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Goals of Aid Organizations and Perspectives of Employees: Urban Integration of Syrian Refugees in Jordan

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Goals of Aid Organizations and Perspectives of Employees: Urban Integration of Syrian Refugees in Jordan

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Modernization and Social Change, SIT
Study Abroad, Spring 2016

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the entire staff of SIT for supporting me in the research process, especially DemaAloun, who provided contacts for interviews and without whom this research would not have been possible.

Thank you to my Arabic teachers for always brightening my day and looking out for me, especially habibti Riham. You made this semester the best I have had, and you always make me feel loved.

I would also like to thank my advisor, Dr. Ismaiel Abu Amoud, for providing insights and support during the ISP process.

Many thanks to my friends at SIT who have become my family over these last few months. I am so glad I had the opportunity to meet you all.

And lastly—Emma and Noah, thank you for being my partners in crime. I am forever grateful to have you in my life.

Abstract

This research aims to explore the perspectives of aid workers in Amman among various aid organizations, both local and international, and how aid workers feel the country should move forward from both a policy and social standpoint regarding urban integration of Syrian refugees. This research includes a review of literature in urban studies and sociology of economics, drawing on absorption theory and the concept of parallel structures of services to contextualize the argument that the role of urban refugees in urbanization and urban economic development should be considered within the systems of relief in place in Jordan, and it is the role of aid organizations to link overall development to relief work with the help of governing bodies. The researcher hypothesizes that the lack of absorption theory practiced in aid organization programming reinforces the detrimental parallel structure of service provision in Jordan. This study's significance is related to the precarious position Jordan is in economically and socially following the Syrian crisis, and the importance of finding a sustainable solution for the future. Interviews and questionnaires were completed with employees of aid organizations in Amman in order to inform this research. In conclusion, while tenets of absorption theory was practiced in many organizations in this sample, the obstacles to further programming are significant, and parallel structures of services remain an issue to social cohesion of Syrians and Jordanians. This study contributes qualitative perspectives of aid workers with experience in this matter to the broader academic discussion of how emergency relief affects host countries and seeks to contribute perspectives on how the international aid community can restructure responses to fit the needs of Jordan.

Keywords: Geography, Development Studies, Disaster Management

Introduction

In Jordan, the Syrian refugee crisis has had a profound and lasting impact on the urban makeup of Jordan's cities, physically, economically, and socially. The intersection between urban studies and the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan is extremely relevant, given the fact that according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of 2016 "over 640,000 Syrian refugees are registered with UNHCR in Jordan, with more than 85 per cent living outside of camps" (2016). Considering this statistic only includes registered Syrian refugees, the number of other asylum seekers in urban areas is higher. Looking at how the Syrian crisis has affected the host population, the major question on everyone's mind is how the Syrian refugee population, a major demographic segment of Jordan, will coexist with the rest of the population.

In the words of the UNHCR, this year "represents a critical juncture for...Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR in Jordan, five years into the war and with no end to the crisis in sight. With limited access to formal employment and savings and remittances long depleted, some 90 per cent of Syrian refugees are now living in poverty" (UNHCR, 2016).

A 2015 assessment published by REACH titled "Social Cohesion in Host Communities in Northern Jordan" detailed the social effects of Syrian refugees living in host communities and the effects of urban integration of Syrian refugees on those communities.

The report identified that challenges to social cohesion emerged at two levels, tensions between the host community and refugee population and limited communication between the citizens and local government. The report suggested there is a need for the international community to re-evaluate the way in which external support is provided, with findings indicating that many respondents perceived that aid was not distributed to the most vulnerable. Additionally, this assessment identified employment and housing as the two primary sectors where Syrians and Jordanians reported high levels of tension; confirming the need to strengthen support for livelihood opportunities for both the refugee and host population as a means to mitigate further community-level discontent.

(REACH, 2015, pp. 3-4)

In efforts to understand the social tensions and obstacles to cohesion in Jordan as a result of the forced migration of Syrian refugees, it must be recognized the different roles that members of each population play. Whether a member of local government, a citizen in the host community, or a Syrian refugee there are certain biases that can be expected based on background. While these biases and perspectives inform the reality of the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan, this research aims to focus on the structural linkages that can improve the situation. For the international community to ‘re-evaluate the way in which external support is provided’ we must first understand how external support is provided, especially in light of urban populations that defy the simplicity of providing services to a centralized camp-based population.

This research aims to explore the perspectives of aid workers in Amman among various organizations, both local and international, and how aid workers feel the country should move forward from both a policy and social standpoint regarding urban integration of Syrian refugees. I chose to focus on aid workers because they exist within a number of spaces; whether they are Jordanian nationals or foreigners, they are part of Jordanian society and are exposed to general sentiments about Syrian refugees. However, separate from the general population, they are also exposed to their organization’s formal goals when it comes to working to alleviate the refugee crisis and in many cases work directly with refugees. They represent a unique perspective in the study of urban refugees in Amman, and their personal narratives bridge the gaps between the views of aid organizations, the Jordanian and international governments, and Jordanian society.

My interest in this topic stems from previous studies in migration, urban studies, and the MENA region. My academic background is in geography, specifically human geography, which looks at how people interact with place and space across time, or how physical variations in the distribution, migration, and growth of populations are related to the nature of places. I am

interested in the interplay between geographic theories of population and the phenomenon of forced migration.

From my own experience living in Amman, the Syrian refugee crisis is a major point of conversation for Jordanian nationals and others living and working in Jordan. Jordanian nationals I have spoken with, from taxi drivers to host families, have expressed frustration with the continuously growing Syrian presence in Jordanian cities with regard to rising rent prices and Syrian participation in informal sector work. Jordan's already strained economy is the main reason cited in conversation to explain anti-Syrian refugee sentiment. The situation in Jordan is tense, and the future is uncertain when it comes to the role of Syrian refugees in society and the long-term effects of being a host country in economic crisis within the regional context of political and social instability.

In terms of the theme of modernization and social change, Jordan is rapidly urbanizing along with many other developing nations. The issues of population within the urban context are a major point in modernization, and the role that the Syrian refugee crisis and Syrian refugees themselves play in Jordan's urbanization is significant. When we look towards phenomena such as informal settlements and lack of affordable, adequate housing, food insecurity, and unemployment, Syrian refugees are at the forefront of urban issues that similarly affect the country's urban poor, including other asylum seekers living in Jordan. The sharp increase in population that Jordan has experienced as a result of regional instability has negatively affected Jordan's urban infrastructure and development, and will continue to without a drastic change in procedure on the part of both aid organizations and the Jordanian government. The sociodemographic makeup of Jordan has been permanently changed as a result of the Syrian

refugee crisis, and how Syrian refugees are integrated into society and the formal economy (or excluded) in this time period will doubtless have lasting effects on Jordan's future.

Terms and Definitions

In this paper, the term 'aid organization' is used as an umbrella term for non-governmental organizations and international bodies that work in the relief sector, specifically including but not limited to ACTED, UNHCR, and the Collateral Repair Project in Amman, Jordan. 'Urbanization' and 'urban development' are related terms referring to the increasingly urban distribution of the larger population and economic health of urban areas. Urban refugees are "self-settled refugees, formally recognized or not, residing in urban areas" (Jacobsen, 2005, p. 40). The term 'refugee' refers to the broad UNHCR definition of:

[Any person] owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (UNHCR).

Much of the theory discussed in this research is related to urban studies, as well as critical interdisciplinary research in the fields of aid and relief work. In her seminal work "The Economic Life of Refugees" Karen Jacobsen calls attention to this gap between development work and relief work, calling it the phenomenon of "parallel services" (Jacobsen 2005). "In many host countries, humanitarian services exist in parallel to a separate but often underfunded set of services for the surrounding population" (Jacobsen 2005, p. 99).

This concept of parallel services is the larger system that separates refugees from host community by keeping refugees outside of host community services and keeping host

communities separate from funding that aids refugees, whether they are living in host communities or camps.

Refugee assistance can be divided into two types of services: those that are specialized to address the needs of forcibly displaced people (including emergency shelter, emergency health and nutrition services, trauma counseling, family tracing, and legal aid) and those that are needed by both refugees and the host community (including education, health services, and agricultural support services). [...] As the emergency phase passes and refugees become more settled, other services of the type needed by all communities become equally important. [...] Relief agencies provide schools, clinics, and economic stimulus packages for refugees, but these services are underfunded in the local community. In particular, when livelihood programs—which are a form of economic stimulus packages and can include agricultural or pastoralist extension services, seeds and tools, income generating projects, vocational training, and microfinance—are provided to refugees by humanitarian agencies, they are rarely extended to the host community. The resulting system of parallel services is both unfair and inequitable and is not in the interests of refugees in the long run. (Jacobsen 2005, p. 98-99).

I expand upon Jacobsen's theory of the fallacy of parallel services, arguing that not only are parallel services a basic failing of the relief model, the inability of local and international aid organizations to work together effectively creates a further parallel between local interests and international ideals pressed onto host communities.

In contextualizing my argument within the field of urban studies I will also use the framework of absorption theory, which states that anyone who lives in an urban area faces the same issues. In context, this means that urban Syrian refugees face similar issues as poor economic migrants and the urban poor living in Jordan. The goal of absorption theory is to make communities better able to deal with sudden population growth due to migration or crisis, and help these communities benefit from their physical growth (Lyytinen 2009).

These theoretical arguments are situated within an ongoing critique of the role of aid organizations in crisis management and development and the unsustainable nature of emergency crisis management.

Research Parameters

This research aims to understand how aid workers in Jordan view urban integration of Syrian refugees, from both a social and economic standpoint. This research is based upon the hypothesis that the most sustainable approach to urban integration of refugees would be to abolish parallel structures of aid and development and instead focus on a bilateral, cooperative approach to improving Jordan's social welfare and economy.

The parameters of this study include interviewing aid workers in Amman and distributing questionnaires to aid organization offices. The scope of this study encompasses different types of aid organizations, local and international, and through semi-formal interviews, has sought to engage with aid workers at a deeper level than only using questionnaires or surveys.

As discussed in the Journal of Forced Migration's guide to urban refugees, "the greatest analytical purchase comes from integrating the study of urban forced migrants with more general discussions of urbanization and urban phenomena" (Landau, 2004, p. 2). I hypothesize that the lack of absorption theory in practice has caused parallelism to exist in Jordan's infrastructures, and that this parallel structure in the relief network works against the stated purpose of both aid work and overall development. I also hypothesize that a main outcome of this research will include the belief among workers that the current aid organization actions and relief models in place are not meeting the full range of current needs nor expected future needs, but that addressing these frustrations is outside the control of individual workers and their organizations. Given these expected outcomes, I will argue that the specific and often overlooked role of urban refugees in urbanization and urban economic development should be considered within the systems of relief in place in Jordan, and it is the role of aid organizations to link overall development to relief work with the help of governing bodies. In proving that the needs of urban

refugees cannot be met without considering their physical context, I will also address in what ways the needs of urban refugees could be better met, and how models in place could be changed for the better.

Literature Review

As mentioned previously, absorption theory helps to situate the argument that the successful integration of Syrian refugees in Jordan, especially urban refugees, relies on the linkage of emergency work with development work. Absorption theory was previously discussed in the context of Abidjan, Khartoum, and Mogadishu, where Lyytinen (2009) argues, “any attempt to address the needs of IDPs [Internally Displaced Persons] must include those who end up in urban areas. Any attempt to manage the process of urbanization must acknowledge the impact of IDPs and their capacities and vulnerabilities” (p. 5). The framework of absorption theory is focused on reinforcing “the capacity of urban areas to deal in a sustainable way with a relatively sudden population growth. It is aimed at reducing vulnerabilities and increasing reference capacities of all the different actors involved in urban displacement by utilizing self-help and self-reliance of communities” (Lyytinen, 2009, p. 5). Within the theoretical framework of absorption theory, the role of NGOs would be to help urban areas and populations in Jordan absorb the Syrian refugees into the larger population, and find venues for the larger economy to benefit from sudden population growth. Absorption theory calls for “developing infrastructure and services, creating sustainable economic opportunities for marginalized urban communities, encouraging good governance, and enhancing IDP coping strategies” (Lyytinen, 2009, p. 5).

With this theory in mind, I seek to understand to what extent NGOs in Jordan subscribe to absorption theory and whether NGO employees agree with formal integration, or have different views when it comes to integrating refugees.

Turning to Jacobsen's concept of parallel services, refugees are understood to at first have a larger amount of their basic needs met when compared with vulnerable members of host communities. For instance, a set amount of earmarked funds may go to helping Syrian refugees pay rent in urban areas, or food vouchers will be distributed to them. These relief systems are a short-term solution that addresses the needs of refugees living in host communities, but not the needs of host communities themselves. From a social standpoint, as Jacobsen (2005) notes, "allowances for refugees can create resentment on the part of host populations who are equally poor and affected by conflict, but not eligible for humanitarian support" (p. 42). The populations of urban host communities that refugees can afford to settle in are in many cases as vulnerable as refugee populations, and in the case of Jordan are often asylum seekers from other countries.

Parallel systems are created as a way to make sure aid money is received by the people who need it. Although admirable in mission, these aid systems end up becoming detrimental once they continue to separate refugees from host communities after the period of emergency relief. While I am not advocating the end of emergency relief, I do believe that there is a better way to channel emergency relief structures into community relief and development models so as to avoid economic stagnation of host communities. Host communities relying on emergency relief to care for refugee populations are especially prone to economic stagnation and collapse following drops in emergency relief funding, commonly referred to as 'donor fatigue' in protracted crises. When money runs out, host communities could be left worse off than they were before aid organizations became involved. As Jacobsen (2005) questions, "is there a way in which international refugee assistance can be designed to include host populations, who are often as poorly off as the refugees and who face their own economic and security problems?" (p. 92).

There have been several models put forth that seek to move away from traditional aid structures, including Jacobsen's "Designated Zones of Residence" model (2005). This model is a different type of containment model than refugee camps, and was created to address the reasons refugees avoid camps. Jacobsen (2005) states that "rather than allowing asylum-seekers to live anywhere in the country, a designated zone of residence for refugees is advocated for two sets of reasons: the interests of asylum-seekers and those who work with them, and the need to acknowledge the political realities in host countries today" (p. 95). Within these 'designated zones' refugees would have full economic rights, and there would be both public and private sector involvement in this urban 'zone'. Jacobsen (2005) argues that security would be better for the refugees, given that an international presence can be concentrated within the zone, and that economically refugees would not be competing for jobs with the host population, since their economic right to work would be confined within the refugee zone. Also economically speaking, "the burden of the asylum-seekers' presence on the local population can be offset by aid resources that are targeted at social and economic infrastructure in the zone" (Jacobsen, 2005, p. 95).

Jacobsen also discusses the often-cited issue that refugees increase competition for already scarce jobs. As she points out, refugees cannot be realistically confined to camps and kept from economic activity. If the host community ignores this reality, refugees will continue to work illegally, driving down prices for labor and requiring policing because of the illegal nature of their work. If refugees are granted the formal right to work, they can be part of the formal economy, taxed and protected as citizens are taxed and protected.

Although Jacobsen's "Designated Zones of Residence" model attempts to address the needs of both host countries and refugees, it is not a realistic or sustainable model for Jordan.

Syrian refugees are now a part of Jordanian society and live spread across rural and urban areas of the country. Beyond the human rights implications of requiring Syrian refugees to leave current places of residence in order to reside within designated zones, the scale and infrastructure requirements of housing Syrians separately from the rest of Jordan is a major impediment. The camps have already been created, and from the balance of Syrians living outside of them it is clear that camps are not the solution. Besides logistical fallacies, the “Designated Zone Model” does not truthfully solve the issue of parallel service structures. By requiring refugees to live and work in certain areas it still separates humanitarian assistance from host country services, creating a spatial entity separate from the rest of the host country that prevents refugees from integrating into economic and social space.

Although the “Designated Zones” model could be seen as an improvement over traditional camp enclosure models, the only sustainable solution for Jordan is one that works within the systems in place to change current outcomes. As parallel services have been developed by governments and international aid organizations to separate refugees from local populations, they can also be linked back together in order to promote equality among refugee and host populations.

Methodology

In seeking to answer how aid organization employees view urban integration of Syrian refugees in Jordan I interviewed four current employees and one retired employee working in the relief sector. Possible participants were identified with the help of SIT staff and contacted by me. Participants represent a range of ages and backgrounds, and work for both local and international organizations. Interviews were semi-formally constructed, meaning I came prepared with a list of

questions that were consistent across interviews but allowed interviewees to steer the conversation. In my experience, semi-formal interviews were a productive approach to finding out personal viewpoints of interviewees alongside factual information. Interviews typically lasted between 30-45 minutes and were predominantly conducted at the interviewees' offices. I chose to take interview notes instead of recording interviews. In general, interviewees are often more comfortable sharing personal opinions when the setting is more informal, and I found this approach to work well with my research participants. Although taking notes does not present the same quality of data as recordings, I felt that for the purposes of my research the relaxed setting of interviews took precedence. I took care to write down exact quotes and check wording with participants in order to ensure quality of data. After interviews were completed, within 24 hours I expanded shorthand notes into longhand, detailed descriptions. This was to ensure that observations were not lost or mixed with other interviews, and that the shorthand notes taken during interviews could be accurately contextualized. In instances when the participant did not feel comfortable conducting the interview in English a translator was present to help facilitate communication.

In efforts to protect the identity and opinions of interviewees, all participants have been assigned a letter instead of their name, and will only be referenced by this pseudonym throughout the paper. Any information that would easily inform readers of the participants' identity has been omitted from my final research results.

Obstacles to Research

Originally, I had planned to survey a larger sample size, but survey response rates were low. Thirty questionnaires were distributed to aid organizations, but only five were received and completed. The process of distributing and collecting questionnaires was difficult in the short

time period and follow-up with organizations was an issue. Also as a result of time constraints related to the time intensive process of coding and translating some surveys the overall survey sample size was much smaller than originally planned. A larger sample size of survey participants would have increased the scope and possibly the depth of my research, but throughout the interview process I chose to focus more on interviews in order to get the best depth to my data as time allowed. Although the response rate was low, the questionnaires received showed interesting responses that are applicable to the overall research findings.

It is important to note the difficulty of conducting research in an unfamiliar culture and, at times, second language. Although only one interviewee was uncomfortable conducting the interview in English and a translator was present, many interviews were conducted in a mix of Arabic and English, to my best ability. Interviews are at the most basic level a conversation between people, and because of this cultural understanding is key. Conducting interviews outside of the culture that I am accustomed to researching in was a learning experience, and ultimately helped me to understand Jordanian culture better despite the obstacles that this presented for ease of research and data collection.

Findings

The most relevant result of this research is that many employees are aware of the detrimental effects of parallel structures in place, and are actively seeking to bridge the gap between host communities and Syrian refugees. Examples of parallel structures discussed are the food vouchers provided by WFP and smaller organizations that target only Syrian refugees, despite the reality that most of the urban population in areas that refugees live faces food insecurity. With government involvement, the systemic food insecurity should be addressed for

all people living in underserved communities. Furthermore, Syrian children outside of camps are often educated in a segregated “shift” approach, where Jordanian students go to school in the mornings and Syrian children in the afternoons (or vice versa) in attempts to cut down on overcrowding. Separate educations cannot be seen as equal educations, and they reinforce group otherization in the youth population.

There is general awareness among the employees interviewed in the aid sector that the current balance of funding that favors refugees in camps is not a sustainable solution for Jordan. In short, employees interviewed sometimes felt they had to work around the system in order to practice absorption theory and create more sustainable, livelihood- and development-oriented programming. As one local organization employee expressed, “we cannot meet the need that we see” and securing funding is a major point of contention (Interview A, April 16, 2016).

“Spending on refugees outside of camps in countries of first asylum is miniscule. Since the existence of camps is the reason for inflows of humanitarian assistance, governments retain the camp model and the parallel system persists” (Jacobsen 2005, p. 25). The funding structures put in place by the international aid community to respond to refugee crises are structures that allow parallelism to flourish in host communities, negatively affecting the future development of Jordan and the social and economic integration of Syrian refugees.

This type of money streaming ensures donors that the money they donate is actually going to what they want, but a holistic approach is something that needs to be recognized at the international scale as more sustainable. Syrian refugees in Jordan are supported by UNHCR and international aid organizations, while Jordan’s urban poor rely on sparse government assistance. Since the majority of Syrian refugees at the time of this research were not legally allowed to work, emergency relief and the existence of parallel structures of support are crucial to the

survival of many Syrians in Jordan. I am not advocating the withdrawal of emergency support by criticizing the emergency relief network in Jordan, but rather advocating the need for aid programming that eliminates the need for emergency relief assistance to Syrian refugees, thus eliminating the need for service parallelism in Jordan that separates Syrians from Jordanians.

One major finding of this research was that, although interviewees and literature published by aid organizations working in Jordan saw the gap between development work and relief work as detrimental, the existing obstacles to further linking the two sectors are viewed as impossible to change. Employees explained the obstacles to practicing tenets of absorption theory were the fault of the Jordanian government (Interviews A, D, and E, April 16, 20 and 24, 2016) and to a lesser extent, cited the international structure of relief work that supports the refugee camp model (Interviews A and C, April 16, 2016). These two major actors were viewed as outside of the control of aid organizations, from the perspectives of employees interviewed in Jordan.

This research largely supports the existence of parallel structures in Jordan as hypothesized. However, contrary to my hypothesis that the major tenets of absorption theory is lacking in the practices of aid organizations in Jordan, the degree to which absorption theory is followed by specific organizations differed along a spectrum, as reported by interview subjects and online resources.

Organizations working in Jordan are beginning to move towards bridging relief work and development. In the UNHCR's 2009 addendum to their refugee response policy, "UNHCR policy on refugee protection and solutions in urban areas" the focus of their policy is on implementing absorption theory in urban areas in order to best meet the needs of refugees and host communities. This is a departure from previous policy that focused on upholding the

enclosure model (aka camps) and largely ignored the needs of refugees outside of camps. The new policy states that:

UNHCR will foster the development of harmonious relationships amongst the different refugee groups residing in the same city. Similarly, the Office will encourage refugees and their local hosts to interact in a positive manner. To attain this objective, UNHCR will endeavor to combat discrimination and xenophobia and will ensure that the services it provides to urban refugees bring benefits to other city-dwellers, especially the neediest sections of the population and those who live in closest proximity to refugees.

(UNHCR 2009, pg. 7-8)

The hypothesis that aid organizations in Jordan lack practices informed by absorption theory has been almost completely disproved through this research, and interviews with employees show that employees and their organizations are attempting to move from relief programs to projects that will stabilize Jordanian communities. Out of the sample of both local and international organizations, employees reported new programming which seeks to put urban context and the needs of the surrounding community first. What is apparent is that there has been a recent change in how the international community approaches protracted refugee crises, and the practices informed by absorption theory are in general new programs in Jordan, and only recently put into place. Data is lacking monitoring the overall efficacy of these new programs in Jordan.

Interestingly, there was a split among in-person interviews and questionnaires when it came to perspectives on whether Syrian refugees have the right to be integrated into Jordanian society. While in-person interviewees all agreed that Syrian refugees either have been de facto integrated or will-should be soon, questionnaires showed a wider range of views. From five questionnaires collected at one international organization, when asked “Do you personally believe refugees should be integrated into Jordanian society?” two employees answered “no”, two employees answered “yes”, and one employee was uncertain (research survey, April 2016).

Explanations for negative responses were “not in the time being, until they fix the infrastructure of the hosting communities” and the other cited how “this will affect the Jordanians life and job opportunities” (research survey, April 2016). Respondents who answered this query positively cited the human rights of refugees and the importance of “freedom of movement” for mental health (research survey, April 2016).

It is important to state that despite generalizations made in this research about the specific employees interviewed, their perspectives cannot be considered a representative sample of all employees of aid organizations working in Jordan and should not be transposed above the qualitative nature of this data. The perspectives of aid organization employees cannot and should not be easily generalized as an entire population, especially among sample groups of local and international organizations, and foreign and Jordanian employees. Although this research may provide insights into some aid organizations and employees, it is not representative of the whole.

Perspectives of Aid Employees on the Reality of Syrian Refugees in Jordan

Programming, Funding, and Obstacles to Absorption Theory

As detailed in the following interview analysis, participants broadly demonstrated awareness of how aid organization programming and emergency relief does not achieve equity in helping refugees based on where they live, favoring camp-based refugees over urban populations (Interviews A, B, C and D, April, 18 and 20, 2016). One local organization’s employee also discussed how the specific nature of relief work structures in Jordan are often detrimental to host communities and relations between Syrian refugees, Jordanian nationals, and other refugee populations living in Jordan (Interview A, April 18, 2016).

Several employees interviewed mentioned how their organizations are attempting to move toward more inclusive programming that would bilaterally develop the livelihoods of both refugees and Jordanian nationals, but that this programming is under-recognized and underfunded, based on obstacles from the Jordanian government and the international relief community, and these obstacles are seen as outside of the control of one single organization (Interviews A, B, and C, April 18, 2016). As expected, specific employees in organizations do not feel the impetus or the ability to change the structure of relief and aid despite recognizing the current model's failings in Jordan.

In questionnaires, when asked, "What could your organization change to be more effective?" three out of five respondents answered either privatizing or diversifying funding sources. One of these respondents explained that "diversity in [their organization's] funding sources" would allow them to "focus more on community self-management as exit strategy for its programs" (research survey, April 2016). Funding was mentioned in all five interviews conducted as a constraint on how organizations can create programming that helps Syrian refugees and host communities.

As explained to me by one participant, after this amount of time "you have to start thinking of sustainability" when it comes to Syrians in Jordan, but that "this is political" (Interview C, April 18, 2016). By calling change political, she referenced both the inability of aid organizations to control the Jordanian government's actions and also the general political nature of relief work. Much of this so-called 'politics' is tied to funding and how to elicit sufficient funding from donors.

Interviewee B talked about new programming that she is involved with which seeks to empower rural women in agriculture, working together with small, community-based

organizations (CBOs). The original plan for this program was to involve equal amounts of Syrians refugees and Jordanians, since a large number of Syrian refugees work in agriculture in Jordan. However, to secure funding and for security purposes, the women who are involved in the national-level workshops and management positions are all Jordanians. This is a result of the Jordanian government's general history of not accepting Syrians' right to work in Jordan, although in recent months the Jordanian government has altered their official stance and has recently started offering Syrians legal work permits in specific economic sectors, including agriculture and construction. "UNHCR estimates that the measures could potentially see up to 78,000 Syrians able to work legally in the short term and many more thousands in years to come" (UNHCR, 2016). The Jordanian government's decision to start allowing Syrians access to legal work has been lauded by the international community as a step forward, which it undoubtedly will be for those Syrians able to access legal work.

Yet the conversation around Syrians in Jordan remains a narrative that paints Syrians as a strain on Jordan's already faltering economy and services, and the Jordanian government as a victim of regional crisis. Until Syrian refugees are widely recognized in Jordanian society as possibly beneficial to Jordan's economy and accepted as having a right to stay in Jordan, Syrian refugees cannot truly be seen as integrated into society. "Refugee entrepreneurship gives back to the community and refugee co-nationals, revitalizing otherwise economically underdeveloped areas" (Jacobsen 2005, p. 44). Until the Syrian refugee community as a whole has equal access to legal venues of work, they cannot live up to their potential. Through the lens of absorption theory, Syrian refugees must also be recognized as part of the urban demographic of Jordan's cities and towns, and given the same opportunities as nationals.

The need for creative development projects that benefit Syrian refugees and host communities equally is something that aid organizations in Jordan have recognized, at least on paper, and strive to meet within the current bounds of funding and government cooperation (or lack thereof). Most importantly in understanding the Jordanian government's often unclear stance on Syrian refugees' right to work, "these efforts to increase livelihood opportunities for Syrian refugees also follow February's London conference on the Syria crisis. This focused on the dire need to increase access to work and education opportunities for Syrians, including through boosting partnerships with the private sector to allow refugees and local communities to share in economic progress" (UNHCR 2016).

The outside pressure tied to this funding caused the Jordanian government to reverse their official stance on banning Syrians from legal work. International bodies can absolutely change the structure of relief and aid work towards sustainable practices, but this change is only now beginning in Jordan. The London conference was a crucial step towards changing the lack of absorption theory practiced by aid organizations in Jordan. These UNHCR reports focus on how legal obstacles are being fixed, but the reality is more complex. As stated by Interviewee C, "the government policy is to replace other migrant workers" with Syrians (Interview C, April 16, 2016). Whether this selective dispersal of work permits will be a long term solution is something that many aid workers questioned.

Questions About the Future

Beyond the legal obstacles present for Syrians working in Jordan, there remains social pressure on Jordanian employers to employ Jordanians first. Furthermore, employers may hesitate to sponsor legal work permits for Syrians since informal work comes at a much cheaper price, and the demand for jobs in Jordan is high. As one former UNHCR employee explained,

employing “three Syrians is like one Jordanian” (Interview D, April 20). She continued, describing how “it is good they [Syrians] will have work permits...but this will cause tension between Syrians and Jordanians... there will be problems” (Interview D, April 20). She believed that although some Syrians may receive work permits through this new government decision, the majority will not because employers will not sponsor them (Interview D, April 20). While access to informal workers benefits employers in the short term, considering the cheap labor force that Syrians represent, in the long term the informal work cycle prevents Syrians from entering into the formal sector. Perhaps most relevant to this argument is their labor is untaxed, and Jordan’s economy cannot fully benefit from their work. This cycle ultimately damages the Jordanian economy on a macro scale.

Although employees interviewed and online aid organization materials recognize the need for cooperation between local governments, international bodies, and aid organizations in order to improve the social and economic situation in Jordan for both Syrian refugees and the host community, putting these ideas into practice has been and continues to be difficult. Simply put, “relief [work] is only one time, over and over again. Where does this stop?” (Interview C, April 16, 2016). One employee questioned the lasting effects of relief work in Jordan, saying that “when the UN leaves, it will just be Jordan’s problem” (Interview D, April 20, 2016).

When asked whether Syrians would return home if a political solution was reached in Syria, the former UNHCR employee plainly answered “No. they will not leave” (Interview D, April 20, 2016). When asked to elaborate further, she qualified “Maybe the women and children will go back to Syria, but the men who can work will stay in Jordan. There will not be good work in Syria for a long time” (Interview D, April 20, 2016).

Other interviewees had different views. One employee in an international aid organization described how their organization attempted to rehabilitate housing in northern cities where Syrians were living; but the government of Jordan blocked them from carrying out these plans. The employee believed that this was because the Jordanian government does not want “[Syrian refugees] to feel permanently settled... if there is nothing concrete for them, they must leave” (Interview C, April 16, 2016).

Another employee in the same organization disagreed with the idea that Syrian refugees would leave, even given the lack of housing infrastructure and government-imposed obstacles to integration. She believed “they will stay for many years... They want a real, sustainable solution” (Interview B, April 16, 2016). She cited the hope that many Syrian refugees hold for UNHCR resettlement, which would bar them from returning to Syria in hopes that their refugee status would eventually gain them access to a new life in a different country (Interview B, April 16, 2016). What remains to be seen after this research is whether the real, sustainable solution for Syrian refugees in Jordan is staying in Jordan.

Changing the Narrative Surrounding Refugees: Considering Social Factors in Integration

Besides physical obstacles to Syrian refugee integration cited by employees, most notably the lack of affordable housing across Jordan and the general lack of access to basic needs, social factors were cited as main obstacles to Syrian refugees integrating into Jordanian society.

“Locals see refugees as responsible for crime, as vectors of disease, as competitors for jobs and customers, and as a threat to cultural values” (Jacobsen 2005, p. 46). In Jordan there exists a number of stereotypes about Syrians, including that “they are good at work... in restaurants, in construction, in shops. Many of them worked from a young age in these jobs in Syria before the war” (Interview D, April 20, 2016). While this stereotype puts Syrians into a box, other

stereotypes surrounding Syrians living in Jordan are more negative, and stem from the economic and social tensions. One employee related how, working as an elementary school teacher, she experienced young Jordanian children bullying Syrians based off of ideas that “must come from home” (Interview A, April 16, 2016). When asked whether education could help stop anti-Syrian sentiment in elementary schools, the employee expressed uncertainty, saying that it would need to be more than education for children, it would need to be widespread education for everyone (Interview A, April 16, 2016).

Syrian refugees are overwhelmingly discussed as a burden in Jordan, especially at the policy level. This narrative, although useful for eliciting international donations, propagates the idea that individual Syrian refugees are themselves a burden to Jordanian society. This poses a significant cultural barrier to integration of Syrian refugees, especially in densely settled urban areas that rely on social cohesion to support community health.

Conclusion

The solution to bridging the gap between relief work and development lies in changing the culture of how aid organizations and governments interact and how the international community approaches forced migration crises. While aid organizations are attempting to move from emergency relief to a longer-term approach to help develop livelihoods in Jordan, cooperation between organizations and governing bodies is lacking. Only with international pressure tied to funding from the 2016 London conference did the Jordanian government agree to issue work permits for refugees, and although this is a step in the right direction in helping Syrian refugees integrate into Jordan the larger question of how this will work in reality remains.

Employees of aid organizations in this study overwhelmingly agreed with the major tenets of absorption theory, supporting the importance of treating the vulnerabilities and needs of urban host communities in Jordan and as a result support integration and livelihoods of Syrian refugees in these communities. Among interviewees, community-building work was seen as the most effective approach to lessen the perceived burden of the Syrian refugee crisis. There exists many obstacles to applying absorption theory across aid organizations and relief work agencies, some of which discussed in this paper include funding challenges, government cooperation and xenophobia in society. However, despite these obstacles, many employees of aid organizations in this research are moving to bridge the gap between unsustainable relief work and development work, with the goal of supporting the independent livelihoods of Syrian refugees in Jordan.

In summation of this research, my hypothesis that parallel structures of service provision exist in Jordan and that these structures work against the successful integration of Syrian refugees stands true. Emergency relief focusing on Syrian refugees alienates them from their surrounding society, reinforcing tensions among vulnerable Jordanian nationals and other asylum seekers that view Syrians as draining the Jordanian economy and taking their work. At this time, considering the protracted nature of the Syrian crisis, livelihood support and community development for all of Jordan should be the major focus of aid organizations, as Syrian refugees living in Jordan are a part of the urban population—and from the view of aid workers, not likely to leave soon.

Study Limitations

It must be noted that the positionality of the researcher is always relevant in data collection. Some biases are especially relevant, and as a young foreign woman my research will

undoubtedly differ from researchers with different backgrounds researching the same topic.

From a personal standpoint I cannot be certain whether my identity helped or hindered my data collection and research goals, but it should be included as a possible source of bias.

The majority of interviewees were contacted with the help of SIT staff, and this represents a further bias. These interviewees were already connected in some way with SIT and were not randomly selected from a large pool of possible participants. Because of the difficult nature of contacting and scheduling interviews with people who were not connected with SIT staff, the most expedient way to conduct research was with contacts that were available. Without the personal connection between SIT staff members and employees in these organizations many of these interviews would not have been possible. Attempts to meet with employees whose direct contact information was not provided by SIT proved difficult, although contact with other employees through connections with interview participants did prove to be a good way to involve a wider range of people in this study.

The major limiting obstacle to conducting research was the strict time constraints of the research period. Some possible interviewees were not available at short notice and could not be included in this research as a result. The original study plans included a larger sample of interviews and surveys, but working within the time constraints caused me to lessen the scope of my research. While quality and depth of data was not greatly affected, the scope of data collection was limited by lack of time. Without this time constraint, the research could be more expansive, and better applicable to the field of urban studies and critical examinations of the effects of aid organizations in post-emergency relief recovery and development.

Recommendations for Further Study

Considering the Jordanian government's recent policy changes regarding Syrian access to formal work permits, further study is required to see how this will affect Jordan's economy and the lives of Syrians in Jordan. Whether this program is determined to be successful will undoubtedly affect the future of Syrian refugees in Jordan and their continued access to legal work.

Further studies at the intersection of forced migration and urban studies should seek to ascertain long-term effects of forced migrants on the landscape of cities. These studies should be done with attention to the geographic theories behind ideas such as ethnic entrepreneurship, which posits that migrants are much more likely to create economic opportunities that serve their own displaced population and employ fellow migrants (Li, 2007).

As Jordan continues to urbanize, develop, and eventually economically rebound from the effects of the Syrian crisis, further studies should be conducted to determine the economic role that Syrian refugees play, whether through formal or informal work. Further studies are needed to determine the social integration of Syrian refugees in Jordanian society. A further gap in studies is the lack of spatial data on where Syrian refugee populations cluster in urban areas, given the highly mobile nature of the majority of the population. With the help of spatial data many of the gaps in funding and targeting of programming could begin to be met. In Jordan there is a lack of accessible and reliable countrywide census data combined with spatial elements, and this data could prove useful for aid organizations in the field.

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Primary Sources

Interviews:

Interview	Participant Description	Date
A	Program manager at a local organization, non-Jordanian	April 16, 2016
B	Manager at an international organization, non-Jordanian	April 16, 2016
C	Local program director at an international organization, Jordanian	April 16, 2016
D	Former UNHCR employee, Jordanian	April 20, 2016
E	New hire (analysis department) at an international organization, non-Jordanian	April 24, 2016

Research survey. Distributed by Alysha Alloway, April 2016.

Appendix A (Copy of Research Survey)

QUESTIONNAIRE

Age

1. العمر اقل من 20 30-21 40-31 50 اكبر من 41

Gender

2. Male ذكر الجنس Female انثى

Nationality

3. الجنسية.....

4. Education Level (High School, BA, MA, PhD)

- المستوى التعليمي ثانوية عامة بكالوريوس دكتوراه ماجستير

How long have you worked with your current organization?

5. ما هي المدة التي امضيتها في عملك الحالي في هذه المؤسسة؟

.....

Briefly describe your organization's main goals:

6. باختصار ، ما هي الاهداف الرئيسية للمؤسسة التي تعمل بها؟

.....

.....

.....

Does your organization work with refugees? Yes/No

7. هل تعمل مؤسستكم مع اللاجئين؟

لا نعم

What is your role in the organization?

8. ما هو دورك في المؤسسة/ عملك؟

.....

What do you see as the most effective work that your organization does?

9. برأيك، ما هو اهم دور تقوم به المؤسسة التي تعمل بها؟

What could your organization change to be more effective?

10. ما هو الشيء الذي يمكن لمؤسستك القيام به او تغييره لتصبح اكثر كفاءة وفعالية في العمل؟

.....
.....
Does your organization support integrating refugees into the Jordanian economy and/or community?

هل لمؤسستكم دور في دمج اللاجئين السوريين في الاقتصاد او المجتمع الاردني؟.11

.....
Do you personally believe refugees should be integrated into Jordanian society? Please explain.

هل تعتقد ان اللاجئين يجب ادماجهم في المجتمع الاردني؟ ارجو .12
التوضيح.....
.....
.....

Do you think refugee camps are a successful model? Please explain.

هل تعتقد ان المخيمات نموذج ناجح؟ ارجو التوضيح.13
Yes نعم No لا

.....
.....
What are the main programs, activities that your organization does to integrate refugees into the Jordanian economy/community?

Training Funding Other.....

14. ما هي البرامج التي تقوم بها مؤسستكم لدمج اللاجئين في الاقتصاد والمجتمع الاردني؟
تدريب تمويل اخرى.....

Appendix B (Copy of Informed Consent)



CONSENT FORM

1. Brief description of the purpose of this study

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of employees working for aid organizations relating to urban integration of refugees, both economically and socially. This research will be used to determine how aid workers and non-governmental employees perceive the reality of the Syrian refugee crisis, and what they believe to be the correct approach to alleviating the effects of the refugee crisis in Jordan.

2. Rights Notice

In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT ISP proposals, this study has been reviewed and approved by a Local Review Board or SIT Institutional Review Board. If at any time, you feel that you are at risk or exposed to unreasonable harm, you may terminate and stop the interview. Furthermore, you may at any time refuse participation in any aspect of the study. Please take some time to carefully read the statements provided below.

- a. **Privacy** - all information you present in this interview may be recorded and safeguarded. If you do not want the information recorded, you need to let the interviewer know.
- b. **Anonymity** - all names in this study will be kept anonymous unless the participant chooses otherwise.
- c. **Confidentiality** - all names will remain completely confidential and fully protected by the interviewer. By signing below, you give the interviewer full responsibility to uphold this contract and its contents. The interviewer will also sign a copy of this contract and give it to the participant.
- d. **Future use of data** - data and information obtained in this study may be used in future projects done by the researcher. You may at any time request that the information you provide only be utilized in this project.

Participant's name printed

Participant's signature and date

Interviewer's name printed

Interviewer's signature and date