

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND HUMANITARIAN AID AMONG  
URBAN SYRIAN REFUGEES IN JORDAN

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## **Abstract**

Strong social networks have been shown to correlate with improved economic outcomes and emotional wellbeing in urban refugee populations. In the Middle East and North Africa, social networks are based on a wide variety of relational identities that interconnect, suggesting an array of opportunities for community self-support. However, this research shows that Syrian refugees living in Irbid, Jordan, no longer actively turn to social networks for support. The financial and emotional strain of exile, and the failure of international aid agencies to support the maintenance of pre-existing social connections or the development of new ones, has led to the collapse of social networks among Syrian refugees in Jordan. Without the ability to forge new, strong ties in urban Jordan, Syrians also struggle to make bridging ties with the local and humanitarian communities. The result is social and spatial segregation, humanitarian programming which is poorly attuned to the needs of Syrians, and a reproduction of camp space and associated relations of power in the urban setting.

## Dedication

*I can only hope that this work might somehow serve the people  
who call or have called Syria home, however small a gesture that may be.*

## Acknowledgements

I could never have achieved this project—logistically or logically—without the support of my supervisor, Prof. Jennifer Hyndman. Thank you for having the patience to let me make my mistakes, and thank you again for putting me back on track.

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Without the advice and support of Dr. Gillian Gregory, I would never have found the start of this trail, much less gone down the path. It is difficult to count all the unexpected ways she has influenced my life, from the Ucali to Azraq.

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With the utmost sincerity and gratitude,



Matthew Russell Stevens  
2 August 2017  
Charlottetown, PEI

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## List of Acronyms

<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GoJ</b>	Government of Jordan
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Governmental Organization
<b>JRP</b>	Jordan Response Plan
<b>MoU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>SAA</b>	Syrian National Army
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Program



## Chapter One: Introduction, Background, Literature and Methods

In the winter before the war, a young, stoic red-haired boy, maybe fourteen or fifteen, stood beside me in the plaza in front of the central citadel in Aleppo, Syria. We were sporting matching leather jackets and keffiyehs—that polarizing symbol, the traditional Arab scarf—his red, mine a meaningless blue. We swapped names in broken Arabic—“Ismi Muhammed,” “Ana Matt.” He laughed: my name, in Arabic, means “dead.” I’m dead. It was a joke I had become used to telling.

He took me into the market and bought me a coffee—small, thick, strong, with a hint of sweetness. We drank slowly under the shadow of the minaret of the central mosque, put up by the Umayyids more than nine centuries ago. Muhammed held his head at a bold angle and nodded at the men that passed: he was playing out the role of the Arab man, a youth on the vulnerable cusp of adulthood. Impulsively, I reached into my bag and handed Muhammed a harmonica I had carried from Canada. He suddenly broke: his grin reappeared and he flashed the small instrument to his friends across the lane, blew a few experimental tuneless bars. I had him pen his name and phone number in my notebook.

I never called. Two months later, I left for Turkey, expecting a short stay there and swift return to join in the “new” Syria. One year later, under mortar fire, the ancient minaret was brought down. (Excerpt from personal journal, 2013)

And today, where is Muhammed, my young friend? With over 5 million people displaced across international borders (UNHCR, 2017a; MMP, 2017a) and an estimated 6.3 million internally displaced within Syria’s borders (UNOCHA, 2017; MMP, 2017a), nearly half of Syria’s pre-war population have made the decision to leave their homes under threat of violence. Academics and humanitarians struggle to balance the scope of the tragedy with the biographies and human stories of individuals and families displaced. Of those Syrians who have crossed international borders, close to 660,000 have

registered as refugees with UNHCR in Jordan (UNHCR, 2017; MMP, 2017a), though the total number of Syrians residing in Jordan may be as high as 1.3 million (MMP, 2017a; Ghazal, 2016; DoS 2016). With 6.6 million Jordanian citizens of both Jordanian and Palestinian origin, there is one Syrian in Jordan for every five Jordanians<sup>1</sup> (Ghazal, 2016; DoS 2016).

In 2014, when I carried out the fieldwork for this research, 82% of Syrians in Jordan lived outside of formal refugee camps, either in urban centres or informal tented settlements. While UNHCR and other agencies have taken unprecedented initiative<sup>2</sup> in supporting urban-based Syrians, 4 of 5 urban Syrian households benefit only from World Food Program food vouchers—recently reduced to a value of only 10 Jordanian Dinars (JD) (less than \$15USD) per person per month—and the opportunity to apply for one-time emergency cash assistance (WFP, 2013; 2016). Meanwhile, Amman, host to more than 175,000 Syrians, has been declared the most expensive city in terms of living cost in the Middle East (Al Emam, 2017; UNHCR, 2017a). High cost of living, increasing Government restrictions, and dwindling humanitarian support have pushed Syrians to relocate to the camps since I began my research. The number of Syrians in refugee camps in Jordan has risen from 18% in 2014 to 22% in 2017 (UNHCR, 2017a). The

1 The hosting of very large numbers of refugees relative to local populations is the new norm in the Middle East, with over 1 million Syrians registered as refugees in Lebanon and nearly 3 million registered in Turkey (UNHCR, 2017a). As formal migration pathways become increasingly restricted, informal migration means numbers are likely even higher. This is especially so in Lebanon, where registration has been closed since 6 May 2015. Estimates now run as high as 1.5 million Syrians residing in Lebanon, more than 1 Syrian for every 3 Lebanese citizens in the country (MMP, 2017a).

2 Until 1997, UNHCR policy disqualified all urban-based refugees from humanitarian assistance (UNHCR, 1997). When UNHCR 'discovered' large numbers of Iraqis had quietly crossed the border and were already living in urban Jordan, UNHCR Jordan took the initiative to establish services for them in cities (Calhoun, 2010; Lenner, 2016; Crisp, 2017). Aid to Syrians in urban areas, while at times problematic, marked a new standard in UNHCR support of refugees who choose to reside outside of camps.

conflict entered its sixth year in March 2017, and Syrian families have long forgotten the one-time emergency assistance that most agencies provide. The vast majority of Syrian households in urban Jordan are now struggling to make ends meet with little to no support from international aid agencies.

In Chapter Two of this thesis, I consider the question: *how do Syrians in urban Jordan use membership in social networks to support their wellbeing and livelihoods?* Literature suggests that refugees' membership in strong social networks correlates both with a sense of belonging in their host countries and with access to the employment opportunities which support a stable life (Long, 2011; Buscher, 2011; Landau and Duponchal, 2011; Calhoun, 2010; Fábos & Kibreab, 2007). Anthropological studies of the Middle East emphasize the strength, size, and complexity of social networks in the region (Batatu 1999; Calhoun 2010; Crisp, Janz, Riera, and Samy, 2009; Chatty and Mansour, 2011; Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1993; Haddad, 2011; Leenders, 2012; Leenders and Heydemann, 2012; Salamandra, 2004; Wedeen, 1999, 2013). The establishment (or re-establishment) of these networks by Syrians in exile influence how Syrian refugees interact with one another and with their host societies—and, in turn, influence well-being and livelihood. Yet my research has shown that Syrians are receiving very little financial or emotional support from social connections, and are struggling to make new bridging ties. The result is increasing segregation, both social and spatial.

In Chapter Three I then ask: *what is the interaction between refugee and humanitarian social networks in urban Jordan? How do these interactions affect the*

*wellbeing of Syrians? How does the interaction of these social networks play out across space?* In the course of my research, I found that refugees shared few bridging ties (Ager and Strang, 2008; Calhoun, 2010; Putnam, 2000) with humanitarian aid workers and are not often members of the same social networks. Despite a lack of social interaction, refugees and humanitarians are linked by relationships of unequal power (Hyndman, 2000). These relationships both create and are created by the urban space in which refugees live (Massey, 2005; Lefebvre, 1991). Social isolation of humanitarian aid workers exists elsewhere, but has not been closely studied in Jordan (Autessere, 2014; Apthorpe, 2011a, 2011b; Mosse, 2011; Harrison, 2013; Smirl 2015; Tauson, 2016). I examine how space is created for refugees in urban Jordan and in Azraq camp, and what role unequal structures of power and “humanitarian reasoning” (Brun, 2016) play in the production of that space. I argue that the structures of humanitarian control and maintenance in camps are being reproduced in urban space.

While a body of critical academic scholarship on Syrian displacement is beginning to emerge, most international humanitarian aid work continues to be based on reports of a descriptive or diagnostic nature, based on biological rather than biographical data (Hoffman, 2017; Brun, 2016; Hyndman, 2000), and focused on recommendations addressing immediate need rather than long-term support of people with physical, cultural, and emotional needs (Brun, 2016; Tauson, 2016). I intend this research to join a body of academic literature which provides contrast to “official refugee reports... as ways of knowing about a subject population” (Hyndman, 2000, p. 118; see also Hoffman, 2017; Brun, 2016; Tauson, 2016) and produces a more comprehensive, open-

ended picture of refugees' lives and experiences. I have attempted to foreground the voices of people who agreed to share their knowledge with me, as far as possible.

*Background: From the Hawran Plateau to the Syrian Civil War*

*Recent aesthetic displacement onto such concerns as fashion choices could no longer distract from the inequality generated by market openings and the endless deferral of political reforms. Nor could glamor and glitz obscure the regime's preference for handling protest by promising redress while acting to destroy all perceived threats to its survival. And, yet, even as Syrians were joining the protests in locales throughout the country—in Syria's two major cities, Aleppo (Syria's key commercial hub) and Damascus—the population failed to mobilize in significant numbers. The question is why not? (Wedeen, 2013, p. 842)*

Under the late Ottoman Empire, there were no barriers to migration comparable to the borders which now separate the modern Levantine states of Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel. The fertile Hawran plain, which today is now split by the Syria/Jordan border, was a region with strong communal ties: nomadic and agriculturalist families and larger, tight-knit social units known as *qaba'il* (in the singular, *qabilah*)<sup>3</sup> spanned the region (Batatu, 1999; Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1993). Mercantile trade took place freely throughout the plain, leading to a strong merchant class which frequently intermarried (Salamandra, 2004; Haddad, 2011). Today, Hawrani identity still competes with Syrian and Jordanian national identity (Hokayem, 2013).

3 The literature often translates *qabilah/qaba'il* to "tribe" in English, but I prefer to avoid this term. Instead I leave the word untranslated. Another related term used in this text, *'ashira*, refers to a subunit of a *qabilah*.

The collapse of Ottoman rule at the end of the First World War marked the beginning of the European Mandate period (Anderson, 2013; Mutawi, 1987). Britain and France partitioned the Levant into *de facto* colonies, splitting the Hawran (Batatu, 1999; Rabinovich, 2008; Anderson, 2013). The French Mandate was roughly equivalent to the territory of modern Syria and Lebanon. French colonial strategy fostered religious and ethnic minority identities, both to counter the rising tide of pan-Arab nationalism and to provide fodder for the colonial maxim, “divide and rule” (Rabinovich, 2008). The British Mandate, conversely, covered what is now the states of Jordan and Israel. During this period, cross-border loyalties to *qaba’il* remained influential. For example, the ‘*Atrash*, a large *qabilah* of the Hawran spanning both sides of the border, led revolts against both French and British rule (Rabinovich, 2008; Anderson, 2013).

The arbitrary colonial borders established during this period now define the borders of independent states, and tensions over borders and sovereignty persist<sup>4</sup> (Wedeen, 1999; 2013). The border between Jordan and Syria divides the Harwan plateau, despite lingering social, economic, and familial ties (Leenders, 2012; Leenders & Heydemann, 2012; Rabinovich, 2008; Batatu, 1999). In Jordan, the British-backed Hashemite King Abdullah I built a stable government by integrating local *qaba’il* into the state, leading to a fortification of traditional networks of power (Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1993; Rabinovich, 2008). Syria followed a drastically different political path as a succession military presidents carried out a rapid series of violent coups. In 1970,

4 Perhaps the strongest example of tension over sovereignty in the Levant is the persistent popular (although rarely state-backed) claims of Syrian sovereignty over Lebanon (Wedeen, 1999; 2013).

Hafez al-Assad consolidated political control over Syria, beginning what was to become a 30 year rule (Wedeen, 1999; Batatu, 1999).

Politics of identity lay at the heart of the new Government of Syria. Hafiz populated his regime with trusted family members (Batatu, 1999). The government began to be associated with a socio-religious group known as the *Alawi*. However, many *Alawi* who were not closely tied by family or friendship to the government suffered from poverty and political neglect (Wedeen, 1999; Batatu, 1999). Hafez's governing style proved to be repressive: he established an extensive secret security force known as the *mukhabarat* and promoted a hyperbolic presidential “cult” to help ensure loyalty to his rule (Lesch, 2012). Summary imprisonment and torture of dissenters was common; security and fear went hand in hand (Wedeen, 1999; 2013). Hafez based his rule on a self-claimed ability to balance the powers of competing sectarian groups (Wedeen, 1999; 2013; Batatu, 1999). The *qaba'il* of the Hawran in Syria—now known as Dar'a province—were forced deep underground (Batatu, 1999; Wedeen, 1999; Salamandra, 2004; Leenders, 2012).

Bashar al-Assad, the son of Hafez, became president of Syria in 2000 upon the unexpected but unrelated deaths of his father and older brother.<sup>5</sup> Bashar's presidency eased Government controls and opened Syria to the outside world. Economic reforms allowed for an increase in private businesses, producing urban wealth. Bashar opened

5 Bassel al-Assad, Bashar's older brother, had been groomed to inherit the presidency, while Bashar pursued a career in ophthalmology in the United Kingdom. When Bassel died in a car crash in 1994, Bashar quickly returned and began preparations to follow his father. Hafez died in 2000 of a heart attack and Bashar assumed the presidency (Lesch, 2012).

Syria to ATMs, cellphones, and the internet.<sup>6</sup> Support for Bashar in the urban centres of Damascus and Aleppo was high (Wedeen, 2013; Lesch, 2012). Yet these massive changes in the cities masked the hardship that Syrians experienced outside the big cities, in regions such as Dar'a: Bashar's government stripped social welfare systems, subsidies, and agricultural price controls, leading to spiraling poverty and a massive gap between rich and poor (Wedeen, 2013). Unemployed and underemployed youth could not afford to care for aging family members or, perhaps more importantly, pay the dowries required to marry prospective spouses, move out of their parents' homes, and begin a family (Lesch, 2012). Cronyism expanded rapidly, as entrepreneurs close to the regime earned billions operating monopolies (Lesch, 2012; Haddad, 2011; Wedeen, 2013). Behind it all, the secret police continued to maintain public order through fear, clandestine abduction, and abuse (Wedeen, 2013; Hokayem, 2013).

When the string of protests known as the Arab Spring began to spread across the Middle East, international analysts predicted that Syria would not follow suit (Lesch, 2012; Leenders, 2012). Yet regional and international analysts failed to look beyond the thriving business communities of Damascus and Aleppo to the struggling rural poor (Lesch, 2012; Leenders, 2012; Hokayem, 2013). Starting in March 2011, a series of escalating protests began in Dar'a province, still a culturally independent region of Syria with persistent sense of Hawrani identity. When Government security forces met peaceful protests with gunfire, a cycle of escalating protest and repression spread

6 Bashar's international upbringing is sometimes cited in his decision to open Syria to the outside world—as was his time as head of the Syrian Computer Society (Lesch, 2012; Haddad, 2011).



outward from Dar'a. Protest against the Government eventually swept all but the most dense urban centres of Syria<sup>7</sup> (Leenders, 2012; Lesch, 2012; Wedeen, 2013).

When groups of protesters began to arm in self-defense, open civil conflict began. Decentralized rebel groups formed around defecting Syrian National Army (SAA) units (Hokayem, 2013). Support from Gulf countries and the United States propelled a proliferation of rebel groups with widely varied aims. Meanwhile, the SAA and other military groups supporting the Assad government began to operate increasingly like militias themselves. SAA units began to act with more autonomy, leaving the hierarchy of command unclear (Hokayem, 2013), and pro-Government civilian militias took on increasingly large roles in the conflict (Hokayem, 2013; Yazbeck, 2012). Reports of human rights abuses proliferated on both sides (Hokayem, 2013; Yazbeck, 2012). The SAA began to employ tactics which have been identified as war crimes, such as the deployment of chemical weapons, indiscriminate bombing, and starvation siege tactics (Amnesty International, 2017; 2015a; Hokayem, 2013).

In the face of indiscriminate violence, forced conscription, and economic collapse, millions of Syrians fled for neighbouring countries (Hokayem, 2013; Wedeen, 2013; Amnesty International 2017; 2015a; Hamdo and Bassiki, 2016; Ferris, Kirişci and

7 Two women from the locally prominent Abu Zeid *qabilah* were arrested in January 2011, ostensibly for openly discussing the protests in Egypt. Shortly afterward, a group of youth aged 10 to 15 (which included the children of the arrested women) spray-painted the local school with slogans borrowed from the Egyptian revolts from months before: “*ash-sha’ab yurid isqat an-nizam*,” or “the people demand the downfall of the regime” (Leenders, 2012; Lesch, 2012). After the local governor rudely rejected the community’s attempts to intercede on behalf of the arrested children—in traditional terms, a powerful insult—the following Friday, a small group of protesters, chiefly close members of the Abu Zeid *qabilah*, approached the governor’s mansion (Leenders, 2012). Security forces met this protest harshly, and killed two protesters by gunfire; the next Friday, hundreds marched in the street of Dar’a. When this subsequent protest resulted in further violent deaths, a cycle of escalating protest and repression was released, eventually sweeping all but the most dense urban centres of Syria (Leenders, 2012; Lesch, 2012).

Shaikh, 2013). More than 130,000 Syrians from Dar'a have settled in Irbid Governorate, on the Jordanian side of the Hawran plain (UNHCR, 2017a), one key group among the millions displaced inside and outside of the country. The dynamics of forced migration from Syria are likely influenced by the strong social connections between the Syrians of Dar'a and Jordanians of Irbid (Leenders, 2012). Hawrani identity persists in the region and intersects with identities based on *qaba'il*, religion, language, and citizenship. In this study, I seek to better understand how intersectional identities mediate belonging to social networks, and how bridging ties to host communities can influence livelihood and wellbeing in displacement.

#### *Jordan's Relationship with Refugees*

*'Imagined communities' of belonging may constitute national identities, but they can also create the basis for noncommunities of the excluded. (Hyndman, 2000, p. xxv)*

*Every society... produces a space, its own space. (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 31)*

Refugees have found safety and, often, complete integration in Jordan. Before independence, Armenians and Circassians settled in and around Amman, eventually becoming valued members of society (HRH Princess Basma bint Talal, 2014; Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1993; Lenner, 2016). Palestinians, chiefly arriving in 1948 and 1967, received full Jordanian citizenship while retaining Palestinian nationality (Mutawi, 1987; Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1993; Lenner, 2016).

However, violent revolt against the regime by the Palestinian Liberation Organization contributed to a serious shift in public and political regard of refugees in the Kingdom (Lenner, 2016; Mutawi, 1986). As such, groups of Iraqis arriving in the early 1990s and 2007-08 were met with new caution by the Government of Jordan. Iraqis arrived slowly, over time, and UNHCR did not notice their arrival until four years after the United States invasion (Lenner, 2016; Calhoun, 2010; Crisp et al., 2009). Agencies and the Government did not establish camps. Instead, they permitted Iraqis to settle in cities, but did not grant the right to work. Iraqis therefore mostly forged informal livelihoods with considerable vulnerability (Calhoun, 2010; Lenner, 2016). The same sense of institutional skepticism persisted as Yemenis, Libyans, new groups of Iraqis and (in much larger numbers) Syrians have arrived since 2011. Reception of Sudanese and Somali refugees is even more unfavourable, ostensibly as they lack a shared cultural, linguistic, and ethnic identity with Jordanian citizens. Practically, their status as visible minorities may also influence their lack of acceptance by the Jordanian community (Calhoun, 2010; MMP, 2017b).

Jordan is not a signatory of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention or its adjoining 1967 Protocol. The Kingdom signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with UNHCR in 1998, assigning the task of refugee status determination and protection to UNHCR (UNHCR, 1998). This MoU was updated in 2014 to address the Syrian situation, but has never been made public; as such, the present relationship between the Government of Jordan and UNHCR is kept secret (Lenner, 2016; Lenner and Schmelter, 2016). Until recently, refugees were typically referred to as “guests” (*duyuf* in Arabic) in official

discourse (Chatty and Mansour, 2011; Turner, 2015). The official stance towards refugees in Jordan has been, until recently, that they are welcome to find refuge in the Kingdom, but that they must not be made so welcome as to stay permanently.

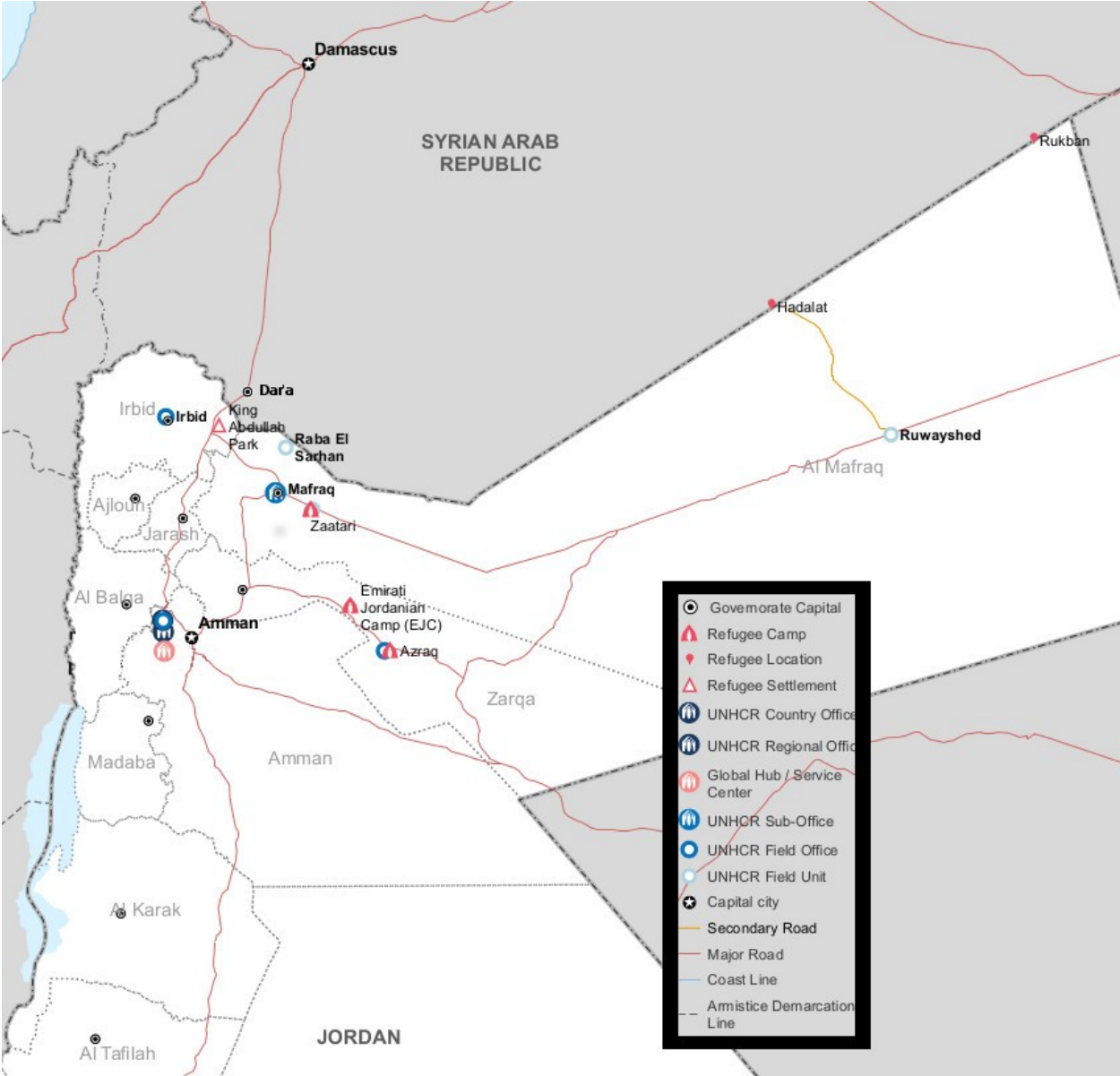


Fig. 1: Southern Syria and Northern Jordan. Adapted from Jordan Situation Map (UNHCR, March 2013)

Jordan's tolerance of Syrian refugees living in urban spaces has steadily declined as the war in Syria continues and the strain on communities mounts. Initially, all Syrians were able to cross into Jordan with few restrictions. Increasing numbers of arrivals led the Government of Jordan to close the Dar'a/Irbid border crossing to establish Zaatari and other refugee camps in 2013 (Turner, 2015; Achilli, 2015; Hoffman, 2017). Formally, camp residents in Jordan are only able to leave the camp via "sponsorship" by a Jordanian citizen; however, many left the camps informally for cities where they continued to be served by humanitarian aid agencies (see Chapter 2; Achilli, 2015; Lenner, 2016). In cities, local Governments and police tacitly accepted Syrians working in the informal economy, though penalties for being caught in occasional sweeps were severe: deportation to Syria was a common punishment (see Chapter 3; Achilli, 2015; Su and Laub, 2017; Hayden, 2017). A politics of fear kept Syrians in line.

Until 2015, the less accessible eastern desert border crossings remained open. However, inside Syria, the route to this border checkpoint was very expensive and dangerous, crossing multiple front lines (Amnesty International, 2015b; Achilli, 2015). Asylum claimants arriving with passports entered the country freely, but the Jordanian military settled those without travel documents in the newly opened Azraq camp (Hoffman, 2017; Achilli, 2015). As numbers of Syrians in Jordan continued to grow, occasional violent incidents attributed to Syrians occurred (Al Jazeera, 2016), international aid began to curtail (for more, see Chapter 2), and Jordan joined the international "fight on ISIS" (Achilli, 2015), the Government of Jordan placed limits on daily crossings. Informal camps of Hadalat and Rukban began to form inside "the berm",

the unclaimed land between Syria and Jordan, where Syrians waited to be admitted and sheltered from violence (Amnesty International, 2015b; MMP, 2017a). In Azraq camp, a new, high security area called “Village 5” was established for the detention of new arrivals, ensuring that new arrivals would remain in the camp and out of urban areas (Hoffman, 2017; Staton, 2016b). After a bombing at Rukban camp in December 2016, the largest informal camp on the berm, the border has been fully closed to all but those in need of urgent medical attention—who are only able to remain after treatment if their condition makes return to the border camps impossible (MMP, 2017a; Al Jazeera 2017; Vio, 2016).

Government policy towards urban refugees has become similarly more strict since late 2014. Syrians were compelled to re-register with the Government of Jordan in 2015 in order to retain access to aid. The new process collected more detailed personal “biodata” and produced a new identity card that is tied to the location of registration (Achilli, 2015; Lenner and Schmelter, 2016; Lenner, 2016). Syrians could only receive aid in the communities where they were registered, curtailing open migration between urban centers and confining residents to camps. The Government could now enforce a moratorium on aid to Syrians who left camps outside of formal channels after early 2015 (Achilli, 2015; Lenner and Schmelter, 2016; Hoffman, 2017). Free access to health care ceased in 2014 (Amnesty International, 2016). Funding shortfalls led to a steep reduction in food support from WFP (Fröhlich and Stevens, 2015). Numbers of camp-based Syrians have steadily increased since the re-registration exercise of 2015,

securitization of Azraq camp, and corresponding restriction of aid, increasing from 18% in 2014 to 22% in 2017 (UNHCR, 2017a; Turner, 2015; Achilli, 2015).

Increased reliance on encampment is coupled with a growing acceptance that Syrians will remain in Jordan for many years, even if the war in Syria were to stop (Lenner and Turner, forthcoming; see also Chapter 2). In concert with EU desire to reduce informal migration, Jordan has agreed to provide 200,000 sector-restricted work permits to Syrians in Jordan in exchange for EU trade deals<sup>8</sup> (Jordan Compact, 2016; Crawley, 2017; Williams, 2017). While easing access to formal work is a positive step, Syrians have been reluctant to register for permits for a variety of reasons.<sup>9</sup> Serious concerns remain about the quality of work available, as the formation of special economic zones often leads to exploitative working conditions (Lenner and Turner, forthcoming; Crawley, 2017; Yaghmaian, 2017).

Despite the steadily increasing securitization of Syrian refugees and an increasing focus on encampment, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan's reception of Syrian refugees has been generous. With recent census data showing that 29% of residents in Jordan are now Syrian (DoS, 2016), the Kingdom's willingness and ability to welcome refugees is remarkable.<sup>10</sup> While the Jordan Compact work permit scheme is flawed, the offer of work

8 The establishment of the Jordan Compact is tied tightly to the recent advocacy of Prof. Alexander Betts for employment of refugees in Special Economic Zones (SEZs) (2017). This work has recently come under criticism for putting refugees at risk of exploitative labour (Crawley, 2017; Williams, 2017; Turner and Lenner, forthcoming)

9 Reluctance to apply for Jordan Compact work permits is due to: an overly complex application processes; an emphasis on work inside Special Economic Zones, especially in exploitative clothing factories; a limit on sectors accessible outside SEZs to agriculture, construction, cleaning, and the service industry; that most of these industries operate on a daily basis while work permits are annual, and tied to one employer; fear that work permit holders will lose access to aid; transportation costs and distance to workplaces, especially to SEZs; and that most approved industries already operate mostly in the informal sector (Lenner and Turner, forthcoming; Crawley, 2017; Williams, 2017; Staton, 2016a; Alhajahmad, 2017).

10 The willingness of Jordan to welcome such a large number of Syrians is especially striking in comparison to the reluctant and lackluster response of the European Union, the United States, Australia, and Canada.

permits is a positive step towards integration of Syrians into Jordanian society. I feel it important to state that my critiques in this work are intended to help open pathways to improved wellbeing for Syrians and refugees of all backgrounds in Jordan, and hopefully for Jordanians as well.

### Urban Refugees, Refugee Livelihoods, and Protracted Refugee Situations

*By itself, life in urban areas does not constitute an answer to a refugee's problems and may well be significantly more difficult than in a rural settlement, where appropriate community support can more easily be generated and where UNHCR often has programmes. (UNCHR, 1997, p. 2)*

*'Cities' may indeed pose the general 'question of our living together' in a manner more intense than many other kinds of places... The challenge of the negotiation of place is shockingly unequal. (Massey, 2005, p. 169)*

*The most important concern [of town refugees] appeared to be the possible loss of the power to determine one's own status and place of residence. (Malkki, 1995, p. 155).*

UNHCR's most recent estimate is that 53% of refugees worldwide are living outside of traditional camps (UNHCR, 2012). In Jordan, Zaatari refugee camp has attracted major worldwide attention,<sup>11</sup> yet 78% of Syrians in Jordan reside in urban settings, unseen, unheard, and often abandoned (UNHCR, 2017a; UNHCR, 2015; CARE, 2013, 2014). Refugees of other nationalities are barred from living in camps (MMP, 2017a). Yet popular assumption, humanitarian attention, and the majority of academic analysis continue to focus on camp settings.

11 Notably, the more recent Azraq refugee camp has been conversely kept out of the public eye, for reasons that will be discussed in Chapter 3.



Malkki (1995) was among the first to explore the experiences of refugees living in urban areas.<sup>12</sup> At the time of her research, UNHCR considered urban refugees to be an aberration: unruly or exceptional individuals who elected to remove themselves from the protection of the refugee regime by choosing cities over camps. Official discourse portrayed them as either brash or possessing of unusual wealth, thus justifying their disqualification from humanitarian support (Crisp, 2017; UNHCR, 1997). Malkki countered these assumptions by demonstrating that, even without a governing humanitarian policy or external support network, urban-dwelling refugees employed a wide range of strategies and tactics to achieve *de facto* integration, especially through access to the informal economy. Urban-based refugees, she learned, often avoided institutional contact and formal documentation in order to side-step pejorative associations with the identity of “refugee”. She found that decision to live in cities was made expressly to retain the right to determine one's own future (Malkki, 1995).

Malkki's work helped to render urban refugees institutionally visible. Shortly after, UNHCR responded with the publication of its first formal policy on urban refugees, in 1997. This document was the refugee agency's first formal recognition of urban refugees. However, it was a largely punitive document, recognising but resisting that refugees had “voted with their feet” for cities. Access to aid was formally excised for those who chose to live in urban settings (UNHCR, 1997; Crisp, 2017). It was not until the discovery of large numbers of Iraqis living quietly in Amman in 2007 and 2008 that UNHCR began to recognize the benefits of urban support (Crisp, Janz, Riera, & Samy, 2009; Calhoun,

12 In addition, Malkki's insights on how camp and urban spaces contribute to the formation of new identities, and the methods by which urban refugees negotiate identities to integrate into host communities (1995), underly much of my thinking in the second chapter of this thesis.

2010; Crisp, 2017). In 2009 UNHCR's global policy shifted from a camp-based “care and maintenance” model towards a recognition that urban refugees require less support and live relatively more dignified lives than those confined to camps (UNHCR, 2012; 2009; Crisp, 2017).

With the Syrian conflict now entering its sixth year, Syrian refugees are now living in “protracted displacement” (Brun, 2016). Both in camp and urban based settings, protracted refugee situations are increasingly becoming the norm (Loescher & Milner, 2004; Hyndman, 2011; Milner & Loescher, 2011; Long, 2011; Hyndman & Giles, 2011; UNHCR, 2012). Traditional refugee response relied on a model of camp-based “care and maintenance”: biological lives were preserved in stasis while political or military activity resolved whatever conflict had spurred displacement. Displaced persons would then be able to return to their countries of origin voluntarily. However, this approach fails to address the consequences of long-term civil conflicts as experienced in Somalia or the Darfur region of Sudan, leading to enforced encampment of refugees for 20 years or more (Hyndman & Giles, 2011; Hyndman, 2011; Loescher & Milner, 2004; Milner & Loescher, 2011; Harrell-Bond, 1986). More recently, social and economic studies have quantified the potential benefits of including displaced people in host communities (Landau and Duponchel, 2011). Refugees living in urban spaces has in some historical cases been a *de facto* solution to protracted displacement; if refugees are not interfered with by legal powers, the informal economic opportunities of life in the city can counter the otherwise pressing need for perpetual external funding (Milner & Loescher, 2011; Long, 2011; Landau and Duponchel, 2011; Brun, 2016).

## Methods

*I would emphasize that in all of this, the success of fieldwork hinged not so much on a determination to ferret out 'the facts' as on a willingness to leave some stones unturned, to listen to what my informants deemed important, and to demonstrate my trustworthiness by not prying where I was not wanted. (Malkki, 1995, p. 51)*

I conducted this research in Irbid, Jordan, capital of Irbid Governorate and 20km from the Syrian border, from 3 June to 28 November 2014. I selected Jordan over other major host states of Syrian refugees (chiefly Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt, and Iraq) because of its proximity to Syria, its enduring political stability, and its linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and economic ties with Syria (Batatu, 1999; Leenders, 2012). The city of Irbid has cross-border social and familial ties with Dar'a province in Syria, the region where the uprising first began (Leenders & Heydemann, 2012; Leenders, 2012). The city is therefore a major centre for Syrians who are not settled in camps: currently, at best estimate, 130,000 Syrians are residing in Irbid Governorate, compared to approximately 1 million Jordanian citizens (UNHCR, 2017a). Irbid is the first urban centre at a safe distance from the border, defined by the Canadian government as greater than 5km (DFAIT, 2017).

I contracted a female Jordanian field assistant from among Masters students at Yarmouk University in Irbid based on language skill, ability to conduct interviews with sensitivity, experience working with marginalized groups, and in order to form a mixed-gender research team. Pay was per diem (approximately \$20US/day). My research

assistant supported in translation, cultural interpretation, and locating Syrian respondents.

I designed the study around a mixed methodology, utilizing qualitative and quantitative methods. My chief method of data collection was a series of semi-structured interviews (n = 45; these were backed up by a small-scale survey and key informant interviews, which will be discussed in more detail below). These interviews focused on the roles social networks play in participants' lives, especially in securing livelihoods, on the processes through which livelihoods are identified and accessed, on how members of social networks perceive other networks, and on how households perceive their relationships with key figures and agencies outside the household who contribute directly or indirectly to its support (see appendices A through E). My research assistant and I conducted interviews in Syrians' homes. A mixed-gender team allowed for more relaxed interactions with respondents.

Basic demographic data and livelihood information were collected through surveys. Surveys also included questions on social self-identification to help understand how identity relates to livelihood. We conducted surveys in the office of an INGO operating in Irbid, and as an extension of home-based interviews. Surveys were planned to be a much larger part of the data collection program (n = ~150), largely carried out through the support of the INGO. However, the surveys were poorly received by respondents when associated with the INGO. Challenges included the delivery of surveys in the INGO office, the similarity of the questions to those asked by other INGOs, and the brevity of interaction required to complete many interviews in one day. Out of respect

for respondents' disinclination to participate in surveys, this element of the study was adapted to much slower delivery in the household and, as a consequence, deemphasized. The final number of households surveyed was 28. Instead, the response itself was taken as data; see Chapter 3 for an analysis of this finding.

My initial sampling was purposive: my research assistant and I made entry-point contacts with Syrian communities as they arose in social and professional settings in Irbid. I then explored social networks of these initial contacts via snowball sampling; each randomly selected household provided contact information for up to three additional respondents. My research assistant and I met initial members of social networks who were neighbours, friends of friends, in chance encounters at mosques, restaurants, places of work, or on the street. Some interviews and surveys were also carried out with Syrians met in INGO offices, either there as 'beneficiaries' or as volunteers. Many Syrians in Irbid were interested in conversation and often approached out of curiosity when they saw a foreigner. When we asked for further contacts in respondents' social networks, we made effort to sample different household structures in varying financial situations, especially those who spent less time outside the home. I chose this approach in recognition that Syrians met outside the home and who were willing to identify themselves to strangers represented a biased group of respondents.

My research assistant and I carried out interviews and surveys with self-identified household heads or their partners, when the household head was not available. Frequently, other members of the household contributed to interviews as well. The focus of interview and survey questions was on the household rather than the individual level.

We did not collect information that could serve to identify households, firstly to ensure the security of respondents and secondly to avoid confusing respondents by mirroring typical INGO assessment surveys which focus on biodata. This restricted the generalizability of the research findings, yet seemed to be a reasonable balance between protecting respondents while still addressing all research questions. Ages of household heads ranged from early 20s to late 50s, and were both women and men. Household economic profiles ranged from more-or-less comfortable to “vulnerable households” as identified by UNHCR.

To better understand programming available to Syrian refugees, to provide context, and to help with orientation, I conducted twenty key informant interviews with staff at various humanitarian agencies and UNHCR, as well as academics in the country. These interviews helped me to understand institutional perceptions of the crisis and of Syrians themselves, and to glimpse into the relations of power between agency staff and those they are attempting to serve.

Finally, I engaged in near-constant participant observation among Syrians, Jordanians, Jordanians of Palestinian origin, and other foreigners in both Irbid and Amman. The most important of these were the Syrian and Jordanian friends I made from INGO volunteers and staff, and in my neighbourhood. We shared many hours in conversation and contemplation, joy and worry, as we talked about our histories, stories of today, and thoughts on the future. Much of my mental map of the crisis is built on knowledge and belief which these friends shared with me.

Other key contributors to participant observation findings include humanitarian agency staff, academic researchers, and other residents of Jordan. These were particularly important in understanding the social networks of humanitarian aid workers, and how they related to Syrians. Participant observation took place in homes, offices, shops, cafes, and public places in Irbid. I attended conferences, lectures, and refugee-related events throughout my research. Finally, I arranged one trip to Azraq refugee camp through an INGO in Jordan, to see the camp and participate in an agency-wide orientation session. I support this thesis with fieldnotes in which I recorded observations and reflections made in all phases of data collection.

Pre-revolutionary Syrian society was characterized both by a suspicion of strangers and a willingness to, over time, embrace outsiders as members of social units (Wedeen, 1999; Salamandara, 2004). Trust was less a token to be earned as a gift to be given mutually. As I will show in later sections, many Syrians mentioned frustration, shame, and indignity of being insistently questioned—“treated like liars,” in the words of one informant—by humanitarian workers. As such, in conducting this research I did not probe topics such as child labour or underage marriages, nor did I ask questions about what events compelled participants to choose to leave Syria. While these topics are important, my translator and I instead sought to set participants at ease, share food and laughter, and provide a chance to talk earnestly and openly about the present and the future. The initial lines of questioning of this study followed those of social connectedness and coping strategies, as discussed in the following chapter. Other topics raised in this work are those that participants themselves chose to be important.

I conducted all my interviews with Syrian respondents in Irbid and nearby villages, while I held key informant interviews in both Irbid and Amman. Findings are therefore restricted to Irbid and nearby villages, unless otherwise stated; my trip to Azraq camp was the largest exception to this rule. This geographical restriction on my research introduced a certain degree of selection bias to my research: the data I collected does not, for example include, the voices of Syrians who settled in Amman, or who chose to remain in Zaatari camp. This limitation will prove to be important when discussing the meaning of social networks and social capital among Syrians—do people with better social connections move on to Amman? What motivates some people to remain in Zaatari, where social networks play a major role in economic access (Field Notes 9 August)? I can only share the experiences of people whose migration brought them to Irbid for some time the latter half of 2014 (whether or not that was a final destination). Also, laws and regulations in Jordan regarding refugees are, in practice, very different for individuals of different nationalities. Palestinians, Iraqis, Sudanese, Somalis, Libyans, or individuals of any other background face very different situations, and this would likely have some impact on their social and spatial experiences of Jordan. However, there are is no reason to believe in other, similar contexts, that the trends which I identify in this work may not be similar. As always, more research will have to be done.

#### *A Brief Caveat*

Through the course of my research, I spent considerable time getting to know local and international staff at INGOs in Jordan. Many were among the most hardworking,



caring, inspiring, and dedicated I have ever known. Agency staff, in Jordan as elsewhere, are often overworked and operate in a high-stress environment. They are often (although not always) aware of the scale of the responsibilities placed upon them, and the shortcomings of the system in which they operate. Many struggle against the structure of the organizations which employ them, but the inertia of bureaucracy does not offer significant opportunity for individuals to take initiative (Field Notes 16 June, 18 June, 19 June, 12 July, 5 Aug, 9 Aug, 9 Oct; see also Autesserre, 2014; Brun, 2016). INGOs operating in Jordan extensively include Jordanian citizens in the relief effort, paying dignified salaries and placing locals in positions of management; however, front-line local staff are often from diverse, private-sector backgrounds and are learning the humanitarian industry “on the fly”. These staff are expected to learn large amounts of information in a very short time, and are provided very little support for the emotional trials to which they are suddenly exposed (Field Notes 15 June, 12 July, 16 July, 1 Aug). International staff, conversely, are often trained and hired from abroad, with little experience local culture and context, and equally lacking in social and emotional support (Field Notes 9 Aug, 9 Oct; Brun, 2016). If at times times the content of this thesis is critical, in doing so I try not to forget that humanitarian aid workers in Jordan work very hard under enormous constraints. Sometimes people simply do not know what to do in the face of overwhelming need. I myself have experienced this since, in sometimes heartbreaking detail. Oftentimes my critiques are formed from their critiques. I write this thesis in the spirit celebrating what humanitarian workers do well while simultaneously dreaming of doing better.

## Chapter Two: Intersectional Identities and the Collapse of Syrian Social Networks

The first thing Majd<sup>13</sup> did with me was train me to say “*Majd batl.*” The translation? “Majd is a hero.” I liked Majd quite well. His eyes are narrow, blue, and piercing. He is tall. He has a thin face, with a nose badly sloped to one side. He fought with the rebels before he came to Jordan. Now he volunteers for the NGO.

Majd drinks hard. He is Druze. He has a lover; she is Sunni. They cannot be together in this new world, though who knows how it may have been before. They speak on the phone. I do not know if they meet; if they have even met. He flirts with all the girls in the office. They call him “The Romeo of Irbid.”

One evening, he was struggling with a bracelet. There was a small key hanging from it. He asked me to help. “What is that key? The keys to Paradise?” a friend teased him. I didn’t understand what he said in reply. With his English and my Arabic, we really only half-understood one another.

We went to an amusement park in the mall for a staff Ramadan outing. One of the Syrian volunteers also worked the front desk there, so we got tickets for free. On the swinging, spinning rides, he joined for just one. He buried his face in his hands for the entire ride. Sweat poured down his face. It was more than play-acting: he was upset, though he buried it in a smile. (Field Notes 12 July)

Pre-conflict Syria was typified by dense, overlapping social networks based on intersecting relational identities such as religion, ethnicity, region of origin, family, and class (Lesch, 2012; Batatu, 1999; Salamandra, 2004; Wedeen, 1999; 2013; Rabinovich, 2008; Philips, 2012; Cunningham, 1993; Leenders, 2012; Haddad, 2011; Hokayem, 2013). Scholars have suggested that these social networks can act as protective shelters in times of crisis; members are able to access capital held by others in the network, which could help respond to shocks (Leenders, 2012; Leenders and Heydemann, 2012; Chatty and Mansour, 2013; Chatty, 2011; 2010; Batatu, 1999; Wedeen, 1999; 2013;

13 Name has been changed.

Salamandra, 2004). Leenders and Heydemann (2012) and Chatty (2013; 2010) suggest that social networks have played major roles in the emergence of the revolution in Syria. While these social networks persist in exile, new relational and spatial configurations (Massey, 2005) produced through displacement may dramatically alter the significance of various identities in Syrian communities.

The research I present in this chapter examines how social networks and social capital contribute to the wellbeing of Syrians living in exile. It demonstrates that that traditional social networks are not contributing to the financial and emotional support of Syrian households in Irbid, Jordan, despite the presence of family or other relations that one could reach out to for help. Instead, social networks that traditionally provided support in times of hardship have collapsed under the punishing financial and social strain of years of displacement. Informal and exploitative work does not pay sufficiently well for Syrians in Jordan to pay expensive transportation costs required for social visits. It consigns many Syrians to sub-standard housing and poor diets, situations which left respondents reluctant to invite guests to their homes. Depression and fear of arrest kept people alone and indoors. When Syrians did reach out to friends and family, they found their contacts in similar situations and unable to provide support.

However, some exceptions to this rule exist. Some refugees in Jordan have managed to build new professional and personal networks in exile, often with members of the host community and/or NGO staff. These individuals fared much better, both emotionally and financially, which acted as a base for further re-population of social networks. The examples of these exceptional people suggest the potential value of maintaining and

producing new social bonds in host communities, if circumstances could be established which foster this growth.

*Social Networks among Syrian Forced Migrants*

*My mother lives in Syria. I have sons and daughters in Lebanon and Syria. My husband is in Syria. I don't like that my family is spread out, all in different places. I want them to be together. (24 July #2)*

*Urban refugees could be highly beneficial to cities if they were allowed to pursue productive lives, absent legal restrictions, harassment, and insecurity.... Host governments and UNHCR could do much to bring about positive outcomes without expending significant resources, and without placing the host society at a disadvantage. (Jacobsen, 2006, p. 273)*

In their 2011 study, Landau and Duponchal explore correlations between various indicators of well-being in foreign migrant populations (including but not limited to refugees) and populations of national migrants. They find that two indicators in particular—access to employment and local presence of friends or family—are strongly and mutually correlated with well-being in foreign migrant populations (far outstripping such indicators as legal status, access to humanitarian aid, or education). Ager and Strang propose that access to employment is also heavily predicated on social connections such as friends and family (2008; 2010). The existence of social bonds—which may be referred to as “social networks”—in refugee and migrant communities, therefore, strongly relates to successful employment and a greater sense of well-being

(Jacobsen, 2002; 2006; Calhoun, 2010; Pascucci, 2011; Chatty and Mansour, 2013; Chatty, 2011; 2010; Buscher, 2011).

Neat, succinct definitions of the term “social network” are elusive in the literature. In the content of this work, a “social network” is considered to be any group of individuals who are connected by identifiable common variables (see Leenders, 2012; Leenders and Heydemann, 2012, Calhoun, 2010). This may be a shared identity (for example, an affinity among individuals who share a common place of origin or religion) or may be based on looser ties, such as present geographical location. In this sense, any individual may be a member of multiple social networks.

Social networks are closely related to social capital. Putnam defines social capital as “social networks and associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness” (2000, p. 137). Similarly, Lin insists that social networks and social capital cannot be studied in isolation (1999). As “resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions” (Lin, 1999, p. 12), social capital cannot be understood without examining the network of relationships which connect resource-holding individuals to one another. In livelihood studies, social capital is considered integral alongside other forms of capital in the formation of livelihood strategies (Scoones, 1998; Collinson et al., 2003). In line with these approaches, I consider social capital to be any resource which is accessed through social ties; this may include access to information or bureaucratic assistance—known in Jordan and other parts of the Middle East as “*wasta*” (El-Said and Harrigan 2009; Cunningham and Sarayrah 1993; Ronsin 2010)—as well as access to financial resources, work or educational opportunities, and emotional support.

Ager and Strang propose that the integration outcomes of refugee populations are based heavily on social networks and social capital (2008; 2010; see also Putnam, 2000). They argue that social capital comes in two forms: bridging capital and bonding capital. Bonding capital refers to the social links within a community—for example, at a particular scale, one could consider bonding capital to occur within the Syrian refugee community in Jordan; at another scale, within members of an extended family (2008; 2010). Bridging capital, conversely, refers to links a community forms with other groups—Syrian refugees' relationships with local Jordanians, or one family's relations with another. According to Ager and Strang, both of these types of social capital are required for successful integration outcomes (2008; 2010).

In a 2010 UNHCR study, Calhoun found that social capital has been integral to *de facto* local integration of Iraqi refugees in Jordan. Comparatively, Sudanese and Somali refugees, who hold fewer pathways to bridging ties with the local Jordanian population due to cultural, linguistic, and ethnic differences, face greater challenges to successful integration. Social networks and bridging social capital were found to be “particularly important for economic advancement, as people need these more distant ties to get new information, about job opportunities or markets” (2010, p. 2). Calhoun also observed that bonding capital within the Iraqi community is weak, especially between economic classes—that Iraqis are disconnected from one another, and in particular wealthy Iraqis are disconnected from poorer Iraqis (2010).

Calhoun suggests that UNHCR is missing an opportunity: by fostering social connections across economic classes within the Iraqi community, more displaced Iraqis

would have more access to social capital, with little need for international funds or complex programming. Calhoun further points out that UNHCR tended to underestimate Iraqis' potential for bridging capital, considering the community to be cut off from Jordanian society and economy and entirely dependent on external support (2010). This reflected a poor understanding of support strategies which Iraqis engaged in, especially in terms of independent economic integration such as business or home ownership (2010). Failure to consider Iraqis' own efforts to sustain themselves in assessing need hampered UNHCR's response plans, even as laudable new policy supported the settlement of the displaced in urban areas. As this chapter will demonstrate, Calhoun's findings remain relevant in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan. Syrians, like Iraqis before them, are disconnected from one another in Jordan. Also similarly, Syrians have been somewhat able to capitalize on shared linguistic and ethnic identity in terms of finding informal work in host communities. However, as will be shown, managing to secure informal work with a Jordanian employer did not constitute a safe or reliable bridging tie with the host community.

The study of livelihood strategies—the methods by which individuals and families secure resources to provide for themselves—is useful in understanding urban refugees' experiences and needs. To provide descriptive structure to my study of Syrian refugees' survival strategies and the factors which influence selection of those strategies, I refer an adapted livelihoods framework developed by Collinson et al. (2003). This framework is adapted from that proposed by Scoones (1998), which defines various “capitals” which an individual, household, or community employ to meet needs. Collinson et al. define a

range of types of capital including natural, physical, economic, human, political, and social capital. Additionally, they emphasize the key roles which vulnerability and the political economy play in livelihood choices in conflict situations (2003). Recognizing both the benefits and limitations of attempts to frame and quantify survival strategies, this study will harness Collinson et al.'s adapted framework as a descriptive metaphor rather than an essential representation of reality. In recognition of the role the values, beliefs, hopes, and desires play in decision making alongside the satisfaction of physical needs, I also balance livelihood analysis with an appreciation for “wellbeing strategies” as introduced by Tauson (2016).

### *Intersectional Identity in the Middle East*

*Rather than defining themselves collectively as ‘the Hutu refugees’ (or even just as ‘the Hutu’), they tended to seek ways of assimilating and of inhabiting multiple, shifting identities—identities derived or ‘borrowed’ from the social context of the township. (Malkki, 1991, p. 3)*

*This is a recent thing. Before the war, nobody asked if you were Shi’a, Sunni, Christian, anything. It wasn’t important. (20 Oct #1)*

Benedict Anderson's theory of “imagined communities” is a useful starting point in understanding Middle Eastern identity: national identity, posits Anderson, is a social construction where sense of community is generated through a shared, but arbitrary, process of conceptualization (1983). This neatly captures the emergent nationalisms in many of the ethnically and religiously diverse colonially-delineated states of the Middle



East. Edward Said, conversely, introduces us to “imagined geographies:” structures of power which delineate interactions between communities (1978).

While Said explores imagined geographies of “East” and “West” framed on a global scale, these power structures exist at all levels: communities *within* the Middle East are similarly produced, and similarly go on to engineer power hierarchies between them. Identity in the Middle East is not a simple clash of nations. Anderson's theory can be applied to reach beyond nationalism—ethnic, religious, or *qaba'il* and *`asha'ir* based communities, for example, are often deliberately produced and reproduced through similar processes of collective imagining (Phillips, 2012; Rabinov, 2008). Said's imagined geographies inevitably are produced between and across all categories of social identification, generating a complex map of alliances and power hierarchies that include nationality, religion, ethnicity, gender, class, family lineage, *qabilah/`ashira*, village of origin, profession, age, education, and more. These identities are potential seeds around which social networks can grow, and so are integral to this study.

Further, these relational identities are not static, despite the frequent (and lazy) portrayal of age-old rivalries rooted in supposedly ancient antagonisms. Instead, they overlap, jostle, clash, reinforce one another or produce new vulnerabilities, all within individuals and households. In order to conceptualize the complicated and overlapping identities of Syrian refugees, I call on two chief theories: first, the feminist theory of intersectionality laid out by Crenshaw (1989; 1991) and adopted by Valentine (2007); second, Massey's depiction of identities as relational and in a constant state of co-production with the spaces in which they operate (2005; see also Lefebvre, 1991).

Intersectionality is useful in describing the complexity of identity in the Middle East because it rejects the essentialization or isolation of identities: individuals are not reduced to any single identifier, but instead, coexisting identities are taken in concert to produce a complicated landscape which may be navigated (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991). Valentine has proposed that the significance of various identities is intrinsically tied to geographic location (Valentine, 2007). “Identity,” then, is never stable, but instead the product of an ever-shifting set of relationships which take on different meanings in step with the shifting networks around them. As identity is integral to the formation social networks, I argue that social networks themselves similarly intersect and interact with the landscape. Massey (2005) and Lefebvre (1991) predicate this by arguing that space and identity are co-constitutive. Malkki, too, documents how urban refugees emphasize or obscure intersectional identities to best find common ground and integrate with the host community (1995). Tellingly, she finds that the identity most often de-emphasized in efforts to integrate is the applied and othering label of “refugee” (1995).

There is no research that seeks to map intersecting identities in the Levant (and, of course, any claims to do so comprehensively would be frivolous). However, from a composite of various studies, it is possible to form a rough outline. The three most common identities through which Middle Eastern dynamics are understood are religion (or sect), ethnicity, and nationality (Leenders, 2012; Lesch, 2012; Batatu, 1999; Salamandra, 2004; Wedeen, 1999; 2013; Rabinovich, 2008; Philips, 2012). “Tribal” relations, referred to here by the Arabic terms *qabilah* and *`ashira*, are commonly mentioned in the literature as influential, without supporting detail (for some

exceptional examples, see Leenders, 2012; Leenders and Heydemann, 2012; Chatty, 2013; 2010; Batatu, 1999; Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1993). All these exist in both southern Syria and northern Jordan, suggesting that they should have some impact on the experiences of Syrians there—but these standard examples are not all the identities that are present in the context of Syrian displacement.

Some exceptional pieces of anthropological work in Syria animate and complicate categories of ‘identity,’ which encouraged me to challenge dominant, all-encompassing depictions of identity and instead take an intersectional approach. Christa Salamandra demonstrates how identity among the Syrian upper classes is highly complex and constantly under negotiation (2004). Alliances shift and re-shift as marriages, business partnerships, and fickle taste recast the social plane. Most of all, a reduction of identity to sect, she argues, is inappropriate; despite the common invocation of sectarian labels, sect instead becomes an idiomatic label which refers to a large number of intersectional identities, especially economic class (2004). Leenders similarly argues that social networks in Syria—especially those found in Dar'a province, along the Jordanian border—are extremely “miscible”; that is to say, they easily “dissolve into one another due to their high degree of interconnectedness” (2013, p. 420), and that this flexibility allows for strategic negotiation in times of crisis (2013). Hokayem supports these observations in his discussions of power structures in the Syrian government, arguing that “being Alawite is more about cultural and social behaviour than the adherence to a set of religious tenets... Indeed, power in the Alawite community resides in clans rather than clerical institutions” (2013, p. 31). While identity is often assumed to foment conflict in

the Middle East, the binding power of identity is less frequently discussed (Phillips, 2012; Rabinovich, 2008). Leenders and Heydemann assert that the strength, power, and interconnectedness of social networks in southern Syria allowed the revolution to begin and to endure in the face of harsh government oppression. These connections pre-date and break through the colonial Jordanian/Syrian border (Leenders, 2012; Leenders and Heydemann, 2012).

A synthesis of these literatures suggests that strong, overlapping social networks could play a role in Syrians' attempts to build a sustainable life in exile. Extending Leenders' assertion that powerful social networks—especially those which include cross-border Jordanian members—provided a protective shield for emergent protest groups, it would stand to reason that these same networks would contribute to the wellbeing of Syrians living in exile. In common terms, this practice fits with the assumption that in times of crisis, individuals turn to friends and family for support. Identities could be seen to contain an element of potential, a seed upon which social networks may form. Yet, to what extent do networks most integral to pre-conflict Syrian society continue to dominate after displacement? Is it safe to assume that the once-lucrative networks will continue to be useful in new social, economic, cultural and legal contexts? These questions are important to ask in order to better attune strategies of provision of humanitarian aid to displaced Syrians living in urban centres.

## Syrian Refugees in Jordan: Isolation and Exhaustion

*Because of the dispersed, divided and often isolated nature of refugee communities in Jordan, humanitarian agencies have understandably focused on provision of individual services, e.g., psychological counseling, individual advice on schooling, outreach through home visits, etc. While this approach is effective in delivering 23 essential services, it is not empowering or sustainable. Ultimately, refugees will need to find resources within their own communities or the host community to solve various problems. (Calhoun, 2010, p. 22)*

*When I feel bad, I sleep. Or go to the garden. If I feel good, I share it with my family. (24 July #1)*

In this research, I did not attempt to reproduce exhaustive livelihoods studies conducted elsewhere (CARE 2013; 2014; UNHCR 2015). However, a basic survey breaking down on sources of household income were asked of 28 households to form a rough understanding of what the Syrians who participated in this research rely on for support. Financial aid via social connections was predicted to be an integral part of household livelihood strategies. Yet no families reported receiving regular or recent financial support from Jordanian or Syrian households inside Jordan. Instead, households' livelihood strategies were primarily based on informal employment, NGO support (both one-time emergency aid and monthly), remittances, non-cash gifts, and loans.

% of households which are currently receiving...	
Employment income	50%
NGO support (ever)	89%
NGO support (one time, recently)	59%
NGO support (regular and ongoing)	7%
Remittances	48%
Gifts	37%
Loans	93%

*Table 1: Household Income Sources by Percentage (survey respondents; n=28)*

Families reported relying heavily on relatives within the household working for income. Half of survey respondents (14 of 28) confirmed that members of the households were working to bring home income. However, this number is very likely under-reported, as no work permits were being issued to Syrian refugees in Jordan at the time of this research. All work income reported therefore came from the informal sector. Informal work was a major source of vulnerability for Syrians in Jordan (CARE, 2014; Turner, 2015; UNHCR, 2015; Amnesty International, 2015).

Syrians frequently expressed fear and frustration that the restriction of access to legal work severely limited their ability to care for themselves and, worse, put them at risk of detention, removal to camps, or deportation back to Syria<sup>14</sup> (26 June #1, #2,#3; 10 July #2; 13 July #2; 23 July #1; 24 July #1, #2; 11 Aug #1; 13 Aug #4; 14 Aug #2, #4; 18 Aug #1, #2; 17 Sept #1, #2, #3; 18 Sept #1, #3; 13 Oct #2, #3; 14 Oct #1, #2; 20 Oct #2). One young father described that he was “caught twice” by police, who “made me sign a statement saying I would not work again” (13 July #2). Another explained, “Sometimes the government says I can't work. The government caught me once, and I paid a 200JD fine. They told me I had to leave back to Syria, but I used *wasta* [paid a bribe] to stay” (23 July #1). Some were not so lucky: “My brother was

14 The provision of formal permits, starting in 2016 (Jordan Compact, 2016) has made little impact on this situation. Fields in which work permits are offered are largely informal, and even Jordanians do not work formally in them. Other industries are based around special economic zones, which are difficult to access and lead to exploitation. There is belief among Syrians that agencies cut off support to work permit holders. The application process is extremely complicated, and finally, fear persists; Syrians worry they will be monitored by the Government if they comply (Lenner and Turner, forthcoming; Crawley, 2017; Su and Laub, 2017; UNHCR, 2016). See Chapter 1 for a discussion.

working.... They sent him back to Syria. The police caught him many times [before], but he paid *wasta* to get out” (14 Oct #1). Many household heads were critical of the fact that agency support was insufficient to provide for their households, thereby forcing members of the family into work that had been declared illegal (13 July #2; 11 Aug #1; 18 Aug #1; 18 Sept #1, #3; 13 Oct #3; 14 Oct #1, #2; 20 Oct #2). In interviews, agency staff confirmed that humanitarian agencies expected Syrians to supplement their income by informal work that would put them at risk (Field Notes 12 July; 9 Aug; 9 Oct).

Slightly less than half of families who participated in the survey reported receiving remittances directly from family members in other states, primarily the Gulf States and Syria itself (13 of 28, or approx. 48%). One friend told me that, before the war, he owned three shops in Dar’a, but now, “sometimes they send me money from in Syria. Can you believe that? *From* Syria. When there is work. When the electricity is on” (Field Notes 15 June). Only one household reported receiving remittances from a Western state, Germany (13 Aug #2). One family specifically expressed frustration that a cousin of Jordanian nationality who had married an American and moved to Texas was not providing any support (13 July #2).

Sources of Remittances:	
From Syria	23%
From Gulf States	77%
From EU	8%
From regional asylum states	8%

*Table 2: Sources of Remittances (survey respondents; n=13)*

Many families mentioned rumours that those Syrians who receive remittances from the Gulf, Europe, or North America experience the best situations in Jordan (13 July #2; 24 July #1; 27 July #1; 18 Aug #2; 18 Sept #1; 20 Oct #1), but few reported knowing such families personally or well. One man explained, “some [Syrian families] have better situations: they come with money, or have children in KSA [the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia], or other Gulf countries. I know them from Syria, sometimes I see them when I go shopping—they have gold, and new cars from Syria” (24 July #1). Conversely, one woman who had a husband working in Kuwait, found herself being harassed by other Syrians for money she did not have: “Some people here, when they hear we have family working in Kuwait or something, they think we will be rich. But [my husband] didn't have much work there—I wasn't rich, I didn't have a lot. People would say, 'you have a husband in Kuwait, give me 50 lira’” (20 Oct #1). The frequency with which Syrian families attributed international remittances to other households' income contrasted with the infrequency of households reporting such income in interviews. This may suggest proliferation of unattributed rumours among the Syrian community in Jordan; equally, this disparity may be the result of a selection bias inherent in the geographical scope of the research. Moving to Amman was sometimes seen as a goal among Syrians and Jordanians alike; as one Jordanian told me, “Irbid is the real capital of Jordan, not Amman. Amman is not Jordan. Amman is heaven, and we are all trying to get there” (Key Informant 20 July). Without further study, it is difficult to say whether families with income from remittances made their homes in other parts of the country.



Intermittent, usually one-time assistance from NGOs supplements household income. Of 28 survey respondents, 25 (approx 89%) reported having ever received support from humanitarian agencies, cash or otherwise, not including WFP food vouchers (see below). However, one-time “emergency” cash assistance is the primary intervention strategy employed by humanitarian organizations in Jordan, designed to help families and individuals cope with financial shocks. This type of aid is most useful when delivered within the first months of arrival, or when it is delivered quickly in response to unexpected hardships which financial support can help to offset (13 Oct #1). Yet one-time aid often took months to reach families, long after any specific shock would have passed; aid was also often given to people who had been residing in Jordan for months or years, rather than targeting newcomers (26 June #1; 13 July #1; 13 Aug #1; 17 Sept #3; 13 Oct #1; 14 Oct #1). In order for aid to constitute a consistent portion of a livelihood, household heads were forced to routinely visit agency after agency, attempting registration—often describing their poverty through the same demeaning questions at each office—eventually returning to the same organizations in hopes that a new project would have been started to which they might newly qualify (13 July #2, 11 Aug #5; 18 Aug #2; 18 Sept #3).

Often, when attempting registration or re-registration at agencies, refugees reported being treated with contempt and disdain, despite there being no other reliable means for Syrian applicants to register. (18 Sept #1, #2; 13 Oct #2, #3). Several women complained of agency staff using “rude words” (18 Aug #1; 18 Sept #2; 13 Oct #3; 14 Oct #3), and one expanded, saying:

I applied with [an international agency]. Nothing happened. When I went back to ask what happened, they said 'we are busy, you can't stay here.'... The man was very rude. He said some very bad things. 'There is no help here,' he said, and made me leave. (18 Sept #1)

Another explained:

There are big problems with employees of the agencies. They are very rude with Syrians—they don't respect us at all. UNHCR, sometimes they shut the door on us, tell us to go away. Some other agency, I forget which one, we waited for three hours. In the end they gave back all the papers, told us to go home without even seeing us. (13 Oct #3)

One-time aid was often used by families to pay re-occurring costs that had accrued, such as back-rent or utilities, or to pay back informal lines of credit at local shops (23 July #2; 27 July #1; 11 Aug #2; 13 Aug #1; 18 Aug #2; 17 Sept #3; 14 Oct #3). Once the money was spent, aid recipients found themselves in the same situation as before (26 June #1, 13 July #1; #2; 23 July #1; 11 Aug #2; 13 Aug #1; 17 Sept #1, #3; 14 Oct #1). As one woman explained, “We registered, and six months later they gave 110JD to pay the rent for three months. But it didn't even pay one month. The agencies here, they only give help one time, and it's over.” (20 Oct #1). One-time aid packages were thus quickly forgotten, having no lasting effect on a household's ability to support itself.

Households frequently reported becoming disillusioned with aid agencies, giving up first on calling help-lines as they were typically not answered, then out of frustration or embarrassment ceasing to apply for services at all (10 July #3; 13 July #2; 23 July #1; 27 July #1; 18 Aug #1, #2; 17 Sept #1; 14 Oct #1, #2). Household heads explained that they were tired of the degrading practice of begging from office to office, and being rejected for unclear reasons (26 June #3 13 July #2,#3; 18 Aug #1, #2; 18

Sept #1; 13 Oct #1, #2). Syrians often asked me specifically why one-time aid was favoured by humanitarian agencies over ongoing, monthly support (13 July #2, #3; 27 July #1; 11 Aug #1; 17 Sept #3; 14 Oct #3; 20 Oct #1, #2). One woman summed up the situation by saying,

When you visit, you sign a paper saying you would take it just one time. I wonder why. What are the use of these agencies if they only give one time? What about the people who rely on agencies only? How do they live? What do they do?... I have an idea about the situation here. If all the agencies work together, and provide salaries for the Syrian families, it would be better. Some take many times, others take none at all. Some search hard, register everywhere.... Because of this some people take a lot. (20 Oct #1)

Only families without any working-age men, which could also demonstrate financial need during home visits, received monthly cash assistance from UNHCR. This program is known among Syrians as the “eye-iris” or sometimes just the “iris”, as the cash is released via iris-scans at technologically-equipped bank machines (Malkaw, 2014; WFP, 2016). Several households had benefited in the past from a similar program run by the Red Crescent, which had recently ended. Syrians benefiting from this program reported being generally satisfied with the level of support and seemed more certain of themselves during interviews (10 July #1, #2, #3; 13 July #3; 17 Sept #1; 18 Sept #3). Most households did not qualify, however, and often asked why they were rejected (26 June #1, #3, 10 July #2; 13 July #2, #3; 23 July #1; 27 July #1; 11 Aug #1; 13 Aug #5; 14 Aug #1, #2; 17 Sept #1, #3; 18 Sept #1; 14 Oct #1). One woman explained her experience:

We want IRIS from UNHCR. It would help. But we wonder why we did not get it. We hear of people who have family sending money

from KSA [the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia] who have the IRIS. When we went to ask, they just said UNHCR rejected us. No reason was given. (27 July #1)

Another expressed frustration and anger about the unclear criteria, claiming that UNHCR was not succeeding in its mandate:

UNHCR does not provide protection for Syrians. They complicate everything. They visit for IRIS, then reject us. We have no furniture. Our clothes are dirty. And they reject us. (14 Oct #1)

When my research began, all households registered with UNHCR benefited from monthly food vouchers from WFP.<sup>15</sup> Most families reported resorting to “selling” food vouchers to convert the cash value into unrestricted paper money in order to pay rent and utilities or buy cleaning and hygiene supplies (13 July #1; 24 July #2; 11 Aug #1; 18 Aug #1, #2; 17 Sept #3). Typically these were sold at below-market prices. Government subsidized bread was then purchased, and the difference was used to cover rent, water, or electricity bills (13 July #1; 24 July #2; 11 Aug #1; 18 Aug #1, #2; 17 Sept #3). Selling food vouchers at below-market prices was the primary method which Syrians in Irbid reported using to respond to financial shocks. An in-depth discussion of this practice is offered in the following chapter, but for the purposes of this discussion it can be accepted that this is an inefficient method of adapting inappropriate aid to meet the actual needs of those who are receiving the support.

The overwhelming majority of households, (25 out of 28 survey respondents, approx. 93%) reported taking loans, emphasizing that they would have to be repaid. These loans often took the form of missed rent or buying from neighbourhood

<sup>15</sup> Note that this program, and how Syrians have circumnavigated its limitations, is explained in depth in the following chapter.

shopkeepers on credit. Inability to repay was a serious concern among households, as one respondent summarized: “I can't borrow [any more] money. There is nobody left to help me pay people back” (18 Sept #3). When asked whether he had taken loans from anyone in the neighbourhood, another man explained, “We [would] need to pay the neighbours back, but how [would] we? We have no money for that” (14 Oct #2).

Missing rent was very common among Syrian families, who viewed skyrocketing rental prices with fear and frustration. “Agencies should provide the rent of the house. This is the biggest problem here for Syrians. We would prefer help in this way,” explained one woman (23 July #1). Another woman explained, “The owners of this house used to rent this house for 70JD. Now, after the Syrians came, it costs 250JD” (13 Oct #1). Through the course of the research, it became clear that Syrians in Irbid heavily rely on loans, skipped rent, and skipped utilities payments in order to make ends meet (see also CARE, 2013; 2014; UNHCR, 2015). The monthly juggling of debts between landlords, utilities companies, shopkeepers, and others may help sustain livelihoods in the short term, but it is an unsustainable strategy in the long term. Without access to more effective, sustainable livelihoods, Syrians will likely find themselves in increasingly vulnerable situations as time spent in exile goes on.

## Social Networks and Livelihood Strategies

*It's not about trust. I am afraid of problems. (10 July #1)*

Literature suggests that social capital and social networks can help households address immediate everyday concerns such as financial support, housing, and employment. Yet these types of support from social networks were not generally evident in Jordan. The findings showed that social capital was not, at the time of research, a large part of livelihood strategies employed by forcibly displaced Syrians living in the Governorate of Irbid. My interview questions had been designed to highlight what identities Syrians relied on to form social networks. I realized that a new approach would be required to explore the cause of this unexpected lack of bonding ties between Syrian and Jordanian members of pre-conflict social networks. A new line of questioning was devised to explore how reliance on different social networks had changed over time, in order to understand how Syrians had come to be socially isolated in Irbid. The following discussion unpacks some of the findings of this portion of the study, exploring the strains on social networks among Syrian refugees and the causes for their increasing social isolation.

	% of households which perceive support sources as...			
	Not existing in community	Existing but doesn't help	A little bit helpful	Very helpful
Close Family	20%	44%	20%	16%
Extended Family	27%	62%	8%	4%
Fikhz (subset of 'ashira)	30%	59%	11%	0%
'ashira (subset of qabilah)	31%	58%	12%	0%
Qabilah	24%	64%	12%	0%
Neighbours from Syria	23%	73%	4%	0%
New Neighbours in Jordan	4%	58%	15%	23%
People from work in Syria	44%	56%	0%	0%
People from work in Jordan	33%	40%	7%	20%
Strangers	0%	79%	11%	11%
Religious people	21%	71%	4%	4%

*Table 3: Perceptions of Social Networks as Sources of Support (survey respondents; n=28)*

Social networks figured strongly in narratives of migration inside Syria and arrival to the Syrian/Jordanian border. The research found that while social networks were often utilized in families' initial voyages into Jordan, these ties were not sustained in the long run. Syrians often used contacts from their home village to make the trip into Jordan—especially those associated with the Free Syrian Army (FSA), who would sometimes secure safe transit to the border. Families often spoke of entire villages “coming together” to Jordan (23 July #1, 24 July #1, 27 July #2, 18 August #2, 17 Sept #2; 20 Oct #1). Some referred to family members being turned back, often for having Palestinian heritage or failing to carry clear identification.

However, few households maintained contact with either those who facilitate travel or those in the transit groups after arrival (24 July #1, 27 July #1, 18 August #2, 17 Sept #2; 20 Oct #1). Some, who came without passports, were separated out and sent to Zaatari camp. Newcomers destined for urban Jordan, or people who left Zaatari

at a later date, tended to stay for two to three months with cousins or other family. This could refer to distant Jordanian family members, family who had arrived previously and were already established in Irbid, or occasionally, individuals from the same village (26 June #3, 13 July #1, #2, 14 Aug #2, 18 Aug #1 17 Sept #1, #3; 18 Sept #1, #2, #3; 13 Oct #1).

All made it a priority to secure their own housing as quickly as possible. When relocating to permanent housing, most households reported their residences were found simply by looking for advertisements, calling agencies, or asking shopkeepers (11 Aug #2,#4; 18 Aug #1). Very few reported finding homes through friends or employers. When friends assisted in finding housing, they typically were simply asking around as well rather than inviting Syrian families into their homes (13 Aug #1; 14 Aug #2; 18 Aug #2). Among those who did deploy (usually distant) social ties to secure housing, outcomes were mixed: for some, this resulted in improved housing conditions (14 Aug #4; 18 Aug #1; 17 Sept #1, #2; 18 Sept #1), but others reported that employers or friends would arrange apartments which were either dirty, or did not reflect the financial realities of the household (13 July #1; 23 July #1; 24 July #1; 11 Aug #2; 14 Aug #1; 18 Aug #2; 17 Sept #1). One man reported that, “When my family went back to Syria, I slept in my workplace for one year. There were no houses for a single man. Before I was married, there was nowhere to live. So I moved afterward” (23 July #1).

Similarly, social connections were not often utilized for securing employment. Few households interviewed reported finding work through strong or pre-existing social ties (13 July #1, #2; 24 July #2; 18 Sept #1, #2) with incentive-based volunteers at local



agencies being a major exception (14 Aug #4; 17 Aug #1; Field Notes 12 July, 14 July, 1 Aug; Key Informant 29 July). Most simply “asked around” by stopping in at clothing stores and barbershops to see if opportunities were available (26 June #2; 23 July #1; 24 July #1; 27 July #1; 17 Sept #1, #2; 13 Oct #2; 14 Oct #1, #2).

There was a some information sharing within social networks on methods to reduce the risks of informal work. Syrians had not at that time been granted formal access to the Jordanian economy, but most households reported having at least one member working without a permit. The same sets of strategies were frequently used across households: many reported working only in the afternoons because “the police are less likely to come after 2pm,” (13 July #2; 24 July #2) and most families engaged in the same types of work—sale of clothes or food from the house, cutting hair, shop or restaurant work, or “bag-boys” at supermarkets—which had been identified as easy to secure but difficult to regulate (26 June #2, #3; 13 July #1, #2; 24 July #1, #2; 27 July #1; 17 Sept #3; 18 Sept #1, #2; 13 Oct #2). Families living in villages on the outskirts of Irbid reported work in agriculture (11 Aug #1; 14 Aug #2; 18 Aug #1). While this research did not focus on sensitive topics such as child labour, some respondents did allude to youth in the household working as they were seen as less likely to be hassled by police (26 June #3; 27 July #1).

Debts and loans tended to refer to missed payments on rent or utility bills (CARE, 2013; 2014; 24 July #2; 11 Aug #2; 13 Aug #1, #5; 17 Sept #1, #3; 13 Oct #1, #2; 14 Oct #1, 20 Oct #2) or goods purchased on credit (11 Aug #1; CARE, 2014; UNHCR, 2015), rather than assistance from individuals. Households sometimes took small and

infrequent cash loans from close family, but expressed concern about ability to repay (14 Aug #2; 18 Aug #1; 17 Sept #1, #3; 18 Sept #3). Households commonly refused to take loans because they did not want the shame of being unable to pay back family and friends (18 Aug #1; 17 Sept #3; 18 Sept #3). Benevolent Jordanian shopkeepers would often allow Syrians to buy on long lines of credit (11 Aug #1). Whenever households spoke of loans, they asserted that the loans would be repaid when better times returned (14 Aug #2; 18 Aug #1; 17 Sept #3; 18 Sept #3). The practice of loaning money in some cases led to social isolation: those unable to give loans sometimes reported avoiding the people who might ask for them (18 Aug #1; 17 Sept #3; 18 Sept #3). Household heads, for example, would avoid speaking with family out of fear that they would request loans or other assistance which could not be provided.

To examine the effects of social networks on livelihood strategies from another angle, household heads were asked if they themselves provided financial assistance to anyone outside the family. All interviewed families replied in the negative. Many added explanations such as, “We haven't helped anybody. We need help, we have nothing to help others” (27 July #1). Many households framed the failure of other households to support them in similar terms (11 Aug #2; 13 Aug #3, #4; 17 Aug #1; 18 Aug #1, #2; 17 Sept #1, #3; 18 Sept #2; 14 Oct #2; 20 Oct #1). Frequently, interviewees explained that they used to provide support for people in Syria, but were ashamed that they no longer were able to do so. In the words of one young man, “In Jordan, I haven't helped anyone. In Syria, I helped all the people” (27 July #2). This dynamic sometimes led to frustration: “I gave help to a neighbour in Syria. Now when he came here, this person

has a good situation, but doesn't help.... In Syria, I would help anyone, but now, they are not helpful. I used to give money, so now it is hard to ask for help” (11 Aug #1). When asked where families could turn to in times of crisis, the usual response was “only to God” (10 July #1, #2; 13 July #2, #3; 24 July #2; 13 Aug #5; 17 Sept #3; 13 Oct #1; 14 Oct #2).

The lack of frequent visits was attributed to the cost of travel (26 June #1, #2; 10 July #1, #2; 13 July #1; 23 July #1; 24 July #1; 24 July #2; 27 July #1; 13 Aug #3; 14 August #2; 14 August #4; 18 August #1, #2; 17 Sept #3). Others indicated they did not want family to see them in undignified situations (24 July #1; 27 July #1; 18 Aug #1; 17 Sept #1, #2, #3; 13 Oct #3). As one household head explained, “We can't visit others. We have small houses and big families. It's hard” (13 Oct #3). Isolation was frequently an active decision made to cope with lack of resources. Often, respondents simply shrugged when asked why they did not visit nearby friends and relatives; fear and loneliness were frequently referred to as a major barrier to social interaction (26 June #2; 10 July #1, #2; 13 July #2; 24 July #2; 27 July #1; 18 Aug #2; 17 Sept #3). On one occasion, two families who lived a short walk apart met in order to facilitate an interview. When we opened the door, a large celebration with clear expressions of joy broke out. I asked why everybody was so excited, and was told by a member of one household, “It has been two months since we last met.” The other explained, “My friends have not come to visit since two months, because her mother is ill and needs care, and her daughters do not know what to do. They have to stay in the house and take care” (24 July #1, #2).

When infrequent family visits did occur, they were referred to as a source of joy and a break in the monotony of what one man referred to as “refugee life” (Field Notes 15 June), and people wished they could visit more often (26 June #2; 13 July #3; 23 July #2; 24 July #1, #2; 11 Aug #2; 13 Aug #3; 18 Aug #1; 18 Aug #2; 17 Sept #1; 18 Sept #1, #3). As one family explained, “Sometimes we visit the family here in Jordan. Just once a month, maybe. You know how the situation is here” (18 Aug #2). The effects of social isolation will be explored in depth in the next chapter; however, these findings suggest that circles of kin-based social capital are shrinking as restrictive financial conditions in displacement make face to face interactions increasingly infrequent. As my research went on, this finding was supported by other data which will be explored later in the chapter.

While social isolation was reported as the norm for most households, the experiences of some exceptional individuals hinted that active membership in social networks carried tangible benefits to households. For families with pre-existing business skills—another important category of social capital—personal connections produced potential for business opportunities (26 June #3; 11 Aug #1; 18 Sept #1, #2; Amos, 2013; Nahhas, 2015). Partnerships were offered by new contacts in Jordan, such as neighbours, and were based on the assumption that Syrian families had business experience or resources which were otherwise difficult to secure (26 June #3; 11 Aug #1; 18 Sept #1, #2). In effect, Syrians were sometimes seen by Jordanians as an unusual opportunity to access financial capital in return for the social capital which Jordanian citizens hold as legal citizens. These connections were often new, reflecting a

dynamic negotiation of identity to promote integration. However, few Syrians interviewed in Irbid felt able to pursue these offers (26 June #3; 11 Aug #1). They either did not have the assumed financial resources to make such investments, or did not trust the financial risk of engaging in informal partnerships (26 June #3; 11 Aug #1). These concerns reflect the importance of power dynamics in relationships, which will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3.

Families occasionally referred to supporting one other in non-financial ways. Some gave examples of the sharing of goods (24 July #1; 11 Aug #3; 18 Sept #1, #2, #3; 14 Oct #2; 20 Oct #1); one man gave an example of providing household goods: “I have two gas canisters. I gave one to another Syrian family here. But we can't help much. We all need money” (14 Oct #2). Another explained, “Sometimes some Syrians come knock on the door, looking for a house. Sometimes they ask for water. If I can give help, I do” (24 July #1). When asked if she supported others, one woman was initially unsure, then referred to the act of giving as a positive experience for both parties: “We haven't helped anyone. Ah, one time, I gave a Syrian woman some things for the kitchen. I felt happy to give these things” (20 Oct #1). This again hints at the importance of balanced power dynamics to wellbeing. In one notable example, a household head described sharing money with a friend whenever she received humanitarian aid, and vice versa (18 Aug #2). However, even in this case, money was only shared when it was given by aid agencies, to offset the ineffectual nature of infrequent one-time aid.

Syrian families extensively share information about events in Syria and Jordan, especially regarding which NGOs are currently offering aid packages (10 July #1; 23

July #1; 24 July #1; 18 Aug #1, #2). This seems to be the chief way that social networks influence physical or financial wellbeing in Irbid. One former health worker explained, “We help with information. When I know things others do not. For example, how to fill out resettlement forms. Or health information. I was in the hospital before, so I can give information. But I can't provide money. So I help like that” (18 Aug #1). However, some families reported refusing to share information about INGO support programs, fearing that too many applicants may decrease the size of aid packages or the likelihood that households would receive aid packages (23 July #1; 18 Sept #1; 20 Oct #1).

Syrians commonly related the psychological and emotional benefits of spending time with friends and family, helping to cultivate a more positive outlook on life (26 June #2; 13 July #3; 23 July #2; 24 July #1, #2; 11 Aug #2; 13 Aug #3; 18 Aug #1; 18 Aug #2; 17 Sept #1; 18 Sept #1, #3). One woman described how friendships help to absorb the awful loss to war: “When my son was killed, people came, shared the sadness.... I feel good about them” (18 Sept #3). These benefits were not trivial; it became clear during research that those who were less depressed were considerably more successful in finding new work opportunities, coping with unexpected shocks, and finding the inspiration to work towards a better quality of life in exile (Field Notes 12 July, 14 July, 1 Aug; 14 Aug #2, #4; 17 Aug #1; 18 Sept #1, #2, #3). One woman, who had formed a successful home business with a Jordanian neighbour, explained some of the complexity: “Things here have become worse [in Jordan]. We need money. Help. But for relationships, friendships, it has become much better. We are comfortable now!”

(18 Sept #2). Another, who made Jordanian friends through incentive-based volunteering positions at humanitarian agencies, explained “When I came here, I spent one year without talking to anyone. But now I have a life here, and I like this country” (17 Aug #1).

Education was found to be a key type of human capital that held the potential to connect households to new social networks. With proper skills and demeanour, individuals could access a much wider range of informal positions, such as office work or remunerated “volunteer” positions with aid agencies (Field Notes 12 July, 14 July, 1 Aug; Key Informant Interviews 20 July, 29 July, 8 Aug; 11 Aug #1; 14 Aug #2, #4; 17 Aug #1). However, acquiring these sensitive positions often relied on *wasta*, the culturally significant network of personal connections common in many Arab states. *Wasta* also figured in many other social interactions, and therefore is explored in detail the following section.

### *The Ambiguities of Wasta*

*The intertwinement of social spaces is also a law... they attain ‘real’ existence by virtue of networks and pathways, by virtue of bunches or clusters of relationships. (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 86)*

*The relationship of assistance is spatialized between those who are assisting and those who are being assisted. (Smirl, 2015, p. 6)*

*Wasta* figured regularly in respondents’ accounts of social connections in Jordan. Literally translating from Arabic to the English “mediator” or “go-between”, *wasta* refers

to the invocation of a trusted and empowered individual to help one with an issue or challenge. This could be the securing of a job, easing of a bureaucratic procedure, or tilting of an admissions process in one's favour (Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1993). *Wasta* can sometimes involve a financial element (Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1993; Rabo, 2005) but it is more commonly rooted in common familial or social ties (El-Said and Harrigan, 2009; Rabo, 2005). This social element of *wasta* demands its inclusion in the study of social networks in the Middle East.

This study does not equate *wasta* with “corruption”, as this would be misplacing the role of *wasta* in Jordanian society (Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1993). In pre-conflict Syria, distinctions were made between inappropriate *rashwa*—bribery, considered distasteful and destructive—and socially sanctioned, positive *wasta* based on face-to-face contact and good communal standing (Rabo, 2005). *Wasta*, like any social force, has both positive and negative elements, and any non-contextual maligning by foreign actors is misplaced (Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1993; Ronsin, 2010).

NGOs sometimes offer temporary “volunteer” contracts to Syrians, which in fact pay stipends well above national average wages (Field Notes July 12, July 16, Aug 1; Key Informant 20 July, 29 July; 11 Aug #1; 14 Aug #2, #4; 17 Aug #1). As agencies were inundated by an overwhelming number of applications, these positions were sometimes transferred through personal networks—an example of the utilization of *wasta* by Syrian refugees in Jordan (Field Notes July 12, July 16, Aug 1; 14 Aug #4; 17 Aug #1). In one example, participant observation revealed that an individual moved into a new position with another agency, headed under a mutual friend's brother-in-law (Field Notes Aug 1).



In another, a household consisting of young, single, male, former rebels of a common religious minority had successfully referred one another in turn for the same temporary contract, ensuring income for the household far beyond the three months that the contracts normally serve individuals (Field Notes July 12; 14 Aug #4). Once accepted into networks which could provide this type of employment, Syrians frequently were able to find new contracts through social connections—though it would be inaccurate to describe this type of employment as “stable,” as the conclusion of every contract presented new vulnerabilities to be mitigated.

However, initial access to these rare opportunities is difficult to secure. Applicants tend to be university educated, have office experience, and have some ability in English (Field Notes July 12, July 16; Key Informant 20 July, 29 July; 14 Aug #2). The social networks which produced these employment opportunities seemed to primarily be based on new connections developed after displacement (Field Note 16 July, 1 Aug; 14 Aug #4). These newly emergent networks are nevertheless largely built on pre-existing identities and social capital: the new social ties are accessed through pre-conflict education and skills. While some respondents reported developing their computer or language skills in exile, it was uncommon and always required a certain base level of education in order to make the initial entry into the network (Field Notes 9 Aug; Key Information 20 July; 14 Aug #2). The basis for these social networks was therefore almost always pre-existing.

A more concerning use of *wasta*, commonly reported by Syrian respondents and NGO staff, was to secure assistance from NGOs and UNHCR through family networks (13

July #2; 27 July #2; 11 Aug #1, #2; 17 Sept #1, #2, #3; 18 Sept #1, #3; 20 Oct #1).

While *wasta* should not be simplified to a negative social force, in the course of interviews questions about *wasta* often elicited responses about the real or perceived preferential treatment of well-connected households in the aid distribution process (13 July #2; 27 July #2; 11 Aug #1, #2; 17 Sept #1, #2, #3; 18 Sept #1, #3; 20 Oct #1).

This was described very negatively by Syrian respondents, nearly all of whom reported not benefiting from any such ties. One woman had recently applied for the UNHCR monthly cash program. “I hope I can get IRIS from UNHCR. Some get it. I think it's because they have *wasta*,” she said; her friend interjected, “of course it's *wasta*!” (17 Sept #2). Another woman laughed and cried out, “Everybody, every Arab uses the 'waw' [the name of the first Arabic letter in *wasta*]! Everybody, everybody!” (18 Sept #3). The question then became: with so few interviewed households reporting access to socially-based *wasta*, who was accessing this social support? Social ties to the humanitarian system in Jordan come in many forms. Syrian volunteers fill the front-line ranks of humanitarian aid assessment teams (Field Notes July 12, July 16, 1 Aug; Key Informant 20 July, 29 July, 8 Aug; 11 Aug #1; 14 Aug #2, #4; 17 Aug #1). Many Jordanians have Syrian family (13 July #2; 11 Aug #2; 18 Aug #1, #2; 18 Sept #2), and many Jordanians had spent considerable time living in Syria, often with extended family, having now returned to secure case management positions thanks to their familiarity with Syrian geography and customs (18 Sept #2; Field Notes 1 Aug). Syrians form bonds with humanitarian staff through attendance in psychosocial and educational programming (discussed at length in the coming chapter) (Field Notes 19 June, 14 July,

1 Aug). Syrians, or Jordanians with strong connections to Syria, were often accused by interviewees of favouring families with whom they shared family ties or other social connections (13 July #2; 27 July #2; 11 Aug #1, #2; 17 Sept #1, #2, #3; 18 Sept #1, #3; 20 Oct #1). These claims do not reveal to what extent aid distribution was indeed affected by *wasta*, but it is significant to note that the dominant sentiment for those outside the bounds of these networks was that *wasta* exacerbated an unequal system that privileged some while disadvantaging others. The majority of people interviewed, who lacked access to networks which included humanitarian aid workers, certainly perceived membership in such networks to be ideal and valuable. This also suggests that, among select socially privileged individuals, social networks based on family identities might be valuable indeed.

Rumours were widespread of *wasta* influencing the provision of aid, but specific examples were more difficult to find. A few families or individuals interviewed directly reported employing *wasta* through relatives from the *'ashira* or *qabileh* to secure aid (26 June #3; 14 Aug #4; Field Notes 1 Aug). One man petitioned a stranger in the Government to help access medical treatment for his son—notably, he had no connection to the man previously (11 Aug #2). Other households circumvented formal, time-consuming registration systems through direct access to aid workers outside of work hours (Field Notes 12 July, 9 Aug). The relative infrequency of reports of *wasta* may simply have been reluctance to share sensitive information: in cases where households admitted to the use of *wasta* to secure aid, it was presented as a shameful necessity rather than a normal part of social behaviour—an informal and embarrassing process to

correct a dysfunctional aid system that forced every family to fend for itself (11 Aug #1; 13 Aug #1; 14 Aug #4; 18 Aug #1; 18 Sept #2; 20 Oct #1). Use of *wasta* should emphatically not be used to support narratives of corrupt households or aid workers attempting to subvert an otherwise fair aid-provision system. The lack of households reporting access to *wasta* in Irbid may also be due to a selection bias; as mentioned before, there is a strong but unconfirmed possibility that more privileged households used their increased resources to settle in Amman.

*Wasta* was necessary for Syrians to circumvent any legal troubles. The arrest of refugees caught working without a permit is routine in Jordan (26 June #3; 23 July #1; 24 July #2; 14 Oct #1; 20 Oct #1; Key Informant 9 Aug). Based on interviews, the functioning police policy seemed to be that, on the second offense, Syrians working without a permit were given a choice to relocate to a refugee camp with the entire family (at the time of this writing, Azraq camp, though Zaatari was the previous destination), or to return individually to Syria (26 June #2, #3; 13 July #2; 23 July #1, #2; 11 Aug #1; 17 Sept #3; 13 Oct #3; 14 Oct #1; Key Informant 9 Aug). Whatever the case, this process was very poorly understood in the Syrian community. Neither UNHCR nor the Government of Jordan had released a description of the policy or practice, and police response to incidents of working without a permit often seemed to be *ad hoc* in nature. However, many households reported invoking *wasta* to circumnavigate police orders to relocate relatives (23 July #1; 24 July #2; 14 Oct #1). One man described escaping deportation through *wasta*, while his brother was less fortunate: “My brother [and I were] working in Zaatari. They sent him back to Syria. The police caught him many

times, but he [had] paid *wasta* to get out. They took us to Zarhan Square, to take us to Syria. There, I paid to escape” (14 Oct #1). Households also used *wasta* to leave the camps informally (11 Aug #1; 18 Sept #3; 13 Oct #3; 20 Oct #2). One household head reported a son who was caught five times before being removed to Zaatari, after which the son was allowed to return to Irbid “through *wasta*” (24 July #2). In order to legally exit the camps and reside in urban areas, Syrians are required to register under a related Jordanian “sponsor”; sometimes these were close relatives, but more often distant family members or strangers were bribed to act as sponsors on paper while Syrians themselves paid for their paperwork (18 Sept #3; 13 Oct #3; 20 Oct #2).

### *Compassion Fatigue and Social Isolation*

*Of course my family is important! My family makes me feel comfortable. I don't feel alone. (27 July #1)*

*At first, Jordanians provided lots of help, but then too many people came. We had to stay so long. Then the help was finished. There was none left. (18 Sept #3)*

This research found that the vast majority of Syrian households in Irbid did not, in fact, engage in extensive social interaction, despite the strong benefits reaped by those who did maintain or negotiate belonging to new social networks. Even when family or friends from Syria were nearby, households did not frequently turn to them to help deal with shocks or to ease loneliness (26 June #1; 10 July #1, #2; 13 July #2; 23 July #1, #2; 24 July #1, #2; 11 Aug #1, #4; 14 Aug #1; 18 Aug #1, #2; 18 Sept #2, #3; 13 Oct

#1; 14 Oct #1). These findings contradict both anecdotal reports from aid workers and previous scholarly work discussed in this article, both of which suggest that social networks should play an integral role in the day-to-day life of respondents. The question, then, became *why* Syrian households were unwilling or unable to engage in their communities.

By exploring the histories of Syrian families’ social interactions in Jordan, respondents explained that social relationships with pre- and post-displacement contacts were more common and stronger earlier in the conflict. I asked families to rank “how helpful” different categories of social contacts were around the time of arrival and at the present time.<sup>16</sup> Considering only households that had received support from a category at least once, support from every pre-conflict connection type had decreased since arrival. As one Syrian father explained, “When we came at first, we gave a bit to other families. But that was a long time ago” (17 Sept #3).

% of households which have ever received support from a source after arrival, and say support from that source has...

		Stayed same since arrival	Decreased since arrival	Increased since arrival
Close Family	(n=16)	44%	50%	6%
Extended Family	(n=7)	29%	57%	14%
Fikhz	(n=8)	13%	63%	25%
'ashira	(n=8)	13%	50%	0%
Qabilah	(n=6)	33%	50%	17%
Neighbours from Syria	(n=4)	25%	75%	0%
New Neighbours in Jordan	(n=17)	35%	47%	18%
People from work in Syria	(n=3)	0%	100%	0%
People from work in Jordan	(n=4)	0%	0%	100%
Strangers	(n=10)	20%	50%	30%
Religious people	(n=6)	17%	67%	17%

*Table 4: Perceptions of Change in Support over Time (survey respondents)*

16 The wording “how helpful” was chosen based on feedback from my research assistant in order to encompass an open-ended definition of support. My research assistant was trained to clearly indicate that support could include money, household items, information, or any other useful services.

Jordanians, be they relatives, friends, or strangers, had also been more open to receiving Syrian newcomers charitably earlier in the conflict. Both Jordanian hosts and displaced Syrians expected that exile in Syria would last only a few months (26 June #3; 23 July #1; 24 July #1; 14 Aug #4; 18 Aug #1; 18 Sept #3; 14 Oct #2). As one father explained, “When we first came, the situation was better. It is more difficult now. We thought we would be here for only two months. We didn't think we would be here so long. We know there are lots of [Syrian] people here and it puts stress on the people here” (18 Aug #1).

In the context of this expectation, both Syrians and Jordanians were willing to host Syrian forced migrants for free in empty or unfinished homes, or in their own homes, for a period of several months (26 June #3, 13 July #1, #2, 14 Aug #2, 18 Aug #1 17 Sept #1, #3; 18 Sept #1, #2, #3; 13 Oct #1). Many Syrian households reported receiving generous donations of non-food items, especially furniture, clothing, and kitchen supplies from Jordanian neighbours when first moving into apartments in Irbid (13 July #3; 24 July #1, #2; 11 Aug #1; 17 Sept #3; 18 Sept #3; 13 Oct #1, #3; 14 Oct #1; 20 Oct #2). Interviewed families occasionally reported having relatives working in the Gulf who carried out fundraising campaigns with relatives in the *ashira* and *qabilah* or former residents of home villages. More often, families referred to other households that had such connections (26 June #3; 13 July #2, #3; 24 July #1; 27 July #1; 13 Aug #1; 14 Aug #1; 18 Aug #1; 18 Sept #1; 20 Oct #1; CARE, 2014; UNHCR, 2014b). One practice, common early in the conflict, was for a Saudi benefactor to “sponsor” an entire

apartment building, paying the rent of all Syrian residents inside for a period generally of several months; however, this practice had largely stopped due to increased Government scrutiny of large financial transfers (27 July #1, UNHCR, 2014b). This practice was also contingent on the assumption that the conflict would end quickly.

As the conflict wore on, distant relatives in Gulf States became less enthusiastic about these campaigns and remittances were reduced to transfers between direct relatives (17 Sept #1, #3; 24 July #1; 18 Sept #1; 13 Aug #3). Often, Syrian family in these countries found their work permits were not renewed, cutting remittances (26 June #3; 18 Aug #1; 17 Sept #1; 13 July #3; 13 Aug #1; 20 Oct #1). Similarly, the burden of supporting cousins and friends seriously impacted Jordanians, many of whom are themselves struggling financially—a situation well understood by many Syrian interviewees (10 July #3; 24 July #1; 27 July #1; 18 Aug #1; 17 Sept #3; 18 Sept #1; 13 Oct #3; 14 Oct #2; Al Wazani, 2014). As one woman explained, “The economic situation is bad here now. Because of that it is hard for Jordanians and Syrians at this time” (24 July #1). It can be argued that a “compassion fatigue”, similar to that of “donor fatigue” (UN, 2015), has taken place since the initial displacements of 2011. Syrians’ inability to obtain capital from social networks hastened as the capital in these networks depletes; this was exacerbated as social networks themselves contracted due to lack of financial resources (see above). For example, as remittances from the Gulf slow down, incoming funds are distributed less extensively through family and other social networks. Many households also report being unable to help friends and neighbours when they are in need, despite the desire to do so (10 July #2, #3; 13 July #2; 24 July



#1, #2; 27 July #1, #2; 11 Aug #1, #2; 13 Aug #3, #4; 18 Aug #1, #2; 17 Sept #2, #3; 18 Sept #3; 13 Oct #1; 14 Oct #1, #2; 20 Oct #1, #2). When asked why they could not help, one household responded, “because nobody here has anything to help each other with” (10 July #3).

The re-establishment or re-negotiation of membership in social networks is difficult, if not impossible, due to financial and psychological reasons. The cost of travel and of hosting friends and family were cited as reasons not to engage in social activities (26 June #1, #2; 10 July #1, #2; 13 July #1; 23 July #1; 24 July #1; 24 July #2; 27 July #1; 13 Aug #3; 14 August #2; 14 August #4; 18 August #1, #2; 17 Sept #3). Similarly, concerns about the reciprocity and generosity required in hosting kept households apart (24 July #2; 27 July #1; 18 Aug #2; 17 Sept #3). At a more emotional level, many respondents felt ashamed of a loss in status and were reluctant to allow others to see the reduced circumstances in which they were living (24 July #1; 27 July #1; 18 Aug #1; 17 Sept #1, #2, #3; 13 Oct #3). Syrians also revealed a common fear that new connections might produce new risks in an environment of extreme vulnerability (10 July #1; 27 July #2; 13 Aug #2; 17 Aug #1; 18 Aug #1; 17 Sept #1, #3; 18 Sept #1; 20 Oct #1). Many families reported a fear that Jordanians would turn them in to the police for illegal work or other perceived infractions (26 June #2; 10 July #2; 13 Oct #1, #2, #3; 14 Oct #1). While they asserted that most Jordanians are “good people,” they felt that it would only take one vindictive individual to completely destroy a family's livelihood (or even structure); in this sense, reaching out to strangers was not considered worth the risk (26 June #2; 17 Aug #1). As one woman summarized simply,

“When I came here, I spent one year without talking to anyone.... We can't know the feelings of strangers” (17 Aug #1). Parents expressed fear for their children, especially daughters, as they perceived themselves unable to protect them in Jordan (18 Aug #1; 17 Sept #1, #2, #3; 13 Oct #1, #3; 20 Oct #1).

New contact with Syrian families was considered similarly risky, even among those who were mutually known in pre-conflict Syria (23 July #1; 27 July #2; 17 Sept #2; 13 Oct #1). This was largely due to fears that individuals could be “spies” for the Assad government—reflecting a common concern in pre-conflict Syria (Wedeen, 1999)—or that men in a household could be identified as residing outside Syria and thus not participating in the conflict or having participated in rebel groups (27 July #2; 14 Aug #4; 17 Sept #2; Field Notes 15 June, 16 June). By choosing not to reach out and make new bonding ties with Syrian neighbours or work colleagues, in concert with the disintegration of pre-conflict bonding ties, social support networks for the Syrians living in Jordan contracted further.

Conversely, people who had the financial and human capital to make new bonding ties, and thus earn membership in new social networks, seemed to fare significantly better. Social capital and financial capital especially seemed to be co-constitutive: together, they maintained one another and sometimes even grew in tandem. But the conjoined health of social and financial capital also seemed to indicate that, when one element was lacking, the other would also falter. While this study found more evidence of atrophying social ties, the few exceptions who maintained social capital demonstrated an ability to reach out to these new networks to find new work or support via *wasta*. This

was especially so for those who are able to forge contacts with the Jordanian community. Individuals who dynamically negotiated membership in multiple social networks thus had access to opportunities which more isolated Syrians missed.

Conclusions: The Collapse of Syrian Social Networks

*I don't know about Syrians with bad situations. But some here have better situations: they come with money, or have children in KSA, other Gulf countries. I know them from Syria. Sometimes I see them when I go shopping. They have gold, new cars from Jordan. (24 July #1)*

*Feeding and providing direct services to these populations is no longer a viable option. This ability to provide for themselves... allows urban refugees to address their own needs without substantive further assistance from the humanitarian community. (Buscher, 2011, p. 20)*

The collapse of social networks has exacted an emotional and financial toll on displaced Syrians in Jordan. This can be measured in a loss of the economic support networks which traditionally tied households through unexpected shocks (Wedeen, 1999; Salamandra, 2004; Batatu, 1999), or by the withering of the *wasta*-based relations that Syrians and Jordanians alike use to advance their standing through education, employment, and bureaucratic access (El-Said and Harrigan, 2009; Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1993; Ronsin, 2010). Equally important, the collapse of social networks among Syrians has exacerbated and accelerated the very human hardships of loneliness, boredom and depression (Khoury, 2015; Hyndman, 2011). All too often, humanitarian organizations ignore these intangible psychological challenges in favour of empirical targets such as shelter, poverty and hunger, while evidence for the structural links

between these two broad categories of challenges are ignored (Calhoun, 2010; Hyndman, 2011; see also Chapter 3).

Understanding the dynamics of relationships and social networks is integral to the success of long and short term humanitarian responses. The social networks which previous research asserted were integral to the workings of Syrian society (Wedeen, 1999; Salamandra, 2004; Batatu, 1999) have almost entirely dissolved. While pre-conflict social networks were of use to displaced Syrians in Jordan very early in the crisis, it seems that social networks' utility in coping strategies has a limited 'shelf life' in displacement. This is especially the case when people are not supported in their ability to form new networks. The relational spaces of refugees in Jordan are typified by a lack of positive social interaction. New networks have been slow to emerge, in large part due to the oppressive financial and legal climate in which displaced Syrian families find themselves. These dynamics further illustrate the relational nature of space and the importance of identity to the formation of space, as outlined by Massey (2005) and Lefebvre (1991): the identities which carried meanings within and across socially constructed groups in pre-conflict Syria have been dramatically re-inscribed in the space of displacement. The institutional lack of engagement with these shifting sets of meanings marks a missed opportunity to counter the weakening of social networks and growth of suspicion.

The majority of Syrians living in exile have found no new meaningful social relationships to fill the gap. However, in the few instances where respondents formed new social networks, individuals and families uniformly reported a higher quality of life.

This supports theories of Ager and Strang (2008; 2010), who find that bridging ties between different social networks correlate to refugee integration. Both bridging ties (with the Jordanian host community) and bonding ties (with other displaced Syrians) among Syrians have weakened over time, in large part due to a lack of financial capital within the network. Bridging ties are, as theorized, heavily related to economic success, but their usefulness is currently limited because they are relatively rare.

In summary, the relationships which form between individuals of various identities are not pre-inscribed (this is notably contrary to the assumption that in the Middle East they are perpetual, Biblical-era conceptual monoliths). They are instead in a constant state of flux, heavily influenced by the space in which they play out. Relational identities are themselves intersectional, meaning that individuals carry a multitude of labels which, while arbitrary, nevertheless mark potential grounds on which to forge unity or foment conflict. The groups of individuals linked by these identities form social networks in which social and financial capital circulates. Social networks are themselves then highly dependent on space, are intersectional, and belonging to them can be negotiated as the various identities which purchase membership are re-inscribed. Incidents of forced migration—during which both socially accepted meanings of identities and spatial location are in deep flux—are particularly acute examples of this process.

### Chapter Three: Humanitarian Bridging Ties, Relations of Power, and the Production of Urban Space in Exile

“I’m beginning to think the camps are the best place for them,” a friend working with one of the NGOs in Amman says to me. We are having coffee at the ultra-hip Books@Cafe, with East Amman rolling away below us.

“Why do you say that?” I ask.

“The logistics,” she tells me. “Providing adequately for people in cities is impossible. It just can’t be done.” (Field Notes 9 August 2014)

“There are lots of people who go to Zaatari. Some can’t find a place there, a job, so they go to Syria.”

“Where would you go?” I asked.

“We are 90% decided that we would go back to Dar’aa, not Zaatari.” (20 Oct #2)

These two conversations, both held in late 2014, are representative of a contrast I encountered many times in my research. As shown in the previous chapter, the vast majority of the Syrians with whom I spoke were losing access to pre-conflict social capital and struggling to negotiate membership to new social networks in exile. This collapse contributed to social segregation both within refugee communities and from host communities. During the course of my research on the social networks of Syrians in Jordan, I was struck that urban-based Syrians were segregated from another important community in Jordan: the thousands of humanitarian aid workers, both Jordanian and from other countries, who had come to serve them. I saw the impact of this segregation daily. In moving from the INGO offices and cafes in upscale neighbourhoods of Amman to the distant homes of interview participants in Irbid, it was sometimes hard to see how the spaces were related. In the language of social networks, which I had employed to

better understand Syrians' livelihoods, these two spaces seemed infinitely disconnected—but this obscured the relationships of power which lay beneath the social distances between humanitarians and refugees. These power relations were integral to the production of urban spaces of displacement. Based on these emergent themes in my research, in this chapter I ask: *what is the interaction between refugee and humanitarian social networks in Irbid? How do these interactions effect the wellbeing of Syrians? And finally, how does the interaction of these social networks play out across space?*

Few expatriate aid workers I interviewed in Amman experienced any contact with Syrians outside of carefully staged events, arranged by the organisations they worked for. Some had never met a person from Syria, despite being nevertheless confident that their work was serving Syrians well (Field Notes 9 Oct). Often, the most insulated people were responsible for project design and implementation, leading sometimes to disastrous results (Fröhlich and Stevens, 2015). Jordanian aid workers I met, conversely, often filled the so-called 'front lines' of the humanitarian response and thus met Syrians daily. But their interactions with Syrians took place almost entirely in the politically charged environment of the 'case worker's office,' where interviews were carried out to assess Syrians' eligibility for various types of financial aid. These were confrontational, emotionally charged, and unpleasant for both Syrians and Jordanians—and encounters that shaped aid workers' opinions of Syrians (Field Notes 11 Aug, 14 Aug). Most Syrians, similarly, had almost no contact with the agencies that served them. Office hours for registration were short and interactions during that time were strictly regulated by the power structures and politics built into the layout of the office. Thousands of callers

overwhelmed phone lines for feedback, leaving people unable to contact the office. UNHCR communicated with Syrians via mass text message campaigns, including informing recipients about unexpected cuts to monthly aid packages, with no opportunity for human interaction (20 Oct #1, Field Notes 10 Oct). Confusion and frustration on both sides seemed to correlate with a lack of bridging ties (Ager and Strang, 2008; 2010; Calhoun, 2010) between humanitarian and refugee social networks.

At the same time, some of the exceptional Syrians mentioned in the previous chapter fared better emotionally and financially when humanitarian staff were present in their social networks. Syrians made bridging ties to humanitarian social networks through family, work, or bonds of friendship; some of my first contacts with the Syrian community in Irbid were via incentive-based volunteers at a local INGO office through which I volunteered (see Chapter 2). These young people became my friends, and we enjoyed outings and activities that were out of reach for the vast majority of my randomly selected interview respondents (Field Notes 15 June; 1 Aug). Once Syrians negotiated belonging to the humanitarian social networks, they were more able to secure remunerated volunteer positions—and yes, in some cases, to access financial aid. Clearly, bridging ties between humanitarian and Syrian social networks posed both potential opportunities and potential problems.

For these reasons, I felt it necessary as a responsible researcher to consider the dynamics and effects of bridging ties between Syrian and humanitarian social networks. I did not attempt to map the social networks of humanitarian aid workers in this study. However, I did pay close attention to the bridging ties Syrians made with members of



other social networks, including Jordanian and international humanitarian aid workers. The lack of bridging ties between humanitarian and Syrian social networks was so pervasive that evidence was present in key informant interviews and participant observation sessions, especially at organised events. My findings supported those of others who have documented the segregation of humanitarian workers in a multitude of countries and contexts around the world (Brun, 2016; Smirl, 2015; Autesserre, 2014; Apthorpe 2011a; 2011b; Mosse, 2011; Hyndman, 2000; Harrell-Bond, 2002; 1986). Findings on the dynamics of social networks in displacement intermeshed with my own geographical understandings of space, relationships, and power. Individuals in vastly unequal political positions and relations of power controlled the bodies of Syrians through humanitarian practice, law, social convention, financial exclusion, fear, and shame. These dynamics played out spatially in the city, influencing where people were able to go, who they were able to speak to, and how they interacted with difference spaces in the city.

I begin this chapter with a micro-geography of the physical layout of an INGO office in Irbid, Jordan, and consider how Syrians responded to the design and attempts to control the office space. I then contrast the targets and goals of humanitarian aid projects in urban Jordan with the needs and priorities Syrians themselves expressed. Building on these contrasts, I consider how humanitarian logic leads aid workers towards a promotion of encampment in Jordan, despite strong resistance from the Syrian community. As a case study, I compare my own experiences of a visit to Azraq refugee camp with the reasoning and logic behind its design. Finally, I examine cases of Syrians

who have successfully made bridging ties with humanitarian aid workers in Jordan.

Throughout these case studies, I consider how “humanitarian reasoning” (Brun, 2016) relates to social networks, production of space, and relations of power.

### *The Social Production of the Case Worker’s Office*

*A comparable approach is called for today, an approach which would analyse not things in space but space itself, with a view to uncovering the social relationships embedded in it. (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 87)*

*It was a hard day. People don’t understand the survey well, or [my assistant] doesn’t understand it. People in the office are different. They are tired, suspicious, and angry. I do not like doing the surveys there. Being in the office changes people, or different people are invited into the office... What more sign do we need that we are doing things wrong than the frustration people show when they step inside? (Field Notes 11 Aug)*

I first began to consider the *spatial* product of refugees’ and humanitarian aid workers’ relationships in the office of an INGO where I volunteered Irbid, Jordan. Research participants, I noticed, reacted very differently to my questions when I engaged them in their homes versus in the borrowed office of a case worker (Field Notes 11 Aug, 14 Aug). In refugees’ own spaces, interviews seemed to be taken as empowering exchanges, typically well received and often infused with pleasant, if emotional social interaction. As much laughter as tears were shared, along with coffee, tea, food, stories of home and plans for the future. When asking the same questions in a borrowed caseworker’s office at a prominent INGO in Irbid, the response could not have been more

different. The Syrians who participated were either sad and withdrawn or angry and aggressive, if they consented to participate at all. One respondent was so abusive to my research assistant that I was forced to stop the survey early, the only time this happened in 45 interviews (11 Aug #5). I recorded in my field notes:

This day set it firmly in my mind that people *do not* like the office. It is a stressful space, a space of confrontation. The life of the refugee and the life of the aid worker come into contact, and they conflict in an ugly way. The tension creates conflict. It is not a healthy thing.... I was very uncomfortable to be implicated in this project. The result in myself was shocking—I was short of patience, snappy. [My field assistant] noticed. (Field Notes 14 Aug)

After three days of surveys in the INGO office, my research assistant and I, both rattled, agreed we would abandon the office and carry out surveys in homes—where we were again received warmly<sup>17</sup> (Field Notes 11 Aug, 14 Aug). What caused this unexpected disparity in reception of interviews and surveys between the homes—refugees' own spaces—and the humanitarian aid office? What caused my own negative response? I began to consider the spatial layout of the office from which I had planned to base this phase of my research, and the underlying power relations that contributed to the design of that layout.

Even when standing on the street outside, the entrance to the office hinted at unequal relationships of power. Separating the entire office complex from the street was a tall wall, with two heavy metal doors that were kept locked outside of registration

17 In the original design of this study, 150-200 surveys on livelihood were intended to be carried out in the INGO office. The quantitative portion of this research was reduced significantly in out of respect to the negative reactions of participants. Surveys were instead a coda appended to longer semi-structured interviews carried out in homes, a context in which they were well received. This portion of the research then pivoted away from the planned exhaustive livelihood analysis towards an understanding of these different responses.

hours. During the hours in which the INGO accepted new registrations of Syrians, one metal gate was slightly ajar, with a heavysset Syrian volunteer guard (in at least one case, a former rebel fighter) and a hired Jordanian private security guard adjudicating access. The wall and the guards protected staff within from the perceived danger that refugees applying for aid might present, even while the team worked to protect those same refugees from danger. Positioned behind the wall, I became an accomplice to the power relationship between humanitarian workers and refugees, who were taken both as “a risk” and “at risk” in the words of Hoffman (2017) and Pallister-Wilkins (2015).

Syrians who were fortunate enough to arrive during receiving hours would queue outside seeking access to the complex. Once the guard confirmed that the individuals held valid UNHCR registration papers,<sup>18</sup> he admitted them to a small garden outside the building, otherwise he turned them away. In the shaded garden area, Syrians sat and waited in rows of chairs. They faced a glassed-in enclosure, lined with desks and office chairs, inside which Syrians applicants were taken in turn. There, volunteers (notably, also Syrians) performed a “quick assessment”: a blunt quantitative survey tool used to quickly determine an applicant’s ineligibility for financial aid. This type of bureaucratic data collection, while quick and efficient, erased biographies in the official humanitarian depiction of applicants, retaining only a record of their biological need (Brun, 2016; see also Hyndman, 2000; Hoffman, 2017). If applicants passed the quick assessment, they were brought to a long room inside the building, with a new seating area. There, applicants waited for their turn to participate in a second quantitative vetting process.

18 Applicants additionally had to be Syrian or Jordanian, as services were not available to any other nationality. This was regardless of refugee status. This distinction is exceedingly common in Jordan (MMP, 2017b).

Then, they waited to be brought up the stairs. The management and control of bodies for the efficiency of humanitarian machination against the will of those supposedly benefiting from INGO intervention was reminiscent of camp-based “head counts” described by Hyndman (2000). The successive periods of waiting, and waiting, and waiting seemed a localized representation of the waiting that is institutionally inscribed into refugees’ experiences (Hyndman and Giles, 2011). The arrangement prioritized the convenience of staff over the time of refugees. The logic seemed to be: what else did they have to do?

Upstairs, Jordanian staff busily worked (in contrast to downstairs, where Syrians waited). Work, for the case workers, meant collecting detailed biodata via interviews for the final aid eligibility assessment. Case workers and management staff stayed upstairs, sending Syrian volunteers downstairs to mediate interaction with Syrian refugee applicants. The upstairs space was clean and well furnished, with a kitchen and separate (and better stocked) staff bathrooms. Upstairs, the atmosphere was convivial and relaxed, with frequent joking and laughter; downstairs was tense and silent. The power relationship between Syrians and humanitarian aid workers was almost tangible, and inversely related to the possibility for social interaction. Relationships were co-constitutive with the physical and subjective construction of the office space in the manner described by Massey (2005) and Lefebvre (1991): the INGO had built the office around preventing all opportunities for Syrians to speak to Jordanian staff out of turn. There would be no bridging ties built here.

Syrian volunteers would bring applicants (who had passed the first two tests) upstairs and escort them to the office where the final interview would take place. Case workers' offices were a series of narrow rooms, each with a plastic folding slat-door offering marginal privacy. Case workers did not like conducting aid assessment interviews. Before and after interviews, I would sit with them in the open-concept administrative office (unconsciously, and later reluctantly, positioning myself in the power structure). They were often tense and emotional, complaining about the unpleasant interactions with Syrians which occurred in case workers' offices. These interactions frequently escalated to heated verbal conflict. I would struggle to reconcile the perceptions of my aid worker friends with my generally positive experiences carrying out interviews in Syrians' homes, all the while reflecting that this type of charged interaction is found in other accounts of aid workers, usually in relation to workers who are isolated and overworked (Walkup, 1997; Hyndman, 2000; Autessere, 2014; Smirl, 2015; Apthorpe, 2011a). My struggles to relieve that tension eventually estranged me from many of the friends I made in the first days of my research.

When the interview was finished, applicants for aid were immediately and carefully escorted back to the garden area—that is, unless they were brought to my field assistant and I for a second unwelcome round of questioning. In either case, they soon found themselves back downstairs, where a volunteer told them they would be called in two months if their application was successful. “Successful” meant the assessment of the

biological data collected during interviews demonstrated they were, in fact, ‘in need.’<sup>19</sup>

The escorting volunteer then asked them to leave.

Outside, expelled from the tightly controlled and politicized space of the office, Syrian applicants found themselves back on a deserted and dusty back street. Taxis that plied the street often took advantage of the location, further inflating costs which were already high enough to isolate the Syrian community. Staff, conversely, had a private exit. The INGO had laid out the space to minimize time spent downstairs during entry and exit; typically, staff left in groups, waiting by the stairwell until a few people were ready to go. As a group, they maintained distance from waiting Syrians and filling the downstairs space with laughter and jokes during their passage.<sup>20</sup> Staff often began to leave before all the waiting Syrians were served, a fact which was not lost on would-be applicants. Senior staff returned to Amman in the evening; an INGO van and driver waited for them immediately outside the staff exit. Smirl describes transportation and remote housing as techniques which contribute the social segregation (2015). Who is protected, who is considered a risk, and the segregation that results is a re-inscription of the power relationships which form and are formed by that space (Hyndman, 2000).

How do these social networks map spatially? Smirl defines the “space of the field” as produced by “the physical and institutional underpinnings of providing humanitarian assistance manifest in material and spatial constraints for aid workers” (Smirl, 2015, p.

19 The definition of ‘need’, of course, rested solely with the agency and UNHCR, as all interview respondents felt keenly various needs created by the legal and financial restrictions of displacement in Jordan. UNHCR definitions of need were not shared with Syrians; the confusion arising from this will be discussed later in the chapter.

20 I must admit, to my shame, I naively emulated this behaviour on more than one occasion as I attempted to fit in among the case worker team. This complicity with the power relationships at work in the office speaks to the incompatibility of conducting surveys in that environment with the goals and approach I sought to employ in conducting my research.

4). The relationships of power between humanitarians and those they work to aid delineate the boundaries of “the field,” a space which humanitarian aid workers identify as distinct from the communities in which they work. Smirl suggests that a geographic approach helps to describe how “the relationship of assistance is spatialized between those who are assisting and those who are being assisted” (Smirl, 2015, p. 6). The “space of the field” is produced for humanitarians by the same relations that generate “camp space”, a socially produced parallel space built for the control and maintenance of refugees—but, notably, reproduced by camp residents as a site of political and economic agency (Ramadan, 2013). Camp space in some ways resembles urban space as it is experienced by Syrians in Irbid—the techniques of power and control at work in the INGO office certainly bear resemblance to those identified by Hyndman (2000) and Hoffman (2017). But more on this later.

Technologies of reporting and control impact both the formation of bridging ties and the relational meanings of identities. The control of social interaction between humanitarians and refugees, and the segregation of people in physical space of this particular INGO office, is both produced by and contributes to the formation of unbalanced power relationships between humanitarian aid workers and those they serve. It also serves, both incidentally and explicitly, to control and cut social bonds between Syrians and humanitarian aid workers who serve them. Correlations between a lack of social interaction and hostile encounters between humanitarian workers and those they serve are identified, for example, by Walkup (1997), Autessere (2014), Hyndman (2000), or Tauson (2016).



Aid workers are often cloistered in social bubbles, socially and spatially segregated from those they attempt to serve (Hyndman, 2000; Apthorpe, 2011a, 2011b; Mosse, 2011; Harrison, 2013; Autesserre, 2014; Smirl, 2015; Fluri and Lehr, 2017). In the context of the refugee regime, this segregation reflects, among other things, a sheering of bridging ties between refugees and host communities. Autesserre observes that “local people and interveners themselves deplore the latter’s tendency to live in a bubble, where they interact mostly with other expatriates and lack contact with host populations, and yet this phenomenon still occurs throughout zones of intervention” (2014, p. 5). Smirl, similarly, identifies “an impression among fellow aid workers that it was impossible to ever reach ‘the field’ as it truly was,” spurring on what she calls “the endless search for ‘the field’” (2015, p. 8). Smirl describes humanitarian aid workers as “a closed tribe”, among whom there is no talking to outsiders, accepting of critique, or admission of flaws (2015, p. 13); she describes this as an “inside/outside divide” between aid workers and beneficiaries (2015, p.14). The inside/outside divide was on clear display at all the valves of admission in the INGO office, but it was at work at all times in Jordan. One UNHCR staff member admitted to me that UN staff in Jordan are forbidden to “fraternize” with Syrians, for fear of corruption (Key Informant 5 Aug).

The security of aid workers is enforced through fortification of the spaces aid workers occupy, making refugees simultaneous objects of sympathy and suspicion (Smirl, 2015; Hoffman, 2017; Pallister-Wilkins, 2014). No actual recipients of aid are allowed into this artificial, extra-geographical territory, except in highly orchestrated moments of contact; interaction with “beneficiaries” swiftly becomes an uncomfortable

inconvenience, especially when overworked NGO staff are told by those supposedly benefiting from their labour that the work they are invested in is not, in fact, helping very much (Walkup, 1997; Apthorpe, 2011a; Autesserre, 2014; Smirl, 2015). This distance impacts social networks, relationships of power, and the corresponding production of space. As these three elements reinforce one another, Smirl observes that “the space of the field [is] becoming more and more distant from the places in need of assistance.” (2015, p. 5).

Formation of bridging ties and the negotiation of belonging to new social networks is prevented by, in part, social, human and financial capital: “Membership in the community of interveners endows expatriates with social capital,” Autesserre tells us. “Interveners are treated like VIPs in many theatres of deployment and, because of the salary gap, they enjoy a quality of life much higher than that of their local peers” (2014, p. 206). Communities of “expats” enjoy privileges which are normalized within their closed communities and resented from without, both by host populations and aid recipients (Apthorpe, 2011a; Autesserre, 2014; Fluri and Lehr, 2017), which further prevent membership in varied social networks in the country of work. Similarly, both international staff and national staff experience a life which is out of reach of their “beneficiaries” (Apthorpe, 2011a; Smirl, 2015). Separation arising from social capital was manifest even in the seemingly shared (but actually socially policed) space of the waiting rooms INGO office: staff built a social cordon by displaying their own untouchable VIP status when passing through places where refugees were allowed to sit and wait (but little more). Members of humanitarian social networks belong to a distinct

and highly mobile culture unmoored to physical space and unrelated to the countries in which they live and work (Apthorpe, 2011b). Staff members, both local and foreign, rotate quickly based on technical expertise rather than familiarity with Syrian culture in exile, creating an inward-looking social sphere which has little in common with those it is created to serve (Apthorpe, 2011a; 2011b; Autesserre, 2014; Smirl, 2015).

### The “Lost” and the “Saviours”

*We didn't want to register with UNHCR. We didn't want to be refugees. But when we saw the situation... (14 August #2)*

*Syrians are lazy. They do not want to work, and prefer to come begging to NGOs.... They are greedy.... They shop from office to office, asking for more and more... Even if they are working, they go to offices and ask for more. Compare this to the Iraqis... (From a conversation with UNHCR staff, Field Notes 12 July)*

Early in my research in 2014, I was invited to a celebration of “World Refugee Day” put on by a prominent INGO in Amman. In a series of skits, refugees of various nationalities were depicted as being “lost”, moving in an aimless fashion on stage before a projected backdrop of wilderness and, in a booming voice-over, wondering if they “had a destiny” (Field Notes 19 June). Then, on the projector screen, the wilderness was replaced by the logo of the hosting INGO, two metres high. The actors turned one by one, dropped their personas of being lost, and pointed at the logo. They then walked towards it, as if drawn, with their arms and fingers extended. The music stepped up to a

celebratory tone and tempo, and the actors pin-wheeled their arms to point out at an audience made up largely of INGO staff, donors, and embassy workers. The message was clear: they had found their destiny (Field Notes 19 June). Having arrived in Jordan only two weeks before, it is hard to imagine a more shocking introduction to what passed for normal in humanitarian social spheres (Smirl, 2015; Brun, 2016).

The term “refugee” carries with it semantic prejudice. It is the title of the helpless, the idle, the weak and needy, of those demanding of international rescue (Harrell-Bond, 2002, 1986; Arendt, 1943). Malkki describes how urban refugees deliberately shrug off the assigned label of “refugee” to avoid prejudice and to blend in with host communities (1995); Kumsa documents how people struggle with the implications of being “the refugee” even after resettlement (2006). In Arabic, the term “refugee” (s. *laji*, pl. *laja’in*) includes connotations of rootlessness, homelessness, of being without family, homeland, or history (Chatty, 2013); early in the conflict, Syrians in Jordan were referred to by the Government as “guests” (*duyuf*) but this diction has changed with time (Turner, 2015; Lenner, 2016; Chatty; 2013).

With this enforced shift in identity from “guest” to “refugee,” Syrians have been increasingly pushed to the margins legally, financially, socially, and spatially (Lenner, 2016), and correspondingly have an increasing perception of being “lost” in Jordan. Syrians participating in my research repeatedly pointed to the legal prohibition by the Government of Jordan from work in their chosen field as the primary source of this sense of being lost or without destiny (26 June #1; 26 June #2; 26 June #3; 13 July #2; 23 July #1; 23 July #2; 24 July #1; 26 June #3; 13 August #2; 13 August #4; 14 August

#4; 18 August #1; 17 Sept #3). This was contrary to the perception that a loss of destiny is an innate attribute of being displaced. “I was a taxi driver for 15 years. What else can I do? I'm 50. The Government won't let me drive,” one man explained (13 Aug #2). “I was an engineer. But I cannot continue because the Government rejects it,” explained another (14 Aug #4). Instead, these feelings were related to the specific legal framework coupled to the legal, political, and social identity of “refugee”. Sense of loss or diminished worth attributable to the ban on work comes from both isolation in the home (14 Aug #4) and inability to support the family (especially for men who are the traditional source of income) (13 August #2; 14 Aug #4), but also resulting from the demeaning nature of informal work as related to life before exile. “I have a son working downtown, to pay the rent,” says one mother, “he brings fruits and vegetables to people’s cars. He was studying law in Syria, but now...” she trailed off<sup>21</sup> (24 July #1).

A lack of communication of biographical stories and an emphasis on biological data on the human subjects of aid renders these complaints illegible in humanitarian understandings of the crisis (Smirl, 2015; Brun, 2016; Hyndman, 2000). There was a fractional logic behind the narrative employed in the World Refugee Day ceremony described above. The ban on legal work, in place until 2016, forced Syrians to wait at home for handouts from aid agencies or spend their days visiting INGO offices petitioning for better financial support, or to break the law to support their families<sup>22</sup>

21 Demeaning work and poor working conditions associated with most positions for which a work permit is available mean these situations persist into 2017 (Lenner and Turner, forthcoming),

22 In 2016, Jordan agreed to provide 200,000 work permits over four years to Syrians in Jordan in exchange for EU trade concessions (Jordan Compact, 2016; Crawley, 2017; Williams, 2017). While easing of access to formal work is a positive step, initial uptake has been tepid. This is due to complex application processes, a limit on sectors of work available, fear that work permit holders will lose access to aid, transportation costs and distance to workplaces, and the fact that most approved industries already operate mostly in the informal sector (Lenner and Turner, forthcoming; Crawley, 2017; Williams, 2017; UNHCR, 2016; Staton, 2016a; Alhajahmad, 2017).

(CARE, 2014; Achili, 2015; Lenner, 2016; Lenner and Turner, forthcoming).

Humanitarian aid workers and members of the host community often interpreted these acts of waiting and begging as laziness or an innate inability to care for oneself (Field notes 12 July, 19 July, 25 Aug, 9 Oct), without appreciation for the legal structures that created the situation (CARE, 2014; Lenner, 2016; Lenner and Schmelter, 2016) or reference to Syrians' own ability to describe their experiences of the situation.

Brun refers to this partial logic as “humanitarian reasoning” (2016). Without any sharing of refugees' experiences and narratives, humanitarian aid workers struggle to build awkward mental models of what refugees want or need. These are largely based on ungainly representations of refugees' situations—needs assessments, inter-agency reports, internal memos, and statistical aggregations of survey data based on Likert scales, but very rarely any actual conversation with “beneficiaries” about their needs and goals (Hyndman, 2000; Smirl, 2015; Brun, 2016; Hoffman, 2017). All other concerns are not made visible. This stripping away of biographical histories to present only simple biological needs allows only for the understanding of refugees as apolitical *homo sacer* in the humanitarian eye, however politically active they may be and however they may see themselves (Agamben, 1998; Brun, 2016; Ramadan, 2013). These representations in turn are the only lens by which humanitarian spaces are represented to headquarters, shaping a flawed “humanitarian imaginary”, which feeds back into reproducing the “space of the field” (Smirl, 2015, p. 3). Smirl describes this effect as the “disconnect of epistemologies” which occurs between aid workers and those who “experienced the

Practically, the situation remains the same for the majority of Syrians in Jordan.

disaster” (2015, p.1). By devising tools which focus on the need to preserve life in an emergency context, past experiences and future goals are superseded by immediate needs (Brun, 2016).

Humanitarian aid in to Syrians in urban Jordan focuses largely on financial support for food and shelter. Yet when I asked Syrians in Irbid how social networks and identity impacted their lives, many families responded by foregrounding the severe negative effects of loneliness, isolation, and being cut off from the world. Interview respondents sometimes mentioned loneliness *in the same sentence* as hunger and poverty as a serious hardship endured by interview respondents (27 July #2, 14 August #2 , 17 August #1, 17 Sept #3). Work as a means to leave the home and interact with others was often identified as one solution; as one respondent who had recently secured a volunteer position at a local NGO summarized,

When I came [to Jordan], I felt mentally sick, because I stayed at home all the time. I just thought of how life was before... of problems in Syria. This job helps me be more normal. A more normal person. In Syria I worked as a teacher for 12 years. Here I just stayed home, just watching TV. Just home with my daughters, no one else. I felt bad about it. (14 Aug #2)

Families specifically identified increased social interaction as a way that their lives could be improved (14 Aug #1; 17 Aug #1). Household heads identified spending time with other Syrians who shared a common understanding of their situation as potentially helpful. At the end of our interview, one woman told me, “I want more things like this. I want to talk to people. A society where I could talk with other Syrians, yell, cry” (14 Aug #1). Biographies and futures (Brun, 2016) were the most pressing concerns in the

imaginaries of refugees themselves. These findings both illustrated how Syrians felt social networks *could* benefit them in non-financial ways, and because they demonstrated a lack of connection between humanitarian aid workers (and the understandings and meanings they create) and the refugees they worked to serve.

Similarly important to respondents was lack of agency and the mental effects of perpetual inactivity (13 July #2; 24 July #1; 27 July #2; 17 Sept #1; 17 Sept #3). “I haven’t ‘done’ anything since I came here,” says one woman, when asked about what she does in her spare time. “I just react. I miss everything about Syria” (24 July #1). Another man said, “I wake up, take coffee, take *argileh*,<sup>23</sup> go to work. I come back home, smoke *argileh*. I eat, drink and sleep. I want to see my family. I miss my family” (13 July #2).

One father, grieving for his past life in Syria, told me:

When we lived in Syria, we were building a house for my sons. And I was going to marry one of my sons. But now, my whole life has stopped. I can't marry my sons here. Three years ago, my life stopped. My daughter was in university, second year. But she can't complete her education now. Education in Jordan is too expensive. My other daughter—the university qualification exams were cancelled in Syria (27 July #1).

This focus on emotional and mental health, equal to that of physical health, helps to show how wellbeing is central to decision-making (Tauson, 2016) and how biographies are integral to understanding refugees’ understanding of their own situations (Brun, 2016).

These feelings of loneliness, boredom and powerlessness are brought on by an inability to pay the cost of transportation to visit nearby friends and relatives. Many who

23 A water pipe used for smoking tobacco, common practice throughout the Middle East. *Argileh* pipes are sometimes referred to as shisha or hookah pipes in English.



expressed loneliness said that more time with friends and family would solve this problem, but that the cost of visiting and hosting prohibited this (26 June #1, #2; 10 July #1, #2; 13 July #1; 23 July #1; 24 July #1; 24 July #2; 27 July #1; 13 Aug #3; 14 Aug #2; 14 August #4; 18 Aug #1 #2; 17 Sept #3). As one respondent said, “I know some people from Syria. I meet them by chance at UNHCR or in the street sometimes. Sometimes I see on TV that someone I knew is dead. But they live too far away, so I don't connect with them... Maybe if there was a better situation, more money, I could travel more” (24 July #1). Another said, “I know lots of people from Syria. Some are family, some are not. But we did not connect. There is no money” (24 July #2). Syrians recognized isolation and loneliness as a generalized trait of the space they occupied; one woman summarized the commonality of this situation: “Sometimes we visit the family here in Jordan. Just once a month, maybe. You know how the situation is here” (18 Aug #1). One father explained that spending money that could be used elsewhere in order to maintain social connections was a trade-off he could not accept, even if it would improve his life: “Another part of my family lives here, brothers, but far. I prefer to save the money a taxi would take. I want to save it for my children” (18 Aug #2).

While my research suggests that stronger relationships with the host community correlates with improved wellbeing (see the previous chapter; see also Tauson, 2016), household heads specifically related that a lack of money restricted their ability to build new relations. “There are some good new relationships, mostly with Syrians. There aren't really with Jordanians. I can't make relationships because I have a bad situation. If I had more money, I could go out, meet more people,” explained one father (14 Aug #4).

Without opportunities for dignified self-sustenance, Syrians become segregated in the city much as they are in the camp, cut off from both host and humanitarian communities. Mobility is restricted through financial and legal rather than political prohibitions. Social networks are dismantled, and new connections have no space in which to grow. While humanitarians and other Jordanians have the power to travel from city to city daily, Syrians are dispossessed of the right to movement. Refugees' interaction with urban space is defined in part by this restriction, much as camp space is heavily influenced by restrained mobility (Ramadan, 2013; Hyndman, 2000; Harrell-Bond, 1986).

Power relations produce space. Fear of being reported to Jordanian police as illegal workers kept many Syrian respondents inside, insulated, and silent when necessity forced them out of the house.<sup>24</sup> “We can't know the feelings of strangers. I don't feel safe here,” said one woman, when asked about new friendships (17 Aug #1). Of the respondents who stated they had made new friends in Jordan, most said that they could not make “deep” relationships. One man explained that he goes out, but does not reveal any personal details: “I go to the mosque, but I don't speak to anybody. I prefer not to make relationships here. I think this will make problems” (13 Aug #2). Fear of the authorities was not the only reason people stayed inside. Respondents explained that Jordan is a significantly more male-dominated and misogynistic society than that of pre-conflict Syria (17 Sept #1, #2; Field Notes 12 July). When asked why she had not made friends in Jordan, one woman responded with the story:

24 As many Syrians have chosen not to apply for work permits, are unable to do so, or have changed jobs since receiving a work permit, this fear persists into 2017 (Su and Laub, 2017; Lenner and Turner, forthcoming).

My daughter went to the pharmacy for medicine. An old man said 'have 15JD and come with me.' He took them to a building and said he would give some things for school. The girls said this is a bad man, so they ran away from him. I want to go back to Syria and feel safe. I am afraid for my daughters after this situation. I don't feel safe here. There are bad boys, the police came—there are many problems. It is a dangerous place. (17 Sept #1)

As in humanitarian/Syrian relations, Syrians were completely powerless and extremely vulnerable to exploitation in relationships with Jordanians. The systems in place to protect Syrians were failing; while theoretically Syrians could go to the police for protection, the *de facto* requirement that Syrians work illegally to survive meant that reporting of a crime could be equally dangerous. Relationships of fear and vulnerability further dictated what spaces Syrians could access and how they behaved in those spaces. As described elsewhere (Hoffman, 2017; Smirl, 2015; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015), and evidenced by the INGO office described earlier in this chapter, the preoccupation of the humanitarian community with the security of their own staff (to the point of self-enforced spatial segregation) contrasts with the bare exposure of Syrians to vulnerability in urban space—which produces its own distinct dynamics of segregation.

### *One-Time Aid and the Denial of Self-Determination*

*If any one thing characterizes the camps and humanitarian work generally, it is the grinding and constant state of displacement: of staff, of refugees, of local people, and of language. (Hyndman, 2000, p. xx)*

Humanitarian staff who participated in this study rarely mentioned the social and emotional hardships emphasized by Syrians. In open-ended interviews, aid workers tended to focus on themes of encampment (Key Informant 9 Aug), shelter (Field Notes 13 July), countering fraudulent claims (Key Informant 12 July) and the enduring “emergency nature” of the response demanding ongoing one-time aid rather than monthly support (Key Informant 12 July, 9 Aug; Field Notes 29 July, 1 Aug). The vast majority of aid to Syrian households comes in the form of one-time “emergency” cash transfers. Syrians who participated in the study repeatedly and specifically singled out one-time aid packages offered by most agencies as unhelpful and quickly spent, leaving families entirely on their own going forward (for an extensive examination of this tension, see Chapter 2). Many households expressed a preference for smaller monthly aid packages. “NGOs and UNHCR must provide a salary for each [Syrian family], but they do not. And we don't know why,” one woman told us (13 July #2).

Smirl represents “the field” as an extension of the “space of origin” of humanitarian aid workers, a “pushing out” of home countries, headquarters, and previous countries of work into the present (2015, p. 5; see also Brun, 2016; Apthorpe, 2011a). Space and relationships are temporal as well as physical (Massey, 2005), creating an “asymmetric temporal relationship” between aid workers (who come, briefly, and leave) and their beneficiaries (who invariably stay—or, occasionally, leave with much more difficulty and risk) (Smirl, 2015; Apthorpe, 2011a; Brun, 2016). As Bourdieu (1977) claims that subjects are inseparable from their habitus—from present, past and future—so too aid workers exist in a space that is made in part of these various historical and spatial

remnants<sup>25</sup> (Smirl, 2015; Brun, 2016). Reluctance to shift from an emergency model, a stubborn focus on encampment, and suspicion of refugees as potential fraudsters all reflect how technical training, past work experience in other countries and a “pushing out” of expectations from home countries produce a distinct culture within the social networks of humanitarians (Smirl, 2015; Brun, 2016; Mosse, 2011). By excluding Syrians from their social networks, these displaced imaginaries are not challenged and persist.

Front line humanitarian agency staff (usually Jordanian) employed to determine who would receive one-time aid packages would routinely express frustration over Syrian criticism of one-time aid (Field Notes 12 July, 1 Aug, 9 Oct). The perception of many aid workers interviewed was that Syrians did not appreciate the hard work that agency staff were doing to help (Field Notes 12 July). Front-line staff, referred to as case workers, received regular positive feedback from higher ups assuring them they were doing good work (see also Tauson, 2016; Walkup, 1997; Mosse, 2011; Apthorpe, 2011a; Autesserre, 2014). In one office in Irbid I visited regularly during my research, I observed that the management had recently hung a large whiteboard in the meeting room. One of the administrative assistants had drawn a table on the board in black permanent marker, with the names of case workers written along one side and days of the week along the top. Next to each name was the target number of Syrian households to be interviewed in a week, and beside this, a running tally of how many households were interviewed daily by each case worker. Case workers could track their progress through the week, see if

25 The habitus of the displaced is every bit as influential as that of the aid worker: the spaces produced by and for refugees can also be heavily influenced by a “pushing out” of their home countries and the experiences they had there.

they were ahead or if they were falling behind, and adjust their progress accordingly. Staff told me they loved the whiteboard progress chart. They could measure their progress against one another, and became adept in finishing interviews quickly to ensure they exceeded targets, which became a marker of pride (Field Notes 14 July, 1 Aug).

Syrians, many of whom had made multiple trips to the office and had waited long hours to secure an assessment interview, were upset by the brisk pace of the interviews set by this emphasis on efficiency. When Syrians insisted that different aid packages would better serve their needs, that assessment criteria were identifying the wrong people as ‘in need’, or that it was too difficult to secure an assessment interview, case workers were understandably confused and frustrated. Informal feedback from Syrians (injected into the case worker’s office—the only space of communication available) clashed with the positive feedback from their supervisors. This confusion and frustration sometimes led to resentment (Key Informant 12 July; Field Notes 14 July, 1 Aug, 9 October; see also Tauson, 2016; Autesserre, 2014). As stated above, my own experience conducting research in a local INGO office also reflected this resentment (Field Notes 11 Aug, 14 Aug). When we surveyed respondents in the INGO office, we were integrated into a determination process which the people who were the object of assessment interpreted as offensive and adversarial. Conversely, during interviews in homes, we were told, “I feel more comfortable speaking to you than to the agencies. It’s good you came to my home” (10 July #3). “These questions are good questions,” said another household head at the conclusion of an interview. “We need questions like these” (13

July #3); these were the same questions that were met with hostility in the case workers' office.

The one readily available source of regular aid was the World Food Program's food allowance, referred to as WFP "coupons" or "vouchers". All registered Syrian refugees universally received this support. Since 2013, Syrians have been provided with an "e-card," using the technology of an ATM chip-card and provided by MasterCard<sup>26</sup> (WFP, 2013). These cards are loaded monthly with a balance based on UNHCR assessments of need and on family size. Until August 2014, every Syrian refugee in the country had been entitled to 20 Jordanian Dinars worth of food vouchers each month, or about \$7US per person per week (Fröhlich and Stevens, 2015). The WFP system has been praised as a vast improvement on direct distribution of food to refugees, as it is logistically simpler, contributes the local economy, and allows Syrians to decide what kind of food they eat (Karim, 2014; Darwazah, 2016).

Syrians receiving the aid were not so enthusiastic. Syrians mentioned the limitations of WFP program (referred to colloquially as "the coupon" among respondents) daily throughout the research. The coupon could only be used at upscale, and therefore expensive, markets where MasterCard was accepted: as one mother said, "The coupon is not enough for food. The prices in malls or supermarkets are too much. I can't get what I need" (24 July #2). WFP coupons were electronically restricted at point of sale to only be redeemable for designated food items. Home cleaning supplies and

26 Somewhat unsettlingly, since 2013 WFP has been moving away from ATM cards to iris scans (WFP, 2016). This same technology has been utilized by UNHCR for regulating monthly assistance since 2013 (Malkawi, 2014), which has led to the informal labelling of the program "the iris" or "eye-iris" among Syrians in Irbid. The biopolitical implications of this program, while disturbing, are not explored in detail in this work and merit further research.

person hygiene supplies (11 Aug #1), clothing (18 Aug #2), baby supplies (18 Aug #1), school supplies, sweets for children or for hosting guests (24 July #2), and so on, would be rejected at point of sale. And, of course, households could not use e-cards to pay utilities or rent (13 July #1; 24 July #2; 17 Sept #3). Technology and “big data” are increasingly assumed to solve problems in refugee work; unfortunately, it is more common that a reliance on technology designed to the specifications of an outsiders’ assumptions responds to and reinforces an incomplete quantification of refugees’ experiences (Hoffman, 2017; Brun, 2016). The new WFP technology also allows for a troubling degree of monitoring of refugees’ lives, as all purchasing data is recorded and collected. Card holders have no power to opt out of this data collection (Hoffman, 2017): it is enforced monitoring masquerading as empowerment.

In order to circumvent the limitations of the WFP program and to adapt the program to their stated needs, families commonly resorted to a practice known as “selling the coupon” (10 July #1, #2, #3; 13 July #1, #2; 23 July #1; 24 July #2; 11 Aug #1; 17 Aug #1; 17 Sept #1, #2, #3). Families would either buy a product such as olive oil in bulk quantities, then separate it into smaller units and sell them individually; or, families directly purchased products which someone else had requested in exchange for cash: “Sometimes we buy milk with the coupons, then sell it—we buy the milk for others [for money]” (17 Sept #2). Unfortunately, this exchange typically reduced the direct monetary value of the coupon, as one woman explained:

UNHCR gives help for food. If you want cleaning materials, you can't buy these. So we sell it. But only for half the value. There are only specific places to buy [things with the coupons]. Expensive places. We can't benefit from these coupons. I have to be more free. (11 Aug #1)



Families would use the cash “to buy things that are more important than the coupon has” (10 July #2) in the categories stated above. People would fill their stomachs either by purchasing of cheaper vegetables in smaller markets (17 Sept #3), or more commonly, subsisting only on government-subsidized bread (10 July #3; 17 Sept #1; 18 Aug #1; Fröhlich and Stevens, 2015). As one woman told me during an interview, “Jordan is expensive. Vegetables and fruit are too expensive.” She paused, struggling with emotion, then went on: “I haven’t bought fruits for a long time” (10 July #3). Other studies have highlighted how refugees adapt UNHCR resources in unexpected ways to meet their needs (Hoffman, 2017; Lenner and Turner, forthcoming; Tauson, 2016; Ramadan, 2013; Crisp, 2017; Calhoun, 2010; Malkki, 1995). Unfortunately, these adaptations are as often resisted by UNHCR as embraced (Hoffman, 2017; Lenner and Turner, forthcoming; Tauson, 2016; Ramadan, 2013).

At the end of 2014, lack of planning for anticipated funding shortfalls forced WFP to halt blanket provision of food e-vouchers to Syrians (Field Notes 9 Oct). The cash equivalent provided on the e-vouchers was reduced to 13 Dinars, or about \$4.50US per week per person, due to funding shortfalls<sup>27</sup> (Fröhlich and Stevens, 2015). Still facing funding shortfalls and caught without a plan to respond to the deficit, WFP carried out a last minute “comprehensive food security monitoring exercise” (reportedly without the input of UNHCR) which indicated education as “highly correlated with food security”. As a result, Syrians with a Bachelor’s degree or higher were informed via text message that

27 One UNHCR staff member dryly suggested at a gathering that WFP employees should try “a game”: setting their own food budgets to \$4.50 a week and seeing how long they last (Field Notes Oct 9).

the following month (which would include Eid al-Adha, the feast day at the end of the month of Ramadan) their e-vouchers would no longer be credited; some reported not receiving the text until after attempting to make a purchase with an empty card at the shop (13 Oct #2, #3; Field Notes 12 Oct). On the day that the messages went out, I met with people who were shocked, angry, and deeply afraid. As one degree-holding woman yelled in frustration,

We depended on these coupons for food. Life here is impossible. The situation will be much more difficult.... We can't do anything. They don't want to help. There is no phone number to tell them how the situation is. So the rule will not change. I will just keep crying. What else can I do? (13 Oct #2)

No detail was given to Syrians about why the cuts were made, or by what criteria, and as people attempted to make sense of the policy change, rumours filled the void. One woman told me, "People say they spent the money of the agencies on employees, on the rent of those fancy buildings. This money is for Syrians, not Jordanians! Jordanians are taking it, even if they don't need it" (13 Oct, #3). Another woman said, "They gave no reason. I heard they will stop 8000 coupons every month. I heard they stopped coupons for 300 families from the same region... I think it's to force Syrians back to Syria" (13 Oct, #2). Many people felt fear for the future of the community, predicting returns to Syria and increasing tensions between Syrian families, possibly even violence (13 Oct #2, #3; 20 Oct #1; Field Notes 12 Oct). As one friend said, "You can skip the rent. This is *food*. You can't skip on this for a month. Where will people go?" When I explained the reasoning behind the cuts, he exclaimed, "They would stop the coupon for a man with leukemia, just because he has a university degree" (Field Notes 12 Oct).

While the sudden and extensive cuts to WFP were the most dramatic example, I found many examples of humanitarian agencies in Jordan deliberately concealing qualification criteria for aid from Syrians. This was based on the assumption that refugees would inevitably attempt to cheat the system if they understood it (Field Notes 12 July, 9 August; see also the previous chapter). Syrians are indeed in desperate situations and despairing parents might do anything in their power to feed their hungry families. However, interview respondents keenly perceived their exclusion from the assessment process. Whether or not households were receiving aid, they inevitably did not understand how or why decisions to be included or excluded in distribution programs were made. As one man slowly losing his eyesight to diabetes and receiving no aid from UNHCR explained,

Some people have good situations, but still get the help. Like with the IRIS [monthly support from UNHCR]. I deserve it, I'm sick, I have no money, I have children that have no food. But how does UNHCR make these decisions? I don't know. Nobody knows. People in good situations have it. Why? (17 September #3)

This lack of transparency denies refugees the possibility of providing educated feedback on the effectiveness of aid. Those who best understand the situation are stripped of voice and reduced to statistics relating physical need (Brun, 2016). Denying Syrians basic information about the nature of the system they are relegated to reinforces the unbalanced relationship of power between humanitarian aid workers and the Syrians they serve. Syrians are uninformed, excluded, and confined to the home.

Much as Syrians struggled to maintain or create social connections, access to aid agencies for the purpose of registration was a serious problem for refugees in Irbid.

Many participants complained that nobody answered the phone lines posted by humanitarian agencies (10 July #3, 27 July #1, 18 Aug #2). A woman explained simply, “We call many agencies, and none of them answer the phone” (27 July #1). One household head said that they would prefer home visits for registration, rather than having to visit or call: “We call all the phone numbers, but nobody answers. They must make visits, see the houses, the situations, then make the decision.... Sometimes the computer answers the phone” (18 Aug #2). Without being able to access agencies, refugees would chance making expensive trips to agency offices, often to find the doors closed to them. Sometimes individuals would explain that they learned of opening hours only by reading them on the locked door of an office:

We have been trying to call [the local branch of an INGO]. There was no answer. We all went to the office with my husband. We did not receive assistance. There was no meeting. The door was shut. Just a phone number on the door. You have to call [to make an appointment]. But there’s no answer. (10 July #3)

Once, during a visit to an INGO office in Irbid, I mentioned the large number of complaints I had received from Syrians that the phone lines were jammed. I was told, “No, we fixed that problem” (Key Informant 30 Sept #2). More lines had been opened and more reception staff had been hired. Yet reports continued to come in that agencies were too hard to contact. When I passed on the news to one mother that, in fact, the problem had been solved, she told me, “I have called them enough” (20 Oct #1). Faith had already been lost, and restoring it was not as easy as agency staff assumed.

Entrenched effects of social exclusion and unequal power relationships had led some Syrians to carry out acts of self-segregation from humanitarian agencies. Many

household members interviewed passionately denounced the humanitarian sector, regarding them as unhelpful, corrupt and *actively contributing* to the difficulties they face (27 July #2, 11 Aug #1, 11 Aug #2, 18 Aug #1, 17 Sept #1). In one household, a young man who had lost a leg yelled out, “Why don’t agencies help people who are injured? All the agencies are lying. They didn’t provide any help. I think they are lying” (27 July #2). Another father said, after applying for aid, “I just go and drop the application in a box. I don't know if anyone even saw it” (18 Aug #1). Suspicion of corruption in humanitarian agency decision-making was rife. “One agency got support from [donors] outside [the country]. Heaters. They stole them, just gave them to a few. Others, they took them, ran back to Syria. Too much stuff, carpets, freezers, didn't get distributed” (18 Aug #2). In an interview with two neighbours, one woman told me, “I hope I can get IRIS from UNHCR. Some get it. I think it's because they have *wasta*.” Her friend interjected, “Of course it’s *wasta*!” (17 Sept #2). While UNHCR intended the segregation of its staff to combat *wasta*, Syrians did not seem to perceive the policy was working as it should.

Many participants voiced distinctly that, because UNHCR did not help them access legal work, agencies were responsible to support them financially; the Government of Jordan lends support to this assumption in its structuring of the response (JRP, 2016). However, adequate support was not available, forcing household heads to choose between illegal work, malnourishing their children, or submitting to the indignity of encampment (13 July #2, 11 Aug #1, 18 Aug #2, 17 Sept #1, 17 Sept #2, 17 Sept #3). “I want to change the way UNHCR or agencies help.... Let Syrian families work here to help their families. I am afraid if my sons work they will be sent back to Syria,” said one

father (11 Aug #1). Staff at humanitarian aid agencies did not stop to consider the tension that their approach produced. The prevailing understanding in humanitarian space is that refugees must work to make ends meet, because humanitarian aid is necessarily insufficient (Key Informant 12 July, 9 Aug; CARE, 2014; UNHCR 2015; Lenner and Turner, forthcoming). People labelled as refugees were being forced to break the law by the very agencies charged with protecting them. The simultaneous goals of reducing vulnerability while quietly placing refugees in vulnerable situations echoed the simultaneous protection and securitization of refugees identified by Hoffman (2017; see also Pallister-Wilkins, 2015).

If Syrians are not willing to take on these risks, humanitarian reasoning follows, relocating to refugee camps such as Zaatari or Azraq is always as an option (13 July #2; Key Informant 9 Aug; Brun, 2016). The rationalizing of that choice by aid workers is rooted in a logical framework very alien to those who are actually deciding between extreme legal vulnerability and a camp life devoid of dignity. “I asked UNHCR for help,” one man said. “They told me, 'if you don't like it, you can go to Zaatari.' I said: How can we live? We can't work, you don't give us money. 'You can go to Zaatari,' they said” (13 July #2). Rejection of Zaatari camp as a viable place to live for Syrian refugees was plain from my first day in refugees’ spaces. Of all households, only one reported that Zaatari *might* be an acceptable place to live, if the healthcare was better; they had left because they could not get the medical attention one household member required (14 Aug #1). Only a short open conversation would be sufficient to illustrate the grave humanitarian failing in the suggestion that “if you don’t like it, you can go to Zaatari.” The aid worker’s

inability to understand the widespread horror with which Syrians in Jordan view encampment is a microcosm of a multitude of problems that the isolation of urban refugees creates in the relief effort.

*“If you don’t like it, you can go to Zaatari”*: Competing perspectives on Encampment

*Refugees will make this camp. Our role is to accompany them, abiding by the laws and regulations of Jordan... the mandate of the Government and UNHCR do not conflict. We are speaking with one voice. (Presentation by a UNHCR Representative at Azraq Camp, Field Notes 16 June)*

*Spatial structures try to ‘hold the world still’ but this eliminates also any possibility of real change. (Massey, 2005, p. 38)*

Humanitarian aid workers in Amman commonly expressed confusion and frustration regarding Syrians' resistance to living in camps (see, for example, the recollection at the opening of the chapter). Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war, humanitarian agencies have struggled to adequately support urban refugees, who are difficult to locate on a map, count, assess for need, and provide with the various types of aid required to maintain nutrition, shelter, and hygiene—the basic stuff of life. Since the Government of Jordan shifted from a non-encampment policy in 2013, UNHCR Jordan made Jordan a poster-child for a new era of refugee camps (Seeley, 2013; 2014; UNHCR, 2017a). Today, Jordan features two large camps, Zaatari and Azraq.<sup>28</sup> Zaatari, in the north and near to the Syrian border, was established in 2013 and holds just over

28 In addition to Azraq and Zaatari, three other camps exist in Jordan. The largest, known as the Emirati Camp, is sponsored by UAE and holds nearly 7,500 Syrians (UNHCR, 2017a). Two smaller camps, Cyber City and King Abdullah Park, were established in contracted business compounds in 2013 to house Palestinian-Syrians. Little is known about the latter two camps (Field Notes Aug 9).

80,000 Syrians. Azraq, in the east, was established in 2014, has recently grown to hold nearly 54,000 Syrians by UNHCR's count (UNHCR, 2017a; Hoffman, 2017; Turner, 2015).

Logistically, all refugee camps in Jordan are very well connected, within two hours of the capital, Amman, driving on paved roads; most camp workers live in the city and commute daily. Resources are readily available and reaction time to shortages or other emergencies is quick (Field Notes 16 June, 9 Aug; Kliendschmidt, 2014). Zaatari and Azraq camps have abandoned tents in favour of hard-walled shelters. In both camps, WFP supplements basic allotments of bread with cash vouchers and—to the incredulity of journalists and visiting VIPs—a supermarket, where camp residents allocate their monthly WFP allowance of 20JD per person (camp based Syrians were spared from the cuts described above) on whatever varied foodstuffs they see fit (UNHCR, 2014a, Seeley, 2013; 2014; Staton, 2016c; Su and Laub, 2017). In both Azraq and Zaatari camps, Syrians have access to healthcare and schooling which surpasses that available to refugees in most cities in Jordan.

The conceptualization of camps as tools of management, securitization, control, and governance of refugees (Harrell-Bond, 1986; Malkki, 1995; Hyndman, 2000; Ramadan, 2013; Turner, 2015; Hoffman, 2017) is not common in the humanitarian epistemology of Jordan. Instead, aid workers insisted that camps were designed around better serving the needs of refugees, with guaranteed housing and better service provision (Key Informant 9 Aug). Camp residents are thus (in theory) guaranteed access to adequate food, shelter, health care—all the base requirements of life—often in



unprecedentedly flexible ways when compared to past scenarios of encampment (Seeley, 2013; 2014; Staton, 2016c; UNHCR, 2017a; Hyndman, 2000; Harrell-Bond, 1986). After a difficult first year marked with riots and lagging infrastructure, a thriving Syrian community complete with shops and restaurants led Zaatari refugee camp to be heralded as a revolution in the way UNHCR designed refugee camps (Seeley, 2013). During the construction of Azraq, UNHCR repeatedly announced that the new camp was being built on “lessons learned” from Zaatari, giving the impression that it would improve further on the supposed humanitarian gains made in Zaatari (Hoffman, 2017; Seeley, 2014; Staton, 2016c).

Yet clearly something else is going on in Azraq and Zaatari, as Syrians in Jordan desperately avoid encampment. At the time of my research, only 18% of Syrians in Jordan were living in camps (UNHCR, 2017a). Many Syrians interviewed reported previously living in Zaatari camp before leaving (usually irregularly) for cities. If humanitarian aid workers could produce long lists of reasons why camp life was better for Syrians, what could be driving them away?

Syrians who participated in this research did not hide their opinions on camp life. In contrast to the image presented by humanitarian agency staff, Zaatari camp was “unlivable” (27 July #1; 18 Aug #1; 17 Sept #2, #3; 13 Oct #1, #2; 20 Oct #2). The new semi-permanent shelters still stripped the household of privacy, especially with respect to private space for women (27 July #1; 18 Aug #1; 17 Sept #2, #3; 13 Oct #1). Communal washrooms meant line-ups in the sun and the publicisation of the private acts of relieving oneself and bathing—again, especially for women—were

considered intolerable (27 July #1; 13 Oct #1; 13 Oct #2). As one young woman told me, “Life in Zaatari was too hard. We had to line up for the bathroom. Life was hard. We can't live there. So we left” (27 July #1). At night, it was considered too dangerous to go out, meaning a long and degrading wait until morning. “When I came, I lived in Zaatari for one week. Then I left. If you [need to] go to the bathroom at midnight, you can't. Women can't leave the house at midnight” (13 Oct #3). Another woman explained her experience there:

I spent three days there. The life was too difficult. They put me and my children in a tent with many other people. All in the same tent, with each other. If you want to sleep, we all slept at the same time, together. There was just one bathroom, a dirty one. I thought if I couldn't get to Irbid, I would go back to Syria. (13 Oct #1)

Especially in the early days, the infrastructure of the camp was inadequate to deal with environmental realities of the area. As one man told me, “I came in January 2013. There was snow at this time. All the Zaatari camp was destroyed by the snow, the water. I stayed there seven days, then... when the storm started [again], I went to the main gates” (17 Sept #3). Lack of stimulation or purpose was a major concern of Syrians who had left Zaatari for Irbid. For people who were accustomed to working hard in career tracks they were proud of, idly waiting for aid and loitering at home was for some too much to take (17 Sept #3; 13 Oct #2; 14 Oct #1; 20 Oct #2; Field Notes 16 June; see also Khoury, 2015). In the city, at least, one could cling to a shred of hope that hard work would lead to a clean, dry, and private home with a balcony garden. Several interview respondents even reported having family who chose to return to Syria rather

than remain in Zaatari (13 July #2; 23 July #1; 13 Aug #1; 18 Aug #1). “My brother and sister lived in Zaatari, but the life was very bad there so they decided to go back to Syria,” said one former camp resident (18 Aug #1).

I was given the rare opportunity to a visit Azraq in June of 2014 as part of an INGO ‘staff day’. During the span of research, Zaatari camp was closed to new admissions (except family reunification in a very limited number of cases) and all new arrivals were to be sent to Azraq (Seeley, 2014; Field Notes 5 Aug; Hoffman, 2017). The camp is set about 100km east of Amman, in some of the harshest desert in Jordan. The uniform landscape was broken only by rows upon rows of identical gleaming metal cabins and small dark stones—no trees or natural shelter could be seen. I wrote in my Field Notes “We walked through this crop of metal huts, newly raised from the desert. The heat was fierce. We turned our collars up.... The ground was orange-red with little black broken stones” (Field Notes 18 June). The view was bordered by brown hills in the distance. Most of the cabins were empty (Field Notes 16 June; 18 June; Seeley, 2014). Those which had inhabitants were decorated with children’s drawings in black paint—FIFA World Cup drawings, memories from Syria, and other children's distractions; a staff member explained from our air conditioned “VIP” bus that camp residents had been getting lost among the rows of identical cabins, so black paint was provided to children to decorate their homes with unique motifs and thus provide distinguishable landmarks (Field Notes 16 June).

During a walk along one cabin block, a camp resident zeroed in on me. I recorded the encounter in my field notes:

An old man comes up to me... and asks a question, tapping the metal cannister [shelter] walls. I don't understand his question, and the staff around me laugh and usher me forward. "He thought you were important," they say. "He asked, 'why did you use metal? Can't you change it?'" (Field Notes 18 June)

He had approached me because I was the only foreigner in the group, assuming that I was the most (rather than the least) influential person in the group. Families living in these structures were squatting—no chairs were in sight—in the shadows of doorways, the best spot to balance the otherwise-unbroken sun and the baking heat inside the homes. Residents who approached us wore shirts or scarves tied over their heads and were deeply tanned; there were no other sources of shade in the landscape. Later on, we were brought inside to attend a presentation by senior camp staff. "Poisonous snakes and scorpions in the camp" were listed as a challenge, and the dangerous creatures were known to "hide in the shade of shelters" and water distribution points (Field Notes 16 June). Wind whipped at the canvas roofs of communal structures so brutally that voices could not be heard over the slapping fabric; the UNHCR camp manager shouted over the noise to express thankfulness for the good weather. I assumed she was being ironic, but it quickly became clear that she was not. "You can see that Azraq is not Azraq today," she shouted above the din. Typically, the wind and dust were much worse<sup>29</sup> (Field Notes 16 June).

UNHCR intended each pre-planned 'village' to have a community-run market, as in Zaatari; these market spaces were marked on the map included in the welcome

29 The physical layout of Azraq has not changed since 2014. Cabins are still built to the same specifications, shelter from the sun is hard to come by, and, of course, the weather is the same (Hoffman, 2017; Staton, 2016b; 2016c). Driving past the camp in 2017 revealed that coloured paint had been distributed.

document (UNHCR, 2014a). However (as is so often the case), the map did not represent reality. Unlike Zaatari, the community markets were to be regulated jointly by UNHCR and the Government of Jordan, with a mix of Syrian and Jordanian business operating in the camp. Negotiations with the Government of Jordan to regulate businesses and allow local Jordanians to open shops had stalled, and no community markets had been opened (Field Notes 16 June; Staton, 2016c; Hoffman, 2017). The lack of informal markets both stripped residents of daily occupations and meant the only source of food was the central supermarket, owned and operated by a Jordanian chain. It was 20 minutes walking from the center of the village we visited, again through unbroken desert sunshine (Field Notes 16 June; WFP, 2016).

At the time of my visit—shortly before Ramadan, the most religiously significant month in Islamic faith—no mosque had been opened in the camp. The INGO representative stated that “hopefully” the mosque would be finished before the start of the holy month, but his tone did not suggest this was likely.<sup>30</sup> In the mean time, people were using a tent for prayer. “It’s hot to sit there. It’s not a very nice place,” said the presenter (Field Notes 16 June). In going through a list of grievances received through the official complaint system, almost all of the most common requested changes were dismissed as “not going to happen”. Camp residents complained that not enough bread was being distributed—only four pieces per person per day. “But these things will not change,” said the presenter. People felt that water distribution points were too far, but were “still within SPHERE standards” (Field Notes 16 June). The only complaint that

30 Informal markets were finally opened in 2016. However, they are failing due to a stagnant economy in the camp: too few camp residents have any money, and fewer still have ways to make more (Staton, 2016c).

produced a change in the camp was that the prices of supermarket goods were too high: in the absence of competition from informal markets, the single permitted supermarket owner had used his monopoly to increase the prices of goods<sup>31</sup> (Field Notes 16 June).

Unlike Zaatari, in Azraq there was no wired electrical power grid in the residential areas of the camp (there has always been electricity in the staff areas). This was a source of common complaint for camp residents, but at that time there had been no serious efforts made to change the situation—the electrical network was also “not going to happen” (Field Notes 16 June). As such, the only electricity readily available to households was a solar-powered lantern with a port which allowed for the charging of cellphones (Field Notes 16 June; UNHCR, 2014a). However, the lanterns only produced enough current to recharge Nokia “stick” phones, and not enough to charge the smartphones which many households had retained from previous lives in Syria, and allowed access to cheaper communication options like Whatsapp and Facebook.<sup>32</sup> Camp managers had opened a smartphone recharging station powered by a gas generator; a staff member admitted that when the station was a half-hour late in opening one morning, a camp riot had nearly resulted (Field Notes 16 June). Another member of the camp staff told a story about a similar situation. Camp staff attempted to arrange a showing of a FIFA World Cup game, but misinformation about which game would be shown had been given from staff to people living in the camp. When people arrived to an

31 Despite reporting in the staff day presentation that the problem had been solved, reports in 2016 suggest that price inflation at the supermarket is ongoing (Staton, 2016c).

32 Azraq was connected to a solar power grid in May 2017. It is being celebrated by UNHCR as “world’s first refugee camp powered by renewable energy”. These celebrations conveniently overlook the fact that camp residents lived without electricity for three years. The electricity will be connected to shelters housing 20,000 people; Azraq is home to nearly 55,000 (UNHCR, 2017a, 2017b).

empty and dark building, frustration again reached a boiling point and another riot was narrowly averted (Field Notes 16 June).

During the staff day event, some camp staff received news of these events with rolled eyes and clucked tongues (Field Notes 16 June). Quick and extreme responses to what seemed to be small problems reinforced (consciously or unconsciously) the dual narrative of refugees as “at risk” and “a risk” (Hoffman, 2017) found in the humanitarian imaginary. But clearly these oversights were important to camp residents. Cellphones with internet access and televised sporting events were examples of the very few links these individuals had to the world beyond camp space (Ramadan, 2013). These thin cellular lifelines were tools to carry snippets of previous lives of independence and dignity into the spaces these people now occupied (Brun, 2016; Smirl, 2015; see also Bordieu, 1977). Cutting links to the outside further restricted ways in which Syrians were able to exercise agency in camp space, and influenced their ability to take part in the production of camp space (Ramadan, 2013). Misinforming camp residents of opening hours or event times, and then dismissing the importance of that misinformation, served to reaffirm the unbalanced relations of power in this new environment (Brun, 2016; Hoffman, 2017).

After the information session, the day ended with packed lunches brought from a restaurant in Amman and a cheery quiz game. Questions about the history of the INGO and Syrian crises were met with laughter and cheering as staff jostled for a chance at the microphone.

The event was more of a party than a training. There was a quiz game, excited shouting, applause. Prizes. Competition, fierce competition for the prizes.

A kid, little, brown-tanned kid hissed at me from a nearby window. “The food,” he said in Arabic. “Bring me some of the food.” The lunches had been packed away, but there were plates of cookies on the other side of the hall. The boy was small, maybe five years old, maybe seven. There were spaces between his teeth. He wore a dusty red fleece sweater and pushed his face against the bars of the window. His hands held fast to the bars, pushing his face against them.... I noticed a scar on his forehead for the first time. It was as long as the last joint of my thumb. Long healed, with little pockmarks of hasty stitches tracing the arc. “Food!” His eyes swept the room—the cheering staff. The prizes. He saw it all very clearly.

Absurd. I could not [bring myself to] cross the room—upset this upsetting ritual ‘team building’—to fetch cookies for this boy. I pointed across the makeshift hall with metal walls and the canvas roof. “Try that window,” I attempted to say in Arabic. “Closer to the food.” He replied with something I did not understand, then said again *food*, more agitated. Try that window. Food. The exchange was repeated until the security guard chased him away.

We were in the community centre—the space for the ‘village’ to convene—which we had appropriated for the event. Beside it was the waiting area where refugees could make their complaints, provide their feedback to the NGO. They sat with scowls—we had seen them during the tour, though most of us had our backs to them—while we clapped and cheered and made jokes. (Field Notes 18 June)

I was deeply shaken by what I had seen in Azraq. How could humanitarian workers get it so wrong? It seemed that every decision had been made for residents before they arrived—and had been made against their interests. I was also upset by the ways I had implicated myself in the power structure; I record in my field notes that, anxious to make friends in a new place (and hopefully to find work down the road), I did my own share of joking and laughing through the day (Field Notes 18 June).



Many (but by no means all) UNHCR and INGO staff I met in the camp were aware of and concerned by the failings at Azraq. A senior INGO staff member had implemented the complaints system in response to the humanitarian failings of the camp, and he was upset about being unable to fix many of the problems. “Economy is protection. No economy, no protection,” said one UNHCR staff member when asked about the lack of informal markets (Field Notes 16 June). The same person admitted that “people will not stay without access to electricity” (Field Notes 16 June). In response to the miscommunication about the FIFA World Cup showing and similar events, UNHCR was training staff on the importance of communicating information correctly and clearly, and on saying “I don’t know” when appropriate. Establishing a permanent mosque before Ramadan was a serious goal of the team, even if it was beginning to appear unlikely (Field Notes 16 June, 18 June). However, all the concerns I recorded in my notes were in reaction to, rather than anticipation of, the discomfort of camp residents. Many of these problems should not have been difficult to predict by industry professionals. When Azraq was mentioned by Syrian respondents in household interviews, the camp was presented alongside “deportation” to Syria (refoulement) as a roughly equal punishment. Many insisted that they would rather return to Syria than face life in the new camp (26 June #3, 13 July #2, 23 July #1, 24 July #1, 18 August #1, 17 September #3). Members of the humanitarian community seemed to believe that the problems which had arisen in Azraq were beyond the possibility of prediction, rather than inherent in the design of the camp.

At the time of my visit, UNHCR had only opened one village of the six clusters of pre-fabricated cabins. Throughout the time of my research, this village never filled to capacity. UNHCR built Azraq to house up to 130,000 Syrians (Seeley, 2014); at the time of research in 2014, frustrated aid workers repeated rumours that camp occupancy was a more-or-less steady figure somewhere between 8,000 and 12,000 (Hoffman, 2017; Turner, 2015). The exact number was unknown, however, as new arrivals were counted daily, but “head counts” conducted every three weeks indicated that the number of residents remained steady. Syrians were leaving Azraq via clandestine departures as quickly as they were being forced in<sup>33</sup> (Field Notes 9 Oct; for similar critique of attempts to quantify people via headcounts see Hyndman, 2000).

In the context of emergency and disaster relief, Smirl argues that “the post-disaster site provides a blank canvas where idealized aspects of the international may be introduced and tested” (2015, p. 3), built according to the epistemology of the builder—that is to say, the aid worker—rather than the resident of the built space:

So, when designing for a group that falls outside the group epistemology, assumptions will be made regarding the needs and nature of the second group. Historically, these assumptions are drawn from within the planners’ own society, and parallels will be drawn between the problems and needs of the planners’ immediate or known context and the problems that s/he encounters or imagines in the new environment. (2015, p. 2)

The spaces refugees occupy are “blank canvasses” built to the specifications of the builder—both physically and socially in the case of the camp (Hoffman, 2017; Ramadan,

33 Conflicting figures have been published on the current population of Azraq camp. UNHCR states nearly 55,000 are currently living in Azraq (2017). Hoffman cites 30,000, although her numbers could be out of date (2017). The real number is likely somewhere in between as UNHCR’s numbers are notoriously incorrect (Maine, 2017). The increase reflects increased securitization of Azraq, rather than an improving standard of living in the camp (Hoffman, 2017).

2013; Hyndman, 2000; Harrell-Bond, 1986). UNHCR teams designed and built Azraq camp space from institutionalized assumptions of what a camp ‘should be,’ with little regard to what Syrians themselves might expect or want from their communities. Even the camp-based staff “party” I attended aligned with expectations of an enjoyable team-building exercise—but did not respect the “needs and nature” of refugees living in Azraq.

Azraq was designed largely around challenges faced by UNHCR in Zaatari: the “problems and needs of the planners’ immediate or known context” mentioned above (Smirl, 2015, p. 2). During the staff day at Azraq, staff made many references to lessons learned from Zaatari, matching the terminology seen in UNHCR publications and journalism (Field Notes 16 June, 18 June). But when the actual “lessons” were described by UNHCR, they were focused around logistical convenience and institutional control. Contrary to hopeful reports in the media, UNHCR’s lessons learned had nothing to do with what had made Zaatari camp into a more-or-less successful community—i.e., the ability of camp residents to reshape the space to their own needs<sup>34</sup> (Hoffman, 2017; see also Ramadan, 2013). In response to the “unauthorized”/unanticipated accessing of the electrical grid in Zaatari by camp residents, the “privilege” of access to electricity was simply revoked. To avoid the security issues of the early days of Zaatari, Azraq was divided into six remote “villages”, explicitly described as “easier to control” in case of riots (Field Notes 16 June; Hoffman, 2017) but rendering central services such as the supermarket and mosque (eventually established after my visit) brutally remote and a

34 For another point of view on the Syrians’ ability to reshape Zaatari camp, see also the ‘TedX Talk’ given by Kilian Kleinschmidt in 2014. Despite Kleinschmidt’s endorsement of this particular adaptation of UNHCR resources, his methods were extremely contentious within the humanitarian community. Shortly after he resigned in late 2014, in a private conversation the head of one INGO in Jordan dryly referred to his approach as “The Kilian Show”.

second priority (Hoffman, 2017; Staton, 2016c). Despite the distance, WFP food coupons could only be used at the supermarket by the household head—often the most elderly person in the household—to control unauthorized use and dissuade attempts at fraud. The unregulated markets of Zaatari were replaced by an unworkable business registration system which means markets were not allowed to open until long after the conclusion of the research (Staton, 2016c).

In Azraq, UNHCR replaced the trailer homes of Zaatari with dirt-floor<sup>35</sup> pre-fabricated cabins built of material inappropriate for the heat—but fixed to the ground. In Zaatari, Syrians had engineered ad-hoc methods to move trailers around, joining together family homes and building larger structures for social and business purposes (Hoffman, 2017; Seeley, 2013; Klienschmidt, 2014). Azraq planning teams solved this logistical ‘problem’ by staking cabins down and numbering them (Field Notes 16 June; Hoffman, 2017). Households could submit a form-based request to move to another cabin, and no unauthorized moves are tolerated. However, camp staff confirmed no move requests were being accepted at the time of my visit (Field Notes 16 June). When distant and overcrowded latrines led neighbouring households to move together into one cabin and dig their own latrines in the second, instead of tolerating or improving upon the process, UNHCR began to “rehabilitate” unofficial latrines and make them “fit for habitation”—to the horror of a cabin’s new residents (Field Notes 16 June; Hoffman, 2017).

35 The first cement floors in Azraq were poured in the winter of 2014/2015.

While UNHCR showed a general disinterest in the perspectives of those who were to live within Azraq, the organization was quite savvy to the perspective of another group of people: external visitors. Very little secondary information was available on the situation in Azraq without speaking directly to agency staff. Notably, journalists and VIPs frequently toured Azraq before it was populated. No new articles on Azraq were released to the media during my research—yet visits to Zaatari were facilitated for Neil Gaiman (Gaiman, 2014) Orlando Bloom (McNeil, 2014), and Prince Charles (Jordan Times, 2015), to name a few.

The meticulous construction of Azraq along the lines of “lessons learned”, while producing an environment considerably more inhumane than that of Zaatari, is perhaps the ultimate example of dominance and disconnect humanitarian reasoning. The design of Azraq camp ignores non-biological needs, the biographies and futures of those that now live there (Hoffman, 2017; Brun, 2016). Despite the hard work of some dedicated staff, the legacy of Azraq is secured: business as usual in a long line of camps built around principles of management, securitization and governance (Harrell-Bond, 1986; Malkki, 1995; Agamben, 1998; Hyndman, 2000; Ramadan, 2013; Turner, 2015; Hoffman, 2017), rather than humanitarian principles and a desire to ensure the best lives possible for displaced people.

Exceptions: Refugees in Humanitarian Social Networks

*We did our best to prove to other people that we were just ordinary immigrants. We declared that we had departed of our own free will to countries of our choice.... We wanted to rebuild our lives, that was all. In order to rebuild one's life one has to be strong and an optimist. So we are very optimistic. (Arednt, 1943, p. 110)*

*The quality of life—the level of life is becoming harder, everything gets more expensive and the agencies stop helping. But on the other hand, our children are starting to like it, to make connections. So in some ways, it's easier than before. (20 Oct #1)*

A small number of refugees in Jordan have forged strong bridging ties with members of humanitarian social networks. In my research, I frequently met Syrian “incentive-based volunteers”, individuals quasi-legally contracted to humanitarian agencies from among refugee communities. Agencies pay these volunteers a living stipend (typically at or above the average monthly wage for Jordanians). Once individuals gained experience in and personal contacts from an incentive-based volunteering position, it became considerably easier to secure further positions—the most successful had established firm memberships in new social networks and were able to use this inclusiveness to their advantage (Field Notes 1 Aug, 11 Aug). The difficulties that Syrians in Jordan faced were often lessened or negated entirely by the financial support awarded by volunteer positions (Field Notes 15 Jun, 12 July, 14 July, 1 Aug; 14 August #2, #3, #4, 17 August #1). Stipends allowed them to pay cab fares and order coffee and shisha on nights out with friends, enabling further maintenance and expansion of networks—a reflexive example of this, of course, is the friendship that some Syrian volunteers formed with me over dinners, coffees, or even imported liquor (Field

Notes 15 Jun, 12 July, 14 July, 1 Aug). Their financial and social stability circumvented or defused emotionally charged meetings in case workers' offices and led to more positive relationships with humanitarian workers. Incentive-based volunteers further improved case worker conduct and project design by helping to translate motivations, experiences, and feelings between refugees and colleagues. They acted as points of information exchange and emotional mediation.

Of course, it was an incredible challenge to secure these volunteer opportunities. Those who were lucky enough to enjoy these positions tend to be middle or upper class, familiar with office culture, computing, and the English language (14 Aug #2; Field Notes 15 Jun, 12 July, 14 July, 1 Aug). Even for those with the qualifications, the vast number of applicants meant that only a tiny percentage of qualified applicants were accepted. Yet, securing a new position became considerably easier after the first bout of work experience. This demonstrates the value of the social capital that comes along with membership in new social networks. Despite the small scale of the incentive-based volunteer model, it demonstrated some of the potential of building bridges and of evening the power relations between humanitarians and refugees.

Similarly, a few small NGOs operating in Amman were often referred to by key informants as providing quality support by being "close to refugees" (Field Notes 9 Aug, 9 Oct; Key Informant 29 July). These agencies tended to be staffed by individuals who had spent time in Jordan or Syria, who spoke or were learning Arabic, and who took active interest in Syrian and Jordanian culture. They often underemphasized "the professional" and instead brought "the personal" into their humanitarian roles (Fetcher,

2012a; 2012b; Roth, 2012). These organizations typically merged management and project offices, and did not have extensive security regimines (a locked door with a buzzer rather than tall wall with a gated security office), meaning that project staff regularly met with refugees. Projects these organizations implemented often included elements of community building and shared ownership of space, with participants spending casual time in spaces where humanitarian decisions were made, making friends in a secure and friendly environment (Key Informant 8 July #1, #2; 29 July; 9 Aug; 1 Nov). While these agencies were far from perfect, and tended to operate at small scales that may be difficult to scale up, they too provided evidence that an emphasis on the maintenance and creation of social networks and decreasing power differentials can have very positive results.

Conclusion: Pushing Camp Space into the City

*The isolated and segregated location of the camps exacerbates these relationships by defining refugees as “others” and restricting them to the lands officially designated for refugee use.... The refugees are not considered a legitimate part of the human landscape outside the camps. (Hyndman, 2000, p. 136)*

*The persistence of these inefficient modes of operation are all the more perplexing because in many cases we cannot attribute it to callousness, stupidity, or lack of self-awareness on the part of the international peacebuilders” (Autesserre, 2014, p. 5)*



In this chapter, I sought to explore some of the dynamics of the social networks between Syrian refugees in Irbid and the humanitarian workers who serve them, and traced the spatial expressions of these relations from an INGO office in Irbid to Azraq refugee camp. There is very little interaction between humanitarian and refugee social networks. Bridging ties between members of the two groups are rare. This is in parallel and contributes to Syrians' segregation from host community networks and, increasingly, from other Syrians. In Jordan, aid workers and the refugees they seek to serve are mutually isolated by culture, privilege, poverty, political and legal agency. In this chapter, I attempted to highlight three main themes in my findings: power and the production of space; humanitarian reasoning; and the "pushing out" of camp space into the city.

#### *Power and the production of space*

Syrian refugees in Irbid are intrinsically linked to humanitarian aid workers through vastly unequal relationships of power. The social production of the space in which refugees reside helps to segregate the two groups of people. Aid workers are mobile and have freedom to interact with urban space in a multitude of ways, while Syrian refugees are not. Unequal spatial and power relations are co-constituted and reinforced by dynamics of securitization, legal marginalization, economic inequality, and fear. Syrians in urban Jordan increasingly remain inside, cut off from friends, family, and opportunity. Boredom and depression reign supreme. While Syrians have been permitted to settle in cities in Jordan, without sufficient social and economic capital they have no

right to the social framework of the city. Humanitarians, conversely, are highly mobile both within and outside Jordan. They commute between cities in agency vehicles, living in upscale neighbourhoods which are economically and socially inaccessible to most Syrians. Security regimes reinforce this spatial and social segregation and underline the dynamics of power between humanitarians and Syrians themselves.

The unequal dynamics of power between Syrians and humanitarian aid workers produce built spaces such as the INGO registration office and Azraq refugee camp. These spaces are similarly produced by and reinforce relationships of power; both the office and the camp are designed to control Syrian refugees and quantify their status, stripping away “biographical data” (Brun, 2016; Hyndman, 2000) to quantify and render visible only bare life (Brun, 2016; Agamben, 1998; Hyndman, 2000). The camp and the office are spaces of conflict and tension between humanitarian aid workers and the people they are attempting to serve, and are built around the control of conflict rather than the relieving of tension. Finally, the camp space and the office space are similarly built to logistical specifications, without respect for the feelings, goals, or priorities of their human targets.

In a larger sense, Syrians report being only partially accepted in urban spaces in Irbid. While many are forced to take on informal work to make up for inadequate humanitarian aid, they do so in an environment of fear and powerlessness. The urban landscape is one of danger, and as such interaction with both Jordanians and Syrians is limited. Transportation is prohibitively expensive, magnifying distance and restricting mobility. Urban spaces of Jordan are typified by a lack of public space, and private

spaces such as cafes and restaurants require money that must go to deficits in rent, food, and water costs. Places of work are sites of risk. As a result, many Syrians do not have safe access to social spaces outside the home.

### *Segregation and Humanitarian Reasoning*

Without interaction between humanitarians and refugees, humanitarian programming is developed in a vacuum. Refugees' experiences are filtered into the humanitarian consciousness through quantitative, institutionalized data gather methods and reporting tools. Biographical data, the life-stories and hopes of Syrians, is discarded, while biological data on physical vulnerability is preserved and processed (Brun, 2016; Hyndman, 2000). Humanitarian habitus—past experiences and out-of-place assumptions, desires of donors and countries of international offices, and emphasized challenges faced locally by agencies—are fed back into project designs (Smirl, 2015; Brun, 2016). Lacking in biographical data (which is anyways incompatible with established ways of knowing), these designs often fail to meet the clearly-stated needs or desires of their Syrian objects. This constellation of incomplete data produces what Brun calls “humanitarian reasoning” (2016).

In this chapter, we consider three Jordan-based case studies: humanitarian reliance on one-time “emergency” aid, WFP e-vouchers with cash value restricted to the purchase of food, and interventions in states of work and idleness. All of these programs are based on a logic which does not give precedence to the expressed needs of refugees. Humanitarian aid workers' efforts, in other words, are failing because they are not able

to see clearly into refugees' own spaces through the narrow institutional windows afforded to them (Smirl, 2015; Brun, 2016).

Refugees themselves voiced a stubbornly consistent set of priorities very different from those held by humanitarians. Broadly, respondents were concerned with problems related to *agency*, *dignity*, and *safety*. Inability to work in meaningful ways, to visit friends and family or make new social bonds, led to feelings of aimlessness, uselessness, loneliness, helplessness, and mental decay. Loss of careers, land, fracturing of families, inability to pay rent for clean and healthy housing, all led to embarrassment, hopelessness, and perceived lack of personal or social worth. Aid that was one-time rather than regular limited the life choices that could be made by families. The need to petition multiple agencies regularly to receive consistent aid was tantamount to begging. Confusion about secret criteria left individuals in the dark about who was receiving what and why. Fear and perceptions of the danger of host communities, other refugees, and forced relocation left families isolated. Finally, avoiding encampment (because it was seen as an abject violation of agency, dignity and safety) was paramount in many refugee respondents' minds.

It was uncommon for these priorities to be considered in conversations and interviews I had with humanitarian aid workers. Neither were they frequently reflected in aid projects being carried out by INGOs in Jordan. The camp, both in its humanitarian depiction as an idealized technology for serving Syrians, and in the brutality of its execution, was an extreme example of the differences in logic and reasoning that emerge

from coupled social and spatial segregation and extremely unequal relationships of power.

### *The Pushing of Camp Space into the City*

Bordieu explains how habitus travels along with individuals through space and time (1977). Brun (2016) and Smirl (2015) describe how the habitus of humanitarian aid workers—assumptions and beliefs carried from home countries, headquarters, technical trainings, and previous “deployments” in other countries—contributes to the production of “spaces of aid” and humanitarian reasoning. Serving refugees in cities is a new endeavour for UNHCR and the humanitarian regime, and the methods and practices employed in urban settings show evidence of a long history of camp-based programming. The similarities in the nature of interaction with humanitarian organizations between urban and camp space is occasionally eerie.

The production of spaces for refugees by those with the power to do so (i.e., humanitarian aid workers, operating within the restrictions placed by government and donors) is at its most explicit in the space of the refugee camp (Ramadan, 2013; Hyndman, 2000). However, the isolation of urban refugees found in this research parallels the production of space in the camp. Based on the faulty assumption that camps are the most efficient model for serving refugees (Key Informant 9 Aug), spaces for urban refugees are produced by humanitarians as *an extension of camp space*—a perpetuation of camp space outside the camp (Ramadan, 2013). The isolation of refugee residents of urban space is achieved through a different set of tools: where the camp is

set apart from society, physically bordered and patrolled (Hoffman, 2017; Ramadan, 2013; Hyndman, 2000), urban refugees are confined by legal, economic, and social forces. Despite not being confined to camps, urban refugees in Jordan are still “not considered a legitimate part of the human landscape” (Hyndman, 2000, p. 186). Urban refugees are cooped up in homes, socially and legally obliged not to show their faces on the street.

### *Reproducing Camp Space: Social Networks and Resistance*

But Ramadan also asserts that refugees are active in the production of “camp space”. By engaging with the politics of camp space, refugees make camps into “more than just a humanitarian space of physical relief and welfare, more than a space of exception and intensified biopolitical control”, but also of “active arenas of agency in which refugees organise and resist their marginalisation” (2013, p. 71). Ramadan problematizes Agamben’s depiction of the camp as a “space of exception,” arguing that Agamben’s understanding is useful only to understand “how, why, and by whom the law is suspended” (2013, p. 69). Agamben fails to appreciate the camp as a site of agency and political activity. While the haphazard, out-of-control (from the perspective of UNHCR) development of Zaatari camp into something approaching a community (consider Hyndman, 2000) may mirror this, Azraq camp is built to a new standard of control. The ‘villages’ of Azraq, while built on UNHCR’s ‘lessons learned’ from Zaatari, will remain “noncommunities of the excluded” isolated both from urban Jordan and from each other (Hyndman, 2000, p. xxv).

Cities, too, are spaces of agency for refugees, where resources are taken up and used in new ways to meet the needs of those who live inside it, where voracious place-making occurs to adapt the space as best possible. Why else would Syrians fight so passionately to escape camp life? By renting dignified homes, engaging with the informal economy, and carefully engaging with communities, Syrians are resisting the forces which work to segregate and exclude them. Syrians who found some degree of *de facto* integration in Jordanian host communities had expanded their social networks in new directions, post-displacement, based on new negotiations of intersectional identities that would not be possible in camp space. By branching outward when capital in traditional networks was exhausted, new capital can be brought in. Increased social contact may not influence dynamics of power with respect to humanitarian policies or governmental laws (though through connections in the right places, it very well may). It does, however, allow for increased social capital and a sharing of outlook. That benefit seems to have been reproduced in the operations of refugee serving organizations which consciously build ties with the communities they serve. On the other hand, Autesserre finds that humanitarian workers who spend time and effort in breaking the boundaries between humanitarian space and the residents of the host country make decisions which lead to better outcomes and are better able to predict future events (2014). Encouraging the formation of bridging ties between refugees and humanitarians (and between members of the host community) might very well help to build better spaces for refugees in urban Jordan, and, if applied with open eyes, around the world.

## Chapter Four: Building Better Spaces

We read so often of the conquest of space, but what was/is at issue is also the meeting up with others who are also journeying, also making histories. And also making geographies and imagining space: for the coeval look back, ignore you, stand in a different relation to your 'here and now'. (Massey, 2005, p. 120)

You feel sad when you hear it. Imagine how it feels to live it. (13 Oct #2)

In opening this research, I asked: *how do Syrians in urban Jordan use membership in social networks to support their wellbeing and livelihoods?* I considered how identity mediates participation in social networks (Lin, 1999; Putnam, 2000), and explored how the intersectional nature of identity complicates that participation (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991; Valentine, 2007). Based on research by Malkki (1995) and Landau and Duponchel (2011), combined with the rich multitude of intersecting identities present on the Hawran Plateau (Wedeen, 2013; Leenders, 2012; Batatu, 1999), I expected to find social networks and identities to be a major factor in Syrians' livelihoods in urban Jordan. Rather than serving as a major source of social capital, however, most Syrians I met in Irbid were financially and emotionally exhausted. Depletion of physical and psychological resources had led to ever-increasing isolation. There was little opportunity for Syrians to negotiate membership in new social networks: the act of making new connections demanded financial, human, and social capital that most people lacked. Livelihood strategies were not largely influenced by social networks, except in terms of occasional sharing of information, in all but a few exceptional cases. Additionally, support from UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations did not make large or



sustainable contributions to most peoples' livelihoods. UNHCR and other major organizations provided very little support for community building or the establishment of sustainable livelihoods, instead focusing on one-time aid emergency provision. Six years into the conflict, one-time aid was largely forgotten and regarded as useless.

In interviews, I received continual reports of one-time aid being unhelpful, and isolation, depression, and lack of agency being a major problem among Syrians. Yet it seemed that few humanitarian aid workers I spoke to were aware of this critique of their services. To understand this disconnect, I explored the isolation of Syrians living in Irbid from another angle. To pursue this, I then asked: *what is the interaction between refugee and humanitarian social networks in Irbid? How do these interactions affect the wellbeing of Syrians? And how does the interaction of these social networks play out across space?* It was difficult to find examples of bridging ties between Syrian and humanitarian social networks, reflecting the overall segregation of Syrians already identified. In Jordan, aid workers and the refugees they seek to serve were mutually isolated by culture, privilege, poverty, and political and legal agency. Yet, despite a lack of face-to-face bonding, these two groups were linked by very strong social relations of power akin to those found in refugee camps. I identified three themes among my findings: the social production of urban spaces for refugees; the disconnects of humanitarian reasoning; and the “pushing out” of camp space into the city.

Space is produced and re-produced via relations of power, and the spaces in which refugees live out their lives are no different (Hyndman, 2000; Ramadan, 2013). Vastly unequal power dynamics between humanitarians, the host community, and refugees

have led to the production of urban spaces of exclusion and segregation. Without bridging ties or shared social networks, and sharing only highly politicized and controlled spaces such as INGO offices, humanitarian aid workers have no means by which to share in the practical, lived experience of refugees. A lack of understanding of urban Syrians' lives, blended with the assumptions and biases of humanitarians' own past experiences, created a system of reasoning which is disconnected from the actual needs and wants of would-be aid recipients. Instead, institutional logic based on decades of encampment has produced programming which reproduces the dynamics of camp space in the city.

Why are the benefits of urban refugee settlement, recorded elsewhere (Malkki, 1995; Landau and Duponchel, 2011; Calhoun, 2010; Fábos and Kibreab, 2007; Jacobsen, 2006), not reflected in the experience of Syrians in Jordan? In other case studies, refugees achieved relative financial and social integration in urban areas by negotiating intersectional identities to de-emphasize the legal label of “refugee”. In some cases, refugees have gone to great lengths to be *left alone* by UNHCR and other aid agencies (Malkki, 1995; Calhoun, 2010; Crisp et al. 2009; Landau and Duponchel, 2011). Syrians in the Middle East are among the first refugees to be served by UNHCR largely in urban settings. Somewhat counter-intuitively, this has resulted in attempts by UNHCR to make urban spaces governable in similar ways to camp space (for refugees, at least). In Jordan, a strong and well-established state authority reinforces and supports this project. Camp space is thus pushed into the urban. Where the Hutu who spoke with Malkki found the freedom of anonymity in the township (1995), Syrians are now

controlled, made ‘beneficiaries’, and in the process excluded and defined as “other”—much as they have been in camps since the 1980s (Hyndman, 2000; Harrell-Bond, 1986). The power and scope of UNHCR’s interventions into Jordanian society makes it much more difficult for Syrians to escape the notice of state and society as has been documented elsewhere (Malkki, 1995; Landau and Duponchel, 2011). Still, Syrians with sufficient financial and social capital attempt to self-segregate from humanitarian networks, removing themselves from these structures of control—according to the Jordanian Government, some 1.3 million Syrians live in the country, with only half registered as refugees at UNHCR. Some arrive on investment permits and start businesses (Amos, 2013), others simply prefer to stay below the radar (Hayden, 2017). These expressions of agency and resistance to humanitarian intervention can be seen to parallel to the re-production of “camp space” by the people that live there (Ramadan, 2013).

The findings of this research have included little optimism. What hope, then, can geography bring to a landscape built without respect to the future? In the course of my research, there were a few points where the borders built around refugees became porous, where Syrians seemed to find some hope for the future and pride in the present.

## Building Better Spaces

*Thinking the spatial in a particular way can shake up the manner in which certain political questions are formulated. (Massey, 2005, p. 9)*

*(Social) space is a (social) product. (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 26)*

In this research I found that humanitarian aid workers struggle to produce effective humanitarian interventions, as have innumerable other researchers and evaluators. Humanitarian workers often fundamentally misunderstand the *experience* of refugees in urban and camp spaces, and instead relied on assumptions based on technical trainings brought from previous experience (see also Autessere, 2014; Smirl, 2015; Brun, 2016). Participants in this research readily voiced their chief concerns: a lack of control over life, little hope for the future, and a choice between crushing idleness or the shame of engaging in otherwise normal activities which have been made illegal. A lack of space for a fulfilling life drives behaviours which agencies and governments struggle to understand, such as clandestine moonlit “escapes” from camps or dangerous onward migration to Europe.

The spaces in which refugees live are largely delineated by the overwhelming power of humanitarian and government actors. As such, it is within the power of actors and agencies to contribute to and support refugees in “building better spaces” in which refugees (and humanitarians themselves) might experience more fulfilling, dignified, and sustainable lives. The path towards better spaces begins, I believe, with bridging ties: the more opportunities humanitarian workers have to listen and learn from those

they are attempting to serve, the more humanitarian reasoning (Brun, 2016) will come into step with refugees' own imaginaries.<sup>36</sup> Existing emphasis on quantitative data and cataloging of biological life, which weeds out biographies and futures (Hoffman, 2017; Brun, 2016; Hyndman, 2000), should be complimented by more open means of direct communication which lead to more holistic understandings of culture, crisis, and motivation<sup>37</sup> (Autessere, 2014). Equally, humanitarian agencies would benefit by regarding refugees' own acts of placemaking: 'lessons learned' should ideally not focus on how to counter refugees' attempts to adapt flawed policies to meet their needs, nor force them to comply with measures designed for the convenience of aid workers. Instead, the lessons carried forward should be those which best adapt the spaces in which refugees live to refugees own needs and desires.

Once information is translated and lessons are learned, humanitarian aid workers should engage *spatially* with project design and advocacy. When building policies and projects, attention should be paid to where refugees live, where they work, and yes, even where they relax—and how this relates to people's pasts and desires for the future. How do refugees move in their landscapes, if they can? More attention to the challenges of transportation in Jordan, for example, could completely re-inscribe Syrians' relationships with their communities, families, and work (see also Lenner and Turner, forthcoming)—not to mention the impact a revised public transit system could have on Jordanians' own city spaces. Finally, and I believe most crucially, UNHCR and other agencies must pay

36 The belief that humanitarian workers must avoid contact with Syrians because they cannot resist the temptation of corruption (Key Informant 5 Aug) leads me to question the hiring and training practices of agencies rather than the corrupting power of Syrians.

37 And, one can dream, eventually *replaced* by, though it would be unrealistic to expect humanitarian agencies and their donors to give up long-standing standards of reporting in a heartbeat.

attention to the ways in which refugees engage in placemaking. How do refugees adapt the resources provided to them, retooling aid in unexpected ways? Currently, INGOs and UN bodies resist and block, rather than promote and facilitate Syrian adaptation of humanitarian programs. Instead, academics and humanitarian aid workers must remain (self) critical about how programming meets refugees' needs in refugee space in order to continue to improve responses.

Neither have UNHCR and other agencies produced programmes to counter the decay of social networks or support the formation of new networks. This type of programming does not demand the raising of near-infinite funds for food or rent payments or cabins in the desert, but political action and economic strategizing to allow for dignified self-sustaining activities by Syrians. The promotion of neutral and open-use social spaces would support the re-growth of social networks; better communication networks with Syrians and Jordanians alike would ease tensions within and between various communities. In order to achieve this, UNHCR must be an active political advocate to address not only the legitimate concerns of the Government of Jordan and Jordanians themselves, but also of Syrians. Aid programmes should be better integrated into development initiatives which involve Jordanians. The raw material to unite Syrians and Jordanians in common causes exists in the form of shared identity markers such as family ties, networks of *qaba'il* and *'ashiraat*, and pan-Arab nationalism. But today, relief efforts highlight and define categories of difference rather than emphasizing what communities share.

This brings to attention our role, as academics, as translators of theoretical concepts which could lead to more efficient and human-centred programming. For better or for worse, UNHCR can not be expected to cite academic theory in policy documents—it is the academic's job to communicate these frameworks in a format logical to residents of humanitarian space. UNHCR may not recognize that identity is relational, or that relationships are socially constructed in the context of produced spaces. But it is not unreasonable to communicate that “identity” lacks intrinsic meaning, that and that the real-life effects of relationships between identities can be influenced through humanitarian programming. “Space” is a useful concept for translation because it is both academically relevant and tactile—something that can be implicitly understood. Stating that “refugees live in a different space” and that humanitarian workers should try as much as possible to “share space with refugees to understand their needs and goals” makes intrinsic as well as academic sense.

Syrians are clearly not passive. They are not weak or idle. They are perhaps desperate, but only because the legal regimes and humanitarian policies that govern refugees confine them to marginalized spaces. If Syrians in Jordan seem helpless, it is because they are denied so many opportunities—social, financial, spatial—to help themselves. Research since the 1980s with people who are refugees repeatedly has shown that many of the stereotypes thrust upon refugees are, in fact, produced specifically by the legal ramifications of the label. Yet the legal framework and social practice promoted by UNHCR does not change in the face of new instances of displacement; even while policies shift and new spaces are opened to refugees,

segregation remains entrenched in law and practice. In Jordan, the legal envelope in which Syrians exist is constricting; new regulations are being introduced which force Syrians out of work or into undignified work, out of cities, and back into camps where options for self-determination are few and getting fewer.

Attempting to sustain the physical bodies of 600,000 Syrians with external aid while overlooking unaddressed social needs—the imperative to improve oneself and one's society—simply establishes a feedback loop of poverty. While aid agencies fail to centrally manage the economic needs of Syrians—an impossibly vast task—the displaced are barred from providing for themselves both physically and emotionally in any dignified manner. As enforced indignity saps the will of parents and children alike, the ability to cope either formally or informally collapses. This leads to more demands on UNHCR, the Government of Jordan, and host communities—and to still more shame, isolation, hardship and suffering. As the Syrian crisis enters its sixth year, and international funding continues to dwindle, the humanitarian community is in dire need of new and creative strategies to maintain the quality of life for Syrians in exile—institutional engagement with social networks and spatial thinking represents one such opportunity.



Post-Script: What Came After/Two Years in Between

I carried out the fieldwork for this research from June to December 2014. In the intervening years, I was hired on first as a Project Director and then as a Country Director with a small but prominent faith-based INGO in Amman, Jordan. I applied for the position because this agency had a reputation for doing things “differently” and because their small scale meant more responsibility (see also Ferris, 2011). Having a touch of *wasta* with the outgoing PD may have played a role in my application, as well, but I believe I was granted the position because of the rage and frustration I expressed in the interview. The vision that grew into this thesis was fresh in my mind.

My time as a researcher informed much of my work with refugees of all backgrounds in Jordan. At first, I managed to maintain the closeness for which I advocate here—though notably, less so than my predecessor, who was intimately connected with the 30-or-so people who came to the organization looking for a better life. I was told to treble the size of the project, as the cost per beneficiary was too high. With three times as many people asking for support, both inside and outside the official framework we had laid out, my emotional capacity was soon overwhelmed. I became irritable and impatient, and spent less and less time getting to know the people I was there to serve. I was praised from above for growing the project, and received a promotion.

This trend only worsened as I rose in the organization. After assuming directorship of the country office, I was distressed to see myself falling into habits eerily reminiscent

of the people who had frustrated me during my research. As responsibility increased, and the projects grew, so did my distance. People in need—often people I knew personally from my previous position in the organization—came to my office door asking desperately for help that was not in my power to give. I felt lost, tense, caged in my office. Along with other staff, I became weary of answering the door. We tried to discourage people from coming to the office to register, and instead call our new registration line; our phones were quickly overwhelmed. My personal number began to circulate, and in response, I stopped answering the phone. The echoes of voices from 2014 were loud in my ears.

Eventually, I withdrew. Much of my staff did the same. We had joined to do something different, but we were swept up in humanitarian epistemology: grow the project, serve the donors. We even swapped monthly aid for one-time emergency support, despite my protests, because of concerns from Regional over “dependency syndrome.” The logframes and indicators said we were doing something different, “building community” and “providing social support,” but day by day it was harder and harder to see what distinguished us from the next mid-sized up-and-coming INGO. Meanwhile, overwork, stress, and lack of time for reflection recreated, to an eerie degree, the dark personal space that Autessere first brought to my attention in *Peaceland*. I cut the social ties and withdrew into the bubble. I built and fortified my own space, swapped iftar dinners in refugee friends’ homes with the expensive restaurants and bars of “the expat scene”. I even changed the streets I walked down, to avoid chance encounters.

It was painful to reflect, in the infrequent moments of calm, how similar to my key informants I had become. But in moments of reflection on these challenges, both then and now, I am ever more convinced of the importance of the message of this research. My struggle to counter these practices detail just how difficult the task is. If it was easy, it would already be complete.

While it may reach beyond the bounds of my research, I felt the need to include this short post-scriptual reflection on my own experiences in the time since fieldwork. The years following are intrinsically related to what came before, part of the same process of learning and practice and demand for something better. It is impossible for me to separate in my thinking the research and the experience of years following: they are two sides of the same coin. As always, there is more work to be done.

### What next?

*Space is open. In this open interactional space there are always connections yet to be made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction (or not, for not all potential connections have to be established), relations which may or may not be accomplished. (Massey, 2005, p. 11)*

*Everyone feels sad. We all have the same situation. We never feel happy. There's always news of the family, that someone is dead, another is dead. Because of this, I have decided we must leave Jordan and go to another country. Especially the sick ones. When other children play with fireworks in the street, my kids think it's the war. It hurts me to see my children grow this way, with nothing I can do. Some agencies should take care of these things. (18 August #1)*

*The only good thing? I had this boy during the war. (#2 17 Sept)*

While time has passed and many developments have occurred since the time of my research, academic updates and my own personal experience in Jordan have demonstrated that the underlying trends I identified during my research have not significantly changed. Syrians are increasingly isolated, leading to ever-increasing poverty and desperation—and since the conclusion of my research I have learned that other groups of refugees such as Yemenis and Sudanese are experiencing the same patterns of increasing isolation. Humanitarian attempts since 2014 to better serve Syrians have sometimes been commendable in concept, but are still leading to poor outcomes—consider for example the weak response of Syrians to the Jordan Compact work permit program (Lenner and Turner, forthcoming) or the abject and ongoing humanitarian disaster of Azraq Camp (Hoffman, 2017). Despite these new initiatives, a disturbing number of the same basic frustrations that Syrians communicated to me in 2014 have stayed the same or even worsened.

At the time of my research, many Syrians feared that they would never be able to return to their home country. Even in 2014, people I spoke to believed that Bashar al-Assad was the only possible victor in the face of an increasingly divided and aimless opposition. For young men in refuge, this meant a life in exile: having fled conscription would mean an institutional “disappearing” into regime prisons if they were to return home. When asked about the future, one man told me, “I don't know what will happen next year. The Palestinians tell me I will not go back to Syria. I don't think I will return. Bashar will stay there, and if we go back, Bashar will kill us... but I want to go back to Syria and feel safe” (#1 17 Sept). The fear that Syrians would become “like the

Palestinians” was palpable among both Syrians and the Jordanians who host them, a process which has been termed “Palestinization” (Isotalo, 2014). There was little expectation then or now that Syrians would ever be accepted in Jordan to the extent that Palestinians had; the work permit model now being implemented is more reminiscent of the liminal tolerance Lebanon has extended to the descendants of those displaced from Palestine. One man told me a story: “The Jordanians here, many don't want to talk to Syrians. Maybe one person, out of all these people. I asked a taxi driver once, 'do you like Syrian people?' He said, 'to now, yes, but if you stay like the Palestinians, we will not like you” (17 Sept #2).

Little wonder, then, that Syrians have turned to irregular onward migration—the most accessible of which is by smuggler’s boat to Europe. The time of my research covered the massive 2014 spike in migration by sea from North Africa to Italy, before the later switch to land and sea routes from Turkey to Greece and the Balkan states (MMP, 2017a). The boats were on everyone’s mind. Syrians were very aware of the dangers of irregular migration across the Mediterranean. For me, the most arresting example was when an interviewee, discussing her son's departure to Libya to find a ship, ran out of words to describe her concern. In the silent moment, she gravely showed me (on her smartphone) Massimo Sestini’s now iconic 2014 image of an overloaded jetty, moments before interception by the Italian Navy. Syrians *knew* the risks. They knew what the boats looked like, knew what happened to those who weren’t lucky. They knew the statistics. But with no options for a securing a sustainable future for families in Jordan, people saw frighteningly few options to preserve their wellbeing. Then as now, careers,

home ownership, marriage, and registration of children are difficult if not impossible to achieve.

The realization that displacement may drag on many years is beginning to stagnate. Young men are driven to take the risk of onward travel in the hopes of regaining some semblance of control over their lives and contributing to their families' futures. The boats are dangerous, but risking everything—literally everything—and finding trust in divine support in a quest for safety and stability is not an unfamiliar experience for many Syrians in 2017. The decision to travel onward, which seemed to befuddle so many policy-makers and commentators in Europe and beyond, was fairly simple calculus when one actually stepped into the homes of Syrians. Stay and live like with no hope for tomorrow, or risk death once more for a chance at a life that most Europeans take for granted. The young Syrians of Irbid are only asking the same question as everybody else—what next?

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## Appendix A: Interview Schedule

All interviews took place between June and Oct 2014.

Interviews with Syrian households:

1. 26 June #1 (long interview)
2. 26 June #2 (long interview)
3. 26 June #3 (long interview)
4. 10 July #1 (long interview)
5. 10 July #2 (long interview)
6. 10 July #3 (long interview)
7. 13 July #1 (long interview)
8. 13 July #2 (long interview)
9. 13 July #3 (long interview)
10. 23 July #1 (long interview)
11. 23 July #2 (long interview)
12. 24 July #1 (long interview)
13. 24 July #2 (long interview)
14. 27 July #1 (long interview)
15. 27 July #2 (long interview)
16. 11 August #1 (short interview + survey)
17. 11 August #2 (short interview + survey)
18. 11 August #3 (short interview + survey)
19. 11 August #4 (short interview + survey)
20. 11 August #5 (short interview + survey)
21. 13 August #1 (short interview + survey)
22. 13 August #2 (short interview + survey)
23. 13 August #3 (short interview + survey)
24. 13 August #4 (short interview + survey)
25. 13 August #5 (short interview + survey)
26. 14 August #1 (short interview + survey)
27. 14 August #2 (short interview + survey)
28. 14 August #3 (short interview + survey)
29. 17 August #1 (short interview + survey)
30. 18 August #1 (long interview + survey)
31. 18 August #2 (long interview + survey)
32. 18 August #3 (long interview + survey)
33. 17 September #1 (long interview + survey)
34. 17 September #2 (long interview + survey)
35. 17 September #3 (long interview + survey)
36. 18 September #1 (long interview + survey)
37. 18 September #2 (long interview + survey)
38. 18 September #3 (long interview + survey)
39. 13 October #1 (long interview + survey)
40. 13 October #2 (long interview + survey)
41. 13 October #3 (long interview + survey)
42. 14 October #1 (long interview + survey)
43. 14 October #2 (long interview + survey)
44. 20 October #1 (long interview + survey)
45. 20 October #2 (long interview + survey)

## Key Informant Interviews

1. 6 June (International Security Consultant)
2. 12 June (Academic, UVA)
3. 13 June (Academic, WVU)
4. 27 June (Academic, Berkley)
5. 3 July (IRD)
6. 8 July #1 (Academic, GWU)
7. 8 July #2 (Academic, Sussex)
8. 13 July (NRC)
9. 20 July (Relief International)
10. 28 July (Irbid Volunteers)
11. 29 July (JRS)
12. 5 August (UNHCR)
13. 8 August (ARDD-Legal Aid)
14. 9 August (CARE)
15. 20 August (UNHCR)
16. 25 September (Academic, Oxford)
17. 30 September #1 (CARE)
18. 30 September #2 (CARE)
19. 7 October (CARE)
20. 1 November (Identity Centre)

## Appendix B: Interview Guide, June – August 2014

-these introductory questions are starting points only

-participants are not to provide names when discussing individuals

### A) Core Questions:

1. How do you cover your expenses here in Irbid?

كيف تستطيع تغطية نفقاتك هنا في اربد ؟

2. Who helps you cover your expenses? How do you know them?

من يساعدك في الحصول على هذه النفقات ؟ وكيف تم التعرف عليهم ؟

3. Do people help you in ways other than money? Who?

هل يوجد شخص ساعدك بطريقة اخرى غير النقود؟ من هو؟

4. Do you help anyone? Whom?

هل قمت بمساعدة احد ؟ ومن هو ؟

5. How well do you live? What is missing?

كيف تمارس حياتك ؟ وما الذي ينقصك ؟

6. What challenges do you face? How could they be overcome?

ما هي التحديات التي تواجهك ؟ وكيف ممكن التغلب عليها ؟

### B) Community:

1. Are there Syrians in Jordan who are better off? Why? How?

هل السوريين بالاردن من هم بحالة افضل ؟ لماذا ؟ وكيف؟

1-b. Do you know any of them? How?

هل تعلم اي منهم ؟

2. Are there Syrians in Jordan who are less well off? Why? How?

هل هناك سوريين في الاردن بحالة اسوء ؟ لماذا ؟ وكيف؟

2-b. Do you know any of them? How?

هل تعلم اي منهم ؟

3. Are there Syrian people you respect here? Who?

هل يوجد اشخص تكن لهم الاحترام هنا في اربد ؟

3-b. Why are they important to you? To others?

ما سبب اهميتهم بالنسبة لك ؟

3-c. What do they do?

ماذا فعلوا ؟

**C) Migration History:**

1. How did you get here? *Why did you choose Irbid?*

كيف انتقلت للعيش هنا ؟

2. Is there anything you would have done differently?

هل يوجد شيء تفضل ان يتم بشكل مختلف؟

3. Tell me about your family here in Irbid.

اخبرني عن عائلتك هنا في الاردن؟

**D) Livelihood:**

1. Where do you earn your spending money?

من اين تحصل على النقود التي يتم انفاقها؟

2. Which sources are best?

اي من هذه المصادر افضل ؟

3. (If household holds savings) How did you earn your savings?

هل يقوم افراد العائلة بالتوفير ؟ ومن اين تحصل على هذه المدخرات ؟

## Appendix C: Short Interview and Survey Guide, August 2014

1. Tell me about your family.
2. Who are your five best friends here? (no names – just how you know them)

**If necessary:**

3. *If you hear a good story, who do you tell it to?*
4. *Do you watch TV? Do you watch alone or with friends? Who do you watch with? What do you watch?*
5. *How do you get news about the situation in Syria? In Jordan?*
6. We're going to ask a few questions about different kinds people you know. They can be in Irbid or in other places.

*(5 - Very helpful / 4 - a little bit helpful / 3 – neutral / 2 - somewhat unhelpful / 1 - very unhelpful / 0 – none in my life)*

	How helpful were these people when you arrived in Jordan?	How helpful are these people now?	Are any Jordanian? How many?
Close Family			
فخذ عشيرة			
قبيلة / people from home village in Syria			
New neighbours in Irbid (Syrian or Jordanian)			
Colleagues from profession			
Friends from work in Jordan			
Strangers			
People of same religion			
Other: _____			

7. Now we're going to ask some questions about how your household supports itself.

X	Does your household currently benefit from X?	If so, what is the source or type?	If yes, did anyone help you find X? Who?
Work			
NGO Support			
Remittances			
Gifts			
Loans			
Other			

8. How did you find your home? Did anyone help?

9. Have you ever used wasta since arriving in Jordan?

10. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

## Appendix D: Mixed Survey and Long Interview Guide, September – October 2014

1. Tell me about your family.
2. Who are your best friends? (anywhere, not just in Irbid)
3. Describe a regular day in your life.
4. If you need something (a tool, or a thing for the kitchen), who could you borrow it from? Does anyone borrow things from you?
5. If you have a big problem, who can you ask for help?
6. Are there Syrian people you respect here? Jordanian people? Who? Why are they important to you? Anyone else? (Repeat question several times.)
7. We're going to ask a few questions about different kinds people you know. They can be in Irbid or in other places.

*(3 - Very helpful / 2 - a little bit helpful / 1 - not helpful / 0 - none in my life)*

	How helpful were these people when you arrived in Jordan?	How helpful are these people now?	Are any Jordanian? How many?
Close Family			
فخذ عشيرة			
قبيلة / people from home village in Syria			
New neighbours in Irbid (Syrian or Jordanian)			
Colleagues from profession			
Friends from work in Jordan			
Strangers			
People of same religion			
Other: _____			

8. Why did you choose to come to Jordan? To Irbid?
9. How did you find your home? Did anyone help?
10. How is your life in Irbid? What is missing? What difficulties are there?
11. How have things changed since you arrived in Jordan? Are they easier? Harder? Why?
12. Now we're going to ask some questions about how your household supports itself.

X	Does your household currently benefit from X?	If so, what is the source or type?	If yes, did anyone help you find X? Who?
Work			
NGO Support			
Remittances			
Gifts			
Loans			
Other			

13. Do you have more friends now, or fewer, than when you first arrived in Jordan? Why?
14. Did anyone help you in the past that doesn't help you now?
15. Do you help Syrians here now? Could you help people here in the past?
16. What do you think will happen in the next year? What will you do?
17. What are your hopes for the future?
18. Do you have any fears here in Jordan?
19. Has anyone you know ever considered traveling to Europe by boat or through Turkey? Why?
20. Have you ever used wasta since arriving in Jordan?
21. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?
22. Is there anyone else you think would like to speak with us?



## **Appendix E: Key Informant Questionnaire**

1. What is your name and position?
2. How did you start to work in your position?
3. Can you describe the work your agency does for Syrians? What kinds of support are offered?
4. How do people register for your projects?
5. How are people chosen to be supported? Do you support only Syrians, or Jordanians as well? Iraqis?
6. Approximately how many people receive support per month?
7. Do you take on Syrian volunteers?
8. Can we give your agency's contact information to Syrian families we meet with?