



**ETHICAL COMMITMENTS AND *RAISON D'ETAT* IN
RENTIER STATES: ASYLUM-SEEKER POLICIES IN
THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL AND CENTRAL
ASIAN REPUBLICS DURING THE REFUGEE CRISIS**

**RANTIYE DEVLETLERDE ETİK TAAHHÜTLER VE
RAISON D'ETAT: MÜLTECİ KRİZİ SIRASINDA KÖRFEZ
İŞBİRLİĞİ KONSEYİ VE ORTA ASYA
CUMHURİYETLERİ'NDE SİĞİNMACI POLİTİKALARI**

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ABSTRACT

The international migrant crisis made headlines during summer 2015 and challenged the national asylum systems of many countries worldwide. Going beyond academic circles, hot debates on migrants and the role of asylum highlighted the gap and paradoxes that exist between claimed values of solidarity on the one hand, and the restrictive policies and regulations towards asylum seekers on the other hand. This paper documents this tension in oil and gas exporting states, particularly in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Central Asian Republics (CAR). It questions the claimed regional, ethnic and/or religious ties and the borders that have been closed to most asylum seekers from Syria and Afghanistan, who are presently living in poorer (oil and gas

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deprived) neighboring countries. This paper argues that in a time of low oil revenues and fiscal difficulties, rentier states give priority to the Raison d'Etat over any form of transnational solidarity and commitment to international human rights agreements and charters. New and creative institutional arrangements are needed to deal with the global refugee crisis, as traditional solidarities are, in both regions as well as in other rentier countries, victims of the modernization of politics and its uncaring redefinition of state interest in times of low oil revenues.

Keywords: Migrant Crisis, Rentier State, Raison d'Etat, Central Asian Republics, Gulf Cooperation Council, Ethical Commitments.

ÖZ

Uluslararası göçmen krizi 2015 yılının yazında dünya basınında manşet olarak birçok ülkelerin ulusal sığınmacı sistemlerini zorladı. Göçmen ve sığınmacılara yönelik tartışmalar, akademik çevrelerin ötesine geçerek, bir taraftan dayanışma değerleri, öbür taraftan ise sığınmacılara yönelik sınırlayıcı politikalar arasındaki paradoksları ve var olan kanunlardaki açıkları sorgulamaktadır. Bu kapsamda çalışma, petrol ve gaz ihracatı yapan Körfez ve Orta Asya'daki bazı ülkelerin ortak bölgesel, etnik ve dini aidiyetlere rağmen Suriyeli ve Afganistanlı sığınmacılara yönelik sınırlayıcı politikalarını belgelemektedir. Buna göre, petrol fiyatlarının düştüğü ve mali sıkıntıların var olduğu dönemde rantie devletler, devlet çıkarına ulus-ötesi dayanışma ve uluslararası insan haklarından daha fazla önem vermektedirler. Küresel göçmen krizi kapsamında yeni ve yapıcı kurumsal anlaşmalar gerekmektedir. Çünkü her iki bölgede ve diğer petrol ihracatı yapan ülkelerde geleneksel dayanışma, siyasi modernleşmenin ve petrol fiyatlarının düşük olduğu dönemlerde devlet çıkarının yeniden tanımlanmasının mağduriyetine uğramaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Göçmen Krizi, Rantie Devlet, Ulusal Çıkar, Orta Asya, Körfez İşbirliği Konseyi.

INTRODUCTION

The idea to study the influence of rentierism on asylum seekers' migration patterns and national asylum regimes was borne out of preliminary research that revealed a trend of asylum seekers being denied access to relatively wealthier neighbouring countries. In particular, few of the world's two largest groups of asylum seekers, i.e., Afghans and Syrians, have been granted protection in the rentier states of Central Asia and the Arabian Gulf region. Such a finding appears counterintuitive given that there are deeply rooted ethical commitments based on shared religious, cultural, and ethnic links between these countries. This paper argues that despite certain concrete obstacles to hosting refugees, be they demographic or economic, the main explanatory factors for hostile policies towards asylum seekers are security concerns and attitudes pertaining to wealth distribution carried by the ruling elites of rentier states.

To clarify, this study is not meant to be a criticism of or provide justification for asylum policies developed by rentier states. Rather, the paper explains how economic and political structures have defined the current state of migration policy regimes in rentier countries. The paper starts with a discussion on the moral and ethical components of contemporary forced displacement crises. The second part of the paper sheds light on the plight of the world's two largest nationalities of asylum seekers, the Afghans and Syrians. In the third and last section, the article discusses how states in the Arabian Gulf and Central Asia have been negotiating between solidarity with refugees and state interests in recent years.

1. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE STATES ABOUT ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

The question of state obligations towards asylum seekers and refugees has become one of the most important issues for the international community since 2015 and the so-called 'European migrant crisis'. That year, more than a million asylum seekers, economic migrants and refugees crossed into Europe, sparking an international humanitarian and political crisis as European countries struggled to cope with refugee flows that were unprecedented since World War 2 (UNHCR, 2015).

Today, there are more than 65 million forcibly displaced people and more than 22 million refugees worldwide. To put things in perspective, if forcibly displaced people were to create their own state, it would host a larger population than countries such as Spain or Italy, with a population roughly equal to that of France or the United Kingdom. Due to prolonged and worsening conflicts in major refugee source countries, the growth of the global refugee population (with 20 new displaced persons per minute) is higher than the natural demographic

growth of most countries. During 2018, refugee populations are expected to grow even further, raising fears in Europe of how to manage the flow of migrants.

It is worth noting however that the vast majority of the global refugee and asylum seeker population live in the Global South. The world's top refugee hosting countries are Turkey, Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon, Iran, Uganda and Ethiopia (UNHCR, 2017). Turkey alone, has been hosting more Syrian refugees than the entire European Union since the beginning of the Syrian uprising and subsequent civil conflict (UNHCR, 2015).

Some scholars argue that it is necessary to stress the role of 'Southern solidarity' in understanding the share of refugees hosted by the so-called Southern countries (Pacitto, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013). As Pacitto and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh notes '*This has the result of recognizing Southern actors' agency and capacity for agency, instead of considering the South as a wholly passive and dominated entity*' (Pacitto, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013: 9). They show the extent to which humanitarianism and ethical commitments are dominated by the 'Northern /Western' approach in academic literature (Pacitto, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013) and stress the realities based on data. However, according to Souter it is important not to exaggerate the ethical credentials of refugee-hosting states within the global South due to the fact that they are accepting refugees only in effect, rather than as a result of intentions motivated by cultural and religious affinity (Chatty, 2013). He continues this line of thinking by underlining that their welcoming of refugees may say more about their limited capacity to control their borders than the commitment to international refugee law. Therefore, he links good international citizen and state commitments to complying with Refugee Conventions (Souter, 2016).

As can be seen through the ongoing case of Hungary and Poland rejecting the European Union's scheme to host quotas of migrants from the Mediterranean region, arriving chiefly from Greece and Italy, the main actor for refugee affairs remains the state. Despite some European and international frameworks and charters on these matters, signed and ratified by these states, the state remains the top political authority which controls borders and decides how to execute - or not - national and international regulations (GLOBSEC, 2017).

Against this forced migration background, German philosopher Vittorio Hösle (2017) argues that nowadays people are not only bound by helping others living nearby, but also helping those living away, something which was not the case before. In such a global village perspective, he considers that refugees are in need and others have the moral obligation to help them due to the urgency of the situation and the fact that they are not responsible, but rather victims, of

complex crises. Similarly to that, Haddad (2008) considers that refugees are products of the 'inter-state system' and that there is, because of it, a constant production of refugees. She argues that asylum is a means to maintaining the stability of the international community and plays the role of a 'corrective mechanism' (Haddad, 2008: 88). In the same logic, Souter (2016) considers that asylum - unlike other forms of refugee protection - can secure the full range of human rights within a state.

Many authors underline the concept of responsibility in dealing with refugee flows. Souter (2016) Byman (2007) and Beinart (2017) argue that in several cases, some states have taken the approach of militarily engaging the origin country, creating more refugees and thus having a direct responsibility towards them. This responsibility question includes, for instance, the states who carried out operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. Carens (2013) used the case of Jews who had fled Germany to other states, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, to highlight the important economic and academic contributions refugees can provide, and more generally the utilitarian dimension of opening borders to asylum seekers. In a more libertarian perspective however, thinkers such as Nozick (1974) claim that the land of a nation shall not be seen as the collective property of a specific citizenry, and therefore the state shall have no right in restricting immigration. Beyond the libertarian intellectual movements, many believe that refugees should be seen as important as the native community because they are in *urgent* need (see e.g. Hösle, 2017).

Despite emergency situations, Hösle (2017) acknowledges that no country can host *all asylum seekers* due to economic costs, and he highlights that the more developed the state, the less open and generous it is due to the high costs associated with hosting each refugee. Could this theory explain why rich countries such as Denmark and Norway have shown a particular zeal in making it more difficult for asylum seekers to obtain permanent residency in recent years? Hösle (2017) explains the reason for closing borders as the fear of the 'other', who is sometimes perceived as a potential destructive threat to what has been collectively built by the host community. Accepting refugees thus depends on the 'state's integrative capacities' (Gibney 2015: 448).

Some authors argue that it is necessary to compensate states taking up more refugees (Heykoard and Odalen, 2013); (Souter 2016). As Carens stated '*States may choose to be generous in admitting immigrants, but they are under no obligation to do so*' (Carens, 2013: 251). Walzer (1983) supports closed borders, overall, but considers that populations who share the same cultural homogeneity should be allowed to enter into the state. Nowadays, this seems to be the position defended by Hungary and some other Central European governments, who highlight that they have been accepting (mainly Catholic Christian)

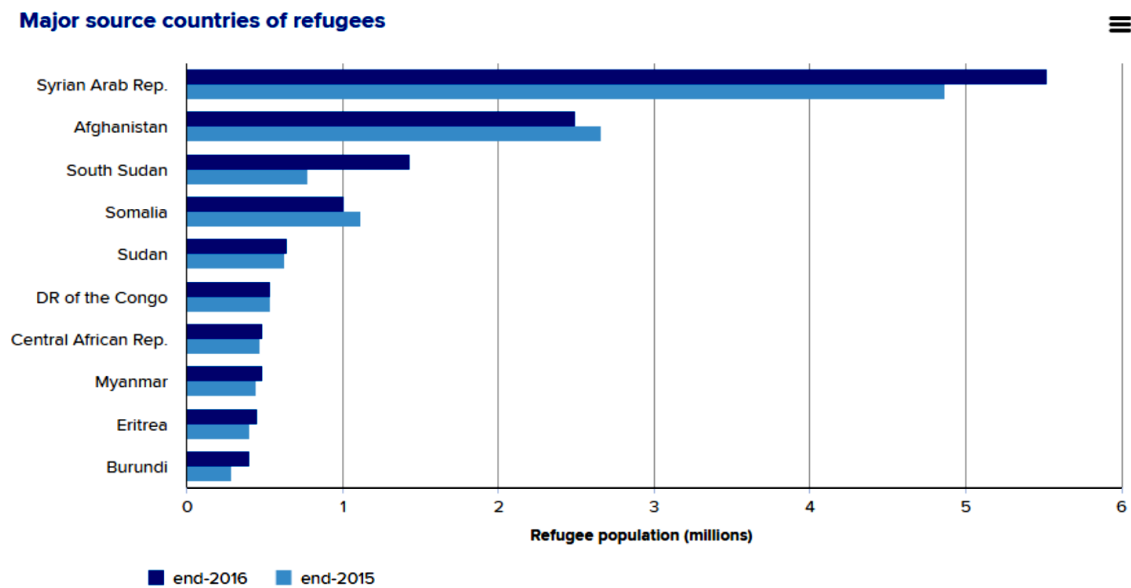
Ukrainian refugees and argue that they see no obligation to accept refugees from the predominantly Muslim Middle East and Northern Africa. Against this background of closed borders, and considering the difficult past of many European countries during the 20th Century, some authors consider that the current responsibility to protect should constitute a 'payback'. Türk (2016: 47) noted that *'it is an ironic turn of events that some of the countries that so greatly benefited from refugee protection in the past following the adoption of the 1951 Convention, are the same ones now closing their borders'*.

According to the UNHCR, the size of a host country's economy, population and level of development are important considerations in measuring the impact of hosting refugees. Paradoxically, the Democratic Republic of Congo hosted in 2015 the largest number of refugees in relation to the size of its economy (UNHCR, 2015), while Lebanon hosted the largest refugee community related to the size of their native population, and both show alarming signs of state services being overwhelmed. However, we consider that along with economic criteria it is also useful to measure social, political and cultural determinants that are important to hosting refugees. For example, the case of Jewish refugees of Germany has proved that in some cases refugees are not willing to come back although the situation has improved in their countries of origin. Besides the trauma, it is also important to indicate that victims had often also lost trust in, and social cohesion with, the German society at large, as it had massively collaborated with the Nazi state in exterminating them. Today, a similar situation is developing with Rohingya communities who will probably never willingly come back to Myanmar. Therefore, besides the economic health of the country, it is useful to observe a host country's integrative capacities. From this perspective, one can argue that some EU states (such as United Kingdom) who develop a Parekhian *multiculturalism* can more easily 'absorb' newcomers over states that have strong ethno-nationalistic tendencies (Parekh, 2000).

2. AFGHAN AND SYRIAN REFUGEE FLOWS

Since the start of the so-called international migrant crisis in 2015, and as of early 2018, the world's two largest groups of asylum seekers have been the Afghans and Syrians (see figure 1; UNHCR 2017).

Figure.1: Main Source Countries of Refugees in Late 2015 and Late 2016 (UNHCR Data)



Paradoxically, few people from these two large populations of asylum seekers have been granted protection in richer neighbouring countries, where most elements of their culture and religion (Sunni Islam) are shared. The Afghan refugee crisis was the outcome of the country's internal wars, which started in 1979 and was aggravated by the 2001 regime change and subsequent guerilla wars with the Taliban and other non-state actors. In 2016, Afghans still constituted the world's second largest displaced population - 2.6 million people - according to the UNHCR (2017). The Syrian conflict started more recently, in 2011, but rapidly resulted in around 11 million Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs) and refugees. Large communities were displaced into neighbouring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, and to a much lesser extent, throughout the Arab world. The Syrian crisis showed shared certain similarities with previous humanitarian crises (e.g. with Kurdish, Iraqi and Palestinian refugees in previous decades), who moved primarily to neighbouring countries of the Levant. In the Syrian case, however, there were massive migratory flows towards neighboring countries and the EU, making the Mediterranean Sea the world's deadliest water body over the past four years. Noticeably however, the Syrian conflict has not led to any massive flows of migrants towards the Gulf Arab states, despite the latter's diplomatic, humanitarian and financial involvement in the Syrian crisis (Gengler and Ewers, 2015).

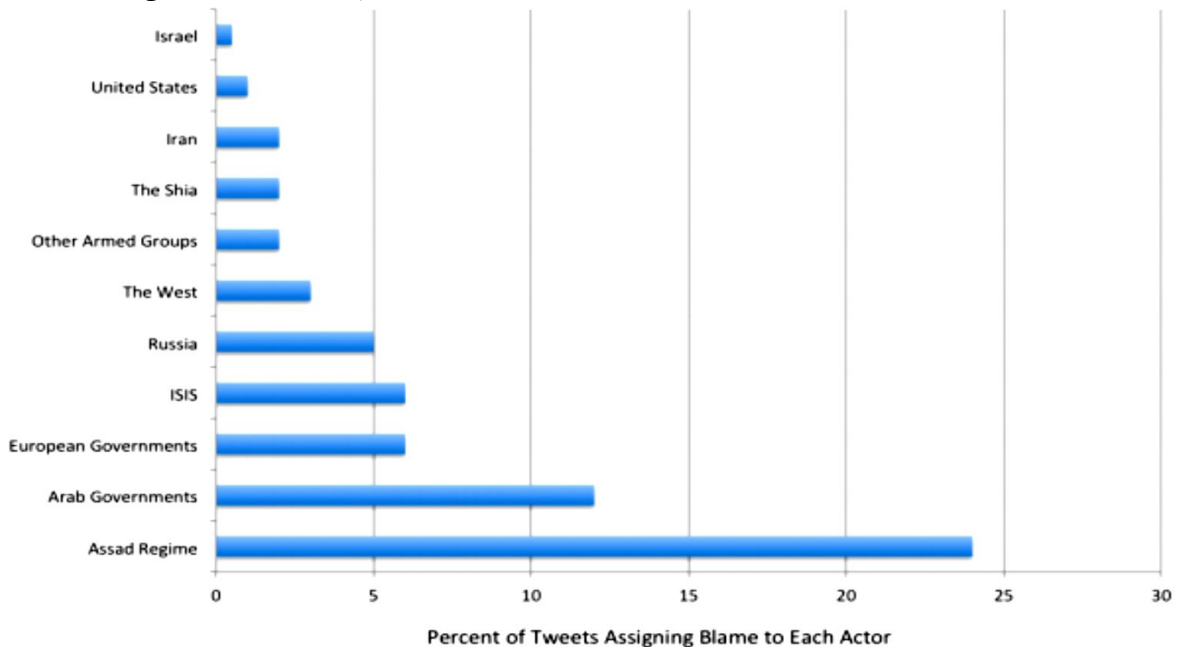
The Syrian conflict occupies an important place in discussions between the world's most powerful international actors (i.e., states and international organizations) and remains on the agenda due to various complex issues (terrorist organizations, internal wars, forced migrations, etc). Unlike in previous

conflicts, the national public opinion has become an important element of consideration, even among countries which are not directly involved in, or bordering, Syria and Iraq (Pew Research Center, 2016).

By 2015, Human rights organizations, forcibly displaced populations and international media outlets argued that there was a certain discrepancy between the active role of the relatively wealthy Gulf states in Syria and their apparently closed doors to Syrian refugees (Gengler and Ewers, 2015). However, more recent reports have highlighted that the situation is more complex and that some Syrians found their way to the GCC states, although not as formal refugees, but through economic migration channels, and in smaller numbers (Bel-Air (de), 2015).

The following year, the ‘Social Media and Political Participation Lab Data’ report of New York University showed that particular concern over Syrian refugees within social media has reached to its maximum following the death of Alan Kurdi, a Syrian refugee child (see SMaPP, 2016). In it, the Gulf Arab states were among the most blamed figures, just behind the Assad regime, and closely followed by EU governments, ISIS and Russia (SMaPP, 2016).

Figure.2: Actors Blamed for Syrian Refugee Crisis in Tweets Characterizing Refugees as Victims, in 2016



Source: Data SMaPP NYU; Figure: Alexandra Siegel.

Given the fact that most Arabic tweets referencing Syrian refugees came from the Middle East, this arguably shows it is hardly possible to ignore the reality of the refugee crisis as it becomes a public issue through transnational media and negatively impacts the image of the Gulf Arab countries abroad. This

feeling of responsibility in the Syrian refugee tragedy is accentuated due to the obvious ethnic (i.e. Arab) and religious (i.e. Sunni Muslim) bonds that link Syrians and Gulf Arab nations.

Following the highly mediatized death of his three-year-old child, Aylan Kurdi, while crossing the Mediterranean Sea from Turkey with his Syrian family in 2015, his father stated unambiguously that: *'I want Arab governments - not European countries - to see [what happened to] my children, and because of them to help people'*. In another video shared on the 'Syrian Community in Denmark' Facebook page at the end of that same year, a Syrian refugee referring to the asylum granted to large numbers of Syrians by EU countries asked the rhetorical question: *'How did we flee from the region of our Muslim brethren, which should take more responsibility for us than a country they describe as infidels?'*. These questions highlight the frustration many refugees have about the gap between expected solidarity due to ethnic, geographic and religious bonds on the one hand, and the realities of Gulf Arab states' restrictive rules and regulations towards asylum seekers on the other.

The oil-rich countries of the Gulf have thus been accused of indifference and failing to fulfil responsibilities (SMaPP, 2016). But what are those responsibilities in contemporary humanitarian crises, and more importantly, how are they understood by rentier states in the Arabian Peninsula and Central Asia? How do rentier states try to find a balance between ethical commitments and costs (economic, social and political) in responding to such large scale humanitarian crises?

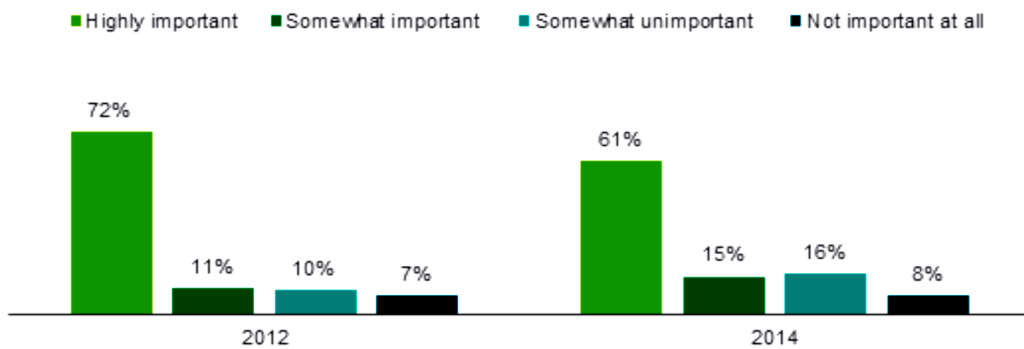
3. NEGOTIATING BETWEEN ETHNIC-RELIGIOUS SOLIDARITY AND STATE INTEREST

The large volume of development aid and other financial contributions from Gulf monarchies towards Arab and Muslim majority countries throughout the decades can hardly be ignored. The GCC states have been visible actors in international aid since their independence from the United Kingdom. Between 1973 and 1990, their expenditure on aid as a proportion of GDP was twice that of standards set by the UN and five times higher than the average of OECD–DAC donors (Tok, 2015). However, their aid philosophy has evolved due to evolving political, social and economic conditions. It is necessary to underline that aid from Gulf economies decreased from 4.7 percent of GDP in the 1970s to 1 per cent in the 2000s (Khalifa Isaac, 2015), which does not mean an absolute drop, but rather indicates a growth in GDP higher than the growth in foreign assistance.

The majority (60 per cent) of Gulf aid was focused on Arab and Muslim neighboring countries through bilateral agreements in form of the aid (Khalifa

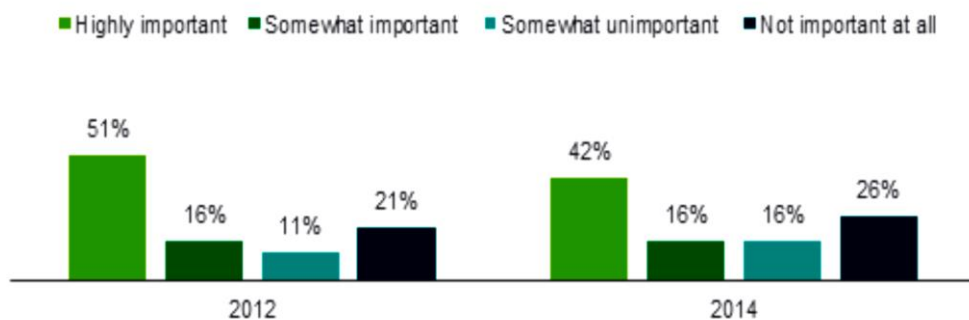
Isaac, 2015), due to various ethnic and religious bonds that remain strong in the Gulf states. In national surveys performed in 2012 and 2014 by the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) of Qatar University, a majority of Qatari nationals expressed a preference that their financial assistance benefit Muslim recipients first. When asked: *'how important to you is it for the recipient of your donation to be Muslim?'*, around 83 per cent of Qataris answered that it was either highly or somewhat important in 2012. In response to the same question in 2014, this figure decreased slightly, but stayed generally consistent at 76 per cent.

Figure.3: Importance of the Recipient’s Muslim Faith for Donations (Qataris)



When it comes to expatriates (a majority of the population in Qatar, but also Kuwait and the UAE), they too showed a preference for the recipients of their donations to be Muslim. In 2012, 67 percent said that it was either highly or somewhat important to them that their charity benefits Muslims first. Although this figure decreased to 58 per cent in 2014, we may still conclude that there is a strong and sustained preference for aid recipients to be Muslim among Qataris and expatriates alike. Compared with Qatari participants, expatriates (chiefly Arabs, Asians and Westerners) placed less importance on the religion of the recipients.

Figure.4: Importance of the Recipient’s Muslim Faith for Donations (Expatriates)



The Muslim nature of the state is affirmed in all constitutions of the Gulf monarchies, while CAR constitutions are secular. According to the Pew research study, 'The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity' (Pew, 2012), religious affiliations matter less in Central Asia compared to the Middle East and North Africa region. Although Muslims represent a majority in Central Asia, at least 50 per cent describe themselves as *'just a Muslim'* rather than a follower of a specific branch of Islam (Shia, Sunni, Hanafi, etc). Despite this, the same paper also shows that, in Central Asia, people are likelier to engage in giving alms than attending mosque or praying (Pew, 2012: 52). Central Asian states also avoid taking a hardline position on current conflicts in the Middle East and Myanmar in order to reduce the risk of sparking off internal conflicts based on ethnicity or religion.

Despite the long-term religious identity, the post-Arab Spring situation has shown that some of the Gulf countries are clearly focusing on both maximizing profits and mitigating security concerns while investing in new countries of Sub-Saharan Africa and the Americas, for instance. Investing in projects with concrete impact rather than merely transferring cash became the new aid philosophy of Gulf states (Khalifa Isaac, 2015). Today, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar are among the top donors of the UNHCR. All of them are rated among the world's top 45 donors, with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait reaching the top 20. The data shows that, between 2012 and 2017, KSA, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE provided more aid to refugees than much larger countries such as Brazil, China, the Russian Federation or even Turkey, which is regularly featured in news headlines related to Middle Eastern refugees (UNHCR, 2017). In a similar fashion, oil and gas rich Kazakhstan has been gaining in international influence through its foreign aid, while formalizing and professionalizing its official development aid programme. Known as KazAID since its reform between 2011 and 2015, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Kazakh foreign assistance developed itself to go beyond ad-hoc support (essentially of a financial nature), of regional nations during crises, as in Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan. Over the past years of professionalization, KazAID has thus delivered humanitarian and development assistance to countries beyond Central Asia, in Latin America and the Pacific. It also proves that more profit-seeking investments (at least in terms of international respectability and status) replaced the traditional 'cash aid' of the oil and gas exporting countries of the Gulf and Central Asia.

In a search of practical solutions against a background of under-resourced refugee assistance, the UNHCR also lobbied Muslim nations and states with the underlying 'religious card' related to Syrian refugee crisis. For example, in 2016 the organization launched Zakat programme with the Tabah Foundation in order to provide help for the refugees of the Middle East. The first Tabah report

explains religious norms and recommendations related to the reception and management of religious funds (zakat and sadaqah) by the UNHCR (Tabah, 2017). UNHCR also tries to underline conceptual similarities between conventions related to refugee protection and Islamic traditions. From this perspective, the 1951 and 1967 Conventions are not perceived as ‘Western’, but rather as universal and can cover a part of so called ‘Islamic humanitarianism’ according to the book ‘The Right to Asylum between Islamic Shari’ah and International Refugee Law A Comparative Study’, interestingly prepared in collaboration between UNHCR, Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and Naif Arab University (Abou-El-Wafa, 2009).

Table.1: Islamic Asylum Norms and Geneva Convention 1951

Focal Different Points	Islamic Norms	Geneva 1951 Convention
Asylum granting authority	State and individual	State
Beneficiaries	No exclusion	Except SCO list defined by the granting states
Extraterritorial aspect of the asylum grant	Yes	No
The nature of the right to asylum	Asylum is an inalienable right for individuals in terms of grant and enjoyment	Does not grant automatic or permanent protection to whoever seeks it
Involuntary or compulsory asylum and refugee extradition	An obligation and in some cases an inevitable choice	It shall rest with the State granting asylum to evaluate the grounds for the grant of asylum
The grant of the nationality of the state of asylum	Nationality granted automatically	Nationality is granted based under regulations and norms

Source: Compiled by author, based on Abou-El-Wafa (2009)

To this day, none of these efforts has led to the signature of the 1951 Geneva Convention by Arab Gulf countries. Moreover, even the ‘Arab Convention on Regulating the Status of Refugees in Arab Countries’, prepared in 1994 by the Arab League, which was largely similar to the Geneva Convention, has never been ratified by the majority of Arab states (UNHCR Refworld, 2017). Besides that, although the Organization of Islamic Conference has raised and taken serious steps to focus on Syrian refugee problem, no real outcomes came from the members of the organization. The ‘Cairo Declaration on the Protection of Refugees and Displaced Persons in the Arab World’ (1994), which was mainly focused on Palestinian refugees, urged in article 4 that it

'Hopes that Arab States which have not yet acceded to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the status of refugee will do so' (UNHCR Refworld, 2017).

Therefore, the recent work of Hanafi raises several questions related to solidarity between Muslim communities in the light of Syrian refugee crisis (Hanafi, 2017). By using Braumans' framework, he considers that "politics of pity" has replaced compassion, empathy and justice (Brauman, 1996). Pity as a social convention occurs at a distance, while compassion takes place when the person who is suffering is in front of the person not suffering (Hanafi, 2017: 113). He points out that the Gulf's approach towards the Syrian refugee crisis reflects a sense of pity rather than compassion as the dominant force among the Gulf populace. He also describes the divergence of opinions among Islamic scholars in relation to the question of Syrian refugees. He shows that *fatawa* (religious norms) emitted by the *ulama* (Islamic scholars) can be at times contradictory, depending on the place/space they emanate from. The universality of those *fatawa* can be debated based on the simple fact that they seem to obey a specific political agenda (Hanafi, 2017), rather than the values they should uphold. Although the Syrian crisis is probably the largest refugee crisis since 1967, there is no real theological unity towards the refugee situation and a common position vis-a vis the Syrian refugee crisis, except some pity and a formal yet powerless call to peace. Therefore Hanafi (2017) decides to qualify the *ulama* as *textualist who 'advocate in very careful relationship with the majority population (for Muslim migrants and refugees in the West) and sometimes against the basic concept of integration as defined by migration studies, politically cautious realists who are 'keen on establishing good conditions for migrants in the host societies...but one feels that there are many unspoken issues (Kafala system, Syrian refugees)' and the humanists (such as European Council for Fatwa and Research) who 'move from dichotomy Land of Islam vs. Land of Disbelief frame into humanity frame'*.

In fact, Gulf countries do not recognize refugees as so and in turn, some Gulf state officials have criticized the conditions of refugees living in camps. Saudi Foreign Minister Adel bin Ahmed Al Jubeir for instance, once expressed his ideas about Saudi aid for Syrian and Yemeni refugees:

'...Since the beginning of the crisis Saudi Arabia has taken in almost 2.4 million Syrians, of whom somewhere between 600-700 thousand Syrians still remain in Saudi Arabia. Over the past year and a half, Saudi Arabia has taken in almost a million Yemenis, of whom probably 700-800 thousand still remain. None of them is in a refugee camp, none of them lives in a tent... King Salman decreed last summer that any Syrian who comes to Saudi Arabia or any Yemeni who comes to Saudi Arabia be immediately provided with the work permit, so they can have legal status, they can have jobs, they have access to healthcare and their children can go to schools. Because we don't have one person in a tent, and as a consequence we have not registered them with UN

organizations as refugees. We want them to live an honourable life and we want them to live a decent life. Not living in tents or refugee camps. So we have taken in lots of Syrian refugees, lots of Yemeni refugees as guests, not as refugees. And they are free to stay in Saudi Arabia until the crisis is over and their homes are rebuilt, and they can go back. And we have not made a great deal out of it, because we are not doing to get credit, we are doing it to help our brothers both in Syria and Yemen. And this is in addition to substantial financial assistance that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has provided to Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan.’ (Embassy of Saudi Arabia to USA, 2016).

The above official statement illustrates the public position of the Gulf states on Arab refugees: they try to offer decent living conditions and economic opportunities (better than those offered by neighboring countries and the UNHCR) and consider Syrians and Yemenis the same as other guest workers. Some scholars argue that these high figures cannot be verified (De Bel-Air, 2015) but maintain that the Gulf states have accepted Syrians, although not as ‘refugees’. It is arguably partly due to the development of moral values and the concept of “help” in Gulf countries. Primarily, aid in the case of almost all Gulf states is not seen as a purely voluntary act, but rather a set of Islamic obligations, with both the Zakat (which entails giving at least 2.5 per cent year of one’s earnings) and the compulsory solidarity with the Muslim nation’s most destitute, due to the fact that the Gulf countries are “blessed” with given natural resources, generally perceived as a “*ni’ma*” (bounty, in Arabic) from God. For instance, the former President and founder of the UAE federation, Sheykh Zayed, once stated that:

‘Any aid we supply to any Arab country is in fact aid for the Emirates and our Arab mother land. No Arab country should be in misery in its assistance to a sister country because God does not give us money to appropriate for ourselves. It is a gift from God to be invested for the benefit of the people, all the people’ (Almezaini 2012, p.107)

As Islamic principles continue to greatly influence the allocation of aid (emanating from both individual donors and governments) which is considered as an obligation rather than a voluntary act, governmental funds for Islamic solidarity (including the ones related to the management of *zakat*) constitute an important pillar of foreign aid in GCC.

Almezaini considers (in the case of UAE) that moral dimensions of foreign aid “*lies in the principles and values of both intrinsic human behaviour and these (Islam and Arabism) particular ideologies*’ (Almezaini, 2012). Therefore, he finds it useful to illustrate that Gulf states’ aid is not only limited to ‘Arab’ and ‘Islamic’ identities, but includes other communities and countries (Khalifa Isaac, 2015).

Despite such moralistic considerations as well as religious and ethnic affinities, state interests of GCC and CAR states are arguably the primary

explanation for contemporary policies towards refugees and asylum seekers. Both regions consider stability as a key challenge amid complex and systematic conflicts occurring close to their borders. Therefore, state interest in both regions is connected to 'regime security' that includes political, economic and social policies of the ruling elite.

First of all, although Gulf countries and Kazakhstan host large numbers of economic migrants as rentier economies, the Gulf states are less enthusiastic about *hosting* humanitarian migrants. Considering Syrians as 'guests' does not grant Syrian refugees the same treatment granted by the Geneva Convention, which for example, stipulates that after a certain number of years in a country, refugees can apply for a nationalization. Although GCC and CAR elites articulate the idea that hydrocarbon natural resources are "given" by God, they also clearly show that they understand them as a finite source of wealth. Therefore, unlike 'productive states', it remains difficult for 'allocation states' (Beblawi and Luciani, 1987) to have long term projects due to the instability of the price of commodities and to host refugees in times of lower oil prices.

As a consequence, Palestinians are entering into their third generation as guests in Gulf monarchies yet they cannot become citizens there, while it is a serious economic and political concern for any state in the Near East where the international conventions have been ratified. A similar issue can be observed with regards to Afghan refugees in Iran who are likely to stay there for additional decades. Rentier states of the Gulf and Central Asia may be willing to offer financial assistance for humanitarian aid or accept economic migrants, but they are less open to accepting humanitarian migrants due to the nature of their hydrocarbons-based economies. The same trend can also be observed in other rentier states, such as Algeria, Norway and Venezuela. In the case of Norway, which heavily depends on hydrocarbons and owns the world's largest sovereign wealth fund as of 2017 (more than USD 1 trillion in assets), they managed to reduce refugee admission to Norway by more than 95 per cent compared to 2015 through implementing more restrictive policies.

Secondly, since their early independence, CARs privilege ethnic dimensions under the framework of nation building. Although, in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan the concrete measures related to allocation of funds or conditions for compatriots living abroad are not advanced, both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan decided to stress the emigration program of compatriots living abroad in order to pursue 'Kazakhization' and 'Kyrgyzization' of each society. In the Gulf countries, Arabism and pan-Arab solidarity is being replaced by a so-called '*new nationalism*', arguably '*as a response to demographic pressures, fiscal challenges, the rising threats of transnational ideologies and movements and regional unrest*' according to Smith Diwan (Diwan, 2016). Therefore, tribal identity and

support of the country and its leadership are becoming the new boundaries of nationalism in GCC. As a result, unlike what is found in multicultural state models (Kymlicka, 1996; Parekh, 2000), these states cannot easily “absorb” large numbers of what are increasingly defined as the “others”.

Thirdly, both regions have rapidly increasing populations which is an important factor to consider when explaining their position on refugees and asylum seekers. In fact, the population growth in Central Asia has around 1.4 per cent annual increase with a fertility rate that is above 2.5 per cent (UN, 2015). In addition, more than half of the population in CAR is under 30 years of age, reflecting the rate of demographic growth in recent years (Bussolo, Koettl and Sinnott, 2015). According to UNFPA forecasts, population ageing in Central Asia can only happen in the second half of the XXI century (UNFPA, 2017). Saudi Arabia had around 3 million inhabitants in 1950, but more than 31.5 million in 2016, of whom 21.1 million are Saudi citizens.

Fourthly, even before the Syrian refugee crisis, issues were raised concerning the UNHCR’s funding and transparency. Since the organization only receives 2 per cent of its funding needs via the UN, which covers mostly administrative work, the UNHCR needs to raise the remaining 98 per cent of its finance via donors (Vayrynen, 2001). *“This means that UNHCR has a hard time planning its activities, and it never can be sure whether the humanitarian obligations can be met”* (Vayrynen, 2001: 151). Although, the agency’s operational expansion grants itself recognition as an important actor in various regions, its lack of capacity and budgetary uncertainties will remain as key problems in ensuring that non-donor governments cooperate with the organization.

Fifthly, security challenges remain as the main concern in both regions. Therefore, the case of refugees is not only seen from humanitarian, but also from a security perspective. Specifically, the old threat and emergence of radical Islamist groups such as the Taliban, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Daesh and Hizbut-Tahrir in Central Asia increased the concerns of authorities towards Afghan and other refugees. The threat from Daesh and the long struggle against Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has become a direct concern for the whole Middle Eastern region. Therefore, currently, the small GCC look first and foremost for stability within the region (Todman, 2016), rather than the plague of Syrians on their borders. Old solidarities are here, as in several other rentier countries, victims of the modern redefinition of state interest.

4. CONCLUSION

Although Islamic norms and tradition of asylum are supposed to provide better conditions than the Geneva Convention of 1951 and 1967, no Gulf state currently applies them in practice, or at least not holistically. The absence of

efficient religious (Muslim) or ethnic (e.g. Arab, Turkmen, Tadjik) aid mechanisms functioning at the international level is revealing of a decay of traditional solidarities. As paradoxical as it may seem to the external observer who may notice the inflows of foreign workers towards the hydrocarbons exporting states of these regions, that duality between welcomed economic migrants and unwelcome humanitarian ones shall be explained by several concrete factors such as the resource-based and rentier national economies, their rising demography, the unstable neighbourhood, and the present period of lower oil prices ever since 2014.

It is important to underline here that CAR' and Gulf Arab countries' approach is not very different from that of the EU countries towards the mass migrant crisis. As coined by the report of the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies (2016), the EU states try to externalize their borders by offering financial contributions to bordering countries, such as Turkey and North African countries, inter alia. CAR and Gulf Arab states do not consider the refugee crisis as a purely local or regional one, but as a global concern. They try to cooperate with other regional and global powers in order to reduce their political and economic burden. For example, previously Uzbekistan proposed *Six plus Three initiative* aimed at peaceful resolution of the Afghan conflict with the enrolment of six neighboring countries of Afghanistan (China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) and three main anti-terrorist actors such as Russian Federation, USA and NATO.

The current refugee crisis proves that the national asylum policies are still completely dependent on states and their interests, first and foremost. Consequently, engagements with the International Refugee Regime and International Human Rights Instruments can provide a useful platform for state-to-state cooperation. The growing financial gap in UNHCR operations in many regions shows the urgency of such cooperation with non-state actors including private donors. New and creative institutional arrangements are needed as traditional solidarities are, in both regions as well as in several other rentier countries, victims of the modernization of politics and its uncaring redefinition of state interest in times of low oil prices.

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