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Unraveling humanitarian narratives: Syrian gender norms in contestation

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ABSTRACT

The war in Syria has displaced millions, leading to many Syrians seeking refuge in countries like Jordan, where they access humanitarian assistance, including interventions designed to promote 'gender equality and women's empowerment'. Many international humanitarian agencies assert that Syrian refugees experience gendered changes during displacement. This includes increased early marriage and gender-based violence, transformed gender roles as women shoulder economic responsibilities, and altered mobility for women and girls. In these narratives, conclusions are often made about the role of forced migration in disrupting gender norms.

Based on ethnographic research with Syrian women and men in Jordan, and interviews with humanitarian workers who work on gender issues, this thesis seeks to unravel dominant humanitarian narratives about gender norms and 'change'. It contributes knowledge to the study of gender norms and power, focusing on (im)mobility, family relationships and resistance to gender norms. These contributions are situated within three periods: before displacement, during the conflict in Syria and during displacement in Jordan.

The findings challenge assumptions about gendered (im)mobility and vulnerability, offer insights on how older women exercise power over younger women, and contribute to thinking on how Syrian women and men resist prevailing gender norms in sometimes unexpected ways. These findings suggest that the humanitarian agency fixation on 'changes' in gender norms during displacement hides complexity and can overstate the role of displacement as an intervening force. It builds on existing literature on gender and forced migration, highlighting the complexities in finding a singular narrative around 'change' and pointing to the importance of understanding intersecting power hierarchies both in the lives and experiences of Syrians, and in the humanitarian structures that serve displaced populations.

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ACRONYMS

COFEM - Coalition of Feminists for Social Change

DFID – Department for International Development

FGD – Focus group discussion

GAD – Gender and Development

GBV – Gender-based violence

GBVIMS - Gender-based Violence Information Management System

IDP – Internally displaced person

IRC – International Rescue Committee

ISIL - Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

MOU – Memorandum of Understanding

MSF - Médecins Sans Frontières

OCHA - Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Oxfam – Oxford Committee for Famine Relief

PSL – Personal Status Law

WFP – World Food Programme

UNDP – United Nations Development Program

UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF - United Nations Children’s Fund

UNRWA - United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

NOTES ON ARABIC TRANSLITERATION

Transliteration of Arabic words and phrases follows the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* transliteration guide. Diacritics have not been used for names of individuals/places. Transliteration of quoted authors has been kept. All Arabic words are italicised, except for names of individuals/places and words with English spellings in Merriam-Webster's dictionary. The complete list of Arabic words is below:

'ādiyy – normal

ahlan wa sahan – welcome

Allah - God

argīla – smoking pipe

As-salāmu 'alaykum - peace be with you

'ayb - shameful, bringing dishonour

bil asel - originally

bint haram – indecent woman

drwys – beggar

dubb – bear

fidā'iyūn – Palestinian guerrilla fighters

hamdu li'llāh – praise be to God/thank God

haram – poor/helpless, or forbidden

ḥijāb – head covering worn by some Muslim women

Ḥoran(i) – geographical region describing flatlands from Dar'a to Irbid

ḥubb – love

inshallah – if God wills it

jihāz - dowry/trousseau

karam - generosity

kayd – craftiness of women

khalaṣ - enough/done/finished

kuba – a dish made of bulgur

kuḥl – Arabic black eyeliner

mukhābarāt – intelligence agencies

mukhtar – head of village/neighbourhood

nāmūs – gnat/mosquito, or (colloquially) a man’s right to ensure virtue or honour

nafs – nerves/psychological status

nasawiyeh - feminism

naṣīb – fate

nawartū – you bring light

Quran – religious text of Islam

riḍā – being pleased with God’s will

rūḥi – go!

ṣabīya – young girl

salām - peace

sheikh – an Arab chief

sumud - steadfastness

suq – market

sutra – covering used for prayer, or covering shame

talāq – divorce

tayybeh - good heart

usra – family/to be captured or held captive

wallah(i) - Oh my God

wasta – using connections to obtain a favour

ya‘nī - it means

DEDICATION

*This thesis is dedicated to the Syrian women and men whom I have had the honour of
knowing*

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

RESEARCH RATIONALE AND QUESTIONS

My research aims to challenge and unravel dominant humanitarian narratives about gender norms among Syrian refugees. The rationale for my research emerges out of two experiences I had while working for international development and humanitarian agencies. Some years ago, while working as a Gender Advisor, I began to feel that my input into programs was sometimes tokenistic. I was often asked to review program designs and add content for the customary 'gender' section, where donors required explanation of how a program would address gender inequality. Such statements, despite my best efforts, often ended up being recitations of the current development mantras around 'adolescent girls' or 'engaging men and boys'. Were we really addressing unequal power, I wondered, or merely surrounding complex issues with enough gimmicky language and catchphrases (Cornwall, 2014, p. 129) to 'pass'? I was regularly asked to produce 'tools' and 'checklists' for busy programs staff to quickly (speed was important) conduct gender analysis. As the donor emphasis became increasingly focused on measurement and demonstrating impact, the requests evolved. Now, people wanted indicators (preferably quantitative) to show that programs had transformed gender norms. Programs became increasingly ambitious, aiming to reduce incidents of gender-based violence (GBV) within a space of two or three years, or increase the value placed on girls simply through 'awareness-raising' campaigns. As I responded to these requests, I wondered, was this really what engaging with issues of gender inequality was about?

The second experience specifically relates to my work within the Syria Regional Response in Jordan. Due to the accessibility and safety of Jordan, donor visits were regular. The 'spiel' we provided to donors about the GBV program I managed, was frequently the same. We would explain that our program sought to respond to GBV survivors and talk about how some women faced domestic violence in the home because their husbands were frustrated from lack of work in Jordan. We talked about women and girls being afraid of the host context and their experiences of harassment. In almost every meeting with donors, the issue of early marriage inevitably arose. The common refrain from

donors was: 'We heard early marriage has increased since the conflict'. Although my colleagues and I tried to explain that early marriage was practiced in Syria before the war and that reliable data did not exist to enable comparisons with the pre-war period, it was clear that donors (as well as other visitors) were disappointed by our tempered explanations, which were evidently less sensationalist than they had hoped. In all these meetings, the topic of gender norms and 'change' always came up; it was almost taken as a given that gender norms had changed – in both positive and negative ways - as a result of war. Over time, these narratives about displacement as a cause of change started to bother me. After all, did we really know enough about the lives of Syrian women and men *before* displacement, to be making conclusions about changes *during* displacement? As more reports were released about how the war had shifted gender norms in Syria, I began to question the assumptions underpinning these definitive declarations. Were 'gender norms' really so easy to pin down, could there be more complexity than what these reports implied, and what did all of this mean for humanitarian agencies implementing activities that sought to promote what is referred to as 'gender equality and women's empowerment' (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015, p. 400)? These questions form the foundation of my research puzzle.

My motivation in researching gender norms among Syrians stems from my frustration regarding humanitarian analysis of gender-related issues during displacement. My experience working in humanitarian agencies has made me concerned about simplistic analysis of gender issues, particularly the way dehistoricised analysis (Malkki, 1996) leads to flawed assumptions about refugees and poorly-informed interventions (Chatty, 2016b, p. 54; 2017b, p. 30). Within humanitarian narratives, gender norms among Syrians are often presented in static, homogenising ways that fail to recognise the diversity among Syrians. Humanitarian agencies appear only interested in the present needs of refugees, rather than the historical context shaping their experiences. History is 'leached out of the figure of the refugee' (Malkki, 1996, p. 385) and people's lives are 'reduce[d]... to a site stripped bare' (Fluri, 2012, p. 31). Understanding the historical context is perhaps seen as too time-consuming (Hyndman and de Alwis, 2003, p. 213) for an industry that seems driven by the need to make complex issues easily-understood. This is not just a problem within the humanitarian sector; it is argued that academics

within the field of Refugee Studies and Forced Migration Studies have similarly paid insufficient attention to the history of refugees (Chatty and Marfleet, 2013, p. 11).

Although my research is motivated and inspired by my work in humanitarian agencies, I intend to critically engage with academic literature. This thesis aims to challenge, unravel and disrupt and add nuance to humanitarian discourses, whilst also contributing to academic debates around gender and change during displacement. My key conceptual question is: *How helpful is the concept of 'change' in understanding gender norms during displacement?*

My key empirical question is: *How (if at all) might the experiences of Syrian refugees in Jordan confirm and challenge dominant humanitarian narratives about gender norms?*

The following sub-questions relate to this empirical question:

What roles and attitudes/behaviours are expected of Syrian women and men, and how do they respond to these expectations, both before and during displacement?

How does (im)mobility shape the activities and relationships of Syrian women and men, and what gendered causes and consequences may (im)mobility have, both before and during displacement?

How do gender specialists/advisors/consultants within humanitarian agencies in Jordan conceptualise the activities promoting 'women's empowerment' and 'gender equality' among Syrian refugees in Jordan, including the assumptions underlying implementation?

Within this Introduction, I will first explore the dominant international humanitarian and development agency narratives on 'gender'. I will then discuss issues around data and humanitarian power, which contextualise these dominant global narratives. In the third section, I will provide specific examples of humanitarian narratives about gender among Syrians. Where relevant, academic critiques have been integrated into these three sections. The Introduction ends with an overview of each chapter in my thesis.

At various points in this thesis, I draw upon my experience working in international development and humanitarian agencies (International Rescue Committee, Mercy Corps and World Vision). These roles involved program management, provision of technical advice on gender equality and monitoring/evaluation/research. I have eight years of professional full-time employment experience in the development and humanitarian field, including field postings in Jordan (1.5 years), Burundi (1 year) and Nigeria (9 months). I have additional experience working as a consultant for several agencies.

DOMINANT GENDER NARRATIVES IN INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES

Conflicts and humanitarian crises affect men, women, girls, and boys differently due to their different societal roles and the deep-rooted socio-cultural and economic inequalities which become exacerbated during crises. Men and boys form the vast majority of direct victims of armed conflict and associated impacts like forced recruitment or arbitrary detention. Women bear the burdens of running the households under extreme stress and are often exposed to different forms of gender-based violence. During emergencies, women and girls become more vulnerable as basic services collapse and livelihoods diminish... (Oxfam *et al.*, 2016, p. 1).

Crises can be transformative with respect to empowering women by giving them a voice and role that was previously denied or traditionally dominated by men... be it being involved in making decisions on building back safer, or determining those most vulnerable and in need of assistance, or changing harmful social-cultural paradigms of protection (CARE, 2016, p. 42).

Overview

Gender is an increasingly important lens through which international humanitarian and development agencies understand the lives and experiences of communities they work with. In focusing on narratives on gender, my research recognises that the ‘buzzwords’

and narratives used by humanitarian agencies do matter, and have the ability to shape practice (Cornwall and Brock, 2005, p. 1045). While the bulk of this section focuses on narratives within international *humanitarian* agencies (whose work focuses on responding to humanitarian emergencies, typically over shorter timeframes), it is worth noting that many gender narratives are common to international *development* agencies (whose work involves longer-term programs) – or may even have originated from development agencies. These narratives (discussed in this section in a broad sense, as well as throughout this thesis) emerge from what may be termed ‘grey’ literature – originating from international humanitarian and development agencies, including donor agencies, UN agencies and non-government organisations. These are collectively referred to as humanitarian agencies or development agencies, although there is often overlap as agencies may be involved in both kinds of work.

The grey literature discussed in this thesis includes policy statements, research reports, assessments, baselines, evaluations, situation reports, technical guidance documents, toolkits, manuals and websites. Some of this literature is directed towards donors or the public with the intent of raising the profile of particular topics to generate funding. Other literature is practitioner-focused, intended to guide practice. However, in my experience, the intent and use of these reports is often blurred, with reports intended for advocacy purposes being used by practitioners to explain the need for intervention. In this thesis, I understand ‘dominant’ narratives to be the main or primary account that emerges from international agencies, drawing on Liisa Malkki’s (1996) assertion that the humanitarian representation of refugees’ lives may ‘produc[e] anonymous corporeality and speechlessness’ (p. 389). The dominant narratives presented in this thesis emerge from recent reports – dated largely from 2011 onwards - making clear the most current dominant narratives. The narratives presented are from international agencies - largely because their literature is more easily accessible, while recognising their (often-problematic) role in driving policy direction as well as their positions of power over local agencies. Lastly, it is also worth noting that despite the focus of this section on the problems in dominant narratives, there are exceptions where analysis released by international agencies is detailed and written with nuance (International Rescue Committee, 2017; Smith, Boyce and Mohammed, 2018). Interestingly, quality analysis may be linked to the role of external/academic researchers – which perhaps makes the

point that a level of distance from being invested in a program/agency can help when analysing data.

Within both international humanitarian and development agencies, gender is referenced both as a 'cross-cutting theme' to be embedded within sectoral programs, as well as an issue in its own right. Historically, however, the initial response in forced migration situations was driven by a 'male paradigm' (Indra, 1987, p. 3); women were largely 'invisible' (Harrell-Bond, 1986, p. 267). Although humanitarian and development agencies initially focused on 'women' (through what is referred to as the 'Women in Development' approach), it became clear to these agencies that merely including women was insufficient. The focus shifted to the term 'gender' (or the 'Gender and Development' approach), as programs sought to, at least in theory, address the structural dynamics of unequal power (Rathgeber, 1990, pp. 492–493). As part of this focus on gender, donors require agencies to explain how their programs will address gender issues, or how interventions have resulted in gender equality and women's empowerment. These ways of framing and addressing gender issues may at times become problematic. Cornwall & Rivas (2015) argue that the term 'gender equality and women's empowerment' is part of the lexicon of humanitarian and development agencies without actual consensus on what this means (pp. 399-400). This conceptual confusion influences how agencies measure the 'changes' and 'impact' of interventions and programs. In humanitarian settings, some donors require agencies to rank themselves based on the 'Gender Marker' to demonstrate how successfully programs respond to the different needs of women, girls, men and boys (Foran, Swaine and Burns, 2012, p. 234). As a subjective process however, this can result in agencies over-marking themselves with no consequences or accountability, or at the very least, in inconsistent application (Foran, Swaine and Burns, 2012, p. 244).

'Gender analysis' – required in both humanitarian and development work – describes both the process as well as the end product whereby gender norms, relations and inequalities are explored and explained (March, Smyth and Mukhopadhyay, 1999, p. 18). Gender analysis, as will emerge in this overview section, is often the mechanism through which gender narratives about communities emerge and become institutionalised. Gender analysis has increasingly become technicalised – as often only possible with access to a specialist (Kothari, 2005, p. 440; Mosse, 2011), or the use of a 'checklist'

(Hyndman and de Alwis, 2003, p. 214; Eyben, 2010, p. 60; Cornwall and Rivas, 2015, p. 400) or a 'gender analysis framework' (March, Smyth and Mukhopadhyay, 1999, pp. 14-15).

Within humanitarian settings, where there is more pressure to implement quickly, agencies often deliver on gender analysis requirements through what they call 'rapid assessments'. These tend to be conducted over five or ten days, by agency staff themselves or sometimes a consultant (Danish Refugee Council, 2012; International Rescue Committee, 2012a; CARE and International Medical Corps, 2014; International Medical Corps, 2014; Fry, 2017). I suggest the short period of primary data collection for these assessments tends to result in reports that only provide a snapshot of gender issues and can result in problematic ways of describing data. For example, an Oxfam report (2018) notes that child marriage was reported 'in seven out of 21 FGDs and by eight key informants' (p. 36). This raises questions about how issues are framed in group discussions and how biases about what is typical in humanitarian emergencies inform how questions are asked (Comes, 2016). In gender analysis reports within humanitarian crises, generalised statements about change during displacement also emerge. A report on women's and men's roles among internally displaced persons (IDPs) in South Sudan notes: 'Traditional gender roles have been substantially altered, reversed, shifted or accelerated during the crisis' (Oxfam, 2017, p. 50). Only a few examples (without intersectional analysis) are provided, which makes it appear that there exists a repository of data somewhere that demonstrates this causal connection. Such statements hide the complexities underlying gender norms that may be more evident from longer, more in-depth research. The assumption that conflict *causes* change is at times taken as a given in gender analysis reports, which will emerge from the examples in this section.

In the context of humanitarian crises, a grant proposal or report usually includes what I term the 'gender section' where gender analysis is articulated. This gender section typically reverts into a boilerplate statement (like the example at the start of this section) that captures notions of 'difference', vulnerability, and the idea that women and girls are significantly affected by conflict in different ways to men and boys - especially in terms of GBV. Elisabeth Olivius' (2014) critique of the focus on 'difference' within humanitarian analysis of gender is instructive in explaining how dominant narratives across multiple

gender-related themes are analysed. She argues that instead of engagement with complex issues around power hierarchies, gender analysis has become about analysing differences between women and men (p. 94).

As the following sections highlight, gender analysis appears strangely similar across varied contexts, as if each humanitarian emergency is a replica of a past emergency. Such analysis is still not usually intersectional, which Hyndman and De Alwis (2004) critiqued some years ago as problematic within humanitarian narratives (p. 539). This results in 'template' solutions (Barakat and Wardell, 2002, p. 910) and 'one-size-fits-all universalising remedies' (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015, p. 397) that are not always fit for the context.

Dominant narratives are also influenced by the imperative that agencies find a compelling story or accessible summary of problems and solutions to justify intervention. This approach to understanding complex issues may mean that other aspects of people's lives - which don't support the 'case' for funding - are missed. It may influence what issues refugees perceive as worthy of sharing. This most resonated during my research when one woman paused during our interchange, pointed to her friend sitting nearby and said, 'You should interview her. Her life is even worse than mine'. Her assumption was that I wanted to hear a terrible story. Challenging this kind of research, Lila Abu Lughod (2013) warns: 'Superficial vignettes and extreme cases tell us little about the variety of ways women experience their lives and the contexts we must appreciate in order to make sense of their suffering' (p. 78). The often-anecdotal, journalistically-styled reporting used by agencies may 'flatten the three-dimensional lives' of people, shortening their stories into 'tidy case studies' devoid of complexity (Lindisfarne, 2000, p. 124). The use of simplistic analysis, although attractive (Rosling, Rosling and Rosling Rönnlund, 2018, p. 186) may be a product of the marketing/public-facing language that presents interventions as being able to quickly resolve problems. It makes it seem that gender inequality is a simple issue, merely 'an expression of under-development' that can be 'remedied by the introduction of international human rights norms' (Olivius, 2016a, p. 272). In actuality, as Abu Lughod (2013) argues, 'it is not so easy to talk about "patriarchy" or to put one's finger on how power works' (p. 6).

The de-politicisation of gender equality provides further context. Agencies have preferred to position social issues like GBV as ‘technical’ or ‘personal’ issues rather than complex problems that require societal transformation. Scholars argue gender equality is treated ‘as a technical, administrative issue rather than an issue of power and politics’ (Olivius, 2016a, p. 280). ‘Technocratic’ approaches over-emphasise the importance of technical standards, resulting in ‘mechanistic’ solutions to problems like GBV (COFEM, 2017, pp. 2–4), making what should be political, a technical issue (Eyben, 2010, p. 55). This technicalisation of gender equality is symptomatic of the valuing of the technical within the sector more broadly. The CEO of the American Refugee Committee, Daniel Wordsworth (2017b), recently critiqued this approach, writing: ‘[T]he focus on technocratic approaches is narrow-minded, oriented toward minimums, too divorced from human aspirations, and insufficient in the face of complexity’. For him, moving away from rigid ways of approaching problems requires returning to the principles of humanitarianism.

With this broader context to dominant narratives, the next sections outline five key themes around gender that emerge from international humanitarian and development narratives at a global level.

‘Culture’ or ‘tradition’

Within the narratives of international development and humanitarian agencies, discussions about gender inevitably involve references to ‘culture’ or ‘tradition’. In these narratives, ‘culture’ or ‘tradition’ are terms that simultaneously absolve and judge the shadowy practices of unknown ‘others’. They become catch-alls – mysterious, static forces – that are linked to problems. For example, one Oxfam report on the Rohingya Refugee Crisis states: ‘The Rohingya are a conservative community, with social and cultural norms that create tensions around women’s empowerment’ (Oxfam International, 2018, p. 10). This is sufficiently vague to reflect some parts of a community, without providing clarification on what being ‘conservative’ means, or what these ‘norms’ are. The report references the conservative nature of these refugees multiple times, linking these to lacks in income-generating activities (p. 5), access to services (p. 8) and leadership opportunities for women (p. 49). Statements like this are used as the premise

to analysis that follows. Culture is seen as creating problems for the progressive agenda of international agencies.

A report on Save the Children's programming among conflict-affected communities in South Sudan also reflects this. It comments on the 'deeply held beliefs and customs' of communities, noting that these 'affect social frameworks such as marriage, child bearing and rearing, access to property and land, inheritance rights, division of labour, health behaviours, and decision-making' (Fry, 2017, p. 12). In this example, the fact that culture affects multiple areas is taken as a given. It is framed as an entrenched force that – in isolation of everything else – influences lives in negative ways. The assumption is that it is only these unknown 'others' whose lives are shaped by culture (Giles, Van Esterik and Moussa, 1996, p. 17), therefore allowing humanitarian 'outsiders' to determine that culture is something that needs to be changed (Barakat and Wardell, 2002, p. 924). In humanitarian emergencies, promoting 'gender equality and women's empowerment' becomes a means of reforming/transforming 'backward' cultures (Olivius, 2016a, p. 270). This is grounded in 'the belief that it is possible to engineer progress' (Barnett, 2011, p. 21). The suffering of refugee 'others' becomes an 'opportunity' – a chance 'to imagine new arrangements that can peel away the causes of suffering' (Barnett, 2011, p. 227).

This is not to suggest that culture is never linked to gender or is always positive. Instead, my argument is that humanitarian and development narratives fixate on culture as a scapegoat – using it as a substitute for more thorough critical analysis that takes into account the complexities underlying human behaviour, including historical forces, neoliberal economics, geography, class and other factors. Even if attempts are made to acknowledge differences among refugees based on education or economic status, the conclusions revert to blaming the 'conservative' culture and religion of communities (Inter Sector Coordination Group, 2017, p. 1).

The 'dark side' of human experiences

Cornwall & Rivas (2015) suggest that development agency narratives depict women as either 'heroines or victims' (p. 400). The victim angle has a longer history within the

narratives of international agencies. For example, a UNHCR Handbook (2008) on the protection of women and girls, states:

Forcibly displaced women and girls in urban areas often live in squalid conditions and lack access to fundamental services, such as education and health care. Without money to pay for rent or even food, women risk sexual exploitation by landlords and others. Some displaced women and girls are virtually imprisoned indoors, fearing arrest and deportation, or the wrath of their husband, father, male siblings or other relations, if they leave their homes (p. 9).

This dramatic, geographically non-specific description calls to mind Mohanty's (1988) critique about how an 'average third-world woman' is depicted as leading 'an essentially truncated life' involving being 'sexually constrained', 'tradition-bound' and 'domesticated' (p. 65). Such narrow assumptions are part of what Jennifer Fluri (2012) suggests is an interest in the 'dark side' of people's experiences (p. 45). For example, in the context of the so-called 'European Refugee Crisis', UN Women (2015a) describes the 'general profile' of women refugees entering Macedonia and Serbia, as '[t]ired, dirty and traumatized... [with] limited or no knowledge of English...' (p. 4). It is as if trauma is an automatic condition of refugee-ness, or that refugees do not speak English, irrespective of their nationality or education level.

At times, 'gender analysis' pursues a negative narrative. For example, a report on Rohingya refugee girls brushes over the fact that 'overwhelmingly', girls feel safer after being displaced (Plan International, 2017, p. 4). Instead, it favours the dominant narrative around violence, limited mobility and lack of rights:

While most girls say they feel substantially safer in Bangladesh than they did in Myanmar, nevertheless fear of violence among girls and within the community persists. This fear impedes the realisation of girls' rights, further limiting their freedom of movement and their access to education (p.3) .

These kinds of narratives perpetuate ideas about refugees needing assistance (Fassin, 2012, p. 21), implicitly justifying the role of humanitarian agencies. Focusing on the negative changes of displacement may help to mobilise funding.

The male-female dichotomy and vulnerability

The negative tone within these narratives has explicitly gendered, often stereotypical connotations. In both humanitarian and development narratives, the male 'other' is imbued with negative, violent behaviours (Cornwall, 2014, p. 133; Olivius, 2016b, p. 57). Men are depicted as violent actors who use their power in oppressive ways, forcing women and girls into lives they have no control over. For example, reports often cast fathers as impediments to empowerment and gender equality (UNICEF, 2014, p. 33; UN Women, 2015b, pp. 14–15; UNHCR, 2017b, pp. 37–41), or draw attention to the negative dynamic between husband and wife (CARE International, 2013, p. 22). Addressing gender inequality has come to be equated with a focus on the husband-wife relationship (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015, p. 403). Andrea Cornwall (2014), in reflecting on how 'gender' has been appropriated within humanitarian and development agencies, writes: 'A preoccupation with marital relationships characterized the way gender relations came to be defined in international development policy and practice, as if these specific kinds of relations constituted the totality of gender relations' (p. 128). She traces the reason for this over-emphasis to White, second-wave feminists whose fixation on the dynamics within marriage shaped discourses around early GAD policy (p. 129). This means analysis inadvertently dismisses not only women's use of power, but also how other familial relationships may be gendered.

In these narratives, men must also be 'engaged' because they are (however flawed) decision-makers. An Oxfam (2017) gender analysis on IDPs in South Sudan recommends that civil society organisations engage with religious and community leaders on child marriage issues: 'Engaging with these powerful men is key to changing community attitudes on child marriage' (p. 64). This may be a useful strategy, however the gender analysis did not reveal any findings around religious or community leaders – regarding child marriage or other issues. The influence of male religious and community leaders was taken for granted. Narratives surrounding men suggest they participate in 'awareness-raising' activities and be 'educated' on women's rights, so they can better consider the needs of their wives and daughters (Olivius, 2016b, p. 60). A CARE program in Nepal explains these changes by focusing on the example of one man, who is described

as a 'model man': 'After a year of gender equality awareness training, Sonam's behavior and attitudes towards his family improved. Contrary to local cultural norms, he started calling his wife by her name, and helping with housework' (CARE International, 2013, p. 25). The focus is on reforming men, achieved after a year of training. This narrative perpetuates the notion of international agencies 'saving brown women from brown men' (Spivak, 1994, p. 92). Culture can be overcome – with the help of agencies.

In 2000, scholars critiqued the 'one size fits all' narrative of aggressive men and victimised women that emerged during conflict (Jacobson *et al.*, p. 12). Nearly twenty years later, these simplistic binaries appear to persist. During humanitarian emergencies, the violent man caricature becomes even more extreme and the focus shifts to the emasculation of men that justifies their violence in situations of displacement (Olivius, 2016b, p. 59). Only on rare occasions is the argument about men's emasculation backed up by actual statements from displaced women and men (International Organization for Migration, 2016, p. 37). As Katarzyna Grabska (2014) found, these narrow ideas may lead humanitarians to call men 'perpetrators of violence' or 'guardians of patriarchy' – drawing on stereotypical depictions that communities feel are used 'to chastise men' (p. 89).

In humanitarian emergencies, while men are violent and emasculated, women and girls are depicted as everlastingly vulnerable. While this is a reaction to how the concerns of refugee women and girls were ignored for many years (Harrell-Bond, 1986, p. 267; Indra, 1987, p. 3), vulnerability no longer emerges from analysis in a specific context, but at times may be inscribed on groups by default. Female-headed households, for example, are seen as a particularly vulnerable group; their vulnerability occurs as a result of men leaving women in charge of households while they participate in armed conflict. A gender analysis report on Rohingya refugees contains the sub-title: 'Alone and vulnerable: the case of female-headed households' (Oxfam, 2018, p. 17), as if the absence of men from the home is enough to render women vulnerable. A report on the humanitarian crisis in Yemen observes that internally displaced women and girls have to take on men's roles and female-headed households face 'heightened risk of exploitation' because of their low mobility, poor access to resources and social exclusion (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015b, p. 5). These statements are not based on primary data collection and

no secondary data is cited as evidence for this claim, so it appears these causal connections are merely assumed: female-headed households face challenges around mobility, resources and inclusion, making them particularly susceptible to exploitation.

The fixation on the vulnerability of women and girls, means the vulnerability of men and boys may at times be overlooked (CARE and Promundo, 2017, p. 5). This has been noted by some agencies, who have sought to nuance the dominant narrative that men and boys are not vulnerable during conflict (CARE, 2018, p. 5). A CARE & Promundo (2017) humanitarian report on assistance and protection for displaced men and boys observes that male refugees 'often lack a clear place within humanitarian frameworks' because of the assumption among agencies that 'men are best able to look after themselves and negotiate the complexities of displacement unaided' (p. 5). In contrast, the vulnerability of refugee women 'is often simply accepted as a fact that requires no justification or analysis...' (p. 14). Women's vulnerability already exists but men's vulnerability must be proven.

'Empowerment'

Alongside dominant narratives about women and girls being vulnerable – both in development settings and during displacement - there exists a slightly newer empowerment narrative: women are not just 'victims' who are vulnerable to GBV, early marriage and exploitation, they are also 'heroines' (Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead, 2007, p. 3) who, when 'empowered' (ideally by agencies), can emancipate themselves and their families through economic activity (Cornwall, 2014, p. 131). This narrative is linked to what Fluri (2012) calls the 'bargain with capitalism' (p. 38).

The notion of 'women's empowerment' has become increasingly present in development and humanitarian narratives, evolving from its feminist, Freirean and social construction and post-colonial theory beginnings in the 1980s (Batliwala, 2007, pp. 557-558). Naila Kabear's (1999) definition of empowerment as the expansion of ability to make strategic life choices by those previously denied such choice (p. 437), has, according to Cornwall & Rivas (2015), been selectively applied and taken on a trajectory of its own (p. 406). Empowering women has come to represent providing women with knowledge, skills and

resources (Cornwall, 2016b, p. 356). The empowerment of women has been approached in a 'piecemeal fashion' – reduced to signifying economic activities (Tadros, 2010, p. 236). Cornwall's (2014) critique of empowerment narratives draws attention to the neoliberal underpinnings of 'empowering women and girls'; such empowerment is 'smart economics' (p. 131) that lifts families out of difficult situations (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015, p. 400; Cornwall, 2016a, p. 10). Through narrowing the meaning of empowerment, the notion of 'power' that was critical to its origins has slipped from focus (Batliwala, 2007). Empowering women and girls therefore is now seen as 'an easily measurable outcome' (Cornwall, 2016b, p. 344) instead of 'a contextual, relational process that does not have predictable outcomes' (Cornwall and Edwards, 2014, p. 24).

In both development and humanitarian narratives, participation and empowerment are instrumentalised - framed as contributing to broader humanitarian goals and efficiency (Olivius, 2014, pp. 94–96; Cornwall and Rivas, 2015, p. 406). This is often described as the 'business case' for gender equality (UN Women, 2011). A CARE (2018) report on women and girls in emergencies states:

Women and girls are at the heart of the transition from crisis to stability at the family, community and national level... Investment in women's empowerment, their capacity to lead in crisis, and development of skills and employment opportunities can provide families with sustainable sources of income and livelihoods (p. 18).

Although this statement appears positive - not drawing attention to the vulnerability of women and girls during emergencies - the message has a strong neoliberal tone: investing in women and girls during crisis improves the incomes of everyone. The Women Deliver Conference for 2010, which had the theme of 'Delivering Solutions for Women and Girls', proclaims an even stronger message: 'Women are at the economic heart of the developing world. And to do all this work, they need to be healthy' (Women Deliver, 2010). These statements form the arguments for the benefits of 'investing' in women, or increasingly, girls. The popular 'Girl Effect' video (Girl Effect, 2008), viewed over 1.3 million times on YouTube, declares girls to be the 'unexpected solution' to poverty, AIDs, hunger and war. The message of this video is: 'Invest in a girl and she will do the rest'.

These kinds of narratives suggest that an empowered girl or woman can do anything, without an analysis of structural inequalities or the drivers of poverty. Instead, the individual is the solution. This implies that the problems of inequality are because of lack of knowledge, lack of education, lack of skills, or lack of 'awareness'. In such narratives, power is relegated to the sidelines (Calkin, 2015, p. 297; Cornwall & Rivas, 2015, p. 398). Lila Abu Lughod (2013) writes:

The standard idea is that patriarchy is the problem. The solutions are shelters, police training, anger management training, media campaigns to increase awareness, the development of women's rights consciousness, holding governments accountable for not protecting women, and becoming modern (p. 192).

Empowerment that lacks the concept of power can easily fit into the agenda of humanitarian and development agencies, who often use simple messaging and clear explanations of what they can achieve. ActionAid's 'Theory of Change' on GBV, for example, describes empowering women and girls as 'core' to addressing GBV: 'Empowering women is both the means and the end: focusing on the rights of, and being accountable to, women and girls is the most effective way of tackling gender inequality as the root cause of violence against women and girls' (ActionAid, 2012, p. 4). Empowerment is thus framed as the solution for everything: '[I]nvesting in girls' economic and social empowerment can reduce their risks of experiencing violence and is an effective pathway to sustainable development' (Women's Refugee Commission, 2014a, p. 1).

Mobility

Alongside this representation of 'empowerment' emerges another, sometimes intersecting, narrative: mobility. The dominant narrative around mobility is premised on the notion that immobility implies inactivity, being less progressive and being shaped by culture and tradition, while mobility has a (preferably economic) purpose:

Recent research in Central Rakhine has shown that displacement, intercommunal tensions and insecure livelihoods have the potential to increase women's mobility, as some women, particularly female-headed households, increasingly take up livelihood opportunities in the public sphere... This suggests that alongside the many challenges displacement creates, the changed circumstances also provide opportunities for positive change (Oxfam, 2018, p. 11).

Women and girls, both before and during displacement, are depicted as immobile, bound by cultural mores around segregation, work and safety. References are made to 'cultural and social issues around women's mobility' (CARE Bangladesh, 2017, p. 13) without explaining these issues. The relationships between culture, tradition and immobility are taken as a given: as women take on men's roles during conflict, they face challenges because their mobility is constrained by culture (Oxfam, CARE and GenCap, 2016, p. 14).

The issue with these messages is their universalist tone, without clarifying which groups may be particularly affected. For example, a CARE document on 'gender justice' worldwide observes: 'In many parts of the world, women have restricted mobility in the public sphere, and laws, attitudes and social norms discriminate against women's participation in the economy' (CARE, 2017, p. 41). The recommendations for how agencies should respond take on similarly vague tones: 'Programmes aimed at improving women's access to livelihoods should address the wide range of mobility issues women face, particularly in rural areas and areas controlled by armed groups' (Oxfam, CARE and GenCap, 2016, p. 48). The broad assumptions and groupings of people lack specificity, affecting how interventions are designed.

The dominant narratives on mobility also focus on the kinds of 'changes' that may occur during crisis: women either find themselves with more freedom (thus can be termed 'empowered' through economic activity or agency intervention), or, women face even tighter regulations (thus need to be 'empowered' and freed from their homes and oppressive husbands):

Even before the crisis, women usually required accompaniment by a male relative (for movements outside the place of residence) or by another woman or child (within the

place of residence). This restriction has increased as a result of the conflict, making it more difficult for women to access services (Oxfam, CARE and GenCap, 2016, p. 34).

Conflict itself may be empowering, causing women to be forced to work outside the home to carry the financial burdens of absent husbands. Mobility and economic work become intertwined in these narratives (CARE International, 2018, pp. 33–34). This empowerment, however, contains an element of danger, which can be rectified through ‘empowerment’. This ‘tension’ between safety and mobility (Gill, Caletrió and Mason, 2011, p. 307) is evident in humanitarian literature, where women’s mobility is linked to danger and GBV (Women’s Refugee Commission, 2014b, p. 5); the fear is that mobility may result in violence (Najmabadi, 2000, pp. 150–151; Koskela, 2005, pp. 257–262). In these mobility narratives, there are also references to transactional sex, or sex in exchange for goods, money or services (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2017, p. 22). Danger is seen as inherent in the streets (Sadiqi and Ennaji, 2006, p. 89), yet unique to only women (Women’s Refugee Commission, 2016); their bodies are seen as transgressing upon men’s space.

DATA AND POWER HIERARCHIES IN INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES

I suggest that the problematic narratives around gender described above are often a symptom of the drive to measure problems, generate evidence and prove impact within the humanitarian and development industry. Data is increasingly viewed as a panacea to the challenges of implementing programs. For example, UN Women describe the power of data like this: ‘Data and statistics are indispensable tools for devising evidence-based policies to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment’ (UN Women, 2016b, p. 9). This emphasis on data as the solution detracts from understanding the complexities of gender inequality. While data is useful for decision-making, I suggest that the fixation on data - particularly quantitative data - can become problematic, especially when it comes to topics related to gender and GBV (Merry, 2016).

The way data is viewed as the solution emerges in how people are counted. This includes relentless donor requirements for the so-called ‘beneficiary count’, driving humanitarian

organisations to reach as many people as possible. This piece of data however, fails to account for quality of services. Hyndman (1996) suggests that the act of counting people has ‘highly political objectives that relate more to organizational aspirations than staff or “client” welfare’ (p. 238). Counting people, however, is an important way that agencies demonstrate ‘value for money’. With international agencies pressured to prove impact, in my experience, it becomes less important for humanitarian agencies to learn how people adjust to displacement or their coping strategies. Instead, the approach is more extractive, focused on information that will make the case for more funding, or worse, information with a donor interest. It is during this process that refugees become the ‘objects’ rather than the ‘subjects’ of humanitarian activities (Hyndman, 2004, p. 203). Humanitarian agencies (or donors) decide what issues are important to understand, they define the scope of research, and they carry it out. This is especially concerning from a feminist perspective because of the power inequalities between humanitarian agencies and refugees. What is analysed may not reflect issues of actual concern to refugees, but instead represents what others deem as relevant.

Power hierarchies

If people need to be counted to show that funding has been appropriately spent, and if humanitarian and development agencies face pressure to show ‘impact’, it is perhaps inevitable that the interactions between ‘beneficiaries’ and agencies become characterised by unequal power relationships. Mary Anderson, Dayna Brown and Isabella Jean (2012) highlight that unlike other businesses or entities that involve serving, ‘[a]n aid agency does not need to receive the approval of aid recipients to continue to receive donor funding’ (p. 37). Didier Fassin (2012) argues that humanitarianism is based on ‘an unequal relationship between the one giving aid and the one being aided’ (p. 193). Barbara Harrell-Bond (2002) similarly emphasises the ‘asymmetrical relationships’ between humanitarian workers and refugees, where accountability is ‘skewed’ towards donors instead of refugees themselves (p. 53). This means that humanitarian and development assistance may be complicated by competing priorities.

This may clash with the core meaning and intent of humanitarianism. David Rieff (2002) suggests that the 'core' of humanitarianism is about 'helping people when they most desperately need help' (p. 27). Michael Barnett (2011) suggests that this term refers both to 'an act of control' (p. 12) as well as 'nothing less than a revolution in the ethics of care' (p. 18). Long-time Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) official, James Orbinski (2011), is more aspirational: 'Humanitarianism is about the struggle to create the space to be fully human' (p. 8). The three principles commonly linked to humanitarianism are humanity, neutrality and impartiality (Nyers, 2006, p. 29). The first of these – 'humanity' – is what I suggest has shifted to the periphery. This slippage may be linked to the increasingly bureaucratic machinery underlying humanitarian activities (Waters, 2001, p. 44). The 'quandary' faced by humanitarian agencies is: 'To become part of an efficient bureaucracy, a humanitarian organization must figure out how to take the humanity out of humanitarianism' (Waters, 2001, p. 39). Bureaucracies are focused on efficiency and professionalism, while other aspects of a humanitarian response linked to the 'humanity' – for example, ensuring people's dignity – may not be prioritised. Results become more important: 'the desire to measure places a premium on numbers - for instance, lives lost and saved, people fed, children inoculated - to the neglect of non-quantifiable goals such as witnessing, being present, conferring dignity, and demonstrating solidarity' (Barnett, 2011, p. 216). Indeed, Rosalind Eyben (2010) likens the 'categorizing, counting and objectifying' of agencies like the Department for International Development (DFID) as similar to 'colonial bureaucracies' whose approaches 'saw people as objectified subjects requiring intervention and treatment' (p. 19). This means that 'evidence' is political.

The humanitarian bureaucracy heightens divisions between refugees and agencies, and may even lead to refugees being dehumanised by humanitarian workers who abuse their power (Agier, 2011, p. 17; p. 82). This is not a new phenomenon that can be blamed on the 'efficiency' focus of recent years. Alex de Waal (1988) described refugees being 'shouted at, abused and refused even the simplest courtesy' by humanitarians who are 'quick to assume an authoritarian manner' (p. 9). Malkki's (1992) landmark research on Burundian refugees discusses how humanitarian workers assume refugees have negative qualities, such as being untrustworthy and dishonest (p. 32). These ideas feed into the antipathy from humanitarian workers towards refugees. Harrell-Bond (1986) suggests that the hostility from humanitarians towards refugees may stem from the frustration of

humanitarians as well as their own inadequacies (p. 302). Refugees are therefore kept at a distance (Harrell-Bond, 1986, p. 305) - treated as 'objects', rather than being engaged as subjects in their society's progress' (Rajaram, 2002; Anderson, Brown and Jean, 2012, p. 135).

Creating progress on issues as complex as gender inequality is further complicated by organisational challenges around gender within humanitarian agencies themselves. Aside from the argument that can be made about 'Western' humanitarian workers ignoring inequalities in their own countries while trying to create equality in other contexts – which some critique as a justification for inaction (Hamid, 2006, p. 89) - the other challenge around gender equality issues is the often 'omnipresent' gender discrimination within humanitarian agencies themselves (Sandler & Rao, 2012, p. 551). Agencies that purport to 'empower' refugees face their own challenges in institutionalising gender equality, yet tend to primarily focus on addressing issues among displaced populations – without self-reflection. Gender inequality in agencies remains unaddressed: the 'elephant' in the room (Sandler & Rao, 2012). This is perhaps most strikingly represented by the recent series of sexual misconduct allegations within the humanitarian sector, which can be linked to broader issues of power hierarchies within organisational culture (Daccord, 2018).

Whose and what knowledge?

Power hierarchies between humanitarian agencies and communities have consequences for how data is obtained and analysed. Even when explicitly trying to be 'participatory', research by agencies may frame questions in limiting ways (Cornwall and Fujita, 2012, p. 1755), or even with the answer in mind (Comes, 2016). Power also affects which voices are reflected in analysis. This is seen in a recent research report on violence against women in conflict and post-conflict settings (South Sudan, Nepal and Sierra Leone) which is part of DFID's 'What Works' program (George Washington University, CARE International UK and International Rescue Committee, 2018). This research involved primary data collection, however only one group discussion was held with community members themselves across the three countries (p. 49). Instead the primary data collection focused on legal authorities, community leaders, government representatives,

UN representatives, service providers, staff in NGOs and local grassroots organisations – all selected because they held ‘relevant local knowledge’ (p. 48). The report front cover depicts a woman of African origin carrying a heavy bag on her head – reinforcing the interminable visual of African women working for their families - yet strangely the voices of women affected by violence are missing from the report. Instead, experts are the ones who speak for them (Merry, 2016, p. 7).

Questions over whose voices are reflected in analysis have direct consequences on the types of narratives that emerge. A rapid assessment on GBV among refugees from the Central African Republic who are living in Cameroon, emphasises that GBV risks outside the refugee camp are ‘far greater’ than the risk of domestic violence. This is despite refugees stating the latter was a ‘significant concern’ (International Medical Corps, 2014, pp. 7–10). It is unclear if the author of the report is using their own judgement to state that the risk of violence outside the camp is higher, or if refugees themselves said this.

Within some reports, dominant narratives that conform to more stereotypical ideas about refugees receive more emphasis even in the face of contradictory, mixed or more complex data. In a gender analysis report on Rohingya refugees, some group discussions with women revealed they made decisions on minor matters themselves, or made joint decisions on bigger issues with their husbands. Nevertheless, the report states: ‘While these were said to be joint or shared decisions, however, it was clear in all the focus groups that men still had the final say and most of the power over all decisions’ (Oxfam International, 2018, p. 38). Later, the report states: ‘The level of consultation and joint decision making varies among women, but the same rule applies: it is still recognized that men have the greatest decision-making power in the household’ (p. 39). It is not evident if these statements are the judgement of the author, or if the women themselves. The report states that 15% of respondents said women make decisions on spending but notes this ‘most likely’ related to female-headed households (p. 39). The assumption is that women in this culture would only decide on spending in the most dire of situations: being a female head of household. In this same report, data on household division of labour is similarly presented as ‘fixed’ despite presenting statistics that show more mixed findings (p. 45). The report also notes that ‘some women and some men’ commented on women having increased power in the family in the last decade due to access to education. The

report then states: 'Strong beliefs persist around women's roles and power, however, with four key informants saying that men still had power in the household' (p. 39). Through quantification as well as referring to 'key informants' (local informal and formal leaders; it is unclear if they were male or female), the idea of women having power in the family before displacement appears to be discounted.

In these examples and in my experience, there is sometimes discomfort with critically reflecting on mixed findings. Intersectional factors such as educational level, pre-displacement economic status, or age are not always recognised. Rather, it seems that the most negative view is taken, reinforcing what appears to be the humanitarian agency image of refugees.

In international agencies, the question of whose knowledge counts is also influenced by the value placed on quantifiable data. The international agency, CARE, comments on the importance of measuring women's empowerment with these compelling words:

Saying women and girls are the best investment in the world has a louder ring of truth when you're holding the bottom-line analysis to prove it. Imagine how many more people will buy into this idea — with their hearts, their time and their support — when we have the answers to these questions (CARE, 2012, p. 6).

Sally Engle Merry (2016) writes: '[I]t is the capacity of numbers to provide knowledge of a complex and murky world that renders quantification so seductive' (p. 1). The 'seduction of quantification', she argues, is that numbers contain 'a particularly reliable form of truth' (p. 26). Humanitarian and development agencies seem to possess an 'urge to represent the world through quantification' (Brun and Lund, 2010, p. 822). This can be problematic: complex social and cultural issues do not easily lend themselves to quantification. When donors and humanitarian agencies disproportionately focus on quantitative data, qualitative data may be devalued. Cathrine Brun and Ragnhild Lund (2010) describe how the agency whom they conducted research for kept asking for the 'real facts' because 'people's experiences were not considered valuable knowledge' (p. 822). Qualitative data may not be seen as 'real' knowledge, but merely 'stories' (Malkki, 1996, p. 385). Graeme Rodgers (2004) writes that the shift away from qualitative data is underpinned by the assumption that the lives of refugees 'are a largely irrelevant concern

to researchers and aid organisations beyond the extent to which selected aspects may be recognised, measured and controlled as important “variables” (p. 48). When this kind of data is preferred by humanitarian agencies and the donors who often drive organisational priorities, contextual aspects may be neglected.

Quantifying GBV

When it comes to GBV, there appears to be an even stronger imperative to make quantitative declarations. This is notwithstanding the Inter-Agency Standing Committee guidelines on GBV in humanitarian settings, which specifically state: ‘Waiting for or seeking population-based data on the true magnitude of GBV should not be a priority in an emergency due to safety and ethical challenges in collecting such data’ (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015a, p. 2). This caution on GBV data, which also appeared in the 2005 edition of the guidelines, also states that GBV is always occurring and does not need to be proven to justify intervention.

This guidance contrasts with how humanitarian agencies often attempt to quantify GBV during displacement and conflict. A UNHCR report on internally displaced women living in camps in Haiti acknowledges that sexual violence was a problem in Haiti prior to the earthquake however notes that the earthquake ‘led to an increase’ in sexual violence and GBV (UNHCR, 2011, p. 2). No study showing an increase is referenced; however, a footnote explains that prior to the earthquake GBV rates were at 30%. It goes on to say that after the earthquake a UNFPA survey found 1% of women had experienced sexual violence but that there was a three-fold increase in pregnancy in camps after the earthquake, two-thirds of which respondents said were undesired. The footnote ends somewhat ominously: ‘It is unknown how many of these undesired pregnancies may have been caused by sexual violence’ (p. 11). This type of speculation, which makes causal connections, is not unusual in humanitarian reports. This report also describes transactional sex as ‘widespread’ and ‘invisible but common’, stating that ‘100% of 15 focus groups’ reported this was an issue (p. 15). Transactional sex may indeed be occurring, but the question is how something can be described as ‘widespread’ merely by asking the question in focus groups. References to survival sex are evident in other reports (UN Women, 2016a, p. 14; Women’s Refugee Commission, 2016, p. 20), including

regarding 'widespread prostitution' among IDPs in South Sudan (Oxfam, 2017, p. 53). Despite only three quotes about prostitution from research participants in the report (one under the dramatic heading 'sex for food') (p. 34, p. 53) and one vague reference to 'media reports' of prostitution without a citation (p. 47), prostitution is described as widespread and is referred to as one of the summary findings of the Oxfam report (p. 13). The resulting recommendation is that agencies raise awareness, increase female self-esteem and encourage school attendance (p. 16).

Strangely, statements sometimes quantify violence even without available data. A report on IDPs in Yemen notes that sexual violence is 'reportedly high', then adds, 'but accurate data is not yet available' (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015b, p. 5). A report on GBV among IDPs in South Sudan describes intimate partner violence as 'prevalent' (Danish Refugee Council, 2012, p. 8) yet no prevalence data was collected. The lack of protection during war is taken as a given, and an increase in GBV is the key message (International Rescue Committee, 2013, p. 2), which affects the quality of analysis. In Yemen, recorded GBV incidents are stated as showing 'an upward trend' of '70% more incidents' between March 2015 and September 2015 (Oxfam, CARE and GenCap, 2016, p. 11). This is merely a six-month period and may be due to multiple factors including increased data collection or humanitarian activity, yet this is not mentioned and this data is prematurely referred to as a 'trend'.

As will emerge in the next section, these issues have adopted a particular tone within the context of the Syria Crisis.

HUMANITARIAN ANALYSIS OF GENDER AMONG SYRIAN REFUGEES

Humanitarian analysis about gender among Syrians has focused on the types of changes that occur as a result of displacement, in what I suggest are problematic ways. The humanitarian literature on Syrian refugees tends to focus broadly on five 'gendered' issues in analysing these apparent changes: the empowerment of women and girls, GBV, early marriage, gender roles and mobility (Oxfam and ABAAD, 2013; UN Women, 2013; International Rescue Committee, 2014; Save the Children, 2014). I will explore the

dominant humanitarian narratives within these topics, drawing attention to the problems within these narratives.

Empowerment

Within narratives about Syrian refugees and empowerment, economic activity is particularly important. Refugee women (unlike passive men) are depicted as leaving the home to earn income for the family (Oxfam and ABAAD, 2013, p. 20). Empowerment is not only economic but has a social dimension with positive consequences. For example, 'empowering' girls with basic skills including communication and problem-solving can help them to refuse early marriages during displacement (Save the Children, 2014, p. 9), and in the 'safe spaces' provided by humanitarian agencies, women and girls can find an 'empowering environment' (UNFPA Regional Syria Response Hub, 2015, p. 8). Refugee women can also become empowered through developing leadership skills (Women's Refugee Commission, 2014b, p. 19). Within these empowerment narratives above, refugees are presented as disempowered by default, who shift to being 'empowered' through simple inputs such as being 'trained', having their 'awareness' increased, or being provided with assets and opportunities (International Rescue Committee, 2014, p. 29; Save the Children, 2014, pp. 10–11; UNHCR, 2017b, p. 62). This is the impact humanitarian agencies can achieve.

GBV

Within humanitarian discourses about Syrian refugees and gender, GBV is associated with displacement. Like in other contexts, this tends to focus on the husband-wife dynamic (Oxfam and ABAAD, 2013, p. 15; UN Women, 2013, p. 24; International Rescue Committee, 2014, pp. 8–10; UN Women Iraq, 2014, p. 7; Women's Refugee Commission, 2014b, p. 12; Buecher and Aniyamuzaala, 2016, p. 28). The dominant humanitarian narrative is that men find themselves unable to work in host countries like Jordan, therefore feel they are not fulfilling their traditional roles, which, according to humanitarian narratives, causes them to act out against their wives using violence (CARE Jordan, 2013, p. 31; Buecher and Aniyamuzaala, 2016, p. 14). References are made to the 'serious risk' of GBV increasing because of this emasculation and due to shifts in gender

roles (Buecher and Aniyamuzaala, 2016, p. 5). This analysis appears to be speculative rather than based on evidence and neglects to recognise that GBV was already occurring in Syria before the war (United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2005). Rather it fixates on displacement as the cause of violence. Within this narrative, GBV is addressed by information: through making women especially aware of their rights, and through emphasising the importance of accessing legal and psychosocial services, rather than being positioned as connected to disparities in power at the household level. These humanitarian GBV narratives also carry racial judgements (Olivius, 2016b, p. 60). Nadjie Al-Ali (2016) writes: 'Discourses on sexual violence are frequently deployed as part of wider racist and sectarian culturalist discourses: where their "barbaric" culture is essentially different from "our" civilized culture...' (p. 3).

The way different kinds of knowledge - quantitative over qualitative - are prioritised clearly emerges in the context of the Syria Crisis. One report with a sample size of twenty people uses percentages to describe GBV data (International Rescue Committee, 2012a, pp. 6-7). In some cases, questions about whether GBV is occurring are asked in potentially unsafe ways that threaten the confidentiality of survivors, for example within group discussions (UN Women Iraq, 2014, p. 6). Even if actual quantification is not possible, the language of quantification is used, for example to refer to 'rampant' and 'endemic' GBV (Refugees International, 2012, p. 1). Although GBV needs to be analysed within context and with respect to complex power hierarchies, these are usually not the dimensions reported to donors. In my experience, at the inter-agency level in Jordan, it is only the numbers of people experiencing GBV that are reported by humanitarian agencies each month. Underlying the reporting of these figures are the sensitive questions that are asked of refugees about their experiences of GBV - questions they feel compelled to answer because of who is asking. The drive for reliable data has resulted in the GBV Information Management System (GBVIMS) used in countries like Jordan, which delve into each GBV incident experienced by women. While the GBVIMS is supposed to improve interventions, in my experience it is not always clear who the data is collected for. The question that remains is whether the probing, personal nature of these questions is justified, especially in the context of feminist approaches to research.

Early marriage

Early marriage has also emerged as an issue – a problem – warranting analysis by policy-makers and scholars. This analysis positions early marriage as a harmful gendered practice that families resort to for largely economic reasons (Save the Children, 2014, p. 1; Higher Population Council - Jordan, 2017, p. 8). The father is depicted as determining his daughter's early marriage (UNICEF, 2014, p. 9), casting men yet again as the bad decision-makers. Alongside statements about early marriage prevalence, humanitarian agencies focus on the state of displacement as a cause of early marriage (Save the Children, 2014, p. 1). There is acknowledgement that early marriage occurred in Syria as well, but this tends to be brushed over quickly to focus on the increase as a result of displacement (International Rescue Committee, 2012, p. 6; Oxfam and ABAAD, 2013, p. 4; Save the Children, 2014, p. 1). This, I argue, shifts the focus away from gender norms that prioritise women's role in child-bearing and caring for the household which perpetuated the practice of early marriage both before and during displacement - towards displacement as an external, intervening stressor.

Gender roles

Gender roles have also received attention within humanitarian analysis. While some agencies like Oxfam & ABAAD (2013) acknowledge that shifts in roles are complex, others like CARE have made stronger claims about gender roles being 'reversed' (Buecher and Aniyamuzaala, 2016, p. 4). Similar to the dehistoricised analysis of early marriage and GBV, I argue that analysis of changes in Syrian gender roles seems to have occurred without sufficient analysis of pre-displacement gender roles (International Rescue Committee, 2012a; Oxfam and ABAAD, 2013; UN Women, 2013). This is also my experience working within the Syria Regional Response in Jordan; there is little knowledge of people's lives before displacement. It is assumed by agencies that men were the 'sole providers' and women did not work (Centre for Transnational Development and Collaboration, 2015, p. 13), instead of there being recognition of the diversity based on rural/urban location, class and education levels. Instead, the narrative is that displacement has offered opportunities for women to work (Buecher and Aniyamuzaala, 2016, p. 8); it seems taken as a given that women did not work before. While less analysis has occurred on gender roles among Syrians remaining in Syria, the reports that do exist

seem to frame women's involvement in activities with the war (such as smuggling) as solely for economic reasons (Buecher and Aniyamuzaala, 2016, p. 16). This suggests that only men fight for ideological reasons – a problematic assumption given the existence of women's battalions that formed to fight against the regime (Khattab and Myrntinen, 2017, p. 26).

Mobility

Lastly, the (im)mobility of Syrian women and girls has been presented in rigid ways. For example, one report (UNFPA Regional Syria Response Hub, 2015) asserts that the mobility of women and girls in host countries has 'curbed significantly' due to displacement, citing harassment and GBV as preventing mobility (p. 5). Other reports are more nuanced, referring to both increased and decreased mobility during displacement (Oxfam and ABAAD, 2013, p. 13). Attempts to go beyond conclusions about increased/decreased mobility result in vague allusions to 'cultural norms' about mobility (Oxfam and ABAAD, 2013, p. 6) without explaining what these norms are, but implying that limited mobility is part of Syrian (read: Muslim) culture.

Humanitarian narratives about mobility are often tied to discourses about work and economic activity. Women are positioned as confined to the 'domestic' sphere during displacement; the home represents immobility and disempowerment in contrast to outside the home (International Rescue Committee, 2014, p. 8; Buecher and Aniyamuzaala, 2016; UN Women, 2017). Women should be present in the public sphere because this is where they become productive citizens (Buecher and Aniyamuzaala, 2016; UN Women, 2017). Humanitarian agencies emphasise the public sphere as linked to women's freedom and mobility (Oxfam and ABAAD, 2013, p. 20; Buecher and Aniyamuzaala, 2016, pp. 8–9; International Organization for Migration, 2016, pp. 17–20). Somewhat paradoxically, the outside-the-home space is also the place of danger, where Syrian women risk violence and exploitation (Women's Refugee Commission, 2014, p. 12). Narratives about unaccompanied women allude to, or even explicitly reference, sex being used as a survival tactic (International Rescue Committee, 2012a, p. 7; CARE Jordan, 2013, pp. 37–39; UNHCR, 2014, p. 37). This is not dissimilar to assumptions made by the French during the French mandate in Syria, that Syrian women without families or work

would unavoidably become drawn into prostitution (Thompson, 2000, pp. 86–87), supporting Sheller's (2008) argument that women's mobility has historically been associated with sex-related transactions (p. 260).

Within the narratives on widespread harassment and sexual violence, humanitarian agencies use the intervention of 'safe spaces', which are premised on the fact that in 'most societies' women and girls have limited space to meet and spaces are dominated by men (UNFPA Regional Syria Response Hub, 2015, p. 5). Mokarram Abbas and Bas van Heur (2014) question whether women-only 'safe spaces' are in fact empowering or leave the root causes to women's subordination unaddressed. Humanitarian agencies have focused on the empowerment logic, which suggests that in order to be protected from harm, obtain information safely and build relationships with others, women must be segregated from men (UNFPA Regional Syria Response Hub, 2015). This rationale, I suggest, normalises violence against women, seeing segregation as necessary for violence prevention, instead of engaging with complex gendered power hierarchies.

Although humanitarian narratives largely tend to focus on *women's* mobility, such analysis also increasingly contrasts the behaviour of women and men during displacement. Women are presented as being pro-active in seeking work and assistance, while men, too ashamed to ask for help, are at home (CARE Jordan, 2013, p. 40; Oxfam and ABAAD, 2013, p. 14). Implicit in these accounts is the notion that men's ability to live up to masculinity is so eroded that men are now effectively 'feminised' – passively immobile in the private sphere: the women's space, which stands for tradition and backwardness (Sheller, 2008, p. 257). This argument also reinforces economic narratives about women's resilience and their ability to hold families together during displacement through income-generation (Oxfam and ABAAD, 2013, p. 20). Men are depicted both as constantly mobile actors who access space in the host contexts freely, as well as somehow vulnerable to a crisis or loss of masculinity due to lack of work (CARE and Promundo, 2017, p. 13; Khattab and Myrntinen, 2017, p. 30), which renders them immobile.

RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

My research is positioned within the context of these intersecting issues. This thesis explores the complexities around gender norms among Syrian refugees. It seeks to critique dominant humanitarian narratives about their lives based on feminist ethnographic research among Syrian women and men living in Jordan, within the areas of Amman, Zarqa, Irbid and Jerash (one participant was from Jerash). My research aims to contribute to conceptual debates on gender and mobility, specifically the work of Erin Baines (2004) and Lila Abu Lughod (1985). I also seek to contribute to theorisations of family relationships in the Middle East, particularly the work of Deniz Kandiyoti (1988) and Laila Rabho (2015). I also seek to contribute to literature on resistance, specifically work done by Lila Abu Lughod (1985, 1990), Jason Hart (2008) and Katarzyna Grabska (2014). My work also looks to contribute to thinking on power and humanitarianism, building on the work of Fenella Porter (2012).

STRUCTURE OF THESIS

The following describes the main issues covered in each chapter. In Chapter Two, fieldwork is discussed, including research methods, challenges, ethics and positionality.

In Chapter Three, the conceptual framework for my research is presented. This includes an overview of transnational feminism. The chapter explores key concepts such as self-settled Syrian refugees, displacement, change, gender norms, gender roles, and (im)mobility - providing the theoretical framework for my research, and helping to position the key issues.

In Chapter Four, the empirical context is discussed. This begins with broader background to the Syrian conflict, including historical context on social groups in Syria. The historical context of humanitarian assistance for refugees globally is also outlined, with a focus on challenges to humanitarianism. These challenges are situated within the humanitarian context of Jordan, including Jordan's history of providing refuge. The chapter also covers how the Jordanian government and humanitarian agencies have responded to Syrian refugees. The chapter ends with analysis of gender regimes in Jordan and Syria, outlining

how state-led feminism and symbolic linkages between women and notions of the nation's progress as well as tradition, affect gender norms in both countries.

Chapter Five deals with assumptions underpinning analysis of gender and (im)mobility. It challenges the idea that displacement is the first experience of 'mobility', outlining how migration across borders has influenced Syria's economic development. It explores how Syrians spent their time before the war as well as during displacement in Jordan, emphasising diverse mobility experiences. Issues of women's work and household division of labour are also explored, suggesting that the home represents more than immobility and disempowerment. In this chapter, the photographs taken by participants during photography workshops are presented and explored, focusing on the themes of home, work and appropriation of space. Notions of gendered mobility and vulnerability are challenged in this chapter. The chapter ends by questioning solely gendered explanations for the (im)mobility of women and girls.

In Chapter Six, the role of the family is explored. The chapter begins with a focus on relationships between a husband and wife, highlighting the diversity in how marriages occur in Syria and exploring tensions that underlie marriages. Next, the chapter dives more deeply into other kinds of gendered relationships, particularly the relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. This chapter suggests that the analysis of gender within the family needs to expand to these broader family relationships instead of solely fixating on the husband and wife dynamic. The chapter explores the extent to which family relationships have changed (or not) during displacement.

Chapter Seven deals with the concept of 'change', exploring how analysing gendered change among refugee populations is not a simple matter. The chapter complicates how empowerment is understood, and critiques the technocratic solutions that often drive humanitarian interventions. In this chapter, the way gender norms are communicated among Syrians is explored, emphasising that expectations for women and men are often unspoken. The ways women and men contest expected norms is explored. This chapter also explores the complications and contradictions in human behaviour. It analyses how humanitarian agencies understand and measure change, drawing on social norms theory. The chapter ends with an exploration of the idea of 'proximity', highlighting how the

distance between humanitarian agencies and the refugees they serve reflects how power is used in humanitarian agencies, and pointing towards the importance of better reflection on the principles of humanitarianism.

In the conclusion, key conclusions of the research are reiterated, including conceptual contributions and implications for humanitarian agencies.

CHAPTER TWO: FIELDWORK AND ITS COMPLICATIONS

When we enter a field we make footprints on the land and are likely to disturb the environment. When we leave we may have mud on our shoes, pollen on our clothes. If we leave the gate open this may have serious implications for farmers and their animals (Letherby, 2003, p. 6).

DOING RESEARCH DIFFERENTLY TO HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES

My choice of research methods and the principles I have based this research on are motivated by my desire to conduct research differently to humanitarian agencies. My research is interdisciplinary, however my research methods are drawn from anthropology. My work takes the approach of a feminist ethnography, to recognise power hierarchies within people's lived experiences as well as the research process itself. Gayle Letherby (2003) emphasises that the imperative of feminist research is 'to produce useful knowledge that will make a difference to women's lives' (p. 4). Gobo Giampietro (2008) suggests a feminist ethnography involves multiple components, including listening, reflexivity, addressing power hierarchies, being aware of the voices being represented, and a specific ethical approach (p. 59). This extends to data analysis, including the decisions made about which narratives to include and exclude (Buch and Staller, 2006, p. 215). In this kind of research, people's experiences inform theory, rather than theory being the starting point. This means that knowledge is viewed differently; even the researcher's personal experiences may be part of ethnography (Davis and Craven, 2016, p. 81). In ethnographic research, social processes are placed into historical context and the varied viewpoints of individuals are contextualised (Biehl and Petryna, 2013, p. 12).

This research approach is, however, not straight-forward. Power infuses the research process: 'researchers enter the world of participants uninvited, extract a resource called data, process this resource into a product called theory, and use the product only toward their own ends' (Paradis, 2000, p. 840). Presenting ethnographic descriptions carries the risk of simplifying and homogenising people's experiences, requiring researchers to

analyse and present data carefully (Abu-Lughod, 1993, p. 9). Ethnographic research findings may not easily 'translate' to lessons for humanitarian or development agencies; an ethnographic approach may not result in generalisable data, but instead focuses on depth rather than breadth (Grabska, 2014, p. 193). A large sample size is not the object of ethnographic research; this approach is more focused on contextualising the lived experiences of participants. Feminist ethnographies can prove useful in challenging generalisations by drawing on people's experiences (Biehl and Petryna, 2013, p. 17; Davis and Craven, 2016, p. 99) and, in the case of research with refugees, may be used to encourage more careful policy and programming approaches (Grabska, 2014, p. 193).

For me, taking this approach to research means not behaving like a detective whose sole purpose is to 'ferret out "the facts"' (Malkki, 1995a, p. 51). Rather, like Liisa Malkki, I have tried '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' (p. 51). I have prioritised building relationships of trust through sharing food with refugees, revealing information about myself and being genuine in my interest in people's lives. As well as these aspects which describe 'how' I engaged with people, the methods I have chosen are also important.

This does not mean, however, that participatory research is automatically 'empowering' for participants (Doná, 2007, p. 212); participatory or other alternative research methods do not solve the challenges of research among refugee populations (Sukarieh and Tannock, 2013, pp. 508). Given the enormity of the challenges faced by Syrian refugees, it is overly ambitious to assume that 'empowerment' is possible. Perhaps what is more realistic is considering how sharing stories may have been helpful in enabling participants to assert agency through voicing their opinions (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, Khanlou and Moussa, 2008, p. 13) or helping them to understand themselves better (Eastmond, 2007, p. 256). In some cases, I observed that interviews became 'a space to vent and express sadness, anger, and frustration' (Nusair, 2013, p. 64). Like Isis Nusair, on many occasions I felt helpless in being unable to solve people's problems (p. 66) and found myself in tears alongside them. At times, hearing stories of people's journeys fleeing war, domestic violence, torture of relatives and hardship was very difficult. The issue then became about what it meant to 'bear witness' to the pain of others (Fassin,

2012, p. 204) and how to be vulnerable as an observer (Behar, 1996, p. 2). As Marguerite Feitlowitz (2011) writes about her experiences researching torture, 'testimony fulfils the sacred obligation to bear witness, and however discomfiting it may be for us, our pain, though great, is minor compared with that of the victims' (p. 58).

In her book on sensitive research methods, Pranee Liamputtong (2007) asserts that feminist research requires the use of multiple methods that are flexible and participatory (p. 13). The idea here is that methods themselves can reduce gaps between the researcher and participants (Rodgers, 2004). In this empirical context, Syrians have been continually interviewed by humanitarian agencies, journalists and donors and many may have experienced 'research fatigue', making it particularly important to exercise care. In this research, I used a range of methods, including participant observation, semi-structured interviews and life stories (which are typical of ethnographic research), alongside approaches that allow for greater participation of participants in constructing knowledge, specifically FGDs and photography. As detailed below, these methods are particularly flexible, leave room for creativity and hopefully helped to reduce the extractive nature of the research (Kara, 2015). The use of a combination of methods in my research was helpful in generating 'thick' description and triangulating information, made easier by qualitative analysis software, NVivo.

RESEARCH METHODS

Photography

Photography, as a type of visual ethnography, was used in my research to reduce power differentials between refugees and myself (Liamputtong, 2007, p. 143), to counter the 'research fatigue' among Syrians, to involve refugees in conducting analysis (Campbell, 2002, p. 20; Sutton-Brown, 2014, p. 171), and to provide an opportunity for alternative knowledge production that challenges existing hierarchies regarding who produces knowledge (Packard, 2008, p. 63; Kilomba, 2016). Photography has been used in research among vulnerable populations, including Palestinian refugees (PhotoVoice, 2014, p. 18) and internally displaced youth in Northern Uganda (Green and Kloos, 2009).

For me, photography was a strategic choice in challenging research within humanitarian agencies, as it moved methods away from a focus on 'impact' and towards understanding the context. Although humanitarian and development agencies have incorporated participatory photography into efforts that promote social change, these initiatives have been critiqued as overly romanticised and not always empowering (Fairey, 2015, pp. 7–21). Instead, I suggest humanitarian agencies may benefit from using photography as a means of understanding refugee populations – without the further (often overriding) concern with using the images to achieve social change. Within academic research, photography has been somewhat relegated to the margins of the 'arts' (Butler-Kisber, 2010), although it is growing as a method to explore the lives of refugees (Lenette and Boddy, 2013; Robertson *et al.*, 2016). My use of photography in this research challenges academic tendencies to view photography as merely a means of presenting data differently, rather than also a means of producing different kinds of knowledge and challenging hierarchies between researchers and participants (Packard, 2008, p. 63).

Through working in Jordan, I recognised that although Syrians would like the opportunity to learn new skills and engage in creative activities including art, photography and music, these activities were less available due to limited resources. Visual methods like photography represented a potentially more interesting activity for refugees, thus could be a way of 'giving back' to participants – though importantly not within the context of economic development/vocational activities as other kinds of humanitarian activities might be positioned. Instead, the incorporation of photography was more relational, recognising that for many Syrian refugees, photography can be a way of maintaining ties and reflecting on the past.

Roland Barthes (1982) suggests that in photography, *'the object speaks'* (p. 38, emphasis in original). He argued, 'Every photograph is a certificate of presence' (p. 87). Photography is also empowering to the photographer. Susan Sontag (1979) writes that photography represents 'a social rite, a defense against anxiety, and a tool of power' (p. 8). It is also a way for the photographer to communicate, as one research participant aptly put it during an FGD: 'The photographer can speak'.

It is not just the photos themselves, but the discussion regarding the photographs, that provides insight and meaning (Wang and Burris, 1997; Green and Kloos, 2009; PhotoVoice, 2014). Facilitation of this discussion is one of the critical elements of using photography in ethnographic research (Packard, 2008), and is predicated on participants being trained to take photographs in a careful way, with intent, instead of randomly (PhotoVoice, 2014), and analysing photos critically (during photo elicitation exercises and in describing their own photographs). Even with appropriate training, there may be challenges associated with creating discussion on photographs, which I had to consider during fieldwork. For example, Eric Green and Bret Kloos (2009) found that youth in Uganda were more inclined to focus on negative aspects of displacement while discussing photos. They attribute this to humanitarian agencies, who tended to focus on the negative in their discussions around material needs (p. 477). I therefore tried to frame activities as not solely about challenges and problems faced by refugees.

For my research, photography workshops were conducted with six groups (two male and four female groups) in three locations: Amman, Zarqa and Irbid. In total, thirty-four women and nine men received certificates for participation in the workshops, though more participated but did not attend enough sessions to receive certificates. In Amman and Irbid, due to fewer participants in the former location and time limitations in the latter location, the groups were held over a five-week period, but were held over six weeks in Zarqa. Each session lasted approximately 1.5 hours. Although I provided cameras for participants to use during sessions and to borrow for home-based tasks, they largely used their own smart phones. The workshops covered basic photography skills, as well as ethical issues regarding photography (Wang and Burris, 1997, p. 378). As the final activity, participants were invited to photograph their favourite and least favourite 'spaces' in Jordan, and to reflect on the reasons for selecting these spaces. Through the workshops, I facilitated discussions about the different locations people access and how refugees spend their time in Jordan compared to Syria. While being truly 'participatory' would involve participants themselves determining what is photographed without any parameters from me (Packard, 2008, p. 68), I saw a need to provide some structure to guide the activities.

At the end of the sessions in Zarqa and Irbid, exhibitions were held where participants invited friends and family members to view their photographs. The following photographs were taken at the exhibitions:



Exhibition in Zarqa



Exhibition in Irbid

Separate to the positive feedback participants had regarding the photography workshops, the organisation in Zarqa decided they wanted to use the workshop content to start a new photography activity in their centre. After fieldwork, I revised the materials and these are now being used by facilitators in their centre, adding to their existing activities which are slightly more traditional (sewing, hair-dressing, English classes etc.). This was an unexpected positive outcome of the research.

Focus group discussions (FGDs)

Using FGDs earlier on in my research (as part of the photography workshops) helped to verify the topics covered within other methods, as well as enable me to broaden my research focus beyond mobility alone, as had been my original plan prior to fieldwork. FGDs are a useful method of engaging people in a more participatory way, and are often used to reduce power differentials, however power dynamics are still present. FGDs do not occur within a 'natural' setting (Smithson, 2000, p. 105), rather are 'performances' within which varying interests are at play (Smithson 2008, p. 363). The aspect of interaction is critical to FGDs (Smithson, 2008, p. 359), but may also be problematic, allowing particular individuals to dominate - as I experienced in my research - or resulting in only normative views being vocalised (Smithson, 2000, p. 116) - as I once experienced when after an FGD, I was pulled aside by two participants who said they wanted to explain the 'truth' about pre-war life in Syria, which was different to the rosy, positive FGD discussion. Good facilitation is key to a variety of opinions being heard. It is not just the content of what is said that is useful, but the silences, laughter and facial expressions that provided insight.

As mentioned above, FGDs occurred within the photography workshops, with the same six groups who participated in photography workshops. As well as shorter discussions about how time is spent, differences between Syria and Jordan and where people go or don't go, I adapted an exercise I have used in the past in Jordan called 'gender boxes'. In this exercise, a box is drawn onto a flipchart and the group is asked to describe the ideal behaviours/attitudes of Syrian women/girls in Jordan. The words generated by participants are written inside the box. Responses are probed to identify the spaces in which these behaviours are expected. A discussion then occurs around the consequences of failing to uphold these expectations, which are written outside the box. Discussion compares expectations and consequences in Jordan compared to Syria. The exercise is repeated with the same group for men/boys. Groups of women and men complete the activity for their sex and the opposite sex. I facilitated the exercise without drawing on flipcharts in the last two locations, which made it a little easier.

Semi-structured interviews

In this research, I also invited participants from the FGDs (as well as a few other participants who were related to/friends with the FGD participants), as well as humanitarian workers, to participate in semi-structured interviews. In semi-structured interviews, similar questions may be asked of multiple participants, but there is also flexibility to follow other threads outside the interview guide (Hesse-Biber, 2006, pp. 115–116).

In total I conducted twenty semi-structured interviews with refugees (fifteen women and five men; five were aged 18-25, eleven were aged 26-45 and four were aged over 46) and ten semi-structured interviews (all female) with humanitarian workers who have worked on gender/GBV/empowerment programs in Jordan as either employees or consultants. The interviews were used to triangulate FGD and life story data. I used open-ended questions and gave participants the opportunity to ask me questions, in order to address power inequalities (Nusair, 2013, p. 66). During the interviews, I asked follow-up questions, and used verbal and non-verbal methods to probe the responses of participants (Hesse-Biber, 2006, p. 126-127). In a few cases, participants who were friends/relatives were interviewed together.

Life stories

Alongside the semi-structured interviews, I invited participants from the FGDs (as well as a couple of individuals who were related to FGD participants) to participate in life story interviews. Life stories are distinct from other interview methods in that they require multiple, prolonged sessions (Leavy, 2006, p. 154), therefore involve a greater investment of time. They are focused less on information-gathering and more on the interaction between the researcher and the participant (Anderson and Jack, 1991, p. 23). Life stories provide wider social context to the experiences of individuals (McLeod and Thomson, 2009, p. 41). They are based on personal experience, therefore they ‘may challenge the collective story and its essentializing tendency’ (Eastmond, 2007, p. 253). As noted by Halleh Ghorashi (2008), this method may be particularly suited to research with refugees, as it runs counter to the ‘too fast, too purposive, or much too short’ interviews (p. 118) that often characterise interactions with refugees. Importantly, while this method places more value on the experiences and voices of participants, what is

narrated is itself also constructed (Scott, 1991, p. 777). Experiences are, as Richard Black suggests, not 'unmediated', rather people are narrating what they wish to be heard (cited in Kothari, 2016).

In total, I conducted ten life story interviews, with seven women and three men across different generations and locations: two were aged 19-25, six were aged 26-45 and two were aged over 46. Across multiple sessions, in homes, cafes and parks, I asked refugees to share their life stories with reference to the following periods in their lives: childhood, adolescence, adulthood, leaving Syria and life in Jordan. I began the discussion by asking 'What did it mean to be a girl/boy growing up in Syria? Can you tell me about your childhood?' and used a similar question structure to invite narratives about later life stages. Once the life story interviews were completed, a transcript was developed (in Arabic for eight participants and English for two) for participants to check (Hopkins, 1998; Atkinson, 2012). All participants bar one received a transcript; the last person was unable to meet despite multiple attempts even after I left Jordan and has since been resettled in Europe.

At first, I was overly pedantic about the time spent on life story interviews, aiming for 15-20 hours per person over multiple sessions, but this proved unhelpful. For example, it was unrealistic to expect the same length of interview from someone who was 25 years old, compared to someone who was 60, given the latter had many more life experiences to share. As such, while I kept track of the time spent with each person (which ranged from meeting just three times, to as many as ten times), I focused more on the type of content and level of detail provided, rather than being too prescriptive about the number of hours. I also deviated from my plan of asking questions about their lives in a chronological order, as I noticed a few participants preferred to discuss how they left Syria first, before discussing their childhood and adolescence. I left this open for participants so that conversation flowed more organically.

Participant observation

Participant observation, as a key aspect of ethnographic research, was also used to understand day-to-day behaviour, in recognition that there may be gaps between what

people say and what they actually do. Elena Buch and Karen Staller (2006) suggest that observation involves seeing 'even mundane, common actions and beliefs as unusual and worthy of extended analysis' (p. 188).

I focused on key spaces where I had access, particularly humanitarian agency spaces, homes of refugees and cafes. I paid attention to the tasks people did, the tone of voice people used, how people reacted to each other, facial expressions, and the way people spent their time. I took detailed notes on these aspects, being sure not to interfere with activities (Angrosino, 2005, p. 730), although my presence itself likely affected the activities and interactions. Being a 'stranger' to people's homes in particular also helped me to be more aware of details (Giampietro, 2008, p. 150).

As part of participant observation, while spending time with refugees, I learned how to make *kuba*, which was a very involved almost 5-hour process including shopping for ingredients, visiting the butcher to mix ingredients using a machine, making the *kuba* and eating it. I also went shopping with one woman in Zarqa, which I mention later in this chapter. These experiences of observing the behaviour and interactions of Syrian refugees are made more complex by my own background and values; my observations are shaped by my positionality.

POSITIONALITY

Taxi Driver: Are you from Pakistan?

Me: No, Australia.

Taxi Driver: Muchos gracias.

Me: (silence)

Anyone*: Where are you from?

Me: Australia.

Anyone: No, no, *bil asel* [originally]!

* This question was asked by too many people to count, so this conversation could really be with anyone.

Me: Well, Sri Lanka but...

Anyone: Ah! Sri Lanka. Good.

So,

here you are

too foreign for home

too foreign for here.

Never enough for both.

(Umebinyuo, 2016, p. 175)

Bodies, whether we like them to or not, carry meaning and can be 'read' in certain ways. These meanings and readings influence the research process in varied ways, as I found during fieldwork. My positionality, which, prior to fieldwork I felt was fairly straightforward, was complicated and challenged while I conducted research in Jordan, highlighting that positionality is not a static concept, but evolves under different conditions (Osanami Törngren and Ngeh, 2017, p. 14). As well as the research process being undoubtedly infused with my personal and political beliefs, it is also shaped by how my presence in physical space is interpreted and assessed by others.

Understanding the evolving nature of positionality requires reflexivity. Maithree Wickramasinghe (2010) describes the practice of reflexivity as 'an overarching action of consciousness that straddles the entire research process...' (p. 56). This means being aware of my positionality throughout the research process, and being clear about how this may influence my analysis (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, p. 121).

Positionality is perhaps particularly relevant given the subject matter of my research; forced migration itself is 'neither passive nor apolitical' (Hyndman, 2000, p. xv), rather it 'cries out for moral positioning' (Chatty, 2010a, p. 1). My decision to study the experiences of Syrian refugees stems from my experience working in humanitarian and development agencies (including on refugee programs), my personal values, my concerns regarding the treatment of refugees in Australia (where I have spent most of my life), as well as my family background. My parents and their relatives on both sides of the family

left Sri Lanka during the civil war before I was born, due to their Tamil ethnicity. This has shaped my worldview and politics, as well as my career choice. Having lived in multiple places during my childhood (Brunei until age 8, New Zealand for 4 months, then Australia), I have always been interested in refugee and migration issues, which led to some of my volunteer work with refugees and migrants in Australia and during my PhD in the United Kingdom. My experiences working in Jordan have made me particularly sympathetic to the experiences of Syrian refugees, and especially cognisant of the need for humanitarian agencies to better-understand their situation. Like Jennifer Hyndman (2000), when I critique how humanitarian agencies operate, I am not suggesting they are redundant, rather my feeling is that the deficiencies of humanitarian aid are overshadowed by the fact that action is needed (p. 61). My motivation therefore is in helping to improve humanitarian practice.

My feminist beliefs and my personal commitment to promoting gender equality also shape this research. I recognise however that what I see as a 'gender struggle' (Sayigh, 1993, p. 288) may not be perceived as such by Syrians. Prior to fieldwork, I knew that I might carry assumptions about Syrians based on my previous work experiences.

Being 'assessed' by others

I am an 'outsider' to the experiences of Syrian refugees in terms of my largely Western education, my Australian nationality, my faith and my cultural background. While having a similar background to Syrians could assist in making people feel more comfortable to participate in the research, it may not necessarily improve the quality of my research. Tracey Hurd and Alice McIntyre (1996) argue that the 'seduction of sameness' may result in a researcher who shares a similar background with participants not engaging in reflexivity because they feel they understand the issues of the participants (pp. 78-82). This is important to consider because of the degree to which I am an 'insider' due to my experience working in Jordan on programs for Syrian refugees and my ability to converse (somewhat) in Arabic. I earlier outlined the problems with humanitarian analysis on gender-related issues; having been immersed in this humanitarian context may cause me to assume that I understand what is occurring.

At various points I felt more of an insider, through the kind and welcoming comments Syrians made to me. One older woman, in the middle of an interview, smiled warmly at me and said, 'If you weren't married, I would take you to my son to be my daughter-in-law'. There were however times where I felt the acceptance of Syrians was more 'in spite of' my outsider status. At the end of one interview, a woman said to my Research Assistant, '[F]rom the first sight we know if a person is good and kind-hearted or... Michelle is a foreigner even though we still know that she is *tayybeh*, you know, good heart'. During another interview, the mother of the interviewee said about me, 'She's sweet, this girl', and her daughter added about her mother, 'She doesn't like all foreigners'. Underneath the layer of acceptance, there was a thread of separation. I felt this in a different way towards the end of my fieldwork when I visited a women's Quranic Centre for a fair. I had been invited by one of the research participants, who proudly took me around the room, introducing me to her friends. Her introductions went something like this: 'She is from Australia. She is Christian. She is interested in the centre'.

The feeling of being assessed by the people I interacted with was a constant feature of the fieldwork period. Research participants seemed to be constantly weighing me up; my actions and words, what I wore and what I ate, were constantly on display. This became evident from one of my first interviews, where I was asked by one older man, in the middle of eating lunch, 'Do you know about Sykes-Picot?' I was taken aback slightly (as it seemed I was being tested). Thankfully, my affirmative response meant that I passed this assessment.

At other times, my actions carried particular meanings. Once, I was sitting in the corner of the room at Khadija's house, on the Arabic couch when this conversation began:

Khadija: [suddenly looking at me] Don't sit in the corner, move to the side.

Michelle: It's ok, no problem. I like the corner.

Khadija: There is an idiom, the strong ones sit in the corner... [laughing]

Michelle: Oh, thank you!

Khadija: No, no, but you are not strong. You are kind, not strong [lots of laughing].

I was perhaps unreasonably annoyed by this interchange, as if my personality was being assessed and found wanting. Couldn't one be strong and kind? Both my research assistant and Khadija seemed to find this hilarious.

At the beginning of my research, I always took notes during interviews despite also using an audio recorder. I stopped note-taking after a few months due to problems with my wrist and this was immediately noticed. One woman was telling me a story, and suddenly stopped in the middle and asked me in a shocked tone, 'Aren't you going to write?' During another interview where multiple people were present, one person noticed me writing a lot and gasped, 'Look at how much she is writing!' This resulted in laughing and amazement at how much I had written – they seemed surprised that I found their stories interesting.

Skin colour

One complicating aspect to my positionality is my skin colour, which, although enabling me to blend in more easily than other expatriates, also had implications. Although I did consider the way my skin colour would shape my research experience, I was somewhat unprepared for the full extent of this. My previous working experience in Jordan was that being brown was seen as unusual, causing people to be interested in my background; being mistaken for a domestic worker at the very least opened the door to interesting conversations. These conversations were not always positive; my past experiences with racism in Jordan included conversations where people did not believe I am Australian, insisted on knowing where my parents are from, or directly commented on my skin colour (including the fact that my husband's skin colour is different to mine).

Although being different to a white expatriate has benefits, it also places a higher onus on me to explain my background. I deliberately tried to reveal more of my personal background with research participants, but it was more the conversations with other Jordanians: taxi drivers, supermarket workers and random strangers, that most challenged me. Perhaps because I was more present in public spaces during the fieldwork than I had been previously during my work in Jordan, where I had access to a car and

worked long hours, I found myself encountering people more and more regularly having to explain my background, than before.

The question 'where are you from?' became commonplace; the inevitable uncertainty that hovered in every conversation. This question, suggest Sayaka Osanami Törngren and Jonathan Ngeh (2017), positions the asker as an insider and the person being asked as a racial and ethnic outsider (p. 7). People would be visibly surprised when I said 'Australia', but sometimes I went further to explain that my parents are from Sri Lanka, since they looked so obviously disappointed to have guessed incorrectly. As time passed, I became frustrated by the incredulous responses to my 'Australia' answer, so I would immediately say I was from Sri Lanka, knowing that this likely meant they assumed I was a domestic worker. This answer largely stopped the conversations though; people were satisfied that I fulfilled their expectations.

The assumption that I was a domestic worker most revealed itself in perhaps an unlikely setting: the American Centre for Oriental Research, where I went one evening to hear a lecture. I arrived a few minutes late, and wandered around the foyer, trying to find the room where the lecture was being held. A woman with skin colour similar to mine was sitting on a couch, and, seeing my confusion, pointed me towards one corner of the foyer. I walked that way, expecting to find the lecture room, and instead found myself in the kitchen, where a few people who were not Jordanians were preparing food. Surprised, I walked out. Seeing me leave, the woman shouted, 'Kitchen, kitchen!' and pointed me again towards the kitchen. Feeling quite embarrassed, I said quietly, 'I'm here for the lecture', and she looked surprised and pointed me in the opposite direction. This was quite startling, because I wasn't in the mindset to be aware of my skin colour, like I would be when walking on the street or catching a taxi. It was interestingly on this same day that the opening vignette to this section occurred and I was asked about being from Pakistan. It reminded me that we carry the meaning represented by our bodies everywhere we go: it is inescapable.

The way I was treated in Jordan differed considerably when my husband was with me. I felt uncomfortable having to rely on his 'credit' as a white person, to gain status. At one point, I forced him to come to our small local supermarket with me - to make our

relationship clear to the supermarket staff, so that they would treat me better in his absence. This was after a Jordanian lady was served before me (on instructions from the supermarket manager to the cashier), despite me waiting in the queue before she arrived. I noticed that my Uber passenger rating was consistently low, despite me speaking better Arabic than my husband and always knowing where I was going; his ratings were always higher to the extent that I stopped using my account. Alongside these events, I came across an article in the *Washington Post* about how Jordan was the least racially-tolerant country based on the World Values Survey data (Fisher, 2013). It made me question the interactions I'd had even with local humanitarian agencies in the start-up phase of my research. Were they secretly wondering why this brown person was in their building, and negotiating for access to refugees? What did they really think of me?

The conversations with Syrian refugees about my skin colour were mostly positive. I found myself as the confidant of two Syrian women, both of whom had slightly darker skin colour than the average Syrian. One of them spoke frankly about the racial discrimination she experienced as a child at school, including experiences of bullying. For the other woman, the questions were more about marriage prospects. She was curious about my marriage, wanting to know if my husband's family accepted me despite my skin colour. Both were pleased to learn that the city where I lived was multicultural and they joked about finding Australian husbands for themselves. These women used humour to discuss their skin colour, saying things like, 'My mum forgot me in the oven for too long'. Jokes were sometimes however delivered from others to these women in ways that were less amusing. During an interview with one of them, her sister reacted to a jibe by calling her an Indian driver.

Apart from these two women, most Syrians did not reference my skin colour. This was perhaps because I spent some time explaining my background (in Arabic) at the beginning of each photography workshop, so that the Syrians attending knew a bit about me. In many cases however, this was not enough, and I faced quite personal questions from the women in particular, who wanted to know about my husband and whether I had children. A few times, I was asked to show a photo of my husband, which resulted in very positive reactions because they liked my husband's skin colour and described him as 'beautiful'.

Questions about my husband were inevitably followed by a discussion of why I did not have children. In most cases, I evaded the question and talked about how it wasn't the right time, not wanting to go into why I did not want children now or ever. During one interview with two women, they really wanted specifics about why I didn't have children. One of them asked, 'Is it something from your hand or God's?' I said, 'Mine'. They checked again, 'Is it your husband or you?' I said, 'Both'. They asked, 'Which one more?' I said, 'Me'. They asked, 'Why?' but this was, thankfully, interrupted by us having to cross a busy road. I felt awkward about what to say. By the time we arrived at the other side of the road, they had forgotten the conversation. At another occasion, I was a bit vague in my response and then the older woman asked what the doctor had said. I said, 'I haven't been to see the doctor about this'. She was visibly shocked, and said something like, 'You have been married for almost 6 years and you haven't seen the doctor about this'. She seemed very worried and concerned, while I tried to brush off her worries and vaguely alluded to hopefully having children in the future. Although I found these personal questions unsettling, I understood this was an important part of them understanding who I was.

FIELDWORK COMPLEXITIES

Research scope

At the outset of fieldwork, I did not intend to explore gendered relationships. My focus was on exploring gendered (im)mobility. As photography workshops and interviews were carried out in the first few months, it became evident that I needed to broaden my topic. Research participants increasingly discussed complex accounts of marriage and relationships, including mixed accounts of gender roles and gender norms. I decided that it might be more useful to reflect on gender roles and norms more broadly, to include (im)mobility as well as relationships. At this point, I also decided to include humanitarian workers in my research to focus more explicitly on the humanitarian implications of some of the findings that were emerging. The analysis on relationships emerges as an important component of my work – although this was not the original intent prior to fieldwork.

Access to participants

I obtained access to refugees through the humanitarian agencies I volunteered with. Upon arrival in Jordan, I had meetings with a handful of organisations to explain my research and ask if I could conduct photography workshops in their centres. Three organisations agreed: *Syrians Across Borders* (Amman), *Arab Women Organization* (Zarqa) and *Family and Children's Protection Association* (Irbid). Before fieldwork began, I had anticipated that I would be conducting photography workshops in larger, international agencies, but the opposite occurred due to larger agencies not having the space/time to incorporate my activities. It was a useful experience to work through these smaller agencies, as they sometimes have ways of reaching people who do not access services from larger humanitarian agencies. Although these smaller, local organisations lack some of the institutional mechanisms of larger organisations (for example, child protection checks were not conducted for me or my research assistants, although we came in contact with children in each location), they play an important role in linking refugees who may be on the margins (Dickinson, 2014).

Although I conducted the photography workshops for women and men, I had anticipated it might be more difficult to engage men rather than women due to the timing of activities and the relevance of photography. It was more difficult for men to attend sessions due to their work and volunteering commitments. A few men had hoped the sessions would enable them to obtain jobs as photographers, or learn about editing photographs on computers, therefore dropped out of the sessions when they realised what the content would cover. This meant numbers of men in the workshops were less. Surprisingly, it was not difficult to conduct individual interviews with men. I had been concerned about not finding any men to participate in life story interviews however much to my surprise, each man I asked was willing and even enthusiastic about participating. The first male participant was ready with stories and examples from the second I finished my first question. He shifted seamlessly from story to story and was so focused on speaking he did not eat/drink for some time; I had to stop him and urge him to eat multiple times as he would begin talking while holding the sandwich midair! At the end of his first interview, he exclaimed, 'I still haven't told you a quarter of my story!' Another male

participant, who was the husband of a woman who participated in a semi-structured interview, also participated in a life story interview. I was unsure of how willing he would be to talk, because he didn't know me as well as the other participants did, however over the course of five interviews, I was pleasantly surprised by how much he shared. A big part of this was his wife's presence during the interview. During the interview, his wife would interject from time to time, sharing extra stories or reminding her husband about particular incidents: 'Tell her about...' This particular participant was also interesting because of how he reflected on the questions that I asked. It seemed like there was little need to ask many questions – I would just pause and he continued talking! At times, it felt a little bit awkward to leave so much silence and space - sometimes I paused for 30 seconds or even up to a minute. But, it seemed to be helpful to him to collect his thoughts and share another story.

Participant profiles

Prior to fieldwork, I planned for participant ages to be grouped across three generations. Peter Loizos (2007) suggests that generational analysis may be structured according to cohort, parent-child lineage, life stages or based on historical moments. I planned to use the latter two categories. The youngest generation were those aged 18-25, based on the importance of the under-25 age group within the region (Chatty, 2007). I grouped the two other generations roughly according to the types of changes they witnessed over time in Syrian government narratives regarding gender, which I discuss earlier in this paper. People who were born from 1970 onwards would have experienced most of their lives (until the last 15 years or so) under Ba'athist policies that emphasised women's labour force participation and education, so were grouped in the next age group of 26-45. The last generation were those aged 46-65 and represents individuals who may be able to reflect on experiences prior to economic liberalisation policies. Alongside sex and age, economic class is important to analyse. This aspect is more fluid during displacement, so I used other indicators to understand the previous class of Syrians, including education level, profession and lifestyle in Syria.

In reality however, it was more difficult to get a broad spectrum of participants across these different criteria. Just over half of the semi-structured and life story interview

participants were in the 26-45 age group: this was the group most heavily represented. Participants lived in Dar'a, Homs, Damascus and Hama before the conflict began; a few participants were however originally from other governorates. Among male interview participants, two were university-educated and one had plans to complete high school. Among the women, only one was university-educated though another had begun university and another is trying to finish high school so she can attend university. Seven of the women (around a third of female interview participants) worked in paid employment at one time; only one of these was not working when the conflict began and had stopped employment shortly after her marriage. My impression was that almost all interview participants owned their own homes in Syria. Drawing on interviews, education levels and professions of participants, most Syrians who participated in my research were middle-income in Syria.

The majority of interviewee participants had not received assistance from the larger humanitarian agencies like Save the Children, the International Rescue Committee, International Medical Corps and the International Catholic Migration Commission - all of whom have large amounts of funding and implement activities across the country (though less so in Amman), though many of the refugees receive cash assistance from UNHCR. This meant that these individuals have different experiences/exposure to humanitarian agencies - for example, none I believe had ever attended an 'awareness-raising' activity on GBV or gender; only the Zarqa organisation had this activity but I don't think any of the participants attended this (especially since the Zarqa organisation lost some funding prior to my fieldwork and had to reduce activities).

Translation, research assistants and power relations

I conducted my research with support from two paid local research assistants (female), who carried out direct translation for me during interviews, as well as co-facilitated some of the FGDs. Co-facilitation reduced the need for translation in some activities, ensuring better flow in conversations. The research assistants also helped to organise activities and assist with transcription of interviews/FGDs from recordings. Prior to fieldwork, I advertised among my contacts in Jordan for recent graduates who wanted experience in research and/or humanitarian work, and conducted Skype interviews to find the first

research assistant. For the last two months, I used a new research assistant, who I had known for a few years and worked with previously in Jordan.

I had developed training materials on fieldwork methods in previous humanitarian roles, so adapted these materials to develop a more comprehensive training program covering gender issues, ethics, as well as practical research skills, to help the research assistants. I also provided additional training and CV support for the first research assistant, at her request, after six months or so.

Prior to the fieldwork, I was quite concerned about the translation of interviews and FGDs since this was not ideal and represented a significant limitation of my research. I had previously had both positive and negative experiences in using a translator during interviews and workshops, and recognised the possibility in meaning and momentum being lost through translation. There were however some positives to having translation. It seemed the Amman group especially were listening to the English as well as the Arabic translation, and were using the process as a way of improving their English skills. Having the opportunity to develop English skills became a useful by-product of the workshop, particularly in Amman – another way of ‘giving back’.

Translation however does contain inherent challenges. Bogusia Temple (2002) challenges the idea that there is one ‘true’ translation, arguing that the translator’s account emerges from their own experience and background. This was reflected through my experience with research assistants and others who helped with transcription and translation; there were sometimes disagreements about the most appropriate translation. Although difficult at times, my key principle was presenting the exact words of participants rather than tidying grammar.

Translators themselves are not neutral actors and may not necessarily represent the culture they are positioned in (Temple, 2002, p. 848). Rather, they are ‘active producers of knowledge’ (Berman and Tyyskä, 2011, p. 11). Bogusia Temple and Rosalind Edwards (2002) assert that research involving translators has a ‘[t]riple subjectivity’ because of the relationships between the translator, researcher and participant (p. 11) – an important aspect I will discuss in the next paragraph. They suggest that understanding

the positionality of not just the researcher but also the translator, is critical to conducting reflexive research. My relationship with the research assistants, particularly the fact that it is an interaction based on employment (Deane and Stevano, 2015, p. 5), is important to consider. This meant me being transparent regarding issues like remuneration, as well as intentionally investing time in training and debriefing (Deane and Stevano, 2015, p. 13), which may be particularly important for a recent graduate (Turner, 2010, p. 217). The relationship between the research assistant and the participants is also critical to consider, particularly their class (Block *et al.*, 2013, p. 79) and age (Deane and Stevano, 2015, p. 10) relative to research participants.

The '[t]riple subjectivity' that Temple and Edwards (2002, p. 11) reference became particularly important as my research progressed. As mentioned above, the majority of my research was conducted with one research assistant. As part of conducting feminist research, I was always striving to ensure that I was not using my power negatively towards either the research participants or my research assistant. In this focus on my power however, I failed to recognise that other power dynamics were also at work. Over time, I became more and more aware that my research assistant was the one who had the most power in the room during interviews; I needed her in order to communicate with the refugees, and they needed her in order to communicate with me. It was more than her just being a 'go-between' – she held a significant amount of power. The dynamic between us shifted as she became more confident. She began asking participants her own questions during interviews without checking with me. This created problems when sensitive/inappropriate questions were asked. Unfortunately, the relationship became quite tense when I provided feedback to her, and she decided not to continue as research assistant.

My experiences with this research assistant have challenged me to think about power in a more complex way. It is not just a case of me having more power by default because this is 'my' research, rather power dynamics are constantly evolving and may shift over time. This perhaps links to the discussion about positionality earlier in this chapter; being a different skin colour changed the dynamics of our interactions in ways I had not expected because I was fixated on my positionality as a Western-educated researcher. In both examples, power was more complex and shifted in unexpected ways. Conducting feminist

research requires analysis of power, but this analysis must be done in a fluid way to allow for surprising changes in how power works. Like I discuss in the chapters that follow, power is not so easy to understand (Abu Lughod, 2013, p. 6).

Unexpected moments

Research assistant: Michelle needs pyjamas [She thought this because of a conversation where I said I only had a couple of pairs of pyjamas].

Khadija: What kind of pyjamas?

Research assistant: Pyjamas for married women... [At this point, I tried to intervene, but it was too late].

Khadija: She needs fire pyjamas. If your lover is precious, wear fire clothes.

A week after this somewhat-startling conversation, the three of us went shopping in Zarqa, in al-Shaddeh Street. It was cold and rainy. Khadija walked fast through the streets and mostly ignored shop staff. We struggled to keep up with her. Khadija was on a mission to shop for 'pyjamas' for me, despite my protestations. I found her acting like a giggling child at one point - when she pointed to a mannequin in the street which featured bright red skimpy underwear. At one store, my research assistant and Khadija found the pyjama/lingerie section and dragged me to that part of the store. Khadija picked up various lingerie packets, while we were watched by a burly man who stood about one metre away. She chose bright yellow lingerie, saying, 'Your husband will follow you if you wear this one', while I smiled nervously and steered them back to the winter jumpers. They urged me to try things on, but I refused. It was surprising to me to see very public displays of underwear and lingerie in the market in Zarqa - all in shops staffed entirely by men. I had seen this in Amman previously and assumed this was because Amman was less conservative, however I found it uncomfortable to see semi-naked mannequins in provocative poses on the street. Neither Khadija nor my research assistant seemed to find this unusual, but I felt very awkward. No one purchased any lingerie, but I found the whole idea of buying lingerie with other people also a bit strange; in Australia, I would only do this with a very close friend.

It was also unexpected to hear women making sexual comments or telling riskier jokes. During one interview, a cat entered the room, and a woman laughed and exclaimed, 'The cat smells like she was with a man!' My research assistant found this to be a surprising and very sexual comment. I was also startled by this statement, especially since we were there to visit her daughter, not her, and she never met either of us before.

At other times however, the sexual was avoided. One research participant decided that she wanted to be interviewed at a zoo. She guided us through Zarqa and we ended up at a building with a sign that said, 'International Animal Park'. Among the lions, birds and emaciated wolves, while chatting as we strolled through the park, we came across two tigers who were in the process of mating. This created a somewhat awkward moment where my research assistant and the interview participant (both single women) slowly backed away. We all giggled nervously while quickly moving to another part of the park. In this case, perhaps the reaction would have been different if married women had been present, since they seemed less shy in talking about such topics.

Apart from these awkward moments around lingerie and sex, I was surprised by the level of disclosure made by women. In one photography workshop, while playing a game that was resulting in a lot of laughter, two women shared a fact about themselves: they 'hate' their husbands. This was said in a laughing way, and resulted in laughter around the room, but there was also a tone of seriousness to it. These were not the only negative comments women made about their husbands. During one casual conversation with a few women before the feedback workshop, one woman was explaining that her husband was sick. Another woman chimed in longingly: 'I wish my husband had a disease!' Although this made everyone laugh and appeared to be an offhand comment, I found it quite confronting. I was surprised that women made such comments in front of other women who they were not that close to and that the reaction was laughter.

Joking and laughter was a common occurrence during workshops and interviews. While visiting one woman at her home, at one point, she disappeared for five minutes and then came in dressed in red and black and talking in a certain way, moving her hands. My research assistant explained she was pretending to be a Bedouin. She did this for a few minutes, explaining she does this so she doesn't think too much. She said that if she thinks

she will 'die'. I recalled another incident a few months ago when she had pretended to talk like a Bedouin. This appeared to be a common joke for her. Other women also made jokes about Bedouins – including one about a Bedouin who didn't wear trousers. I felt uncomfortable during these interludes because I knew of at least one participant whose father was a Bedouin.

Each of these unexpected moments occurred with women, which perhaps explains them. Women may feel more comfortable with other women, therefore might feel they can be more free in these moments.

Reciprocity and ethics

The concept of reciprocity is important in feminist research. 'Giving back' to the participants was intentionally not merely a side focus, rather I sought to incorporate the principle of reciprocity throughout the entire fieldwork process (Liamputtong, 2007, p. 60). This included how I interacted in people's homes (playing with their children, helping take dishes to the kitchen), the food I purchased for us in cafes/or which I brought to people's homes, how I listened to the issues they raised, and the ways I tried to help them with engaging with the UN and other agency bureaucracy. In general, it seemed also that the act of visiting people was viewed very positively, although I was there to conduct interviews. Apart from the interview, a lot of time was spent just chatting and eating. A few refugees said '*nawartū*' to me, which means 'You bring light when you come' and likely reflects that having visitors is special.

Acting on the basis of reciprocity meant at times taking people's UNHCR registration information and making phone calls to find out about access to services, about eligibility for cash assistance and about the status of resettlement processes. The last was perhaps the most challenging to obtain information on and I found myself frustrated at the complex bureaucratic processes that meant refugees had little information beyond the fact that their claims were being processed and they would be informed of updates – a process that one UNHCR staff member informed me could take days or years. On these occasions, I felt quite helpless at being unable to provide useful updates for refugees who

were endlessly waiting to hear back from UNHCR, although they seemed grateful that I had at least tried to find out more information.

On other occasions it was much easier for acts of reciprocity. During one interview, a woman was explaining that her inability to pay a hospital bill for her son might result in him being deported. A local humanitarian organisation was supposed to cover the surgery for her son, however after the surgery said that it wasn't possible, leaving her with a large bill. I was not surprised to hear this fear of deportation, as I had heard of cases of Syrians being deported in circumstances that were nothing to do with 'security', during my previous work in Jordan. While my research assistant Leila and I were debating whether it would be easier for us to just pay this bill for them, we thought it may be useful to speak to the agency who were supposed to cover this expense. I found the number for the office and Leila spoke to them on the phone to try and understand why they were unable to cover the surgery. During the phone call, we discovered that the local organisation was also confused about why their records showed that the surgery could not be covered, and said that they would investigate and get back to us. Some 15 minutes later it turned out that there had been an administrative error and they could actually fund it. The whole apartment erupted in cheers as the entire family kissed each other and us. Many hugs were exchanged. It felt positive to be able to thank the family members for their interviews by resolving their problem.

Part of reciprocity in my research was 'closing the loop' by providing feedback on the research findings to participants. I decided to conduct group feedback sessions in each location. As well as separately sharing findings with two out of three of the organisations (the third was not available) on key research themes, I met with the refugees to share the key findings. In Amman, this took the form of a small group discussion with three of the women participants in one of their homes. In Zarqa, a larger group meeting was held, which was the first occasion where the women could all gather again and share food. In Irbid, I held two sessions: one for men and one for women, which were very well attended. An additional direct way of reciprocating for life story participants spending significant amounts of time with me, was to provide the participants with transcripts of their interviews. This proved to be a time-consuming and costly process, especially when it came to the production of Arabic transcripts, where I relied on others (research

assistants, as well as a couple of trusted translators) to ensure accurate translations. It was however rewarding; participants were often surprised and pleased to receive their transcripts. I encouraged them to let me know if there were any mistakes or clarifications they wanted to make, but no one has yet done so.

Reciprocity, importantly, is also part of Middle Eastern culture. Lara Deeb and Mona Harb (2013) discuss the concept of *'ayb* [shame/dishonourable behaviour] and give the example of someone not appropriately following reciprocal social relations that are part of Middle Eastern culture. These reciprocal relations are about responding when it is your 'turn'; there is a back-and-forth of invitations (p. 21). During the fieldwork process, I reflected that I was reciprocating to their participation in my research with coffee and sandwiches that we ate together, but I began to wonder if they saw it like this. A few times during these interviews, women particularly paused to ask if what they were saying would actually help my research, and questioned if they were contributing anything of interest. This made me realise that they weren't sure they were helping my research, so I tried to make this clearer, so that they recognised they were fulfilling their end of this social contract. I tried to show appreciation for them taking the time to talk to me, recognising that it is not uncommon for Syrian refugees to have been treated by others 'as data sources rather than human beings who have endured horrors' (Pearlman, 2017, p. 504). Reciprocity also emphasises that researchers take care in not taking advantage of the power dynamics at work within a research context. For refugees, engaging with a researcher may be a positive experience, offering the possibility of friendship and connection. But, as Pamela Cotterill (1992) notes, 'close friends do not usually arrive with a tape-recorder, listen carefully and sympathetically to what you have to say and then disappear' (p. 599).

I often felt uncomfortable when it was time to leave people's homes. It seemed that the time spent there, even if it was three or four hours, was never enough – a not uncommon problem facing researchers (Huisman, 2008, p. 384). It was difficult to balance the pressure of completing fieldwork with not being extractive in my interactions with refugees. They were always conscious of how long I spent at their homes, and would comment on this, so I had to adjust my schedules to avoid offending them.

A few times, women from photography workshops directly asked me, 'Am I last to be interviewed?' and seemed offended about this. This was despite the fact that my research assistant had tried to arrange an interview a few times earlier with these individuals, or was unable to reach them. I realised that despite many women only meeting each other for the first time in the workshops, many continued to have relationships with each other and my visits to people's homes were being reported among participants. During a feedback session, it became particularly uncomfortable when one woman announced to the group, 'Michelle and I have a special relationship'.

While any kind of fieldwork requires consideration of ethical issues, the fact that my research involved refugees meant that ethical issues took on a particular significance, because of the vulnerability of this group. Prior to fieldwork, I knew that colonial and other power hierarchies that are reaffirmed through the delivery of aid from the 'West' to refugees (Harrell-Bond, 1986; Hyndman, 2000; Agier, 2011; Fassin, 2012) were also present in the interactions between Syrian refugees and humanitarian agencies in Jordan. My presence was at times associated with humanitarian agencies, which created implications regarding managing the expectations of research participants and ensuring voluntary participation. Tania Kaiser (2004) suggests that refugees may feel they must participate in research or risk loss of material benefits (pp. 187-188). Part of building trust therefore was explaining my position as a researcher and my previous humanitarian experience honestly, clarifying the purpose and benefits of participation, and also dissociating myself from donors and the Jordanian government (Uehling, 1998, p. 153). Ensuring people understood that participation is voluntary, and that they were free to stop participating at any time without any consequences, was therefore key and was important in ensuring consent was informed. In explaining consent, I detailed how information would be used, how I would use pseudonyms (although some refugees wanted their names listed; I then explained why it was better for everyone to be anonymised), and that I would not disclose information that revealed people's identity in any products resulting from the research. In this thesis, in order to ensure that individuals are not identified, in many cases, where content may be sensitive or controversial, I have not specified the governorate where Syrians lived before, or the location where they live now in Jordan. Where relevant, I refer to whether people lived in the countryside or the city, or to age or economic status, but usually not in conjunction with other identifying

factors. In one case, a photograph taken by a research participant of her workplace was not depicted because it may identify her, and in another case the photograph and accompanying explanation of a participant's home was not included in the thesis because it may identify the participant.

The consent statements that were read out in Arabic to participants sometimes felt a bit tedious. While obtaining consent from one woman, I was struck by how this might be viewed by refugees when she exclaimed: 'It's like you've come to ask for my hand in marriage!' I was reminded of the very casual approach to consent within humanitarian agencies. I obtained verbal consent for interviews and FGDs, and written consent for the use of photographs that were taken by participants.

Conducting ethical research also required me to minimise the risks associated with participation in my research, including conducting research in appropriate, accessible locations where people feel comfortable to speak. In many cases, interviews occurred in people's homes, but sometimes we met in cafes, animal parks or, in the case of a few male participants, in the space of one of the humanitarian agencies where photography workshops had been held. For the women who disclosed GBV to me during interviews, I provided information about counselling services available through humanitarian agencies. In one case, over a year after my fieldwork, I was told by one female participant (who I am regularly in contact with) about GBV she had just experienced from her husband, and I was able to arrange for a humanitarian agency in Jordan to assist her with counselling support.

The issue of providing financial assistance to refugees came up on multiple occasions. One participant, a widow, consistently struggled with paying her rent as her son was sick and unable to work, so on two occasions I provided money for rent, along with my research assistant. She didn't ask for this money; in fact I was never asked directly for money or food from any research participants. I only found out about her challenges when I noticed her mood was particularly low during an interview, and when she eventually broke down in tears as she explained that they were about to be evicted. In this case, I felt it was quite clear that I should take action, so it wasn't really an 'ethical dilemma' as such.

Ethical action must also be appropriate. When visiting people in their homes, I always brought a small gift, for example a box of biscuits or chocolates, or for a few that I visited multiple times, colouring books for the children or drinking glasses for the kitchen. Generally these items were food-based however, but I realised that on two occasions, the boxes of chocolates I brought were not appropriate because the families were really financially struggling and barely had enough money for food. On my subsequent visits to these two women, I later brought bread and fruit, knowing these would be more useful. I also brought cleaning supplies for one woman, who felt frustrated by being unable to clean her house since they didn't have money for cleaning materials, and diapers and baby formula for another woman who did not have money to pay for these for her baby. In these cases, I felt that I could assist in relieving their stress with little inconvenience to myself. I did however recognise that after I left Jordan, it was likely that their financial situations would continue to be difficult, so I referred these women to other services. I also contacted one organisation that provides one-off cash assistance to individuals without any complicated surveys needing to be completed, and within a few days both women received a large amount of money. One woman purchased a pram with this money, which made it a lot easier for her to walk around and take her baby on visits to her family's house nearby.

Responding to the needs of refugees is part of acting ethically as a researcher. Eileen Pittaway, Linda Bartolomei and Richard Hugman (2010) suggest that ethics is not just about 'do no harm' but encompasses 'promoting the interests and well-being of extremely vulnerable research subjects', making these individuals not only research 'participants' but 'beneficiaries' (p. 242). Seeking to benefit refugees is more active than merely refraining from harming them; it requires reacting to what Karen Block *et al.* (2013) refer to as 'ethically important moments' (p. 70) in intentional, proactive ways. This is a higher onus that is normally understood as being part of a researcher's responsibilities.

The process of data analysis is also one where a researcher is required to act responsibly and ethically. During analysis, a researcher infuses their own ideas, positionality and interpretations onto the data, drawing conclusions that may surprise the research

participants. Paul Riesman (1982) cautions that as researchers we are 'using the knowledge they [participants] give us for goals they would never imagine themselves'. For a researcher, this means holding data carefully and weighing the consequences of data analysis.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

In unraveling narratives around gender norms among Syrian refugees, I am aware that the research process I have undertaken is limited in several ways. The most significant limitation of this research is undoubtedly language translation, which is not a neutral process but is tied strongly to the issue of representation (Temple, 2002, pp. 846, 852). The potential shifts in meaning that occur during translation are a key challenge to cross-cultural research generally. During the process of transcribing, it is possible that some issues in translation were rectified, however meaning may still have been attributed to the words of participants where none was intended, and conversely statements of particular weight may have been translated in ways that change intent.

Another limitation of this research is that what has been captured only represents a particular moment in time - a snapshot of people's lives. People do not necessarily understand or articulate events in the same way over time (Brah, 1996, p. 20); asking the same question at a different time period may trigger an entirely different discussion. My fieldwork period was not insignificant in length, however the degree to which I was able to form bonds with participants and share experiences was limited. It is likely that spending more time completing fieldwork would have resulted in increased trust between participants and myself, and therefore deeper discussions and even different conclusions.

Along these same lines, my research is also limited in the sense that it is qualitative, therefore the extent to which the findings are generalisable to the wider Syrian population (or other refugee populations) is limited given the (relatively) smaller number of individuals involved in the research compared to a wider-scale quantitative assessment that involves randomised sampling. My research focused largely on Syrians

who were middle-class in Syria, were mostly within the ages of 26-45, were from Dar'a, Homs, Damascus and Hama, held a range of education levels, and received humanitarian assistance mostly from smaller agencies (apart from cash assistance). These unique factors – these intersectional dimensions – mean that their experiences are bound to their contexts, and therefore need to be weighed carefully before being applied to a larger group.

CHAPTER THREE: GENDERING 'CHANGE' DURING DISPLACEMENT

Forced displacement is an extreme event and disjunction. The social change that might accompany such a disruption, however, emerges as a process that is fragmented, happening at different points and in different arenas, not always simultaneously (Grabska, 2014, p. 124).

How social change occurs is an empirical question, not an a priori theoretical assumption (Risman, 2004, p. 434).

In exploring the conceptual question, *'how helpful is the concept of 'change' in understanding gender norms during displacement?'*, this research grapples with complex issues around 'change'. While humanitarian agencies have been confident and authoritative in making statements about the 'changes' both in refugees' lives (International Rescue Committee, 2012a; Oxfam and ABAAD, 2013; UN Women, 2013; International Rescue Committee, 2014; Save the Children, 2014), as well as changes related to programmatic interventions that promote gender equality and women's empowerment (Save the Children, 2014; UN Women, 2015b; UNHCR, 2017b), this chapter presents a more complex approach for situating 'change' within the process of displacement. Understanding gender norms themselves – let alone how they change – is presented here as a difficult, complicated exercise requiring nuance and recognition of how power hierarchies shape people's lives. It is not always possible to articulate if change has occurred.

In this chapter, I will outline my conceptual framework, which frames my analysis of the problematic ways in which humanitarian agencies analyse gender norms among refugee populations and explores how this analysis needs to be more complex.

TRANSNATIONAL FEMINISM AS A LENS

My conceptual framework is shaped by a transnational feminist approach, which acts as the overarching theoretical lens for the terms in the conceptual framework. Transnational feminism developed out of post-colonial and Marxist feminism, and represents a reaction to post-structuralist feminism. It enables 'a way of seeing that potentially offers a feminist escape from overdetermined colonial and colonizing, liberal and neoliberal, Western paradigms, narratives, processes, methodologies, practices, and applications' (Blackwell, Briggs and Chiu, 2015, p. 6). It can be described as 'an anti-imperialist, anticapitalist, and contextualized feminist project' that seeks to 'expose and make visible the various, overlapping forms of subjugation of women's lives' (Mohanty, 2003, p. 515).

Transnational feminism incorporates an analysis of 'intersectionality' – a term developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw to recognise the intersections between different power relations, including class, nationality, race and gender. Her analysis highlights that a singular level of analysis that fails to capture the complex combinations of intersecting power has detrimental effects: 'when one discourse fails to acknowledge the significance of the other, the power relations that each attempts to challenge are strengthened' (1991, p. 1282). Intersectional analysis means that 'women' are not seen as a homogenous group, rather it recognises that intersecting oppressions shape their experiences (Mohanty, 1988; Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009). Although scholars have critiqued the appropriation of 'intersectionality' into other narratives about 'diversity' (Ahmed, 2012, p. 14; Falcón and Nash, 2015, p. 5), it remains a useful way of understanding 'how certain structures collaborate and collude to produce positions of marginalization' (Falcón and Nash, 2015, p. 3). The focus on intersectionality addresses a significant gap in humanitarian discourses on gender and refugees – complicating the often simplistic-narratives about 'refugee women' and 'refugee men' with more critical analysis on power hierarchies.

Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (1994), in initially conceptualising transnational feminism, highlighted the importance of understanding 'the material conditions that structure women's lives in diverse locations' (p. 17). This focus on materiality means that transnational feminism recognises how neoliberal economics intensify power hierarchies (Mohanty, 2003; Herr, 2014). The reference to material conditions also emphasises that part of critical analysis involves intentionally situating the experiences

of women and men – analysing ‘multiple, overlapping, and discrete oppressions’ instead of creating ‘a theory of hegemonic oppression under a unified category of gender’ (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994, pp. 17-18). This means not generalising and overly seeking ‘themes’ based on people’s experiences. The consequence of this approach is that people’s lives are seen as complex and are not reduced to rigid categorisations.

Transnational feminism is a particularly useful lens for my research because it enables analysis of intersectionality, as well as materiality, which is particularly important for my research context. The intersections of gender-class are relevant in Jordan where refugees are largely self-settled, as well as due to the linkages between mobility and economic activity. Age is also a particularly important means of situating analysis, given the ways in which elder members are privileged within patriarchal systems in Middle Eastern societies (Joseph, 1994b, p. 275). The ways in which nationality and gender intersect, particularly in terms of what ‘Syrian’ femininity and masculinity look like (and evolve) in the host environment of Jordan, also receives attention when principles of transnational feminism are used. Taking this approach, experiences of displacement and change are locally-situated rather than being assumed as common experiences. This lens complicates stereotypical assumptions about power and patriarchy that often characterise humanitarian analysis.

SELF-SETTLED SYRIAN REFUGEES

My research draws attention to the specific context of Syrian refugees in Jordan. To situate this research further, it is important to understand the nature of what it means to be a refugee. The term ‘refugee’ is a highly political label with contested meaning (Zetter, 1988; Black, 2001). Dawn Chatty (2010) critiques how refugees are depicted by humanitarian agencies and government actors, commenting on how this word has come to refer to people ‘without homelands, torn loose from their culture’ who are seen ‘as an aberration to the way the world was meant to be organized’ and who therefore need ‘therapeutic intervention’ (p. 37). Within dominant media and humanitarian discourses, refugees are seen as ‘unfortunate creature[s] stuck in purgatorial circumstances’ (Rajaram, 2002, p. 247) who ‘embody a visceral human geography of dislocation’

(Hyndman, 1996, p. 1). Refugees are also linked to narratives about 'crisis and danger' (Nyers, 2006, p. 4). They are positioned by humanitarian agencies as 'subjects who need to be rescued, protected, assisted, activated, controlled and reformed through humanitarian interventions, while humanitarian workers are positioned as rational administrators and progressive agents of social transformation' (Olivius, 2016a, p. 270). Much has been made of the state of being a 'refugee' by humanitarian agencies who seek to generate funding, such that I argue this 'experience' has almost become fetishised, creating the idea of an exotic 'other' who is forced to flee. This 'other', Isis Nusair (2013) suggests, 'is never only ethnic but also always gendered and sexualized, albeit in ambiguous and conflicting ways' (p. 68).

Academic research on refugees has sought to explore the policy implications of the refugee experience (Black, 2001). This has included analysis on the linkages between being a refugee and identity, with scholars challenging ideas that refugees who are 'uprooted' automatically lose their identity (Malkki, 1992; Brun, 2001). The synergies between being a refugee and national identity have been studied, perhaps most strikingly in the case of Palestinian refugees (Sayigh, 1993; Hart, 2008; Abdallah, 2009), and the idea of a quintessential 'refugee experience' has also been critiqued, drawing attention to the diverse experiences of refugees (Eastmond, 2007, p. 253). This is different to the approach taken by humanitarian agencies, who tend to assume refugee experiences are similar across contexts; this justifies the almost indiscriminate recycling of 'models' and 'approaches' across varied humanitarian settings (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015, p. 397).

Within this body of academic research on refugees, feminist research has challenged some of the ways in which power is analysed among refugees. This includes research on how 'managing "others"' has become part of humanitarian assistance (Hyndman, 1996, p. 279), and how the intersections between gender and age offer important insights to understanding the experiences of refugees (Grabska, 2014, p. 9). In the Middle Eastern context, feminist research has drawn attention to the need to situate analysis within the family unit (Joseph, 2004). These works draw attention to power hierarchies within the humanitarian response, the importance of intersectional analysis, and the grounding of analysis of social life within the family unit.

The experiences of refugees have become a topic of considerable interest to anthropologists, policy-makers and humanitarian agencies alike. Peter Loizos (1999) cautions that ‘we need to think carefully before we interpret social action as produced by “the refugee condition”’ (p. 245). Indeed, the danger in so carefully scrutinising the behaviour of refugees is that analysis further isolates, creating a category of ‘others’ so different to the rest of us that we are driven to perpetually link every nuance of behaviour to the state of being a refugee. It can also lead to failing to recognise the resilience and coping strategies of refugees – a claim that can be levelled at humanitarian agencies - in favour of equating being a refugee with having one’s human rights infringed (Uehling, 1998, pp. 123–124). The category of ‘refugee’, Hyndman (2010) suggests, has resulted in humanitarian agencies ‘infantaliz[ing] and/or feminiz[ing] refugees’ (p. 453).

My research will only focus on people who identify as Syrian. In referring to ‘refugees’ in this research, I speak of people who are commonly thought of and spoken of as ‘refugees’ in a humanitarian sense, and/or those who call themselves refugees, although they may not have been determined as refugees under the Refugee Convention. The legal definition of refugees under the Convention is itself problematic (Black, 2001, p. 63); labelling people as refugees is a ‘political act’ (Agier, 2011, p. 33), therefore my research does not use this definition. I instead follow Liisa Malkki’s (1995b) thinking:

The term refugee has analytical usefulness not as a label for a special, generalizable ‘kind’ or ‘type’ of person or situation, but only as a broad legal or descriptive rubric that includes within it a world of socio-economic statuses, personal histories, and psychological or spiritual situations (p. 496).

In taking this broad approach to ‘refugees’, my research then narrows to focus on ‘self-settled’ refugees – that is, refugees who live outside camps. The academic literature on gender-related changes during displacement tends to focus on refugees within camps (Sayigh, 1993; Joseph, 1994b; Turner, 1999; Hyndman, 2000; Hart, 2008; Abdallah, 2009; Horn, 2010; Barbosa, 2013; Grabska, 2014). While existing gender-related research on camps explores gendered humanitarian structures (Turner, 1999; Hyndman, 2000; Grabska, 2014), the higher incidence of domestic violence within the close confines of camps (Horn, 2010) and women’s increased economic activity during displacement

(Kaiser, 2014), it is less clear what may occur in self-settled areas where refugees interact with the host community. I argue that the literature on refugees in camps highlights only one dimension of what it means to be a refugee; equating the category of 'refugee' with the physical space of camps is limited, because it excludes the experiences of the majority of refugees (Crawford *et al.*, 2015, p. 1).

Academic literature on self-settled refugees – as opposed to refugees in camps - is sparse. Malkki's (1995a) influential book on Burundian camp and self-settled refugees in Tanzania is one example, however she does not specifically focus on gendered changes, nor does Nadia El-Shaarawi (2015) in her study on Iraqi refugees in Egypt. Anita Fábos (2001) however focuses on refugees outside camps, observing that Sudanese refugees in Cairo emphasised how they were different to the host population through connecting propriety with 'Sudanese' (p. 106). Modesty became a 'marker' for being Sudanese (p. 97), which she suggests was due to the changes in gender roles during displacement. In contrast, Nusair (2013) explains how lower-class Iraqi women living in Amman attempted to change their clothing and accents in order to blend into their surroundings and thereby avoid harassment (p. 68). In this situation, being seen as similar to the host population was a coping strategy. These two examples highlight that interaction with the host community can cause new gendered dimensions of change to emerge, compared to a camp situation, influencing how femininity and masculinity are articulated (Fábos, 2001a; Rodgers, 2008; Nusair, 2013). My research therefore focuses on self-settled refugees based on the thinking that analysing gender-related change during displacement contributes new ways of understanding their experiences. The idea here is that displacement itself is gendered and triggers gendered changes.

DISPLACEMENT

The notion of 'displacement' reinforces the idea that those who move are somehow outside the norm – an idea which is grounded in the seemingly natural connection assumed between people and place (Malkki, 1992; Chatty, 2016a, p. 3). To conceptualise displacement, I draw on Cathrine Brun's (2003) definition of displacement as 'a state of being attached to several places and simultaneously struggling to establish the right to a

place' (p. 26). Displacement is not merely an event that occurs when refugees are forced to leave their homes, but is an ongoing process; it involves not only loss but the process of making a place (Turton, 2005, p. 278). Following Jennifer Hyndman and Wenona Giles (2011) and Malkki (1992), my research seeks to explore displacement not in sedentary terms with refugees seen as being out of place. I suggest that displacement is a time of transition, adjustment, uncertainty but also opportunity, where people utilise new strategies (Brun, 2003, p. 32) and draw on what Bourdieu (1984) refers to as 'habitus' – embodied knowledge people gain and carry with them throughout their lives (p. 467).

Academic literature has drawn attention to the fact that displacement creates opportunities - 'a fresh backdrop' (Kaiser, 2008, p. 376) for social change. The concept of 'change' has become critical to discussions about gender and displacement. Ruth Krulfeld (1994) suggests that 'nowhere is the opportunity for studying this creative formulation of gender models greater than in refugee communities' (p. 83). Research suggests that gender may become particularly important to refugees who are adjusting to displacement (Nolin, 2006), offering a way for people to find meaning and ways of asserting agency and control through reasserting social relations (Davis, 1992, p. 157) during periods of uncertainty. Combined with the ways in which gender norms and relations have been historically instrumentalised in Syria (Rabo, 1996; Thompson, 2000; Sparre, 2008; Totah, 2013), my research explores the ways in which the process of displacement may create new and ongoing opportunities for gender to continue to be contested. What might change look like among Syrian refugees? Who resists gender norms, and why? And, importantly, can changes solely be attributed to the state of being 'displaced'?

'CHANGE'

'Change' itself is difficult to define. It has proven perhaps the most complex of concepts to operationalise within my research. I began with the vague notion that 'change' was potentially occurring among Syrian refugees. As discussed in Chapter One, humanitarian agencies have sought to identify the kinds of gendered changes that may occur as a result of displacement. Such analysis has been used to shape humanitarian interventions

related to women's empowerment and gender equality. I wanted to understand if the experiences of Syrian refugees confirmed humanitarian narratives about changes in gender norms.

Scholars emphasise that gender-related changes may not only occur due to displacement. Some gender-related shifts occurring during displacement may be a continuation of changes that were already in process while refugees lived in their home country (Utas, 2005, p. 426; Grabska, 2014, p. 81). In the Middle East context, these gendered changes may be the result of increased access to education, urbanisation, industrialisation, improved legal protections and changes in family structures (Moghadam, 2003, p. 25). In such cases, it is not the displacement itself that causes the change; contestations about gender were already occurring. Conversely, it may be precisely because of the fact that refugees are not 'home' that different behaviours can be practiced (Grabska, 2014, p. 194).

The dialectic between the socio-cultural contexts of the host and home country may influence changes during displacement. While studies on gendered changes during resettlement strikingly portray shifts in gender roles when refugees are settled into a 'Western' context (Matsuoka and Sorenson, 1999; McSpadden, 1999), contrasts may not always be as dramatic. Fábos (2001a) in her analysis of gender norms among Sudanese refugees in Egypt, details how Sudanese refugees vacillated between asserting difference with the host population and drawing attention to the similarities between the two cultures to feel included into Egyptian society (pp. 92-106). What Avtar Brah (1996) refers to as 'situatedness' – how a group is 'inserted' into the social structures of the host country (p. 179) – is important when it comes to processes of change, particularly for self-settled Syrian refugees who have more interaction with the host community. Historical context, particularly the instrumentalisation of gender in Jordan and Syria (see Chapter Four) is relevant in understanding situatedness in my research.

It is not just the host environment that may affect the construction and practice of gender norms, but other factors may also contribute, including development and humanitarian agencies themselves. A growing body of literature examines the role of these agencies in creating and perpetuating negative power structures (Malkki, 1996; Agier, 2011;

Hyndman and Giles, 2011; Fassin, 2012; Grabska, 2014), while less has been written about humanitarian agencies enabling social connection among refugees (Darychuk and Jackson, 2015, p. 455). The gendered dimensions to humanitarian power in refugee situations has been explored in terms of men being emasculated (Turner, 1999) and women being feminised by humanitarian agencies (Hyndman and Giles, 2011). In a context like Jordan, where UN agencies have been likened to the state (Al Hussein and Bocco, 2011), the role of humanitarian agencies in gendering spaces is also relevant in understanding power hierarchies.

The literature exploring gender norm change emphasises that change is complex and may be shaped by multiple factors, meaning that it is difficult to make definitive statements about the extent to which changes will be sustained after displacement (Joseph, 2004, p. 272). Change may move in an egalitarian direction in some areas, while shifting in the opposite direction in other areas (Turner, 1999, p. 148; Abdallah, 2009, p. 57; Nusair, 2013, pp. 69-70). At times, change may be 'incremental' or even 'invisible to the actors involved, and even more so to outsiders' (Grabska, 2014, p. 195) while at other times change may occur 'explosively' (Connell and Pearse, 2015, p. 86). Therefore, analysis of change in my research is only based on this particular moment within displacement, in comparison to moments in Syria identified by refugees themselves.

These discussions about change are not only relevant in terms of the gendered changes refugees may experience as a result of displacement, but are also connected to the gendered changes that humanitarian agencies themselves seek to achieve in their programs, as stated earlier. The importance of understanding the context 'before' displacement thus becomes even greater; this analysis has implications not just for understanding how displacement changes the lives of refugees in gendered ways, but it also acts as a benchmark for humanitarian agencies who seek to measure the changes related to gender equality and women's empowerment which result from their interventions. This research attempts to refocus analysis away from the fixation with 'change' towards a more historical, contextual understanding of gender norms before displacement.

GENDER NORMS

In analysing gender norms during displacement, my research asks the question: how is displacement and being a refugee gendered? Are the connections between being a refugee woman and being inherently vulnerable to violence, exploitation and limited mobility so automatic? Are refugee men forever resigned to become emasculated through lack of work and therefore more likely to use violence against females? Are gender norms this rigid and prescriptive? Is human behaviour within a patriarchal system so predictable?

To answer these questions, I take a multi-dimensional approach to gender, which Barbara Risman (2004) calls the 'integrative' approach (p. 230). This approach draws on both structuralist and interactionist theories of gender (Risman and Davis, 2013, pp. 743–744) to position gender as 'a socially constructed stratification system' (Risman, 2004, p. 230), which is shaped by institutional, interactional and individual levels (Risman & Davis, 2013, p. 747). I draw heavily on this broad theoretical approach to frame my conceptualisations of gender and change, recognising that people's gendered behaviour is based on socialisation, interactions with others as well structural/systemic factors, and, importantly, the context itself (Ertürk, 2004, p. 9); that '[g]ender is always enmeshed in a nexus of discursive practices – legal, political, and social' (Giles and Hyndman, 2004, p. 8).

According to R.W. Connell (2005, p. 71), 'Gender is a way in which social practice is ordered' (p. 71). R.W. Connell & Rebecca Pearse (2015) write: 'We make our own gender, but we are not free to make it however we like. Our gender practice is powerfully shaped by the gender order in which we find ourselves' (p. 73). This gender order, which is locational, cultural and varies over time, is situated within 'patriarchy' – a 'male dominated, male identified, and male centered' system that promotes male privilege and is 'organized around an obsession with control' including 'the oppression of women' as a key component (Johnson, 2014, pp. 5–6). Suad Joseph's (1994b) definition of patriarchy incorporates the factor of age and emphasises the role of the kin structure – making it a particularly useful definition for patriarchy in the Middle East. She describes patriarchy

as ‘an ideology in which males and elders are privileged and kinship idioms, structures, and morality are utilized to legitimate gendered and aged domination’ (p. 294). Patriarchy itself ‘has to be continually reinforced, re-constructed and re-established’ and may evolve in new ways while its key components ‘remain constant’ (Saigol, 2002, p. 8).

With this foregrounding, I use the term ‘gender norms’ to frame the expected, ideal behaviour of women and men. Cristina Bicchieri (2006) writes: ‘Norms refer to behavior, to actions over which people have control, and are supported by shared expectations about what should/should not be done in different types of social situations’ (p. 10). Her definition provides an overarching way of looking at the behaviour of women and men, linking the term to the notion of shared expectations: ‘Not only do we expect others to conform to a social norm; we are also aware that we are expected to conform, and *both* these expectations are necessary reasons to comply with the norm’ (p. 42).

Within the Middle East context, gender norms have been described in various ways, with scholars challenging the essentialising, stereotypical depictions of ‘Muslim’ men and women (Amar, 2011, p. 40). Marcia Inhorn (1996) argues that there is too much attention placed on ‘honor and shame’ among Middle Eastern women within the literature (p.42). Instead, suggests Caroline Nagel (2005), the experiences of Muslim women are ‘ambiguous and highly variable, marked by subordination and opportunity, mobility and immobility, security and insecurity’ (p. 4). Valentine Moghadam (2003) encourages us to think about the status of women and girls with reference to kin and agrarian structures instead of religion (pp. 5-6). This is echoed by other academics, who situate the control of women within family structures (Inhorn, 1996, p. 2; Dahlgren, 2008, p. 7). Joseph (2000) writes that the family is the ‘site where women’s “authentic” place in society is shaped’ (p. 19). Afaf Almala (2014) builds on this, writing that ‘the naturalisation of femininity as inferior to masculinity is not only established by family relationships, but is also protected and legitimised by state laws’ (p. 103). As outlined in the next chapter, state laws have served to reinforce patriarchy both in Syria and Jordan.

This body of literature highlights that both women and men face consequences by failing to adhere to gender norms. Adel Abadeer (2015) suggests that the collectivist structure of Middle Eastern societies means that if women deviate from the collectivist group, they

face shame and punishment (p. 37). Women who become active in the public sphere, including in politics, may be referred to as having 'masculine' qualities, deterring them from engaging in such activities (Droeber, 2005, p. 203). Inhorn (1996) similarly comments that a man who is not able to manage his finances will be 'exposed' as a 'poor provider' (p. 69) – an issue that may be important to recognise among humanitarian narratives about refugee men who are unable to provide for the needs of their families.

Academic literature on the Middle East emphasises the way women challenge gender norms. Arlene MacLeod (1992) writes:

women, even as subordinate players, always play an active part that goes beyond the dichotomy of victimization/acceptance, a dichotomy that flattens out a complex and ambiguous agency in which women accept, accommodate, ignore, resist, or protest – sometimes all at the same time (p. 534).

Women may find ways of managing their own adherence to norms to ensure men do not become involved in this (Abu-Lughod, 1985, p. 647). As well as this, women may at times themselves benefit from constructions of gender norms (Shami, 1996, p. 23), including using their own power to ensure other women comply with gender norms (Williamson and Nimri, 2009, p. 38). Relationships *between* women emerge as less of a focus within the literature, though some academics have explored issues like rivalry between women (Salamandra, 2006, p. 157) and relationships between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law (Rabho, 2015) – the latter of which is particularly relevant for my research.

My research situates discussions of gender norm change within the complex and varied practices of women and men in the Middle East region. By grounding my analysis in this way, I aim to explore questions like: how does the ideal Syrian woman/man behave, what roles are women and men expected to carry out, and how might these expectations change during displacement? In asking these questions, I aim to contribute to conceptual debates about gender roles and change within the context of humanitarian policy, to complicate the often-linear thinking about displacement and gender within the Middle Eastern context – especially within humanitarian agencies. Building on themes in the literature on gender in the Middle East, I will explore gender norms within marriage and

family relationships, seeking to contribute to the existing work in this area. I also aim to understand (im)mobility during this research, exploring how the activities and relationships of Syrians might be limited or expanded by their mobility. My research asks, how (if at all) are gender and mobility linked? Are the connections as powerful and prescriptive as humanitarian discourses might suggest, or is there more to mobility? To explore this, my research is grounded in understandings of gender and mobility among Syrians *before* displacement.

In this research, I position gender norms as the umbrella term for how women and men are expected to behave – providing the overarching framework for ‘femininities’ and ‘masculinities’. My research focuses on understanding gender roles and (im)mobility within the context of gender norms. I define ‘femininities’ as how ‘ideal’ women ought to behave and ‘masculinities’ as how ‘ideal’ men ought to behave. Femininities and masculinities sustain patriarchy and ‘are important tools for social control’ (Johnson, 2014, p. 86). Allan Johnson writes: ‘To live in a patriarchal culture is to learn what is expected of men and women – to learn the rules that regulate punishment and reward based on how individuals behave and appear’ (pp. 38-39). Femininities and masculinities are ‘configurations of gender practice’, representing processes occurring over time (Connell, 2005, p. 72). While it may appear that femininity and masculinity are static categories, they each vary based on age, class and other power structures (p. 76) as well as within specific situations like displacement (Grabska, 2014, p. 200). Importantly, femininities and masculinities are positioned in opposition to each other (Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994, p. 11; Connell, 2005, p. 68). Although humanitarian discourses reinforce static ideas about refugee women as both victims and ‘mothers of the nation’ (Giles, Van Esterik and Moussa, 1996, pp. 18–19), while men are positioned as perpetrators of GBV who wield power in unhealthy ways (Olivius, 2016b), the categories of femininity and masculinity are ‘not essences’ but are ‘ways of living certain relationships’ (Connell, 1987, p. 179). Connell & Pearse (2015) suggest that ‘efforts to maintain essentialist ideas about fixed womanhood and manhood are themselves strong evidence that the boundaries are none too stable’ (p. 7). As well as being fluid, femininities and masculinities are ‘relational’; women are involved in the construction of masculinities and men are involved in the construction of femininities (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 848).

Analysis of masculinities has often been informed by the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity', developed by Connell. R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt (2005) define hegemonic masculinity as 'the currently most honored way of being a man' (p. 832). It suggests that there is a hierarchy of masculinities; hegemonic masculinity sits above both femininity and the other kinds of masculinity and is contrasted from what Connell (1987) describes as 'subordinate' masculinity (p. 179). However, this conceptualisation is not one that will inform my research. Following Inhorn (2012), who argues that the notions of hegemonic and subordinated masculinities lead to the 'pigeonholing' of men as 'static subjects' (p. 45), I will take a more open approach to understanding masculinities and femininities, to avoid what Inhorn calls 'harmful caricatures' (p. 31) that negate the idea of masculinities and femininities being 'dynamic social practice[s]' (p. 46).

In problematising the attempts to pin down a definition for 'masculinity', Connell (2005) observes that defining masculinities as 'ideal' may be flawed as few individuals may meet this normative standard (she makes the same argument in relation to 'hegemonic masculinity') (p. 70). However, I suggest that the issue is not necessarily that few achieve masculinity and therefore the majority are then 'unmasculine' as Connell argues (p. 70), rendering the definition redundant. I instead propose that the notion of an 'ideal' is significant in itself, whether people attain it or not. It is important to note that people believe they are assessed and treated by others based on these standards, therefore they shape their behaviour accordingly (Ridgeway and Correll, 2000, p. 113). Bicchieri (2006) writes: 'We conform to social norms because we have *reasons* to fulfill others' normative expectations' (p. 29). The expectations of others can be powerful in shaping gendered behaviour, but these expectations also extend to other areas of life. For example, refugee scholar Elizabeth Colson (1989), writing about social relations among refugees, says: 'People respond to what they believe others are thinking... Social life depends on face saving and the tacit agreement that understanding is mutual' (p. 2). This is true for social relations more generally, but it resonates perhaps most strongly regarding how notions of femininity and masculinity shape behaviour.

Academic literature has theorised the interplay between displacement and gender, emphasising that displacement may challenge gender hierarchies, heighten existing

gender inequalities or even result in changes in both directions (Daley, 1991, p. 267; Matlou, 1999, p. 136; El-Bushra, 2003, p. 261). Grabska (2014) writes: 'War and displacement give rise to multiple forms, both weakened and reinforced, of femininities and masculinities' (p. 200). Refugees may exercise new kinds of power due to displacement, for example women who previously had limited mobility may find that displacement offers them the opportunity to easily access community centres and assistance from humanitarian agencies (Darychuk and Jackson, 2015, p. 457). Young men may find they have more power than older men during displacement and may move into leadership roles (Turner, 1999, p. 145; Grabska, 2014, p. 86). Power shifts may also occur in personal relationships, for example Janet Benson (1994) found that resettled refugee women chose to divorce their husbands and marry men of higher economic status (p. 71), capitalising on the changes they were experiencing to better their situations. For other refugees, the very idea of what it means to be married can alter significantly as a result of displacement (Al-Rasheed, 1993). Familial relationships may also shift during displacement, and may, for example, increase the level of protectiveness males feel over females, as Jason Hart (2008) found in Palestinian camps in Jordan (p. 73).

Displacement can lead to masculinities and femininities becoming militarised, as Grabska (2014) found among Sudanese refugees in Kenya (p. 62). It may result in women (El-Bushra, 2000, p. 69) and men (Maksuoka & Sorenson, 1999, p. 224) taking on new roles, including women working outside the home in roles that may previously have not been socially acceptable (Kaiser, 2014, p. 226), but these changes can sometimes be multi-layered and are not always positive – even if outwardly appearing to be so. Rubina Saigol (2002) for example, critiques narratives about the freedom found by Afghan women who find work after the death or injury of family members, arguing that this is not emancipation but merely represents how patriarchy has 'found another means by which to maintain its tenuous hold in a situation that threatened to dissolve it' (p. 16). In the case of resettled refugee women in Kansas, other complexities arise: these women refugees had varied reasons for wanting to work, however chose to publicly explain their actions through referring to family needs (Benson, 1994, p. 69). In cases like these, refugee women may find the need to affirm traditional values and norms during displacement, emphasising their mothering abilities or even more strictly adhering to ideals around women's work (Baines and Rosenoff Gauvin, 2014, p. 295) as social life is

rebuilt. My research interrogates the common assumptions made about displacement and gender, to build on the way this academic literature challenges simplistic explanations about norm change and to challenge humanitarian actors to view these issues more carefully.

I conduct three levels of analysis in understanding gender norms. At one level, I explore how femininities and masculinities are 'constructed': how they are imagined, thought about and spoken about based on symbolic and cultural ideals (Budgeon, 2014, p. 323) and what is perceived as acceptable/unacceptable behaviour. Who determines and perpetuates the ideal is also important; in some cases it may be women who drive narratives about how women should behave, rather than men (Abu-Lughod, 1985, p. 646). My research, in exploring gender roles and mobility, asks: what roles are Syrian women and men supposed to take on, and, how should women and men ideally behave? This level of analysis enables understanding of how Syrians perceive they *ought* to behave based on being male or female. These represent the societal expectations for behaviour, however it is important to note that these expectations, although seeming to convey a black and white conceptualisation of 'gender norms', may not be representative of how power operates 'offstage' (Scott, 1990, p. 5). This nuance is important, particularly for development and humanitarian agencies, who tend to assume that the way people describe expected behaviour, is in fact how they ultimately behave. In reality, the decisions people make about their own behaviour may be different to what they articulate as expected behaviour - which links to the next two levels of my analysis.

At the second level, my research looks at the practice of femininities and masculinities, which I position based on the conceptualisation of 'doing gender', initially developed by Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987) and expanded by a number of scholars (Ridgeway and Correll, 2000; Deutsch, 2007; Messerschmidt, 2009; Risman, 2009). West and Zimmerman (1987) write: 'Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine "natures"' (p. 126). Underlying this is the idea that meaning is assigned to behaviour based on perceived sex categories and that people may be held accountable for their actions based on this sex category (West and Zimmerman, 1987, 2009; Messerschmidt, 2009). The notion that gender could be constructed based

on interaction with others was different to prevailing ways of thinking about gender, making it a significant conceptual development (Messerschmidt, 2009, p. 85). Instead of gender difference being attributed solely to socialisation or structural issues, a different idea emerged: gender being 'accomplished based on interaction with others' (West and Fenstermaker, 1995, p. 21).

This approach of doing/performing gender is different to Judith Butler's post-structuralist notion of 'performativity'. In problematising male and female categories, post-structuralism positions identity as discursive, meaning that gender arises 'through a *stylized repetition of acts*' (Butler, 1999, p. 179) and does not exist independently outside of these acts. In contrast, doing or performing gender based on the West and Zimmerman notion is about behaviour arising based on association with a sex category. Post-structuralism suggests that these categories do not already exist (Butler, 1999, p. 187; Connell and Pearse, 2015, p. 65), meaning greater possibilities for 'agency' - which is 'the ability to define one's goals and act upon them' (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438) - compared to approaches that see identities as fixed (Butler, 1999, p. 187). The thinking behind performativity, according to Connell and Pearse (2015), is that when the performative action changes, non-normative gender is created (p. 108). Moya Lloyd (1999) suggests that the difference between Butler's 'performativity' and performance may be less helpful a distinction, as both rely on 'recitation' of norms (p. 209). Shirin Rai (2014) similarly asserts that the two are linked, but that performance is more helpful in reflecting on power (pp. 3-4).

My research takes a different approach to Butler in thinking about the doing/practice/performance of gender, to recognise that in the Middle East context, these male-female binaries criticised by post-structuralist feminists do nevertheless continue to influence behaviour. While post-structuralism helpfully challenges automatic associations between sex-gender, I take a more historically and geographically situated approach in conceptualising gender that aligns with the lived experiences of people within my research context (Nelson, 1999, pp. 331-332). I emphasise the 'doing gender' approach because of the value it adds to a multi-dimensional perspective of gender by recognising the role of relations with others, not just the structural or individual factors. In positioning gender roles and (im)mobility as issues that are affected by how

femininities and masculinities are constructed, how people respond to these expectations becomes important. Mokarram Abbas and Bas van Heur (2014) found that Palestinian women adapted their behaviour in certain spaces based on the nature of the space as well as the people within the space (p. 1219). In this case, femininities and masculinities were performed in different ways based on interaction with others. The 'doing' of gender may vary according to class, as depicted in Salamandra's (2006) research among elites in Damascus in the 1990s, where women engaged in display in semi-public spaces, using their beauty to gain the attention of others, often of a future husband (pp. 154-155). Comparing how femininities and masculinities are constructed as well as 'done' allows analysis of the gaps that may exist between what people say and what they actually do (Grabska, 2014, p. 195).

At the third level, my research explores the 'resistance' to gender norms - acknowledging that people do not always adhere to expected norms, but may challenge and manoeuvre around the expectations placed upon them (Almala, 2014, p. 131; Grabska, 2014, p. 84). These acts of resistance can be referred to as 'undoing gender', following Francine Deutsch (2007) and Risman (2009). West and Zimmerman (2009) do not agree that the concept of 'undoing gender' is useful, and suggest that gender is instead 'redone' to form new masculinities and femininities (p. 117). They use 'doing gender' to describe both resistance and conformity to gender norms (Deutsch, 2007, p. 122). I agree instead with Deutsch that defying normative expectations is 'undoing gender'. I am not sure that it is helpful to link resistance to creating new masculinities and femininities, because this perpetuates the idea of a standard derived from sex categories, which I see as inherently problematic. In aligning myself with this line of thinking, like Barbosa (2013) I question the idea that masculinity or femininity is therefore 'in crisis', since these are merely constructs to begin with (p. 192). Resistance is important because it provides insights into how far people will go to push the boundaries of what is expected of them. It is important to note, however, that these acts of resistance may not necessarily result in transformation at the macro level (Ridgeway & Correll, 2000, p. 114).

In conceptualising gender in this theoretical way, I recognise the need to refocus on the fact that human behaviour is not always so predictable, easily classified or 'integrated' (Colson, 1989, p. 3). Theoretical debates can in fact perpetuate 'artificial divisions'

(Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 285) about the lives of real people in unhelpful ways because 'real men and women do not always or literally fulfil the terms of their society's prescriptions or of our analytic categories' (Scott, 1986, p. 1068). Reducing the actions of individuals to these conceptual abstractions: how gender is 'constructed', the 'doing' of gender or how people resist against these norms, is not always useful and may result in solely situating discussions on 'culture' which Colson (1989) argues is sometimes 'more comforting' than talking about human beings (p. 3). Instead, in this research, I seek to understand 'patriarchal systems in their cultural, class-specific, and temporal concreteness' to explore 'how men and women resist, accommodate, adapt, and conflict with each other over resources, rights, and responsibilities' (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 285). I aim to locate analysis within the lived experiences of Syrian women and men, which means acknowledging the contradictions that may emerge from people's behaviour (Abu-Lughod, 1993, p. 9). My work is informed by Hyndman's (2001) caution: 'Fieldwork should hedge omniscient representations, grounding its findings instead in social relations of institutions, practices, and processes of research from below' (p. 267). By intentionally trying to situate my understanding of patriarchal systems, I hope to tangibly contribute to theoretical conceptualisations of gender norms broadly, as well as specifically with respect to gender roles and (im)mobility.

GENDER ROLES

Gender roles emerge out of constructions of femininities and masculinities. Johnson writes: 'Roles are sets of ideas about what is expected of people based on the positions they occupy in social relationships' (p. 84). West & Zimmerman (1987) emphasise that gender roles are 'situated identities' that vary across time and space (p. 128). Within literature on the Middle East, the depiction of the roles of women has tended to 'flatten out the subtleties of women's subjectivity under power', writes MacLeod (1992), critiquing the two narratives of 'women-of-the-harem victimization and behind-the-scenes-but-truly-powerful agency' in asserting the need for more nuanced analysis of power (p. 535). Power is critical to understanding and positioning these roles; gender roles may perpetuate gender inequality, limiting the activities of women and men (Risman, 2009, p. 83).

Important to the idea of gender roles is division of labour (Diekman and Goodfriend, 2006, p. 370). In some Middle Eastern contexts, men and women may carry out distinct gender roles (Darychuk & Jackson, 2015, p. 448). Men may be expected to be breadwinners (Abdallah, 2009, p. 50; Inhorn, 1996, p. 109), while women may be seen as responsible for caring for the family (Nusair, 2013, p. 69) and bearing children (Inhorn, 1996, p. 59). Gender roles are not solely individualistic but need to be viewed as relational (Joseph, 2012, p. 14) – emerging out of connections with others.

This ‘relationality’ of gender roles shapes how people interact with each other. Joseph (1999) writes: ‘Patriarchy entails cultural constructs and structural relations that privilege the initiative of males and elders in directing the lives of others’ (p. 12). Here emerges the idea of males and elders exercising power over the lives of females and younger members of the family, seeing it as their role to shape the decisions of their kin. This is not to say that it is solely these actors who exercise influence; Salamandra (2006) for example suggests Syrian mothers (and sisters) are involved in selecting wives for their sons (and brothers) (p. 156) and Joseph (1994) herself has discussed the way younger males start to act as patriarchs in a family. This emphasises the above point that gender roles are not static. Although these two examples appear illustrative of a rejection of gender roles, they may in fact merely be extensions of patriarchy: a mother’s involvement in selecting a spouse for her child could be part of her ensuring the continuation of the family line, and a younger male rising to power may be taking his rightful place under a patriarchal system. Classifying behaviour as a rejection or reversal of gender norms can be problematic, leading to assumptions about ‘change’ and ‘empowerment’ that are not always accurate. Stefan Schütte (2014) draws attention to this, explaining how women taking responsibility as breadwinners and decision-makers may do so out of necessity rather than empowerment (p. 1184). This emphasises that the meaning made of changes in gender roles is important.

While it may be tempting to equate observable changes in gender roles to signs of the weakening of patriarchy, such conclusions may be over-ambitious. Changes in gender roles may not necessarily be indicative of wider, broad-based ‘change’ but may be simply representative of the acts of one individual. As such my research avoids making sweeping

conclusions about 'Syrian gender norms'; instead I refer to change only using direct examples of individuals. This is a different approach to the way humanitarian agencies have analysed gender and change, but represents an intentional approach in my research to counter the often-problematic conclusions and responses that eventuate from generalising about populations.

Within the literature, perhaps the most dominant thread on gender roles is the focus on men not being able to economically support their families during displacement, which results in an erosion of masculinity (Abdallah, 2009, p. 57; Kaiser, 2014, p. 227; Olivius, 2016b, p. 62). In contrast, women are depicted as not only taking on increased responsibilities outside the home, but also continuing their roles within the domestic space (Sayigh, 1993, p. 190). Men may be involved in domestic tasks also, however taking on such roles may result in a loss of status (Kaiser, 2014, p. 227), which may cause some to hide their involvement in these tasks (Grabska, 2014, p. 162). Displacement, importantly, can also affect women's work outside the home, resulting in women losing the ability to economically contribute to their households (Abdallah, 2009, p. 51). This latter narrative is less present within the academic and humanitarian literature; the losses experienced as a result of not working have been presented as largely only affecting males.

To understand gender roles, I place particular focus on understanding how power shifts between members of the family, specifically how husbands and wives, young men and mothers-in-law exercise power. Positioning gender roles in the broad way described in this section allows me to explore how gender roles are perceived and lived among Syrian women and men, as well as how these roles may shift (or not) during displacement. Using the language of 'gender roles' also directly speaks to the development and humanitarian policy narratives that use this language. Similarly, alongside the analysis of gender roles, humanitarian agencies have become more concerned about 'mobility' and gender, therefore my research also speaks to these narratives.

(IM)MOBILITY

Mobility, as outlined in the Introduction, has been construed by humanitarian agencies in highly gendered ways – that I suggest need to be interrogated and explored in more detail. A common-sense understanding of ‘mobility’ defines it as movement across different spaces, and ‘immobility’ as lack of movement. Jennifer Hyndman (2004b) writes: ‘Mobility is an outcome of various economic, geopolitical, gendered, and racialized relations and is constitutive of people’s locations as social and political subjects’ (p. 169). In my research, I use the term ‘(im)mobility’ to recognise the power hierarchies underlying both movement and lack of movement. Mobility, in contrast to immobility, has positive connotations (Bissell, 2007, p. 278) and is linked to modernity (Cresswell, 2010, p. 19). Mobility shapes and is shaped by power relations (Hyndman, 2004b, p. 170). This makes it particularly interesting to feminist scholars (Cresswell and Uteng, 2008) who seek to understand the gendered underpinnings to ‘whose bodies belong where’ (Silvey, 2006, p. 70). Amy Freeman (2005) argues that analysis about the mobility of Arab and Muslim women is based on the ‘[w]idespread and often erroneous perception’ that such women have far more limited movement than women in the ‘West’ (p. 148). This critique is important to keep in mind alongside theorisations of gender and mobility, especially because of the way these kinds of perceptions shape humanitarian mobility narratives.

In analysing (im)mobility, my research draws on feminist geography, which is relevant for its focus on how women and men experience spaces and places in gendered ways (McDowell, 1999, p. 12). The meaning attached to space is linked to these discussions about mobility (Preston and Ustundag, 2005, p. 246). Lise Nelson & Joni Seager (2005) write that ‘oppressions are embedded in, and produced through, material and symbolic space and place’ (p. 7). They emphasise the importance of understanding where social relations occur, in order to capture ‘relationships between bodies, identities, places, and power’ (p. 7). Discussions about space and place are intertwined with the concept of mobility, allowing exploration of questions such as: who is mobile/immobile, why are they mobile/immobile, and is mobility/immobility a choice? (Cresswell, 2010, pp. 22–26).

Cathrine Brun’s work (2001) explores the different conceptualisations of place and space, particularly how these are applied in representations of the lives of displaced

populations. She suggests that the distinctions between place and space are less important, but what underlies both is a link to social practices and processes (p. 16). Space is socially constructed (McDowell, 1999, p. 4; Brun, 2001, p. 15; Chatty, 2010a, p. 25). David Turton (2005) puts it like this: 'we must treat place, not as a stage for social activity but as a "product" of it' (p. 258). Space is shaped by the social relations and activities occurring in it (Kaiser, 2008, p. 377). Chatty (2010) writes: "Geographic space, as anthropology has long argued, is made meaningful by people. The experience of space is always socially constructed. Spatial meanings are thus established by those with the power to make places out of spaces' (p. 25).

This approach is particularly relevant for my research because of how (im)mobility is positioned as gendered by humanitarian agencies. Academic literature has increasingly focused on the people and activities *within* spaces (Fenster, 1999; Abbas and van Heur, 2014), rather than on the idea often perpetuated by development and humanitarian agencies that spaces have an intrinsic quality. The discourses within agencies perpetuate ideas about streets being dangerous for women and girls (Women's Refugee Commission, 2016), instead of recognising that physical spaces are not the issue, rather the activities, people and power relations in spaces are the problem. Feminist academic analysis of (im)mobility has also pushed thinking beyond simplistic private-public demarcations (Shami, 1996; Joseph, 1997; Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 2001; Sadiqi and Ennaji, 2006; Cresswell and Uteng, 2008; Fenster and Hamdan-Saliba, 2013; Abbas and van Heur, 2014) that have often framed discussions of mobility among humanitarian and development agencies. For example, Seteney Shami (1996) discusses how Palestinian refugees in Amman invoked gender roles as 'mothers' and 'wives' that are normally associated with the private sphere, to engage in activism in the public sphere – drawing on the 'traditional' to achieve more political ends, which blurs the lines between acts that are 'progressive' and acts that are not (pp. 22-23). In Muslim households in Iran and India, the home shifted from being 'private' to 'public' when non-related males entered it, and streets were less 'public' during Friday prayers when many men were at the mosque, suggesting that the gendered undertones to space change depending on who is within the space (Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 2001, p. 304). This analysis counters often-narrow ways in which humanitarian agencies analyse public and private space – which is also reflected in narrow 'gender analysis frameworks' that separate the activities and spaces

of women and men, perpetuating a private-public divide (March, Smyth and Mukhopadhyay, 1999, pp. 33-34, 56-60). My research therefore is positioned to interrogate these common ways of analysing mobility before and during displacement, asking the question: how do Syrian women and men actually spend their time and where do they go/not go? I take the analysis further to ask: is the relationship between space and gender automatic, or are these categories more blurred than the sometimes Orientalist assumptions that characterise humanitarian narratives?

These social relations and activities may be coded with gendered expectations, which people affirm and/or challenge in different ways. I explore this in my research through asking: who controls space and movement? Is this gendered, or might other factors influence mobility? The idea of belonging to a particular 'place' is important. Annika Rabo (2005) comments that men's presence in city spaces in Aleppo was 'self-evident and legitimate' in contrast to women's presence in these spaces, which had to be justified (p. 21). It is this logic that means the mobility of girls for example, as David Marshall (2015) found, is legitimised if they are seen to be completing a chore for their parents, 'transforming what would be a shameful act into an act of obedience' (p. 201). My research analyses how the (im)mobility of Syrian women and men is shaped (or not shaped) by gender, as well as how (im)mobility has consequences for gender norms and relations. This means learning about how Syrian women and men spend their time both in Jordan as well as before displacement, and understanding the spaces they access and the feelings they have about these spaces.

As well as being tied to space, mobility is connected to time (Peteet, 2017, p. 127). Analysis of time within refugee literature has often involved consideration of the topic of 'waiting', given the nature of protracted refugee crises (Hyndman and Giles, 2011, pp. 361-363; Peteet, 2017, p. 177). David Bissell (2007), in challenging 'productivist' approaches to analysis of waiting, suggests that time is 'perceived, felt and experienced through the body'; awareness of the duration of time while waiting is based on bodily 'intuition' (p. 284). His analysis suggests that the act of 'waiting' involves both action and inaction (p. 294). Time continues to proceed, even during displacement (Brun, 2015, p. 34). Time, like mobility, is also tied to narratives about power. Julie Peteet (2017) suggests that hierarchies are not just created within space, but also time, using the

example of the Israeli regime constructing Palestinians as from a different time period - outside of modern time (p. 173). The lack of control over time, or being subject to the timing of others, also highlights how time is linked to power hierarchies – a particularly relevant experience for refugees, who spend considerable time waiting for the decisions and actions of others (Hyndman and Giles, 2011, p. 362).

Taking this approach allows exploration of the intersecting power relations that define social and spatial boundaries, including who belongs and who does not (McDowell, 1999, p. 4), and how certain expected behaviours are associated with specific spaces (Abbas and van Heur, 2014, p. 1219). The subject matter of my research is connected to space and place in multiple ways, including analysis of how people navigate ‘displacement’ and how they find their ‘place’ (Hammond, 2004; Turton, 2005).

Overall, this conceptual framework allows exploration of the complications underlying analysis of displacement and change among Syrian refugees, including the extent to which gender norms (as the overarching category for femininities and masculinities) might be constructed, lived/done and resisted across the specific issues of (im)mobility and gender roles.

CHAPTER FOUR: SYRIAN REFUGEES AND HUMANITARIAN AID IN JORDAN

No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark (Shire, 2011, p. 24).

It is the obligation of every person born in a safer room to open the door when someone in danger knocks (Nayeri, 2017).

INTRODUCTION

‘[In] Jordan, our families are tangled with one another’, Rami said one afternoon during an FGD. He was explaining that he had been to Jordan many times before the war, because his sisters and aunts lived in Jordan and married Jordanians years ago. Rami lived in Dar‘a before the war, close to the border with Jordan. Sometimes he visited Jordan two or three times a month, especially for celebrations, Eid or funerals. Before the war, borders between Syria and Jordan were more open. Jordanian friends told me how they would go to Damascus for the weekend, especially to buy goods and food at a much cheaper price. My European friends, who have lived in Amman for almost a decade, similarly recalled regularly hiring a car and driving into Syria for short weekend breaks, exploring souks and eating the famous Syrian ice-cream.

The ties between Syria and Jordan – geographical, cultural and familial - have been long-established (Achilli, 2016, p. 8). For some Syrians – especially those from Dar‘a who now live in Irbid - there is therefore a familiarity with Jordan. This familiarity has caused a few families I met in Irbid to reject offers of resettlement. For them, moving to Canada or the United States is too far a leap from what is familiar, from what is known. For one man, it was the cultural ties to Jordan that caused him to decide to stay: ‘It’s enough that when I walk the streets and I find someone I can say, “*As-salāmu ‘alaykum*” [peace be with you] to, and they say, “*Salām*” [peace] back’.

The historical ties between Syria and Jordan provide important background to understanding the current situation facing Syrians in Jordan. This chapter situates my research findings within the historical context of Syria and the conflict, humanitarian assistance for refugees, the humanitarian situation in Jordan, the specific experiences of Syrian refugees in Jordan, and the gender regimes operating in both Jordan and Syria. This contextualisation offers insights on the role of history in shaping responses to refugee influxes in Jordan, the evolution of humanitarian assistance in Jordan, the treatment of Syrian refugees in Jordan and the way gender norms have evolved and been appropriated in Jordan and Syria.

SYRIAN CONFLICT IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Overview

Since the beginning of the 'Syria Crisis' in early 2011, some 5.6 million Syrians have left Syria to be registered as refugees in the surrounding countries of Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt, with highest proportions of refugees hosted regionally within Turkey (63%), Lebanon (18%) and Jordan (12%) (UNHCR, 2018). Importantly, these represent registered refugees only; countries like Jordan emphasise that they host more than the numbers of refugees registered with UNHCR (Carrion, 2015, p. 3). At the regional level, around 92% of registered refugees are self-settled - living in urban areas and informal settlements - while the remainder are in refugee camps within these host countries (UNHCR, 2018). These figures above exclude Syrians who are internally displaced - within Syria - estimated at 6.1 million people (UNHCR, UNDP and OCHA, 2018).

The Syria Crisis began in the context of the wider so-called 'Arab Spring', when a group of children within the governorate of Dar'a who wrote graffiti criticising the Syrian regime on a wall in their school, were arrested and treated with violence by the regime. This initial repression resulted in wider protests in Dar'a and other governorates (Ismail, 2011, p. 539). Prior to 'the events' - as Syrians often refer to the initial starting point of

the conflict - the Syrian government was already an oppressive, totalitarian regime (Meininghaus, 2016, pp. 14–15) with a strong military and powerful intelligence services (Ziadeh, 2012), enabling it to mobilise violence to subdue protestors. This resulted in a scale-up of resistance activities to the national level (Ismail, 2011, p. 539), with the cities of Dar'a, Homs and Aleppo representing key locations for rebel activity.

While the conflict was initially between the regime - led by Bashar al Assad as President - and the 'rebels' or 'opposition' - which formed since April 2011 - the resistance to the regime has evolved into a complex web of splinter groups and fractured alliances as the years have passed. Additionally, since 2011, the conflict 'perpetuates itself with outside help, for outside interests' (Glass, 2016, p. 54), with Russia, Iran, Turkey in particular advancing their own interests and embroiling themselves with the various actors, to further complicate the political and conflict landscape.

Social groups and the Assad regimes

The conflict has often been cast in sectarian terms by the media; with focus placed on the ethno-religious divisions between groups as the driver for the unrest. Bashar al Assad belongs to the Alawite sect – an offshoot of the Shia branch of Islam known for being less strict in their religious observances. His father Hafez al Assad also belonged to this sect; he appointed Alawites in key government position during his presidency – a move understandably not viewed positively by many in the Sunni majority country (Ismail, 2011, p. 541) or the Damascene elites who had previously held key government and military positions (Salamandra, 2004, p. 8). For ordinary Alawites in Syria, it was sometimes easier to hide their Alawi identities especially if they lived in majority Sunni cities – because of the negative associations this identity had with the regime (Worren, 2007, p. 80). Being an Alawite not only carried religious connotations, but was also linked to regional location, class, culture and language (Salamandra, 2004, p. 11). In trying to position itself as legitimate to its Sunni bourgeoisie critics (including the Damascene elites it had displaced), the Ba'thist party, under both Assads, engaged in economic liberalisation initiatives from the 1970s until the start of the conflict (Sparre, 2008, p. 10) and also increased its support of Islam to address criticism of its Alawite allegiances, attempting to straddle the divide between secularism and Islamism (Meininghaus, 2016, pp. 7-8).

Under both Assads, sectarian differences were mobilised for political and economic ends. However, the mobilisation of difference between groups in Syria has a history prior to the Assads. During the mandate period, the French sought to maintain their authority through 'divide-and-rule' strategies that emphasised differences between groups, preferring to fuel regional rather than nationalist fervour (Chatty, 2010b, p. 33; White, 2011, p. 44). Nationalist activities following the end of the Ottoman rule were not just among the elite, but had wider appeal among peasants (Gelvin, 1998), creating a threat to the French. Alawites were given privileges from the early 1920s, enabling this community who were previously seen by other Syrians as 'inferior' to access benefits in education, wealth and power (including in the army), as well as their own geographical domain (Seale, 1988, pp. 17–23, 455). The Druze were also given an autonomous state during this period, which further created divisions with their neighbours (particularly the nationalist activities of the Sunnis) in the geographical area of the Ḥoran (Neep, 2012, p. 31). Later, during the Druze Revolt (1925-27), members of prominent surrounding tribes joined the Druze in fighting the French, creating the very social ties that the French had feared; these ties remained after independence (Batatu, 1999, pp. 27–28). During the mandate, the French also viewed the migratory movements of the Bedouins as a threat (Neep, 2012, p. 187), and wanted to keep the Bedouins away from the nationalist fervour stirring in the West of Syria, because of how this might affect their own power (Velud, 2000, p. 67). They sought to manage the Bedouins while obtaining their support to access large areas of land, resulting in Bedouins being given privileges and various attempts being made to integrate Bedouins into colonial structures (Chatty, 2010b, pp. 33–34; Neep, 2012, p. 170).

These examples highlight that in approaching groups it perceived as minorities, the French sought to strengthen their own power. Their rationale was that divisions (particularly religious divisions) already separated people in Syria. Benjamin White (2011) argues that by creating structures within the state to heighten separation, the French gave meaning to the idea of a 'majority' and 'minorities' (pp. 209-210). These actions had consequences for the new government when the French left. When the Ba'ath party came to power in 1963, it tried to replace 'tribal affiliations' with the 'modern' idea of citizenship (Seale, 1988, p. 10), stripping Bedouins of their privileges. However,

scholars argue that tribal ties were (and are) still important in Syria, albeit in less-overt ways (Seale, 1988, p. 9; Batatu, 1999, p. 24; Kastrinou, 2016, p. 6). For example, in Dar'a, tribal ties remain strong.

Raymond Hinnebusch (1991) describes how the Ba'th party before Assad engaged in transformation of class structures. The Ba'th party implemented reforms that dismantled the power of the Sunni upper and upper-middle classes through land reforms. It recruited minority groups including Alawites into the army (building on the way the French structured the army) (pp. 30-35). Tribes and land owners were targeted as part of these radical policies (Khalaf, 2000, p. 116). It was however difficult for the politically mobilised peasants to obtain employment and the economy stagnated (Khalaf, 2000, p. 117).

When Hafez al Assad seized power, he brought in more liberal policies, focusing on creating 'domestic unity' and consolidating the state (Hinnebusch, 1991, p. 35; Khalaf, 1991, p. 78). This included winning back the upper and upper-middle classes who the earlier Ba'th had alienated (Hinnebusch, 1991) and strengthening the army (Seale, 1988, p. 174). Some tribes regained an extent of their influence during his rule (Batatu, 1999, p. 24). Hafez al Assad was still seen as Alawi despite his efforts to create unity (Seale, 1988, p. 23). He gave benefits to Alawites in the form of employment within the regime, especially within the army and police (Hinnebusch, 1991). The ideology of the Ba'th party itself became more about Assad's personality (Batatu, 1999, p. 176). As Lisa Wedeen (1999) convincingly argues, Hafez al Assad was depicted in state rhetoric as an 'omnipresent and omniscient' leader (p. 1) however the 'cult' of Assad was not necessarily evidence of his legitimacy. She suggests that Syrians acted 'as if' they respected Assad but there was actually a 'general atmosphere of skeptical [sic] ambivalence' regarding his authority (p. 2). As accusations of corruption and negligence emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, Hafez al Assad attempted to enact more progressive economic policies (Wedeen, 1999, p. 35; Sparre, 2008, p. 10) and tried to win support from Islamic groups (Meininghaus, 2016, pp. 7-8), however when his son Bashar came to power in 2000, many of these issues remained unresolved.

Both Assads used violence and fear to suppress opposition, including imprisoning and killing dissenters. The *mukhābarāt* [intelligence agencies] were (and continue to be) pervasive, conducting activities in the open rather than covertly, which fed into the fear surrounding their surveillance activities (Büchs, 2009, p. 15). It is estimated that there was 1 intelligence officer for every 153 Syrians over the age of 15 (Ziadeh, 2012, p. 24). Wendy Pearlman (2016) argues that this constant environment of fear shaped the lives of Syrians in significant ways; fear was ‘deeply formative of their sense of self and being in the world’ (p. 25). This authoritarian context combined with economic challenges created the foundations for revolt. Economic reforms under Bashar al Assad were not sufficient, and the wealth that was created did not reach ordinary people, heightening class divides – the opposite of what Ba’athism was supposed to achieve (Hinnebusch, 2012, pp. 96–102). Slashes in public spending and the removal of agricultural subsidies worsened the situation and led to an agricultural crisis just preceding the uprisings of 2011 (Hinnebusch, 2012, pp. 96–102).

Evolution of the crisis

Amidst this history, the protests in 2011 escalated. In May 2011, the Syrian government deployed the army into Homs, Dar’a and areas of Damascus to suppress protests. The brutality with which the Syrian regime responded to the protests has been criticised by scholars on Syria such as Hinnebusch (2012), who argues that Assad’s initial response transformed what were localised, peaceful protests, into a wider uprising (p. 106). The violence used to crush these early revolts were criticised by both international and regional actors. In May 2011, the United States sanctioned the Assad regime for human rights abuses (Kaphle, 2014) and in November 2011, the Arab League took the unprecedented step of suspending Syria from the Arab League, imposing sanctions against the regime (*BBC News*, 2018). As violence continued to spread, the United Nations attempted (unsuccessfully) to broker a ceasefire in April 2012. In September 2013, the UN stated that chemical weapons had been used by the regime in the Ghouta area of Damascus, however the lack of concrete action from the international community seemed to legitimise the use of chemical weapons and bolster the regime and its allies (Eaton, 2017). In January 2014, reports of torture perpetrated by the regime arose (Kaphle, 2014). The emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) within Syria in

June 2014 renewed international interest in Syria, resulting in an assault against ISIL forces within Syria alongside the ongoing conflict. Although the emergence of ISIL has received significant attention, the Syrian regime still remains responsible for the highest numbers of deaths in the conflict (Pearlman, 2016, p. 21).

In recent years, the conflict has centred on strategic battles for key cities in Syria. In December 2015, Homs, the 'capital of the revolution', was finally released from its siege and rebels were allowed to evacuate the city in an agreement with the government (*BBC News*, 2015). In December 2016, the Syrian regime succeeded in recapturing Aleppo from the rebels – a win that was seen as representing a 'turning point' in the war (Lund, 2016). Now, in the eighth year of war, it appears clear that the conflict has shifted in favour of the Assad regime, with rebel groups losing these strategic cities (Vignal, 2018, p. 69). In April 2018, the regime captured the area of Ghouta from the rebels. In August 2018, the Syrian army focused its efforts on reclaiming areas of Southern Syria from the rebels. To date, over half a million Syrians have been killed in the conflict (Reuters, 2018).

These key events inform the understanding of the overall context in Jordan, helping provide the pre-displacement history often missing from humanitarian analysis about the underlying factors influencing conflict and how the lives of people are shaped by their history (Malkki, 1996). Many academics have criticised the easy blaming of sectarianism for the Syria Crisis, urging a more complex analysis of the conflict that recognises Syria's history of evolving identity politics, authoritarian rule and economic policies (Ismail, 2011; Hashemi and Postel, 2017; Pinto, 2017). The Syrian regime has however benefited from rhetoric on sectarian differences during the conflict, strategically appropriating the language of sectarianism to create conflict between rebel groups and gain support for the regime (Ismail, 2011, p. 543; Pinto, 2017, p. 129). The rebels have also benefitted from sectarian discourses, invoking memories of violent conflicts such as the Hama massacre of 1982 where Alawi-led forces killed 30,000 residents while quelling an Islamist uprising, to justify action against the regime (Ismail, 2011, p. 540).

With this background, what follows now is a general overview of humanitarian assistance to refugees.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO REFUGEES

In the aftermath of World War Two, the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (commonly referred to as 'The Refugee Convention') emerged, initially to offer protections only to these war refugees, but then in 1967 its geographical and temporal scope expanded via a Protocol. According to these international legal instruments, a refugee is defined as someone who:

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 (UNHCR, 1951).

The Refugee Convention was a response to the events of a World War Two – a reaction to the suffering of the many who were displaced (Gabiam, 2016, p. 382). The concerns during this time were fundamentally Eurocentric, then later evolved into a broader perspective beyond just individual political refugees to mass movements of populations (Johnson, 2011, p. 1023). Within this context, humanitarian assistance emerged as a means of responding to influxes of refugees, initially through refugee camps.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the lead agency in these situations, alongside international and local humanitarian agencies. UNHCR has a mandate for protecting refugees, forcibly displaced groups and stateless people. It is also a fundraising agency dependent on donations for the majority of its budget, which means it has a stake in presenting refugees as 'vulnerable, depoliticised and non-threatening' (Johnson, 2011, p. 1033). UNHCR is responsible for 'refugee status determinations' wherein individual cases are reviewed to see if they fall under the protections available of the Refugee Convention. The UNHCR's mandate includes identifying 'durable solutions' for refugees, specifically voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement to a third country (UNHCR, 2003), however these traditional options are not always available to the bulk of refugees (Harild, 2016, p. 4). Dawn Chatty (2016a) suggests that the

resettlement solution emerges out of the notion ‘that people must be tied to territory’ – precluding other ways of thinking about refugees beyond the nation-state (p. 3).

Whether a country has ratified the Refugee Convention or not (as in the case of Jordan), the humanitarian response is challenged by the political and security imperatives that states struggle to balance. For example, host countries may force refugees to repatriate before it is safe, like Tanzania did with Burundian refugees in the late 1990s, because of wanting to distance themselves from regional conflicts and protect their own security (Whitaker, 2008, p. 254). In cases like this, the assistance provided by humanitarian agencies becomes limited by the hosting government. In other situations, it matters who is hosting the refugees and how they are managed; refugees contained within camps or sufficiently distanced from Europe in the global South may be viewed as less threatening than refugees who seek asylum in Western countries (Hyndman and Giles, 2011, p. 362). In yet other situations, there may be a political rationale for how particular groups of displaced populations are treated by states, for example with respect to Kurds, who seek an independent state against the wishes of the countries that currently host them, or Palestinians, who are explicitly excluded from the remit of the Refugee Convention and who instead fall under the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). UNRWA is the agency exclusively supposed to provide support for Palestinian refugees and has been critiqued for taking on the role of a state (Al Hussein and Bocco, 2011). The ambiguity in the protections covered by UNRWA have led to some Palestinians receiving less assistance compared to other refugees assisted by UNHCR (Goddard, 2009, p. 475).

These challenges create complex hierarchies, resulting in certain refugees being given preference over others. The concept of ‘vulnerability’ – which will be explored in the next section with respect to Syrians in Jordan – has become more important in defining who receives services and who does not (Agier, 2011, p. 213), further complicating notions of impartial assistance. Refugees are subject to these external decision-making processes, meaning that their lives are often characterised by uncertainty; uncertainty about their future in the hosting state and uncertainty about decisions from the aid bureaucracy about their assistance (Horst and Grabska, 2015, p. 10). The passing of time increases that uncertainty as the humanitarian situation becomes more protracted. In some

situations, like in Tanzania – a host to refugees from multiple countries including Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo – as the humanitarian situation takes on a more indefinite tone and seems less of an ‘emergency’, funding may decrease, reducing the humanitarian response (Whitaker, 2008, p. 249).

Issues of funding – who funds whom and why – are particularly critical in reflecting on humanitarian assistance, because of the power held by those who donate. Although most aid was given bilaterally, between governments, until the 1970s, the establishment of new actors in the humanitarian world changed the way assistance was provided. By the 1990s, as donors proliferated, more became required of donors; they needed not just to provide funds but also to have a strong field presence and be able to mobilise funds and coordinate activities swiftly in the face of humanitarian emergencies (Macrae *et al.*, 2002, pp. 11–12). Now, amidst greater focus on efficiency and ‘value for money’, donors demand that humanitarian agencies prove their interventions have impact (Anderson, Brown and Jean, 2012, p. 45). This has resulted in the streamlining and standardisation of reporting mechanisms, creating challenges for humanitarian agencies who have to fit into the frameworks donors require (Anderson, Brown and Jean, 2012, p. 80). These approaches sometimes prescribe narrow ways of understanding change – which some argue comes at the expense of critical analysis (Eyben, 2013, p. 9).

As well as who is assisted and who provides assistance, questions surround the issue of what assistance looks like. Humanitarian agencies – more than development agencies – often face the criticism that their assistance does not address the root causes (Anderson, Brown and Jean, 2012, p. 38). Humanitarian assistance, although initially taking the form of the provision of lifesaving immediate assistance for displaced populations, such as shelter (camps), food, water, sanitation and hygiene, and medical services, has evolved to include a response to social issues, such that it has become commonplace for humanitarian responses to include activities that seek to modernise and bring about progress among the displaced (Barnett, 2011, p. 21; Grabska, 2011, pp. 87–88). This, suggests Jennifer Fluri (2012) is because life as experienced by those that require assistance, is viewed as ‘bare life’ that needs intervention (p. 37). The ‘emergency’ inherent within a humanitarian response has thus come to include a more development-focused component. Within a humanitarian response to refugees, this results in

interventions including raising awareness about GBV, and challenging gender norms through delivering food assistance through women instead of men.

Alongside these issues of who receives assistance and what assistance actually is, the matter of how assistance is given has become more important, especially in recent years. The traditional response to refugee influxes has been the containment of refugees within camps, where refugees represent 'an aggregate, spatially legible population' (Peteet, 2011, p. 18). The refugee camp has been theorised as a 'spatial device' (Peteet, 2011, p. 18) and a place where cohesion is strengthened (Chatty, 2010a, p. 35). Most evident in the literature on refugee camps is the way camps are seen as separate from the host population: 'placed on the edges or limits of the normal order of things' (Agier, 2011, p. 180). Refugee camps have been critiqued by scholars for their 'policing' and controlling elements (Agier, 2011, p. 4). Camps, according to Chatty (2017a), are a 'one size fits all' approach which requires reevaluation in the Middle East context of hospitality and generosity (*karam*) (p. 180). She asserts that the movements of Iraqi and Syrian refugees across the region challenge the notion of a displaced person 'who seeks out and succumbs to the ministrations of humanitarian aid as manifested in prefabricated and rigidly administered holding camps' (p. 183). Instead, as a legacy of the Ottoman Empire, what has occurred is mobility across borders, and people seeking out and receiving hospitality from other states – who are seen as representing the family (pp. 189-193). She suggests that this presents a very different context for humanitarianism and a refugee response than what Western agencies are used to (Chatty, 2013, p. 79). Agencies have not however adapted to this different context, preferring to implement interventions and view their duties in more fixed ways, that is, through camps.

As Jeffery Crisp (2017) has shown, the issue of 'urban' refugees had been recognised by UNHCR as a policy gap as early as 1995, but it was not until 1997 that a specific policy was developed (pp. 88-89). This was within a context where there was reticence from UNHCR (in particular) to acknowledge the growing number of refugees outside camps (Chatty and Marfleet, 2013, p. 8). The UNHCR policy was highly criticised for viewing urban refugees negatively (Crisp, 2017, p. 90). It also contained assumptions about urban refugees and positioned longer-term assistance to urban refugees as creating dependence and favouring individual cases over refugees in camps and settlements (p.

89). The policy was quickly revised that same year, but only in 2009 did UNHCR re-issue a new policy, which deliberately distanced itself from the previous policy (p. 93). The failure of the lead agency for refugees to recognise the differing ways displaced groups situated themselves has had consequences, as outlined in the next section. Now, however, there is greater focus on the importance of a unified urban response to displacement. One humanitarian agency, the Women's Refugee Commission (2016), identifies the challenge like this:

Traditional humanitarian response — where UNHCR and its partners create a new infrastructure of services for refugees — is a poor fit for urban contexts. Instead of trying to transplant programs that have worked in camps to cities, programming must focus on promoting refugee integration into the host community... Whereas humanitarian actors are used to working mostly with each other, in cities they must broker linkages with numerous other partners, public and private, across all sectors, and sometimes for the benefit of only one or two refugee subpopulations (p. 24).

This challenge is one that has been perhaps most evident in the context of forced displacement in the Middle East, particularly in Jordan – a country with a long history of responding to refugee influxes.

REFUGEES IN JORDAN

As a country of 9.4 million people, consisting of 2 million Palestinian and some 500,000 Iraqi refugees, as well as Sudanese, Somali, Yemeni refugees and, most relevant to this research, Syrian refugees, Jordan represents a unique context. Jordan is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, however in 1998 it signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with UNHCR (revised in 2014), which recognised that political asylum seekers are entitled to receive protection in Jordan while UNHCR assesses their cases. This, suggests Davis *et al.* (2017), represents the 'temporary absorption model' of refugees, where refugees do not permanently live in Jordan, but may temporarily be in the country until repatriated or resettled to a third country (p. 18). Under this MOU, the Jordanian

government has agreed to *non-refoulement* – protecting (at least on paper) refugees from being involuntarily returned to their home countries.

Jordan's position on refugees, particularly its position on the 'Palestinian question', should be read through the lens of Jordan trying to shape its own identity (Hasso, 2005, pp. 17–20; Almala, 2014, p. 194). Joseph Massad (2001) argues that this identity is yet to be realised, and that Jordan therefore represents 'a malleable entity that expands and contracts' (p. 224). Jordan's identity is complex, and has been linked in literature to notions of hospitality as outlined later in this section, as well as the way gender norms are instrumentalised (Clark, 2006, p. 540) as detailed in the next section. The shifting dimensions to Jordanian national identity is perhaps most evident through the responses of the Jordanian government to multiple influxes of Palestinian refugees. When 100,000 Palestinians arrived in Jordan between 1947-1948, they were immediately seen as refugees and were given Jordanian citizenship. In 1967, in contrast, 400,000 Palestinians arrived from Gaza and the West Bank, but the government of Jordan did not offer citizenship, and considered these Palestinians merely as displaced (Chatty, 2010a, p. 216). The Jordanian government has adopted multiple strategies for dealing with the 'Palestinian question', for example positioning itself as supportive of the Palestinian cause through the granting of citizenship to some Palestinians, but then also trying to reassert its own power and identity by later revoking citizenship for some Palestinians (Shiblak, 2011, p. 119).

These contradictory responses to Palestinian refugees are argued to be reflective of how 'the issue of origin' became more important for Jordanians, who, although sympathetic to Palestinians when they first arrived, recognised that Palestinian involvement within Jordanian society, including the public sector and military, was a 'threat' to the identity of Jordan (El-Said and Harrigan, 2009, p. 1240). Although outwardly messaging that granting Jordanian citizenship would impact the Palestinian right of return, the Jordanian government was largely concerned about the impact of Palestinians upon Jordanian identity. Massad (2001) observes that the Palestinian refugees who fled to Jordan held higher socio-economic status than Jordanians, were better educated, were used to a higher standard of living and had more experience in politics, which created tension between Jordanians and Palestinians (p. 234). This resulted in the Jordanian government

trying to distance itself from Palestinian identity - a strategy which Massad suggests inadvertently led to Palestinians then posing a challenge to Jordanian authority through their resistance activities (p. 274).

The *fidā'iyūn* (Palestinian guerrilla fighters) began engaging in resistance activities against Israel out of Jordan from the mid-1950s, mobilising support from within Palestinian camps. The Palestinian camps were largely UNRWA-managed 'open camps', that Palestinians could enter and leave as they wished. Palestinian refugee camps across the region have been seen as symbols of *sumud* (steadfastness) in the face of the Occupation (Sayigh, 1993, p. 227; Hart, 2008, p. 67). Although the Jordanian government initially supported the *fidā'iyūn*, their activities became more risky and affected Jordan's economic resources. In the late 1960s and 1970s the Jordanian government came to see the camps and their linkage to the *fidā'iyūn* as a problem, and eventually fought against the *fidā'iyūn* in a conflict referred to as Black September. Having defeated the *fidā'iyūn*, the government created strict regulations to monitor their activities (Peteet, 2011, p. 23). This was followed by a 'Jordanization' of the labour force in the 1980s where Jordanians were preferred for jobs over Palestinians as a way to bring balance to the previously strong Palestinian involvement in Jordan's economy (Chatelard, 2010).

This provides the overarching context for Jordan's response to other groups of refugees. Although initially welcoming to Palestinians, the approach of the government shifted as Palestinian identity emerged as a strong force within Jordanian society with the potential to overtake Jordanian identity (El-Abed, 2015, p. 348). When Iraqi refugees arrived in the 1990s and later from 2003 after the American-led invasion of Iraq, the response was much more tempered, as reflected in King Abdullah II's 'Jordan First' policy of 2002, which was seen as an effort by the government to restate the Jordanian-ness of Jordan and position Palestinian and Iraqi needs as lesser (Clark, 2006, p. 546; El-Said & Harrigan, p. 1245). Iraqis were not referred to as refugees, but were strategically called 'guests' instead, decreasing their rights (Nusair, 2013, p. 61). Iraqis were only given residence permits if they met specific conditions, notably, if they invested significant funds into Jordanian businesses - a policy which paved the way for the Jordanian government trying to benefit from receiving refugees through aid (Gibson, 2015, p. 205; Davis *et al.*, 2017, p. 17). The government-quoted figures on how many Iraqis were present in Jordan varied

significantly from other data; these inflated figures were mobilised to generate aid for Jordanians (Gibson, 2015, p. 205) - a strategy that I suggest also emerges when Jordan reports on the numbers of Syrian refugees it hosts. As the Iraqi stay in Jordan became more prolonged, similar to the way the *fidā'iyūn* were seen as a security threat, narratives about security were used to tighten restrictions on Iraqis in Jordan (Lacroix and Al-Qdah, 2012, p. 227). Iraqi refugees in Jordan call themselves the 'new Palestinians' (Peteet, 2011, p. 24), to refer to their prolonged, uncertain status. According to Geraldine Chatelard (2009), Iraqis in Jordan are perceived as exhausting Jordan's limited resources and also being a risk to the religious and national identity of Jordan (p. 11), which is not dissimilar to current rhetoric about Syrian refugees in Jordan.

Since the arrival of Palestinian refugees, the Jordanian government has used a range of terms to refer to its displaced populations, calling them 'refugees', 'asylum seekers' or even 'guests' (El-Abed, 2015, p. 354). Oroub El-Abed (2015) argues that when the Jordanian government uses these labels it is 'a discursive "act of state" in which power is rationalised, drawing boundaries as to who can be included within the process of subjectification and who shall be excluded' (p. 354). While the terms 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker' have legal implications, the use of the term 'guest' for both Iraqi refugees as well as later refugee populations including Syrians, is perhaps most significant. In Arabic, 'guest' is a 'freighted' term (Peteet, 2011, p. 18) invoking notions of hospitality (Mason, 2011) and implying a point where the guest should know when to leave (Peteet, 2011, p. 18). The concept of hospitality was important even in pre-Islamic Arabia, and came to be strengthened as part of Islam and basic ethics systems (Zaman, 2016, p. 42). In Arab societies, hospitality is said to be a 'ubiquitous' part of life (Young, 2007, p. 47). In his analysis of hospitality among the Jordanian Bedouin, Andrew Shryock (2004) describes hospitality as 'a public, national virtue' (p. 60), something that is linked to being Jordanian. Conversely, lacking hospitality is therefore seen as lacking morality (Shryock, 2012, p. s20). Shryock's research highlights how guests may be prisoners of their hosts - dependent and limited in mobility by the generosity of their hosts. However, guests also hold power; how guests speak of their hosts after the act of hospitality motivates hosts to behave better (s23). This implies a kind of reciprocity in the relationship that is not always acknowledged. The nation of Jordan, as host, is also to some extent vulnerable to the views of others on how hospitable it is - how it adheres to these national notions of

welcoming strangers. The consequences may be even wider, affecting Jordan's identity as a country welcoming to refugees at the international level, which also ties to its ability to receive aid and other support. There are limits to hospitality however (Young, 2007, p. 50; Ramadan, 2008, p. 665); the government of Jordan finds itself trying to maintain 'a proper balance between separation and generosity' (Young, 2007, p. 50).

These conflicting motivations and consequences have resulted in the Jordanian government exercising somewhat capricious decision-making with respect to refugee populations. Human Rights Watch (2014) has documented how the Jordanian government has denied entry and detained Palestinians with Syrian documents, and has revoked citizenship for Palestinians from Syria who have Jordanian citizenship. The Jordanian government's inclusion and exclusion of populations has varied over time and depending on the refugee group, instituting regulations such as visa restrictions on certain groups like young Iraqi men (Chatty and Mansour, 2011, p. 60), arbitrary closures of border crossings (which occurred in Jordan while I was there in 2015), and constantly-evolving limitations placed on employment and access to services (for example, ending free medical treatment for Syrians in Jordanian hospitals in late 2014). The process of Jordan establishing its identity has occurred through creating camps to contain various populations, as well as in how nationality laws are narrowly framed, which may be linked to the need to establish Jordan's own national identity as separate to Palestinian or other identities (Almala, 2014, p. 17).

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN JORDAN AND THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

The case of Syrian refugees in Jordan is situated within this history of the broader treatment of refugees in Jordan. The majority of Syrians who are now in Jordan come from the governorates of Dar'a, Homs, Damascus and Aleppo (UNHCR, 2017d). Like the Iraqis before them, Syrians have been referred to as 'guests'. Initially, before the creation of Zaatari camp, Syrians entering Jordan immediately lived in urban areas of Jordan, however refugees who entered after July 2012 were sent to Zaatari camp first, then had to be 'bailed out' (sponsored) to live in urban areas. Arrivals into Jordan were highest during 2012 and 2013, peaking at the start of 2013 (UNHCR, 2017c).

At August 2018, over 668,000 Syrian refugees have been registered in Jordan (UNHCR, 2018) alongside an unknown number of unregistered Syrian refugees who have never had their papers verified. The Jordanian government estimates that there are over 600,000 unregistered Syrian refugees in Jordan (Carrion, 2015, p. 3). More recently, census data indicates there are a total of 1.265 million Syrians in Jordan (Ghazal, 2016) although it is unclear how reliable this data is. Like the case of Iraqi refugees, the debates over exactly how many Syrians are in Jordan has implications for access to aid funding and Jordan's reputation as a state welcoming to refugees. For example, the Jordanian government has negotiated with donors to require most agencies to allocate a third of activities to benefit vulnerable Jordanians (Carrion, 2015, p.6). The government has become more involved in regulating humanitarian activities, requiring agencies to apply for approvals before implementing activities through lengthy administrative processes (Achilli, 2015, p. 7).

In Jordan, most Syrian refugees (between 80-85%) live outside camps, while the remainder live in the two Jordan-UNHCR operated camps: Zaatari camp (which opened in July 2012), Azraq camp (which opened in April 2014), or the privately-operated Emirati camp (which opened in April 2013) (UNHCR, 2018). Currently, Zaatari camp hosts 78,000 refugees and Azraq camp (intended to house 130,000 refugees) hosts 53,000 refugees, while the Emirati camp hosts 7,000 refugees (UNHCR, 2018).

More relevant for this research, self-settled refugees, representing the largest proportion of Syrian refugees in Jordan, are geographically dispersed across the country, with registered refugees in their largest numbers across the governorates of Amman (where 28% of refugees live), Mafraq (24% live here, including refugees in Zaatari camp), Irbid (where 20% of refugees live) and Zarqa (16% live here, including refugees in Azraq camp), each of these representing large geographical areas (UNHCR, 2018). Differently to the way self-settled Palestinians and Iraqis have situated themselves in Jordan, Syrian refugees do not necessarily live in close proximity to other Syrians. My experience in working in Jordan highlights that for many refugees, visiting the facility of a humanitarian agency to obtain services is the only opportunity to meet other Syrians. Self-settled refugees live with friends or family, rent apartments, or live in informal tented

settlements, but being self-settled does not necessarily mean staying in one place, especially given the cost of living in Jordan. With the influx of refugees leading to an increase in demand for accommodation, prices for rental properties in Jordan have skyrocketed in many areas. This has resulted in regular evictions of Syrian refugees who are unable to pay their rental costs, or in refugees being forced to move regularly as landlords increase rental costs (Mercy Corps, 2012; REACH, 2014). Movement among refugees in informal tented settlements also occurs due to the Jordanian government's increasing efforts to dismantle these settlements. It is therefore not just that refugees are no longer only in camps, but even in self-settled areas, they are not necessarily 'in place'. The fact that self-settled Syrian refugees are dispersed within the host population has particular consequences for the relationship between Syrians and the Jordanian host community. In camps, refugees are at a distance from the population, but self-settled refugees are embedded within areas where host communities live. Some humanitarian actors have documented reports of harassment of Syrian refugees and violence between Jordanians and Syrians (Mercy Corps, 2012; UN Women, 2013).

Although almost 60% of the world's refugees live in urban areas (Crawford *et al.*, 2015, p. 1), humanitarian engagement with refugees has largely been confined to camps, leading to rhetoric within humanitarian agencies about the ways in which Syrian refugees pose a different challenge to humanitarian assistance in general. However, this narrative becomes inconsistent when viewed alongside the history of humanitarian action in Jordan and other contexts in the Middle East (Peteet, 2007), particularly the humanitarian response when Iraqis arrived in Jordan in the 2000s. Most Iraqis situated themselves in Amman, and during this period the rhetoric within humanitarian agencies was that of managing new challenges in an 'urban' environment (Chatelard, 2009, p. 15). This is not to say that urban environments are similar to refugee camps, rather that humanitarian agencies already had an opportunity to adapt their responses within the very same context in Jordan a few years before. Humanitarian agencies had also already seen how Iraqis in Syria and Lebanon, and Lebanese in Syria, did not live in camps – which was also the preference of those governments (Gabiam, 2016, p. 384; Crisp, 2017, p. 91) – yet they somehow remained surprised and baffled by this 'urban context' when Syrian refugees arrived.

This history of failing to fully prepare for urban refugees is important in light of the challenges UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies now face in contexts like Jordan. In Jordan, the urban context has raised questions (many of which still remain to be answered) around the efficacy of creating parallel versus integrated services for refugees, the attitude of the host state, the extent to which government and local actors are engaged in the response, whether host communities also benefit from services being accessed by refugees living in the same area, and how funding is disbursed between camps and urban areas (Culbertson *et al.*, 2016, pp. 20–25; Crisp, 2017, p. 94). As the conflict continues and self-settled refugees face increased strain while their savings dwindle, alongside funding challenges that limit services provided by humanitarian agencies (UN Women, 2017, p. 1), the need to address these issues is more important than ever.

The challenge in the Jordanian context is not only about an urban versus camp response, but also the fact that Syrian refugees (like Iraqis before them) were fleeing a middle-income context and entering a host middle-income context (Culbertson *et al.*, 2016, p. 2) unlike the rural refugee situations in Somalia, Kenya and Sudan which humanitarians have been used to engaging in (Brun, 2016, p. 398). The demographics of the Syrian population are markedly different to that of refugee populations in other regions, however the tools, curricula and interventions used among Syrians have often been regurgitated from quite different economic settings into the context of Syrian refugees, creating problems for example when agencies collect data to understand poverty or key needs (Syria Needs Assessment Project, 2013, p. 5; Chatty, 2016b, p. 55). Most relevant for my research, as outlined in the findings, is how materials seeking to ‘raise awareness’ on gender equality and women’s empowerment are based on the premise that this knowledge is not present and that these topics and issues are new for Syrians – which the next section on gender norms in the Syrian context and educational levels of Syrians will challenge.

The urban and middle-class demographic of the humanitarian response in Jordan is further complicated by the way the humanitarian regime in Jordan has unfolded in specific ways because of the fact that Jordan has not signed the Refugee Convention and is therefore not required to provide refugees with specific services. Per the MOU signed between UNHCR and Jordan, UNHCR is responsible for conducting refugee status

determinations in Jordan, providing Asylum Seeker Certificates to Syrians who fulfil the refugee criteria. These Syrians have then been required to register with the Jordanian government to access education and health services (Davis, 2017, pp. 21-22). The Jordanian government has implemented quite rigorous documentation processes for refugees, including a 'verification' process outside camps which began in 2015 to confirm that Syrian refugees had the right to be present in urban areas (Achilli, 2015, p. 6). This process created challenges for Syrians who did not have correct documentation; the lack of identification documents including ID cards, birth certificates and marriage certificates has created significant problems for some Syrians, also making it difficult for them to verify asylum claims, register children in school, confirm marriages, or apply for resettlement (Clutterbuck *et al.*, 2018, p. 59). For others, the legacy of authoritarian rule and fear they experienced in Syria (Ziadeh, 2012; Pearlman, 2016) influences their engagement with the government in Jordan, causing this process of verification with the police to be viewed as risky. In March 2018, the Jordanian government began the process of regularising the status of Syrians in Jordan, allowing refugees who have been living outside camps without permits to access services despite their lack of documents, and to be prevented from involuntary return to the camp, arrest or deportation. This bypassed the barrier of lack of appropriate documents that were needed to verify urban status, meaning that some 30,000-50,000 Syrians could regularise their status (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

While Syrian refugees were initially able to access free health services in Jordan, this policy changed in late 2014, requiring Syrians to pay a subsidised fee for medical services excluding family planning, prenatal care and postnatal care – which are free. This created a situation where humanitarian agencies who previously relied on Syrian refugees receiving health services through existing systems, had no choice but to create new, parallel health services to meet the demand. This has been especially difficult because the disease profile of Syrians is different to typical refugee contexts that focus on issues like malnutrition and the spread of cholera and malaria. Instead humanitarian agencies have had to focus on more costly treatments for diabetes, cardiovascular disease and respiratory illness – which they have less expertise in (Crisp *et al.*, 2013, p. 5). The changing health policies of the Jordanian government have further complicated care. In early 2018, this policy revised again shortly before regularisation of the status of refugees

in Jordan, with subsidies completely removed for refugees who not have appropriate documentation to live outside camps. This was viewed as a highly regressive step given the progress made towards regularisation of self-settled refugees (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

The access to educational services has been similarly fraught. Syrian children have been entitled to attend Jordanian schools, however their educational access and learning has been limited by the implementation of a 'shift' system, where Syrian children attend a separate school session which has been criticised for its lesser quality (Chatty, 2017b, p. 29). Further, to enrol in Jordanian schools requires Syrians to prove their previous education – a difficult task in my experience for some who do not have access to educational certificates from Syria. Humanitarian agencies have sought to respond to these challenges by implementing various educational programs focusing on adults, or 'life skills' activities for children and adults.

Alongside health and education services, the issue of right to work has been critical to discussions about refugee rights in Jordan. Initially, Syrian refugees were not supposed to work without permits (that were almost impossible to obtain), resulting in heavy reliance on World Food Programme (WFP) food vouchers and cash assistance, although this assistance has been inconsistent, with the WFP cutting cash assistance multiple times due to funding deficits (Chatty, 2015). Cash assistance is also provided by the UNHCR and several other humanitarian agencies, who coordinate with each other to ensure refugees are not receiving cash assistance from more than one source; this assistance is often given based on fulfilment of 'vulnerability' criteria. In early 2016 the 'Jordan Compact' provided for up to 200,000 work permits for Syrians in specific sectors. This was widely hailed as a positive step, however in practice the limitations on the type of work Syrians can engage in has limited the wider success of this initiative, with only approximately 35,000 – 45,000 individual Syrians accessing these permits (Lenner and Turner, 2018, p. 48); only 4% of these are women (Kattaa, 2017). The highest number of permits have been issued in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector; this is followed by manufacturing, then wholesale, retail and trade (Kattaa, 2017); this sectoral requirement limits opportunities for people with higher levels of education.

Nevertheless, the Jordan Compact represents a shift within humanitarian agencies in Jordan, from a solely humanitarian (emergency) response towards longer-term programming that focuses on shifting activity implementation to local partners (at the strong push of the Jordanian government), prioritising development planning and advancing an agenda focused on 'resilience' (Pearce and Lee, 2018, p. 31). Since 2015, the yearly 'Jordan Response Plan', which outlines the scope of the interagency humanitarian response in Jordan, has included components on resilience with increasing focus (Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 2015, p. 9). Resilience is seen as representing 'the crossroad between the humanitarian response and development in the face of a prolonged crisis' (Culbertson *et al.*, 2016, p. 15) and has become more prominent in humanitarian narratives related to Jordan. The resiliency rhetoric also placates the anxieties of the Jordanian government regarding the burden refugees create, because of the focus on strengthening national institutions and systems (Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 2015, p. 9).

The humanitarian response in Jordan has been hampered by challenges with coordination among agencies. Although the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is usually responsible for the coordination of a humanitarian response, in Jordan (and Lebanon), UNHCR has instead been responsible for coordination from the beginning, taking on a 'triple role as an implementer, a funder and a coordinator' (Healy and Tiller, 2013, p. 20), which according to evaluations has created tension between the OCHA and UNHCR (Sida, Trombetta and Panero, 2016, p. 50). This has meant that the usual 'cluster system' that OCHA typically leads has not implemented in Jordan (Sida, Trombetta and Panero, 2016, p. 30). Evaluations have also criticised UNHCR for its early deficiencies in coordination (Crisp *et al.*, 2013, p. 7), as well as for being 'reactive rather than strategic' (TRANSTEC, 2015, p. 7) with planning more focused on the need for immediate rather than longer-term funding (TRANSTEC, 2015, p. 6). Coordination with other international and local agencies has largely occurred through sectoral working groups, who share information and address issues at the sectoral level. Alongside these issues with high-level leadership, agencies responding to the crisis have struggled to measure progress and monitor activities in consistent ways, leading to problems with monitoring and evaluation data (Agulhas Applied Knowledge, 2015, p. 14; TRANSTEC, 2015, p. 91).

Criticisms have also arisen around how humanitarian agencies have prioritised certain issues. For example, an evaluation of DFID's response to the Crisis suggest that some DFID staff were unhappy about DFID's involvement in the 'No Lost Generation' campaign which seeks to address issues facing adolescents and children, seeing this as a politicised issue that has taken funding away from other programming areas (Agulhas Applied Knowledge, 2015, p. 5). Similarly another evaluation noted that some felt that had been disproportionate focus on GBV within the response and that this was resulting in the de-prioritisation of other important protection issues (TRANSTEC, 2015, p. 31).

Additionally, as the issue of 'vulnerability' has been increasingly used to determine eligibility for services, criticisms have arisen around how vulnerability is defined. In Jordan, the Vulnerability Assessment Framework – a complex scoring process – defines vulnerability, but this approach has been criticised for narrowly framing vulnerability based on the situation in that particular moment, rather than recognising historical factors including home location in Syria, relationships and networks, or social capital (Brun, 2016, p. 401). Vulnerability has also been cast in stereotypically gendered ways, with the assumption that women and children, and female-headed households are vulnerable by default, while the possibility of men being vulnerable is not recognised (Turner, 2016). As well as this, challenges around how to balance resources between camp and urban settings have arisen, with evaluations censuring donors for being 'keener to be in the limelight in Zaatari, even if they are superfluous, rather than to be essential but invisible in the open settings' (Healy and Tiller, 2013, p. 10). The focus on Zaatari has been heightened by high profile visits to the camp by celebrities, world leaders and donors, effectively turning it into a 'sinkhole' while the needs in urban areas are unaddressed (Healy and Tiller, 2013, p. 21).

The differing capacities and experience of humanitarian agencies has also created challenges for the humanitarian response in Jordan (TRANSTEC, 2015, p. 46). Although the initial humanitarian response largely involved UN agencies and local organisations, by the end of 2012 some 55 international agencies were involved in the humanitarian response (Turnbull, 2015, p. 4). Some of these international agencies, for example Oxfam and the Norwegian Refugee Council, had not worked in Jordan before (Healy and Tiller,

2013, p. 5). Other agencies however had been working in Jordan for much longer; CARE began work in 1948 in response to the influx of Palestinian refugees while Save the Children began working in Jordan in 1974. Some organisations were involved in the response to the Iraqi refugees in Jordan, for example the International Rescue Committee and MSF. In 2017, 61 agencies (local and international) were involved in the interagency response (UNHCR, 2017a, pp. 48–51), although this does not include smaller organisations that are not officially part of the interagency response and funding ask. In 2018 the funding ask for Jordan was USD 945,615,255, which includes activities focused on ‘resilience’ (UNHCR, 2017a, p. 28).

This discussion of the humanitarian context in Jordan must also include analysis of humanitarian values and behaviours. While this is covered to some extent in the conceptual framework for this research (Chapter Three), the specific outworking of humanitarianism within the Jordanian context is also important. At times the notion of neutral service delivery has been challenged, with some refugees suggesting that ‘*wasta*’ [a concept in Middle Eastern countries that refers to using connections to obtain a favour] enabled some Syrian refugees to obtain preferential treatment including access to aid (Stevens, 2016, p. 58). Humanitarian agencies and their staff are bound to operate within the limitations prescribed by the Jordanian government; their presence in Jordan and their delivery of humanitarian activities requires this compliance even if it means delayed service delivery while waiting for government approvals (Brun, 2016, p. 398, 403). Humanitarian agencies also have their own systems, processes and power hierarchies that may limit their ability to care about an ‘Other’ (Brun, 2016, p. 405). This is perhaps exacerbated in the Jordanian context where the Syria Crisis has created a large number of jobs for Jordanians and Palestinians within the humanitarian sector. The Jordanian government’s emphasis on national identity and the varied treatment of refugees in Jordan (especially Palestinians, who may now find themselves working to help Syrian refugees as part of the humanitarian response) creates what I suggest is a complex environment where it may appear that certain refugees count more than others, and where it may be perceived that there are benefits to being Syrian refugees in a way that was denied for other groups. This has consequences for how local humanitarian staff as well as international staff engage with Syrian refugees; the meaning behind ‘responsible action’ towards refugees becomes relevant here as there may be perceived limits about

what is acceptable, ethical behaviour (Brun, 2016, p. 406). This idea of acceptable behaviour ties also to notions of hospitality and generosity that were discussed earlier in the context of Jordan's treatment of refugees. The 'hospitality codes' inherent in both Syrian and Jordanian culture also carry implications for humanitarian actors, who often transgress these codes in how they engage with refugees, especially in their intrusions into the space of the home (Wagner, 2016). While certainly Jordanian and Palestinian humanitarian staff would be aware of the behaviours expected of them when engaging as 'hosts' with 'guests', it is likely that their perspectives are less visible in the hierarchal structures of humanitarian agencies, who tend to rely on international experts (Chatty, 2002, p. 42, 2017b, p. 28).

The most recent developments within Jordan also carry repercussions for humanitarian actors. Important to note here is the growing political resistance towards receiving refugees within Jordan, which has resulted in refugees being denied entry into Jordan and left stranded without access to services. Since 2013, the Jordanian government has become more concerned about security within Jordan, which became more central to government policy in 2014 as ISIL activities grew in Syria (Betts, Ali and Memişoğlu, 2017, p. 9). Azraq refugee camp, intended to represent the ideal refugee camp that built on lessons from Zaatari and other camps, ended up representing this heightened security agenda (Gatter, 2018, p. 23). UNHCR began reporting increased cases of *refoulement* of refugees by the Jordanian government under the justification of security (Molnar, 2017, p. 19). Border controls began tightening until April 2015 when the last remaining border crossing was closed, resulting in Syrians left in 'no-man's land' on a piece of land called 'the berm' (Betts *et al.*, 2017, p. 10). By the middle of 2016 there were 75,000 Syrians stranded in the berm, unable to access aid for three months (Davis, 2017, p. 24). Although the border closure was attributed to security concerns, especially the risk of terrorism, it is suggested that the underlying rationale was the growing pushback against the increasing numbers of Syrian refugees and the pressure this was placing on Jordan's services and economy (Simpson, 2018, p. 16). Some 50,000 Syrians remain at the berm currently, with fears that this could increase as fighting in south-west Syria intensifies (Parker, 2018).

There is an irony to the treatment of Syrians in Jordan when reflecting on Syria's history as a refugee-receiving country. Chatty (2013, p. 84, 2016b, pp. 51–52, 2017b, p. 25, 2018, p. 37) has documented the way the government of Syria accepted several million forced migrants from 1850-1950, then admitted 100,000 Palestinians in the late 1940s, Lebanese in their hundreds of thousands during their civil war, a further million Lebanese after the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon, and then 1 million Iraqis. She argues that these influxes of forced migrants into Syria resulted in the modern Syrian state being welcoming of outsiders (2018, p. 11). The historical hospitality and welcoming approach towards refugees by the Syrian government stands in stark contrast to the increasingly securitised, restrictive policies of the Jordanian government. Although hosts are concerned with their reputation for hospitality (Chatty, 2018, p. 207), it appears these motivations have been side-lined as the Syria Crisis has continued, leaving Syrians – once the welcomers – more marginalised. The juxtaposition of Syrian versus Jordanian hospitality helps to further situate the humanitarian situation facing Syrians. Comparing the Syrian context to the Jordanian one is important in contextualising this research, not just in terms of historical attitudes towards hospitality but also the ways in which gender norms have been constructed, practiced and resisted in Syria and Jordan.

GENDER NORMS IN JORDAN AND SYRIA

In Syria and Jordan – as in many other countries – nationalist discourses and histories provide a helpful way of understanding how gender norms are constructed and transformed (Kandiyoti, 1991, p. 431). Nationalist movements have positioned women as symbolising the nation (Joseph, 2000, p. 6; El Said, Meari and Pratt, 2015, p. 8). Women in Syria and Jordan have been cast as both symbols of tradition and progress within these national narratives (Rabo, 1996, p. 159). In explaining the way nationalist movements have encouraged women to contribute to public life while simultaneously prescribing what constitutes acceptable feminine behaviour, Deniz Kandiyoti (1991) articulates the link between feminism and the 'national context', showing that progress with respect to women's position and status needs to be understood in the context of nation-building (p. 433). These nationalist discourses have been invoked while states pursued policies of economic liberalisation and modernisation (Moghadam, 2003, p. 25). In this section, I will

analyse the ways in which gender norms have been appropriated in different ways in Jordan and Syria respectively, helping to situate gender ideologies among Syrian refugees within the host context of Jordan. The literature on Jordan focuses on the 1950s period onwards due to the lack of sufficient literature focused on gender before independence. The literature on Syria covers a broader period – beginning from the Ottoman rule – given the existence of literature from that period.

In Jordan, as Janine Clark (2006) argues, ‘gender lies at the heart of the symbolic battleground over which issues of national identity are being contested and constructed’ (p. 540). Massad (2001) similarly asserts that masculinity and femininity in Jordan have specific, national meanings and value and are used alongside narratives about tradition (p. 277). These narratives are strongly linked to the notion of the family unit, which is particularly critical to any discussion about gender norms (Joseph, 1994b, p. 275). In the Jordanian context, kin-based relationships infuse multiple spheres and blur the lines between the ‘private’ and ‘public’. Rabo (1996) suggests that the Jordanian government has historically moved between ‘state patriarchy’ and ‘state feminism’ in its rhetoric on gender (p. 165). State patriarchy in Jordan positions women as having a specific role in the family; their relationship to the state exists through the family (p. 166). In this discourse, women require men to represent them and determine permissibility on issues like marriage, divorce, honour and even their own mobility (Amawi, 2000, pp. 164-165). Jordan’s Personal Status Law (PSL) has been a key mechanism used by the state to legislate women’s dependence on men while simultaneously satisfying the interests of Islamists (Adely, 2012, p. 34). Women and discourses about gender norms have been central to discussion about authenticity and identity in Jordan, making gender a critical aspect to the meaning behind being Jordanian (Clark, 2006, p. 540). Although progress has been made in many areas in Jordan, including women’s literacy rates and engagement in politics, as Afaf Alamala (2014) argues, the state’s liberalisation efforts have been limited to these spheres and have not extended to personal and family rights; this is where allegiances to religious actors dominate (p. 22-23).

As well as representing the traditional, state discourses associate women with Jordan’s modernisation and progress (Adely, 2012, p. 35). As Fida Adely (2012) outlines, the state’s efforts at expanding education for girls since the 1950s was an important part of

this modernisation project, although schools were not necessarily neutral sites, and also served to control girls and maintain gender norms (p. 50). She argues that as education expanded, so did more conservative views on gender relations and marriage (p. 52). This shift however was not uncontested, and when combined with other political events in Jordan, soon became undone as the Jordanian state sought to balance the competing interests of strategic actors (Hasso, 2005, pp. 17–18).

From late 1960s, as the Jordanian government tightened controls over the *fidā'iyūn*, government narratives returned to an emphasis on the importance of family and morality (Abdallah, 2009, p. 55). The Jordanian government, in trying to create stability after Black September, strategically strengthened its alliances with tribal and Islamist groups, recognising that their support was needed to maintain power (Hasso, 2005, pp. 17–18). It drew on notions of tribal, religious and Arab identity represented by these strategic actors to address ongoing uncertainty around Jordanian identity (Adely, 2012, p. 55). The result of this was a return to more conservative gender norms (Hasso, 2005, p. 37). By affirming the connection between the state and tribes, the government muddied the waters on legal issues facing women including violence, marriage and divorce; alliances with tribes bolstered the continuation of informal legal processes within tribes that often clashed with Jordan's official legal system. It also meant that the Jordanian government chose not to act during the PSL reform processes in the 1960s, in deference to Islamists, which meant the law preventing women who married non-Jordanians from retaining their nationality remained unchanged (Adely, 2012, p. 34; Almala, 2014, p. 15). This reinforcement of tribal and Islamist groups, Frances Hasso (2005) argues, is an example of how a 'patriarchal gender order serves as a palliative for men who might otherwise resist an undemocratic regime' (p. 18). She suggests that reverting to more conservative values after Black September was done to placate those concerned by the government's actions, 'evidencing how gender and sexuality are often at the heart of politics' (p. 18). Indeed, in the case of Jordan, the struggle for women's rights and the affirmation of specific gender norms can be clearly situated within Jordan's own struggle for identity and position (Almala, 2014, p. 194).

To date, notwithstanding the broad accessibility of education in Jordan for women, women's labour force participation continues to remain relatively low. Despite a 'reverse

gender gap' at the university education level where more women than men attend university, in 2011 less than 20% of Jordanian women participated in the labour force (World Bank, 2013, p. 10). Scholars attribute this to multiple factors including Jordan's economic challenges (Moghadam, 2003, p. 65) and limited industrialisation (p. 36) – not just tradition or culture. In fact, modern Islamist narratives have even affirmed women participating in the workforce, though under specific conditions: when women's domestic role in the family is upheld and where work is 'appropriate' (Taraki, 1996, p. 154). This has perhaps resulted in the higher representation of working women in sectors more seen as suitable for women: education and health (World Bank, 2013, p. 11). Despite these broader statistical trends, it is important to note that Jordanian women have however navigated around these requirements regarding work to forge their own paths (Adely, 2012, p. 161). Women in Jordan have also manoeuvred around restrictive legal regulations such as *wilaya*, which affirms men's guardianship over women (Almala, 2014, pp. 10–11), to exert their own agency (pp. 131-132). Women in Jordan have become more active in politics since the 1980s, including through political involvement with Islamists (Taraki, 1996, p. 155).

This broad context in Jordan, particularly the importance of the family unit in binding women to the state, is relevant to understanding gender among Syrian refugees because of how gender has been mobilised differently in Syria. During the Ottoman rule, Margaret Meriwether (1999) suggests there was variety and flux in the position of Syrian women across society that transcended explanations around Islam or 'classical' patriarchy (p. 6). Her research, which uses Islamic court archives, highlights women's role in purchasing property and administering charitable endowments (*waqfs*) in Aleppo (Meriwether, 1997, p. 134). Similar findings on the role of wealthier women in buying and selling property and involvement in *waqfs* emerge from Damascus during this period (Reilly, 1995, pp. 81–83). In Ottoman Syria, while Islamic law was patrilineal, courts did issue judgments that challenged gendered separation of parental roles (Tucker, 1997, p. 252). While legal punishments existed for people who transgressed morality through prostitution or involvement in producing alcohol, local customary practices of patronage and alliances with the elite allowed women who engaged in this kind of work to escape serious legal consequences during the Ottoman period (Semerdjian, 2003, p. 83). It was not only those with connections to the elite who worked; poorer women from rural areas

also worked – largely from their homes – in textile manufacturing until the 1830s, when commercialisation shifted this work away from rural households (Reilly, 1995, p. 100; Semerdjian, 2003, p. 64). This Ottoman period helps to contextualise the history that followed.

Thompson's (2000) research on gender in Syria during the French mandate highlights how gender was used strategically by the French to consolidate power, setting the stage for how gender norms have been instrumentalised since the colonial era. The French ruled through Syrian elites, giving power to strategic men to consolidate their paternalistic rule (p. 54). In the aftermath of World War One, where women replaced men in farm work (p. 26) and where men were unable to provide for their families (p. 35), changes started to occur within Syrian society, beginning with the Syrian elite who began to recognise the need for women to be educated and work, in order to avoid the same situation in the future (p. 36). After the war, changes in society were perhaps more pronounced and widespread, including delayed marriage, reduced fertility and changes in gender roles (Thompson, 2000, pp. 35-37).

As the French rule started to be challenged more overtly from the 1920s, women became more politically involved based on an ideology of 'patriotic motherhood' (Thompson, 2000, p. 142), allying themselves with nationalist groups (Meininghaus, 2016, p. 55). Newspapers encouraged women to educate themselves in preparation for independence and used the example of women in the 'West' to emphasise the role women would play in the future Syria (Gelvin, 1998, p. 191). Women were given permission by popular committees to participate in demonstrations, but these activities were held in tension with the importance of maintaining tradition (Gelvin, 1998). The women's movement advocated for women's suffrage (though without support of popular committees), for women's presence in public spaces including cinemas, and against veiling. In the 1930s, as the women's movement intensified their activities, their political engagement became a matter of 'honor' between French and Syrian men (Thompson, 2000, p. 188). For example, women's presence in the 'public' sphere resulted in backlash by Syrian men including physical violence against women who used public transport, visited the cinema or walked on the street, as males reasserted their power in these spaces. This was supported by 'tales of terror' and satirical stories in the press documenting the

consequences for women who transgressed implied and explicit physical boundaries (p. 172). Through archival research, Thompson highlights how newspaper articles described women who moved outside the home as coming to harm through kidnapping and being lured into sexual impropriety. These articles, she argues, were warnings to women who entered male spaces in the 1930s (p. 223). Within this context, male elites, religious groups and nationalist groups made alliances with each other to curb the women's movement (p. 174). As such, women were both 'totems of national order and bargaining chips in political conflicts' (p. 224) - a trend which continued after independence.

Thompson's analysis to how gender norms have been appropriated in Syria from the French mandate period, challenges the common view that Syrian women's empowerment or engagement is something new. Women worked, were politically engaged and advocated for their rights including the right to vote in a manner that was even more progressive than some 'Western' contexts. Her work also provides historical context to how constructions of gender norms continued to be tactically deployed for political ends in Syria following independence, as outlined in Annika Rabo's (1996) analysis of the early gender ideology of the Ba'ath party following their takeover in 1963. Rabo shows how traditional gender norms were criticised within the Ba'ath ideology through the rhetoric of 'state feminism' (p. 163). Like in Jordan, women were used as symbols of the nation's possible modernity within Ba'ath party narratives (Sparre, 2008, p. 7). The secular agenda of the Ba'ath party included the establishment of a 'domesticated Islam' during the early years of Hafez al Assad's rule (Ziadeh, 2012, p. 150); this softening of Islam was influenced not just by the Ba'ath party's secular ideology but also the Alawite minority sect of Islam that Assad belonged to.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Syrian government introduced neoliberal policies (Abboud, 2015) which encouraged education for women and emphasised the role of educated women in the economic sphere, particularly the public sector (Rabo, 1996, p. 161; Sparre, 2008, p. 7), as did Jordan, though more women became engaged in the Syrian workforce compared to Jordan. In Syria, women had an increasingly critical role in the economy. Rural women became more involved in agricultural production, while many urban educated women worked for the government - all while being expected to care for their families (Rabo, 1996, pp. 162-163). In Syria, kin-based ideologies had importance

in locating political power within the hierarchy of family life (Wedeen, 1999, p. 51), however, Rabo, in her analysis of gender roles in Jordan and Syria, observes that in Syria, women were not tied to the state through the family like in Jordan, but instead were mobilised as women (Rabo, 1996, p. 166). Women were positioned as representing the nation, resolving conflicts between brothers and being protected by their sons; women would sacrifice their lives for Syria and for Assad (Wedeen, 1999, pp. 60-61). In Syria, kin ideologies were tied to different kinds of family obligations compared to Jordan; Hafez al Assad was presented as 'like the family patriarch: similar to but bigger, better, and more powerful than one's own father' (Wedeen, 1999, p. 51). Government rhetoric stressed the need to obey Assad like children obey their father; this construction reinforced the way power is situated in the family to preference males and elders (Wedeen, 1999, p. 51). Adherence to the regime was therefore implicitly linked to adherence to patriarchal family structures, creating what I suggest were contradictions between the official Ba'athist rhetoric about gender equality and the reality of Syrian familial relations. Wedeen's assertion about the Syrian people behaving 'as if' they were compliant to Hafez raises noteworthy points of comparison for the construction of Syrian family power; if the feeling of 'as if' extends to Syrian family life it may signify a general ambivalence and merely outward compliance towards men's authority in the home. Indeed, women did have a strategic position and role in Syrian society during the rule of Hafez al Assad. Among the elites in Damascus, as Christa Salamandra (2004) argues, women's 'consumption' and 'display' were important in positioning a family (p. 23); displaying wealth became more common as economic liberalisation continued (p. 49).

Although outwardly progressive, the Ba'ath party however also knew its limits and did not establish policies that would completely overturn gender norms (Meininghaus, 2016, p. 185), knowing it needed the support of strategic groups like Islamists for its power to survive (Manea, 2011, p. 193). From the early years of Hafez al Assad's rule, Islamic groups became dissatisfied with the secularist approach of the Ba'ath party and the restrictions placed on mosques. The resistance from Islamists eventually resulted in an uprising by the Muslim Brotherhood in 1982, which was violently quashed by the regime; the Hama massacre demonstrated the power of the state, the attitude towards Islam and the acts of Alawi-led government forces (Ismail, 2011, p. 540). In the context of criticisms about the regime's secularity, the regime was therefore forced to shift its stance on Islam,

bringing in party-loyal religious scholars into mosques and Islamic schools and including increased messaging about Islam in the state-controlled media (Meininghaus, 2016, pp. 7-8). Hafez al Assad donated money to religious scholars and increased salaries of people working in religious institutions, trying to soften his image as an Alawite (Ziadeh, 2012, pp. 139-140).

The Alawi identity of the Assad regimes also resulted in different gender ideologies compared with the majority Sunni population; Alawi women could be less conservative in their clothing and had more interaction with the opposite sex than Sunni women (Worren, 2007, p. 71). The point here is not necessarily to focus on Alawite-Sunni differences (as I did not specifically ask refugees about faith issues, although at best guess, all refugees I spoke to were Sunni based on how they spoke of the Assad regime and each other). Rather, this emphasises that there were differences in how certain groups of Syrian women were expected to behave: there was not a set of uniform, homogenous expectations for women's conduct, but differences (and the perception of differences) in expected conduct existed between groups.

The Syrian regime's approach to the PSL also reflects this tempering of the Ba'ath party's secularist policies. The PSL contained restrictive provisions about women, however the Syrian regime did not try to reform these, despite the laws not aligning with Ba'ath ideology, preferring to benefit from alliances with Islamic groups whose support they needed (Maktabi, 2010, pp. 569–570; Van Eijk, 2016, p. 95). Although the Syrian Constitution refers to equality between women and men, in practice, notions of the 'patriarchal family' were affirmed through processes like the Syrian family book which allowed for registration of up to four wives, although the Ba'ath party officially did not allow polygamy (Rabo, 2008, pp. 130–131). This suggests that the gender equality ideology of the Ba'ath party was more rhetorical than actual – used to mobilise support and instrumentalised in particular ways to maintain power. This is different to dominant assumptions about Middle East contexts.

In comparison to Jordan, the secular ideology of the Ba'ath party in Syria influenced a less conservative ideology regarding gender. In the 1990s however, gender was again instrumentalised by the Syrian state amidst a deteriorating economic situation in Syria.

At this point, the Syrian regime shifted from its secular stance in order to obtain support from the Sunni bourgeoisie, appealing to traditional and Islamic gender ideologies until the beginning of the Crisis (Sparre, 2008, p. 10; Totah, 2013, p. 11). This however did not necessarily undo the effect of thirty years of Ba'ath policies as Sally Gallagher (2012) argues; women's literacy rose from 50% in 1975 to 77% in 2009, and school attendance for girls sat at 98% - 20% higher than regional averages (p. 51).

In the examples of Jordan and Syria, gender has been appropriated by the government and other strategic actors to affirm power, secure alliances and/or emphasise identity. This provides important context: like in other contexts, 'the regulation of gender is central to the articulation of cultural identity and difference' (Kandiyoti, 1991, p. 440) in Jordan and Syria. In the case of Jordan and Syria, gender is key to how power has been kept and attained and how ideologies around expectations for women's and men's behaviours have shaped both nations. Like in other contexts, this may mean that the specific mobilisation of ideologies around gender continue among Syrians, even now, during displacement. In the same way that lurid tales were told of women who transgressed public spaces in Syria (Thompson, 2000, p. 172), it is possible that tales told by Syrians of women's activities in countries like Jordan are part of a broader narrative and pattern in how women are understood and placed within society. This means that when humanitarian agencies engage with refugees about 'gender issues', these conversations hold particular weight; their implications are more significant than just the immediate, but are tied through history to the way narratives about gender have been critical to Syrian society. This means, more than ever, that it matters who speaks and whose voices are heard in representing Syrians and in describing gender norms. It also has implications within the Jordan context, where Syria's unique history intersects with Jordan's. Discourses on gender have been present in both countries, but have perhaps been less evolved in the Jordan context, therefore how Jordanians - particularly the Jordanian staff within humanitarian agencies - understand and interpret Syrian behaviour needs to be viewed through this lens.

CONTEXT IN PERSPECTIVE

This chapter helps to position the history of conflict, humanitarianism and gender in Syria and Jordan. It highlights that Syria's history is important in understanding the current conflict. This includes how perceived differences between tribal and religious groups have been mobilised for political gain, and the way economic pressures, authoritarianism and struggles with identity have shaped the conflict.

This chapter also draws attention to the politics inherent in a humanitarian response, highlighting that state responses to refugees are not always simple. As refugee responses have evolved to mass influxes of displaced groups, so has the humanitarian assistance changed from a solely 'emergency' response to more a development approach that includes social change interventions. In Jordan, the treatment of Syrian refugees is influenced by Jordan's history and struggles with articulating its own identity, especially its identity as distinct from Palestinian identity.

This chapter provides the overarching context for the way in which gender norms are positioned. The Jordanian context, where the government has shifted between 'state patriarchy' and 'state feminism' is perhaps a less-progressive environment than the Syrian one, where gender equality principles informed the establishment of the Ba'ath party rule, although gender equality has decreased in importance as the Syrian regime formed alliances with Islamic groups over time. As Kandiyoti (1991) argues, nationalist narratives have flexible meanings and can be 'reinvented' where necessary (p. 431); both the Jordanian and Syrian regimes have bound nationalist discourses to women's behaviour. Importantly, these nationalist narratives achieved a difficult balance: modernising women while preserving the family (Abu Odeh, 2010, p. 933). This highlights how gender is instrumentalised and manipulated, which provides useful context in thinking about humanitarian approaches and responses to addressing gender inequality. As explored in the next chapter, humanitarian agencies may deploy gender in specific ways, resulting in solely gendered explanations for complex issues like (im)mobility.

CHAPTER FIVE: GENDERING TIME AND (IM)MOBILITY

INTRODUCTION

Within academic literature, mobility is a concept that has become increasingly connected to discussions about power dynamics, as discussed in Chapter Three. The concept of mobility has become more visible within humanitarian narratives because of its direct connections to notions of 'empowerment', to women and men being economically active, and to GBV. I argue that mobility has been appropriated to shape humanitarian gender agendas around these topics in specific ways. Within humanitarian analysis, discussions about mobility during displacement have taken a very particular direction: the (im)mobility of women and girls - which is said to be gendered (Oxfam and ABAAD, 2013, p. 4; UNFPA Regional Syria Response Hub, 2015, p. 5; Women's Refugee Commission, 2016, pp. 63-64). In the context of the Syria Crisis, orientalist overtones shape discussions about gendered (im)mobility. Culture is seen as limiting women's mobility (Oxfam and ABAAD, 2013, p. 6), perpetuating the idea that the 'surveillance' and 'policing' of women are common within Arab and Islamic societies (Sheller, 2008, p. 259), in contrast with women's supposedly free movement in the 'West' (Freeman, 2005, p. 148).

Although academic literature has shifted from the 1970s liberal feminist approach that equated women's movement outside the home (and into waged work) with their emancipation (Silvey, 2006, p. 68), I argue that humanitarian discourses continue to rely on these types of neoliberal framings in analysing (im)mobility. Gender analysis frameworks separate how women spend their time and the nature of work according to the private-public divide (March, Smyth and Mukhopadhyay, 1999). Although such tools were intended to draw attention to women's unequal workloads (March, Smyth and Mukhopadhyay, 1999, p. 63), I argue that the simultaneous focus on 'empowering' women to become involved in generating income has, by implication, devalued the time spent inside the house and over-emphasised the positives of women being present in the public sphere. These narratives neglect to incorporate academic critiques (Shami, 1996; Joseph, 1997; Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 2001; Hubbard, 2005; Sadiqi and Ennaji, 2006;

Cresswell and Uteng, 2008; Fenster and Hamdan-Saliba, 2013; Abbas and van Heur, 2014) on the blurring of the boundaries between the private and public spheres. Instead, the private-public discussion continues to very much influence humanitarian and development policy, specifically due to its linkages with the topic of work, as will emerge in this chapter.

The humanitarian framing of these issues fails to recognise that the people and activities within spaces are the relevant factors for the analysis of power hierarchies associated with (im)mobility. The words of Gill Valentine (1989) are an apt reminder of the consequences of conceptualising space without the social dimension:

Public blame of victims who were in public places, for being in a dangerous or inappropriate place when they were attacked, encourages all women to transfer their threat appraisal from men to certain public spaces where they may encounter attackers (p. 385).

The idea of spaces containing inherent danger is particularly evident in the way 'streets' are depicted, in both academic and humanitarian narratives. Streets are seen as similar to an 'unpredictable urban jungle' containing 'sexualized threats' to women (de Koning, 2009, p. 546). The streets, in contrast to the home, are presented as 'the site of subversive politics' in ways that diminishes the notion of the home also containing its own complex politics (Marshall, 2015, p. 193) – which I explore further in the next chapter. The ways in which mobility and danger/violence are linked can be argued to be premised on the notion that women have a particular 'place' (McDowell, 1999, p. 12), which when transgressed, may result in negative consequences (Massey, 1994, p. 10; Fenster, 1999, p. 229).

This chapter unravels some of the assumptions around mobility among refugee populations. It challenges representations of Syrians as displaced for the first time, and suggests that there is not necessarily a single, dominant narrative about mobility among Syrian women and men in Jordan, but that mobility needs to be viewed in more complex ways. I will begin by presenting findings on how Syrians spend their time, both before the war as well as during displacement in Jordan. I will detail alternative methods of understanding mobility and power hierarchies, specifically through the use of

photography in my research. I will end with an exploration of the extent to which (im)mobility is 'gendered'.

HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURES & 'INTERNATIONAL' MOBILITY

One of the most problematic assumptions about household structures and mobility within the context of the Syrian humanitarian response, is the often singular narrative about families being torn apart by the Crisis, and of women being forced to live alone for the first time while their husbands are either fighting in the war, working or dead (UNHCR, 2014; CARE, 2016). Households are, according to these reports, supposedly for the first time, 'female-headed' and therefore vulnerable – deserving of specific assistance. This narrative however does not align with a historical understanding of shifts within family units before the war. From the 1970s in particular, Syrians began seeking work in the Gulf (Batatu, 1999, p. 9). It was not that family units were static and that people remained in the locations they were born in until everyone was 'uprooted' by war. For a few women who I interviewed, this was the second experience of displacement; they were displaced years earlier due to other conflicts, including the Six-Day War in 1967. For others, shifts in household structures were ongoing and regular. One woman, for example, shared how, one by one, her older brothers left Syria to work in Saudi Arabia, because of better opportunities there. This was a loss not caused by war, but by the drive to improve the family's economic status. At times the move was less permanent; one woman shared about how her husband worked in Saudi Arabia for several years, returning only in the summer, while she remained in Syria with her young children. For others, migration occurred together because of existing ties: a woman shared how her husband worked in Jordan before they were married – and Jordan was where they spent the first year of their marriage. This trend of working in other countries is not a new one – an older man explained how his older brothers, as well as him, worked in the Gulf from the 1970s. This man was away during most of his children's childhood and early adulthood, visiting only during the summer. For others, shifts in the household were due to husbands working in different parts of Syria; one woman shared how her husband worked in a different governorate for some time, so she alternated staying with her in-laws and her parents.

Jennifer Olmsted's (2011) analysis of Syria's Household Income and Expenditure Survey data, provides useful insights alongside my fieldwork findings. This data shows that in 2007, households officially identified as 'female-headed' constituted 9% of Syrian households (p. 409); this is not insignificant given it likely reflects under-reporting of households classified as male-headed even if men were away for most/part of the year. From 1996 to 2007, the proportion of never married single-person female-headed households in Syria rose from 13% to 16% (p. 410). Importantly, suggests Olmstead, extended family members living outside the household may still provide financial support or may influence the household unit in other ways (p. 413). While it is limited to assume female-headed households are independent, it can be equally as misleading to class them as vulnerable by default.

These historical snippets and data trends provide important insights into family life in Syria. It means that familial relationships were not always fixed before the war – they were changing and evolving as people moved from place to place. Families adapted over time, as members came and left, finding ways to adjust through drawing on broader family networks (Khalaf, 2009). This was not unusual to Syria; migration to the Gulf also occurred from other Middle East countries. Mona Khalaf (2009), for example, analyses how male migration from Lebanon to the Gulf led to women becoming more involved in decision-making (p. 117). Displacement is not necessarily the first time that women have been heads of households; rather I suggest that some women may be reverting to roles they carried out in Syria. Many Syrian women shared that they were responsible for other 'men's' tasks in Syria when husbands were absent. Certainly, there are differences between caring for the family alone for defined periods compared to indefinitely in some cases, and there are challenges associated with completing these roles in a new setting, without the regular income, or upon the death of a husband. My argument is that Syrians may already have some of the coping strategies and abilities to adjust to different household structures. It is not as simple a case as displacement being the trigger that disrupted family life and gender relations; some disruptions were already happening.

This is perhaps the opposite to how humanitarian agencies have typically understood families in the context of the Syria Crisis. I suggest insufficient effort has been made to

understand the complex relationships within families *before* war, leading to misleading conclusions about the situation during displacement. The consequence of this idea of women heading households for the first time is that such households are classed as 'vulnerable' by default during displacement, meaning such families have higher access to assistance – particularly cash assistance – from UNHCR and other organisations. This is not to say that such households are *not* vulnerable; the issue here is that vulnerability is presumed because women are in charge of families for the first time. In fact, women who already led households while husbands worked in the Gulf have existing skills and resilience to cope with managing issues that may be handled by a husband. Their unique experiences managing family life during these long periods may, instead, be useful to other women who have never led their households.

Another key example of the poor understanding of Syrian family structures among humanitarian agencies relates to the issue of how 'households' are structured. Although over time, the percentage of Syrian households that also contained extended family members decreased (from 20% in 1996 to 12% in 2007) (Olmsted, 2011, p. 408), the extended family remains an important fixture in Syrian society. Couples would often live with the husband's parents (Rugh, 1997, p. 215); over time siblings continued living in the same building together with their wives and children, sometimes building on top of apartments where other family members lived. This housing structure enabled families to share responsibilities and continue close relations. Sometimes couples saved enough money to move to a separate place; other times they chose to remain. If it was not possible to live in the same building, families lived close to each other, choosing apartments on the same street or neighbourhood. This facilitated visits from house to house, particularly among women, who would cook together, prepare supplies (labneh, stuffed vegetables etc) for winter, and drink coffee with their relatives, sometimes each day. In this context, the husband and wife could work full-time jobs, like some did, while their parents cared for their children during the day: a different narrative to the way pre-conflict gender roles are understood by humanitarian agencies. The lines between immediate and extended families also became blurred through this way of living so closely. Research participants shared that cousins, for example, were sometimes 'raised' together.

TIME USE IN SYRIA

Alongside this background to household structures in Syria before the conflict, it is important to understand how Syrian women and men spent their time, as this itself carries gendered meaning. Time is a resource that is not neutral, because it is situated within gender hierarchies (Zilanawala, 2013, p. 12; Garcia, 2015, p. 34). Within the early thinking about development, the notion of gendered division of labour emerged as a way of explaining the disproportionate time burden placed on women (March, Smyth and Mukhopadhyay, 1999; pp. 45-47; pp. 56-58). The division of labour has generally been analysed by development/humanitarian agencies in terms of women's (unpaid) 'reproductive' role - which is not just about biological reproduction but women's role in social reproduction (Benería and Sen, 1981, p. 290) - as well as 'productive' role in earning income. Analysing how time is spent, therefore, can provide useful insights about gender norms. Despite this, research on time use among refugees has not featured in reports of international humanitarian agencies on gender within the Syria Crisis. When the division of labour is referenced in reports, it tends to be assumed rather than specifically researched, with the roles of women and men presented in rigid, stereotypical ways (Khattab and Myrntinen, 2017, p. 16). Household gender roles are similarly depicted in limiting ways; for example, one report on refugees in Lebanon definitively states that men have not taken on increased responsibility within the home during displacement (Oxfam and ABAAD, 2013, p. 15). This fails to acknowledge the diversity in people's daily lives, resulting in misleading assumptions about the pre-displacement phase that are used to understand changes during displacement.

In my research, during photography workshops, refugees were asked to draw the main activities they engaged in during the day in Jordan, then we discussed how this differed to the way they spent their time in Syria. This exercise provided a useful way of understanding the diverse experiences of Syrians. For some, the narrative about tasks in Syria was very much reflective of traditional division of roles that humanitarian agencies often fixate on. One older woman from Homs for example, explained her activities in Syria:

Wallahi [I swear on God's name/Oh my God], from the early morning, like 7:30 - 8:00 my neighbours would be already in my house. We wake up early... Early in the morning, we make the coffee, my neighbour comes... My husband used to go early to work, at 7:30... So, we drink our coffee with the neighbours from the early day. And we stay together till 10 or 11. At 11, we go back to our homes, we do some housework, see what needs to be done. When I didn't have children, I did the work but after I had my girls they started doing the work. Then we go to prepare the food, so we cook and so and by 2:30 - 3 lunch would be ready... After lunch, it's impossible, you have to sleep... And then between afternoon and sundown, we go to the souk and bring things...

Other women recounted similar activities, also mentioning the time spent visiting family members who lived nearby, participating in associations, or going on strolls outside. Aside from this narrative, there were women who also spoke of their study or work in Syria. Some women only worked before marriage, while others continued working after marriage. It was not always the case that a husband stopped his wife from working after marriage; sometimes it was the woman who decided this herself: '[W]hen I got engaged to my husband, I told him, "Listen to me, after the wedding I'm not doing anything with seamstress. I don't have the patience to do that. No, I don't like these things"'. One woman, Hadiya, ran her own clinic and worked at a government hospital in Syria, even after marriage. For her, work was a positive thing for a woman: 'Work strengthens her personality and makes her more independent'. Hadiya felt her years studying would be wasted if she didn't work. Interestingly, her family encouraged her to work: 'They were happy [laughing]. Even they used to tell me, "Open the clinic more, more hours"'. This is possibly due to the high level of education of both her father and husband: their support helped to create the conditions for her work.

A few women talked about how it was fine for Syrian women to work, which is not that unusual given there is evidence that Syrian women worked (Semerdjian, 2003) and owned property (Meriwether, 1997) even during the Ottoman rule. However, multiple women attached conditions to their work in Syria: it could occur only if a woman was still able to manage her responsibilities inside the home. For example, Mais said that a woman was 'not forbidden' from work and other activities outside the home, as long as she didn't 'cut corners at home'. However, one woman from Homs went further to suggest that it would be acceptable for a man to help his wife with the household tasks, as long as he

agreed to it. She gave the example of a woman in her village who was the teacher at the school. She finished work late and was unable to also complete her household responsibilities, so her husband shared in these tasks, but no one had a problem with this: 'If... he agrees with her, then no problem. No one has business with that. As long as he is happy with that, then that's all that matters'. Another woman also gave a similar example of her aunt who became a teacher in Dar'a. In this example, her work was seen as permissible because of her marital status: 'No one said anything. Because she was married! *Ya'nī* [it means], the freedom of a married woman is not the same as a girl'. Like the previous example above, this woman was able to work because her husband (who was also educated) agreed, but there is also something more that was implied: that somehow a married woman might have more freedom to do as she wishes. This explanation particularly struck me because it contrasts with how humanitarian agencies depict married women (especially younger married women) as disempowered by marriage, unable to make their own choices (Save the Children, 2014, pp. 1-3; UNICEF, 2014, p. 9). In contrast, the unattached adolescent girl is depicted as containing unrivalled potential to overthrow patriarchy (Chant, 2016, p. 12; Hengeveld, 2016). This example, however, challenges that narrative to suggest that the level of status afforded by marriage may be empowering for some women, helping to overcome the hurdle that women should not work.

There may be other reasons for men to be involved in tasks that might be considered women's work. One woman from Dar'a explained how her husband lived by himself away from home while at university, so he learnt how to cook for himself. In Syria, if she was late from work, he would start the dinner. Another young man from a different governorate talked about his father, who took care of them and cooked. This was criticised by some. He said, "There are ignorant people who talk that way. "This is a woman's job. Why do you do that?" His father would respond by saying, 'It's not a problem if I helped her. It's normal. It's normal...' For this young man, the example set by his father shaped his beliefs: 'Some things need to change. For example, a woman should, go out, work outside like have a job. *Ya'nī*, she shouldn't stay in the house, wash the dishes and clean the house... a woman is half the society'. These examples illustrate that the division of labour is not necessarily clear-cut and solely gendered, but that Syrians may practice diverse ways of dividing household labour.

In other cases, age may also define the types of tasks that people engage in. One young woman from Homs, who was the youngest in a large family, didn't have any chores while growing up because these were done by her older sisters; this was echoed by other women - that the youngest daughter did not have responsibilities for chores. This young woman would sometimes run errands or help with shopping, but otherwise was not involved in household work. Her older brothers did not do household work - the reason she gave for this was the fact that they had jobs outside the home. One woman, who lived in the countryside of Damascus said she allowed her teenage daughters to go out by themselves to buy things in Syria, but said that men would whistle at them or say that walking in the street was '*ayb* [shameful, bringing dishonour]. Her daughters would ignore these comments; this mother felt these experiences prepared them for marriage, enabling them to 'take care of themselves' and work later on.

This same woman described how her sons and daughters worked together inside the home, especially when she was at work. Her sons cooked, mopped, tidied the house and even cleaned the ceiling. One young man from Dar'a, Fuad, described his role in the home, in Syria as well as Jordan, like this:

Until now, I clean, I wash the floor, I wash the walls, I do the dishes, I cook, I sweep the floor... Everything. It's '*ādiyy* [normal]. If I lived alone, there would be no need for a woman. Even if someone does the dishes in front of me, I make comments. Like, 'Look he's dirtying his hands in front of me'.

Fuad's sisters are in school and university and his brother is at university, which may explain why he has taken on these household tasks. He still seemed to feel these tasks were normal, however. These narratives contrast with how humanitarian agencies describe the division of labour among Syrian girls and boys. When household chores are mentioned, it is nearly always in reference to women and girls (Oxfam and ABAAD, 2013, p. 13; International Rescue Committee, 2014, p. 5; UNHCR, 2014, p. 12; UNFPA Regional Syria Response Hub, 2015, p. 5; Khattab and Myrntinen, 2017, p. 16); it is rarely mentioned that boys may engage in household tasks (Buecher and Aniyamuzaala, 2016,

p. 18). In contrast, my findings show that there were families that required boys to complete work assumed to be women's work – even before displacement.

The activities of men in Syria tended to vary less than women's activities. Younger men talked about studying, but the rest focused their accounts on work outside the home. The type of work varied considerably; in Syria some men worked as farmers, others were tailors, others owned their own shops, others worked for the government. A few also referred to their military service. Only one man talked about not associating with men outside of his immediate family; others referred to social activities with other men including smoking *argīla* [smoking pipe] and staying out late with other men. Men across locations mentioned how they help women to buy supplies and groceries for the house. One man explained, 'Women in general, it is not necessary to go out of the house. We fulfil their demands, there are some young men around her. It is better for her and us'. Another man said, 'As long as... the man is able to fulfil the requests, his wife does not go out'. A man from Irbid explained women's mobility by emphasising the importance of the home for women:

But you know, so the idea is that just because she doesn't go out on her own, that doesn't mean she doesn't leave the house and only sits at home, no! But I'm telling you, that where we come from this is the job of women. The job of women is... most of their attention should be where? In the house, you know. They have their outings, on Fridays of course and other days too, we will go out for late evenings and so. We will go and sit in gardens and so, take the children with us, the family, sit somewhere. One needs to go out and de-stress too, and it's their right too, you know... *Ya'nī*, this is her right to go out. Just as I go out she has the right to go out too.

The idea of the woman's place being largely in the home also emerged in a women's FGD in Zarqa. One woman described the freedom found in being within her own home:

Now, in her house, she feels this is the origin for the woman. So when she is sitting in her house, whatever she wants she can behave or whatever she wants she can do. While outside of her house she should consider others' feelings - she is sitting in a house which is not her house.

This statement, while appearing to affirm common assumptions of home as the place of women (Massey, 1994, p. 180), also draws out an important nuance: women can find freedom to behave as they wish, and not merely as they ought, when in the home. Within academic literature, while attention has been placed on the fact that boundaries between the private and public are blurred, there is still a tendency to overly focus on women's actions in the 'public' sphere (Abbas & Van Heur, 2014; Shami, 1996), which inadvertently negates the politics and dynamic interactions that occur in the home. This includes visits from family and friends, which were mentioned by many women who described their activities in Syria before the war. Yara, for example, said, 'Since the days of Syria, we always have people, I always have people in my home'. In FGDs in Amman and Zarqa in particular, multiple women mentioned how they would visit each other more in Syria, compared to Jordan. The importance of social interactions in the home were not necessarily confined to women alone; Yara's husband also noted the importance of visits: 'Family visits and visiting friends were the most important thing for us... We used to visit each other every day. Every day'.

This perspective on the positive aspect of 'immobility' is not, in my experience, necessarily one that humanitarian agencies have recognised in the drive to have women 'participating'. During my fieldwork I was struck by the changes that would occur when women were in the more informal setting of the home; head coverings would be removed, some women would dress in jeans and there was an ease to the conversation. Head coverings were removed even in men's presence; segregation was not required for this freedom. It was not necessarily only the home where this freedom could be experienced; in one centre where photography workshops were held, only women accessed the space. Nevertheless, they felt even more comfortable to participate and tell sometimes quite risky jokes when the door of the room was closed and there was no danger of any of the organisation's staff or other women entering. In some ways therefore - notwithstanding the threat of violence that exists in the home for some women (International Rescue Committee, 2014, p. 2) - being in the private space can be empowering; it is not only the public sphere that offers this.

TIME USE IN JORDAN

Analysing how the use of time changes over time can provide useful insights on how gender norms may evolve (or not). During discussions, participants discussed how their activities have changed as a result of displacement in Jordan. For many women, household tasks remain unchanged:

The Syrian woman as soon as she wakes up, immediately to the kitchen, true or false?
[asking other participants] As soon as we open eyes we go to the kitchen, we did the dishes and we finished, we cleaned the house, after that we go to the market, and yeah we drink our coffee also, we go to the market...

It is important to note however that while women still are engaged with household tasks, these tasks have different meaning. One woman explained: 'The house there was my house. I loved to bring things, things of good quality for it because it was my house. Here, I will move from house to house, not knowing when I will return to Syria, so I don't like to get good quality but normal things'. The temporal nature of their time in Jordan means that there is less investment into making their living space a home. Fuad shared a quite extreme example of this, detailing how his father forbade them to buy anything for the house shared by several related families, because he thought that they would only be in Jordan for a month. Fuad laughed as he said how they were forced to share spoons and take turns eating and how his prohibition prevented them from having a washing machine for two years. In this example, the father attempted to control how the household was run, although his sons intervened secretly: '[I]f we buy anything, we don't tell him. We buy the thing and we put it in the house and we keep it hidden from him'.

Earlier, I explained that Fuad was responsible for many household tasks in Syria and Jordan. This perhaps explains his intervention into these household issues, as well as his recounting of this story. He explained that the family members collected money among themselves during Eid to buy an automatic washing machine that would reduce the workload on their mother, however their father forbade this purchase. Here, the person not directly affected by the lack of washing machine made the decision about this resource. Fuad sounded annoyed as he told this story – perhaps because he understood the meaning behind not having the supplies and resources that were needed for the

household. Although male, he had an inside perspective on household tasks because of his previous experience helping in the home.

For still others, tasks in the home cannot occur because cleaning supplies cost money that is needed for food and rent. Cleanliness in the home, previously seen as something Syrian women in particular were known for, is thus deprioritised. In one humanitarian report, the inability to keep a clean house was linked to women's self-worth and identity as women (Oxfam & ABAAD, 2013, p. 13). This however requires greater analysis to understand the connection between gender roles and self-worth.

Women in all locations talked about being bored and having nothing to do in Jordan. Some mentioned they had no one to visit in Jordan, compared to Syria. For others, maintaining visits with family and friends in Jordan was very important. Eman described the enjoyment she felt from visiting neighbours and having them visiting her: 'They are good women. I enjoy myself when I visit them. They are loving!' Roula described how she visited the Palestinian-Jordanian mother of her friend, and then how this mother visited her in turn: 'Wallah, we couldn't get rid of them! All of them came and visited me'. Jumala's new Jordanian friends would also come and visit her at home. They also exchanged gifts and went on trips together. Leena, who lives in Zarqa, also commented on the visits occurring between women: 'In the morning when we sit, there is a Jordanian, a Palestinian, a Syrian, we sit together. We complain, we talk. We love each other. We like to meet up and like: 'I am here, come to me'. 'No, you come to me'. In this way, although 'immobile', women maintained friendships through visiting each other.

One young woman, who worked as a secretary in Jordan and stopped working because she wasn't happy with the hours, is now looking for more work. She said, 'Sitting at home is very boring, I will explode from boredom'. For other women, financial pressure has meant they need to work: 'It wasn't like that before... [A]mong many people in Syria, it was considered wrong to work, the woman shouldn't work. Here she's started working. She's started to do it, and it's become acceptable for her to work'.

In contrast to common humanitarian narratives linking increased mobility and economic engagement during displacement (Oxfam and ABAAD, 2013, p. 20; Buecher and

Aniyamuzaala, 2016, pp. 8–9; International Organization for Migration, 2016, pp. 17–20), there were women who had the opposite experience - a less-common humanitarian narrative (International Rescue Committee, 2014, p. 8). Fuad's mother worked as a medical professional in Syria; her work made it possible for their family to pay for their house and car. This gives an idea of the scale of some women's economic contribution to the household, as well as the role of class - aspects that many humanitarian agencies miss. In Jordan, the government has strict rules around whether Syrians can work, but many research participants said they still work. Fuad's mother does not work in Jordan; Fuad said her family does not allow her to work. He explained, 'It's the system. If she wants anything, we bring it to her. There's no need for her to work'. Further discussion revealed that this was not just about the idea that men provide what women need so there is no need for them to do anything else, but also because Fuad's mother has a tumour. Her family wants to protect her health and believe working will worsen this. One young woman who was studying and had plans to enter university in Syria, found that her life in Jordan changed: '[H]ere I become the housewife'. For Hadiya, who ran her own medical practice and worked in a government hospital, the most difficult part of living in Jordan has been dealing with her children. In Syria, her parents and in-laws helped with childcare, but in Jordan, without work, she spends all day with her children. The tone with which she described her frustration was similar to how refugee men talk about not being able to work, yet this narrative is not common among humanitarian analysis: 'I am... embarrassed because I am not working and all my siblings are sending [money] for them [her parents]. They give them and I am...' Her voice trailed off. For Hadiya, being unable to contribute financially to her parents (who she and her family live with in Jordan) is uncomfortable. She is now dependent on them, like she was before she worked, while her siblings who live in other countries send money to help her parents. If this was happening to a man, it might be described in humanitarian narratives as 'emasculating', but there is no corresponding descriptor for Hadiya's experience.

It is not only women who are frustrated by being unable to work. Men similarly discussed how they have 'the same routine' every single day in Jordan. One man in Irbid said, 'We are not doing a quarter of what we used to do in Syria'. One woman from Damascus said that her husband owned property and was studying trade and economics at university in

Syria, but in Jordan he 'carries boxes of cartons'. Women talked about men's activities, specifically the fact that their lives now centred upon finding work:

Person 1: And he goes to work, as soon as he wakes up he almost eats something, and he goes to work. He come back, at the time he comes back to home he brings few things for the house, and he come back to the house. This is his life, that's it.

Person 2: Work then work then work.

Person 3: Sleeping little bit.

Person 4: This is the life of men, even to take us out, they do not take us anymore.

For one family, living in Jordan has meant they needed to send their 12-year-old son to work in Irbid. Describing this decision, the father said:

Ya'nī, a family will always sacrifice one member. It will sacrifice one. And we sacrificed this boy. We had to sacrifice him; we took him out of school so he can work. Because, you know... There are no possibilities to live, *ya'nī*, there is no income to live!... Apart from working. We took him out of school and find him work to do and we left the other three in school. *Ya'nī*, one person saved an entire family.

This explanation particularly struck me because this family has two daughters but it was the son who was 'sacrificed' – another upending of humanitarian narratives that singularly focus on high drop-out of girls from school. There is a logic to the decision, in that it would be easier for a son to find work in Jordan as opposed to a daughter, but what this example still highlights is that it is not always girls who pay the price for a family's well-being and survival. Fuad's mother is another person who highlights this different narrative around education. During one interview Fuad explained that his mother refuses to have a medical procedure done because she doesn't want to use money meant for her other son and daughter. Fuad said, '[S]he does whatever she can to make sure that my sister won't feel less than her friends at university'. This example highlights that, even before having their awareness (patronisingly) 'raised', Syrian parents make sacrifices too (just like in other countries!), so that their children (whether male or female) can access education. It is not that gender norms are so pervasive and fixed that education for girls is always deprioritised – this example also offers another perspective.

The topic of men's work was one that generated a lot of discussion both during FGDs and interviews. One older man strongly resisted the idea of women working in Jordan instead of men: 'A man who sends his wife to work while he sits at home is a *nāmūs*!'. In this sentence, '*nāmūs*' is a gnat or mosquito, but also refers colloquially to the right of a man to ensure virtue or honour: the idea that a man protects the honour of his household. This dual meaning is referring both to the failure of non-working men to preserve the honour of their families, and to the fact that this behaviour makes them like insects. He explained that such a person is 'not a real man, he has no chivalry'. His criticism was specifically about 'men who sit at home while their wives are outside begging'. He felt these men were 'not man enough'. When I suggested that sometimes it can be difficult for Syrians to find work in Jordan, he argued that some men were too picky about the type of work they did and suggested that these men also behaved this way in Syria: 'They didn't like to work! So, they don't work. They depend on others! They are dependant!' Dependence is positioned as something negative for him - something just to be experienced by women, something that negates men from being honourable.

This idea of work being tied to being a 'real man' is not an unusual one. During FGDs, women and men talked about the importance of young boys finding their career. In one interview, Aya, who has a challenging relationship with her husband, explained how her husband finds it difficult to obtain work in Jordan. Some of this relates to the fear that working illegally will result in his deportation – a common fear among men, which I will discuss in the next section. While Aya finds it frustrating that their family struggled to meet their basic needs because of her husband's lack of work, it is actually his parents who most criticise their son for his lack of work. When they visit his parents, the parents immediately 'guilt trip' him about eating the food they provide. His father would say, 'I give him to drink, I feed him and he is asleep!' Aya felt awkward about these criticisms being levelled at her husband, feeling that these comments should not be made in front of her. Once her father-in-law said to her, 'What's left for you to do is to get a diaper for him and help him wear it'. This comment was directed at Aya but I suggest this language was also intended to emasculate their son; using shame to criticise him in front of his wife for not fulfilling his role of providing for the family. The awkwardness Aya felt about his parents commenting on this in her presence is also significant as it illustrates how a more public criticism can cause more damage. James Scott (1990) writes: '[A]ny indignity is

compounded greatly when it is inflicted in public. An insult, a look of contempt, a physical humiliation, an assault on one's character and standing, a rudeness is nearly always far more injurious when it is inflicted before an audience' (p. 113). The humiliation experienced by her husband may explain his other behaviour towards Aya, specifically an occasion where he beat her in front of his parents for answering back to him. This may have been a way for him to reclaim power that was lost through the many times when his parents criticised him in front of his wife, as well as an opportunity for him to show his parents that if nothing else, he could manage his wife.

Aya has her own ways of managing. She said, 'I have to go and work in people's homes... But behind my husband's back. And my son, pardon me, where am I going to get the milk from? Should I beg, rip my clothes off so I can bring my son milk?' Aya secretly works so that she can pay for basic necessities. For other women, work is also something their husbands are not happy with. One woman from Damascus, who married another Syrian after arriving in Jordan, explained that her husband doesn't want her to work, although she feels work is something that makes a woman stronger. She said that when she attends courses held by humanitarian agencies, 'he keeps telling me cover, cover, so how can I go out to work?' For others, working in Jordan was something they were able to negotiate with their husbands – made easier by the fact that 'it had got to the point that we needed anything we could get'. Necessity was what made it possible for some women to work outside the home. Another woman, whose family is quite conservative, felt the issue was the kind of work that women engaged in: 'I wish that the woman would work. To support her husband, but here there's no work which is suitable for women'. One woman felt this was an exceptional situation when the man was unable to provide: 'Then that's a possibility. She will be the man and the woman'. Here, completing tasks associated with men caused a woman to be referred to as a 'man'. Other women also referenced this change as they described their role in taking on greater responsibilities outside the home, 'Here I started feeling that I was the woman and the man in the house!'

In other cases, it was not necessarily the case that women engaged in the economic sphere in Jordan, but they started to take on tasks during displacement that would normally be completed by men. These included tasks like buying meat and paying bills. For some, this was because their husbands couldn't take time off work to do these tasks.

Other women mentioned that their involvement in these tasks was to lessen the burden on their husbands, who may work as many as twelve hours a day and return exhausted. One woman said that when this happens she cannot ask him to do anything for her, so she just does what needs to be done. Another said, 'Now it's me. *Ya'nī*, now I am the responsible one. *Ya'nī*, in my head I worry about food and drinks, the house rent... *ya'nī*, all the obligations'. Taking on tasks that were previously men's responsibilities caused this woman to refer to herself as 'the responsible one' – as if the tasks she completed before were not real tasks in comparison to paying the rent and budgeting. This comment can be argued to be reflective of prevailing perceptions among some Syrians as well as humanitarian agencies, that the work done by women before displacement was not enough – not 'real work' – compared to the tasks they have taken on during displacement. Although Gender and Development (GAD) practitioners spent years trying to emphasise that women's so-called 'reproductive work' in the home was just as important as 'productive work' that generated income through the use of various gender analysis tools (March, Smyth and Mukhopadhyay, 1999), it seems that neoliberal ideas have influenced current humanitarian narratives, making it appear that women who care for children and complete household tasks are disempowered by default, while it is the working women who are truly free. Within such narratives, it appears that to truly be considered 'empowered', women must do everything.

While humanitarian agency narratives emphasise that women are still required to complete household tasks and take on additional responsibilities including paid work outside the home during displacement (Buecher and Aniyamuzaala, 2016, p. 14), little attention has been placed on men's engagement in the home. One woman in her early 30s described the changes in men's behaviour in Jordan: 'They help, they cook, they do the grocery, they clean. In Syria no, we didn't have such a thing. The society I lived in, man didn't help the woman'. She went on to give the example of her brother's wife who has low blood pressure and sometimes can't get up. When this happens, her brother cooks, washes the clothes, cleans and looks after the children. She added, 'He could tell us to help him, but he doesn't'.

Alongside these dynamic conversations about work, in describing their daily activities in Jordan, Syrian women and men drew attention to their use of social media – something

that none of the participants mentioned when discussing how they spent their time in Syria. One group of men of varied ages said that the first thing they do in the morning is check Facebook. In each location where I conducted photography workshops, WhatsApp groups were established to communicate with women and men. These proved to be vibrant, active spaces for engagement; on multiple occasions I would wake up to find 50-100 new WhatsApp messages from participants, including multiple emoticons, questions about services provided by humanitarian agencies, 'memes' containing encouraging or religious statements, and, most often, messages just saying 'hi'. These mediums are also important for enabling connections with relatives and friends in different countries (Wall, Campbell and Janbek, 2017, p. 242; Twigt, 2018, p. 5). One woman talked about how she makes calls to multiple countries each day using WhatsApp in order to speak with her children, siblings and parents. Refugees also talked about the time spent watching the news each day. In one household, which I visited multiple times, the news was constantly on in the background. This use of social media and access to information through the news is also an important aspect to consider in analysing mobility. Through media, I suggest that refugees who are physically 'immobile' may in fact be engaging in social relationships across national borders (Twigt, 2018, p. 5), building and sustaining virtual communities through WhatsApp groups, Facebook messages and calls to loved ones, and sharing important information.

Karen Waltorp (2013) suggests that social media platforms offer 'a specific form of constructed space' (p. 562) where 'place' can exist in 'non-place' (p. 565). Similarly, Miriyam Aouragh (2011) suggests that social media can be seen as 'almost an embodied experience, the hands and fingers touching the screen, the tears and smiles wrapping the faces, and the voices and noises transmitted...', even as 'physical extensions of virtual interactions' (p. 383). Thus, 'virtual mobility' can become a substitute for physical immobility (Aouragh, 2011, p. 392). For women, who otherwise feel that they are not able to leave the home (for reasons explored later in this chapter), engaging in these virtual spaces can be empowering (Waltorp, 2013, p. 557), or conversely may create further opportunities for freedom to be limited (p. 566), as is the case for one woman, Aya. Caught in a controlling marriage, Aya faces not just physical limitations to her mobility that are prescribed by her husband, but also is threatened with the removal of WhatsApp from her phone. This was a great cause of concern to her; she felt there would be nothing to do

if she was not able to use WhatsApp. On more than one occasion, her husband took her phone away, due to her perceived misbehaviour.

This control of resources is significant among populations where the phone has become a key mechanism for engaging with the outside world. It represents a restriction to mobility that has specific gendered undertones, but is an issue that has not been deeply explored either by academics or humanitarian agencies. Controlling phone access may be an exercise of power. Many Syrian refugees I spoke to explained that they have limited opportunities for physical socialisation with others, therefore I suggest engaging socially through the virtual world may be the only point of connection for many. For one woman, Eman, who lost her smartphone and is not able to purchase another, not having a phone with WhatsApp and the internet is debilitating, and has had significant consequences for her ability to interact with others. Although she does have some physical mobility, the lack of virtual mobility has formed a barrier between her and others.

FAVOURITE & LEAST FAVOURITE PLACES

While the previous section focused on the way Syrians spend their time, this section focuses on their experiences of place. In this research, photography was a way of engaging Syrian refugees on their daily experiences in Jordan, specifically, their movement across space (homes, humanitarian agencies, markets, shops, streets), and the power relations that they negotiate. In my research, space represents a strategic issue and site of contestation (Catanzaro, 2015) that, by being visually represented through photography, provides insights into the lived experiences of Syrian refugees in Jordan. Following Freirean thinking, the images of spaces produced by refugees can act as a trigger for discussions about daily experiences (Green and Kloos, 2009, p. 241); they may 'induce' people to think (Barthes, 1982, p. 48). It represents a means of enabling Syrian refugees to freely express themselves (Azoulay, 2001, p. 98) through a more creative medium. Within humanitarian agencies, few assessments leave it so open for refugees to choose what they reflect on – whether positive or negative – like the photo elicitation activities included in the workshops. Allowing this level of openness is seen almost as too

much of an indulgence, therefore approaches to understanding refugees are less flexible and more purposive.

The use of photography resulted in unexpected photographs, including this one below, where a young man explained the hope he has for the future despite the challenging circumstances he faces as a refugee:



Caption: Hope

Photography proved to be a useful way of drawing out less singular narratives about the experiences and feelings of refugees. Contrary to common humanitarian depictions of the home space being one of immobility and disempowerment, many Syrian women felt that their most favourite places in Jordan were located within the home. This was linked to activities in the home. One woman sought solace in prayer, photographing the prayer rug in her home and explaining the comfort she found in her faith. A few women chose to photograph their morning cup of coffee, explaining how this moment of quiet and regular routine in the home was their favourite moment:



Caption: What a beautiful morning when I have a cup of coffee

The photographic depictions of the value found in activities within the home echo statements discussed earlier in this chapter about the social connections women maintain through home visits. Together, the photographic descriptions and interview reflections suggest that home has more positive meanings for some Syrian women. Academic narratives have tended to define immobility as negative compared to mobility, which is seen as representing freedom and modernity (Cresswell, 2010, p. 19) – ‘the more desirable relation’ (Bissell, 2007, p. 278). My findings indicate, however, that for some Syrian women, the home may not be a site of immobility, but may be seen differently: as a place of rest, safety and connection. Interestingly, women did not say that they only like to be at home when men are present, or affirm narratives about how a ‘safe space’ is always one without men in it.

For others, it was the outdoors that represented the places they most loved. Men in particular shared photographs from daytrips they had taken in Jordan, saying that the green spaces reminded them of Syria:



Caption: *Irbid*. This view rests our psychological status, not like the city, cars and traffic. This is quiet, quiet.

For some, work represents a favourite place. One young woman, who photographed a school where she teaches (not depicted here to protect her identity), explained how this is the space where she finds the most comfort: ‘This is the place that I feel comfort in it, because I forget [her name] who is outside, and it becomes another [her name]’. Here, the space transformed her from one version of herself into another; working in this centre was something positive that affected her identity. The photograph she took of her school and this explanation helps to triangulate statements earlier in this chapter about the value women find in work.

Photography, it is suggested, in Susan Sontag’s (1979) landmark text, provides an interpretation of the world (p. 7). It is, according to French scholar Roland Barthes, evidence of ‘presence’ (1982, p. 87) by conveying ‘*what has been*’ (p. 85), making it a useful way to understand the experiences of people. Photography is not neutral, rather it is linked to and raises a range of questions around power: ‘Who sees? Who is capable of seeing what, and from where? Who is authorized to look? How is this authorization given

or acquired? In whose name does one look? What is the structure of the field of vision? To whom should or can one report what one sees?' (Azoulay, 2001, p. 4).

As both an art form and a means of representing reality (Barthes, 1982), photography is directly connected to power in multiple ways. In her work on the use of photography as a mechanism of resistance to the Occupation, Ariella Azoulay suggests that photography is a way for the photographer to command space (Azoulay, 2001, p. 92; Azoulay, 2012, p. 24) and to intervene into power dynamics (Azoulay, 2001, p. 98), echoing Sontag (1979) who writes: 'To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed' (p. 4). This appropriation is political, according to Azoulay, because it can be used, as in the case of Palestine, to highlight the spatial acts of others, including the state (Azoulay, 2012a). Photography therefore can 'help people to take possession of space in which they are insecure' (Sontag, 1979, p. 9). This was perhaps most clear in the photograph one young woman took of a school, which she explained represents the education she cannot have:



Caption: *Irbid*. I am forbidden to go to school in Jordan because I don't have papers, so I like to look at the cultural centre here. And I like to see them going out of it. So I would remember when I was young at school and because I have been forbidden from school after that because of the war.

Photographing this space was an act of appropriation; a different way for her to access a space she cannot physically enter. Here, it is not a gender norm that prohibits her from accessing education, but an act of the state – a bureaucratic requirement.

This ‘appropriation’ also occurred to some extent through the photography of ‘least favourite’ places in Jordan. For one person, the toilet was the least favourite place, because it is different to toilets in Syria which were separate to the bathroom. In Jordan, the fact that the toilet was contained within the bathroom made her uncomfortable. Another woman photographed her laundry in Jordan, which represents hours of difficult work. She does not have an automatic washing machine like the one she had in Syria, but uses a manual machine which required much more time. The task associated with the space here made this her least favourite place. In these examples, photographing a space which is associated with a negative connotation may itself be empowering for refugees in the sense that they may ‘appropriate’ spaces they find uncomfortable or which represent negative aspects of their lives, through the act of photography. The use of photography in this research therefore carries different implications compared to other research methods, because it reflects this aspect of power between the photographer and the photographed.

At times, these ‘least favourite’ places could not safely be photographed. For example, police buildings or UNHCR were commonly mentioned as ‘least favourite’ places, but refugees were afraid to photograph these buildings. In the case of UNHCR, it was the time and bureaucratic processes associated with the space that made people dislike it: ‘[Y]ou go out from 6:00 clock... you go back 2:00 in the afternoon or 3:00 on the afternoon if you were lucky’. Another woman added, ‘There is no place to sit, and the sun is strong above you. If you begged the employee, he let you in. If you did not beg the employee, you will stay standing outside’. Refugees are subject to the decisions of UNHCR staff, who hold the power. Peteet (2017) reflects on how making refugees wait ‘infantilizes and subjugates’, acting as a ‘prolonged time-out’ as if refugees are children to be disciplined (p. 177).

For others, it was the physical body searches prior to entering the UNHCR building that were the most uncomfortable: ‘[T]hey dig, and she start to like this like this [moving her

hands across her body to show how she was searched]... touching your flesh, on your head also, searching in the hair'. Others screamed when they were touched on their waist or felt tickled, while one woman commented that being touched like this was 'forbidden'.

GENDERED (IM)MOBILITY?

Within humanitarian narratives, there has been strong focus on how (im)mobility during displacement is inherently gendered (International Rescue Committee, 2012a; Oxfam and ABAAD, 2013; Women's Refugee Commission, 2016). This includes increased restrictions to mobility, due to fear of harassment and sexual assault (International Rescue Committee, 2014, p. 8). With reference to Syrians in Lebanon, Oxfam and ABAAD (2013) show a more nuanced picture, drawing attention to examples of both decreased and increased mobility among different groups. These stories of danger, I suggest, are not necessarily proportionate because of GBV that occurs within the home. Although agencies do acknowledge violence in the home, it is somehow still the streets that are presented as dangerous for women through these narratives of harassment and exploitation. This is perhaps not unlike the 'tales of terror' prevalent in the Syrian press when women began to access urban spaces in the post-Ottoman era (Thompson, 2000, p. 172). Within such narratives, the streets implicitly become construed as male and women's presence is therefore unusual, instead of seeing unequal power between women and men as the cause of GBV - whether inside or outside the home. Within contexts of war, women are seen as vulnerable actors - 'innocent, apolitical and passive' victims of men's fighting (Baines, 2004, p. 149). Men, in contrast are depicted as 'potential combatants' who represent 'danger and instability' (Davis, 2016, p. 46) - they are explicitly *not* vulnerable and always mobile.

In my research, I sought to understand mobility not only during displacement in Jordan, but also during the period when people were in Syria. The pre-war analysis of mobility and access to different places is documented in the sections above, however this section focuses more explicitly on gendered narratives of (im)mobility during the war period in Syria, and after Syrians moved to Jordan.

My fieldwork findings revealed complex mobility experiences, both in Syria and in Jordan. One young man, Fuad, discussed how in Syria, both women and men would protest together in his village, though the men would march in front and the women were behind them. He described how women in Syria are now more visible in the public sphere compared to men:

In reality now in Syria, there is nothing called man. The woman is everything now. She brings the bread. She brings things for the house. She works. She makes documents. There is no man to do anything there. He doesn't dare to go out because he will be arrested - they would arrest any man they find.

In this narrative, somewhat like humanitarian agencies, the Syrian government thinking seems to be that 'even if a man does not have weapons and is not engaged in fighting, he is assumed, at the very least, to be willing or able to fight' (Davis, 2016, p. 46). Simply being male is enough to justify these assumptions.

Fuad explained that his relatives who only recently arrived in Jordan told him that 'no one moves around there now except for women'. Women are seen as neutral actors – not implicated in activities related to the war – therefore they pass through the streets more easily. He explained further that women in Syria have changed how they dress so as not to attract attention and move more easily: '[T]hey wear bad clothes to make themselves look less attractive. They don't wear makeup any more'. Presenting themselves differently has multiple benefits – it also prevents beautiful women from being taken by regime officials, which Fuad said happened a lot. During the process of leaving Syria, women's bodies were also understood and appropriated in particular ways compared to men's. Fuad explained how one border official in Syria would allow people to pass through if asked – but only women could approach him: '[M]en did not dare to go, because if any man got close, they would shoot at him'. Just to leave Syria involved women invoking the messages represented by their physical bodies - while men remained at a distance.

The extent to which women in Syria engaged in behaviour that may be considered risky also extends to their involvement in rebel activities, including smuggling weapons and

supplies. One woman, Fuad explained, was a noted weapons smuggler, who was captured by the regime. The rebels gave up sixty rebel fighters for her in a prisoner exchange because of her value as a smuggler. He said, 'When you see her, you wouldn't think of her as a woman, you see a man'. Somehow the task she was involved in rendered her 'male'. This is not the first time Syrian women have participated in war activities; Thompson (2000) discusses how Syrian women were active in combat, as well as supporting war through smuggling and protesting during a rebellion against the French from 1919-1921 (p. 48).

The idea of Syrian women as passive and home-bound – which in my experience was how humanitarian staff tended to verbally depict the lives of Syrians prior to displacement – was also challenged in the stories of a few women who spoke about now being 'wanted' by the Syrian regime because they left their jobs to come to Jordan. The act of leaving was itself viewed by the regime as political – as resistance – although it was not necessarily the intention of these women to actively 'resist' in this way. This example provides another way of thinking about who is viewed as a threat by the regime; for these families, it was the behaviour of *women* that meant that the family cannot return to Syria under the current regime. One woman actively encouraged her son to become involved in the protests in Dar'a, but her husband was afraid and he was the one who sent her son away, for his safety – a different narrative to the idea of women being passive.

These narratives contribute to analysis on the 'contested' nature of 'vulnerability' (Baines, 2004, p. 16), suggesting that the experiences and vulnerabilities of women and men need to be understood in context rather than taken at face value. Cynthia Cockburn (1998) critiques the 'sex-differentiated' imagery of war, urging a more complex analysis:

We see men in combat fatigues, bearing weapons. Women we see expelled from their homes, raped, bereaved. But a certain naturalness is assumed in this too. Here are men and women acting out their age-old trans-historic roles. Facts that do not fit are sidelined (p. 13).

Assumptions about the gendered consequences of war particularly emerge with respect to the notion of rape being used as a 'weapon of war' in Syria (International Rescue

Committee, 2012a, 2012b; UN News, 2013; Wolfe, 2013). One participant mentioned this fear: 'They took us out, my parents, because they were afraid for us, as girls, for our honour'. She also explained the reason for fleeing in another way: because their city - which was under siege by the regime - faced heavy bombing. They were told by rebel fighters that regime forces would rape women when they captured this area, so everyone needed to leave. Another participant similarly presented the reasons for leaving as being multi-layered: due to fear of rape and increased fighting. The idea of government forces threatening rape has also been documented by others (Di Giovanni, 2016, p. 22). In one FGD, one woman said that seeing sexual violence in Syria meant that in Jordan, some lived in 'a state of fear' and did not register their daughters in school because of this anxiety that harm would come to them. In this example, negative experiences in one location affected behaviour in another location (Valentine, 1989, p. 386). Apart from these examples however, refugees did not talk about the fear of rape driving their decision to leave Syria or affecting their mobility in Jordan. My experience managing a GBV program within the Syria Regional Response also highlights that the most common reports of GBV were not about rape, rather focused on other forms of GBV. This of course may be due to the sensitivity of the subject matter; refugees may not wish to discuss this topic. There is however need for more analysis on this (Di Giovanni, 2016, p. 22) – especially given the enormity of the 'rape as a weapon of war' language.

Like other scholars, I suggest that narratives about rape being a 'weapon of war' have dominated discussions about gender during conflict in perhaps-disproportionate ways (Buss, 2009; Mibenge, 2013; Meger, 2016), making it seem like a more common practice than it may actually be: 'an inevitable byproduct of war' (Meger, 2016, p. 1). The narratives around rape during war shift the focus away from unequal power between women and men towards the notion that 'war' as a mysterious force somehow acts upon men to cause rape (Cockburn, 1998, p. 44). The notion of 'rape as a weapon of war' also raises the question: at what point does sexual violence become a 'weapon of war'? (Skjelsbæk, 2001, p. 227). Sara Meger (2016) critiques the '*fetishization*' of sexual violence (p. 2), arguing that 'rape as a weapon of war' has become 'divorced from its wider gendered and racialized political economy context and determinations' (p. 17). Characterising sexual violence in this narrow way, she suggests, 'obscures the continuum of violence against women and girls' (p. 33). Relying on 'primordial explanations' for

violence (Cockburn, 1998, p. 13) also reinforces essentialist depictions of women and men.

The positioning of men as dangerous (Olivius, 2016b) has transferred into displacement settings like Jordan. Both women and men described the fear that *men* have when they leave the home in Jordan. This fear is not, however, that they will be drawn into a war, but that they will be deported for working illegally in Jordan. One woman said, 'He goes to his work afraid, he comes afraid, at any moment he would be caught in the bus, that's it, they take him'. She has a Syrian neighbour in Jordan who is so afraid of being caught by authorities for working that he avoids taking the bus, and walks long distances to work, his feet bloodied from the journey. Men feel this pressure in multiple ways. One man said, '[I]f you did not work, you would eat it from your father'. The consequence of not working, of avoiding danger, is using up his father's financial resources. One man explained that being mobile doesn't always result in deportation; he was caught twice by the police for working in Jordan, but was let go because the police were flexible. But, tragically, his 16-year-old son was found working in Jordan and was deported to Syria and killed there in the fighting eight months later. In contrast, some felt it is easier for women to work in Jordan, because police are less likely to ask a woman for identification documents. Syrian women felt they can visit places, like Aqaba (on the coast), while men cannot because the Jordanian government believes that they will try to escape Jordan by sea. These examples may challenge the static view of men having more mobility in host contexts.

There may also be shifts in women's mobility, when comparing not just to men, but to their previous experiences in Syria before the war. One man, Rami, explained that in Jordan his wife has started to go out more than she did in Syria. Many of these excursions are accompanied: 'Her children are all grown up, you know, so she takes her son and goes out!' For Rami, this shift has been amusing. He laughed as he told the story of how his wife wanted him to travel to Ramtha with her. He told her, 'You go and take your son! Am I going to spend all my time with you? Enough!... It's OK, go, your children are grown up now, they are men, go with them!' On another occasion, when his wife wanted him to come along with her on a shopping trip, he explained how he reacted: 'Good girl, where am I going? You have to arrange this'. This time, she had no one to go with, but

surprisingly Rami told her, 'Go out to the street, watch out for the bus that has the name of the village on it, hop on it and go!' This was a successful journey. Rami seemed to contradict humanitarian common narratives about men being afraid for the safety of their wives and therefore restricting their movement. He said, 'I want her to become more independent'. This account however should be nuanced with the fact that Rami and his family live in Irbid, which historically has had close relations with the border area of Dar'a in Syria. Rami's siblings married Jordanians and Jordan is not an unfamiliar location for him, therefore his comfort with the physical environment may explain his attitude to his wife's mobility.

Aya had quite a different experience that more closely links to humanitarian narratives about women's mobility being strictly regulated by men. Her husband does not allow her to leave her house, even to see her family who live nearby: '[H]e likes to control me, he doesn't let me go out... He doesn't want me to go to my family, not to breathe air'. This restriction isn't about her husband fearing that she will be exposed to violence or harassment – as in my experience is the common verbal narrative by humanitarian agencies – rather, his control is more systematic and extends to other areas of life: the use of her mobile phone, budgeting for household items, whether she works and how her husband treats her in front of others. In Aya's case, the issue is not that displacement is the causative factor, rather it has a stronger root: gender inequality. Her experience emphasises that mobility must be contextualised within other practices, instead of being automatically linked to displacement. It is possible, when viewing the broader context of Aya's husband's behaviour towards her, that even if displacement had not occurred, Aya would be facing these same limitations to her mobility. The link between mobility and displacement is not as strong as humanitarian narratives may suggest.

Seeing (im)mobility as gendered by default can be problematic, because it neglects other factors that influence mobility. During FGDs and interviews, Syrian women talked about where they go and how they spend their time, but on very few occasions did these conversations relate to gender. For example, for many refugees, cost was a barrier to mobility in Jordan. One woman summarised it like this: 'Going out costs'. This could certainly be also analysed from the perspective of gender, in terms of the fact that access to financial resources is often controlled by men, however there is also an aspect to this

that also relates to economic factors. The expense required for public transportation or a taxi is often too high to justify, therefore 'to stay at home is better'. This factor has rarely been acknowledged (Calhoun, 2010, p. 13), the majority of analysis on mobility and gender conducted by humanitarian agencies tends to focus on solely gendered explanations (Oxfam and ABAAD, 2013, p. 20; International Rescue Committee, 2014, pp. 9–10; Women's Refugee Commission, 2014b, p. 5).

Alongside the factor of cost, the hilly terrain of Jordan was mentioned by many female research participants as an obstacle to walking outdoors – both during FGDs and interviews. Women explained that in Syria, the landscape was predominantly flat, making walking to visit friends or relatives easier. They felt that in Jordan, the terrain means that such walking is exhausting. One woman complained, 'You feel your heart will stop'. Interestingly it was largely women who reflected on the difficulties of walking in Jordan. This may be linked to 'an ideology which encourages women to be physically frail, or to think that they are...' (Ardener, 1981, p. 28). My experience conversing with Syrians, Jordanians and communities in other places I have worked, indicates that simply being female is often viewed as a reason for having less physical strength. It may be that these narratives about what women are physically capable of – compared to men – also shape their mobility. In any case, this narrative about the physical environment of Jordan is absent from humanitarian analysis on the mobility of Syrians.

In other cases, there were limitations to mobility that were a result of not knowing others. Some Syrians spoke of how their social interactions were often limited to family members, while others said they also had relationships with neighbours in Jordan. One young woman explained her experience like this:

I suffered at first when I came to Jordan, that it was impossible to go out alone. My mother is scared: 'You are in a strange place, you are in place that you do not know about it anything, not the habits, not the traditions. Do not go to that person's house, do not go here, do not go there.'

Unfamiliarity with the new location and new people can be a barrier to engaging with Jordanians. This perhaps explains one comment from an interview participant in Amman,

when I asked if she liked the café we were meeting in. She said, 'I only go to the places you take me to'. Similarly, during an FGD, when asked about where they go during the week, one woman laughed saying, 'We haven't seen anything. We leave from our house, come here and from here to our house. There's nothing else, nothing at all'. One woman from Homs explained that it is not just about someone being Syrian, but she needs to know who someone is: 'Even if I meet a Syrian, but I don't know them, I won't go to her house until I know what or who she is'. Women and men emphasised that it was better to form connections with people from the same governorate; being merely 'Syrian' was not enough. Having these kinds of social boundaries can make it difficult for Syrians to form new bonds with others during displacement and may perpetuate insularity: 'the same networks that bind also exclude' (El-Said and Harrigan, 2009, p. 1237). Boundaries may form, separating those who are 'outside' from those 'inside' (Deeb and Harb, 2013, p. 181). This finding challenges the common assurance I often heard from humanitarian agencies while working in Jordan - that Syrians and Jordanians share common culture - suggesting that even being Syrian may not be enough, but ties may be formed in more complex ways.

This complexity also requires contextualisation across time. Tim Cresswell (2010) suggests that 'new mobilities' need to be understood in the context of 'old mobilities' (p. 29). Experiences of (im)mobility do not occur in a vacuum but are shaped by the past. Amira explained how during her childhood her family moved constantly due to her father's work. These experiences led to her family being isolated from their extended family and friends, but additionally, these experiences of mobility prepared them for their subsequent experience of displacement to Jordan: 'Maybe if I did not have that experience of continuously moving in Syria, maybe I would be affected more and cry and be more upset... The moving in Syria and changing places served me. So, here I didn't suffer as much and I adjusted'. Similarly, Hadiya, who moved to a different governorate from where her family lived to pursue university studies, felt that this mobility helped her to be more responsible and independent. The first mobility – being driven to this new governorate by her sister - was however uncomfortable: 'The first time I did not know anything and I was scared. Even my sister didn't know anything... We were going into the unknown...'

Mobility across governorates or international borders may have been a pre-existing experience for some Syrians. Alongside the practice of family members working in the Gulf, some Syrians also experienced forced displacement from Golan during the war with Israel, and some experienced internal migration which was implemented by the Assad regimes in various governorates of Syria prior to the conflict. For example, one participant explained how Alawis were moved into Homs as a way of shifting the balance of power in that governorate. Annika Rabo (2010) also discusses such movements of the population to/from Raqqa, starting during the Ottoman rule, and continuing during the French mandate and more recently. These experiences of being uprooted and resettled by the state may have prepared some Syrians for their displacement into Jordan and other countries. Mobility therefore has to be viewed in context.

CONCLUSION

The findings in this chapter problematise and unravel common humanitarian narratives about the linkage between (im)mobility and empowerment, GBV and work, drawing attention to the need for humanitarian agencies and academic scholars to develop more nuanced, situated analysis that is grounded in how refugees understand their own (im)mobility.

This research also challenges binary approaches to understanding vulnerability. Within humanitarian narratives regarding the Syria Crisis, vulnerability according to the UNHCR's Vulnerability Assessment Framework is simplified to being about whether someone is male/female and their educational level (Brun, 2016, p. 401). In these discourses, vulnerability is understood in narrow ways; men are commonly seen as the risk-takers – jeopardising their lives and their family's safety to fight, where women are the ones who need to be protected. In the slightly different narrative that emerged from my participants about life in Syria during the war, it is the men who need to be protected while the women are seen as almost neutral actors in the conflict. Women are protected – not violated – by tradition and cultural values regarding chivalry that allow them to move more freely. In this context, the meaning infused onto male and female bodies evolved in a specific way. Somehow the idea of GBV being a threat in this conflict zone –

a common narrative when the war began – has not stopped women from being present in the streets, doing what it is too dangerous for men to do.

This is, however, a different narrative to what humanitarian agencies emphasise. Movement restrictions imposed on women in Syria receive far more attention in reports compared to the amount of analysis explaining the risks men face, which women have taken on inside Syria (Global Protection Cluster, 2017, p. 30). My findings contribute to academic thinking around gendered vulnerability during war, challenging the notion that it is always women who need protection and always men who provide it (Bergoffen, 2009, p. 318). My findings extend beyond conflict zones in Syria, to how Syrian women and men are viewed at border crossings, as well as in Jordan. Men's bodies may also be 'vulnerable' in Jordan because they are viewed as a greater threat and face greater scrutiny from government actors. Some women are 'vulnerable' for different reasons and risk consequences if they return to Syria because they are 'wanted' by the regime. This research therefore challenges static categorisations of women as always victims (Alison, 2007), building on the work of Erin Baines (2004). She suggests that the idea of women's vulnerability as automatic is easier than trying to understand the complexities in how gender as a power dynamic operates (p. 158), urging a more complex analysis of vulnerability (p. 163). This idea of women doing the tasks of men and moving in outdoor spaces during a war contrasts with the pervasive portrayals of women as vulnerable actors who are at the mercy of men, while men are the only ones actively involved in war, which is seen as a 'manly activity' (Hooper, 2001, p. 47).

Alongside this different way of understanding gender and vulnerability, I also seek to engage with discourses around GBV both in academic and humanitarian literature. I interrogate the sole narrative about 'rape as a weapon of war' which accompanies analyses into gender during conflict. I argue that this categorisation of rape takes the focus away from unequal power at the root of GBV, towards blaming war for rape – much like humanitarian narratives that blame men's lack of work during displacement for domestic violence.

The findings in this chapter challenge common humanitarian depictions of gender roles, for example the conclusion stated in one CARE report that 'Syrian women and men feel

that their roles and responsibilities have been essentially reversed' (Buecher and Aniyamuzaala, 2016, p. 14). Instead, what emerges from my findings is the diversity in gender roles among Syrians. It is not so simple as men and women reversing their roles, rather some women and some men experienced reversals, whereas for others the changes were not so significant, and for still others - who worked in Syria and were already living what might be considered a 'reversal' to a stereotypical female role in Syria - displacement has created more limitations. Understanding people's life experiences with this level of nuance is important because it has implications for how the work of refugees is understood and how interventions are designed. The lack of sufficient analysis into the difficulties women face in not working in Jordan perhaps explains the main kinds of interventions designed by humanitarian agencies, who seem to think women are only interested in sewing, literacy classes and crafts (UNHCR, 2014, p. 51, 2017b, p. 54; Women's Refugee Commission, 2014b, p. 10; UNFPA Regional Syria Response Hub, 2015, p. 17) - activities which may not in fact be relevant for women whose lives revolved around work in Syria. If experiences are flattened out like in the CARE report above and if people's lives are collectively summarised, it can give a false impression of what is needed, of what is changing and of what is not. In contributing an intersectional lens to analysis of gender roles, my research builds on the strong academic emphasis on the importance of situating the gendered experiences of refugees (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994, pp. 17-18).

Additionally, this research challenges the perspective of mobility as representing 'an undiluted, unbounded positive' (Hanson, 2010, p. 10). Within academic literature, mobility is cast in positive terms compared to immobility (Bissell, 2007, p. 278; Cresswell, 2010, p. 19). The complex experiences of Syrian women and men, both before and during displacement, emphasise that immobility is not always a symbol of disempowerment, but at times may present greater opportunities for women to behave as they wish - not as they are expected to. In complicating, simplistic understandings of space as 'public' or 'private', this research places the focus on 'who inhabits it and for what purpose' (Rabo, 2005, p. 21). Within this approach, space is 'contested', structured by social relations (Rodman, 2003, p. 212) that need to be contextualised and localised. This research therefore contributes to conceptual debates about the private versus public sphere, drawing attention away from the sole focus on how women are engaging in the public

sphere that tends to dominate analysis (Abbas & Van Heur, 2014; Shami, 1996) to understanding more carefully the meaning found in activities of the home: praying, drinking coffee, eating and hosting others. I build on work by Lila Abu Lughod (1985) who drew attention to the freedom women experienced when in a space separate to men (pp. 645-647), however, my findings highlight that freedom can come also from comforting activities within the home. Activities as well as relationships within spaces are the focus – not spaces alone.

Following Elizabeth Thompson (2000), who emphasises the unhelpfulness of making public-private distinctions within the Syrian context (p. 173), I suggest that there is a need to move beyond constantly comparing public and private space, and to see these spaces as more unique, rather than possessing intrinsic qualities. While recognising that the initial GAD focus on separating these spaces sought to draw attention to women's work in the private sphere, humanitarian and development narratives have also inadvertently emphasised that engagement in the public sphere should be the aim of empowering women, as if they cannot be empowered within the space of the home. This is not unique to humanitarian narratives; academic literature has also preferred engaging with concepts of 'activity rather than passivity' (Bissell, 2007, p. 291), leading to the space of the home being reinforced as anti-modernity, non-political and bereft of dynamism. In lieu of these narratives, I suggest that moving away from discussions about public-private space, towards allowing spaces to be defined in different ways, may provide more useful analysis that contributes to a better understanding of people's lived experiences. When the private and public distinctions are not the premise, different analyses can emerge instead of simplistic assumptions about the home being the domain of women and the streets the site of subversive politics that men engage in (Marshall, 2015, p. 193).

My findings unravel these dichotomies, revealing experiences of Syrian women who felt frustrated by their new, home-bound status in Jordan that was influenced not by gender politics but by the lack of work. My findings suggest there may be less resistance to the idea of Syria women working than humanitarian agencies assume, if certain conditions are met. I argue also that paying attention to the activities and interactions of women and men in the space of the home may provide more useful insights for humanitarian interventions than solely analysing engagement in the public (i.e. economic) spheres.

Analysis of relationships within the home may create new opportunities for understanding space, place and mobility in ways that challenge stereotypical depictions of family life, as will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: GENDERED RELATIONSHIPS

INTRODUCTION

Within the Middle Eastern context, relationships within the family are often positioned as particularly important. Fadwa El Guindi (1999) suggests that within a Middle Eastern context, the family forms ‘the bedrock of an individual’s identity’ (p. 164), an idea echoed in the work of Suad Joseph, who argues that the family becomes particularly important during war (Joseph, 2004, p. 271). Literature on family relationships within the Middle East region is, however, limited, as is literature on family relationships in the Middle East within the context of war (Johnson and Joseph, 2009, p. 1). The gap in literature is also particularly significant with respect to Syria (Chatty, 2018a, p. 234). Dawn Chatty’s (2018a) critical analysis of scholarship on families in Syria highlights how research has evolved over time to draw in more feminist approaches, however the ‘pool’ of literature on Syrian Arab families remains small (p. 234). This makes analysis of gendered relationships among Syrians an especially difficult undertaking. As a result, in this chapter in particular, as well as drawing on literature from Syria-focused scholars, I draw on Joseph’s work (1993, 1994b, 2004) more strongly. Joseph analyses gendered relationships within the family based on research within a neighbourhood in Lebanon that included a diverse population of mostly Lebanese, but also high numbers of Syrians and Palestinians, as well as Egyptians, Jordanians, Iraqis and Greeks. Her work in this community before and after the civil war in Lebanon is relevant to my analysis, particularly because of how she analyses changes in social and gendered relationships, particularly in the family, as a result of war. Her work can be argued to be relevant beyond Lebanon to other contexts in the Middle East, because it provides insights into ways of thinking about family relationships, however should be applied carefully when analysing Syrian relationships.

Joseph (1999) uses the concept of ‘relationality’ to describe ‘a process by which persons are socialized into social systems that value linkage, bonding, and sociability’ (p. 9). Within such systems, people ‘tend to see themselves in relation to others’ and to a far

lesser degree as individuals (Rugh, 1984, p. 35). In describing relationships among families in Lebanon during the Civil War, Joseph argues that 'a person's sense of rights flowed out of relationships that she/he had. A person came to have rights by being invested in relationships' (1994, p. 273). These rights emerged from relationships of 'mutual obligation' including *wasta*; the rights shifted and evolved as the relationships did (pp. 274-278). The idea of obligation is firmly embedded in Syrian families - as Leila Hudson (2008) argues in her research in Damascus. She explains the origins of the Arabic word for the nuclear family (*usra*), which literally means being captured or held captive (p. 72). As a result of relationships being linked to 'mutual obligation', Joseph suggests people in Arab families are 'connective' (1994a, p. 55); their lives are intertwined. Connectiveness plays out in different ways, as I demonstrate in this chapter: in the bonding of families through marriage alliances, in how the behaviour of a son, daughter or wife is tied to the family, and in how husbands side with their mothers and sisters over their wives.

Within Middle Eastern contexts, patriarchy - the privileging of males and elders - is rooted in kinship (Joseph, 2000, p. 17). However, as Joseph asserts, this does not mean that societies are therefore 'seamless' (p. 18); there is diversity across families. Scholars have challenged the traditional, Orientalist assumptions around Middle Eastern families to argue that patriarchy is fluid, shaping familial and other relationships in diverse ways, depending on rural-urban differences, religion, class, ethnicity and other factors (Rabo, 2008, p. 131). Despite evidence outlining the varied ways families may or may not appropriate patriarchy, assumptions about the supposed consensus across families persist - assumptions, which Annika Rabo (2008) suggests may explain the lack of 'serious' research on Middle Eastern families (p. 130). These assumptions often inform the implementation of humanitarian agency interventions focused on 'women's empowerment' or 'gender equality'.

There are gaps in academic literature on how shifts may occur with Middle Eastern families during displacement, with the notable exception of Joseph, whose work on the family (1993, 1994b, 2004) and whose theorisation of the brother-sister relationship in particular (1994a) has provided new ways of thinking about love and power. She emphasises that understanding the family provides insights into social life during war:

'How family relationships are conceived, both materially and discursively, in the aftermath of war is critical for understanding the processes of construction and reconstruction of the "social" in times of turmoil' (2004, p. 271). For Joseph, these familial shifts point to broader 'social' relations. Understanding Middle Eastern families beyond the husband and wife relationship, has however been less of a focus for humanitarian agencies, despite the fact that Palestinians, Iraqis and now Syrians form large numbers of displaced groups within the region. As a result, for humanitarian agencies, the 'family' in the Middle Eastern context remains a highly stereotyped, generalised unit that is assumed to be similar in structure and practices to families in other geographical regions.

For example, humanitarian agencies sometimes make assumptions about gender roles and responsibilities within Middle Eastern families (Buecher and Aniyamuzaala, 2016, pp. 14–19), presenting family life in rigid ways (UNHCR, 2014; CARE, 2016). One key issue that has perpetuated traditional understandings of family life is around responsibility for caregiving (Oxfam and ABAAD, 2013, p. 5; UNHCR, 2014, p. 10; Khattab and Myrntinen, 2017, p. 6) - who 'raises' a child. Bana, for example, was raised by her sisters while her mother was busy caring for Bana's sick sister. Her recollections almost never include her parents; instead she regularly references her siblings. While her sisters raised her, her brother took her to school to register when they moved to Homs after the 7th grade, speaking to the principal about his fears regarding the racism Bana may experience. Khadija said that her husband (who was aged 17 when she married him at age 12) 'raised' her. She barely referred to her parents, focusing the majority of her stories on her husband and positioning him both as husband and parent, despite his young age. Khadija also said she 'raised' her brother-in-law, who was 15 years younger than her, while living with her in-laws. These examples challenge humanitarian agency understandings of family life in Syria, pointing to the role of other members in caring for children, rather than solely the mother.

The notion of family responsibility may also be more nuanced than often assumed – and may not always be linked to age. For example, Ibrahim was not the oldest in the family - he had older brothers and sisters and one younger sister - however he was the one who always took responsibility for his parent's financial security, which he linked to his faith and his closeness to them. On a few occasions, he paid his father's debts, despite having

older brothers who were also working. Another Syrian man, who was very intelligent, received a scholarship and salary for his entire education from the Syrian Government. Here, his education caused him to be responsible for his family, even though he had older brothers. These two examples illustrate that responsibility in a family may change due to circumstance.

With this overview of the importance of families in grounding people's lives and the diversity across families, this chapter will begin with an exploration of familial relationships. It will analyse the husband-wife relationship and shift to other kinds of relationships, including those between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, mothers and sons, and brothers and sisters. I will discuss the changes people have experienced within families as a result of displacement, placing particular focus on how these relationships may be influenced by gender, age and class. This chapter points to the way patriarchy shifts, is appropriated, and evolves, emphasising that these changes are enmeshed in relationality and the idea of obligation, even while seeming to contradict expected norms.

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Perhaps what has received the most focus in the literature on Middle Eastern families is the relationship between a husband and wife - the marital relationship - and with good reason. Maria Kastrinou (2016), in her research among the Druze in Damascus, writes: 'Marriages, in most cultural contexts, are pivotal transformative rituals that sanction and appropriate unions, that perform and embody the social reproduction of communities and society at large' (p. 1). Christa Salamandra, who conducted research among upper class Damascenes, similarly comments on the importance of marriage: 'Marriage, with the alignment of families, the melding of cultural and economic capital it entails, is a primary locus of identity and sociability' (p. 161).

The complex negotiations, decision-making processes, shifts in relationships and sometimes controversy surrounding the way marriages occur, emerged as an important finding that accentuates the diversity in 'Syrian culture'. Challenging commonly-held

assumptions – especially within humanitarian agencies - that Syrian culture by default prescribes marriages as always arranged, never in consideration of the wishes of the bride, never for love, and primarily driven by economic reasons (Save the Children, 2014, p. 1; UNICEF, 2014, p. 10; Higher Population Council - Jordan, 2017, p. 8) - this research captures the diversity in how marriages come about. My research findings are important in focusing discussions about marital relationships during displacement to how marriage occurred and shaped people's lives *before* war. This, I suggest, is the missing piece in much humanitarian agency analysis on changes in relationships between the husband and wife during displacement. Amidst humanitarian agency literature about increases in early marriage among Syrian refugees who struggle to provide for their families (Save the Children, 2014), marriages characterised by tension and violence due to the stress of displacement (UN Women, 2013, p. 10; International Rescue Committee, 2014, p. 5), and emasculated men who, unable to find work, cope only with violence (Buecher and Aniyamuzaala, 2016, p. 14); my research suggests that these common understandings of marriage during displacement may be misleading. I suggest understanding marriage *before* the war provides enough context to better position humanitarian agency interventions – perhaps even without needing to know how marriages have or have not changed due to displacement.

Early marriage, cousin marriage and marriage for love

One of the most striking marriage stories told was that of Khadija, a now 62-year-old widow, who married her husband when she was aged 12 and he was 17. The mukhtar [head of village/neighbourhood] in the tribe (who was also her grandfather) arranged the marriage. About her grandfather, she said, 'When he has his saying, no one can say otherwise. One word only, my mother nor my father can interfere'. Khadija was engaged for one week only – because the in-laws couldn't wait. Her husband died in an accident when she was 29; he fell from the roof of a mosque in Saudi Arabia. She talked about how her marriage began:

Khadija: I was playing with a jump rope [skipping rope gesture] with my sister. A car came... the groom's mother said: 'We were looking for you, where are you?' [Khadija gestured to show how her future mother-in-law grabbed her]. The rope was in my hand

still and they put me in the car. They took me to them. I had my hair done at theirs [gestured to show how high her hairstyle was]. They put makeup on me. It was so heavy, heavy. I was not used to all of that and I wanted it all washed off. And then they'd add some more again! I felt this like [gesturing to how her face swelled from all the make-up]. One hour after was the wedding...

Michelle: How did you feel about this wedding?

Khadija: I thought I was going on a trip. I didn't know it would be like that. A year later, I told them: 'When am I going to my mum's?'

Michelle: Oh! But no one explained to you?

Khadija: No.

During a shopping trip, Khadija shared stories about her wedding night: 'They gave me something for the wedding night like what Bedouins wear'. She laughed and shook her head. They put her *jihāz* [dowry/trousseau] in an old metal box - for fruits and vegetables - with old rags. She said, 'It was a tragedy' and that she cried because this was 'awful'. For her lingerie, she wore a skirt 'like a gypsy' (with 'slits'), but because she was so small, the part that was to fit her neck, fit her waist. She said that the bedroom was the size of a bathroom.

Although Khadija's marriage was arranged, it became a marriage of love. She said, 'Every day with him I was a new bride. He loved me so much'. Her demeanour was very happy as she described her marriage, including how her husband brought her delicious treats each time he returned from work; if he didn't, she would hide her face from him. She described their love in a way I have not heard before while working for humanitarian agencies - perhaps because humanitarian agencies generally do not explore these topics in their analysis, and certainly not in the case of an 'early marriage'. For example, within reports focused on early marriage among Syrians, only one referenced love being a potential reason for marriage (Higher Population Council - Jordan, 2017, p. 21).

Her descriptions illustrate how a child responded to marriage. The day after the wedding, Khadija cried at night saying that she wanted her mother. Her new husband took her to her parents; it was a 10-15 minute drive. After saying hello to them, she went to a cupboard where she knew there were biscuits and Turkish delight hidden, stuck her head

into this cupboard and started eating. Her husband said, 'Tell me you wanted biscuits, you made me drive out here at 12 midnight!' She told funny stories of how they played together, and how he looked after her: '[H]e spoiled me a lot, he would treat me as a child...' Khadija's recollections about her marriage were overwhelmingly positive – perhaps a result of her memories becoming more idealised over time (Al-Rasheed, 1993, p. 101).

Khadija was not the only participant who married as a child. Yasmeen, who is 35 years old, also spoke about her marriage at age 14, a 'cousin marriage': '[H]e saw me, he admired me... Because I was young, I didn't know anything. And I didn't finish my studies since he wanted to go ahead and get married'. Although I interviewed her husband for a life story interview while she was present, he was not present during her own interview, which perhaps resulted in her feeling free enough to say this: 'For me, really, I don't wish for anyone to get married early, nor do I hope for that for her. She sees nothing of her life. The guy is suddenly her world, and her in-law's family... This is our *naṣīb* [fate]'.

Yasmeen decided that marriage at an early age was not advisable, while in contrast, Khadija, who was married even younger, mentioned that her daughters married at 17 and 19. This may be because Khadija viewed her own marriage extremely positively, as opposed to Yasmeen, who didn't make comments about love like Khadija did – or that Khadija considered these ages to be quite late compared to her own marriage.

These two examples of early marriage – by no means the only ones I encountered during my research – help to emphasise that early marriages occurred in Syria before the war, and are not necessarily a new phenomenon, as some humanitarian agency narratives (for example, Save the Children, 2014) may suggest. One other interview participant, Zubeida, a 60-year old woman, commented that 'in the old days' girls married between 14-17, adding, 'They don't take older than that. They would say, "She's old"'. Margaret Meriwether (1999), in her analysis of family dynamics in Ottoman Aleppo, suggests that early marriage among Syrians within that period should be viewed in context – as linked to differing constructions of childhood and adulthood which prescribed that girls and boys took on the responsibilities of adulthood (such as managing property, signing contracts and entering into marriage) during puberty (p. 115). Her argument points to

the fact that early marriage in pre-displacement Syria may also be representative of different understandings of adulthood among Syrians – rather than Western ideas about marriage. Fida Adely (2016) also observes how ‘socioeconomic realities’ (p. 105) influence marriage; men are expected to have achieved financial security before marriage, which decreases the likelihood that women marry men who are the same age as them because of the time required to achieve this financial status (p. 109).

Both Khadija and Yasmeen’s marriages were ‘arranged’ – one by the grandfather/mukhtar of the tribe and the other one by Yasmeen’s husband/their families. In both cases, the girls had little/no say about the marriages, but perhaps more pervasive than any desire they might have had to resist, was the idea that parents knew what their children wanted and would act in their best interests (Joseph, 2005, p. 91), that the ‘web of relationships’ (p. 81) an individual like Khadija or Yasmeen found themselves in, could be relied upon. Julia Droeber (2005), writing about Jordan, suggests that ‘expect[ing] one’s needs to be anticipated by significant others’ was common in families (p. 112-113). This may explain why Syrian women like Khadija (who was unaware of her marriage yet seemed accepting of it decades later) and Yasmeen seemed to offer little/no resistance to their marriages. Adel Abadeer’s (2015) analysis on collectivist versus individualistic societies is pertinent here; he suggests that among collectivist groups – which it can be said Syrians fall within – an individual would align their needs to the situation and only exercise ‘secondary control’ over decisions (p. 87). In these examples, ‘primary control’ was exercised by community leaders and family members, and the girls adjusted their own plans and needs to fit the situation they found themselves in. This may mean, as Sarah Tobin (2016) argues, that in the case of early marriages among Syrian girls, coercion may be less of a feature (p. 9); early marriages may be viewed as part of ‘social tradition’, in contrast to humanitarian depictions (Chatty, 2017b, p. 28).

As well as early marriage, cousin marriage, like that between Yasmeen and Ibrahim, is not uncommon in Syria. It demonstrates a means of strengthening family ties. When Eman had suitors, her future husband (who was her cousin, who lived next door) went to her mother to say that he wanted to marry her. The reason he did this was that her mother (his aunt) ‘raised’ him. Leena was engaged at 16 to her cousin, however unlike

Eman, who grew up alongside her future husband in their village, Leena's husband worked overseas and she didn't know him.

In contrast to these examples where it was generally families who arranged marriages, one woman, Hadiya, talked about how she met her husband on a bus; he held her luggage. He found out that she regularly took this bus by making inquiries at the bus office and manoeuvred his way to be able to sit next to her each time she took the bus. She explained that in her whole family, and even in the village she lived in, people married for love. Hadiya felt that in the countryside it was easier to marry for love, but that people in the city did not have the approval of their families and couldn't marry for love.

Love featured in other marriages too. During a joint interview with Jamal and his wife, Yara, the atmosphere changed when I started to ask questions about their marriage. Jamal and Yara started smiling and laughing, along with their daughter and a visitor who also happened to be there. Almost every sentence was then followed with laughter and giggling. Yara said, 'It was love, sister!' when I asked how their marriage came about. She laughed saying, 'I still love him and die for him' and then wanted me to ask if he still loved her, but he voluntarily said, with a big smile on his face, 'I love her, yes'. He and his cousin got married on the same day – it was a big wedding which sounded more elaborate than some of the other Syrian weddings described to me. She said, 'He gave me a piece of chocolate to eat during the wedding... He put it in my mouth' and everyone erupted in laughter. She added, 'This is normal, there's nothing wrong with it'.

Resistance

Marriage for love may sometimes be contested. Fuad, who is under the age of 20, met a Syrian girl in Jordan two years ago. His family do not support them getting engaged because she hasn't finished her studies; she is currently in the 10th grade. Her family, although they are quite poor, want someone much richer than Fuad for their daughter. Fuad's mother is on his side, but his father has resisted their relationship. One tense argument with his father, mother and aunt resulted in his father slapping him, and Fuad running away to another aunt's house. Fuad was angry: 'I swore on the Quran that I will marry against their wish'. He added:

I only feel I want to challenge them. Some days I thought of going back to Syria. Because I'm so tired of the subject... I will go to Zaatari then call them and tell them, 'I'm leaving! Do you want anything?' Then they will let me not just marry her, but let me marry two!

During my last interview with Fuad, he had just had another fight with his aunt, who said she would rather send him back to Syria – to a war zone – rather than have the two marry. For Fuad, getting his way is about waiting – wearing his family down and letting enough time pass for the girl he loves to finish school.

In other cases, resistance can take more violent forms. One participant talked about the four male suitors she had before getting married. There was one person whom she loved among these suitors, but her brother threatened to shoot him with a gun, so she had to let him go. She explained this decision: 'Can you accept your love to be shot?' Later, this man whom she loved brought a gun and wanted to shoot the person she eventually married.

Resistance can be caused by other reasons too. Ibrahim and Yasmeen initially faced resistance to their marriage because theirs was the first marriage 'within the family' (between cousins) and apparently other relatives then decided they wanted Ibrahim as a spouse for their daughters. This engagement resulted in both of them receiving threats:

Ibrahim: Even the day of my engagement, I was threatened to be killed!... They threatened me on phone more than once, and called her family to threaten her, too. But unfortunately, I knew who was it. They were from my family. Because I didn't take from them... They wanted me to take their daughter. Even another woman told my wife, 'You took the person who I love!'

Yasmeen: He's the one who took me, I didn't take him!

The challenge was that Yasmeen was the youngest of all the cousins; others were older and were, at least in the eyes of their parents, more ready to be married. Ibrahim was given a gun by one uncle and told to shoot anyone who came to hurt him. Ibrahim was able to defuse the situation once he knew who was making the threats. In this example, the threats of violence around their marriage stemmed not from the shame of choosing

the wrong spouse, rather related to competition between women for this man. Cousin marriages had not occurred in the family yet. Yasmeeen joked, 'He was contagious, after that the whole family!'

For others, resistance may not involve violence, and it may even be possible to appropriate family resistance to get what you want. Zubeida met her future husband as a teenager, and was directly pursued by him: 'Wherever I was going he followed me... I refused, refused him. But after that... [laughing and clapping her hands] the hook was caught!' Her father felt she was too young to get engaged and also was not happy that her prospective husband was a 'stranger' rather than a family member. Her prospective husband sent love letters to her and for two or three years; this continued until her father finally relented. Zubeida, interestingly, used this resistance from her family to get her future husband to do what she wanted, even after they were engaged: '[W]hen he [her father] agreed, all he [husband] wanted to do was to please me. Whatever I wanted... And what did I do? I took advantage of that opportunity too!' She chose the furniture for their apartment, and because she didn't want to live with her mother-in-law, persuaded her fiancé that they should live separately. Although she was not allowed to see her fiancé alone, Zubeida worked around this, using her fiancé's love for her to make him agree to secret meetings.

Her future husband had strategies of his own. Before she was engaged, Zubeida had many suitors, but her future husband decided to deter them by pretending to be advocating for the interests of Zubeida's mother:

He ran after the suitors who asked for my hand and told them not to marry me and that my mother had sent him to tell the suitors her maternal cousin wants her. He didn't let them! When my suitors came, he would be on full watch mode... 'Her father wants her to get married but she [her mother] doesn't want you to come close to her!'

I was surprised that invoking her mother was enough to stop suitors, but Zubeida explained: 'If the mother doesn't accept this person then it is impossible for something to happen'. Her future husband knew that the mother's role managing her daughter's future marriage was well-accepted enough to use it to get rid of his competitors. His actions

implied that the mother was the one with the actual power, having already chosen this pretend 'maternal cousin' for Zubeida. Zubeida seemed to attribute her mother's influence to personality: 'Even, till now, most of the mothers with an overly strong personality, if she doesn't agree to something then it's impossible for it to happen'. I explore the role of mothers-in-law later in this chapter, but this statement also shows how someone with a 'strong' personality (a term women used sometimes to describe the behaviour of other women) may be perceived as powerful.

From this example, the role of the mother in the marriage decision-making process for her child, emerges. This idea is also evident in the literature. Salamandra (2006), in her research on Syrians in Damascus, talked about women competitively displaying themselves to other women (p. 155). This, she suggests, is part of the marriage selection process, but also may continue after marriage (p. 156). One participant, who experienced this behaviour as a single woman in Homs before the war, found it uncomfortable and resisted the pressure to 'display' herself:

Everyone told me, 'Go to dance, you are young and have a nice outfit and you don't dance?' Some said, 'No one will engage if you don't dance'. It's an ignorant mentality. Some girls even danced but didn't take the attention of the mothers... The dancing is for the mothers. 'She moves a lot, she seems good'.

Another woman, Amira, had the same opinion: '...when [a] mother comes and sees you in the street and admires you [laughing], like as if I am sitting under her mood... I'm against this way'. Salamandra's idea of 'display' here emphasises the role of mothers in choosing partners, even if by dubious methods such as dancing skills. These women however resisted the idea that they were to be put on display for mothers.

Views on marriage

The ways in which Syrian women and men view marriage further illustrates the diversity in 'Syrian culture'. Some of the more thought-provoking discussions around marriage were with men and women who were not married. Fuad, for example, first loved a girl when he was in Syria, as a teenager. He sent her love letters which she apparently ripped

up and threw away. When he finally spoke to her, having only admired her from a distance, she told him 'I'm not going to love anyone now', explaining that she wanted to finish secondary school first, then she would 'start thinking of these things'.

Similarly, Amira said her priority is her education. Now 21 and unmarried, she is seen by her extended family as a 'spinster'. They are shocked that she has refused prospective suitors, but Amira is resolute: 'If everybody does it, I don't have to follow them'. After many barriers to accessing education in Jordan, she was finally able to begin undergraduate studies. She sees marriage as something that stops women from being able to use their skills: '[T]hey leave their study when they reach university, or after they finish university they get married and they sit at home. I consider this to be wrong'. Amira's parents are very supportive of her decision to study; her father himself is a professor and his emphasis on education has influenced her. She recalls an incident a few years ago where her father's Syrian friend came to discuss marrying his son to Amira's younger sister. This man argued that it is difficult for Syrians in Jordan to continue education – not to mention expensive – so marriage is the best option for their children. Her father however refused this idea and told this man about the importance of education for girls.

These two examples challenge the idea that marriage is the sole aspiration of girls or their families. They illustrate how women themselves decide that now is not the time for marriage. The idea that people marry for economic reasons may sometimes not apply, as evident through the decisions made by Khadija when she became a widow. Although she struggled financially, Khadija refused to remarry. When approached by her suitors, her family saw this as her decision, 'It's her choice to make, it's not our business'. Her husband's family also expected her to marry again, but she told them, 'No, after my husband, no! He raised me on his hand, and he spoiled me, no'. She had also agreed with her husband not to marry again and felt that a second marriage could result in her not seeing her children again – if the new husband forbade this. This is an example of how even when facing economic pressure or the need for male protection, a woman may not necessarily be driven to marry – a different narrative to how humanitarian agencies position marriage (Save the Children, 2014, p. 1; UNICEF, 2014, p. 10; Higher Population Council - Jordan, 2017, p. 8). Decisions are much more complex, like in this case.

Sometimes, a marriage may restrict options, in this case limiting Khadija's ability to care for her children. It would mean breaking a promise to her husband whom she loved.

For others, the bad experiences of married friends were a strong reason to think carefully before marrying. Bana, for example, said that she has a friend whose husband doesn't treat her well. This husband also has a problem which means they cannot have children. She explained that this friend is 'between two fires' – a disappointing marriage versus divorce and the 'failure story' this will mean for the family. This example made her rethink her views on love: '[H]ow did he love her? He saw her when she was coming from school, and he was tailing after her until he engaged her. Love is not everything'. She added: 'Some people, there are people in my age, that are married and their life is depressed. Their life, *khalaş* [enough/done/finished], that's it... Live your life. Life is beautiful... Things, there are things to make you happy, that will make you richer than having a hundred men'.

Bana's views on love and marriage were particularly striking for their honesty yet cynicism. She said that when she marries, she will set boundaries: 'From the beginning, I [will] tell him, "I have my own privacy, I have my own friends. I can't forbid, abandon my friends, they have to come to visit me, I go out with them"'. She described a husband as 'dough': 'It's like whatever you make from him, you make from him. If you raised him bad, if you taught him correctly...' For her, this was about training the husband so that he knew his place from the outset: '[W]hat you let him used to, get used to, he will get used to'.

Bana made a new friend (who is also single) through the photography workshop, and the two of them asked to be interviewed together. Over lunch, they discussed how a wife should behave towards her husband. While Bana did emphasise some of these views above, she also seemed to contradict herself in what she said to her friend, while describing what she wanted from a husband: 'To be strong, to have a word, to be strong, not to have a weak personality. His word should not be down on the ground. If he says, "Don't go out", I won't go out'. This apparent contradiction – first saying she would determine her own boundaries, then saying she wanted a husband who would be firm - may have been because she was uncertain of her friend's views on the topic and didn't want to come across as too extreme in her opinions. It may also be that she wants a little

bit of both: the ability to set her own rules, but also a man who aligns with more 'traditional' expectations of how a husband should behave.

Married people also shared their views on what they thought about marriage before they got married. For Leena, who married at age 17, marriage was a faraway concept: 'A marriage to me meant a house, children and responsibilities'. For Eman, there was a mismatch between what she imagined marriage would be or what she saw on TV, and what it actually is: '[R]eality is different... responsibility to the husband, responsibility to the in-laws. This you should say and this you shouldn't say, this you have to do and this you don't do...'

For others, like Zubeida, it was important to establish her position in the relationship during the engagement period: 'I was like this – "If you like who I am, then *ahlan wa sahlan* [welcome], if you don't like this, then goodbye to you!"' Her view was similar to Bana's - that it was necessary to be clear about what she wanted from the beginning. Zubeida also shared advice for dealing with an angry husband – advice she had shared with her daughters and daughter-in-law:

Let him be and you stay quiet... *Ya'nī*, she shouldn't say anything at all to her husband and then make sure that everything that concerns him, like if he needs a trouser or... She should make sure his trouser is ironed and neat, so, not to give him any excuse...

Violence and power within marriage

The idea of managing a husband's emotions, being careful not to anger him, and ensuring his needs are met, places an often-heavy burden on women. Before coming to Jordan, Aya was promised in marriage to someone else, however fell in love with a Syrian man in Jordan and ended up marrying him in Jordan. In her research among Palestinian refugees, Stéphanie Abdallah (2009) suggests that exile changes people's expectations: 'Their ideas about life and marriage are more pragmatic. Marriage for love is seen as utopian and not expected' (p. 58). In this example, it perhaps would have been 'pragmatic' to abandon the new relationship in favour of the person she had already been promised to, but Aya pursued love instead. She had only been in Jordan for a short time – different to the

refugees Abdallah worked with - but she chose the person she loved instead of the less complicated option.

She said, 'I loved him and so I took him! [laughing] After love then the bear comes out!' This comment about the bear is an idiom – love (*ḥubb*) and bear (*dubb*) have a similar sound. Over multiple interviews, Aya described how her life completely changed after marriage. They face significant financial pressure, living on potatoes, tomatoes and cucumbers because it is difficult for her husband to find work, and when he finds it, he only earns 6 JD per day. She often doesn't have enough money to buy nappies and milk formula for their baby. Aya is not allowed to go out unless her husband gives his permission - even to visit her mother, who lives a short walking distance away, though sometimes she sneaks out. Her husband also finds other ways of regulating her behaviour, including confiscating her phone and threatening to remove WhatsApp – which makes it difficult for her to maintain social connections. She has also experienced violence from her husband on multiple occasions, including in front of his parents, which was particularly humiliating for her. Aya however seemed to justify this behaviour, reiterating the idea echoed by many women, that men are under pressure in Jordan and should not be bothered: 'If someone can't let it out on his wife, who is there for him to let it out on?' Through tears, as she recounted the many challenges she faces, Aya laughed, saying, 'But it's *naṣīb*. Every human being takes their *naṣīb* in this world. *Hamdu li'llāh* [praise be to God/thank God] for everything'.

The concept of *naṣīb* refers to fate or destiny – the idea that whatever happens has been 'written' by God, therefore cannot be changed. *Naṣīb*, although originally in the Quran, is also cultural. For Aya, *naṣīb* keeps her in her marriage - although she has occasionally fled to her mother's house, when the violence was particularly bad. While it is difficult to know whether the idea of *naṣīb* is what is actually stopping Aya from leaving her husband, or whether there are other factors including the difficulties it may create for her family, the shame of divorcing, or the fact that her baby will not have a father, the fact that *naṣīb* is being invoked warrants taking it seriously. As a concept, *naṣīb* contrasts directly with how humanitarian agencies talk about 'empowering women' – which centres on enabling women to have more power and control over their lives (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015a, p. 324). Humanitarian agencies focus on the idea of human agency,

but *naṣīb* implies that human beings do not have free will because their destiny has already been written. In this case, people's religious/cultural beliefs may directly contradict the ideals being promoted by humanitarian agencies, yet based on my experience working in countries like Jordan and Nigeria - where this idea of fate can be a powerful determinant of behaviour - this barrier is not directly tackled by humanitarian agencies.

Eman's marriage is also difficult. Her marriage also initially started off with love. This was a cousin marriage where Eman's mother essentially raised her cousin. Eman also found that her life changed after marriage: 'There is no freedom anymore. *Ya'nī*, a girl's life is different from a woman's life'. In Jordan, her husband's health has worsened, which means he cannot always work. Her husband has diabetes and also another disease that causes him to have seizures. Eman referred to him being violent towards her - including beating her with a belt when she returned home one day and found him beating their son with this belt. The neighbours had to intervene in this situation. Eman explained that the reason for him acting like this was the diabetes; she said that he doesn't mean it but he can't control himself because of the disease. In this case, her husband's disease functioned almost as a way of controlling Eman's ongoing compliance, making her justify how she was treated.

Control also take other forms, for example, through the threat of 'verbal divorce', or 'triple *talāq*' that is sometimes practiced as part of Islam. Although not seen as valid in some countries, verbal divorce - saying '*talāq*' to your wife three times - is agreed by some legal scholars to be a legitimate way of divorcing someone (Ahmad, 2009). Dina's husband regularly mentioned divorce in Syria: 'He may have thrown 60 divorces on me!' These 'oaths' were usually a result of Dina's sisters-in-law (his sisters) making complaints about Dina. Dina went so far as to ask a sheikh in Syria about this; he said that these verbal divorces didn't count - apparently because they were not documented. He did not verbally divorce her in Jordan; she attributes this to the fact that they lived together in one house in Syria, but in Jordan, his family live far away. In this case, displacement was accompanied by family members living in different locations, which resulted in positive changes in Dina's marriage as the influence of her husband's family on him decreased.

These difficult relationships between husbands and wives demonstrate what Aitemad Muhanna (2013) found in her research in Gaza – that love and control ‘may be enacted in parallel’ (p. 17). This is perhaps what causes women to remain in these challenging marriages.

GOING BEYOND THE HUSBAND-WIFE RELATIONSHIP

Based on my research findings, I contend that the focus on the husband-wife relationship within existing literature has resulted in limiting the analysis of gender dynamics to the marital relationship, instead of recognising that power dynamics may be gendered within multiple relationships inside a family. This section focuses on intra-familial dynamics, including the extended family, recognising how extended family dynamics may not always be positive, but can involve ‘conflict and control’ (Abu Nahleh, 2006, p. 116). At times extended family obligations may supersede marriage bonds (Meriwether, 1999, p. 111). This section explores the relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, as well as the associated relationship between sons and mothers, and the relationship between brothers and sisters. Where necessary, I have drawn connections across these relationships to illuminate the complexity of these dynamics.

Mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships: overview

It is not unusual for the relationship between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law to be viewed as negative, whether in the ‘West’ or the Middle East, such that it has become an almost tired trope. While some work has been done to theorise power dynamics within this relationship in Middle Eastern families (Kandiyoti, 1988; Inhorn, 1996; Rabo, 2008; Williamson and Nimri, 2009; Rabho, 2015), I suggest that this analysis could better-situate the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship within the context of other shifting power dynamics, including the relationship between the mother and son, between a son and father, and between a brother and sister. Further, in my experience and review of humanitarian reports, this dynamic has not been sufficiently analysed

within humanitarian/development circles, which has implications for how power at the familial level is understood and therefore how interventions are designed.

Laila Rabho's (2015) work on the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law dynamic among Palestinian women emphasises the central role of the son in the power plays between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law; both women are trying to 'benefit' from the relationship they have with him (p. 458). She writes:

Eager to continue being the most important woman in her son's life, the mother-in-law 'declares war' on the woman who assumes her position. It is not just the desire to regain the son's love and attention, but to use the son as a tool to gain control of the home... (p. 464).

Deniz Kandiyoti's (1988) work on this dynamic is explained through the concept of the much-cited 'patriarchal bargain' – where women use strategies to resist and gain power within a patriarchal system (1988, p. 275). Kandiyoti revisited her thinking on the 'patriarchal bargain' ten years later to suggest that power and resistance are more complex concepts than her work originally implied. Her critique of her original work emphasised that women do not always behave in ways that are so easily predictable or always according to gender ideologies (1998, p. 139). This point is well taken, however the concept of a 'patriarchal bargain' remains important in articulating the strategies – conscious or otherwise - women may use to gain power amidst even rapidly-changing power hierarchies. Kandiyoti has in recent years shifted from the notion of patriarchy towards the idea of 'masculinist restoration', where she suggests that patriarchy is less powerful a force and requires the structure of the state to be sustained (Kandiyoti, 2013). However, this idea that patriarchy has become weakened is contested and may not be applicable to every context.

Like Rabho, Kandiyoti's work positions the son as critical to this power struggle: 'Since sons are a woman's most critical resource, ensuring their life-long loyalty is an enduring preoccupation' (1988, p. 279). Both Rabho and Kandiyoti emphasise the cyclical nature of these power dynamics: the mother-in-law is seeking to control her daughter-in-law like she herself was controlled by her own mother-in-law. Her son's marriage becomes

an opportunity - a chance to reclaim power that was lost. The seeming contradiction in perpetuating behaviour that was experienced as negative appears irrelevant in the 'anticipation' (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 279) of wielding power against another. In the Syria context, Rabo (2008) documents cases where the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law dynamic is characterised with tension. This includes a mother-in-law in a village of Raqqa mobilising her daughter-in-law for joint family work (p. 148). In a couple of cases, physical proximity to the daughter-in-law contributed to tensions in this relationship and enabled the mother-in-law to exert control (p. 139; p. 148).

My research findings demonstrate the complex power dynamics underlying interactions between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law. During interviews, several women joked and vented about their experiences with mothers-in-law. Roula responded to a question about her life before the war with this phrase about her mother-in-law: 'She was the one who upset all my life!' She shared about the often-terrible ways in which her mother-in-law treated her, including making Roula leave the home where they all lived together only days before she delivered her baby, while Roula's husband (her son) happened to be away. After having the baby, her husband returned and they went back to her mother-in-law and father-in-law's home, but were thrown out again, apparently for no reason, less than 24 hours after she gave birth.

Roula gave multiple examples that illustrated her mother-in-law's negative treatment of her, which, like in Rabho's research, includes emotional, verbal and physical violence. She joked, 'I could talk to you for two months and not finish all the stories I have!' Once, she said, her mother-in-law saw her fresh washing hanging on the line to dry, and threw all these clothes onto the dirt. When Roula's husband died, her mother-in-law hid the gold that was supposed to be given to Roula and taunted her about the fact that she was now a widow, like herself. She treated all her daughters-in-law similarly, and her behaviour also extended to others, including her own son, whom she once physically injured. When her husband died, her grandchildren from another son came to pay their respects to her, and she responded by saying, 'Inshallah [if God wills it] like you condole me with your grandfather, I condole you with your father!' - a strange comment that was interpreted by the family as wishing the death of her own, still-alive son.

Roula's mother-in-law and sister-in-law found a second wife for Roula's husband. Roula says that her husband didn't know about this plan, which she said was formed 'to spite me'. Her daughter, who was also a research participant (Aya), added that her grandmother and aunt were the ones who put the idea into her father's head. Roula explained the second marriage: 'They were abnormally jealous of me because... my husband and I always loved each other and always always we walk together. You'd find us always like newlyweds'. Their love was a 'social threat' to the family (Abdallah, 2009, p. 59). This supports Kandiyoti's (1988) argument: 'Older women have a vested interest in the suppression of romantic love between youngsters to keep the conjugal bond secondary and to claim sons' primary allegiance' (p. 279). This second marriage eventually ended in divorce.

This comment from Roula's daughter, Aya, who was also present for the interviews, helped to defuse some of the anger that was being released as Roula recounted story after story:

Do you know if it was a whole book she wouldn't be able to finish telling you all the stories of my mean grandmother. I am asking you for something, I am asking you that when you publish it, publish it with her full name and make it public! [All women laughing] This is my request to you! Do you know? You will get so many likes on it because of how mean she is!

It can be cathartic to share about being victimised and bullied. For Roula (and Aya, who shared her mother's outrage and also knew these stories), it seemed that speaking about these events was important. Surprisingly, the behaviour of Roula's mother-in-law was not hidden or kept private within the family, like I would have expected. Another participant, in another interview, referred to a Syrian idiom, which, loosely translated means that it is better to have ten sons-in-law rather than one daughter-in-law because the daughter-in-law will not keep the secrets of the house. This idiom emphasises that secrets be kept within the family. In this case, however, the 'entire neighbourhood' were 'fed up' with Roula's mother-in-law and were perplexed about her behaviour. However, despite people knowing, one reason Roula gave for her not pushing back against her mother-in-law was the idea of *sutra* – keeping the shame and scandal away. Roula said,

'Ya'nī, if I wanted to respond to her I'm going to expose myself in the neighbourhood, you know?' Though outwardly people knew what was happening, they also affirmed her inaction: '[A]ll the neighbours, they praise me for not answering back at her'. In this case, social convention – the relational ties between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law – dictated that Roula accept this treatment.

Is the story of Roula's mother-in-law an extreme, isolated example – a case of the 'patriarchal bargain' run amok? Hearing that her mother-in-law also treated other family members negatively seems to indicate this. However, the fact that the wider neighbourhood knew about her behaviour and yet praised Roula for not resisting her mother-in-law, indicates that whether or not Roula's mother-in-law was also troubled with a particularly abusive personality, the idea of 'relationality' and the ties of obligation between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, led to her behaviour being recognised but not actively challenged.

Roula was not alone in her description of extreme behaviour carried out by a mother-in-law. Another woman, Dina, shared about the difficulties with her mother-in-law (who is actually her aunt) and sister-in-law (her cousin), who she didn't know before the marriage was arranged, because she lived in Damascus and they lived in Homs. This example is important because it is a case of cousin marriage – a type of marriage which another participant, Zubeida (herself a mother-in-law) described as creating complications for the mother-in-law. Although it would appear that marrying a cousin reduces potential relational problems, Zubeida said that marrying her son to her niece created friction between herself and her sister. She now felt it would have been better to marry her son to a stranger, so that her new daughter-in-law would comply with what she wanted instead of her having to compete with her sister. This contextualises the case of Dina: the way Dina was treated may also be an extension of the relationship between Dina's mother and Dina's now mother-in-law (the sisters). Secondly, Dina's case is unique because her father-in-law was no longer alive, leaving Dina's mother-in-law with perhaps unfettered power, which I suggest that she wielded both herself as well as through her daughters. These two factors situate the experiences of Dina, and perhaps explain the extreme challenges she faced.

In Syria, Dina and her husband lived with his family, in a room within the same house. Her husband was the eldest child and she was the first daughter-in-law. After only three days living there, Dina was thrown out by his family, when she intervened in a quarrel between her husband's two sisters. This was temporary however; Dina returned to the house, but the fact that this occurred demonstrates the power dynamics Dina had to navigate. Like Roula's experience, the issue of housing was one where the mother-in-law (and sisters-in-law) exercised significant power. Unlike the case of Roula, where she and her husband were living in the house owned by her husband's parents, Dina's husband owned a share in the family house, and also paid for other expenses of his mother and sisters, including food and drinks. Dina attributes the difficult time she had with his family to this: 'I took their brother - the one who was spending money on them'. Providing for his family didn't stop when he married, but perhaps his family felt that his marital status would limit their financial benefits. Later, without asking permission, Dina's sisters-in-law moved into the apartment that Dina's husband had purchased for the two of them, which was just above the mother-in-law's house. Dina said, '[M]y mother-in-law didn't let me move upstairs and live in it, she kept me in the room in her house' – perhaps to keep an eye on her. His sisters later continued to live there when they each married. Dina was shocked at her husband's passivity in the face of this situation: '[M]y husband didn't open his mouth! They told my husband to move out and rent!' This was because he didn't want to upset his mother. A year before coming to Jordan, they were also asked to leave the room they were staying in because his other brother was getting married: 'They knocked on our door and told us, "You rent and leave"'. In both the examples of Roula and Dina, housing was a tool used by mothers-in-law to control their daughters-in-law and to maintain influence over their sons – something which Marcia Inhorn also found (1996, p. 153).

Dina faced challenges when she had her first child, and experienced her in-laws taking control of her baby, including feeding him and changing his nappies:

It's not because they love him, but because they want to harm me... I want to see him, but I could only see him with them. 'Oh, this person took him and left', they would say... And then they'd say: 'She'd gone to my grandmother', 'She went out to buy something', 'She went to the market' ... This is a baby, why take him?

Dina and I discussed how their behaviour fitted with the concept of *kayd* - a term used in the Quran to refer to the craftiness of women, who use sneaky methods to get what they want. Dina felt they also behave this way because 'they don't want me'. On one occasion, while her son was a baby, Dina came to take her baby from her mother-in-law and sister-in-law while they were eating, but her baby didn't want to leave; he was more interested in the food being eaten. This resulted in a violent altercation:

[T]hey started screaming at me, 'Leave him, what do you want with him!' She [the mother-in-law] pulled me from my hair and from my head scarf and threw me on the floor. And there was a shoe on the floor, she picked it up and started hitting me with it... I rang my husband but he pretended not to hear..'

In the face of her husband's passivity, Dina took matters into her own hands with her second child, telling them, 'Enough, you have my first one, this one will stay with me'. She would make excuses whenever they took him: 'I would run to them and say, "Oh, no! He needs cleaning. Let me change him"'. She would give him two or three baths a day simply as an excuse to have time with him. She laughed, cheekily adding, 'Praised be Allah, as soon as they carried him he vomited on them'. These acts of resistance - physically removing her baby from them - helped Dina reclaim a little power. She drew on her expected role as mother, using the excuse of needing to carry out caregiving tasks (which she as a woman was expected to do), in order to prevent her in-laws from limiting access to her baby. Like Roula, who seemed to find relief in discussing the cruel machinations of her mother-in-law, Dina was very animated in discussing her mother-in-law. A few times, she used a dancing movement to imitate her - a small act of defiance through mocking someone who had made her life difficult.

Women's use of power

It is important to note that these accounts from Roula and Dina are quite extreme. Power within mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships can take various forms. For example, Zubeida positioned herself as a source of wisdom for her daughter-in-law, giving her advice on how to interact with her son. Her daughter-in-law, who lives with Zubeida in Jordan, was in the room when Zubeida explained these tips, nodding as

Zubeida spoke at length and occasionally interjecting to agree - in-between being sent off to run errands for Zubeida. During one of these advice-giving moments, Zubeida said:

'If you want to win over your husband, if the husband is known to have a temper from before, then don't talk back at him!'... This is what I tell my daughter-in-law and I tell my daughters. 'Don't have a long tongue! Don't talk back!' But this generation does. If he starts a swear word, she finishes it! In the old days do you think anyone dared to do that? No, you wouldn't dare...

In the example above, Zubeida is directly attempting to influence her son's marriage, encouraging her daughter-in-law (and her own daughters) to treat her son (and her sons-in-law) well. This articulation of power, combined with Zubeida's somewhat-authoritarian manner with her daughter-in-law - who was present during a few visits - suggests that the 'patriarchal bargain' is alive and well. Zubeida's own authority is legitimised through the process of giving advice that focuses on women behaving in more submissive ways. This advice, if taken, keeps the men happy, while she remains the all-knowing older matriarch.

In other cases, the dynamic between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law takes more subtle forms. Leena, for example, married her cousin so already knew her mother-in-law well. She learnt how to cook from her mother-in-law. When she had her first baby, she lived with her in-laws and her mother-in-law helped her (even more than her own mother) in caring for the baby. Despite this positive relationship, Leena's mother-in-law still exercised power over how Leena raised her son. She would argue with Leena when Leena physically disciplined her child, such that Leena would secretly punish him to avoid her mother-in-law's ire: 'I used to hit him behind her back, not in front of her'.

Hadiya initially faced challenges with her in-laws – especially when she wanted to move out of their home into their own accommodation - but said things improved over time. For another woman, Lara, who lived with her husband's parents in the first year of marriage, interference with chores was a problem, but her strategy was to do what she could to avoid problems with her mother-in-law. Although most reflections on relationships with mothers-in-law were less dramatic or detailed than Roula's or Dina's,

even the casual jokes about mothers-in-law shed light on this dynamic. On two occasions, I was served coffee by women (one from Damascus and the other from Dar'a) who made jokes about the coffee saucer (the plate under the coffee cup) being a 'mother-in-law'. Eman said, 'We don't serve the mother-in-law!' and 'Where is the mother in law? Don't you want her?', while laughingly explaining the way the saucer was interchangeable for the mother-in-law. Mais said that when with her in-laws, if she picked up a cup of coffee without also taking the saucer, it would send a message to everyone that she didn't like or want her mother-in-law. These two examples appear to be specific to certain geographical areas, however. Other Syrians I have spoken to had not heard of 'mother-in-law' being used to describe a saucer. This example illustrates how humour can be a way that some women talk about this dynamic; making jokes or asking joking questions may help to voice the challenges within this dynamic.

For many women who discussed relationships with mothers-in-law, a key factor appeared to be living in the same building, or even nearby, to in-laws. Amira reflected on her Syrian friend, who married a Syrian man after arriving in Jordan. The in-laws live in the same building, which has created some challenges for her friend: 'If her mother-in-law sees her going outside the home, [she] will ask her, "Where are you going, where are you going? You must be at home, you just be doing your house, you must be caring for your husband and your daughter". So she is facing that'.

Dina and two other research participants, Eman and Farah, reflected on how living a greater distance away from their mothers-in-law as a result of displacement, has made life a little easier. Dina's mother-in-law and sisters-in-law live in Amman and do not visit her in Zarqa as much. She reflected that living away from her husband's family has improved her relationship with her husband. For Eman, who, like Dina, married her cousin, living in Jordan has offered her more freedom because she is no longer living in her in-laws' house. She explained:

Ya'nī, the parents-in-law have non-negotiable opinions. *Ya'nī*, if they said to their son, 'Divorce her' he would divorce. No problem. Yes, they would say, 'Divorce!', 'Kill!', [this refers to physical abuse such as hitting] 'Don't let her!'. Many things. That's why it's better here!

She also specifically referred to the mother-in-law in talking about how living in Jordan is better: '[I]t's better here. Because so many mothers-in-law ruined the homes of their sons! [Laughing] Especially for girls! So much! [Laughing] So much! The ones that get divorced, the ones that get beaten, the ones whose lives are just ruined!' She gave the example of her older sister, who was married at the age of 13. After one year, when her sister didn't get pregnant, her sister's mother-in-law 'had her divorced' and married her son to another woman. Interestingly, this son later took Eman's sister back as his wife because he loved her. For Eman, living in a separate space to her in-laws has provided new opportunities for socialisation with other women. She also reflected that she felt that when Jordanians married, they did not have to live with their in-laws like was expected in her village in Syria. She felt this meant less interference from the in-laws and greater ability for a married couple to get to know each other better.

For Farah, even leaving Syria was linked to the difficult relationship with her in-laws: 'I left because there was family pressure in the marriage, from my husband's family, pressure'. She added that this was about the relationship between her and her mother-in-law. Before marriage, Farah owned a beauty salon which also hired out wedding dresses and party dresses, but she was not permitted to work after marriage. She said, 'My married life affected my working life!' When she and her husband left Syria, Farah explained the relief she felt – though this may also be linked to them leaving the danger of war behind. When she left, her mother-in-law burnt all her beauty salon supplies – including tools and 17 dresses that Farah would hire out.

Dina, Eman and Farah struggled with interference from mothers-in-law and pressures to behave in certain ways. Each lived with their mothers-in-law in Syria, which may have exacerbated tensions in the relationships – something Rabo (2008) also found in her research in urban Raqqa (p. 139). While changes in this dynamic occurred during displacement, it is not that displacement itself that changed relationships with mothers-in-law. Relief was found in having physical distance between them and their mothers-in-laws – in living separately from mothers-in-law.

Sisters-in-law as proxy and silent husbands

My research also draws attention to the role of sisters-in-law. Dina commented on her sisters-in-law, particularly how they influenced her husband: 'She and her daughters!... Every time they came they would buzz in his ear'. As Rabho (2015, p. 461) found in her research, comments by sisters would centre on the wife's negative qualities, creating rifts between the husband and wife. Dina put it like this: '[H]is sisters would put words in his ear, "Your wife did this, your wife did that", then he would come confront me and I wouldn't know what to say back at him'.

Unlike Roula's husband, who avoided taking sides altogether, Dina's husband turned on his wife – something Rabho found in her research (p. 462). While it was initially Dina's mother-in-law who advised her son to travel by sea to Europe with one of their children, she drew on her daughters to convince her son that this was necessary; they came together and convinced Dina and her husband that he should follow his brother-in-law who was already in Germany. Dina saw this behaviour as strategic – something that her mother-in-law did due to her jealousy of the nice house they initially lived in. I suggest her acts were a response to the decreased power Dina's mother-in-law perceived she had - since her family members now lived in multiple locations across Jordan instead of together like in Syria. When her mother-in-law came to visit Dina when Dina's husband was in Germany, she stood at the doorway of their apartment and taunted her, 'We heard your husband married another wife!' – an act of (untrue) malice.

One incident in Syria clearly illustrates the complexity in how Dina's mother-in-law and sisters-in-law would work together against Dina. This incident began with Dina's husband, who one day was angry that his food was not ready. He asked Dina, 'Why is my food in the pot and not on my plate?' before leaving to talk to his mother. When he returned, he ate the food and then - I suggest due to the conversation with his mother - got angry that Dina had not eaten with him, starting to hit and verbally divorce her. Dina was hit by her husband multiple times and thrown from the bed. She says her mother-in-law heard what was happening from the next room, but did nothing, and later laughed when Dina told her what happened. Her sister-in-law then came into the room - ostensibly to pull Dina and her husband apart, but then joined the husband in hitting Dina. Dina ended up in hospital after this incident, and lost the baby she was pregnant with.

While lying in the hospital bed recovering from this incident, her other sister-in-law came to visit Dina and attacked her: 'She pulled me from my hair and her other hand she wanted to grab me like that and pull me, her finger nails were this long [gesturing] she grabbed me like this and her fingers ended up in my nose and she injured me. I bled a lot *wallah*'.

Dina explained that this sister-in-law had long nails and one nail scraped the inside of Dina's nose, injuring her nasal canal, which resulted in a deviated septum. Dina had to have surgery to repair it but said she still cannot smell out of one side of her nose. Why this second act of violence? My feeling is that the family feared that Dina would complain to the police. Dina herself said this in reflecting on the two incidents: 'I could have put him in jail together with his sisters'. I believe that the family were afraid Dina would respond to the loss of her baby by reporting the violence, so this additional violence while she was still in her hospital bed, was a threat on behalf of the family.

In this power dynamic, it may be that each sister-in-law was an extension of the mother-in-law. While Lamis Abu Nahleh (2006) references the controlling behaviour of a sister-in-law and mother-in-law towards a daughter-in-law (p. 128), she doesn't link the behaviour of the sister-in-law to the mother-in-law. Inhorn's (1996) analysis in Egypt does make this connection, suggesting that a sister-in-law may take the place of the mother-in-law after the mother-in-law had died (p. 172). In the case of Dina, sisters-in-law took on roles of power even when their mothers were still living. The sister-in-law became the mother-in-law's proxy, going into their bedroom while the fight was occurring because the mother-in-law didn't want to get physically involved, and joining in violence against Dina, and then carrying out further violence to make sure Dina didn't talk. The sisters-in-law reinforced what their mother wanted, drawing on relationships they had established with their brother, to influence him. Dina herself reflected on how her mother-in-law's behaviour spread to the sisters-in-law: 'I am convinced now that my mother-in-law is like a tooth decay! She gathers her daughters and brings them here to us!'

A less extreme example of the combined role of a mother-in-law and sister-in-law emerges from the life story of Khadija, who lived with her in-laws for 10 years when she

first got married at age 12, and then also for a short time after her husband died. She described her initial relationship with her in-laws in transactional terms: ‘They paid money for me, they think they can buy me like a sheep [chuckling]. “We paid money for her, let her come and serve us”’. This may link to the idea that a ‘return on investment’ for the dowry is justified – which emerged from research in Jordan (Williamson and Nimri, 2009, p. 43). Khadija’s in-laws had a family of eight girls but like in Rabho’s (2015) research, as the daughter-in-law, the bulk of the work fell to her while the other women and girls were now able to relax (p. 461). Her sisters-in-law were surprised at the dynamic between Khadija and her husband, especially at the fact that Khadija’s husband gave her the freedom to visit her parents and siblings. Khadija said they would say, ‘He is like a ring in your finger. What did you do to him? What did you do to him?’ They appeared to expect more authoritative decision-making from their brother. Khadija’s relationship with her sisters-in-law and parents-in-law worsened after her husband died. According to Khadija, her parents-in-law were worried that Khadija would remarry and bring another man into the home of their deceased son. One of her sisters-in-law (Khadija’s husband’s brother’s wife) was also worried that her husband would take Khadija as a second wife – an assumption that caused many problems. Khadija’s behaviour was therefore monitored by family members. She was accused of having men visiting her – a way to discredit her. She said that her in-laws told her, ‘You are done with your duty now and the children are ours... you can go ahead, and your servant years are ended, and the house is our son's house’. They started to hit her children, so she left and stayed at the original house she and her husband had lived in. They took half the money that her husband had left. It was only years later that this relationship became better, when the sister-in-law realised Khadija would not be taken as second wife of her husband. Khadija was shocked when she heard about this assumption: ‘I told her, “Are you crazy, to marry your husband? I raised your husband on my hands!”’ This woman’s husband was 15 years younger than Khadija and she helped to ‘raise’ him. Although apologies were made to Khadija years later, the power dynamics around being a young widow and an outsider, meant that she experienced years of challenging relationships with her in-laws.

This analysis of how women use power begs the question: where are the husbands in all of this? In Rabho’s (2015) research, the idea emerged of a son taking the side of his mother (p. 462), while women blamed their husbands for being weak in not standing up

to their mothers (p. 465). In the first case of Roula, her husband tended to avoid siding with anyone. Roula said:

Do you know what my husband would say to her? Two words! 'May Allah show you the right path, mother! Allah guide you!' *Wallah* apart from that he wouldn't say anything wrong to her, not shout at her, nothing! She would pray bad things for him and he would say, 'Allah guide you mother!'

Roula did not directly call her husband weak, but seemed to refer to his gentle personality in explaining his mild response to his mother: 'My husband, *haram*, [here, this means 'poor/helpless'] is a very quiet man and doesn't upset anyone... And he respects his mother... *Ya'nī*, if it was any of her other sons, maybe they would kill her if she did that to them'. Roula referred to her father-in-law, who also was subjected to Roula's mother-in-law's controlling behaviour, as 'weak': 'If she said the yogurt is black then he would repeat after her. If she said white, then it was white!'

Like Roula, Dina made excuses for her husband's behaviour, saying, '[H]e wants to please his mother so she doesn't resent him'. She said, '[H]e was under a lot of pressure because he is the oldest one, he is the one who paid the money for everyone's expenses'. Perhaps he saw the behaviour of his mother and sisters as an unavoidable burden he had to bear as the oldest. Dina herself felt she had no options, despite the acts of resistance she engaged in at times: 'What can I do? This is my *naṣīb*'. Dina said: 'I don't blame him for anything that happened in Syria, because he has a kind heart... even here I felt that he was the one most unfairly treated, it's sinful...'

I was surprised to hear her saying this, given the violence and multiple verbal divorces from her husband, but perhaps she ties his negative behaviour to his mother. Possibly, positioning her husband as a victim of this mother-in-law is how Dina makes sense of her current situation, while her husband and son are in Germany and their reunification attempt has been rejected. Being able to hold on to the idea of her husband as a kind man who was simply manipulated by his mother, may make the day-to-day challenges of single parenting her remaining children while trying to navigate complex bureaucratic processes a little easier.

Dina directly challenged the idea that she would behave in the same way to her future daughter-in-law:

[M]aybe this is how mothers-in-law are! But when my son gets married in the future, I can't imagine myself running behind my daughter-in-law telling her, 'Your husband married another wife!' or tell them to go travel away and send my son away, to travel somewhere and leave his children behind! *Haram* [here, this means 'forbidden']! Isn't that *haram*?

Without being too cynical, it is perhaps easy for Dina to say this now, but perhaps with the passage of time, it will be harder for her to refuse the 'patriarchal bargain' when she becomes a mother-in-law. Time may harden the resentment she feels towards her mother-in-law and may cause her to feel a need to reclaim some power. Or, perhaps the opposite will be true and the cyclical nature of the patriarchal bargain will be broken through the quite extreme experiences Dina had; it may drive her to behave differently.

The examples discussed in this section, drawn from the accounts from several Syrian women, highlight the importance of recognising the different forms gendered relationships can take, beyond the typically-analysed husband and wife relationship. Importantly, as Kandiyoti pointed out in 1998, and illustrated by the examples of positive relationships with mothers-in-law, we should avoid squeezing analysis into 'frameworks' (p. 144), rather efforts should be made to carefully contextualise these complicated struggles over power. The power held by the husband in Rabho's research and indeed mine, appears to be less than the mother-in-law's, however there may be reasons for this. In the case of Roula's husband, whom she describes as having a gentle personality, perhaps this is what resulted in the mother-in-law having more power. In the case of Dina, the fact that her the father-in-law was deceased and the marriage was between cousins, may also factor in. My point here, like Kandiyoti's, is that family dynamics are complex and it is not always easy to understand how and why power moves in different directions.

Mother and son relationships

Perhaps a way of deepening the understanding of the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship may be to reflect on the dynamic between a mother and son. Halim Barakat (1993) uses strong language to comment on the relationship between Arab mothers and sons, saying it 'verges on morbidity' (p. 100). Comparing this dynamic to a disease may seem dramatic, however the potency of this relationship emerges within the literature, even to the extent that the relationship between mothers and daughters has been less of a focus in the literature compared to mothers and sons or fathers and sons (Sayigh, 2002, p. 57). Fatima Mernissi (1987) writes: 'In Muslim societies not only is the marital bond weakened and love for the wife discouraged, but his mother is the only woman a man is allowed to love at all' (p. 121). Similarly, Andrea Rugh (1984) notes that in Egypt, a son represented a mother's status and future protection (p. 80). John Borneman's (2007) research in Aleppo suggests that mothers treat sons 'as the husband they had wished for' (p. 28). He argues that sons will side with their mothers over their fathers and over their wives (p. 27). Sons may also place more value on the opinions of their mothers compared to their wives. For example, Abu Nahleh (2006) recounts the example of a young Palestinian woman whose husband only asked advice of his mother when he sought to start a business, while his wife was on the outer – with a low status in the family and limited ability to make decisions (p. 128).

The references to the mother-son relationship came out clearly in the life story of Ibrahim; although importantly, other men only made passing references to their mothers. He said, 'Whatever my mother says I listen to her'. Being apart from her during displacement makes him feel like something is 'missing' from his life.

The prioritisation of his mother over his wife came out multiple times during interviews. He said, 'I don't get anything that I don't share with my mother first. I told my wife before marrying her, my mother and family first come and then you'. He linked his treatment of his mother and father to the concept of *riḍā* in the Quran, where emphasis is placed on the mother being pleased with her son or daughter and giving her blessing. Ibrahim's wife (Yasmeen), who participated in a semi-structured interview, was also present in these interviews, chopping vegetables or cutting her nails as I interviewed her husband, and

interjecting from time to time with her own comments. She remarked on the relationship between her husband and his mother:

Ibrahim: My mother is... [long pause, as if he is trying to find a word to describe her]. I got married and had kids. I have to go in the early morning to say hello to her. And in the evening.

Yasmeen: I became jealous of her [laughing].

Ibrahim: Yes.

Yasmeen: But now I wish my kids will grow up to be like their father.

Ibrahim: If I am bringing delicious food, first I will go to my mum and father and give them, then I will give it to my wife and children.

...

Ibrahim: I never in my life made my mother angry. Even when she got upset with my wife, and sometimes it would be the fault of my mother or siblings, I would still stand by my mother, not my wife.

Yasmeen: At last, he admits it! [laughing]

...

Ibrahim: I got married and had children but every Eid I would go clean the walls and ceilings for my mother. The ceilings - high! So, I would get up there and clean the walls and ceilings.

Yasmeen: He cleans the walls for his mother but for his wife he doesn't! [laughing]

Yasmeen didn't appear outwardly annoyed by the relationship between her husband and his mother, seeming to find it amusing and treating it as almost a given. She thinks there is a special connection between a mother and son, and father and daughter, and added cheerfully, 'My mother loves the boys, she discriminates. Yes, and my father loves the girls more'.

Ibrahim's relationship with his mother caused him to get involved in her disputes with others. Ibrahim said, 'I never said no to her for anything!' When Ibrahim and his wife were newlyweds, his parents were paying off their car in instalments, but they found themselves unable to pay the amount. Ibrahim took his wife's bracelets and sold them, giving the money to his mother. While Ibrahim placed more emphasis on his mother than

his father in telling stories about his life, he also referenced the importance of his relationship with his father, who passed away some twenty years ago.

Although the examples in this section come from only one participant, it is important nevertheless to see the direct ways in which Ibrahim sees his relationship with his mother. This example provides some context to the relationship between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, reinforcing the fact that the shift in power dynamics that can result from a son marrying, could be quite difficult for a mother-in-law to deal with. Her subsequent behaviour should therefore be placed in context – as a reaction to change.

Brother and sister relationships

As part of further contextualising familial power dynamics, I suggest the brother-sister relationship is important. Humanitarian agency programming, in seeking to address issues like early marriage, GBV or early school drop-out among girls, have centred their efforts on engaging parents – and increasingly fathers - seeing them as the key decision-makers/barriers in a girl's life (UNICEF, 2014, p. 33; UN Women, 2015b, pp. 14–15; UNHCR, 2017b, pp. 37–41). While this may be true in some contexts, I argue that superimposing this automatic power structure onto varying contexts results in unreliable conclusions. Instead, I suggest, among Syrians, humanitarian agencies ought to include the brother-sister relationship in their analysis.

Brothers tend to be more present in the household than fathers, which may explain their influence over their sisters (Joseph, 1994a, p. 62; Altorki, 2003, p. 180). The influence of a son increases as he becomes older; the father's power correspondingly decreases (Joseph, 1994a, p. 52; Muhanna, 2013, p. 133) – a fact which may contribute to competitiveness between father and son (Rugh, 1984, pp. 81–82; Jean-Klein, 2000, p. 122). Abu Nahleh (2006) suggests that young men may see the monitoring of the behaviour of their sisters as part of their responsibility, as her respondents did in Palestine (p. 119). Joseph (1994a) goes further, suggesting that the relationship between brothers and sisters in Lebanon was 'a critical vehicle for the socialization of males and females into culturally appropriate gender roles, thus helping to reproduce patriarchy'

(p. 56). Her research describes the 'love/power' dynamic between brothers and sisters that shaped their interactions (p. 52). She writes:

Their senses of self, identity, and future called for their mutual involvement with each other. They saw themselves reflected in each other's eyes and lives. A brother was responsible for his sister's behavior. A sister was expected to embrace a brother's wishes as her own. The boundaries between them were fluid (p. 56).

During one life story interview, Leena shared how her teenage son was recently telling her daughter (aged 12), how to dress, including wearing her hijab differently and not wearing her pink jacket outside because the colour would draw too much attention - similar to Joseph's (1994a) research (p. 51). Here, it was not the girl's mother or father who corrected her, but her brother. These conversations resulted in arguments between her and her older brother. Leena seemed amused by this, explaining that she had to sit with her daughter to explain her son's actions. He had been abrupt with his sister, saying 'This is not nice. Take it off!' but when Leena explained it, her daughter was more willing to obey. She resisted against her brother's intervention because he instructed her like it was an 'order'.

Leena also mentioned how her older son told her daughter that she should clean the table after dinner. She retorted saying, 'Why don't you do it?' but her brother said, 'I am not a girl, you're the girl'. Leena intervened when the children started to argue to say that she would clean it up, but then the children split the chores among themselves rather than have their mother do it. Leena herself had earlier shared that as a child, she barely did any chores, because she was the youngest; age protected her from chores. In each of these examples, Leena was the one who intervened when her son directed his sister to do something. She laughed saying, 'They [her sons] tell her but I, I defend her. I tell them, you need to help, she can't do it alone. My second son helps her a lot'. Her rationale was more about them completing tasks together while her older son referenced more explicit gender roles. Her second son was still older than his sister but it was only the oldest brother who gave these directives. Leena felt that her daughter was a 'child' still and some of these rules were too strict: 'She's young! It's not like she's *ṣabīya* [young girl]. She

doesn't have even period now. It's still too early for her to be told, "This is light, this is dark, this is short, this is tall".

In Irbid, the role of brothers – as well as the mother's disagreement regarding the brother's intervention – came out strongly during an FGD. One woman shared how her sons didn't allow her daughter and her youngest son to go to school in Jordan, because they felt it was not safe. Here, the younger brother's movements were also limited; it was not just about being female. The mother's tone of voice and facial expression indicated she did not agree with this. She later added that she had purchased a clothing item for her daughter but her son didn't allow his sister to wear it, saying it was too short. These brothers also scolded their sister at home, telling her, 'Sit properly'. In response to this, another woman said, '*Haram* [here, this means 'poor thing'], she is only 11'.

Joseph (2004) suggests that brothers may be more protective as a result of war, because they fear that other men are wild and cannot be trusted (p. 287). This explanation may be a factor, however it is unclear if brothers would have still reacted in this way if they were in Syria, or if this is something that has emerged due to displacement. The reflections from participants about the intervention of brothers in Syria would seem to imply that brothers had some influence in pre-war Syria. Zubeida, for example, shared how she wanted to study after the 9th grade, but her older brother didn't let her. He told her and their family that it was because he was worried that another boy at school – who later became her husband – was following her. But, she felt it was because he was jealous of her intelligence. In any case, her brother had sufficient power to persuade her family that she shouldn't continue her education.

Other participants also referenced the idea of a brother protecting a sister. Roula's brother, who is eight years older than her, threatened to shoot the man she loved. She went to her father but he agreed with her brother's decision; he was scared his son would get into trouble if he hurt her suitor. This brother hit Roula because of her love for this man – which resulted in her father shouting at him – but Roula still had to give up this relationship. Other instances of brothers being involved in their sister's love lives were more amicable. Fuad, for example said, 'My sister, if anyone wants to love her, or talk to

her, she tells me. I know everything about her. That was our relationship since the days of Syria’.

In some cases, brothers intervene if there are problems in the marriages of their sisters. Aya is in her mid-20s and her brother is 18 years old, but despite his age, he played a role in helping Aya when she went back to her mother’s house after a particularly bad fight with her husband. He was upset seeing her cry and wanted to know what happened, taking her side: ‘You are keeping up with everything and tolerating with him everything and then he has the nerve to hit you?’ Aya’s brother accompanied her to meet her husband and get her child back, but her husband greeted him warmly, complimenting his brother-in-law’s wife and criticising Aya. This seemed to change her brother’s position; he then urged Aya to remain with her husband.

While perhaps Aya’s brother changed his mind because of the power dynamics linked to his age compared to Aya’s husband, or maybe because he felt uncomfortable intervening, sometimes brothers would defend their sisters much more strongly. Eman shared about the pre-displacement relationship between her brothers and her husband (who is also their cousin), which resulted once in a physical fight between them in Syria. She is careful about what she tells her sister about the difficulties she has with her husband in Jordan, because in the past this was immediately transmitted to her brothers. She talked about her brothers, saying, ‘They are short-tempered and my husband even has a shorter temper. *Ya’nī*, it all falls on my head!’ On one occasion in Jordan when her husband beat her particularly badly, her younger brother saw the belt marks left on her face and back and ‘went crazy’, taking her to her older brother, which made her afraid: ‘I know once this reaches my older brother, it will be over with my husband’. When her older brother saw how injured she was, he wanted her to go to the Family Protection Department to make a complaint, but she refused, saying she would go back to her husband. In this example, the relational ties between Eman and her brothers caused them to wish to take action, despite the marital ties between Eman and her husband; blood ties trumped marital ties.

Here, Eman’s brothers were much more definitive in the action they wanted Eman to take, compared to Aya’s brother, going so far as to urge legal action, but Eman was the one who refused. Eman was blamed by her brothers for having a ‘weak personality’ and failing to

take action against her husband. This is a regular criticism she faces. She said, 'They tell me I am the one who allowed him to stay this way'. The situation is more complicated however, as Joseph (1994a) comments; Eman is 'structurally caught between competing loyalties... torn between families of origin and of procreation' (p. 57). While some research may suggest that love between siblings is more powerful than between spouses (Abdallah, 2009, p. 50), the ties to a husband can still be potent.

Eman also reflected on the positive role her older brother played in her life when she was younger. Her father stopped her from attending school after the 6th grade, which made Eman upset: 'I would look at them from the window... When I see them in their school uniforms I wouldn't stop crying!' Three years later, she explained that her older brother saw how much she loved reading, and wanted her to return to school through the free education system - which involves studying at home and taking the exams. He even bought her books for the exams, but she didn't want to sit the exam with others who were younger than her. In this case, her brother was a positive force, but Eman decided not to pursue the opportunity. While some cases of the brother-sister relationship may place limits on females, I suggest, as with this example of Eman's education, there may be yet-untapped opportunities for humanitarian agencies to engage with brothers in challenging gender inequality.

In the case of Eman, and to some extent, Aya, the idea Joseph (1994a) refers to, about the brother being a 'lifeline' to his sister - 'the only safe male relationship' - emerges (p. 53). In other cases, however, the relationship may not be safe, if the brother is arbitrarily controlling his sister's behaviour like in the case of Zubeida being prohibited from attending school, or Leena's daughter being told what to wear.

What is less clear is whether displacement has altered the dynamic between a brother and sister. It may be that perhaps a brother might feel more protective of a sister after moving to an unfamiliar environment like Jordan. Brothers exerted decision-making power over their sisters in Syria before the war, but whether this has empirically been heightened due to war needs further exploration. There are however other familial relationships where it may be more possible to theorise on what has changed (or not) during displacement.

THE 'FAMILY' DURING DISPLACEMENT

Shifts within the family

Some refugees in Jordan replicated the family living structure they had in Syria - though this was perhaps out of financial necessity. Zubeida and her husband for example, rent a whole floor of a building in Jordan for them, as well as their children and their children's spouses and children. Hadiya lives with her parents in Jordan, along with her two small children and husband, sharing an apartment together. She lived separately to her in-laws in Syria, but sometimes stayed with her in-laws or parents when her husband was away. Hadiya said that her relationship with her parents seems closer in Jordan; her parents seem to know they face financial issues and have themselves discreetly addressed these issues, even though these challenges remain unspoken. This perhaps helps Hadiya and her husband to save face. For Leena, members of the immediate family are much closer in Jordan because they spend so much time together at home, compared to in Syria. She said: 'For me, I don't go out. Children don't go out. So, we spend much of our time in the house. When someone leaves the house, we miss them. We say, 'Come back!' We are together more now. And so now, we love each other more'.

While I had been prepared for many participants to reflect on closer relationships between family members in Jordan, as has been the case in other contexts (Joseph, 2004), I did not expect the extreme opposite. During a visit to Mais, I was struck by the description she gave of her relationships with two family members, her sister and brother-in-law: 'There are people, you feel like they have changed psychologically. You feel like... How can I explain? You feel like there's some kind of cruelty, or they've got selfish as well'.

Mais explained that since coming to Jordan, her sister treats her differently. Mais and her family initially shared an apartment with her sister and her family in Jordan, splitting the expenses equally, although Mais' sister and her family were in a much better financial situation; her sister's husband works in the Gulf. She felt her sister looked down on her

because of her difficult financial situation in Jordan. She explained this was a shift from Syria, where her sister was happy to spend time with her; in Jordan, Mais felt her sister spent time with her as a 'favour'. Mais shared an example, where her husband went with her sister and sister's husband to the market and purchased some items for the house they shared. Her sister snidely looked at the things he had purchased and said this was 'so you can feel like you brought something for the house'. Later, they moved to separate houses and when Mais was sick, her sister only came to visit her once, while in contrast, her neighbours checked on her every day. Mais also shared that her husband's brother did not keep in touch after they all arrived in Jordan although they had lived together in Damascus and Mais had specifically looked after him, even ironing his clothes. He never checked on them, although they had planned to live together in Jordan. For Mais, these changes in familial relationships were linked to the change in their social status during displacement.

In contrast, for one participant, Eman, living in Jordan provided new social opportunities outside the constraints of the conservative village she lived in while in Syria. Combined with social norms that meant families tended to only associate with each other, gender norms in this village meant that Eman's social interactions were limited to her relatives – specifically her female relatives who all lived nearby. In Jordan, lack of proximity to her family members and living in close quarters with other Syrians, Yemenis, Palestinians and Jordanians has provided new opportunities for social interaction. She happily described the freedom she now has to interact with other women, saying, 'I confide in them more than I would in my sisters!' Now, Eman and her husband also jointly visit other couples living in their building – something that did not occur in Syria. In the case of Eman, the often-restrictive ties binding her to her family have been loosened due to displacement.

Not all participants shared examples of family relationships that were as clear-cut as either being 'closer' or farther apart during displacement; other relationships were more complex. Aya, for example, hides information about her financial problems from her mother, whom she is close to, and for some time also hid information about her marital problems. She explained this was because she chose to marry her husband, instead of the person she was originally engaged to. She felt her mother would say, 'You chose' and

blame her for the choices she had made; hiding information that she didn't have enough to eat was a way of preventing this criticism. Aya's act of defiance against the norm in not marrying the person chosen for her has had long-term consequences in her relationship with her mother.

Others also spoke of changed dynamics with parents during displacement. Dina moved next door to her parents in Jordan when her husband left for Europe. Although there had been tension between her parents and her husband, things became better between them when her husband left. Dina said: 'Ya'nī, things are back to normal as if I was back living with them. My food is their food, their food is my food'. Despite this, Dina is afraid to tell them that her application for family reunification has been denied. She feels they will treat her differently and be more judgmental about how she manages the house and her children if they know she is not going to Germany soon. In this case, while she is happy to be near to her parents, she has maintained a façade to minimise negative consequences to her and her children.

For others, hiding information from family members is done to ensure they save face. Eman struggled to feed her family in Jordan. She said that sometimes people in her building would put bread that they are not using into a plastic bag, and hang it on the staircase. When it gets dark, she creeps out to the staircase to get this bread. Her husband knows that she gets this bread from someone but they do not discuss this – it is something unspoken between them because it is a source of shame. Khadija similarly hides information from her children who still remain in Syria; she knows they are unable to pay for meat to eat so she doesn't tell them when she makes her trademark *kuba* dish or describe what she eats – so that they don't feel bad.

CONCLUSION

The shape of power is always the same: it is infinite, it is complex, it is forever branching. While it is alive like a tree, it is growing; while it contains itself, it is a multitude. Its directions are unpredictable; it obeys its own laws. No one can observe the acorn and extrapolate each vein in

each leaf of the oak crown. The closer you look, the more various it becomes. However complex you think it is, it is more complex than that (Alderman, 2017, p. 330).

This chapter illustrates that relationships are multi-layered, both before and during displacement. My findings challenge humanitarian fixation on changes in marriages during displacement. In this chapter, I reconfigure the discussion: taking a step back to historicise Syrian marriages and capture the heterogeneity in Syrian marriages (Kastrinou, 2016, p. 2). This, I suggest, moves the discussion away from the humanitarian agency focus on ‘changes’ in marriages due to displacement, and provides potentially new opportunities for engaging on gender norms through understanding the power relations that influence marriages (Kastrinou, 2016, p. 2). Carol Stack (2003) suggests academic literature tends to focus on individual lives but less on how families influence individuals (p. 7) – a gap my research attempts to contribute to, through the examples of marriages that occurred in multiple ways and through the actions of varied actors. This contextualisation unravels assumptions that are often used by humanitarian agencies who design interventions to prevent girls from marrying early during displacement (Save the Children, 2014, pp. 9–10; UNICEF, 2014, p. 33) – highlighting that individuals in contexts like Syria do not live in a vacuum, but their life events are shaped by their families and communities. If decisions are made relationally, this impacts how ‘agency’ – the ability to define and act upon goals (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438) - is conceptualised within humanitarian agencies. Within the strong rhetoric around the ‘adolescent girl’ or working with ‘men and boys’ in humanitarian agency circles, addressing apparent deficiencies at an *individual* level have come to be seen as addressing gender inequality. The girl, for example, is presented as the hope of the family (Chant, 2016, p. 12; Hengeveld, 2016)– a blank slate upon which humanitarian agencies can intervene. This places an incredible burden on just one person in a family unit (Switzer, 2013, p. 357) and also ignores wider structures and relationships, creating a discourse where the girl is forever positioned as needing to live a life that her family opposes (Johnson and Joseph, 2009, p. 2). Men and boys, in contrast, are positioned as ‘subjects in need of modernization and reform’ (Olivius, 2016b, p. 64). These parallel assumptions are problematic, particularly in a Middle Eastern context, where family relationships shape decision-making processes in

less linear, predictable ways than humanitarian agency narratives imply. I argue that understanding power within the context of multi-layered relationships in a family may reposition how norms are understood. This may present new opportunities for trying to challenge and transform gender norms. This repositioning recognises that power dynamics may result, for example, in a mother urging her daughter to remain in a violent relationship, or in a brother emerging as an unexpected ally: nuances around power which are missing from humanitarian agency analysis of gender norms.

Power itself, I suggest, has shifted to the periphery in humanitarian agency analysis, for example in how GBV during displacement is explained by humanitarian agencies (International Rescue Committee, 2012a; Refugees International, 2012; Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015a, p. iii). My research shows that powerful ideas keep women in difficult marriages, specifically the idea that a husband is behaving this way due to an 'external' stressor (influential family members or illness), or the idea of *naṣīb*, which makes people feel like their life scripts have been written and cannot be changed. These supposed 'external' stressors are often blamed for GBV – not just by women but sometimes by humanitarian agencies, who in their narratives about GBV perpetuate the idea of men being so emasculated and so much under pressure due to displacement, that they lash out against their wives. While increased pressure certainly may cause people to behave differently, I argue that GBV is symptomatic of unequal power relationships, and blaming a disease or the fact that someone is under pressure negates this. Blaming displacement for the violence of emasculated men lacks nuance and means that GBV is less-linked to unequal power dynamics.

Beyond the husband-wife relationship are potentially even more complex power hierarchies that have received little attention in both academic and humanitarian agency analysis. The mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship – which must be situated within shifting power dynamics in other familial relationships - illustrates the complex workings of power between women including the fact that men may become pawns in women's power struggles. The ties which the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship is bound within, are what prevents the daughter-in-law from active resistance, though she may defy power in more subtle ways. Her 'resistance' however may not always also challenge gender norms; at times, a daughter-in-law may find relief

from the behaviour of her mother-in-law through invoking her own traditional role of mother, like Dina did in keeping her second son away from her mother-in-law. In other cases, resistance may not be possible because social conventions about power, the desire to keep scandal away (*sutra*) and the position of elders in the family may hold stronger than widespread agreement about abusive behaviour of a mother-in-law. Here, a community may praise a daughter-in-law for submitting to abuse from her mother-in-law while themselves agreeing her behaviour is difficult; these two ideas somehow coexist, which highlights that while people may believe particular behaviours are unacceptable, they stop short of taking action to rectify the situation. The line between attitude and behaviour change is not always automatic, for this relationship or even for the husband-wife relationship as humanitarian agencies may presume.

The examples in this chapter push the thinking about gendered relationships beyond the typical male-female relationship that humanitarian agencies are often focused on (Cornwall, 2014, pp. 128-129), to relationships between women, which may be characterised by struggles over power, competitiveness and *kayd*. My work broadens the understanding of how women may use power - to include the use of violence, challenging humanitarian agency assumptions around the idea of 'imagined harmony' among women (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015, p. 407). In an interview with an international humanitarian agency worker, we discussed how humanitarian agency interventions are predicated on the idea 'that women are peaceful, men are violent'. This 'easy narrative', she suggested, has resulted in us not being able to understand how women negotiate power throughout their lives. Neither of us could think of humanitarian agencies who have specifically sought to understand and develop programs to respond to female-female dynamics, though programs addressing dynamics between men (i.e. violence perpetrated by men against men) do receive attention within some humanitarian/development circles – again evidence of the way men's violence is seen as a given. Her argument was that blaming men has resulted in humanitarian agencies missing the 'intergenerational battles' that are occurring, that is, the way age also shapes gendered relationships. In emphasising the need to address issues like GBV, humanitarian agencies have unintentionally perpetuated the idea of women as always weak and always vulnerable – misleading generalisations when we consider the often-complex power relations women engage in. The gap in analysis of female-female relationships is not solely a problem of

humanitarian agencies; scholarly analysis, suggests Christa Salamandra (2004), has similarly often been predicated on the idea of 'presumed harmony among women' (p. 62). Salamandra's analysis has been critiqued and may be linked to her positionality and level of engagement with Syrian elite women (Chatty, 2018a, p. 241). My findings do, however, suggest that relationships between women may not always be harmonious. I contribute to the work of Kandiyoti (1988) and Rabho (2015) on the specific dynamic between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law.

The role of a sister-in-law is another example of power between women, showing how love within blood ties can sometimes be stronger than marital ties (Meriwether, 1999, p. 111), causing a husband to turn against his wife in favour of his sisters and mother. Joseph (1994a) suggests that a sister has power over her brother in the sense of her behaviour reflecting on him (p. 56), but it may be that a sister also exercises power in her brother's marriage and uses her connectivity to her brother to influence his attitudes towards his wife. The sister has a preview of the 'patriarchal bargain' through this relationship with her sister-in-law, acting as proxy to her mother and wielding power over her brother herself.

The fact that women may exercise power does not negate patriarchy (Inhorn, 1996, p. 8). Nor does it designate women's power to solely being 'informal' as some analysis has done, according to Inhorn (p. 11). Lila Abu Lughod (1990) has similarly argued against the idea of hierarchies of power, suggesting a more fluid approach to power analysis (p. 48). My findings contribute to these conceptual debates about power, challenging narratives within humanitarian agencies and academic literature about men as forever-opposing 'progress' (Olivius, 2016b), women as always vulnerable (International Rescue Committee, 2014, pp. 8–10; UNFPA Regional Syria Response Hub, 2015, p. 6), and gender norms as typical and generalisable – such that it is easy to conclude when norms have apparently been 'reversed' (Buecher and Aniyamuzaala, 2016, p. 4). Instead, following Inhorn, who argues that 'gender relations are less given than made, unmade, and remade' (1996, p. 19), I suggest gender norms among Syrians need to be contextualised and situated within family dynamics. Intersectional analysis has often been missing from humanitarian agency gender analysis among Syrian refugees; instead, the analysis seemed limited to the margins – to the group of mostly home-bound, uneducated,

'traditional' women (Oxfam and ABAAD, 2013, p. 4; International Rescue Committee, 2014, p. 7; UN Women, 2015a) that have typically been the types of refugees humanitarian agencies have interacted with in other, largely African humanitarian emergencies. Humanitarian agencies have, inadvertently or intentionally, assumed similar social structures upon Syrian refugees, failing to recognise that this characterisation of Syrian refugees as traumatised, non-English-speaking and lacking information (UN Women, 2015a), in fact may only refer to a subset of Syrians – whom Judith Tucker (1985) calls the 'margins of society', and who reflect particularly stark ideologies around gender (p. 10). Leila Ahmed (1992) similarly critiques how more extreme forms of oppression become the focus when the lives of Middle Eastern women are analysed. Focusing on extremes leads to gender norms being presented in particularly negative ways that emphasise 'tradition' and 'culture' as standing in opposition to Western ideas of gender equality and modernity (Olivius, 2016b, p. 60).

This chapter highlights that the lines set by patriarchy are not fixed. Change therefore is even more of a slippery concept, which needs to be considered carefully, as outlined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN: 'CHANGE', RESISTANCE & HUMANITARIANISM

INTRODUCTION

Within narratives about refugees and gender, the concept of 'change' remains troubled and sometimes 'elusive' (Baines, 2010, p. 2). The conceptual framework in Chapter Three outlines how displacement and change narratives have become intertwined and the fact that changes in gender norms are often difficult to pinpoint. Humanitarian agencies have typically engaged with issues of gendered change among refugee populations by speaking of 'change' only with reference to refugee experiences during war/displacement rather than looking more broadly at the lives of refugees *before* displacement. Cynthia Cockburn (2004) critiques the strict divisions often placed between peace and war, calling these 'meaningless': 'To consider one moment in this flux in the absence of the next is arbitrary' (p. 43). Focusing analysis on the displacement phase means that the pre-displacement period takes on an amorphous quality - synonymous with 'tradition' and 'culture', which Lila Abu-Lughod (2013) argues 'means not just flattening cultures, stripping moral systems of their complexity... it means erasing history' (p. 136). This argument about 'dehistoricization' is not a new one (Malkki, 1996), yet it remains an issue in humanitarian analysis of refugee experiences. When tradition and culture are invoked in the name of 'gender analysis', it results in stereotypical tropes and judgments about refugees, presenting their collective experiences as fixed, homogenous, and in opposition to modernity.

With this 'analysis' of what needs to change for refugees, humanitarian and development agencies focus on 'promoting gender equality' and 'empowering women and girls'. As outlined in Chapter One, the 'solutions' to gender inequality and disempowerment are often driven by buzzwords and 'axioms' (Cornwall, 2014, p. 129), which in my experience include phrases such as 'investing in girls', 'creating safe spaces' and 'engaging men and boys'. Speaking the 'right' language to donors by engaging with these buzzy terms is prioritised over nuanced analysis. One humanitarian worker put it like this: 'I felt like at the policy level everyone says the right thing, because... they know that they need to. But

it doesn't matter. It doesn't change anything'. These phrases tend to define the response rather than a thorough analysis of the context, resulting in a predictable series of activities focused on 'raising awareness', conducting trainings and increasing women's participation in economic activities.

If gender is 'a set of slippery, simultaneous, and interactive discourses and forces' (Essed, Goldberg and Kobayashi, 2005, p. 5), how can challenging gender norms be as simple as increasing knowledge and income? Jennifer Hyndman and Malathi de Alwis (2003) write: 'The idea that gender identities and relations are generated differently across space and time, and have no essential pre-established qualities, is critical to changing them' (p. 212-213), yet in my experience this understanding of gender is often absent from humanitarian analysis. Instead, 'empowerment' is the solution to gender inequality. This version of empowerment is not 'contextual' with potentially unpredictable outcomes (Cornwall and Edwards, 2014, p. 24). While scholars have grappled with the unpredictable nature of empowerment and gender equality, agencies have been less hesitant - issuing guidelines and manuals detailing how empowerment and gender equality are to be measured (Nanda, 2011; Girls Not Brides, 2015; Lombardini, Bowman and Garwood, 2017). In my experience, the argument, 'it's easy, we just need to do it' is often deployed by humanitarian workers working on these issues. The problem is framed in terms of people needing capacity or organisations needing political will, yet insufficient attention has been placed on the nature of change itself and the fact that it cannot be easily slotted into the results-based management tools that are used by agencies.

Lori Heise & Karima Manji (2016) reflect on the 'undisciplined approach' agencies and donors take when speaking of challenging gender norms, commenting on how little differentiation is made on whether the needed change is a behaviour, belief, norm or attitude. They argue that each requires a different intervention, but such 'theory-based distinctions' are missing from analysis (p. 1). As well as the problem itself being defined vaguely, the types of changes expected from agencies and donors are often unrealistic and grandiose within short-term interventions, especially, in my experience, in humanitarian contexts. Again, this is markedly different to how academics talk about change being 'subtle' and 'incremental' (Cornwall & Edwards, 2014, p. 25).

This chapter contrasts humanitarian discourses about gender norms among Syrian refugees, with the diverse and complex experiences of women and men in my research. I will begin by discussing the expectations Syrians face in living up to gender norms, drawing attention to how they manoeuvre and resist gender norms in subtle and overt ways. I will then explore what these findings mean for conceptualisations of ‘change’ among displaced populations and end with an exploration of the broader challenges in humanitarian agencies that limit effective understanding of gender norms.

COMPLEXITIES IN GENDER NORMS

As detailed in Chapter One, displacement has been positioned as an event with potential to change gender norms – in ways that are both positive (women working, men and women taking on different roles) or negative (domestic violence due to pressure on men, increased early marriage, harassment and exploitation of women and girls). When humanitarian agencies discuss these gendered changes, such analysis is not necessarily neutral because employing the rhetoric of ‘change’ in the context of displacement brings attention and, more significantly, funding, to the much-neglected programming sector of gender equality and women’s empowerment. When donors hear from humanitarian workers about how Syrian women are now being beaten in their homes by emasculated men who cannot work – and that they have apparently never experienced domestic violence before – it makes them want to support this gender/GBV/empowerment sector which has historically struggled to attract significant long-term funding. One international consultant said that the marginalisation of this kind of programming within agencies has led to this constant need for staff working on these issues to ‘vie for space’, creating a culture where staff feel isolated, ‘like nobody understands, so we have to show them’. These organisational constraints mean that agencies – or staff working on such programs within agencies – have a vested interest in emphasising narratives that make funding possible. This, I suggest, changes the way that research on gender issues is conducted among refugee populations. This has, albeit unintentionally, resulted in stereotypical, un-nuanced assumptions about ‘Syrians’ as a collective, without sufficient recognition of how class, education, home location, upbringing and age may affect gender norms.

The 'typical' Syrian?

Certainly, from reading the UN and humanitarian agency reports about Syria, one could easily assume that there is gendered behaviour that is 'typical' of Syrians (Oxfam and ABAAD, 2013; International Rescue Committee, 2014; Buecher and Aniyamuzaala, 2016). My research findings indicate that gender norms among Syrians are markedly diverse - just as gender norms vary among people living in 'Western' contexts. In interview after interview, irrespective of home locations in Syria, women talked about wanting to continue their education and for their daughters to complete education. Women criticised the notion of 'sitting at home' instead of studying; one woman spoke of how her entire village consisted of both female and male university graduates. This was not the experience of all women; some did say that their access to education and work were limited by their families, their in-laws or - surprisingly to a lesser extent - their husbands.

In contrast to the overwhelmingly negative humanitarian portrayal of Syrian men, I also heard stories of husbands and men who affirmed their wives and daughters. Leena, for example, who is now in her mid-30s, stopped attending school after the 9th grade because the new school was too far from her house. She wishes she had continued studying after marriage, and recently told her husband this. She said, 'He told me, "If you told me that you wanted to continue, I would let you continue". But I didn't tell him I wanted to'. In Jordan, her husband has encouraged her to continue her education and she is now considering this. Another woman, Hadiya, described how her father intentionally took time to advise her about her life, her education and even marriage. He arranged for Hadiya to have her own medical practice and also supported her decision not to marry a suitor who was interested in her. Amira also talked about her father, describing him as her 'role model'. He is a professor, who has encouraged Amira in her efforts to continue studying in Jordan, even when she decided to change her major to a less prestigious one. Another young woman, Reem, whose father was a businessman in Damascus, explained how her father took them to book exhibitions and galleries, using these as opportunities for his children to learn. His influence is what now drives her to continue attending courses to complete her studies. These examples are particularly striking because of how humanitarians often cast fathers as impediments to empowerment and gender equality

(UNICEF, 2014, p. 33; UN Women, 2015b, pp. 14–15; UNHCR, 2017b, pp. 37–41). In these examples however, Syrian men were positive forces in the lives of women.

These flawed assumptions about Syrian women and men are not solely from ‘Western’ sources. Jordanians I have worked with (some of whom were interviewed specifically for this research) expressed views about Syrians being ‘conservative’, about girls not being allowed to attend school and about GBV in ways that did not acknowledge the diversity in gender norms among Syrians. The Jordanians who shared these opinions are themselves well-educated and from higher classes in Jordan – which may affect how they view Syrians. One interview participant specifically mentioned a Syrian TV show called ‘*Bab Al-Hara*’ as an example of Syrian gender norms. This program, which depicts life in Damascus during the French mandate, was criticised by Amira, who felt that the depictions of ‘women gossiping, talking and cooking’ and the men ‘fighting each other’ was not a ‘true’ depiction of life in Syria. She said her Jordanian neighbours discussed the show with them and assumed that Syrians behaved in this way.

Hearing women describe how they were expected to behave during the photography workshop – that they should be quiet, gentle, not laugh too loud, be careful who they spent time with, and so on – could suggest that women always abide by these ideas of how they ‘should’ behave. During interviews however, women described how they push back against these expectations. At times, personality supersedes expectations for proper behaviour. One older woman, Khadija, described how she amused herself by playing pranks and dressing up - practices she began when she was first married, and which she continues now. She was married at age 12, so this perhaps gave her a little more leeway in how she could behave. Once, she dressed in her husband’s army clothes and he found her sitting on a chair and pretending to smoke with a rolled-up tissue. She enjoyed teasing her husband; once on a family trip to a farm, she pushed him into a swimming pool, much to the shock of her in-laws. Another time, she completely covered herself with a *niqāb* (not what she normally wore) and visited her in-laws, pretending to be someone else. Even now, in her 60s, she enjoys dressing up. These personal stories contradict humanitarian ideas of Syrian women as oppressed, disempowered victims needing rescue; Khadija is a vibrant, amusing woman who shocked her own family members by her antics, but this did not negate her behaving more strictly at other times, including

urging my research assistant to cover her head and commenting on what I thought was my quite conservative clothing. These seeming contradictions reflect the diversity within just one person; people have different expectations for different situations but also may directly challenge these expectations if they can.

It may be easier to collectively group people, or to take outlier examples as a way of understanding an entire population, however this overlooks reality. Additionally, for humanitarian agencies, who sometimes appear fixated by the idea of capturing changes in gender norms that have occurred due to displacement, it is critical to recognise that change cannot be understood unless the starting point (gender norms before war) is clear. I argue that humanitarian agencies have spent too much time trying to articulate the situation during displacement, but the conclusions being made are weakened by the lack of analysis of what gender norms were like *before* the war. Assumptions about Syrian society being traditional and conservative therefore inform analysis of change, while ignoring the varied 'starting points' for gender norms before the war.

Expectations for behaviour

During FGDs and interviews, participants discussed how expectations for behaviour often start at a young age. What was perhaps most useful for me was understanding that these expectations are not necessarily verbally communicated, rather they are modelled based on the behaviour of others. One participant explained, '[T]hey didn't use to tell us... but we used to see what's right and we walk in that way'. One older woman, Zubeida, explained household chores like this: 'Just as I saw my mother wipe and sweep the house, I would do the same. She would cook, I would cook'. She added, 'I would watch my mother doing the house work and work with her. *Ya'nī*, she would look at how I did the work... if she didn't like it she would shout at me... I learned everything from her and I role played my mother in front of my siblings'. This role playing carried out by Zubeida included checking the housework done by her younger sisters and shouting at them and hitting them so that they would improve. Zubeida further explained this linkage between behaviour of a mother and behaviour of a daughter by sharing a Syrian proverb: which literally means, 'Turn the jar upside down but the girl would still turn out like her mother'. It is similar in meaning to 'like mother, like daughter'. Zubeida explained this proverb

with the example of her granddaughter, who now takes care of the house, taking after her mother who was excellent at housekeeping. Zubeida laughed, exclaiming, 'Every girl turns out like her mother. It's impossible she would not'.

Other participants also reflected on learning from the actions of others outside the family. One woman described how the female schoolteacher in her village was her role model, because she had a strong personality, was educated and had a salary. Another woman from Homs, who seemed to face a lot of restrictions to her behaviour due to her conservative upbringing, said: '[I]f God sent me strong women maybe I'd become strong like them. Seriously, you learn it!' This idea of younger girls and boys learning from those who are older is also evident in the literature (Abu-Lughod, 1985, p. 646; Hart, 2008, p. 71).

These accounts challenged my own perspective about how gender norms are communicated and shared and passed on, especially to the younger generation. I had expected that norms about masculinity and femininity would be quite explicitly communicated as children grew into adulthood. On the contrary, what has emerged is that often these rules and expectations are unspoken and implicit. A few women mentioned that they started to wear the *ḥijāb* because their friends did - not because their parents insisted that they should. Behaviour may be learnt through observing others, rather than being explicitly mandated.

During FGDs, participants engaged in dynamic discussions around how women and men are expected to behave. In the women's groups, participants explained that girls should be shy and not rude, and should be careful not to laugh too loud. A few of the women felt these expectations were unfair, but others said it was necessary to limit how girls behaved. One woman knew a girl who faced strict rules in Syria, but had more freedom in Jordan and became 'wild'. They also discussed how a woman was expected to manage her household. One woman said: 'The most important thing for the man is his stomach, that she cooks the kind of food he likes'. Another added that a husband returning home should find food ready and a quiet atmosphere. Hearing this, another woman interjected, 'A beautiful face, *kuḥ!*' [Arabic black eyeliner]. This resulted in another woman jumping in, 'A beautiful face, or he would marry on you [get a second wife] tomorrow'. Some of these

expectations were also discussed during interviews. One woman not only talked about the importance of having a clean house – which Syrian women are especially known for – but also seemed to feel that it was important for her to be able to understand what her husband wanted even from just looking at him: ‘If the man looks like this, you should understand that he needs something. He either wants water, or he wants something but is embarrassed to tell you’. I was struck by the weight of these expectations, made all the more hefty when we discussed the consequences of women not behaving as they are expected to behave. The consequences mentioned were: not being able to use the phone, not going out, not being able to do anything, and one older woman in Irbid even said, ‘[M]aybe his nerve, he won't handle that, he will kill her’. Here the implication was that if a man's nerves/psychological status, or his ‘*nafs*’ were too pressured, then non-compliance with expected behaviour could result in the death of the female. In contrast, women felt men and boys had more freedom and never heard the word ‘no’.

Men also face expectations about how they should behave. Women and men discussed the importance of men working (as outlined in Chapter Five) and the need for a boy to learn a career at a young age. One woman said: ‘The important thing that not to grow up, and become without something, nothing to work, nothing to do if so he would have to do something bad’. In an FGD, a man said, ‘I do not show them [my family] the problems which happened outside the house for not worrying them more. It is from myself’. This particularly struck me because it seems to signify a pressure beyond just providing for the family (a common narrative), but reflects the need to present a stoic front. This is relevant for a context like Jordan where humanitarian agencies provide psychosocial activities for refugees (particularly women), to talk about the anxiety and problems they face. If talking about problems is seen as something men should not do, what does this mean in the context of male survivors of GBV? The concerns around replicating a GBV response for men were stated by one GBV specialist, who said that not enough effort was placed on understanding the nature of GBV against men and boys. Instead, she said agencies merely replicated similar interventions to GBV programs for women and girls, for men and boys: setting up ‘men’s spaces’, and creating case management and group counselling processes. While there were men who accessed these services in Jordan, I wondered if implementing these same activities for men was effective if expectations for male behaviour emphasised the hiding of problems.

Change and power

While humanitarian and development agencies have fixated on the concept of 'change' in discussing how gender norms alter during displacement, and while the monitoring and evaluation tools used by humanitarians are driven by the idea of measuring shifts in gender equality and empowerment, I suggest that 'change' is a difficult concept. Rather, the concept of 'resistance' may offer more helpful ways of understanding human behaviour, because it points back to power. Abu-Lughod (1990) argues that resistance needs to be viewed as a 'diagnostic' of power (p. 42) – drawing on Michel Foucault's (1978) assertion that '[w]here there is power, there is resistance' (p. 95). For her, analysing resistance sheds light on how power works. She draws on Foucault (1982), who writes about using resistance 'as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their points of application and the methods used' (p. 780). This approach of exploring resistance to understand power, may, I suggest, offer useful insights for humanitarian and development analysis. It more explicitly points to power, while in contrast, exploring 'change' is inherently difficult because it may allow power analysis to be bypassed – as is currently occurring in how gender norms among refugees are analysed by humanitarian agencies.

In re-situating the discussion towards 'power' I also draw on James Scott's (1990) work on 'hidden transcripts'. He says that a 'hidden transcript' is 'a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant' by those less dominant (p. xii), suggesting that comparing the 'public transcript of power relations' (p. xii) – which he describes as 'the self-portrait of dominant elites as they would have themselves seen' (p. 18) - with what happens 'offstage' (p. 27) provides a fresh way of exploring resistance to domination (p. xii). This approach to power resonates with feminist analysis in many ways, and may offer opportunities for more critical analysis within the field of humanitarian and development work. In contexts like the Middle East, the 'public transcript' about gender norms has perhaps resulted in an over-emphasis on the dominance of men, without recognising how women resist. Scott's work therefore enables a more nuanced approach to understanding the complexities of power dynamics. He writes: 'Most of the political life of subordinate groups is to be found neither in overt collective defiance of

powerholders nor in complete hegemonic compliance, but in the vast territory between these two polar opposites' (p. 136). While Scott's analysis on the 'infrapolitics of subordinate groups' draws attention to different methods of resistance (p. 19), like Abu Lughod (1990), I would caution against assigning more value to certain kinds of resistance over others (p. 47). Resistance, however incremental, is still relevant, shining a light on power as multi-dimensional and complex. Arlene MacLeod (1996) puts it like this:

Women may appear as passive victims, unable to muster any opposition to the forces allied against them; or as consenting partners, acquiescent and apparently satisfied with their deferent role; or even as active participants, supporting and sustaining their own inequality; yet women also, when the times are ripe, seize the opportunity to participate in an ongoing series of negotiations, manipulations, and strategies directed toward gaining control and opportunity.

My findings take this further to argue that just as women contest power dynamics, men do also. It is not only that women resist men's dominance, but men also resist their own dominance, providing opportunities for women to share power and challenging rigid gender norms themselves. The following section outlines subtle and overt strategies of resistance carried out by Syrian women and men, both before and during displacement.

Subtle & overt resistance

For Reem, who wanted to continue her education, the biggest challenge was her in-laws. She married a Syrian man in Jordan and shortly after became pregnant. After having her baby she wanted to continue her study, but her in-laws raised objections, saying, '[Y]ou are married, your house, your husband, your daughter...' Reem was able to navigate these objections, by proving that she could complete her household tasks: '[T]hey found... in my house, I wake up early, I study early, I do my house, I cook, then I finish. So whoever came to me, my house is clean, the food is ready. That - that is the thing they were afraid of'. In this case, it was through affirming 'traditional' gender norms - showing she could fulfil them - that Reem obtained what she wanted. This was not a case of overt resistance, but getting approval from others to 'resist' one norm that suggested a mother couldn't continue education, through invoking her ability to meet their gendered expectations in

another area: completing her household tasks and caring for her baby. This example highlights that boundaries may be stretched without actually being broken (Droeber, 2005, p. 306). Resistance is not always a simple matter, but involves strategic bargaining.

Reem also engaged in bargaining with her husband, choosing to prioritise the thing most important to her - her education - while deciding to 'obey' his wishes regarding her not working. She explained this by saying it was important to respect his opinion because they were not in their country, his *nafs* was 'not comfortable' (a common way refugees described how the self/soul/psyche is unsettled) and 'he is tired, and suffers for us'. For her, studying was the thing she couldn't give up. Like Reem, women may choose specific issues they are willing to acquiesce on, while pushing back on other topics. This 'give and take' approach is, I suggest, nothing revolutionary within the context of relationships, but such bargaining is not captured in the rigid indicators that describe change within humanitarian and sometimes development circles.

For others, compliance may be the only option, yet they may perform acts of indirect resistance for their own benefit - to make the situation easier for themselves. One woman in Zarqa, for example, described how when she was engaged, her fiancé wanted to take her for a walk, but her family didn't allow this, so to her frustration, their walk was accompanied by his two sisters and her sister. She smiled cheekily as she described how she decided to make the walk last for an hour: 'I exhausted his sisters!' This act of resistance did not change the outcome, but it made the walk more bearable for her - knowing that the others supposed to supervise them were struggling with the long walk.

Other women shared examples of how they challenged gender norms regarding interaction between women and men. Safa, a young woman, said she had male friends in Syria as a teenager. She said: 'Many people were shocked, saying this thing is not ok. According to our customs, we don't have that, that a girl has guy friends. So my family started to say, "Don't talk about it in front of those people, that you have these friends"'. Safa's parents didn't mind that she had male friends, but they felt *others* would mind, therefore they instructed her to avoid mentioning her male friends. Safa's parents didn't see her resistance to the norm that women and men would not interact before marriage as an issue, but felt concerned about how others might perceive this, and responded by

asking her to be careful who she told. They had the power to stop the behaviour but chose instead to tell her to hide it from others. The fear of what others would think about a gender norm being resisted, caused steps to be taken to preserve image, however the act itself still occurred.

Later, in Jordan, when Safa became engaged, her fiancé would visit her at her house. Safa's family members would leave the two of them to talk, but would come in every ten or fifteen minutes. Safa laughed cheekily, saying, '[W]e made the best of that time'. In this example, her parents' attitude before the war extended to the period of displacement in Jordan. They did not, as humanitarian narratives suggest, automatically tighten the restrictions on their unmarried daughter because of displacement, but once even allowed Safa and her fiancé to have lunch and shop in Amman by themselves. Here, resistance occurred with the knowledge of Safa's family, also disrupting the idea that challenging a gender norm by implication involves conflict with the family (Johnson and Joseph, 2009, p. 2). Safa explained that her family were 'open-minded' – tracing this openness to her mother's side of the family, not her father's (itself interesting as it indicates the mother's upbringing was more persuasive). She said this openness was due to their education and the fact that they lived in a city; while her father's family lived in the countryside. She added, '[T]hey are not naturally strict like some people. They keep the traditions and customs. But still, they move with the times'.

For some women, there were strong reasons to push back on expectations. Amira talked about how she has her own '*nasawiyeh*' [feminism]. Her views emerged from her own reading and the fact that her family lived without 'intervention' from relatives due to her father's work, which caused them to live far away from family. She said, 'These limits, we created it... I believe that women can, but are not encouraged by their society'. These views were echoed by others like Hadiya: 'There are old people... They don't even give their daughters an inheritance. Even though it is their right... Even in Islam, she has a right'. Bana's reflections on the topic of women's position in society challenged common assumptions about tradition and Bedouin families. She explained her father is a Bedouin, but is 'open-minded' – a fact she attributes to him living in a city.

In some cases, resistance to gender norms is overt, like in the case of Fuad's aunts, who wanted to find out what happened to their brother (Fuad's father) who was arrested by the *mukhābarāt* [intelligence agencies], so they went to each intelligence office for 15 days until they found him. This is extremely unusual in the Syria context, where the *mukhābarāt* have created a culture of fear. In one FGD, a participant explained how it was 'forbidden' for a woman to go to the *mukhābarāt*: 'this thing is just for the man'. Fuad described the actions of his aunts like this: '[M]y aunts, have strong hearts, strong personalities. They were threatened with death more than once. The guard of intelligence building threatened them with killing. And they did not listen to him'. His aunts eventually found the prison where their brother was held, and negotiated to see him and take food to him – which caused Fuad's father to react with shock. He shouted, 'Go out, go out!' when his sister came into the prison cell, fearing harm would come to her. Fuad explained that his aunts behaved in this courageous way because they are 'Ḥorani women'.

The Ḥoran is a geographical area describing the flatlands stretching across Syria and Jordan, from Dar'a to Irbid. Describing 'Ḥorani women', Fuad said, 'They have courage... [T]hey are farmers. They have physical strength'. He explained that their experience with manual labour caused them to be strong and brave, compared to someone living in a city. Importantly, this depiction of Ḥorani women may also be linked to the socio-historical context of this geographical context outlined in Chapter Four, specifically the social interactions between the Sunnis and Druze, and the history of Sunni nationalist activity as well as the Druze Revolt (with support from tribes) against the French. Fuad added that others in Syria view people living in the Ḥoran as ignorant, but all his aunts are university educated. This also perhaps contextualises the somewhat-startling actions of his aunts, highlighting that their upbringing in the Ḥoran, their educational level as well as their own personalities may all be factors that supported their resistance. Fuad went on to recount other examples where his aunts depicted Ḥorani behaviour: intervening in physical fights and using violence against people who wronged their family. He also shared stories of other Ḥorani women, who marched in protests against the Assad regime, and who resisted against the regime and gender norms by smuggling weapons for the rebels and also using violence against the regime; one woman whose husband was killed by the *mukhābarāt* saw the police approaching to arrest her, and threw a washing machine from the upstairs window onto their car, resulting in injuries. These examples

suggest that the social and historical context in geographical locations may affect the way gender norms are constructed.

During life story interviews, as Fuad spent time describing stories about these aunts, as well as other Ḥorani women, I grew increasingly surprised that a young man would speak about women in such positive terms: 'How can't we be proud of them? Of course we are. In general, when a woman helps a man in his life, for sure he would be proud of her. My mum and father – my mum helped him to build the house and buy a car... Of course he is proud. Unless the man was bad'. I suggest that as well as Fuad's stories representing examples of women resisting gender (and other) norms, his stories are themselves significant: a form of resistance against gender norms, because as a male, he is affirming women who challenge these norms. This itself, I argue, is resistance. Fuad places a high value on bravery, evidenced through his descriptions of how he and his friends participated in rebel activity while in Syria, yet he assigns these values to his aunts and other Syrian women, without hesitation or qualification. Similarly, he speaks of his mother's economic contribution in positive ways, suggesting that only a man who is 'bad' would not find value in such women. Men also resist gender norms and power dynamics, not only in how they themselves behave, but in how they speak about *women* who challenge gender norms.

Men themselves also resist masculinity norms. One woman explained that when she worked some distance away from home, she would come home to find that her husband had cooked. She felt this was *'ādiyy* [normal]. In this case, her husband was used to cooking for himself because before getting married he had lived away from his family. Necessity had previously required him to carry out tasks typically be done by women, but this opened the door to him carrying out the same task later on. Khadija, who was married as a child, said that her husband was actively involved in household tasks: 'Anything I want, I need to do, him and I do it. If I want to do the laundry, he puts it outside. If I want to sweep the floor, he like, sweeps with me. Or dry the floor with me'. She explained his behaviour in two ways: because 'he raised me on his hand' and because he was an imam and it was his religious duty to help her.

In other cases, it was less clear-cut as to why a man was not abiding by gender norms. One woman, Ala'a, who married a Yemeni man in Jordan, discussed how her husband, who works in Yemen most of the year, gave her full control of their money immediately after they got married. He said, 'You have the right to this' and he handed over all his money and documents. Ala'a explained it like this: 'He really trusted me from the first time he saw me. And the money, even to the extent that when he wanted money, he'd ask me. He didn't keep anything for himself'. This example highlights the fluidity of gender roles - though his behaviour could be contextualised by the fact that he is not Syrian and may have experience with different kinds of gender norms in countries where he has worked, as well as the fact that Ala'a is older (they married while she was in her early 30s) so she may be seen by him as more reliable with money. Ala'a herself described this arrangement as unusual: 'He's like a strange person, the extent to which he trusted me...'

A few women felt that there was greater freedom for women in Jordan compared to Syria. One woman said in Syria, 'Mostly, the opinion was this: the man says it, and executes. Here, rarely. But us, no, some of us, it's as if we're in Syria'. Another woman, Bana, commented that in Jordan women were more 'strong' than women in Syria. Bana had already heard about Palestinian women being strong while in Syria. She gave an example of how, when house-hunting in Jordan, when it came to the time to discuss the price, it would be a woman who discussed these issues. Importantly, these were Palestinian women that she was talking about. Bana felt that in Jordan it was the women who made the decisions: 'He just has to obey her orders', but she also qualified her statement, saying that this was not the case for all women in Jordan: the exception were the small number of 'weak or respectful women who don't force their personality on the man'. The idea of strong versus weak women came up multiple times in other interviews. Bana referred to women being strong in a positive sense, however there were others who saw this as a negative.

Contradictions & complications

For example, one man talked about his lieutenant in the Syrian army whom he described as 'drwysh' [a beggar]. He added, 'But his wife, God forgive me, she's the man' and explained that this lieutenant was mostly absent from the house while his wife stayed at

home with the children. He believes this increased this woman's control over her husband. He himself was so afraid of his lieutenant's wife that when they would argue in the car he would side with the wife, because he was afraid of her. He called her '*bint haram*' [an insult which roughly translates as 'indecent woman'] giving examples of how this woman would berate her husband when he said anything. This example is slightly complicated because it is unclear how much of it is due to the woman being 'strong' and how much is someone taking advantage of a husband. It does however illustrate that as power shifts, the dynamics that result are not always necessarily clear-cut. In this case it is possible that his general attitude about women's status and position – evident from other interviews – may have coloured his perspective of this lieutenant's wife, causing him to react in this extreme way. On the other hand, it may also be possible that this woman was particularly difficult. This creates other complications – should a woman supposedly controlling her husband be viewed as something completely negative, or as something necessary to bring equilibrium to the relationship within a patriarchal system? Who decides if a particular exercise of power is positive or negative? Is it not equally possible for a woman to exercise power in negative ways, compared to a man?

During life story interviews with Hadiya, further complexities in drawing conclusions about power emerged. At first, I saw Hadiya as a woman with a very egalitarian father who facilitated her education, ensured she was able to set up her own business, and encouraged her ambitions, however I have come to temper my perception in recognising how parents may influence and re-assert power over their children. The example of Hadiya and her family highlights that talking about someone being 'progressive' versus 'traditional' is not necessarily helpful, as there is a lot of grey between these two extremes. Hadiya was the first person from her village to live away from home for her university study. She was encouraged by her parents – especially her father - to do this. This father, during life story interviews, said that he treated his daughters and sons in the same way and all were given similar opportunities. When Hadiya finished university, he rented a property for her to start her own medical practice in their village. Challenged by a friend as I recounted the example of Hadiya, I began to probe more deeply into this seemingly excellent example of progressiveness, to understand if Hadiya actually had 'agency' in how she lived her life. During further interviews and conversations over social media, Hadiya was very positive about the role her family played in supporting her

education. She seemed confident that if she had said 'no' to going to university, her parents would have understood. I was a bit dubious of this, especially when I reflected more on her father's strong personality and the value he placed on education. When she was a child, he would encourage them, saying, 'You are a paediatrician, you are a gynaecologist, you are a doctor of...' During our final interview, Hadiya shyly told me that she had an interview later that week for a scholarship program in a completely different field. She had seen an advertisement for scholarships and without telling her husband or parents (whom she lives with), applied for the program – which involved an 18-week intensive training program. She said her husband was fine with her interviewing but she was scared to tell her parents, thinking they wouldn't agree because she had studied in a medical field and now this was a completely different area. Hadiya had tried a few times to get a job in her field but it was never the right position/pay. Once she was offered a role in Zaatari Camp and her family initially said, '*Rūḥi!*' [a command, meaning 'go!'] until they found out that the salary was only 600 JD per month. Then her father said she shouldn't go, and although her husband encouraged her to take it, she decided not to.

After the interview, Hadiya told me that she was offered the scholarship but didn't accept the opportunity because 'my parents didn't like the idea'. Interestingly, her husband was supportive of her. I guessed that the issue was with Hadiya's father, who has strong views on the importance of education and work. It was unsurprising that he would view his daughter moving to a completely different field of work as not ideal. I also wondered if a contributing factor may be the 'intensive' nature of this course – being away from home for 12 hours a day would put pressure on the family to care for her children or complete household tasks along with her mother. This argument would support existing narratives around women being prevented from pursuing opportunities due to the impact on gender roles. Later, I heard that Hadiya decided to take the opportunity. She said her family weren't happy about the 12-hour work day but she ignored them, and they saw how happy she was and were now pleased for her.

Hadiya's father worked incredibly hard throughout his life to succeed in his education and work. When he recounted the challenges in his early years of poverty, he became emotional, suggesting that what he has achieved is important to him. I had previously seen her father as someone who was more egalitarian due to his education, but then

wondered about the extent to which Hadiya has actually had agency throughout these life decisions. Or, is it more a case of being pushed into a socially-acceptable field of work that is seen as lucrative, because her father did not want her to suffer as he did? What is interesting here is the extent to which Hadiya has been able to push back over time, and pursue the opportunities she wanted. Was it always the case that her parents were so involved in her life decisions, or is it because they were now living together again, that her parents have re-involved themselves in her life? She lived in a separate house to her parents when she got married (in 2007) but moved back to their house in 2012 with her husband as events started to escalate. It makes sense then that if Hadiya did gain more independence after marriage, that some of it might have diminished in the years since the events began, due to living with them again in Syria and now in Jordan. Or, perhaps her 'independence' was unchanged during marriage and her parents always had a strong influence in her life decisions.

It is hard to make conclusive statements about Hadiya's father's 'progressiveness' when his background and personality are taken into account. For me to say that her father was progressive or that he resisted against patriarchy because he provided equal opportunities for his daughters and sons is perhaps not enough. His actions may not actually be about gender equality, but may be more about his personal beliefs about the value of education and his emphasis on the importance of becoming modern. On the other hand, perhaps this is just a case of an older male – the leader of the family – using his influence while Hadiya made the ultimate decision. This highlights that talking about how progressive versus traditional people may be is highly complex – and this is just one family. When humanitarian agencies try to track changes in attitudes regarding gender equality, or when indices like the 'Gender Inequality Index' (UNDP, 2016) are used as a way of understanding human behaviour, it hides what is occurring beneath the surface: the ongoing negotiations and complexities underlying how people behave that may or may not be gendered. In humanitarian agencies, as a consequence of practitioners trying to highlight the importance of gender, sometimes everything becomes 'gendered', when at times something else may be occurring. Just as it is too simplistic to analyse situations without a 'gender lens', so it is equally simplistic to apply a gender lens indiscriminately without recognising other factors that may be as influential.

In humanitarian and development agencies, this kind of 'complexity' is not given attention. One humanitarian worker said, '[E]verything is presented as a positive. So you did this, and then this, and then that change happened... They're all reporting positives'. She reflected on how as a program manager, she felt the need to downplay negative outcomes because of what donors would think. Another humanitarian worker who has worked as an international consultant in Jordan explained that she often feels pressure to show that there is a clear intervention that can respond to complex issues. She said, 'Part of me wanted to say, "You know what, I really don't know how we get armed men to stop raping women"'. Due to the pressure of competing for limited resources and lifting the visibility of GBV, she felt she needed to provide a clear answer to satisfy organisational/donor requirements, despite knowing the issues were complex and may not have a sure-fire solution.

The focus on simple solutions means that there is not much room for programmatic anomalies or for people receiving interventions to behave in less predictable ways. A few participants mentioned how their daughters or female relatives decided to leave school. I tried to probe deeper, expecting to find at the source an oppressive male decision-maker who influenced such a choice, but was myself challenged by their responses. One woman laughed at my question, 'She doesn't like school, that's why!' Not liking school was also mentioned with reference to boys. In my experience (including other research), the notion of children not enjoying school and dropping out has been resisted by humanitarians, who seem fixated on the 'deeper' causes behind this instead of recognising school may not be universally enjoyed. In the example above, a girl exercised agency – though not in a way humanitarian agencies would necessarily want. Is agency any less meaningful if it results in a decision that does not align with the 'empowerment' agenda of a humanitarian agency? Thomson (2013), in discussing how Somali refugee women found 'silence' a meaningful way of surviving harassment in camps, uses a definition of agency as strategic choice. She writes: 'This means that what might appear to be powerlessness or passivity may be read as conscious, strategic silence' (p. 606).

This is however different to how development and humanitarian agencies see the actions of 'empowered' actors. One humanitarian worker suggested the issue is that agencies impose their own ideas of empowerment and equality. She said the question as a gender

and GBV practitioner should be: '[H]ow do I ensure that I'm translating women's opportunities and dreams the way they want to.? And how do I facilitate their options and choices? Even if I think those choices are not the best choices... but it's not for me to make it...'

WHITHER HUMANITARIANISM?

Implications for 'change' and measurement

What do these findings on gender norms mean for development and humanitarian agencies when it comes to the concept of 'change'? Judy El Bushra (2003) suggests that 'neat answers' may not always be possible, but there are questions that we need to consider in understanding change: 'Do people see their lives as being better or worse than before, and how far is their interpretation of this question coloured by their gendered experiences? How far are the interventions of development agencies coloured by their own perceptions and values?' (p. 264)

These are important questions, especially for development and humanitarian agencies, who have been less nuanced in explaining what change means. My experience is that there is often a lack of theory behind the social changes that humanitarian agencies desire to see. Part of this is due to the systems that are used for monitoring and evaluation, specifically the most common results-based management tool used in agencies, the logframe. In a logframe, activities to be carried out are linked to higher level 'outputs' which feed into 'outcomes' which then contribute to an overall 'goal'. Within this approach, the logic is clear - at least on paper. Reality however, is different, which may be a reason that the so-called 'theory of change' approach started to gain more traction in the last eight years or so. The 'theory of change' was supposed to be an organic way of understanding change in a less rigid structure to a logframe, however agencies struggled to use this tool, and it morphed to become another inflexible tool (Eyben, 2013, p. 3) that fails to capture non-linear change. This has left ongoing issues in how change is perceived, planned and, especially, measured within development and particularly humanitarian agencies.

The issue of measurement is tied to how agencies fixate on data and evidence. One humanitarian worker felt that the data collected as part of the Syria Regional Response was sex-and-age-disaggregated more than any other emergency she had worked in, but that this ‘in a way... let everyone off the hook’ - because there was little analysis or linkage of data to improving programming. This was echoed by another humanitarian worker, who went even further to say, ‘I think we have become good at manipulating data’, giving the example of how agencies make problems seem bigger than they are by using percentages instead of numbers: ‘We can say 60% of women have reported that they have been raped, but in reality 60% out of how many women... but we don’t say that... We want to use the percentage...’

Another GBV specialist talked about twisting indicators for donors, giving the example of one UN agency that was trying to standardise its indicators across multiple contexts. Her experience was that the indicators were so different to what was happening in the programme, that it ended up being about ‘figuring out how to bullshit our way through’. In her situation, the indicators that were required were nothing do with the activities, but they couldn’t redesign the program, so they just had to twist data and language to make it fit to what the donors wanted. My own experience trying to explain to donors that it was not helpful to have logframe indicators specifying the number of GBV survivors who disclosed violence per quarter (including having to explain when these ‘targets’ fell short), also reflects this challenge with data. Within all of these conversations about data and evidence, Eyben (2013) suggests there is something more sinister: ‘The technical question of “what works” exacerbates the sector’s tendency to see people as subjects requiring treatment...’ (p. 17).

Although I began this section by highlighting how gender norm change approaches lack a theoretical framework, it is important to note that more recently there has been a greater focus on drawing on social norm change theory in informing approaches to programs addressing gender issues. For example, work by Gerry Mackie *et al.* (2015), and Cristina Bicchieri *et al.* (2014) have attempted to bridge the divide between academic studies and development/humanitarian interventions, presenting conceptualisations of social change for issues like early marriage, female genital cutting (and GBV more

generally). Mackie *et al.*, for example, challenge the thinking in development circles about changes in human behaviour being independent, suggesting, 'there are human actions where what one does depends on what others do, and what others do depends on what one does (many-way interdependence)' (p. 8). This is particularly relevant for the Middle Eastern context, where, as argued in Chapter Six, relationality may influence behaviour. Similarly, Bicchieri *et al.* have contributed to thinking on early marriage, challenging agencies to frame the problem more clearly instead of drawing on multiple explanations for the practice. This, I suggest is also relevant to the way GBV has been framed, similarly resulting in '[p]artial explanations rather than encompassing theories' (p. 3) – for example reports stating: 'In sum contributing factors of GBV, hence of sexual assault are poverty, war, displacement, lack of education and knowledge about human rights, limited rule of law, and law endorsement by the appointed authorities' (Danish Refugee Council, 2015, p. 9). This results in 'piecemeal' (Bicchieri *et al.*, 2014, p. 5) interventions.

These studies have been used to inform CARE'S approach to norm change (CARE USA, 2017) and DFID's approach to violence against women and girls (Alexander-Scott, Bell and Holden, 2016), however whether these approaches to addressing gender equality are actually being implemented remains to be seen. My own experience working as a consultant on GBV programs indicates that humanitarian and development organisations still tend towards definitive language in describing changes they want to see in GBV programs, rather than seeing social norm change as more complex. Problems continue to persist in how agencies frame interventions at the individual level only – focused on knowledge or attitude change - instead of exploring collective expectations as a way of transforming behaviour (Heise and Manji, 2016, p. 2). The 'knowledge, attitude and practices' surveys that are supposed to provide the context to human behaviour and guide interventions do not usually focus on social expectations, which is a key missing piece in measurement (Bicchieri *et al.*, 2014, p. 5).

My research findings support the argument made by Bicchieri *et al.* (2014) about the importance of social expectations. They write: 'Since people's behavior depends on what others in their reference network do and think, they will not change their behavior unless others do so as well. Hence, the entire reference network needs to participate in the change' (p. 5). During one life story interview, Hadiya explained how she was the first girl

to travel and live in a different place for her university study. Normally, girls went to Damascus for study and travelled back and forth every day from their governorate. Hadiya did not obtain high enough grades to study in Damascus so had to live in a different governorate to attend university there. She explained that she was the first girl to do this, however afterwards, many girls started to register for universities in this location, and, like her, lived there. She shared another example of a woman in her village who worked in the Emirates, while her husband and children lived in Syria. This woman was slightly older than her parents, and was the first woman from their village to work alone in the Gulf, but then, '[i]t started to be *'ādiyy*'. This behaviour became seen as normal over time. In both of these examples, behaviour that previously was not acceptable became acceptable as people observed the shifting behaviour of others: as more girls started living away from home for study, others began to feel this was appropriate for them too; although it had been largely men who moved to the Gulf from Syria, this woman's actions laid the groundwork for others to do the same. In an FGD, one man reflected on the changes in mobility and work among men and women, saying: 'Every year, more openness happens, people become *ya'nī*, they get introduced to... It becomes normal, routine...'

Heise & Manji (2016) however urge caution: '[W]hile shifts in gender-related behaviour do not always lead to shifts in gender-related norms, seeing more people act in a new way can challenge people's sense of what men and women usually do' (p. 4). This suggests that care needs to be taken when discussing 'change'. The theories underlying social norm change on gender-related issues are still emerging, so it is difficult to make definitive statements. At the very least however, development and humanitarian agencies need to be less simplistic in understanding problems and proposing solutions. This is easier said than done – the narratives around change, displacement and gender emerge from entrenched bureaucratic systems that value certain kinds of knowledge of others, that prioritise efficiency over quality, and that, as I will argue in the next section, have become detached from the realities of refugees they are supposed to be serving.

Proximity and bureaucracies

With this grounding in the problems and challenges around conceptualising 'change', I suggest that what might be most useful in unraveling the paternalistic, 'we know better than you' Western position on gender equality and women's empowerment that many agencies are driven by – which has resulted in the narrow narratives around 'change' we now face – is to take a step back and reflect more broadly on how humanitarian agencies and their staff engage with refugees.

One of the most valuable lessons that I have learnt through the fieldwork process has been around the need for humanitarian agencies to be less removed from the people that they are serving. My feeling is that with all the toolkits, manuals, curricula and guidelines for best practice, what has been lost is the idea of engaging refugees as human beings who are complex and multidimensional. Instead, as Daniel Wordsworth (2017a) puts it, now there exists 'uncrossable bureaucratic distance' between refugees and humanitarian agencies. I suggest that this distance creates problems at multiple levels: from the way that the 'problems' of refugees are positioned, to the rapid-fire interrogations that occur to understand their 'needs', to the assumptions that underlie programmatic interventions, and the way people's lives are reduced to numerical figures that are inserted into a logframe to satisfy a donor. In all the 'doing', something has been lost. Our ability to see people as people and have conversations that are meaningful and to allow them to drive their own agendas – all ironically key principles in the early years of 'participatory' development – have somehow faded in importance. In trying to be 'targeted' and in the drive for 'scale-up' and 'replication', we have become unable to account for complexity.

Cathrine Brun (2016) suggests that an 'ethics of care' approach might be useful for humanitarian agencies (p. 404), shifting the humanitarian worker from 'a distant, detached observer who creates knowledge based on the application of standardized models rather than on experience in the particular local context' (Olivius, 2016a, p. 280), to someone whose actions are grounded in trusted relationships with the populations being served. This means spending time with refugees to actually understand the issues they face instead of assuming, and it means dismantling the power hierarchies that consign refugees to being called 'beneficiaries' (Hyndman and de Alwis, 2003, p. 218). One humanitarian worker described how she tried to challenge power like this:

I remember being in Jordan and telling the team there that these people that you're going [to] in the camp, and I'm looking down upon, and you find that the questions are so irritating at times... Without them, you would not be in this job... [T]hey are paying your salary... And I want you to feel the fact that you have been given this privileged opportunity to speak for them, to advocate for them. They are paying you for it.

The attitude that humanitarian workers have toward their work and the people they are serving is important. I recall one casual conversation over dinner with UN agency staff during my fieldwork. They were discussing how much they don't like Jordan and want to leave – a not uncommon conversation; I have heard similar sentiments while working in Burundi and Nigeria. In this case, these high-level staff were talking about their work in Jordan as if they had no control over their lives, as if they were forced to be in Jordan. I was struck by the negativity and victimhood that their comments represented, especially because they were all working in a context where literally millions of people (Syrians, Iraqis, Palestinians) are in Jordan because they actually have no options. It almost makes a mockery of the lives of these refugees – made even more ironic by the fact that these humanitarian workers are in Jordan to help refugees. There is perhaps a feeling of being 'noble' associated with remaining in a place/job that you hate, within the humanitarian world. It is like what Liisa Malkki (2015) talks about in her recent book about humanitarianism – that humanitarian work is 'valorized' (p. 2). Malkki makes the important observation that humanitarian workers have their own needs which they seek to have met through this kind of work. Perhaps the need to be the noble hero, to 'stick it out' for the refugees, is a means of self-validation. I use this example to illustrate that the motivations of humanitarian workers matter; motivations influence attitude and inevitably shape interactions with displaced groups.

Reflecting broadly on how refugees are treated by humanitarians, one GBV specialist I interviewed said the problem was that we as humanitarian workers can't put ourselves in their shoes. She reflected on the principle of 'proximity' in organisations like MSF – an agency known for impartiality and for limiting the funding it receives from governments in order to not be beholden to government agendas. In MSF, there is a drive to be 'close' to the refugees - showing solidarity through spending time with refugees meant that 'you

saw them as human beings'. This broke down the 'divide of us versus them' and resulted in a more 'organic' humanitarian response - an argument also made by Graeme Rodgers (2004). She added that in Jordan this kind of approach was mostly used by small solidarity organisations, laughing as she added, 'They weren't very good at writing proposals, you know, like their monitoring and evaluation was all over the place, but they did seem to care and like the refugees!' In Jordan, Sarah Tobin (2016) suggests that the space between refugees and humanitarian practitioners is also visually evident through the fencing between base camp (where humanitarians sit and work within Zaatari camp) and where the refugees live (p. 5).

Treating refugees as human beings and respecting their dignity is presumably a very basic requirement of working in the humanitarian field, yet this is not always evident. One humanitarian worker talked about how hiring staff emphasises skills and certificates, but it actually should be about these two questions: '[D]o you really care about people? Do you really care about the refugees?' Instead she reflected on the 'heartlessness' and 'coldness' refugees were treated with in Jordan - an issue in Lebanon also (Mansour, 2018, p. 5) - including being shouted at by UNHCR staff at the registration centre during the course of lining up for hours. She also mentioned the negative ways in which Syrians were spoken of behind closed doors, something I had also witnessed. It is not only these overt behaviours that are concerning, but in my experience the lack of respect and care for refugees also extends to how the time/space of refugees is valued. Calling a refugee to say that you would like to conduct a quick (it must always be quick) 'home visit' with donors in a few days is perhaps less appropriate within the Middle Eastern context of building relationships, hospitality and reciprocity - yet this is common practice. I suggest that this disconnection from the issues facing refugees, this disregard for contextual and relational factors, and this inability to empathise and show respect, does not occur in a vacuum but it is a consequence of the way power operates within large bureaucracies.

One of the most disheartening things I have experienced and witnessed in working for development and humanitarian agencies, is the way staff treat each other. Some of this is because of poor management (by no means an issue unique to this industry), while in other cases it seems more systemic - stemming from how power is perceived and used

by humanitarians. One humanitarian worker gave the example of how in the UN, people may not even refer to others by their name, rather by their position within the UN hierarchy/pay-scale, for example, 'He's a P3'. A GBV specialist shared about how a meeting was held with GBV program managers from various locations, during which the male program managers dominated the meeting, even shouting over their female colleagues. 'And these were the good guys!' she exclaimed in exasperation. I have myself been in meetings with 'gender specialists' where power hierarchies were so entrenched that the senior manager interrupted and literally shouted over her subordinate staff who were trying to share their opinions. The lack of self-awareness that this involves; using power in such negative ways yet attempting to implement complex programs that seek to address unequal power, reveals a startling layer of hypocrisy. It helps to explain the way refugees are treated by humanitarian staff as well as the distance between humanitarians and the populations they serve.

During one interview with a GBV specialist, we reflected on the way humanitarian workers talk about 'the field' and how those who were based in the capital city and who had never even met a refugee would speak about and for refugees as if they intimately knew them. For these staff, being in an office was being in the 'field' despite the fact that the organisation's activities occurred in other geographical areas. This lack of proximity to refugees has multiple consequences. Instead of understanding the day-to-day experiences of refugees based on actual qualitative research and analysis, old knowledge from other contexts dictates programming. Proximity is not needed because 'we know' what they need.

One humanitarian worker said that often agencies who implement activities hoping to address gender norms, come with a 'blueprint' of what they want to do, without actually understanding the nuances among the populations they are working with: 'We don't talk to the women, we don't ask them. We don't follow up, we don't see what were really the impact[s] of it'. She raised the issue of Western humanitarian agencies using war as an 'opportunity in which then we will emancipate these women' without actually bothering to 'understand their ecosystem' or refrain from judgement. Another GBV specialist suggested that assumptions about gender norms among refugees sometimes emerge from what is 'trendy' within humanitarian circles. She said that someone may make an

off-hand comment about the experience of refugees in a meeting, and if no one has ever heard anything like this, it becomes repeated and reinforced in various meetings - 'it's infectious'. Knowledge about refugees therefore becomes spread through these methods, instead of being directly communicated from refugees.

When I spoke to another GBV specialist, she highlighted that part of the challenge around understanding gender norms is the fact that it takes time to understand these norms in a humanitarian emergency, yet there is an imperative to act quickly. In the case of the Syria Regional Response, she said that they did not have Syrian counterparts who could advise on cultural and other issues, so they had to go with what they 'knew' from similar contexts and from rapid assessments. She said, 'It's better than not doing anything. We have to deliver...' She explained that the problem was failing to 'dig' after the initial response. The issue then becomes about what constitutes the initial response and how standardised such interventions are, versus which interventions need to vary based on context. The challenge with saying that the digging comes later, is that in an emergency response, the urgency of the response does not really dissipate. In a protracted humanitarian crisis, the point at which the situation is under control enough to 'reflect', is harder to gauge. This is particularly true for an industry that has consigned 'reflection' to the point when the activities are subject to a formal evaluation, which could be years later.

The concept of proximity could also be used to talk about the distance between the beliefs of humanitarian workers and the gender equality principles they are supposed to be promoting in their programs. Fenella Porter (2012) argues that 'although an organization may pursue a gender policy through practices such as audits and checklists, it may still overlook the gender relations of the individual development practitioners' (p. 302). In my experiences working in Burundi, Nigeria and Jordan, it was clear that staff who were implementing GBV or girls' education programs did not always believe in the values of these programs – there was a disconnect between what they personally believed and what they were being paid to say to communities. One Jordanian GBV program manager I interviewed in Jordan said that her Jordanian staff were not ready to deal with GBV themselves. They were 'comfortable with the way things are' yet were implementing programs that were focused on the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. For me, combined with the first aspect of being closer to refugees to

better-understand their lives, this is one of the key things that needs to change for empowerment/gender equality/GBV activities to be effective.

CONCLUSION

This chapter highlights that relying on stereotypical ideas of gender norms is inherently problematic given the diversity in gender norms among Syrians. Many refugees may already be 'empowered' and have much to share of their own experiences that could be more valuable and relevant than the examples of empowerment contained in the countless Western-origin gender manuals, guidelines and toolkits I have read (and written!). The sometimes-prescriptive approaches to 'empowerment' and 'gender equality' contained in these guidance materials do not always acknowledge that women (and men!) may already be living out these values and ideals; zero baseline knowledge is assumed, thus the focus is often on 'raising awareness' as if this is the only route whereby women can come to enjoy equality.

The narratives around gender norms among refugees also contain judgements about 'culture and 'tradition' that, as explained through my findings, have little grounding in the lives of Syrian women and men, who draw on and reject culture and tradition in varied ways in their everyday lives. The 'Me too' hashtag which spread in October 2017 across social media highlights that 'the (implicit) self-representation of western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities...' (Mohanty, 1988, p. 65) is a fallacy: GBV (and in fact gender inequality) is pervasive in every society, Western or otherwise. The judgements made by development and humanitarian agencies are at best misguided and at worse, hypocritical.

My research findings build on the work of Abu Lughod (1985) and Jason Hart (2008), strengthening the idea that gender norms can be communicated through observation. This observation positions what is seen as acceptable/expected behaviour. This means that people may resist gender norms through observing the behaviour of others. Rather than being 'told' how things should be, simply observing other people behaving differently may provide opportunities for resistance. This means that the awareness

sessions that humanitarian agencies conduct on empowerment and rights - which tend to take the approach of telling people how various laws protect them, how they have rights, value and dignity – may be misdirected.

Critical to my findings is problematising what constitutes a 'change' in gender norms. One humanitarian consultant whom I interviewed said, 'Change looks different in different places'. This is not however how humanitarian agencies necessarily approach change, which is more and more about having 'universal' quantifiable indicators. Patricia Pessar & Sarah Mahler (2003) argue that 'assessment lies in the eye of the beholder' (p. 832) and that what is a change to one person or agency, may mean something entirely different to another. This emphasises the need to tackle empowerment and equality from the perspective of what is valuable and important to the people who this actually relates to – even if it means uprooting entrenched positions on what it means to be empowered. In one context, what constitutes a change may be a woman making joint decisions with her husband about how household income is spent, while in another, this may already be occurring and may require an entirely different indicator of change. Change needs to be situated in the context of refugee populations, not in 'objective' measures based on Western ideas. Katarzyna Grabska (2011) writes:

Displacement and forced migration offer potential and moments of great change. Yet, for these moments to be realised, it begs for everyone involved in humanitarian assistance to rethink their own stands on gender equality and open up their eyes to 'other' ways of being that can include equality on 'other' rather than 'western and modern' terms. 'Do no harm' remains ever more valid and complex in the era of gender-sensitive humanitarian policies (p. 92).

My conceptual contribution relates to the importance of 'resistance' - rather than 'change' - in shedding light on power relations. Resistance is not always straight-forward. Women may engage in 'strategic bargaining' – resisting in one area while complying in another in order to achieve their goals. I build on the work of Abu Lughod (1990), who has analysed women's resistance, in suggesting that men too resist – not just in their own behaviour but how they talk about *women* who resist gender norms, whether about women working, accessing education or displaying masculine traits like bravery. The narratives

that men have about women are, I suggest, more important than academics and humanitarian and development agencies have recognised. These narratives reveal areas of potential shifts. This takes Suad Joseph's (2004) assertion: 'Their discourse of themselves becomes a site for sensing the possible' (p. 271) even further: it is the discourses of others that may also point to change.

My findings contribute to the work of Porter (2012), in that I propose that there is a need to address both individual attitudes regarding gender equality (p. 303) and the power structures within organisations (p. 308). My research however builds on her work to emphasise the need to reflect on the principles of humanitarianism as part of this process. My argument is this: if humanitarian workers cannot even treat each other with respect and dignity, how can they treat refugees or other populations they are serving with respect and dignity? The lack of proximity between refugees and humanitarian workers stands in stark contrast to notions of Middle Eastern hospitality described in Chapter Four. I suggest there is much humanitarian agencies can learn from the ethos of hospitality that is engrained into Middle Eastern culture; incorporating this approach into the treatment of refugees may be a useful way of moving forward. My argument highlights that having an organisational mandate to serve people must translate to staff as well; anything less is hypocrisy. This is an issue of organisational culture. Cornwall & Rivas (2015) put it like this:

Accountability, inclusion, non-discrimination – all these concepts are ultimately about relations of power. These are not ideals that are abstracted from culture and society; they are deeply, intensely, social. They speak to and about the everyday situations in which we live our lives and can be applied to just about any international development setting, from interactions in the offices of international organisations to debates in national parliaments and bureaucracies to the interface between local NGO [non-government organisation] workers and the 'beneficiaries' of their interventions to our own domestic lives and relationships (p. 410).

Issues of gender inequality are not just a problem among displaced populations, but extend to development and humanitarian agencies: from how they deal with gender discrimination and sexual harassment, to dynamics between managers and their subordinates. In focusing on 'outside' interventions towards displaced populations,

agencies have neglected to reflect on inequality and power 'inside', failing to recognise that disregarding organisational culture prevents the achievement of programmatic outcomes (Sandler and Rao, 2012, p. 556). This chapter illustrates the dissonance between humanitarian principles and the practices of agencies. The lack of proximity between humanitarians and refugees, and between the gender equality messages promoted by agencies and the practice within agencies, demonstrates that fundamental problems need to be addressed.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

A suspension of judgement about our most central assumptions, renewed each time we encounter a new social context, may be salutary: gender may or may not be a salient category for an explanation of contestation and resistance, the self-determining, autonomous individual may or may not be a useful starting point for analysis, 'women' may or may not emerge as a social category around which an articulation of interests takes place and resisting subjects may be both rational actors and unable to think beyond the 'naturalised' givens of their communities. This may be another way of saying that the messiness of social reality has always exceeded the explanatory power of our conceptual frameworks and that this is all the more so in the area of gender (Kandiyoti, 1998, p. 150).

In March 2018, I participated in a symposium exploring humanitarian responses to displacement in Jordan, organised by the University of Amsterdam. As researchers focused on Syrian refugees in Jordan, we explored the complexities of analysing early marriage, the challenges of articulating 'agency' and the difficulties we faced in presenting the lives of refugees. In the last session, we discussed the question: 'how do we choose which story to tell?' Recognising that the lives of refugees have often been depicted in rigid, stereotypical ways, how might we, as researchers, challenge the 'over-representation of suffering' and bring in nuance, without negating the fact that suffering does occur and that there may sometimes be truth in stereotypes? How could we better understand and present the experiences of people affected by forced displacement?

In this thesis, my aim was to explore the usefulness around the concept of 'change' in understanding gender norms during displacement. I wanted to find more nuanced ways of talking about 'change' during displacement. The puzzle I sought to explore was whether 'gender norms' among Syrian refugees were as easy to pin down as humanitarian agency narratives suggest. Were gender norms so 'fixed' before conflict, and did we really know enough about the lives of Syrian women and men *before* displacement, to be making conclusions about changes *during* displacement? I wanted to

understand the complexities, contestations and contradictions involved in analysing gendered change during displacement.

Examining gendered change within a displacement context is, however, a difficult undertaking. Academic scholars have demonstrated that during displacement, gender hierarchies may be challenged, reinforced, or even both (Daley, 1991, p. 267; Matlou, 1999, p. 136; Turner, 1999, p. 148; El-Bushra, 2003, p. 261; Abdallah, 2009, p. 57; Nusair, 2013, pp. 69-70). Gendered power hierarchies may alter in unexpected ways, allowing young men to exercise power over older men in refugee camps (Turner, 1999, p. 145), or shifting power dynamics within families (Hart, 2008, p. 73). More recent scholarship on gender norms during forced displacement reiterates that it is not always easy to articulate if and how gender norms have changed due to displacement. Katarzyna Grabska's research among the Nuer (2014) highlights that it is difficult to state clear conclusions about the direction of social change. However, her work emphasises that despite the challenges around conceptualising 'change', it is possible to highlight narratives of resistance and fluidity in a way that provides useful lessons for the study of gender (p. 338).

My research conceptualises displacement as providing opportunities for changes in gender norms, while noting that fixating on displacement may neglect processes of change occurring outside of displacement (Utas, 2005, p. 426; Grabska, 2014, p. 81). My research suggests that focusing on displacement-induced gender norm change can reduce the idea of human agency, creating the paternalistic impression that without displacement, gender norms are forever fixed. As my critique of humanitarian narratives reveals, simplistic generalisations often inform analysis of the pre-displacement period, reifying the notion that refugees are subjects in need of reform (Olivius, 2016a, p. 270). Informed by Malkki's (1996) critique of the silencing of refugee histories, my research sought to understand gender norms during the pre-displacement period as well, seeking to obtain a broader understanding of gender norms and power among Syrian women and men.

This thesis makes conceptual contributions to the study of gender norms and power, focusing on (im)mobility, family relationships and resistance to gender norms. These

contributions are situated within three periods: before displacement, during the conflict in Syria and during displacement in Jordan. My findings highlight how during conflict in Syria and during displacement, it may be easier for women to be mobile while men face other vulnerabilities. They also suggest that during displacement, Syrian women find connection and routine from the 'immobile' space of the home, challenging the notion that only mobility is positive. My findings expand on theorisations of the dynamic between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law before and during displacement. The analysis also expands on thinking regarding resistance to gender norms before and during displacement, exploring how gender norms are resisted through observation, how women resist gender norms in one area while invoking a gender norm in another area, and how men resist in how they speak about women's resistance. Lastly, as part of the overarching findings on power, this thesis contributes to thinking on power hierarchies within humanitarian bureaucracies.

My analysis suggests that gender norms and power ought to be viewed in less static ways. This has implications for academic scholars and humanitarian agencies, as discussed in this last chapter. While my findings cannot be generalised to all Syrian refugees or all humanitarian emergencies, they do raise questions around how power and gender norms are understood in situations of forced displacement, particularly with respect to the concept of gendered 'change' during displacement. The findings described in this research confirm the complexities articulated in existing literature around finding a singular narrative on 'change'. I suggest that it may be more useful to understand gender and forced migration without using the lens of 'change'. My research findings and the research process I have undertaken indicate that understanding gender norms during forced displacement may be less fraught when 'change' is not the starting point. The fixation on 'change' can affect the questions we ask, the assumptions we make, and the narratives we choose to highlight as researchers. Speaking of 'change' raises questions around measurement - who decides if 'change' has occurred, what metrics are used to determine this, and is 'change' useful when we think about gender norms as constantly evolving? These kinds of questions do not have easy answers. By situating the focus on 'change', it implies that analysis is final, however even the resistance and strategic maneuverings of women (and men) depicted in this research are merely a snapshot into one particular moment. These steps, however small, are not permanent and provide

merely 'a partial account' (Grabska, 2014, p. 195). I argue that a preoccupation with 'change' muddies the waters, causing everything to be viewed through the lens of negatives or positives, and assuming a uniform, generalisable experience.

In the Introduction of this thesis, I expressed my concerns around how research is conducted within humanitarian (and development) agencies. Within the humanitarian industry, assumptions about how gender norms will change during displacement often inform analysis. In the case of the Syria Crisis, pre-existing notions about Syrian 'culture' and findings from other humanitarian emergencies dictate the focus of research and the design of interventions. The focus is on identifying problems, and delivering solutions swiftly and in a cost-effective way to meet donor requirements. In this industry, 'evidence' is treated in ways that are not always transparent or reflexive, which affects how the lives of Syrians are narrated. My research sought to respond to these gaps in how the lives of Syrian refugees are understood. I sought to conduct a feminist ethnography to draw attention to the complexities underlying analysis of gender and forced displacement. I used a combination of research methods, including photography, life story interviews, semi-structured interviews and participant observation, in order to generate thicker descriptions of the lives of Syrian women and men. My approach to this research was informed by the notion that understanding power hierarchies is complex in itself (Abu-Lughod, 2013, p. 6) – let alone during displacement. I felt that taking an inductive approach that is grounded in the experiences of research participants, would allow narratives to emerge without being assumed or prescribed. Using a more open research process, while being aware of my own positionality and predispositions as a humanitarian worker, was a way of countering how knowledge production occurs in humanitarian agencies. I sought to exercise care in presenting the narratives of my research participants, to draw out the broader context informing their life choices and behaviours, however this is a difficult process. Whether an 'outsider' or 'insider', an Arabic speaker or not, it is impossible to grasp the full complexity surrounding people's lives. My findings ought therefore to be viewed in the light of these limitations.

In this final chapter, I reflect on the main findings of this research, highlighting the conceptual and empirical contributions made by this thesis. The first section details conceptual contributions in three main areas: (im)mobility, family relationships and

resistance. In the second section, I discuss lessons for humanitarian agencies, reflecting also on the lessons for me personally. I conclude by pointing to areas for future research.

CONCEPTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

(Im)mobility

My research contributes to conceptual debates about mobility and ‘vulnerability’, building on the work of Erin Baines (2004) in challenging simplistic analysis that women are vulnerable and men are not vulnerable (p. 163). In Syria during the conflict, it is sometimes men who are ‘vulnerable’ and who are forced to remain hidden, while some women move more freely, acting on behalf of men. Women may be directly or indirectly involved in combat and may at times be viewed by the Syrian regime as a threat because they left their government jobs. My research findings extend to perceptions of vulnerability in Jordan (and to a lesser degree at border crossings), where women’s bodies may be viewed as less threatening than men’s. These findings contribute to debates about vulnerability and power by suggesting that a highly gendered belief system exists to somewhat-paradoxically provide opportunities for dominant ideas about vulnerability to be disrupted. Specifically, the idea of women being innocent/vulnerable protects them during conflict; this assumption enables them to move, to take on roles traditionally carried out by men outside the home, to smuggle weapons and to ‘resist’ without being targeted. In my research, women were described as having greater mobility because they were viewed as more neutral actors compared to men; women’s perceived vulnerability provided opportunities for non-vulnerable behaviour, and for power to be exercised in unexpected ways. Vulnerability is therefore more complex than is sometimes understood, in that it may itself enable social norms to be challenged. This is of course not to say that all Syrian women remaining in Syria are therefore protected by perceptions about their vulnerability and move freely; rather this contribution suggests that constructions of ‘vulnerability’ may provide different ways of understanding gender roles and power. GBV in Syria, as in any other context, is still a problem, but vulnerability may at times provide the conditions for gender norms to be transgressed.

My further contribution to debates about gender and mobility relates to the idea of mobility being always positive, and by implication (or even explicitly), immobility being negative. Although academic scholars have moved past debates about the public versus private space that some humanitarian agencies are still engaged in, there is still an inference within academic analysis that mobility - as counter to tradition - is a positive, a 'resource' that is 'better' than immobility (Bissell, 2007, p. 280; Cresswell, 2010, p. 21). I suggest however that immobility can also be a 'resource' - a positive - when it enables women to behave as they wish. I build on work by Lila Abu Lughod (1985) who explores how women find freedom when they have their own space - separate from men (pp. 645-647). My contribution is however different to hers, in that my findings do not focus on the separation of women and men as being empowering, but reflect that activities within the home (praying, drinking coffee, eating and hosting visitors) during displacement may provide comfort, safety and routine for women. In my research, it was not that displacement had rendered every further home strange and uncomfortable, rather some women found the predictability and peace of activities in the home to be positive, and even, perhaps, empowering. A few women photographed their homes in describing their most favourite places in Jordan, notwithstanding the fact that these were the places they most readily accessed due to cost and transportation challenges. Women (and men) referred to the joy they felt in being able to have visitors to their homes - just like they did in Syria. This connection with activities in the home challenges the idea that refugees are frozen in time and space, 'in it but not of it' or 'suspended in a spatial void in which time has ground to a halt' (Bauman, 2003, p. 141) - as if they are only waiting to return to Syria. Although the home in Jordan may for some be a source of pain - a reminder of their change in status and their home in Syria, or the space of violence - for others, it represents safety from war and social connection.

Family relationships

My research contributes to conceptual debates around relationships between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law within the Middle Eastern context (and potentially more broadly), addressing the fact that in academic and humanitarian literature, relationships between women are significantly less theorised compared to relationships between

women and men (Cornwall, 2014, pp. 128-129). The findings in this thesis are not solely focused on relationships after displacement, rather my research takes a step back to analyse relationships before war. My findings build on the work of Deniz Kandiyoti (1988) and Laila Abed Rabho (2015), who have theorised the negative dynamic between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. My findings highlight that the interference from mothers-in-law can be associated with young married couples living with their in-laws. For a few women, this dynamic changed during displacement; they experienced greater freedom and autonomy while living apart from their in-laws. My research emphasises the importance of analysing power dynamics in more open ways instead of assuming that only male-female dynamics are oppressive. This assumption is present both in academic literature as well as humanitarian literature, even to the extent that female relationships are seen as an escape from the violence and mistreatment that characterises women's relationships with men. My findings help to counter these prevailing ideas, pointing to the need for a better understanding of the negotiations, tensions and power struggles between women instead of seeing female-female relationships as peaceful and positive by default. My findings illustrate how women's use of power may include manipulation and violence, as mothers-in-law may struggle to reclaim power over their sons through undermining their daughters-in-law.

Resistance to gender norms

My analysis contributes to thinking on 'resistance', suggesting that acts of resistance to gender norms should be viewed in broader ways. Speaking of resistance refocuses on the agency of individuals to make decisions about their behaviour, rather than forced displacement being the disruption that forces gender norms to shift. My research findings specifically contribute to debates on how gender norms may be resisted. I build on the work of Abu Lughod (1985) and Hart (2008) who suggest that younger generations learn what behaviour is expected from them through observing the behaviour of older people. In my findings, it is less that men are prescribing the behaviour of women/girls, rather the social dynamics within groups of women may shape behaviour before and during displacement. This thinking is important – and links to the discussion above about relationships between women. It shifts the focus from only men dictating how women should behave, towards women themselves shaping and influencing each other. This

challenges essentialist perspectives about who enforces power hierarchies, suggesting that power relations may be shaped through more subtle processes, specifically, through observation. Importantly, this creates the possibility that gender norms may also be resisted through observation.

In the section on (im)mobility above, I explore the idea that ‘vulnerability’ can provide the conditions for gender norms to be resisted - that an essentialised notion can provide advantages to women. This can be extended to apply to the acts of resistance demonstrated by women, who used gendered expectations to their advantage in order to navigate relationships and challenge expectations of what behaviour is permitted. This contribution builds on Grabska’s (2014) research around how women may take advantage of essentialised identities (p. 95). Before and during displacement, Syrian women invoked more traditional gender roles to get what they wanted - whether around reclaiming power, or accessing education or work. Similar to the notion of vulnerability discussed above, essentialised identities brought benefit; they could be manipulated. These findings mean that although stereotypical ways of depicting women have been critiqued in academic literature, even these static representations may offer women opportunities for resistance, creative maneuvering and agency.

My research expands on notions of resistance in an additional way. I build on the work of Abu Lughod (1990), who analyses how women creatively resist. My findings however show that men also resist – but specifically my findings illustrate how this resistance is different; it is about how men talk about *women* who resist gender norms. In my findings, men resisted gender norms in how they spoke about women working and men completing household tasks. Here, the idea is that speech itself can reveal what is occurring beneath the surface of social norms (Joseph, 2004, p. 271). Men’s reflections about women’s acts of resistance has been little-studied in academic literature, yet I suggest may provide different ways of understanding resistance, even acting as a means of resistance in itself. These findings broaden the understanding of ‘resistance’, showing how it may sometimes be difficult to categorise (Pile, 1997, p. 29). Who resists and who comments on resistance are two different issues; analysing the latter may provide previously unknown insights into resistance, pointing to areas where there may be openness to transgress gender norms.

Lastly, my findings also contribute to the work of Fenella Porter (2012), who analyses agency and values regarding gender equality within development agencies. While the power hierarchies perpetuated by humanitarian agencies upon the communities they serve have been critiqued (Malkki, 1996; Agier, 2011; Hyndman and Giles, 2011; Fassin, 2012; Grabska, 2014), the internal structures and processes of humanitarian agencies have been less analysed. My research asserts that not only should personal values of individuals and the power structures be reflected on more critically as Porter argues, but this should be done with reference to the principles of humanitarianism, with emphasis on being proximate to communities and treating them with respect and dignity.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES

With this analysis of the theoretical contributions of my research, I turn now to the practical implications of my research as well as recommendations for humanitarian agencies. A few of these recommendations are linked to the theoretical contributions above, however the 'action' I propose is different for humanitarian agencies. I also reflect on my personal learning around these issues. My recommendations centre on eight main implications, which are discussed below.

The neglect of history and context

In 1996, Liisa Malkki wrote: 'history tend[s] to get leached out of the figure of the refugee'. (p. 385). My findings, over twenty years later, reveal a continuing exclusion of the history of refugees' lives in humanitarian analysis. Not only does this result in generalisations about gender norms among refugees, it can feed into problematic assumptions that shape interventions (Chatty, 2016b, p. 55). My findings highlight that contrary to the popular humanitarian depiction of 'female-headed households' as inherently vulnerable, for some women, this is not the first time they have been heads of households, due to husbands, brothers, fathers and other male relatives engaging in migration to the Gulf in particular. Contextual, pre-displacement analysis may also challenge prevailing understandings of Syrian household division of labour based on economic class and location, allowing for

the fact that some women worked in Syria or that some young men were involved in household chores. My recommendation therefore is for humanitarian analysis to more carefully consider the history and social context of Syrian refugees, before making assumptions about their lives, their work, their time and their vulnerability. As Dawn Chatty writes, 'history matters' (Chatty, 2017b, p. 30).

The over-gendering of (im)mobility

My research sought to complicate the dominant humanitarian analysis of mobility as singularly gendered, that is, influenced primarily by gender. In humanitarian analysis, (im)mobility is not depicted as complex and multi-causal, rather a 'gender lens' is used to narrowly (and ominously) frame (im)mobility in *always gendered* terms - irrespective of other factors. Importantly, my argument is not that (im)mobility is never gendered, rather that (im)mobility is multi-dimensional. While a gender lens can be a helpful way of understanding mobility, mobility also needs to be understood with respect to other power hierarchies, including, specifically for this context, class and social relations. Syrian women and men spoke about how they are constrained from regularly visiting people or participating in humanitarian agency activities because of the cost of transportation in Jordan. The hilly terrain of Jordan makes it difficult for them to walk, so public transportation, which is expensive, is the only option. For other Syrians, not knowing people in Jordan was an obstacle to mobility; they didn't know enough people to visit. In other cases, mobility was broader and related to virtual mobility – social media – where access may be shaped by economic factors. I suggest that while it has been important that humanitarian agencies better-analyse gender issues among communities they serve, gender cannot be analysed in isolation, rather an intersectional approach needs to be taken. Intersectional thinking is not new in humanitarian circles, but at times, in my experience, seems to have been diluted from a critical engagement with power hierarchies like class, ethnicity, rural/urban location, disability and education level, to the watery notion of 'diversity' (Ahmed, 2012, p. 14) or inclusion (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015, p. 409). Increasingly, the specific label of 'social inclusion' is used to supposedly encapsulate the entirety of complex vulnerabilities and intersections of power that agencies wish to address. In my experience, this reductive buzzword does not do justice to intersectional analysis. Therefore, I recommend that humanitarian agencies revisit

how gender analysis occurs by drawing in intersectional analysis to engage with complex power hierarchies in a more critical way.

Neoliberal 'mission creep', (im)mobility and agency

The theoretical discussion above about activities in the home being positive for women also has consequences for humanitarian agencies, whose rationale for engaging women is often strongly tied to narratives about economic empowerment (Cornwall, 2014, p. 131). Women are positioned as needing to be freed from the domestic space, which is explicitly and implicitly depicted as representing tradition and disempowerment. However, when outside the home, women can achieve the holy grail of the humanitarian neoliberal machinery – economic activity - and, apparently for the first time, become productive citizens. My findings and academic research (Thompson, 2000; Semerdjian, 2003) highlight that some Syrian women were economically active well before the Syria Crisis. Perhaps most ironically, this neoliberal argument negates the efforts of GAD practitioners to emphasise the value (including financial value) of women's care work, including through complex gender analysis frameworks (March, Smyth and Mukhopadhyay, 1999). By incessantly equating empowerment with being away from the home and being actively engaged in economic activity, humanitarian agencies have contradicted themselves – placing higher value on what occurs outside of the home, and insisting that women must not only complete all the household chores and duties but also produce income. In these humanitarian narratives, the public versus private is emphasised, despite academic critiques. As emerges in this study, it is not always the case that women want to be outside the home – however wonderful the 'safe spaces' that agencies create. The photographs that depicted 'favourite' spaces alongside the references to social connections sustained through home visits suggest that the home is more than the core of all disempowerment and tradition. It needs to be seen for some of its positives, specifically the comfort women find from routine and social activities. My recommendation is that humanitarian agencies need to revisit the private-public divide. The narrow meanings attached to the home or the outside-of-the-home space may be misleading.

This research also questions the neoliberal underpinnings of economic interventions and efforts to increase women's mobility, building on existing work (Cornwall and Edwards, 2014) to suggest that the issue needs to be brought back to women making their own choices: about whether they wish to leave the home or not, and whether they wish to be economically active, or not. This comes back to the way empowerment is defined (Cornwall & Edwards, 2014, p. 24). If empowerment is about the ability to make strategic life choices, then the person to make these choices should be the person who is empowered, not the associated male in the family or the parent, and not the humanitarian agency who designed the empowerment activity. Marta Nussbaum (2003) writes, 'We should respect people who prefer a life within an authoritarian religion (or personal relationship), so long as certain basic opportunities and exit options are firmly guaranteed' (p. 49). It may sit uncomfortably with development and humanitarian agencies that an 'empowered' woman decides *not* to work or that she would prefer to remain in the home completing household tasks rather than walk the streets to an agency's 'safe space', but surely this is the original intent of empowerment and agency. This means changing perspective on who makes choices and accepting these choices without judgment. My recommendation is around a return to the original definition of 'empowerment' so that it focuses again on the ability to make strategic choices, instead of becoming equated with economic earning or whatever a humanitarian agency determines is 'empowerment'. The implications around empowerment also continue in the next section.

The trouble with 'empowerment'

Within humanitarian discourses, 'empowerment' is ubiquitous; the term is now used in an almost flippant way. The idea of empowerment however needs to be analysed in terms of its appropriateness for the Middle Eastern context. For example, there may be conceptual difficulty in understanding empowerment when it is placed alongside the cultural and religious understanding of *naṣīb* [fate], which is a powerful idea that Syrians (and others) use to understand events in their lives. If the ability to make strategic choices is seen to clash with the idea of an outside force determining events, where does this leave empowerment? Does such a term hold actual relevance? This suggests more work is needed to understand how empowerment may fit into such narratives.

Associated with this are questions around measuring empowerment. In my research, what emerged is that what 'counts' as empowerment is difficult to pinpoint because the pre-intervention stages of individuals are so diverse. The 'starting point' varies depending on class, education level, urban/rural location and even specific geographic location, making it impossible to create an objective standard for 'empowerment'. Somewhat patronisingly, the assumption among humanitarian agencies has been that Syrian refugees do not hold values around gender equality and women's empowerment, therefore they need their awareness increased. By imposing a default 'zero baseline knowledge' onto refugees, not only have the diverse beliefs of Syrians been collapsed and homogenised, the subsequent interventions that respond to this zero baseline knowledge, can come across as condescending lecturing. My recommendation (linked to this point and the one above) about *naṣīb* is that humanitarian agencies spend more time developing a localised, contextualised understanding of people's attitudes and beliefs around gender equality and women's empowerment.

Where does this leave measurement? Rosalind Eyben (2015) writes: 'Projects that emphasize measurable outcomes tend to drive out projects that produce immeasurable ones' (p. 23). If empowerment and gender equality are too difficult to measure, what happens to initiatives seeking to address these issues? My recommendation is that humanitarian/development agencies need to change their approaches to measurement – using more flexible, locally-driven, qualitative ways of understanding how people's lives have been affected by interventions. The 'locally-driven' aspect is important here as it means the 'Western experts' who are often involved in driving how programs are measured in-country are not the ones responsible, rather it is local staff who influence measurement. Local contributions must move from the periphery to the centre (Chatty, 2017b, p. 28). Measurement indicators cannot therefore be 'universal' but must emerge from what is meaningful in each context.

'Relationality' and the danger of an individual 'saviour'

That Syrian society is collectivist, as outlined in the section above, also has implications for humanitarian agencies, whose efforts to tackle harmful gender norms have centred

on actors like 'adolescent girls' and 'men and boys' in ways that are perhaps less helpful for Middle Eastern contexts where decision-making is less individualistic. This is not to say that individuals have no voice and never deviate from the norm, rather my findings suggest that a more effective strategy than changing individual attitudes and behaviours may be to engage more directly with social norms themselves. Cristina Bicchieri & Peter McNally (2015) argue that simply informing people of the negative consequences of their behaviour ignores how the 'social' shapes behaviour, but that instead norm change should be more focused on the collective belief (p. 30). The interconnectedness within families also has implications for humanitarian agencies, including how target interventions around issues like GBV and early marriage. Greater exploration of the role of older women or young men may suggest opportunities for more strategic engagement with specific actors, beyond the often-ad hoc humanitarian and development agency approach to 'engaging men and boys' or 'empowering adolescent girls' which inevitably devolves to the rather tedious process of being 'told' what their rights are, or participating in 'life skills' curriculum (with one or two sessions sneakily covering GBV/early marriage) over several weeks. This is more than just 'adapting' content for specific influential actors, but seeking to strategically use the (empirically-grounded) influence of specific actors in order to engage with social norms. The recommendation here is for humanitarian agencies to more thoughtfully explore collective norms and the role of influential actors, recognising that people's behaviour may be shaped by the collective – by what others expect of them.

Additionally, as discussed above, in conceptually contributing to how gender norms are communicated, this research also has implications for how humanitarian and development agencies position their behaviour change interventions. If people learn not simply through being told things explicitly, but by observation, it may mean that the 'awareness sessions' held by agencies to inform people about their rights, about safety, about early marriage and GBV, might be less effective. The finding that younger generations learn from older generations points to the possibility of role models being an effective way of challenging norms. More powerful than being 'told', it may be that people would benefit from seeing a real person who has challenged norms in their community. The recommendation therefore is for humanitarian agencies to explore how 'observation' and role models could more strategically be used in social norm change.

The two recommendations in this section particularly resonate with me given my experience designing programs to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. I feel that any future work I undertake with development/humanitarian agencies will be better-informed by more complex thinking on social norm change, particularly how behaviour is shaped by collectivist beliefs. This means being more critical of interventions that simplistically respond to complex social issues, and shifting from interventions that are driven by the idea that gender inequality is caused by lack of knowledge.

Complicating gendered relationships

As stated in the theoretical section, my research contributes to thinking around relationships between women, specifically mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. While it is clear that progress has been made in how agencies engage with gender inequality issues, gender is still narrowly confined to the dynamic between women and men, to the neglect of other kinds of relationships - especially intersectional aspects like age, which may complicate understandings of gendered relationships. As part of this, the marital relationship has come to represent the epitome of gender relations (Cornwall, 2014, p. 128) to the exclusion of analysis of other power dynamics. I recommend that humanitarian agencies need to engage in more critical analysis on other kinds of relationships within the family. My findings highlight that relationships between women may be negative. Understanding this may provide useful ways of understanding power relations in more helpful ways.

Displacement as causative

One of the themes emerging from humanitarian narratives is the idea of displacement as an external, intervening stressor – the factor that causes 'change'. I argue that the blaming of displacement for GBV, or war for rape, is not unlike blaming a disease for a person's physical assault of his wife and child, as outlined in Chapter Six. Blaming an external force is fundamentally flawed because it brushes over the fact that GBV is ultimately caused by unequal power relationships. This misallocation of responsibility is somewhat broader

than displacement alone, relating even to how GBV interventions are framed. A humanitarian blog called 'Missing in the Mission' (Anonymous, 2017) recently released an anonymous reflection from a humanitarian worker discussing this:

I have spent whole days unpicking the assumptions that men rape and abuse women and girls because they are 'unaware', because they need 'sensitisation', because they need 'education'. These assumptions, couched in language that appears to be sensitive, thoughtful and considered are so dangerous; immediately, the damage wrought on women's lives is disappeared. They serve to help us look away from the reality that men do this intentionally and deliberately, and that it serves a purpose for them.

These narratives have consequences, resulting in the softening of GBV, as if displacement or war are somehow more palatable aggressors than perpetrators within a system where women and girls are subordinate. My recommendation here is perhaps the most important one for humanitarian agencies, that there is a need to return to a stronger articulation of the root causes of GBV, including how unequal power shapes GBV.

I am also personally challenged by this reflection about power, as it reminds me that it is very easy for the idea of GBV being about unequal power to evolve into something much softer. It feels to me like humanitarian/development agencies have moved away from explicitly naming patriarchy and unequal power as causes of GBV to sometimes reducing analysis using terms like 'social inclusion' and 'difference'. For me, what I carry into future work will be increased care in the language I use to describe social issues, ensuring I critically reflect on causation and power.

Power and proximity

Power, as the critical conceptual contribution of my research, is also relevant for humanitarian agencies. The first area is around the power that is mobilised when humanitarian agencies conduct research. This is about taking time to spend time with refugees, to understand their lives (beyond a one-hour interrogation to answer only the set questions and beyond informing refugees that donors will arrive tomorrow to visit

their homes), and to allow knowledge to emerge more gently. Trinh Minh-ha (1989) reminds us of the importance of this unrushed feminist engagement:

Never does one open the discussion by coming right to the heart of the matter. For the heart of the matter is always somewhere else than where it is supposed to be. To allow it to emerge, people approach it indirectly by postponing until it matures, by letting it come when it is ready to come. There is no catching, no pushing, no directing, no breaking through, no need for a linear progression which gives the comforting illusion that one knows where one goes (p. 1).

This seems to clash with how humanitarian agencies conduct their 'rapid assessments'. In feminist research however, knowledge emerges gently, over time, through relationships. Knowledge should come from refugees – not from anecdotes in meetings, not from people who do not spend time in the field, not from TV shows about Syrians, and not even from host communities who we assume share a 'similar' culture – but from Syrian women and men themselves in ways that are open and agenda-free. When research approaches and methods are less extractive, it may be possible to uncover different, unexpected narratives, for example about the hope still held by refugees and about the solace women find within activities at home. Methods like photography can also be empowering in helping refugees to use photography to 'appropriate' uncomfortable space. My recommendation to humanitarian agencies is around the need to spend more time understanding the issues faced by refugees, from refugees themselves, through more creative, less-extractive, qualitative methods. This is not only about research methods, but relates also to the means of interacting with refugees, in ways that are open and respectful. In this respect, much can be learnt from Middle Eastern understandings of hospitality and reciprocity (Shryock, 2004, 2012; Chatty, 2013, 2017a, 2018b, p. 207).

Secondly, power relates to humanitarian culture – the way hierarchies structure humanitarian bureaucracies, attitudes to harassment, beliefs about gender equality and how refugees are perceived. My research highlights that the way power operates within humanitarian bureaucracies flows outwards into engagement with refugees. Proximity and returning to humanitarian (and indeed feminist) principles around power analysis

are not 'new', in the sense that academic literature has long critiqued and problematised the power hierarchies within humanitarian agencies. However, these debates over humanitarian hierarchies have largely occurred in academia - outside of humanitarian and development agencies. The need for critical reflexivity on power, humanitarianism and the space between refugees and humanitarian staff needs to be recognised within agencies themselves. While some may suggest that the humanitarian industry is itself experiencing a #MeToo 'moment', which may reveal other inconsistencies around humanitarian practice (Daccord, 2018), I suggest that engaging with power requires more concerted, ongoing commitment and not just a momentary focus. My recommendation is that humanitarian agencies need to directly engage with issues of power, recognising that power 'inside' influences engagements of power towards communities being served.

For me personally, these reflections about power will influence my future work, particularly the time I spend being proximate to communities, the research methods I use, and the way I see power within the structure and culture of humanitarian agencies. My fieldwork experience highlights that power is complex and shifts in sometimes-unexpected ways to privilege and empower different actors at different times. The fieldwork process caused me to analyse my own power in more complicated ways – and to reflect on how people's perceptions of me infuse the research in ways that are both negative/racist and positive (e.g. research participants feeling they can talk to me about their own struggles with racism). Any future research I conduct will be guided by a greater awareness of my own power and positionality.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Given the complexities around understanding gender norms – especially within a limited time period – there may be more comprehensive analysis possible through longitudinal research that follows the lives of individual refugees over several years. Although this obviously involves a greater financial investment, such research could help shed light on people's lives in more meaningful ways.

Future research might include reflections on the dialectic between Syrians and Jordanians, which I had intended to explore. This aspect did not emerge as central to people's narratives, however, it may be that contact between Syrians and Jordanians does have consequences for how gender norms evolve. This is however an issue requiring further investigation. Similarly, while I reflect on the importance of routines within the home, the area of social rituals (although beyond the scope of my thesis), may provide insights social relations and home-making during exile. Lastly, there is scope for future research on family dynamics, including the interconnectedness of familial relationships. This could build on the anecdotal findings in my research about how the dynamic between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law may also be situated within the relationship between a son and mother, as well as the brother-sister relationship. More work is also needed on the relationship between sisters-in-law, including the possibility that a sister-in-law may act as proxy for a mother-in-law.

FINAL WORDS

I would like to end this final chapter by emphasising that at the time of writing, the war still continues in Syria, displacing millions both internally and in surrounding countries. The refugees who participated in this research are those who have made it to a safer place, however for many more, the conflict is still very much a daily reality. For those in countries like Jordan, exile can be both a relief as well as unnerving, uncomfortable and isolating. For some it 'means walking down the street and knowing that you don't belong there' (Yazbek, 2016, p. 273), while others have been more successful at making a home amidst uncertainty. As peace agreements and negotiations continue to occur, what is clear is that the lives of Syrians will never be the same. During one feedback session with Syrian women at the end of my research, I was asked, 'What do you think about Syrians?' I immediately said, 'Syrians are very strong. They have been through very difficult circumstances, but they are resilient'. As I spoke, I saw a tear slip down the face of one woman sitting near me. It is easy for me to comment on their strength but for many, this is a daily battle, one that will have ramifications for years to come. What will happen when the war ends? How will this affect our understanding of power and gender norms? These are all, I suggest, important questions for future analysis.

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