trial and 4.272 judges and prosecutors dismissed (turkeypurge.com accessed: 19/07/017). Likewise, purges began in universities, private sector and in the political arena, suspending democratically elected mayors of 28 Kurdish municipalities and replacing them with AKP officers (Öktem &Akkoyunlu, 2016). The purge also affected civil society organisations and especially NGOs working with human rights. Through an executive decree, called KHK, the government permanently closed 1,125 NGOs and the temporally closed 370 more (Cetingulec, Tulay in Al monitor, 21 November 2016).

Some of the NGOs affected by the executive decree were Progressive Lawyers' Association (ÇHD), Association of Lawyers for Freedom (ÖHD), whose members represented victims of torture, Mesopotamia Lawyers Association (MHD) representing communities affected by curfews in south eastern Turkey, Van Women's Association (VAKAD), which provided services to women fleeing domestic violence, and Turkey's leading children's rights organization Agenda: Child Association (Gündem Çocuk) (Cetingulec, Tulay in Al monitor, 21 November 2016). Also Sarmaşık Association, which provided food aid and education services to 32,000 people in Diyarbakır, in Turkish Kurdistan, including people forcibly displaced by the state, was closed (Amnesty International, 2016). In an official statement, the government argues that the Gülenist movement owed its popularity and power to their schools, associations and foundations and so non-governmental organisation become sources of suspicion. Furthermore, some NGOs are accused of making propaganda for the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) or belonging to ISIS (Amnesty International, 2017) as well as having connections with the leftist Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front (DHKP-C) (Cetingulec, Tulay in Al monitor, 21 November 2016). As a consequence, every single organisation in Turkey has been under suspicion.

Therefore, the first issue which is encountered within the logics of exception of the current state of emergency in Turkey is **the opaque and closed legislative processes and the subsequent attacks on human rights**. The opaque legislative process does not provide the possibility to object any law or decree that issued under the state of emergency. Nuran Kizilkan alludes to that in the following statement: "with emergency state, after the coup, the government did major law changes no one can object, as for example: a very interesting date, on 24th November 2016, they delivered a new law, about lowering the age of consent to 12. Now in people's thinking is that 12 is the age of marry too. So it's horrible." She stresses the fact that laws within the emergency state cannot be

objected and such law supposes an attack on human rights and especially women's and children's rights as the age of consent basically relates to the age of marriage. The lack of the right of objection could be related to the restrictions on the freedom of speech or demonstrate, as it will be treated in the following lines, but also to a phenomenon that has recently happened which is leaving the NGOs out of the table. The government stopped inviting independent NGOs and experts to the table when drafting laws about refugees, women's rights or children's rights and thus silencing their critical voices regarding the legislative changes. Gizem Bilim adds that "recently the government tried to pass many law against women's rights. First, that you could marry your rapist. But the protests and especially women's NGOs took action. But the last one about consent hasn't been stopped". Bilim mentions two law changes, one that would let a woman marry the rapist as a way to get him pardoned –which finally didn't pass thanks to the feminist movement pressures- and the one that Kizilkan was introducing some lines above: the lowering of age consent. Both Kizilkan and Bilim believe that the government takes advantage of the current undemocratic conditions to pass laws which fulfil their conservative ideology and Islamic radicalisation.

Another feature of the current legislative dynamics is the lack of will to guarantee CEDAW and international standards. Duygu Eseçe, social worker at ASAM, talks about the worrying gap between the laws and their implementation. Indeed, such phenomenon usually concerns human, children's or women's rights. She argues as follow:

> "We don't have bad laws, but the problem is always implementation. There is a gap between the human rights, children's rights and women's rights and its implementation. We try to always link to this. We always reference CEDAW, we try to create solidarity between organisation and offices. But they don't care. Still, we have to force them to take a women exposed to violence in shelters, so we have to push for these rights to be guaranteed."

Such vivid comment illustrates the lack of willingness on behalf of the government to cooperate and meet the international standards which Turkey has in fact signed. That's a concept which can be found in existing literature too. Van der Borgh and Terwindt talk about the gap between de jure and de facto meaning that civil and political liberties might be present in the legislation but they don't correspond with the actual actions that the state undertakes (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014). While there are some standards that the country must fulfil, it turns out to be very complicated to achieve that. Overall, the last changes in the legislation demonstrate a backwards process in terms of human and women's rights in the country.

A second pattern that I can draw on is the government's **monopolization of public opinion.** The threatening environment to exercise civil and political rights narrated by the majority of my interviewees becomes a big issue for them, as it prevents them from demonstrating or speaking up

against government's decisions or actions for fear of backlash. Ezgi Emre, communty centre manager of STL coins the concept of monopoly of public opinion in the following quote: [...] we are keeping ourselves very low profile. No press releases, no contact with the media. We try to be invisible. They don't want us to inform of what's going on, they don't want us to talk about refugees, they want the monopoly of the public opinion." Emre talks from her professional experience in a big NGO in Turkey and sees cleary the government's intention to contol every single information so that the dissident voices cannot be heard. As a result, NGO are being silenced under the threat to be closed down. To the ones working with refugees, she also refers to the monopoly of opinion regarding the situation of refugees in Turkey. She mentions the recent restriction to do research in this field and links it with the fact that the government does not want anyone else that itself to release information without previous approval. Nuran Kizilkan narrates that "in November 2015 we wanted to protest a lot about the age of consent change but we warned us, don't do that, don't say that and we finally decided not to". Kizilkan reveals the fear of backlash that activists like her suffer when willing to demonstrade against some government's decision. Indeed, these civil rights are being curtailed as Emre affirms in this light that "the police is repressing the protestors" and so going or convoking demonstration becomes a risk.

In this light, a website that monitors the post-coup purge, reported that more than 149 media outlets have been shut down since the coup attempt and more than 269 journalists are currently arrested (Turkeypurge website accessed : 19/07/2017), making Turkey the biggest jailer of journalists in the world (Amnesty, 2017). Therefore, the intention of the government to monopolise the public opinion affects as well critical media and journalists who are silenced and even imprisoned. Indeed, silencing critical voices, from individual scale to the collective one works as a mechanism to keep a biased version of the events happening in the country and ultimately legitimise all the government's actions and decisions.

The third issue that arises from the logics of exception in Turkey is the **politicisation of the judiciary**. As the data points out, more than 4.000 judges and prosecutors have been dismissed, due to the post-coup crackdown. The judicial impartiality has vanished due to a politicisation of such power. The dividing lines between the legislative, the executive and the judiciary powers are increasingly blurry since the executive power is taking over the other two powers. As Emre states in the following quote: "now they are changing judges, and they don't need law background, but they belong to the AKP. So, in the future, AKP will rule the country, in all the areas." As she stresses, AKP affiliated politicians will now performs as judges and prosecutors, which means the impartiality and independence of such services will be profoundly diminished. Gizem Bilim reflects on that too :

"right now, there is no legal authority bigger than the government. No check or balances. They do what they want. Even if we try to stop, they just do it. So now is easier to do this kind of things [law changes], when there is on-going problems, this is a drop in an ocean of problems. For them it is just a detail." So the emergency state is used by the government to exercise an abuse of power which consist on eliminating the checks and balances system. By doing that, the separation of powers is not guaranteed and one branch –the executive- takes control of the other two – the legislative and the judiciay -.

Ezgi Emre concludes that "everything is going backwards. One day they can say: women have to wear the headscarf. We will be helpless. No courts, no press, no opposition, no civil society". With this blunt statement, Emre puts together the major setbacks that have been happening linked to the political, judiciary and civil arena and reflects on the vulnerable place in which Turkey will be left if the de-democratization process continues. She especially points out the increasing islamic and conservative ideology of the government's dicourses and actions which may hypothetically affect women's rights in long term, for instance, by imposing the use of headscarf.

Finally, the process of de-democratization in Turkey is fostered by a **strong nationalistic discourse based on hatred**. Particularly after the failed coup, the government has been portraying specific non-state actors as enemies, which has become a very effective mechanism to legitimise the government's controversial measures such as the massive crackdown and the curtailment of human rights. Moreover, it has mobilised the people who are pro government. Gizem Bilim explains how the Turkish society is changing lately:

> "The dimensions of the Turkish society are changing - which is very hard to do. The rural areas are getting more conservative and binary. 5 years ago people used to talk about political views. But nowadays, you are either against or pro government. This causes hatred within the society and intolerance. And therefore, there is a dangerous polarisation. Both sides want something more".

Bilim refers to the political polarization which has flourish due to the government discourses on dividing society into allies of the state and enemies of the state. Erdogan has used hate speech to build a particular nationalist discourse that is based on creating the government's enemies, namely Gülenist movement, PKK (the Kurdish political party), the critical media and so on. Hence, the previously mentioned monopolisation of public opinion and the crackdown on political and civil opposition along with hate speech are the breeding ground for polarisation taking place in Turkey. Nowadays, the pro government people are portrayed as good patriots whereas the ones who counter the government are portrayed as accomplices of the enemies. It's possible to find such dynamic in existing literature. In Diamond's work, he explains that some systems create aggressive political

discourses that mobilize the nation against some elites and divide the remaining world into friends and enemies, by doing that their power is strengthen (Diamond, 2002). Ezgi Emre observes that the hate speech used by Erdogan, primarily against FËTO (the Gülenist movement), the PKK and other enemies created by AKP will have implications. For instance: "it will lead the people to vote "yes" for a future referendum in death penalty. […] AKP is good at brainwashing and even portraying Kurdish children as terrorist." So, Emre warns that the hate speech is used to put back on the table issues as the death penalty. Although Turkey would lose membership of the Council of Europe's and as a consequence, the access to the High Court of Human Rights, the death penalty is already being presented as the solution to ending the enemies. Emre uses the concept "brainwashing" to point out the misleading content that is used in AKP's hate speech against, for instance, Kurdish kids.

Indeed, the hate discourse against the enemies was also employed during the campaign for the constitutional referendum in April 2017, when Erdogan called his political opponents "enemies" (Turkish minute, 23 May 2017). In fact, Erdogan turned victorious and managed to restructure Turkey's parliamentary democracy into a presidential republic, a profound change which concentrates decision-making processes in the presidency (Grimm, Jannis in Carnegie endownment 27 April 2017). Definitely, monopolising public opinion may have paved the way to win the referendum, since the vast majority of Turkey's media was sympathetic to Erdogan after the huge crackdown over the past year (Amnesty, 2017). Nevertheless, a hate speech portraying the supporters of the "no" as accomplices of the Turkey's enemies might have resulted to be the key factor. Hence, the existent issues which have been explored and defined in this section - the vanishing of the separation of powers and minimal institutional checks and balances - will most likely become more evident from now on.

All in all, this chapter has unfolded the main dynamics which conform a rapidly moving and changing political environment. The logics of exception have been the excuse to speed up the democratic involution that started some years ago all for national security' sake. The hatred discourse which has been used by the AKP and particularly by president Erdogan has been an effective strategy to camuflage an actual authoritarian shift which involved changes in all political spheres –the judiciary, the legislative and the executive – and heads towards a one man state.

4.2 "We have the feeling that one day we will wake up and we will no longer exist"

In this section I analyse the most relevant facts of the Syrian refugee's arrival in Turkey and then I look at how the logics of exception and the on-going de-democratization process are particularly affecting the NGOs engaged in the humanitarian response.

The neighbouring civil war in Syria has affected Turkey in profound ways. Since the commencement of the Syrian crisis and the arrival of the first refugees in 2011, Turkey has followed an open-border policy–meaning that the border was open almost without exceptions- (Özden, 2013). Up to now, more than 3.000.000 refugees have entered the country seeking protection (UNHCR, 2017). Despite of some security incidents which could have led to a conflict spill-over into Turkey, the country has maintained such policy (İdil, 2016).

In Article 1 of the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the application of the Convention in Turkey is limited to persons who have become refugees as a result of events occurring in Europe (Özden, 2013). The vast majority of asylum seekers in Turkey come from non-European states, as for instance, Syrians (Ibid.). In light of the "geographical limitation", Syrians who have fled to Turkey have been recognized as "guests" and not as "refugees;" (Özden, 2013:5). However, Syrians in Turkey are not treated like asylum seekers coming from other non-European countries, either (Özden, 2013). They cannot register with UNHCR in order to apply for asylum in a third country. Nonetheless, the Turkish state has implemented a "temporary protection regime" for Syrians. The principles of temporary protection are an open border policy, no forcible returns (*non-refoulement*) and registration with the Turkish authorities and support inside the borders of the camps (Ibid.). Yet, this modality should be of limited duration (Ibid.). Hence, Syrians who seek for refuge in Turkey are found in a very delicate position. Although in the beginning were treated as guests, Duygu Eseçe, social worker at ASAM, highlights the importance of not seeing them as visitors or guests but as future Turkish citizens. As the third countries quotas are very low and the current EU-Turkey deal restricts the asylum seeking in Europe, NGOs are trying to include them as much as possible in the host community.

Regarding the humanitarian response to the crisis, the Turkish government has mainly tackled the humanitarian crisis through the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) by primarily building a number of refugee camps near the border that currently host around 260,000 Syrians (ECHO, 2017). Humanitarian Relief Foundation (İHH) has been the only NGO allowed by the government to enter the camps and as a consequence, it has been labelled as being ideologically aligned with the Turkish government (Özden, 2013). Yet, 90% of the refugees are found outside the camps (ECHO, 2017), where local and international NGOs have been key actors of the humanitarian response (Ibid). IHH has been the biggest organisation providing aid to Syrians outside camps too

(Özden, 2013) but local NGOs and INGOs have played a big role not only assisting the refugees in the border areas but also undertaking long term projects throughout Turkey. Indeed, they have been in the forefront of the response (Zahed, Shady in the NewTurkey.com). Particularly, many have dealt with refugee women's rights and children's rights addressing health issues, education and gender-based violence -like child marriages- (CTDC, 2015).

Notwithstanding, non-governmental organisation working with refugees have encountered a difficult operating environment. The hostile politics towards non-governmental organisations have also reached those INGOs and local NGOs that work helping Syrians. Concretely it's possible to detect three main strategies that the Turkish government has undertaken to hinder the work of NGOs helping Syrian refugee women.

The first and biggest constrain comes from **legal limitations** by the **Emergency decree laws** issued after the coup attempt, on July 2016. Decree Law no. KHK/668 and 667 call for the closing down of more than 1400 organisations and groups "which belong to, connect to, or contact with the Fetullahist Terrorist Organization (FETO/PDY), posing a threat to the national security" (Turkey's government official newspaper, July 2016:1). Therefore, NGOs which are found to be part or in contact with terrorism or terrorist propaganda are ordered to be closed. An interpretation of this phenomenon can be found in Chris Van der Borgh and Carolijn Terwindt work on *NGOs under pressure in partial democracies* (2012). According to them, **counter-terrorism measures** and policies issued after any terrorist attacks may be held responsible for pressures on legitimate organisations (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012). Thus, a counter-terrorist decree may cover up a backlash on legitimate but critical NGOs.

In addition to the decree of emergency laws that ordered the closure of NGOs –permanently or temporarily- there are **other legal limitations** that hinder INGOs' **registration and work permits**. For instance, some INGOs are hold in question, meaning that can be expelled at any moment if the authorities so decide. Others have to deal with temporary work permits. According to Shady Zahed, these obstacles may be connected to **internal and external security matters**. Despite INGOs haven't been traditionally welcomed in Turkey, the humanitarian crisis led the government to open the doors to INGOs as the Danish Refugee Council and the Norwegian Refugee Council among others. Yet, the government has been watching them closely because they suspect that INGOs are not only in Turkey to provide help but to collect data, as Zahed points out. Chris van der Borgh and Carolijn Terwindt define such dynamic as "securisation of aid", since the state claims that there are geopolitical interests or security concerns behind the aid (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012:1067). Regardless of that, Nuran Kizilkan highlights the devastating effects that this kind of restrictions have

on NGOs. Since NGOs often work in networks and partner up with other organisations when carrying out projects, the working conditions become very instable.

Although the emergency law decree just mentions the belonging or contact to the Fetullahist Terrorist Organization as a reason for an organisation to be closed down or restricted temporarily, there has also been a purge against NGOs working with sensitive issues as education, human rights, women's rights or Kurdish people. An explanation may be a backlash on these various NGO. Van der Borgh and Terwindt talk about this phenomenon as another premise for governments who have become suspicious of NGOs and start to question whether these actors actually represent the legitimate interests of society, as they claim to do (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012). In some cases, NGOs doing activism and working with Kurdish women have been shut down. Besides the risky activity which advocacy work represents nowadays in Turkey - the government aims at monopolising the public opinion – the Kurdish question is more latent than ever and can lead to an accusation of aiding terrorism or propaganda.

Organisations working with refugees and education have also encounter many issues. "The word "education" is forbidden" claims Nuran Kizilan, referring to the highly strict policies that the Ministry of Education has released in regards of Syrian children's education. The Turkish government is trying to find the best solution to include 800.000 children at school and for that reason, it has prohibited that any NGO provide education services. Shady Zahed attributes that to the government's will to have the monopoly of education. The Ministry wants to control the schools and what is taught there. The immediate actions have been to close down the unofficial schools that filled the vacuum left by the absence of official education since 2011 and to close down some other NGOs which delivered education. Despite the reasons behind these actions were firstly unknown, later on the government has revealed the plan to close the current temporary schools and merge them to the public ones, therefore putting Syrians and Turks in the same rooms. As a result, it is just permitted to offer support in language or homework in after-school or before school community centres. However, not allowing NGOs to offer education goes in detrimental to those unregistered refugees who don't have access to the public system. In short, the legal limitations create a sense of uncertainty, due to the wide set of criterions and the multiple aspects which include *posing a threat to the national security* (emergency decree law extracts, council of Europe, 2016:2).

Furthermore, the Turkish government has resorted to the **intervention in the internal procedures and functioning of organisations** as another way to obstruct NGO's work. For instance, paying regular visits, requiring permissions to undertake projects, etc. In general, NGOs try to avoid paperwork, which also leads to stop some projects. Duyu Eseçe argues that at ASAM –asylum seeker NGO and a government partner-, the public officers visit their offices regularly to gather information

about what they are doing and who are the foreigners (asylum seekers) that are reaching their facilities. Besides, when the organisation receives a request to participate in a research, it has to be notified and wait for a permission. Likewise, when they have some project proposal it's obligatory to send it to the migration office and wait for a feedback. Often, this feedback aims at shaping the project. Although they don't limit the work, they shape it. These kind of daily pressures are further explained in the Peter Van Tuijl work on NGO in disabled environments. Van Tuijl argues that the state tries to challenge the NGO's operational space, by requiring permissions, registrations or certifications for any activity or project that the organisation wants to be engaged with (Van Tuijl, 1997). Indeed, the operational space, meaning the performance of the daily tasks, is challenged and constrained by the numerous procedures that NGOs must follow to avoid troubles.

All in all, NGO have to be very careful with bureaucracy and avoid asking for unnecessary permissions. However, this behaviour curtail their creativity and projects which eventually affects negatively the beneficiaries of their organisations. Moreover, after the failed coup, NGOs also started to feel **local authorities' resistance to cooperate**. In addition to the demanding and controlling policies and attitudes, NGOs complain about the local authorities' lack of willingness to cooperate with the non-governmental sector. That pattern is materialised in a set of obstacles that NGOs encounter when looking for help or support from local authorities.

These restrictions don't affect NGOs in the same way as there are some factors which favours certain NGO. In fact, NGOs who count on foreign funds might encounter less problems when carrying out projects, as the foreign funders deal with the local authorities. Also, those NGOs which are service-oriented and cooperate with the government, being partners or collaborators, are less likely to face restrictions. Yet, it's important to bear in mind that the Turkish Government is as changing as unpredictable and this does not ensure the effectivity of the mentioned advantages.

In short, constrains have primarily arisen from the emergency state policies, prohibiting the work or restricting it largely. In addition, the government has resorted to intervening in the daily functioning of NGOs by requiring permissions regularly. Finally, local authorities have shown resistance to cooperate.

Furthermore, it is also interesting to give an insight on the implications for NGOs' workers mood and health. Indeed, feelings like fear, uncertainty and frustration and moral dilemmas seem to play an important role. Yet, there is also a glimpse of hope and desires about the future.

Fear to deliver education, fear to get closed down, fear to make mistakes. Social workers, humanitarian workers, translators, researchers, project managers, are fearful because the rules of the

game have changed and the new ones are unknown and confusing. They worry because they don't know what is allowed to do or not to, what is politically correct and what would mean a mistake, a provocation or a deal-breaker. In consequence, uncertainty arises. Ezgi Emre illustrates that feeling with the following words: "one day we will wake up and we will no longer exist. We never know what will happen tomorrow". She builds upon the premise that the emergency decree law no. 667 is a way to cover up a strategy of backlash against independent non-governmental organisations which is therefore unpredictable and unchangeable.

Such feeling of helplessness leads to frustration. Gizem Bilim expresses that "nowadays it's very frustrating to work in this field. Because sometimes we are very willing to do some stuff and we are excited but when we propose that to the head of the NGO, concerns start to arise about bureaucracy". In this light, Ezgi Emre states "this makes us conservative, we don't want to mess with anyone, the press, we are not that brave any more, unfortunately, the cost might be too high". Thus, frustration arises from the feeling of conformity, the conformity which leads to give up on projects, stop speaking up or demonstrating. In fact, conformity conflicts with NGO worker's values and principles.

Frustration also appears when facing moral dilemmas usually related to distrusting the government. Nuran Kizilkan comments "we have a law that says that if you see a child in a vulnerable situation (pregnant, for example) you should report it to the police or else you might find yourself in jail. So people are swinging on what to do and whether to report it or not." Emre frames such dilemma as a protection issue: "in this vulnerable situation, sending the pregnant girl to a minor camp, is not the best option. Whereas if she stays with her family is better. This protection issues are being a dilemma for us. Even though we report child marriage, it takes ages until the officials do something. So, I always try to protect them from the Turkish government." Therefore, it exist a profound mistrust towards the government, especially in terms of managing very vulnerable situations as child marriages which makes them have moral dilemmas. As a result, taking the decision between the best option and the "right" option causes them moral and security dilemmas.

Yet, hope was also present among the NGO workers. They are aware that attending and integrating 3.000.000 Syrians is an enormous challenge for a country that didn't use to host refugees for a long time. Therefore, they are sure that just by cooperating, it will be possible to become a new country, with rights and opportunities for everybody.

All things considered, Turkey's government has been hindering NGOs' work in many ways, aiming at seizing control of their operations and projects, creating an uncomfortable environment and

restricting the advocacy work. While constrains on NGOs have been framed as part of counter-terrorist measures, due to the recent logics of exception, it has been noted that constrains also arise from other circumstances linked to the de-democratization process that is taking place in Turkey for the last years. Thus, the crackdown on civil society organisations and NGOs represents a backlash on critical voices that have been the counterpower, opposing the increasing curtailment of human rights, freedoms and civil and political rights in Turkey lately.

4.3 "We cooperate with local authorities despite the many difficulties that we encounter"

Given such hostile environment, NGOs adopt different positioning and strategies to be able to keep doing their work. Particularly, it's possible to draw three different strategies: accommodating strategies, proactive strategies and counteracting strategies.

First, the **accommodating strategies** aim at **adapting to the new conditions** by making some changes on the NGO's activities and projects that happen to be restricted by the emergency law decrees. For instance, Small Projects Istanbul (SPI), used to provide education services to Syrians and due to the restrictions, it now offers a space to practise Turkish and do the homework. Therefore, they try to adapt to the new rules but keeping the same purposes. Regarding the restrictions on the freedom of expression, some NGOs that used to do advocacy work related to their activity, for instance, regarding refugee's living conditions or human rights, have stopped doing that due to the fear of backlash. For that reason, they keep low profile and avoid the contact with the media. In Nuran Kizilkan's words: "maybe now is not the time to publicly appoint yourself, because you are going to get their finger pointed at you, attract their attention and you put yourself in danger." The goal, then, is to go unnoticed so that the organisation is able to keep open.

Second, the **proactive strategies** try to **improve the environment** with the local authorities. To do so, NGOs try to stablish daily contact with the public officers and update them about their projects, for instance. In short, the aim is to show willingness to cooperate and be transparent about the NGO's activities. Moreover, in the case of ASAM- a government's partner in terms of migration- it consist in doing direct lobbying and conduct trainings for the officers working in the migration offices about the 2014 law." Is in ASAM's interest that the local authorities know well the law which affects the refugees' rights in Turkey. However, this need a lot of work and patience, as it was mentioned in the previous chapter, there is a big resistance to cooperate by the State. In addition,

ASAM tries to keep a good working environment with the public officers as the government is the one that provides most of the basic needs and facilities to the refugees which arrive in ASAM's offices. Another proactive strategy that NGOs engage with is talking to elite members. Those NGOs that are big enough to have an office in the biggest cities –Istanbul and Ankara- resort to contact with directorates and ministries. For instance, Mavi Kalem approached the minister of national education for Syrians in Istanbul and had the chance to exchange worries and doubts with him. It is a good way to gain understanding about the government's plans and let the elite member know more about the NGO's plan as well.

Third, the **counteracting strategies** aiming at **fighting the pressures.** By using the international community or the international law, NGOs look for opening up channels to influence the government. Local NGOs may ask INGOs to do advocacy work for their rights from their privilege postion. According to Duygu Eseçe, this is the only opportunity that local NGO have to make a difference and try to change the situation. According to her, the international community is very powerful and is currently supporting Turkey's economy – UNICEF is paying Turkish teachers' salaries-. Likewise, mentioning international law principals and standards to report the pressures may be used to counter the pressures. For instance, Amnesty International stated that "Turkey is obliged under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) to guarantee freedom of expression […] also in situations where for national security reassure, there is a need of specific measures" (Amnesty International, 2016: 1). Thus, the advocacy organisation used this strategy to frame the issue as unlawful. In addition to this, coalition building may also be an effective strategy when fighting injustice. An example is the joint declaration that 50 women's and children's rights associations released in November 2016 rejecting the closing down of hundreds of NGOs by the 667 emergency decree (Agos, 14 November 2016). In the declaration, they defend organisations' innocence and stress that their only purpose is to fight against gender based-violence and strive for an equal world. For that reason, they claim that this decree cannot be legitimised under any circumstance.

In short, this section has revealed that NGO working for Syrian refugees are found indeed in a very critical position, trying to get a balance between keeping their shrinking operational space and claiming for their rights. Unfortunately, this equilibrium is extremely complicated to achieve, as the emergency state policies are increasingly threatening human rights workers and defenders and therefore, a wrong strategy may lead to the NGO's closing down.

5 Discussion

Once analysed the de-democratization process and the state emergency policies hindering NGOs' work and some of the outcomes, in this chapter I seek to disclose and discuss the actual implications of this political environment on the Syrian refugee women living in Turkey.

Scholar Zeynep Kivilcim draws on the concept of legal violence which I think it is very appropriate to define and discuss the implications of the de-democratization policies on Syrian refugee women. Legal violence is "a term that incorporates the forms of violence imposed and amplified by legal inaction" (Kivilcim, 2016: 195). That is to say, legal violence may occur through legal inaction when the "State refrains from promulgating legislation for regulating the activities that affect refugees' lives and for protecting their rights" (Kivilcim, 2016: 195). Hence, sometimes, although the state is not the direct agent of violence, it enables violence against female refugees by leaving them exposed to various forms of abuse by different actors (Ibid.). In this discussion chapter, I therefore argue that the logics of exception have used legal violence when dealing with refugees' issues and that has affected very negatively refugee women's rights and living conditions.

To begin with, one of the biggest issues that refugee women arise from **marriage**. Religious marriages and polygamy are legal in Syria, whereas in Turkey are both illegal. Due to the secular basis of the country, just the civil marriage provides rights on the custody over children, divorce, etc. Hence, Syrian women who have married religiously can't claim rights on the children or go to the court in Turkey. Yet, the Turkish legislation hasn't addressed these issues, even though it is of high importance.

Meanwhile, child marriages and forced marriages of Syrian women represent a big problem too. Although there is a cultural interpretation of child marriage both in Syria and in Turkey, the harsh living conditions from the past few years and currently have pushed girls –their parents- and young women to get married. Ezgi Emre calls it "survival marriage". In fact, she argues that marriages between Syrian girls and Turkish men started from the state officials managing the refugee camps who were marrying Syrian young women and arranging marriages between Syrian girls and Turks who had reputation. Moreover, these arranged marriages had an economic side, therefore becoming human trafficking. The girl became a good that was traded. Yet, behind these arranged and child marriages there is poverty and a conflicting legal status. Nuran Kizilkan states that "marrying the daughter it is a plate on the table", since for parents it represents a way out from poverty. As families can't afford to keep the girls at school, marriage seems to be the solution. In case the girl marries a wealthy man, this is going to take care of her and her family. Moreover, the girl's family get the bride

price. Hence, a mix of factors including poverty, ambiguity of their legal status, the patriarchal structures and the government's legal inaction makes young girls vulnerable to child marriages.

Even though the number of child marriages is huge, there is no statistic or data on that. Despite the fact that the government was aware of that for a long time, it was not until 2016 when a law came into force lowering the age of consent to 12 years old. In one hand, it can be read as a way to adapt to the current rise of child marriages and therefore making it easier for Turkish men to marry Syrian girls and consequently legitimising these marriages. In this case, it's a flagrant violation of children's and women's rights. Scholar Zeynep Kivilcim asserts that the law clearly reinforces the abusive dynamics governing relationships between male Turkish nationals and female Syrian refugees, generating the precariousness of Syrian female refugees' lives as unpaid house and sex workers (Kivilcim, 2016). On the other hand, it may be understood as 'symbolic violence' in the sense that law and legal practices normalise and legitimise the social asymmetries which result from racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination (Kivilcim, 2016). In this case, the change of law arises from a patriarchal ideology which is linked to the increasing conservatism of the AKP discourse. In fact, the government has attacked women's rights in numerous occasions within the last few months. Overall, the government has taken advantage of the emergency state policies which allow to pass laws without leaving room for objection and it has resorted to apply a form of legal violence by clearly exposing girls to more violence.

The Turkish government's legal inaction has also taken place in terms of not preventing and not sanctioning the **gender based-violence and xenophobia** against Syrian refugee girls and women. In focus groups carried out by ASAM, Duygu Eseçe comments that according to Syrian women, public officers are the first inflecting gender-based violence in borders and in the registration office – mainly to women and LGTBI people-. Moreover, they can face verbal violence, sexual assault, etc. when they go to ask for social assistance to the State foundation and they also suffer sexual harassment in the streets, and in their own community. On top of that they face xenophobia, for example, when they are referred to women's NGOs or community centres. They say they are being invited less than Turkish women, they get less cash assistance than Turkish, and that they are getting less food compared to Turkish women in the social services. Thus, there is a wide range of different forms of gender-based violence as well as xenophobia which are known by the government but instead, no legal action is taken. Kivilcim contends that "the socially accepted and lauded gender-based violence is explicitly reinforced by the legislation or tacitly approved by the legal silence" (Kivilcim, 2016: 195). By that, Kivilcim draws on the currently Turkish state's role on either reinforcing some kind of violence, as it is the case of passing the law on lowering the age of consent

to 12 years old, or resorting to legal silence, which corresponds to the state's legal inaction regarding the gender-based violence and xenophobia that Syrian women suffer daily in public institutions like social services, schools and police stations. The lack of laws protecting victims or preventing the violence as well as those which even expose them to more violence, contribute so that female immigrants and refugees accept their own dehumanization as part of the social order (Abrego and Menjívar 2011, in Kivilcim, 2016). These scholars refer to the invisible and symbolic violence arisen from both legal practices and legal inaction which normalise and legitimise the social asymmetries that result from racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination against Syrian refugee women.

Access **to security and protection services** is also very restricted. Syrian women generally avoid going to the police to report crimes or accidents due to the fear of deportation. Ezgi Emre illustrates that with a case of a group of girls who were almost kidnapped but they didn't want to report it, because they fear of being deported. In fact, this fear is well-funded, as if a refugee does a minor crime may get deported. This fear paralyses women when reporting domestic violence as well, as they possibly don't want their husband to end deported. Syrian women's rights are once again curtailed because of the ambiguous legal status. Likewise, access to justice is very much restricted, due to the increasing politicisation of the judiciary too. In these cases, prosecutors refrain from investigating the crimes that target refugees, for instance Syrian children who suffer abuses at school, gender-based violence and xenophobia. The reason why the Turkish state does not want to investigate these cases respond to a strategy of hiding issues related to refugees' living conditions. As seen in previous sections, within the emergency state, the government has intensified the monopolisation of media and public opinion with an official discourse which omits news on refugees.

The **restrictions on job permits are also part of the legal violence**. The legal limbo on the conditions of employment of Syrian refugees makes them the most precarious workforce (Kivilcim, 2016). Indeed, for Syrian women, making a living and supporting their family financially represents a serious issue. First, employment opportunities are rare for Syrian women without good level of Turkish. Second, working outside the house may clash with her role of housewives back in Syria. Rahaf H. Saad comments that some of them feel strange and uncomfortable going out every day to work, as in Syria, the man embodies this role. Conflicting gender roles in exile have been widely studied in feminist literature. Scholar Wenona Giles argues that changes in women's roles challenge the traditional expectations and may place women at risk of several forms of violence and discrimination (Giles, 2012). In fact, the largest age group among Syrian women is the 19–54 age group and almost one-third of the Syrian refugee households in Turkey are headed by women or children (Kivilcim, 2016). Consequently the burden of finding paid work falls on women (Jessen

2013 in Kivilcim, 2016). In view of these discriminations, the public authorities do not take any action for sanctioning the wage discrimination against them, as there are neoliberal interests on making the Syrians the new working class. Moreover, Rahaf H. Saad argues that those Syrian women who have mostly come from rural areas in Syria have a low level of education. Consequently, this affects their job prospects and their living conditions. It is therefore important to bear in mind that gender never stands alone as a factor structuring power or creating inequalities. A gender focus has to go along with an intersectional analysis in which age, race, class and religion among others, are integrated and a multiplicity of refugee's identities is taken into account (Giles, 2012).

As it has been analysed and argued in the previous chapter, the emergency law decrees have largely affected **non-governmental organisations** working for women's rights and refugee's rights. On one hand, this means that many refugees were left without the support, help or space of these organisations. On the other, the crackdown has weaken an important counterpower and as a consequence, laws on refugees' legal status have been debated and issued without the participation of expert NGOs. In addition, advocacy work in Turkey is highly risky as being a human rights defender may be enough to get arrested. Likewise, Syrian's children education is a very delicate issue. Since the government prohibited NGOs to provide any education services, these have tried to find the way to help refugees, without breaking the law.

All in all, the de-democratization process and the emergency state policies have been indeed detrimental to women's rights and especially to the most vulnerable, that is to say, refugee women. Syrian refugee women and girls living in Turkey have faced numerous obstacles, based on their gender, origin and age, among others, which the state emergency policies have not exactly mitigated. Instead, the state has resorted to legal violence. Such legal violence enables that discrimination and gender-based violence keep taking place. The lack of gender sensitive social policies to end gender discrimination and xenophobia and the changes of legislation which instead of protecting women's rights, expose them to more violence are just two examples of how the Turkish state has tackled these issues. In addition, it has made them vulnerable to violence, as they hold an ambiguos legal status with the complicity of Turkey and the EU, which curtail their freedoms by the fear of deportation. In fact, the legal inaction has triggered child marriges, human trafficking, sexual harassment and discrimination at public places and work.

6 Conclusions

The aim of this master's thesis has been to find out how the de-democratization process in Turkey has affected NGOs response to the Syrian refugee women's needs. After analysing the valuable data from the interviews, it can be concluded that the democratic involution has affected NGOs' work very negatively and have been detrimental to Syrian refugee women's rights as well.

First of all, the thesis reveals that behind the suspension of the rule of law enacted within the emergency state, the de-democratization process has accelerated in a way that the separation of powers has been almost extinguished, consequently curtailing the independence of the judiciary, legislative and executive. In addition, freedom of press, demonstration and association have been largely attacked. Through the emergency law decrees, the state has carried out a purge in all factions of society, including non-governmental organisations working for Syrian refugee women. It is by using these decrees that the state has created a very repressive and threatening environment for NGOs.

Limiting the work permits, asking for regular permissions and updates and showing resistance to cooperate have been some of the strategies that the government have used to significantly reduce NGOs' operational space. The objective behind this purge was silencing those critical voices among civil society actors and within the government. Yet, counter-terrorist measures, meaning to protect the national security, have been used to legitimise this. Thus, the increasing authoritarian government has taken advantage of the emergency state conditions when arranging law changes and issuing decrees in order to weaken such counterpower.

Given that situation, NGOs have primarily resorted to accommodating strategies to cope with the shrinking political and operational space. In this way, NGOs have adapted to the restrictions and have tried to keep a low profile. Along with adapting to the environment, they have also undertaken some proactive strategies in order to show trustworthiness and willingness to cooperate. In addition, some NGOs have resorted to counteracting strategies aiming to fight the pressures.

Finally, when analysing the implications of such political environment on the Syrian refugee women, it's relevant to point out the legal violence which have been repeatedly used under the state emergency when dealing with refugees' issues. Such legal violence have certainly helped to perpetuate the government's official discourse by silencing issues regarding violence against refugee women and xenophobia.

All in all, NGOs' political and operational space have been reduced and threatened and this have led to limitions on their work and on their response to meet Syrian refugee women's needs. Yet, by using accommodating strategies, they have tried to minisme the impact on the refugee women and to keep helping and moving projects forward. Certainly, they are courageous and firmly believe that cooperation is the key when facing the huge challenge of hosting 3.000.000 refugees.

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