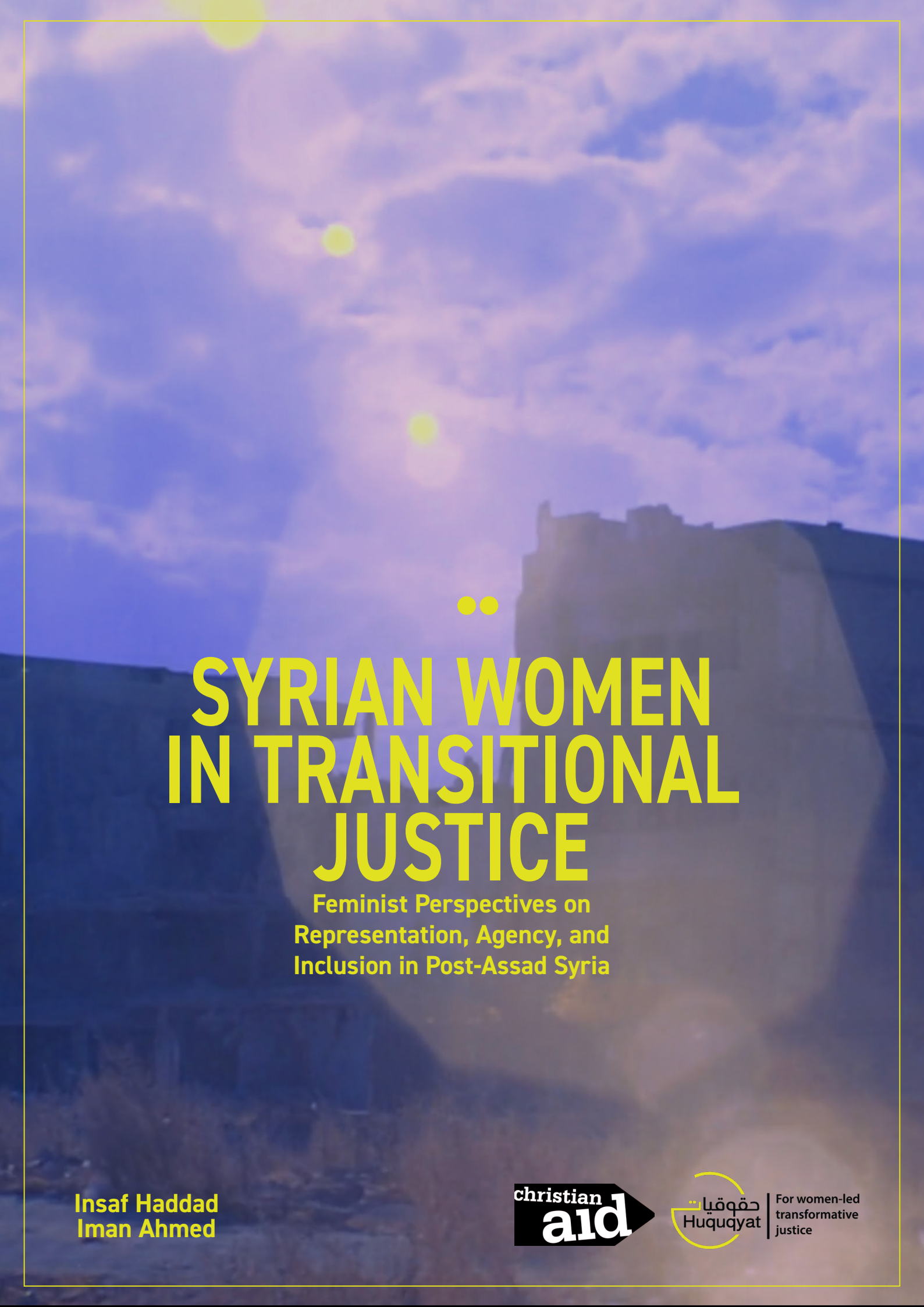

SYRIAN WOMEN IN TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

Feminist Perspectives on Representation, Agency, and Inclusion in Post-Assad Syria

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This work is dedicated to all Syrian women, whose courage, resilience, and resistance formed the cornerstone of the dismantling of the Assad regime, and whose voices and actions will contribute to shaping the course of political transformation and Syria's future.

This research was conducted under the auspices of Huquqyat

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PART 1

Summary, Introduction, and Literature Review

SUMMARY

This study addresses Syrian women's perceptions and demands for representation and active participation in transitional justice processes following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024. Based on field interviews with Syrian women from various regions, the study explores how the intersection between gender identity and class, displacement, ethnicity, and educational background shapes the diverse experiences with injustice and varying aspirations for accountability. Using intersectional feminism as the analytical framework, the findings show that Syrian women understand transitional justice as a holistic process that integrates legal accountability, truth-seeking, collective healing, structural reform, and active political participation, rather than simply punitive mechanisms. The study also reveals various barriers to the participation of women, including displacement, economic vulnerability, psychological trauma, and fear of retaliation, alongside the persistence of patriarchal structures and discriminatory laws. The study concludes that effective transitional justice in Syria requires moving beyond traditional models and towards a participatory approach that places women at the center of the process and that recognizes them as political actors, producers of knowledge, and partners in shaping the future of justice and peace.

INTRODUCTION

The fall of the Assad regime in December 2014 marked a historic turning point for Syria, ending 54 years of the Assad family's autocratic rule and more than 13 years of devastating conflict that claimed the lives of over half a million people, displaced more than 13 million, and tore apart the country's social fabric (UNHCR, 2014). What began in 2011 with peaceful protests demanding political reform escalated into a war that involved the Assad regime's forces, non-state actors, and international powers. The Assad regime was the primary source of systematic violence, employing policies of repression, arrest, torture, and enforced disappearance to consolidate control and suppress dissent. These years left behind a legacy of mass atrocities, systematic gender-based violence, and deep structural inequalities.

As Syria enters its transitional phase, issues of justice, accountability, and reconstruction became central to national and international agendas, and the urgent need to deliver justice by holding the perpetrators of these crimes accountable and compensating the victims and their families for material and emotional damages has emerged.

The new Syrian government, formed in March 2025, began taking initial and serious steps towards establishing transitional justice mechanisms. In May 2025, two national bodies were established by Presidential Decrees 19 and 20: the National Commission for Missing Persons, which is tasked with creating a national database of missing persons and providing support to their families; and the National Commission for Transitional Justice, which is responsible for developing strategies for truth-seeking, criminal accountability, reparations, and reconciliation (Amnesty International, 2025).

Some observers noted the slow pace of progress, with the National Commission for Transitional Justice issuing its first report after a sixty-day-long delay, with efforts that seemed to be largely symbolic. Furthermore, women's participation in these mechanisms remains limited, crucial evidence has been lost or destroyed, while alleged perpetrators roam free, all which exacerbate the trauma of survivors and their families. These shortcomings underscore the urgent need to ensure that transitional justice processes are truly inclusive, victim-centered, and responsive to the diverse needs of Syrians, and particularly women who have borne a disproportionate burden and remain marginalized within formal justice institutions.

Syrian women have carried a double burden, as primary victims of conflict-related violence and, simultaneously, as key actors in resistance, documentation, and the survival of their communities. They have endured the brutality of this conflict and faced multiple forms of gender-based violence, including arbitrary arrest, torture, and the use of sexual violence as a weapon. They have also suffered forced displacement, where over 60% of the displaced population are women. In 2020 alone, 450,000 women and girls were internally displaced within Syria (UNFPA report, 2020). Furthermore, they have faced economic marginalization and lost family members due to arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, and death (Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, 2023). And yet, they have been central

to humanitarian relief efforts, field documentation of human rights violations, and advocacy for justice, where they demonstrated exceptional resilience and maintained community cohesion amidst displacement, persistently advocating for accountability and women's participation in peace and state-building processes (Women for Women, 2023). However, women's involvement in transitional justice mechanisms in Syria remains inconsistent and lacks institutionalization. Despite recent developments, including the appointment of women to government positions –a shift from the token appointments that were prevalent under the Assad regime– women's actual participation in shaping justice pathways and institutional reforms remains limited (Al-Jumhuriya, 2025). Their participation is often dictated through the frameworks of international donors rather than stemming from reality on the ground or women's own experiences, making it more of a superficial response to meet the expectations of external funding than genuine empowerment processes.

This shortcoming reflects the limitations of traditional transitional justice models, which have focused on formal legal mechanisms such as judicial systems, truth commissions, and reparations programs, while neglecting the structural dimensions of gender inequality and interwoven systems of oppression that shape women's experiences during and after the war. As a result, transitional justice in Syria is mostly defined as addressing the legacy of gross violations against the Syrian people, without prioritizing the inclusion and empowerment of women or recognizing their suffering and sacrifices during the revolution and conflict.

This conceptual flaw extends beyond a lack of representation to the marginalization of local feminist knowledge as a source for building more inclusive and equitable policies. Therefore, reorienting transitional justice to become truly inclusive requires moving beyond a narrow legalistic approach and towards a participatory feminist one that places women at the center of the process and recognizes them as key actors in shaping the future of justice and peace in Syria.

From this emerges the central problem of this study:

How do women perceive transitional justice, and how can women's representation and participation be strengthened in post-Assad Syria?

This study calls for the adoption of an intersectional feminist approach that recognizes how gender, family structures, tribal affiliations, ethnicity, language, culture, religion, sect, social class, and displacement status intersect in producing multilayered experiences of marginalization and diverse understandings of justice. Drawing on theoretical literature and field interviews with Syrian women from diverse backgrounds, the paper proposes that Syrian women frame justice not merely as punishment or legal accountability, but as a process that encompasses truth-seeking, collective healing, structural change, and active participation in rebuilding society.
The paper is organized according to an objective methodology that addresses three interrelated dimensions. First, it reviews the theoretical foundations of intersectional feminism and transitional justice and identifies gaps in the literature

related to the Syrian context. Second, it presents the methodology used in collecting and analyzing data. And third, it presents the results of field interviews that reveal how intersectional identities shape Syrian women's experiences and perceptions of justice; reviews the ongoing obstacles to their participation; and demonstrates their effectiveness as leaders, organizers, peacebuilders, and the importance of serious integration into processes of democratic transition and reconstruction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Mainstream Transitional Justice

Mainstream transitional justice refers to the set of judicial and non-judicial measures and programs adopted by societies to address legacies of gross human rights violations. These typically include criminal accountability, truth-seeking and disclosure, reparations, and institutional reform (International Center for Transitional Justice, 2022). While these mechanisms aim to achieve justice, recognize the rights of victims, and prevent future violations, feminist scholars have consistently criticized them for their narrow legality, their neglect of gender perspectives, and their failure to address structural inequalities (Ní Aoláin and Rooney, 2007; Buckley-Zistel and Stanley, 2012).

Traditional approaches often prioritize violations occurring in the public sphere, such as extrajudicial killings, torture, enforced disappearances, domestic violence, and economic exploitation (Rubio-Marín, 2006). The issue here is not that transitional justice should address all forms of domestic violence, but rather that it fails to recognize how conflict transforms and weaponizes pre-existing forms of gender inequality, making addressing it inseparable from the transitional period. Domestic violence that escalates during conflict does not emerge out of nowhere; instead, it exposes and intensifies existing patriarchal structures. Treating conflict-related violence as exceptional and temporary obscures the ways in which conflict amplifies and legitimizes forms of gender-based violence that already existed but become transformed into tools of war and control. Moreover, the narrow focus on "direct" victims ignores the structural harm inflicted on women as indirect victims. In cases of enforced disappearance –which primarily target men– women become economically responsible without legal recognition, face the stigma of "widowhood" without death certificates, lose property rights, and are denied access to economic resources. These are conflict-related harms that traditional transitional justice ignores because it focuses solely on the direct (male) victim. When gender-based violence is acknowledged, women are often portrayed as passive victims in need of protection, rather than as active agents demanding accountability and structural change (Björkdahl & Selimovic, 2015). This victim-centric discourse obscures the multiple roles women play as survivors, activists, community leaders, and peacebuilders.

Moreover, transitional justice mechanisms often operate within existing patriarchal legal and political structures, offering only procedural reforms without challenging the deeper systems that enabled the violence in the first

place (McEvoy and McGregor, 2008). In doing so, transitional justice perpetuates structural injustice: truth commissions may document gender-based harm without addressing discriminatory laws that govern women's legal status, economic participation, or bodily autonomy. Criminal trials may prosecute individual perpetrators but leave intact the institutional cultures and ideologies that perpetuate gender inequality. Reparation programs may also provide financial compensation without addressing the exclusion of women from land ownership, inheritance rights, or access to economic resources (Rubio-Marín, 2009).
Therefore, limiting transitional justice to procedural reforms or individual prosecutions without addressing the discriminatory laws and patriarchal structures that originally enabled the violence only serves to reproduce the very patterns of exclusion it claims to overcome (McEvoy & McGregor, 2008). The recognition of these gaps is not merely an expansion of the mandate; it is a prerequisite for ensuring that transitional justice can address the gendered reality of the conflict and its consequences.

Achieving transitional justice in the long term requires the inclusion of women at all stages of decision-making, whether political, social, or economic,since women are among the groups most affected by injustice and human rights violations in the Syrian conflict, and their participation in decision-making and policy formulation is essential to ensure that their needs and suffering are addressed and to combat discrimination and the laws and traditions that negatively impact them. Furthermore, given women's participation in all aspects of the Syrian revolution and their bearing the brunt of the conflict, it is crucial that women be represented and included in the mechanisms and programs of transitional justice in Syria.

2. Intersectionality as an Analytical Framework

To address these limitations, the intersectional feminist approach offers essential critical analytical tools. The concept of intersectionality was coined by the American feminist lawyer and theorist Kimberly Crenshaw (1989). Crenshaw addressed discrimination against Black women in the United States as a specific case of discrimination where gender and race intersect, arguing that Black women are often overlooked in analyses of gender oppression or racial discrimination. This concept has been further developed by feminist scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins (1990), the Combahee River Collective (1977), and Kathy Davis.
This concept highlights how multiple systems of oppression –such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and disability– interact to produce experiences that cannot be understood through a one-dimensional approach. Instead of treating identities as cumulative (e.g., gender + ethnicity + class), intersectionality examines how these categories are formed through interrelationships that produce unique patterns of marginalization.

And when applied to transitional justice, intersectionality reveals that women's experiences of conflict, violence, and injustice are not determined solely by gender, but rather by the intersection of gender with ethnicity, sect, class, geography, and displacement (Honda, 2019). For example, a displaced Kurdish woman in northeast Syria faces different vulnerabilities and has different

resources than a Sunni Arab woman in Idlib or an Alawite woman in Latakia; their relationships with government institutions, their access to justice mechanisms, their experiences of violence, and their perceptions of accountability differ according to their intersecting social positions.

Intersectionality also underlines the power dynamics within feminist movements by challenging essentialist assumptions that portray women as a homogeneous category with uniform interests or a universal feminine identity (Mohanty, 1984). Syrian women are not a homogeneous group; they occupy diverse social positions within sectarian, ethnic, and class hierarchies and may hold differing views on accountability, reconciliation, and the concept of justice. Therefore, an intersectional approach requires careful attention to internal differences, ideologies, norms, and power relations among women themselves to ensure that transitional justice mechanisms do not reproduce marginalization by focusing on elite experiences while excluding rural or displaced women.

3. Transitional Justice: From Reparation to Structural Change

Transitional justice is defined as a system of judicial and non-judicial mechanisms aimed at addressing the legacy of gross human rights violations through accountability, reparations, truth-seeking, and institutional reform. This system aims to balance confronting the past with building a future that guarantees non-recurrence (2004 United Nations Report).

In the Syrian national context, this framework assumes particular importance given the scale of the violations and the complexity of the political and social structures that preceded and accompanied the conflict. Therefore, any effective transitional justice process must emerge from a hybrid approach that is grounded in the Syrian national context. Drawing on intersectional feminist critique, the concept of transitional justice offers an alternative model to traditional frameworks. Unlike dominant approaches that seek to restore pre-conflict conditions, conditions that were often marked by patriarchal structures, sectarian hierarchies, and economic inequality, transitional justice aims to radically restructure society to process the root causes of conflict and violence (Gready & Robins, 2014; Lambourne, 2009).

The literature on transitional justice suggests that returning to the pre-conflict status quo would, in effect, mean returning to the conditions that led to the conflict in the first place. Therefore, it seeks to dismantle oppressive structures and build egalitarian institutions (Mani, 2008). Feminist approaches show that prosecuting perpetrators of direct violations alone is insufficient unless discriminatory laws, forms of economic deprivation, and the exclusion of women from decision-making are addressed, as these constitute structural factors in the production and persistence of violence.

Feminist and transformational literature on transitional justice criticizes the hierarchical nature of traditional models, which are often designed in a top-down manner through externally defined or elite-driven mechanisms, while

excluding those most affected by violence from setting justice priorities and determining how to achieve them. This conventional approach tends to focus on formal institutions such as judicial bodies or truth commissions and operate under the assumption that technical and legal expertise alone is sufficient to ensure comprehensive justice. (Sharp, 2013; McEvoy, 2007).

In contrast, feminist and participatory approaches to transitional justice propose reversing this hierarchy, emphasizing that transitional processes must be based on the agency and knowledge of those affected by violence themselves (Bastick et al., 2007; Rubio-Marín, 2009). These alternative approaches require genuinely participatory processes in which survivors, particularly women and marginalized groups, are partners in shaping justice initiatives, setting priorities, and participating in the design of institutional reforms. This approach challenges the assumption that only external experts or political elites can determine what constitutes justice, asserting instead that sustainable transformation can only be achieved by empowering local communities to be genuine partners in engineering and creating change (McEvoy and McGregor, 2008; Björkdahl & Selimovic, 2015).

The literature also emphasizes collective healing and community reconciliation alongside formal legal mechanisms. Drawing on community justice practices and local approaches, transformative transitional justice acknowledges that legal interventions alone are insufficient to heal fractured societies or prevent future violence (Llewellyn & Philpott, 2014); it requires addressing trauma, rebuilding trust, acknowledging harm at the community level, and creating spaces for dialogue that extend beyond elite political negotiations. This approach is particularly relevant in the Syrian context, where years of war, displacement, and societal division have left deep levels of collective trauma and mistrust, which makes community reconciliation an indispensable condition for any meaningful political transition.

This builds upon the theorizing of transitional justice in Middle Eastern contexts by several feminist scholars, who emphasize the importance of local knowledge and cultural frameworks. Najd Al-Ali (2018) argues that feminist activism in Iraq and Syria is based on local conceptions of justice and rights that predate Western human rights discourses, blending religious interpretations, customary practices, and contemporary feminist thought. This perspective, which focuses on rights-based frameworks derived from Islamic jurisprudence and reinterpreted through feminist lenses, offers deeply-rooted cultural alternatives to Western-centric models of transitional justice (Abuo Bakr, 2001).
The implementation of transitional justice in the Syrian context requires recognizing the close link between gender justice and broader struggles against authoritarianism, sectarianism, and imperialism. As Syrian academics such as Al-Kawakibi (2020) point out, donor-funded transitional justice processes tend to reproduce colonial structures by prioritizing external expertise over local legitimacy.

4. Comparative Contexts

International comparisons in post-conflict periods indicate that inclusive transitional justice mechanisms produce more sustainable peace and that transitional justice succeeds when it is led by the victims themselves. Rwanda, through its achievement of gender equality in parliament, and women's networks in Bosnia, have proven that genuine inclusion requires time, resources, and institutional will.

In Rwanda, women's participation in the gacaca courts contributed to community reconciliation, but at the same time, it exposed some survivors to the risk of re-traumatization (Berry, 2018). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, gender quotas improved women's formal representation without dismantling patriarchal political structures (Helms, 2013). In Iraq, post-2003 transitional justice efforts marginalized women, resulting in superficial and unsustainable reforms (Ismael, T. Y., & Ismael, J. (2019)). Taken together, these lessons indicate that formal representation is insufficient without profound structural transformation. In relation to the practical realities in Syria, these lessons highlight the necessity of establishing truth and reconciliation mechanisms in which women's perspectives are integrated not merely as testimonies, but as active leadership in policymaking. This theoretical and comparative overview provides the basis for identifying key gaps in the literature on Syria, which in turn underscore the significance of this research. First, there remains a pressing need to incorporate local feminist analyses grounded in the lived experiences of Syrian women, rather than relying on externally imposed models. Second, the intersectional dimensions of class, displacement, and ethnicity remain underexplored, despite being crucial components for understanding justice. Third, the relationship between justice and structural change remains poorly theorized in the Syrian context, despite its centrality to women's experiences. Identifying these gaps provides the theoretical foundation for this study and paves the way for the following section, which examines how Syrian women articulate their understandings of justice in interviews and how their testimonies reshape the theoretical debate on transitional justice from a locally grounded, transformative perspective.

PART 2

Methodology and Results

1. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This qualitative study adopts a participatory feminist methodology that emphasizes the co-production of knowledge, self-reflection, and ethical research practice.

Eleven semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted remotely through secured platforms such as Signal and Zoom between August and September 2025. The sample included Syrian women from diverse social backgrounds and regions, including specialists, activists, refugees, and former detainees in Assad's prisons. The interviews were conducted remotely to ensure safe access and wide participation considering the security instability, displacement, and restrictions on movement.

It should be noted that the sample of eleven participants is not representative; rather, this study aims to offer preliminary insights and propositions that can be expanded and examined in future, larger-scale research.
The interviews were conducted in Arabic, recorded after obtaining participants' consent, and then transcribed verbatim for analysis. This online format enabled the participation of women from within Syria, as well as from Jordan, Lebanon, and the Syrian diaspora, providing broad geographical diversity in a secure and confidential digital environment.

The interviews consisted of approximately ten questions divided into three sections. The first section focused on participants' knowledge of transitional justice and feminist justice. The second section examined women's integration, the obstacles they face, and issues of trust. The third section addressed political representation and intersectionality, which included identity, personal experience, and future aspirations.

B. Participant Selection

The participants were selected through partnerships with local feminist organizations and community networks to ensure the participation of internally displaced women, returnees and refugees. The recruitment process relied on voluntary and non-coercive participation, with an emphasis on the safety, comfort and effectiveness of participants in decision-making.

Participants were contacted through trusted intermediaries, and invitations were extended in a private and confidential manner. The remote participation format allowed women to use pseudonyms and engage through secure digital platforms, ensuring their protection during the interviews. Voluntary participation and participant safety were prioritized in accordance with the Belmont Report's three ethical principles: Respect for Persons, Beneficence, and Justice (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979).

C. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were prioritized given that many participants had experienced trauma.

The study adhered to the following ethical commitments: obtaining informed consent (either written or oral) after clearly explaining the study's aims and potential risks; anonymizing participants' names using pseudonyms to protect their privacy; allowing participants to withdraw from the study up until October 1, 2025, prior to the publication of the findings; and using participants' quotations carefully and respectfully in a manner that reflects their voices without exploitation (McKinsey et al., 2007).

D. Analytical framework

The data were thematically coded using an intersectional feminist coding guide (Syrian Women TJ Codebook, 2025). The main themes included perceptions of justice, access to justice mechanisms, women's participation, barriers and enablers, structural reforms, and future visions. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model: familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition and naming, and the production of the final report.

2. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

To understand what transitional justice may mean in practice, this section analyzes empirical data drawn from interviews with Syrian women in order to explore how their intersecting identities shape their experiences of conflict and their formulations of justice. The analysis of the interviews and research sources revealed several key themes, including representation and agency within transitional processes, as well as reform as a form of transitional justice.

First: Defining Justice – From Punishment to Healing and Participation

The interviews show that Syrian women articulate a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of justice that goes beyond the narrow legal conception centered on punishment to encompass collective healing, institutional reform, and meaningful political participation. For example, A. S. defined transitional justice as "a set of judicial and legal procedures and measures aimed at addressing the legacy of human rights violations, enabling society to achieve stability and social peace." She stressed that justice lies in "rebuilding institutions on just foundations" and "restoring trust between citizens and the state." This linkage between justice and institutional reform demonstrates that women's demands are not limited to retribution, but rather call for the re-establishment of a new relationship between the state and members of society across all social groups, affiliations, and identities. I .H. expands this understanding by integrating

criminal trials with truth and reconciliation commissions, emphasizing that justice seeks to ensure accountability, strengthen the rule of law, restore victims' rights, and rebuild trust in public institutions. Here, justice shifts from a singular legal moment to a long-term process of restoring legitimacy to state institutions. This is consistent with transitional justice approaches that link reparations to reforming the political and legal system while focusing on the past, present, and future. This balance must be preserved while simultaneously confronting critical issues through truth-seeking and opening space for acknowledgment and the assumption of responsibility as a pathway to ensuring non-recurrence. Drawing on her legal background, R.S. argues that truth, accountability, and reconciliation are interconnected pillars for achieving sustainable peace. She conceptualizes justice as a comprehensive system that addresses both past and ongoing violations and lays the foundation for a future based on equality in which women actively participate in peacebuilding and reconstruction.

In another testimony, G., who left Syria at the age of 17, emphasized the priority of accountability, saying, "I see justice first and foremost in accountability, even before peace and dialogue... No compensation for the mother of a martyr or an injured person is equivalent to punishing criminals." She nonetheless linked accountability to broader goals, arguing that it "opens the path to truth and reparations." G. points to the need for a hybrid approach that combines punitive logic with compensation, which is suitable for the specificities of the Syrian context.

These definitions clearly contradict prevailing speeches in transitional justice that focus on formal legal mechanisms. Syrian women emphasize holistic approaches that combine accountability and structural reform, truth-telling and collective healing, and punishment and prevention. These visions intersect with transitional justice frameworks that place community needs, structural change, and participatory processes at the heart of justice.

Second: Intersecting Obstacles: Identity, Class, Displacement, and Trauma

Syrian women's experiences of injustice and their ability to access justice mechanisms are profoundly shaped by their intersecting identities and their structural and social positions. While all participants pointed to the existence of barriers that hinder women's participation, the nature of these obstacles varies according to displacement status, class, geographical location, educational background, and the impact of loss they have experienced.

Displacement has emerged as a central factor shaping women's access to justice and their participation in transitional processes. Displacement not only creates geographical barriers that limit effective participation in transitional justice mechanisms within Syria, such as providing testimony before truth commissions or engaging in constitutional processes but also interacts with multiple factors that may prevent or complicate return, including insecurity, loss of property, and the absence of legal guarantees. For example, L. S., a refugee in Jordan, expressed great hope that the transitional phase would lead to holding perpetrators of

violations accountable, emphasizing that justice means prosecuting all criminals and not leaving them free in our cities as if they had done nothing. However, her geographical distance from Syria made her feel that she was observing a process from abroad in which she lacked channels of influence, despite her optimism about women's ability to assume leadership positions and contribute to rebuilding her nation.

Displacement reveals a dual dynamic that influences women's demands for justice within transitional justice processes: on the one hand, it creates physical and legal barriers to direct participation in transitional processes within Syria; on the other, it deepens the structural damage women face as indirect victims of violence, particularly in cases of enforced disappearance. Wives of forcibly disappeared persons face a suspended legal status: without an official death certificate or legal declaration of their husbands' fate, they are deprived of inheritance rights, cannot legally remarry, lose the ability to make legal decisions on behalf of their children (such as obtaining passports or selling property), and face social stigma as "widows" without official recognition of this status. In the context of displacement, these legal complexities are further exacerbated by bureaucratic procedures; obtaining documents, registering deaths, and asserting legal rights become significantly more difficult across borders.

For example, R. H., the wife of one of the forcibly disappeared and a refugee in Lebanon, focused on the suffering of the families of the missing, saying, "Justice cannot be achieved without the participation of women, as they themselves are detainees, or wives, mothers and daughters of detainees and martyrs." This statement reflects a deep understanding of the intergenerational nature of gender-based violence and kinship ties: women are not only direct victims of arrest and torture, but also bear the economic, legal and psychological burden of the absence of their family members. R.'s demand for women's participation in transitional justice is not just a call for symbolic representation, but rather a demand for justice mechanisms that recognize and address these structural harms, through laws that allow for the declaration of death in cases of enforced disappearance, legal reforms that give women legal jurisdiction over their children and property regardless of spousal status, and economic and psychological support programs that respond to the reality of women as the sole breadwinners of their families.

R. H.'s position as a refugee in Lebanon shaped her temporal understanding of the conflict and of justice. She stated, "The new state is still young; it needs our support and time to restore our rights, and I believe this will happen." Her patience and optimism contrast with the narratives of women inside Syria, who expressed more urgent demands and more direct criticism. This contrast suggests that geographic distance from the center of transitional justice processes may influence women's expectations, as well as their sense of everyday pressure.

G.'s testimony reveals another dimension of the relationship between displacement and justice, namely linguistic barriers and the lack of legal documentation. She explains: "Language barriers silenced many people after the mass displacement of Syrians, and many also lack legal documents, thereby diminishing the weight accorded to their voices in host countries." This illustrates

that displacement not only deprives women of support networks and social standing but also places them within legal and cultural arrangements that limit their ability to articulate their demands and assert their rights.

Analysis of refugee women's statements reveals that transitional justice cannot be limited to holding violators accountable inside Syria, but must create fair conditions for return and participation, from legal recognition of missing persons, to reforming discriminatory laws, and ensuring representation of Syrians in the diaspora. If refugee women are not meaningfully included in shaping the transitional process, justice may reproduce the marginalization imposed by displacement, leaving the most vulnerable women without a voice in decisions that will determine their country's future.

Social class and educational background shape how women engage with transitional justice discourse and the priorities they articulate. F. A., a science student, gave a brief and direct definition: "Transitional justice is achieving people's rights after the absence of law during the revolution", focusing on restoring rights and compensation by stating that "accountability and reparation can compensate people for the harm they have suffered." Her realistic framing reflects a focus on material compensation and direct accountability, a vision that likely reflects the economic vulnerability faced by women in Syria.

Since 2011, Syria has experienced profound shifts in women's economic roles. Many have become sole breadwinners for their families as a result of the killing, enforced disappearance, or arrest of men, forcing them to enter the labor market in unstable conditions, rely on informal work, or face economic exploitation (UNCTAD, 2016; ESCWA, 2020). However, this shift in economic roles has not been accompanied by adequate legal recognition or social protection: Syrian personal status and inheritance laws still restrict women's economic autonomy and limit their ability to access resources and property independently of men. By contrast, I. H. offered a more detailed analysis of punitive and institutional measures, proposing mechanisms such as criminal trials and truth commissions, and stressing the need to "rebuild the capabilities of the state after the revolution by studying transitional justice experiences and engaging in relevant institutions, while excluding those whose hands are stained with blood." Her emphasis on drawing on comparative experience and working through official channels reflects her educational privilege and institutional knowledge in shaping her vision of justice. She said that the obstacles of previous transitional phases could be addressed by holding an awareness workshop to reassert the role of women in all political, legal, and other roles, since social norms and traditions have confined women to the home.

In a similar vein, R. S.'s legal background influenced her analysis. She focused on legislative frameworks and institutional mechanisms while paying attention to structural inequality. She said: "Syrian women have a major role in reconstruction and rebuilding values and moral frameworks that were lost during the years of war imposed by the Assad regime." She criticized "Syrian laws, which have historically been built on patriarchal thinking rather than Islamic jurisprudence, laws that falsely justify their injustice in the name of religion." R. S. also pointed to specific legal frameworks that entrench gender inequality in Syria, particularly

personal status laws (Law No. 4 of 2019), which grant men legal guardianship over women in matters of marriage, divorce, and custody; inheritance laws (Law No. 59 of 1953), which allocate men twice the share granted to women; and nationality laws (Law No. 276 of 1969), which prevent Syrian women from passing their nationality to children born to a non-Syrian father. She further highlights legal provisions that reduced penalties for so-called "honor crimes," notably Article 548 of the Syrian Penal Code prior to its partial amendment in 2009 (ESCWA, 2017). These statements also reveal how social class and educational background intersect with gender to form different visions of justice. Women facing economic fragility focus on material compensation and direct accountability, while women with legal or academic experience provide more complex structural analyses that link legal and institutional reform with social transformation. This shows that transitional justice must respond to the diverse needs of women across classes and backgrounds and integrate economic justice with legal and institutional reform.

Third: Accountability and Reform as an Interconnected System

Most testimonies linked justice, accountability, and structural reform. I. H emphasized that transitional justice includes "a set of mechanisms aimed at ensuring accountability, strengthening the rule of law, and restoring victims' rights." This understanding aligns with feminist theory, which views transitional justice as a means of correcting social and political structures, rather than merely a legal instrument.

R. S., for example, stressed that truth and reconciliation are essential elements for achieving sustainable peace, which is consistent with Lampron's proposal for relational accountability that addresses the effects of collective trauma and restores social cohesion. In contrast, L. S. focused on the punitive dimension of justice, saying: "Justice means prosecuting all perpetrators and not leaving them free." Although this demand focuses on punishment, it reflects a collective psychological need for reassurance and expresses a sense of moral justice as much as it constitutes a legal claim.

Thus, the statements reveal that Syrian women combine legal, emotional, and social justice in their vision of what transitional justice should look like. Despite consensus on the importance of accountability, participants recognized that a punitive approach alone is insufficient to achieve sustainable justice. Trials should address all serious crimes, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, torture, enforced disappearances, and sexual and gender-based violence, while simultaneously recognizing the gendered impacts of these crimes on women. For example, although enforced disappearance mostly targets men, its economic, legal and social consequences fall disproportionately on women. Preventing the reproduction of historical structural discrimination therefore requires accountability mechanisms to consider how different crimes affect women, even when the direct victims are men, and to be designed in ways that respond to these gendered dimensions.

It also requires cooperation with the International Criminal Court or establishing hybrid courts that combine local and international expertise, along with a comprehensive reform of the national judicial system to ensure gender-sensitive courts, witness protection, and victim participation at all stages of proceedings. However, given the scale of violations and the weakness of judicial capacity, trials alone are insufficient to achieve justice as envisioned by Syrian women. Therefore, it should be integrated into civil peace mechanisms that include community reconciliation, institutional vetting of those implicated in violations, and administrative and political reform to prevent their recurrence, as well as measures to support and compensate victims for the harm they have suffered.

Fourth: Justice as Structural Reform

Interviews reveal that the central demand of women in the context of transitional justice is meaningful gender participation, that is, participation that is not symbolic or limited to numerical representation, but rather participation that gives women actual influence in forming justice pathways and institutional decision-making. From this perspective, the contributions link justice, rebuilding state institutions, and structural reform, in line with Lamborn's (2015) concept of justice as a process that seeks to achieve equality, recognition, and redistribution of power.

In the Syrian context, this means integrating gender equality into the drafting of the constitution, transforming women's quotas from symbolic representation into actual decision-making authority enshrined on the ground, and reforming discriminatory laws in the areas of personal status, nationality, and property. Women's statements clearly reflect this transformative perception. One of the participants proposes rebuilding state capacity after the revolution by drawing on comparative experiences and excluding those whose hands were stained with blood. A. S., in turn, emphasizes the need to support independent documentation of violations, as well as the inclusion of women across all stages of transitional justice.

These statements demonstrate that women view justice not only as a criminal procedure, but as a comprehensive institutional reform project, and that justice in Syria will not be transitional in its true sense unless it is accompanied by a review of the laws in force, institutional cleansing, and ensuring women's representation in decision-making positions. The proposed reforms, such as amending some laws, including personal status laws, auditing judicial and security institutions, and establishing local reconciliation committees, are a practical translation of this transformative theoretical framework.

Fifth: Representation between Symbolism and Power-Sharing

Women's representation in Syria's emerging political institutions remains unbalanced. Although there was an increase in women's participation after the 2024 transition, many of these appointments were more symbolic than

substantive. One participant described this reality by saying that women "are portrayed either as victims or as heroic symbols, with no real role in decision-making."This position reflects feminist criticisms of tokenistic inclusion (tokenism), where women's representation is used as a tool to legitimize political projects rather than as a means of redistributing power (Bell and O'Rourke, 2007).

At the local level, women lead community reconciliation initiatives, humanitarian efforts, and campaigns to defend detainees. However, these roles are rarely recognized as political activity or part of a process of reshaping the public sphere. In her studies of Arab women's movements, Tripp (2015) points out that informal feminist work often contributes to supporting political transformations more effectively than state-led reforms. Likewise, F. A. expressed the continued social restrictions, saying that women do not have a voice or freedom of expression due to social pressures, which reflects the continued dominance of patriarchal structures at the family and institutional levels.

These dynamics show that ignoring the active roles that women play in daily life contributes to reproducing their marginalization within formal transitional processes. Therefore, the integration of women from different backgrounds, including those working in grassroots initiatives, survivors, refugees, and women from marginalized areas, is not just a representative requirement, but a condition for transforming these informal practices into recognized political participation capable of influencing justice pathways, state-building, and institutional reform.

The persistence of gender symbolism also intersects with sectarian and class barriers. In some conservative areas, participation in transitional forums is restricted by traditional religious interpretations of women's roles. These dynamics demonstrate the need to adopt intersectional approaches that take into account the intersection of gender with sectarianism, displacement, and ethnicity in order to understand the complexities of women's participation in the transitional phase. Justice must center on the effectiveness of women as political actors, producers of knowledge, and partners in shaping change, rather than treating them merely as beneficiaries or victims. This requires moving from extractive research models in which women's experiences are documented without giving them decision-making authority, towards truly participatory processes in which women participate in setting priorities, designing mechanisms, and making decisions. In practice, this means ensuring the effective (not merely formal) representation of women on constitution-drafting committees, transitional governing bodies, security sector reform processes, and judicial institutions. True representation is not achieved by numbers alone, but by challenging power dynamics within institutions, providing resources and training, and ensuring security and independence.

The diversity of women in terms of sect, ethnicity, class, and geographical location must also be taken into account, and true representation must not be replaced by symbolic representation of elites. Centering women's knowledge further requires recognizing the epistemic value of lived experience alongside academic or professional expertise. Survivors, activists, and community leaders possess accurate insights into conflict dynamics and community needs that international experts lack. Therefore, this knowledge must be incorporated into policy formulation, rather than being limited to legal or technical perspectives.

Sixth: Fear, Trauma, and Security

Fear has also emerged as one of the most prominent gendered barriers. As G. explained, "There are big obstacles in our way, the first of which is fear." Many women have lost their husbands or children, and some continue to fear threats or revenge if they raise their voices. In essence, women face a pervasive lack of security. In this context, security considerations intersect with gender identity to shape who can safely participate in transitional justice processes, and whose voices are silenced or whose participation is constrained by fear, violence, or the loss of protection. On the other hand, psychological trauma constitutes another intersecting obstacle that deeply affects women's participation. G. noted that the trauma greatly limited women's ability to engage, saying: "Psychological factors such as trauma, loss, and deprivation have deeply affected Syrian women, making it painful to talk about justice or participate in peace processes, as this reopens wounds that had not yet healed."

In this regard, women's statements point to the need to integrate psychosocial support programs into transitional justice mechanisms in Syria. This perception shows that diverse experiences of violence, from arrest, bombing, and displacement to domestic and sexual violence, have long-term psychological and social impacts, taking specific gender forms that restrict women's ability to engage politically and socially. This vision warns that transitional justice processes that neglect psychosocial support, or lack approaches that take into account trauma, anxiety, and loss of security, may contribute further harm to survivors and exclude those most affected from active participation in the transitional process.

Seventh: Effectiveness and Initiative

Interviews show that Syrian women refuse to be reduced to the image of the victim and demand a rupture with the externally imposed duality of the passive victim or the exceptional heroine, a binary that strips their complex experiences of meaning and limits their political and social effectiveness. Women have never viewed themselves within this simplistic binary framework; rather, the fundamental problem lies in external representations that impose these rigid roles upon them.

Participants criticize the prevailing binaries that confine women to the roles of "victim" or "heroic symbol", asserting that women are true actors who have led relief initiatives, civil society initiatives, refugee support networks, and contributed to maintaining social cohesion.

Despite the many intersecting obstacles, Syrian women have continued to resist narratives of victimhood and to assert their effectiveness as key actors in reconstruction and the pursuit of justice. It is noteworthy that a number of participants directly criticized international actors and externally imposed frameworks. R. S. says: "My message is directed to us only, not to anyone else, because I do not trust that anyone in the world truly wants to save us from our current reality." On the contrary, many globally imposed frameworks and

standards diminish women's roles, treating them as commodities to be invested in according to trending agendas, rather than recognizing them as peacemakers, leaders, and activists. This critique reveals that international interventions, while claiming to support women's empowerment, may restrict their effectiveness by imposing pre-established agendas and stripping gender of its local social and political context, thus reducing complex struggles to simplistic narratives that serve donor priorities.

These statements challenge international humanitarian and human rights discourses that portray Syrian women as vulnerable groups in need of external protection. Women do not deny their experiences of violence and oppression, but they demand recognition as political actors who possess the ability to lead, make decisions, and contribute to structural transformation. Their narratives highlight a tension between women's representations of themselves and externally imposed images of them, raising questions about who has the authority to narrate the Syrian feminist experience, and how these narratives affect access to resources, platforms, and decision-making processes. This tension intersects with broader debates in cross-border feminist thought about the politics of representation and the dangers of colonial feminism, as put forward by Mohanty (2003) and Abu-Lughod (2013). Criticisms by Syrian women suggest that transitional justice should reject externally imposed templates and revolve around local priorities, authentic cultural frameworks, and Syrian feminist visions of liberation and justice.

These statements show that Syrian women are demanding a break from the externally imposed duality of the passive victim or the exceptional heroine, a framing that strips their complex experiences of meaning and limits their political and social effectiveness. Women have never seen themselves within this simplistic binary framework; rather, the fundamental problem lies in the external representations that impose these rigid roles on them. Through community organizing, participation in relief efforts, documentation, and advocacy for legal reforms, Syrian women offer a real model of transformative justice from the bottom up, insisting on achieving their recognition as multi-role political and social actors: survivors, activists, community leaders, peacebuilders, and agents for structural change. At the same time, they strongly criticize international discourses that strip their experiences of their emancipatory meaning and reduce them to a single stereotype. In this way, the empirical evidence connects with the theoretical argument that women's empowerment can only be realized when women are acknowledged as holders of knowledge and power, capable of shaping the future of justice and peace in Syria, and when transitional justice mechanisms are designed around their priorities.

PART 3

Recommendations and Conclusion

1. RECOMMENDATIONS: TOWARDS COMPREHENSIVE JUSTICE

Based on the theoretical framework, field findings, and comparative analysis, this study proposes a set of practical recommendations for achieving feminist transitional justice in Syria.

First: For the Syrian Authorities

1. Making international conventions related to women, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), a source of legislation and a reference for the processes of drafting the constitution and governing institutions, and ensuring the effective participation and fair representation of women from diverse backgrounds in all transitional justice mechanisms through a system of quotas and reserved seats, and providing support for women candidates in a manner that is sensitive to gender, sectarian, ethnic, class, and geographic dynamics, and that advances gender equality and non-discrimination against women.
2. Prioritizing comprehensive legal reform that addresses discriminatory laws, including personal status laws, nationality laws, laws governing economic rights, and legislation to combat violence against women. This should be pursued through cooperation with specialized legal experts, the allocation of sufficient resources, and the establishment of monitoring and accountability mechanisms.
3. Reforming the security and judicial sectors to ensure effective and gender-sensitive accountability:
    A. Restructuring the security forces and police to include women-led units that are specialized in gender-based violence.
    B. Training judges, prosecutors, and lawyers on feminist transitional justice principles and investigating sexual violence according to international protocols such as the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict (Murad Code).
4. Establishing a witness protection system specifically for women:
    A. Developing a national framework for the protection of victims and witnesses, considering the specific needs of women and girls, including: identity protection, safety guarantees, support and recovery services, and integrated referral mechanisms.
    B. Establishing "legal aid" offices within government institutions that provide free counseling for women.
5. Establishing a truth and dignity commission focused on Syrian women designed to be gender-sensitive through being staffed and managed by women investigators. Its mandate would include playing an oversight

role in transitional justice processes concerning women, uncovering the truth about various violations, holding those responsible accountable, and providing reparations and redress to women victims., to achieve justice for women, thereby contributing to justice for women.

6. Removing existing administrative and legal obstacles that limit women's access to justice by simplifying procedures in civil registry offices and religious and civil courts, in order to ensure women's ability to register children, prove marriage or divorce, obtain personal documents, and claim inheritance and guardianship rights.

7. Enhancing transparency and the right to access information by enacting legislation that guarantees access to information, particularly regarding past violations, the archives of security and judicial institutions, and the availability of official data on missing and detained persons in a manner that protects the privacy of women and their families.

8. Formally acknowledging the suffering of women and incorporating it into national narratives by including women's experiences during the conflict in educational curricula and collective memory and adopting a national day to honor women survivors and the families of the missing.

9. Supporting cultural and research production that documents the experiences of women from a feminist perspective and ensuring their inclusion in reconstruction processes from the outset, not at a later stage.

10. Integrating women into urban planning and infrastructure reconstruction, especially those related to essential services (health, education, housing), and ensuring women's access to contracts and financing mechanisms related to reconstruction.

11. Preventing the continuation of discriminatory and violent practices in both public and private spaces; establishing ongoing monitoring mechanisms for domestic violence, child marriage, economic exploitation, and community violence; and imposing clear and effective penalties on perpetrators of violence against women, both within and outside the family, and implementing them.

12. Strengthening collaboration with local councils to ensure women's inclusion in local governance bodies by establishing mandatory quotas for women in local councils, judicial bodies, and administrative institutions, and by facilitating access to these spaces for women from rural and marginalized areas through support for awareness campaigns and local elections.

13. Adopting approaches that are sensitive to trauma, depression, and psychological distress resulting from war, given that such harm is often insufficiently acknowledged or taken seriously, and providing safe and dedicated environments for giving testimonies. Violations in both the public and private spheres must be systematically documented, with particular attention to sexual violence, enforced disappearances, and economic exploitation.

14. Designing reparations programs for material and emotional damages

that consider the specific harm suffered by women and their social circumstances. These programs should include healthcare, psychological and social support, economic empowerment, education, and housing. They should also encompass individual and collective reparations tailored to diverse needs, as well as the establishment of specialized shelters for children of unknown parentage as a result of rape in prisons.

15. Supporting civil society and sustainable participation by providing resources, protection, and platforms for women's organizations and women human rights defenders, and ensuring their active participation in the design and implementation of policies, rather than being limited to consultation.

16. Integrating intersectional analysis into all phases of transitional justice while recognizing the diversity among women and addressing the overlapping systems of oppression that shape their experiences.

17. Capacity building through supporting institutional development and technical training while prioritizing local expertise and avoiding paternalism.

18. Enhancing women's voices and influence through creating platforms that enable women's organizations to participate in decision-making and policy development.

Second: for the international bodies

1. Providing flexible and long-term funding to Syrian women's organizations and civil society organizations, while respecting local priorities and avoiding imposing donor agendas.

2. Promoting the exchange of experiences and the building of solidarity networks between feminist Syrian organizations and international feminist movements in post-conflict contexts, while respecting the leadership and independence of Syrian women.

3. Engaging in self-criticism and accountability in international policies by analyzing the impact of international policies on the course of the Syrian conflict, and ensuring that the discourse of women's rights is not used to justify geopolitical agendas.

4. Ensuring the participation of Syrian women in transitional justice processes and decision-making:

    A. Supporting the participation of Syrian women, especially from marginalized areas, in designing transitional justice mechanisms, includingreparations,truth-seeking,andaccountabilitymechanisms.

    B. Ensuring the representation of women's civil society organizations in international forums such as working groups, conferences, and policy-making mechanisms.

5. Protecting feminist civil spaces from international and regional restrictions by: applying pressure on international and regional actors to prevent policies that restrict the work of feminist organizations through funding laws, registration requirements, or security surveillance.

6. Developing accountability models that are sensitive to gender-based violence:

    A. Supporting investigations into sexual and gender-based violence as international crimes and providing specialized technical and legal resources.

    B. Working with women-led organizations to develop trauma-sensitive interview protocols that ensure non-retraumatization.

7. Holding international actors accountable for sanctions and aid policies by:

    A. Conducting periodic reviews on the impact of international sanctions on women and marginalized groups and ensuring that they do not exacerbate poverty or restrict access to essential services.

    B. Ensuring that humanitarian aid is gender-sensitive.

8. Supporting the autonomy of the feminist economy and livelihood building by:

    A. Investing in women-led economic programs that go beyond "income empowerment" to include resource redistribution, labor control, and ownership.

    B. Support social protection initiatives for women, especially families of missing persons and women survivors of violence.

9. Promoting economic justice as part of transitional justice by:

    A. Supporting compensation mechanisms that consider the economic losses suffered by women (inheritance, property, unpaid wages, loss of the main source of income).

    B. Integrating the care economy into long-term social justice policies.

Third: For Syrian feminist organizations and civil society

1. Building alliances across differences that facilitate dialogue among women from diverse backgrounds, while acknowledging internal power dynamics and intellectual differences.

2. Developing local feminist frameworks rooted in authentic concepts of justice: equity, rights, and dignity, while critically engaging with international human rights discourse without subordinating to it.

3. Adopting an intersectional approach to advocacy and programs that ensures marginalized women –rural, refugee, and working women– are at the center of feminist efforts and avoids generalizing elite experiences.

4. Maintaining long-term independence from political parties, armed groups, and international donors, while building strategic alliances that directly serve women's interests.

5. Promoting intergenerational dialogue to ensure the participation of young women in leadership roles, while also drawing on the experience of older generations of feminist activists and leaders.

6. Promoting the psychological empowerment of women as a national initiative that involves the collaboration between local civil society organizations, institutions, and relevant ministries, including Social Affairs, Education, and Information.

Fourth: For Researchers

1. Centering the voices and knowledge of Syrian women in scientific research by adopting participatory methodologies that engage participants as partners in knowledge production, not merely as data sources.

2. Conducting in-depth intersectional analyses that illustrate how gender, sect, ethnicity, class, and displacement intersect to shape experiences and needs, while avoiding generalizations or stereotyping.

3. Critically engaging with power dynamics within feminist movements, within local and international actors, and with the researchers' own positions,recognizingthatresearchcanreproducerelationsofdomination.

4. Making knowledge accessible to Syrian communities, including activists and decision-makers, through multiple media and languages, not just within academic circles.

5. Building long-term relationships with Syrian women's organizations and communities, rather than relying on extractive research models that collect data without ongoing commitment or accountability.

6. Working continuously to address the challenges and gaps faced by Syrian women through scientific and professional research that helps mitigate these difficulties by formulating tailored, case-specific proposals and recommendations.

2. CONCLUSION

The fall of the Assad regime has opened a historic window for change in Syria. After 54 years of dictatorship and the profound damage it inflicted on the social fabric, and more than thirteen years of devastating conflict, Syrians face an immense challenge: addressing the legacy of mass violence, authoritarianism, and social inequality, while simultaneously rebuilding institutions and society.

How Syria manages this transitional phase will determine the country's trajectory for generations to come.

This study argues that achieving genuine justice and sustainable peace requires centering Syrian women's voices and leadership at the heart of the transitional process. Through an intersectional feminist analysis grounded in field interviews, the paper demonstrates that prevailing transitional justice frameworks are insufficient. Narrow legal approaches that focus on trials or truth commissions, despite their importance, are unable on their own to address the structural dimensions of gender inequality that fueled violence during the conflict and continue to shape post-conflict realities.

The Syrian women that were interviewed articulated expansive visions of justice that encompass accountability, truth-seeking, collective healing, structural transformation, and meaningful participation. They challenged narratives that reduce them to passive victims in need of protection. Instead, they emphasized their roles as central actors, community leaders, and political agents. They also emphasized that empowerment not only includes access to education or social and political participation, but also a radical transformation that enables women to shape their own self-image and position within civil society. At the same time, they identified a range of intersecting barriers that obstruct their effective participation in justice processes, namely institutional weakness, discriminatory laws, patriarchal norms, displacement, trauma, and political exclusion. They stressed the need for locally rooted approaches that resist externally imposed frameworks while drawing on indigenous concepts of rights and dignity.

Justice in Syria requires a comprehensive restructuring of institutions and social relations in order to dismantle patriarchal structures and systems of exclusion. This entails comprehensive legal reform, gender-responsive truth-seeking and reparations mechanisms, accountability processes with reconciliatory dimensions, and the meaningful participation of women across all spheres of governance and reform. It also requires supporting civil society and feminist movements as central actors in the transformation process, while safeguarding their independence and diversity. International support must be based on solidarity, not imposition, by providing resources and platforms without removing leadership roles from Syrian actors.

There is no doubt that the path forward is difficult and complex. Syria continues to face ongoing violence, a humanitarian crisis, economic collapse, and multiple external interventions. International attention and funding remain limited, while decades of authoritarian rule have destroyed institutions and civil structures. Yet the resilience, organization, and future-oriented vision of Syrian women offer genuine grounds for hope. Throughout the years of conflict, and despite the violence and marginalization they endured, women continued to support local communities, document violations, demand accountability, and articulate powerful visions of justice and transformation. As G. stated, "Syrian women are the future of the country, not mere decoration." R. H. affirmed, "Justice cannot be achieved without women's participation." Participants agreed that Syrian women are capable, determined, and ready to lead the reconstruction process. And despite the fragility of the current transitional moment, it represents a rare

opportunity to build a more just, inclusive, and democratic Syria. Realizing this opportunity depends on political will, sustained participation, and a genuine commitment to structural transformation rather than cosmetic reforms. International actors, Syrian authorities, civil society, and feminist movements all share responsibility for ensuring that this phase does not repeat historical patterns of exclusion and inequality.

The establishment of the National Commission for Transitional Justice in Syria holds particular significance as the first official body mandated to lay the foundations for a comprehensive transitional process that addresses the legacy of violations and establishes principles of accountability and reparations. It represents a historic opportunity to reimagine transitional justice in Syria in ways that move beyond narrow, traditional models and place the needs and perspectives of the most affected groups, and especially women, at the core of its work. However, the Commission's ability to achieve inclusive and sustainable justice depends critically on its commitment to the meaningful participation of Syrian women, not merely as passive beneficiaries or witnesses, but as genuine partners in designing mechanisms, setting priorities, and shaping institutional reforms. This is where the importance of the present research lies: it seeks to present how women conceptualize transitional justice and which mechanisms and reforms they set based on their lived experiences, thereby contributing to guiding the Commission towards a participatory approach that reflects Syrian realities and responds to the needs of those most affected by the conflict.

Ultimately, transitional justice in Syria will not be measured by the number of prosecutions conducted or the volume of truth commission reports produced, but by Syrians' ability, women and men alike, to live with dignity, security, equality, and freedom; by the extent of women's genuine participation in rebuilding their communities and their country; and by whether the systems that enabled violence against them have been fundamentally dismantled. This transitional vision, articulated by Syrian women themselves, must serve as the guiding compass for Syria's path toward justice and peace.

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