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# Editorial: Gender, violence and forced migration

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## Editorial on the Research Topic Gender, violence and forced migration

There is a growing cross-disciplinary literature on gender and violence in the context of conflict, displacement and forced migration. This Research Topic of “Refugees and Conflict” in *Frontiers in Human Dynamics* and *Frontiers in Political Science* comprises seven articles on issues of gender and violence at various stages of the forced migration journey with a broad geographical scope encompassing many borders and countries/regions around the world. Read together the research articles present commonalities but also context-specific differences and contribute to the existing literature by enriching current debates. Echoing other research findings but also with specific reference to the articles in this Research Topic, we have synthesized in this Editorial a “map” of “take away points” dotting the landscape of gender and violence in forced migration.

**First**, gender-based violence is understood in **interpersonal but also structural terms**. In structural terms, GBV during displacement or forced migration may be the result of the absence, “neutrality,” misinterpretation or inadequate enforcement of the law. [Reilly et al.](#) through their critical review of Ireland’s policy responses to GBV as it affects migrant women, illustrate the “exclusion, minimization [and] inaction” of the state through the practices of “ever narrowing and individualized framing of vulnerability in EU migration regulations, a lack of application of an intersectional gender perspective, the diminished influence of indivisible human rights norms... as a well as a wider national context of declining resource allocation to addressing gender-based violence and integration, including anti-racism initiatives, for over a decade.”

Furthermore, the structural dimensions of violence may include humanitarian practices inspired by colonial discourses. In *Tracing colonial maternalism within the gendered morals of humanitarianism: experiences of migrant women at the Moroccan-Spanish border* [Sahraoui and Tyszler](#) examine the ways in which women humanitarians exercise power over women’s lives, bodies and mobility on the two sides of the Moroccan-Spanish border. Drawing on interviews and participant observation they argue that the power exerted by women humanitarians reproduces a form of maternalism with long colonial roots, underpinned by gendered moral beliefs regarding women’s bodies, mobility and family life. The gendered moral beliefs are fundamentally racialized, as they also justified women humanitarians’ prominent role (religious, medical, social) in intervening in the intimate spaces of women caste as radically Other, ultimately impacting their possibilities for mobility.

**Second**, gender and violence are brought together in various “stages” of the forced migration journey. As Veloso illustrates in *Safety and security issues, gender-based violence and militarization in the time of armed conflict: the experiences of internally displaced people from Marawi city*, individuals may experience violence in conflict in various geographical spaces and times/phases of the journey, such as in Marawi City and/or the evacuation process/facility in Northern Mindanao in the Philippines. Or, as Tastsoglou et al. illustrate in *The gender-based violence and precarity nexus: asylum-seeking women in the Eastern Mediterranean*, GBV may have occurred in transit through various African and Middle Eastern countries, or during the prolonged asylum determination process on Aegean islands within European borders, and/or in the streets of Athens.

**Third**, the consequences of past GBV, especially in the form of trauma, are not “over” upon reaching “safety” but continue their harmful impact in resettlement. As Bhattacharyya et al. show, individuals may have experienced GBV and extreme trauma in Northern Iraq, with repercussions on their re-settlement journey in Canada. The authors focus on the re-settlement needs of 21 Yazidi women genocide survivors who arrived in Canada only weeks after their release from captivity by ISIS. As the Canadian settlement program falls short of adequately addressing trauma, and especially GBV related trauma, the researchers argue that a staged approach be adopted with different services provided in each stage, in addition to other support.

**Fourthly**, arrival in a “safe” country does not mean real safety. Through interviews with “key informants,” Tastsoglou et al. illustrate how precarity interweaves with GBV in five “loci” in the “irregular” border crossings of the Eastern Mediterranean route. The “loci” are not necessarily consecutive stages as not all asylum seekers go through them, but they show how precarity and GBV are co-constitutive and reinforce one another, well beyond the “irregular” crossing, in everyday life when asylum seekers must deal with homelessness and destitution suffer deficiency of care services further aggravated by intersectional discrimination; and become trapped in abusive settings and relationships due to an ineffective state response, a sluggish criminal justice system, and victims’ financial dependence on the perpetrator.

**Fifth**, all research analyses are “situated” in the specific empirical context where GBV or its ramifications unfold, in order to understand the specificities of the GBV experience/response at the level of the victim/survivor, community and broader society/state, respectively. In *Mapping complex systems: responses to intimate partner violence against women in three refugee camps*, Horn et al. seek to understand the reconfiguration of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) response pathways in three refugee camps in South Sudan, Kenya and Iraqi Kurdistan. Through a broad sample of qualitative interviews with IPV survivors, refugee community members, refugee leaders and service providers, the researchers synthesize a complex picture of help seeking and response pathways. Although the pathways are distinct to each camp, several similarities were noted. Differences highlighted the importance of understanding complex informal systems and the availability and functioning of organizational responses.

**Sixth**, all researchers share a social justice and policy orientation. The impacts of GBV are long-lasting and far-reaching,

going well beyond physical health consequences, affecting the ability to work, mental health, caring for others, integration, and the exercise of citizenship. An effective and appropriate response cannot and should not solely be left to the victim/survivor’s personal devices. Addressing the conditions that give rise to GBV vulnerability is a major responsibility for state structures. The writers in this volume engage in tracing the root causes of GBV so that they can make recommendations about fixing them. Horn et al., for example, recommend that in order to fully utilize the resources of both formal and community-based systems for the benefit of IPV survivors, it is important to listen to women’s voices, recognize their key role in life-sustaining activities and shift “power and resources to local women-led organizations. With respect to practices for the protection of children, Baillie-Abidi in *Prevention, Protection and participation: children affected by armed conflict* underscores the importance of unveiling and challenging structural frameworks contributing to children’s vulnerability to violence. Addressing issues like access to health and education, unequal support for children involved in violence based on location or affiliations with armed groups is crucial. To eradicate “cultural violence,” the author urges a clear comprehension of global interconnections, including the intertwined peace and wellbeing of ourselves and our enemies and that of our children and grandchildren.

**Seven**, violence appears to be universal in refugee generating contexts and is gender-based. The sending, transit and receiving states where violence unfolds comprise many countries and regions. Papers in this Research Topic address diverse geographical contexts and movements from Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Marawi City, to Canada, to Ireland, to African countries, to the Middle East, to the Moroccan-Spanish border, to the Eastern Mediterranean route and Greece. We argue that violence affects people in gender-specific and intersectional ways. Veloso explores the experiences of armed conflict and displacement among civilians. In doing so, she recognizes that there are unique trends and risks for GBV among women and girls and men and boys in conflict zones (either in evacuation centers or alternative home-based evacuation arrangements). More on the structural level, Reilly et al. identify how “exclusion, minimization [and] inaction,” exemplified through practices of narrow conceptualizations of “vulnerability” and human rights, or declining resource allocation for diversity, though affecting everyone, end up victimizing women applicants for international protection, leaving out of protection trafficking victims and women survivors of domestic violence linked to dependent migration status.

**Eight**, GBV affects different gendered age groups as well as individuals in non-gender-conforming roles. It is crucial to understand how intersectionality of identities and positions affects the experiences and systemic responses to GBV in order to properly address it. Baillie-Abidi explores the vulnerability of children in fragile/conflict environments. Besides the gender dimension to violence, age is an important “vector of oppression,” as children are disproportionately affected, either as direct or indirect recipients (recruited as child soldiers and stigmatized for it upon return). Veloso’s IDPs are predominantly racial, ethnic and religious minorities in the Philippines. The asylum-seeking women in the Eastern Mediterranean route come from diverse

ethnic backgrounds in Africa, Asia and the Middle East - their experiences of GBV reflect their ethno-racial backgrounds.

Taken together, these seven pieces provide unique glimpses into gender and violence in displacement and forced migration contexts, enhance our understanding of the issues through empirical analyses and challenge us to imagine and advocate pathways to prevent and redress GBV.

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