A Field Study Report

The Case of Syrian Refugees in the Za’atari Refugee Camp, Jordan

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MA in Post-War Recovery Studies

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PREFACE

The Post-war Reconstruction and Development Unit (PRDU), established at the University of York in 1993, is an international centre of excellence for the study of war-torn societies and their recovery. The PRDU engages in teaching, trainings, research and advisory services to improve the design, management and impact of development programming and service delivery in countries in or recently emerging from conflict.

Since its first cohort of students in 1996 the MA in Post-war Recovery Studies has been at the heart of the PRDU’s activities. The MA programme is designed to offer students the opportunity to link theory and practice in the study of post-war recovery and provide an experience of actual conduct of field research in a conflict-affected or post-conflict environment. The group field visit is an essential component of the programme that enables students to apply and test the concepts and theories of studied in the classroom to concrete field settings. This report is the product of the 2012 field visit to Za’atari Refugee Camp in Jordan that addressed the Syrian refugee crisis.

The field visit could not have been a success without the assistance and support of our hosts in Jordan. For this reason I would like to thank HRH Prince Hassan bin Talal and Al-Albayt University for receiving our students.

It is our belief that research into conflict and reconstruction should not wait for the fighting to stop; rather conducting research during conflict is essential to understanding new and emerging dynamics. The research presented here offers such an opportunity to reflect on an unfolding crisis that is of major humanitarian concern. The report is intended as a contribution towards improving understanding of the Syrian refugee crisis and offers insights and recommendations on this pressing issue.

Professor Sultan Barakat

Director, Post-war Reconstruction and Development Unit
In March 2013 the Syrian conflict will mark two years since the commencement of the civil war. While the struggle emerged amidst the broader regional context of regime change and revolution, the case of Syria outlasted that of its neighbours. Tunisia and Egypt fell quicker, though lasting, positive change is yet to take root. Initial comparisons with Libya have been discarded, for while the trenchant position of the former leader Muammar Gaddafi brought civil strife to the country, the tribal dimension differentiated between the two conflicts and the duration of eight months was soon eclipsed. The Syrian conflict has found new, negative dimensions: sectarianism, divisions between the rebels, international engagement and the destruction of not only the physical infrastructure of major towns and cities, but also the state structure, as the healthcare system collapses under the pressure of the continued conflict (The Guardian 2012). To date, over 40,000 fatalities have been recorded (Reuters 2012) and with daily violence, the figures continue to rise in Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Daraa and Hama.

Accompanying the unrest has been the caution of the conflict spilling over into the wider region; to date, the violence has erupted strongest in neighbouring Lebanon, when in October 2012 Brig. Gen. Wissam al-Hassan was assassinated in a car bomb in the Christian-dominated Ashrafieh district of Beirut. Despite residing in the nucleus of the violence and suffering fatalities, Lebanese Christians avoided direct comment; in contrast, anti-Syrian Sunni groups vocalised concerns regarding the role of Hezbollah and Damascus-based Shi’a groups (Wood 2012). By the end of the year UNHCR recorded 170,637 Syrian refugees in the country, including 126,724 registered individuals and 43,913 scheduled to be registered in Tripoli, Beirut, the Bekaa and South Lebanon (Global Times 2012). In northern Iraq, the Kurdish Regional Government’s Bureau of Migration and Displacement (BMD) estimated the arrival of over 5,300 Syrian refugees, while the Domiz refugee camp near Dahuk – which opened in April 2012 – comprises 3,509 residents. Those who choose not to enter the camp have sought shelter with relatives and local mosques in the governorates of Sulaymaniyah and Erbil (IOM 2011).

On Syria’s northern border, Turkey has experienced both the humanitarian and security cost of the conflict. In October 2012 Turkish and Syrian military positions traded fire over the course of six days when shells fired from Damascus struck the border town of Akcakale, killing five Turkish civilians (The Telegraph 2012). Akin to Jordan, Turkey has provided refuge to approximately 145,000 refugees in tent cities established in the Yayladağı, Reyhanlı and Altnözü districts of Hatay Province (Hurriyat 2012), as well as the official refugee camps in Hatay, Gaziantep, Kilis and Urfa. While UNHCR has called for an aid plan for Lebanon totalling one billion US dollars – of which Lebanon would receive $267 million specifically for assisting the Syrian refugees (Global Times 2012) – Turkey has remained self-funded with the government administered Turkish Red Crescent and Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı (AFAD) disaster agency guiding the mission, rather than UNHCR (Phillips 2012). In this respect, Turkey mirrors Jordan, wherein the Jordanian Hashemite Charity Organization oversees the management of the Za’atari refugee camp and works closely with international humanitarian organizations, such as UNICEF and UNHCR while dispensing humanitarian assistance.

Yet for the Kingdom, the role of host is both known and unknown: since 1948 Jordan has provided refuge to those fleeing Palestine-Israel, Iraq and presently, Syria. In the context of the Palestinian refugees, Jordan stands apart from neighbouring states, holding the largest number of refugees – approximately 1.9 million amidst a country population of 6 million (Chatelard 2012). Through the course of the subsequent Iraq War (2003-2011), Jordan absorbed, according to the government, a further 450,000; however, it is worth noting that UNHCR, which bases its figures on registered refugees, places the number closer to 32,000, supplementary to an additional 2,200 asylum-seekers from Somalia and Sudan (UNHCR 2012). By December 2012, Jordan had once more opened to
families fleeing the conflict, this time on its northern border, with Syria. According to the Department for International Development (DFID), the Kingdom currently hosts 150,000 refugees in the informal and formal camps lining the borders (DFID 2012) as well as with host families in the northern towns of Mafraq, Irbid, Ajloun and Jerash, and the capital, Amman. However, the number of residents in the Za’atari refugee camp remains ambiguous – each day brings hundreds of new refugees seeking assistance and shelter, some bussed from the border, others disembarking from taxis at the gates of the camp.

Registering can be haphazard and keeping track even harder – a task exacerbated by the desire of refugees to escape camp life for urban hubs. As many as one in three currently reside in unfurnished accommodations in Amman, seeking unofficial work to ensure they escape the harsh winter that will shortly arrive in the northern tent city. Nevertheless, life in the capital provides no assurance of better conditions: the accommodation often lacks heating and with unemployment nudging 30% in the Kingdom, paid employment (official or otherwise) can be equally hard to gain. Despite this, the refugees continue to leave the camp northwards – 6,000 have returned to Syria (Seeley 2012) – or to the south through the kefala system, which brings Syrian refugees together with a Jordanian kafeel (sponsor) who monitors their location and welfare. Although the kefala system – which is currently in place in the countries in receipt of the highest number of refugees and migrant workers, specifically Lebanon, Jordan and the Gulf states – provides support, it holds a price: in Jordan, camp shops sell falafel, khobs and kefala, the latter commanding between $70 and $1,400. Not only does the kefala system place the refugees in a financially vulnerable position, but it legitimizes a practice condemned by human rights organizations as ‘modern day slavery’. In the context of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon, 52% are verbally abused, 14% physically abused and 7% sexually violated (Nallu & Andersen 2011). In Jordan, leaving the camp can be at a worse price: the trafficking of female refugees commences at JD100, as Maher Abu Tair notes, ‘[a]ll we hear these days is talk about a Syrian wife who can be bought with 100 dinars. One could go to any of the areas of Al Mafraq, Amman, Ramtha, Irbid or Karak to pick for himself a Levantine houriya (virgin)’ (Hassan 2012). The logistics of hosting an increasing refugee population is thus rendered complex through not just the finances and dispensation of aid, but also the question of security both inside, outside and in-between the camp and urban centres, on both an official and unofficial level.

Central to this is the cooperation between non-governmental organizations, on an international and local level, and the Jordanian Hashemite Charity Organization. Amidst the foremost implementing organizations are UNHCR and UNICEF; thereafter, working alongside are Caritas Jordan, International Relief and Development, Jordan Health Aid Society, Jordan River Foundation, Legal Aid, Mercy Corps, the National Centre for Human Rights and the Noor Al-Hussein Foundation and UNOPS. On an operational level, the International Medical Corps, Care International, Save The Children, the King Hussein Cancer Foundation, the International Rescue Committee, Médecins Sans Frontières and the Heartland Alliance, in addition to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNDP and WHO. In addition, organizations such as the Japanese NGO, JEN, UNHCR, InterSOS, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) are engaged in the winterisation process of ensuring the refugees have a consistent supply of clothes and provisions for the oncoming season, including the adaptation of existing UNHCR tents to hold fire-resistant porches and water-proof roofs, fire awareness campaigns for women, men and school children, the provision of fuel and hot water bottles, and 6,000 heaters over the New Year period (NRC 2012).

Nevertheless, while provisions are being made for winter, the distribution of winterisation packages has proved a flash point for unrest in the camp. During the course of the visit by the Post-war Reconstruction and Development Unit (PRDU) team to Za’atari, the Bahraini school served as a distribution point for clothes and blankets. Within a few hours windows had been smashed and
violence erupted as the refugees clamoured for provisions. A similar sentiment was expressed by
refugees as the team conducted research in the camp: the desire for provisions – more provisions –
in time for winter was prominent. The challenge of meeting expectations quickly and circumventing
the outbreak of violence remains a significant component of the winterisation process: as the NRC
notes, an information campaign explaining to the refugees what to expect this winter and the
processes involved could quell unrest before it commences.

Similarly, while 2,500 prefabs are currently being installed in the camp under the auspices of the
government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, alterations are required to render the shelters effective
in terms of insulation, accessibility and drainage; it is not enough for the prefabs to be there – they
must be fully effective. Central to this is the ability to sustain supply and demand; while the 2,500
prefabs met the initial deadline of early December, the increase in the number of refugees may
require further prefabs to be delivered – a need that the NRC believes will not meet the winter
deadline unless the construction of the prefabs is distributed between more factories and suppliers
in Jordan (NRC-RRT 2012). Nevertheless, the result has been, to date, the successful cooperation
between Jordanian suppliers and international organizations within the camp, and the two parties
continue to address the unfolding challenges that continue to emerge.

Amidst the maelstrom of distribution and assistance, the PRDU team, comprising 30 Masters
students and three members of staff, Dr Luisa Gandolfo, Dr Claire Smith and Dr Mark Clegg, entered
the refugee camp for four days under the auspices of the Jordanian Hashemite Charity Organization
and the governorate of Mafraq, with access facilitated by the president of the JHCO, His Excellency
Ayman Al-Mufleh. An important component of the postgraduate degree in Post-war Recovery
Studies, the two-week annual field study visit delivers a profound understanding of the issues that
emerge in a conflict, as well as to serve as a pedagogical mechanism through which the students put
into practice the methodological, ethnographic and data collection skills learnt during the course. In
recent years, the course cohort has visited Afghanistan, Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Croatia, Iran,
Jordan, Lebanon and Sri Lanka. On its return to Jordan, the PRDU team was hosted by Al al-Bayt
University and was strongly assisted by the Vice President, Dr Osama Nusier and the UNESCO Chair
at Bayt al-Hekmah, Dr Hani A. M. Akho Rashida in the provision of student facilitators from the
departments of English, sciences and social sciences at Al al-Bayt University. The concept of the visit,
conceived by the director of the PRDU, Professor Sultan Barakat, was fostered in close cooperation
with the JHCO and Al al-Bayt University, resulting in a strong foundation of research collaboration
that ensured access and a firm understanding of the past and present context within which the
findings within this document would be determined.
From the outset, the students gained an in-depth understanding of the ethical considerations to be enacted prior to and within the field. Through lectures with a sustained focus on vulnerable populations, youth, children and the displaced, the students drew on their own experiences of working within the field of displacement and reconstruction to share research methods, as well as familiarising themselves with the ethical protocols of Sphere, the World Health Organization and the Istanbul Protocol (2004), thereby juxtaposing academic theoretical practice with the protocols utilised by the organizations working in the field. In particular, the students were highly aware of the live conflict situation into which they were progressing and remained consistently cognisant of the pressure upon humanitarian organizations working within the camp. In turn, they sought to approach members of the organizations on the basis that the objective of the project was understood and that the activities of the organization would not be hindered or affected by the research being conducted.

Incorporating these points, the groups operated on a rotational basis with pairs sent into the camp on alternate days, thus minimising the overall presence of the PRDU team in the refugee camp. Each group was accompanied by a student facilitator from Al al-Bayt University, who assisted in the translation of interviews and gaining of access to residents within the tent area. Data on coordination and humanitarian assistance was collected prior to the study trip, while in the refugee camp interviews were conducted with Jordanian and international NGOs as well as adult refugees. For certain groups, research was conducted through a combination of individual and focus groups, while special considerations were given to the awareness of sensitive issues, such as the psychological impact of the unrest and the refugees’ role in the conflict. For those working with youth groups, youth was defined as between the ages of 14 and 24, while households proved to facilitate a holistic approach to family coping mechanisms and revealed the nuances within kinship support networks. In addition, those focusing on coping mechanisms worked with individuals and
families who had resided within the Za’atari refugee camp for varied durations, thereby gaining an insight into the changing nature of coping mechanisms. Equally, group three utilised semi-structured interviews, both with refugees and with programme coordinators in the education and protection fields, to gain an insight into the provision of education and protection for children and their families inside and external to the camp.

While efforts were made to minimise the physical presence of the teams entering the camp, logistical anomalies frequently resulted in multiple members of the facilitating team of the host university entering the camp. This was particularly the case when one Al al-Bayt University student would be requested to accompany two PRDU students into the camp, but on the day five would be waiting within the compound. While efforts were made to mitigate the numerical disparity, it proved vain as the students would remerge at alternate points in the camp and re-join the researchers. As they often did not understand English, conveying the need for ethical consideration was difficult. In one instance, upon declining an offer to view a bloodied neighbour awaiting medical assistance, three facilitators pushed into the neighbour’s tent to gaze. In such instances, the efforts to promote respect and ethical principles while in the field were compromised on more than one occasion. Once more, the issue was tactfully broached, to little or no avail, as the numbers of facilitators increased through the week with minimal positive impact on the research. Nevertheless, the core students who joined the group from the outset and remained to the end of the visit proved invaluable: their patience, diligence and understanding of the project objectives rendered their presence a tremendous asset and one which augmented the research immensely.

**Objective and Structure of the Report**

The objective of the field visit to the Za’atari refugee camp and the surrounding urban areas was to gain first-hand experience of a conflict proximate environment, with a specific focus on the issue of Syrian refugees in Jordan. As the conflict in Syria continues to unfold, Jordan provided an excellent case study due to its nearness to the unrest and its past as a sanctuary for the refugees fleeing conflicts in Iraq, Palestine-Israel and Kuwait. Hosting more than 50,000 refugees receiving assistance from a number of governmental, non-governmental international and local humanitarian and religious organizations, the camp and the nearby town of Mafraq – itself holding a number of transitory refugees within host families – provided a potent environment within which the students, in their four research clusters, would explore the following themes:

1. Humanitarian assistance to refugees;
2. Coping mechanisms among refugees in the camp and in urban areas;
3. Education, protection and youth programs;
4. Social cohesion and host communities.

These four themes will now be considered in terms of the key findings of the field research. This will be followed by a conclusion and recommendations for future research and action on Syrian refugees.
HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE COORDINATION

Introduction

The first group, humanitarian assistance to refugees, entered the camp with the objective of analyzing the coordination of humanitarian assistance in the refugee camp in the context of three sectors: shelter, food and water, and sanitation. In addition, the group aimed to explore the actors who operated individually and external to the coordination chain, such as Médecins Sans Frontières. In turn, the group’s primary objective has been to assess the effectiveness of aid coordination in the camp and to highlight challenges and strengths confronting organizations engaged in camp welfare.

Findings

Conducting field research in the dynamic environment of Zaatari refugee camp was an extraordinary experience. Researching and talking to thousands of men, women and children who were trying to survive very harsh conditions could get quite emotional. As a group researching the coordination of humanitarian assistance, we tried to remain focused on understanding the coordination structure and identifying its weaknesses and strengths. Through this academic exercise we intended to make a valuable contribution to strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance within Zaatari camp by indicating the issues and challenges facing refugee communities and reporting them to camp authorities. The following is a summary of our research findings on the coordination of water, food, shelter in Zaatari camp. We also looked at the refugee structure and organization in order to understand how refugees organize and coordinate with camp authorities.

REFUGEE ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE

The camp is divided into two zones referred to as Zone 1 and Zone 2. Refugees also referred to these as East Zone and West Zone. Each zone is divided into 21 streets making a total number of 42 streets in the camp. The streets were becoming less organized mainly because refugees did not remain in their initially assigned spaces. Refugees moved from one street to another in order to live close to people they know well. Refugees also move tents in order to live close to people from their tribe, city, or community in Syria.

Residents from each street chose one leader for the representation of their street. That would make in total 42 Street Leaders in the entire camp with 21 Street Leaders from each Zone. Around 95 families live in each street. A similar structure also exists for female refugees in order to represent the female population within the camp and address their issues and concerns to camp authorities. Street leaders were the primary contact person for refugees.
While the overall picture of the camp structure seems very strong, in reality it was very weak and inefficient. This refugee leadership mechanism is organized to empower refugees by allowing them to influence policies regarding the overall management and organization of the camp. However, the international agencies did not utilize this structure in order to enhance coordination and seek opinions from refugee leadership structures. During an interview with Karima, an employee of the International Relief and Development Organization mentioned that female Street Leaders are not active and hardly participate in any meetings and activities in the camp. The International Relief and Development Organization had initiated a training program for women. The training was conducted in a small tent. During our visit to this tent we noticed a very small number of women attending the training program.

Male refugees on the other hand were relatively more active. During a focus group interview with Street Leaders, Samad Moslih who was both a Street Leader and a Committee Member mentioned that, although the Street Leaders do not organize any meetings, some refugees continue to approach them for their problems. As an example he described the following event:

Ten days ago we had a water shortage which caused many kids to suffer from diarrhea. We collected money from refugees, bought some water and distributed the water among families who desperately needed to hydrate their kids (Appendix 2, 13, 12, 2012).

This example indicates how refugees continue to believe in refugee organizational structures as a point of contact for resolving their issues. However, the organizational structures are becoming weaker as the Street Leaders find themselves incapable of responding to their refugees’ demands and necessities.

**WASH**

**Structure**

UNICEF is the cluster lead for the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector. UNICEF contracted the following agencies as implementers:
Technisches Hilfswerk (THW), the German Technical Relief Agency: Hard components, installation, water delivery and waste removal

Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), a French humanitarian charity: soft components, monitoring and education

JEN, the Japanese relief agency: Community outreach, communications, health promotion

Oxfam: new contractor in hard components for new camp sectors

Challenges

Co-ordination and Communication

THW have close ties to refugees as they are in close contact through their distribution network. Their relationship is close but as a technical agency they are not best suited to exploit that relationship to educate and inform – nor is it in their mandate. ACTED, the agency tasked with these responsibilities have the means but seem to have a more formal and hierarchical relationship with the refugees, perhaps as a result of their large number of international staff.

- JHCO distribution of bottled water
  - JHCO distribution of bottled water from private donations parallel to the cluster system has caused problems for WASH
    - It has inculcated a perception among the refugees that the main water supply is unsafe/unclean spreading resentment and fear for those families that are unable to procure the bottled water.
    - It is ACTED and JEN’s responsibility to educate and inform the refugees on these issues but so far they have not been able to quell these rumours. Rumours which seem to have taken on the status of perceived wisdom.

- Education and information
  - Refugees have shown an unwillingness to wash with cold water which has led to a small number of cases of diarrhoea and general deficiencies in hygiene.

SHELTER COORDINATION

Structure

In the Za’atari camp, shelter is coordinated and implemented by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). The NRC has two units within the camp which provide the following services:

A: STRATEGIC PLANNING UNIT

1. Settlement planning.
2. Covered living space.
3. Construction.
4. Environmental impact.

B: NFIS - NON FOOD ITEMS UNIT

1. Individual, general, household and shelter support items.
2. Clothing and bedding.
3. Cooking and eating utensils.
4. Stoves fuel and lighting.
5. Tools and fixing.

The provision of these services and items is based on the minimum standards for shelter, settlement and non-food items. These are a practical expression of the shared beliefs and commitments of humanitarian agencies and the common principles, rights and duties governing humanitarian action that are set out in the SPHERE Humanitarian Charter.

Challenges

Communication between the NRC and the JHCO is particularly weak. For example, the refugees tend to move their tents from the allocated areas to other areas closer to wash amenities. This interferes with camp planning and causes congestion in the available wash units. When the NRC explained to the JHCO that this movement is not conducive to the overall camp planning they received no help.

NFI distribution unit: The main challenge is the duplication of the distribution of NFIs to the refugees by NRC, JHCO and ACTED which also distributes hygiene packs for UNICEF. An example given was that the NRC had distributed diapers to the refugees in need on one morning and the JHCO did the same without informing the NRC later the same day. Since JHCO does not have an organised system of distribution many of those who needed the diapers missed out. When this happened, some in the camp got more than others thereby raising tensions/complaints. NRC had asked the JHCO a number of times in their bi-weekly coordination meetings to make the distribution information available beforehand but this request had not yet been honoured.

A refugee camp is a very sensitive environment and to avoid duplication, data sharing between the implementing partners is important so as to coordinate their activities as well as plan distribution of items that cover the entire camp population.

Food Coordination

Communication and coordination:

While coordination and communication between international agencies (UNHCR, WFP and STC) in regard to the distribution of food was strong, JHCO failed to coordinate their activities creating significant concerns among refugees. International Agencies held regular meetings and coordinated efficiently. They use the RAIS system for coordination and communication in order to prevent parallel distribution. Communication between JHCO and the International organizations was significantly weak which resulted in parallel distribution. Refugees regularly complained about JHCO’s distribution system which often resulted in unequal distribution of food among refugees.
COPING MECHANISMS

Introduction

The second group, *coping mechanisms among refugees in the camp and in urban areas*, commenced with a definition of ‘coping’ within the context of the Syrian refugees in Jordan, before pursuing a dual approach comprising the assumption that refugees have come from an urban area and that the study will explore how they ‘cope’ with the camp environment. Questions central to the research analysed how informal urban networks are established within the camp, whether and how kinship networks are sustained, how urban environments are recreated (through the establishment of informal businesses and memorialization) and the role of the (former) urban community in facilitating coping mechanisms and support among the refugees. The second definition was broadened to incorporate potential variations in the coping mechanisms of refugees who have settled in the urban areas of Irbid, Mafraq and Amman, and those who have remained in the Za’atari refugee camp.

Methodology

In Research Group Two, we sought to assess the varied coping mechanisms that Syrian refugees used to deal with the stresses of the new environments and of their new lifestyles. The aim of our research was to observe the coping strategies and find ways that the relevant authorities and international organisations in the area could enhance these.

The situation in Jordan has undergone significant alterations between our field research in December 2012 and the time of this report. The number of Syrians crossing not only into Jordan but also into neighbouring Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq has continued to rise over the past months. Located in Mafraq district, northern Jordan Za’atari refugee camp has expanded enormously and is now at a point where the media discusses it as Jordan’s fourth-largest ‘city’. These changes mean that what we observed during our research period cannot be considered an accurate reflection of the current environment.

The research question generated from our preliminary preparations was: “What do people who have fled the Syrian conflict do to cope with the problems they face now, living in Jordan?” In addition to our overarching area of inquiry, we identified three sub-themes:

- **Livelihoods** - Are Syrians able to make a living and support their families? If so, how are they doing this? If not, what are they doing instead?
- **Basic necessities** – Are people able to access the basic necessities for life such as water, food, health services? If no, what do they do instead?
- **Individual coping mechanisms** - Are individuals developing new behaviours that improve their lives in Jordan and help them deal with challenges?
Research Findings

Following four days of research in Za’atari camp and the surrounding urban areas, our findings were broken down into three constituent elements:

Refugee Resilience

In this case we witnessed the alteration of social space and an overall determination to avoid dependency, as far as was practicable. Specifically, we became aware through our interviews that Syrians living inside Za’atari were moving their tents in order to live in closer proximity to their families, friends and extended communities thereby, in our analysis, maintaining elements of their old social networks and previous social structures. We discovered that the main street of Za’atari was nicknamed by some as ‘Souq al-Hamidiya’ after the famous Damascus market. Informal stalls and cafes set up inside UNHCR tents lined the edges of this main street. Although not officially permitted, the camp authorities tolerated their existence. The presence of these stalls and cafes meant that there was a level of independence to source basic necessities, which reduced their level of reliance on the distribution of international aid items, as well as providing a place for men to socialise with friends outside the tent. In addition we also felt that these informal structures added a normalising element to camp life and, for the small number of Syrians working in these places, provided a source of additional income to support families and a sense of daily routine. Outside Za’atari we noticed some similar strategies. As far as possible, Syrians continued to live close to family and extended communities for the same reasons we found inside the camp. We heard from one family that they had settled in this particular area of Jordan because they wanted to ‘stay as close to Syria’ as possible. There were several reasons given for their choice to remain outside a camp environment; maintaining independence was one, and several interviewees mentioned that they had not heard good stories about the quality of life in Za’atari at that time. Life outside the camp also had its own challenges, however - employment was a difficult issue as jobs were scarce and, without any source of income, it seemed likely that the future held economic difficulties.

Hospitality

One of the things that we observed was that, even in a very difficult situation, the refugees were always very welcoming both inside and outside Za’atari. Our hosts always offered us drinks and food
even when they had little for themselves and we came consequently to feel that this hospitality was an important coping mechanism for the refugees living inside and outside Za’atari camp. In this case, the emphasis on hospitality – which is a common norm in the Syrian culture - was a way to release stress and take a level of control over the situation around them.

Although not all will agree that hospitality is a true strategy for long-term coping in a stressful environment, we could not ignore the hospitality and generosity of refugees in the camp, and believe that the ability of refugees to welcome guests is a factor worth consideration, through the opportunity it afforded to maintain an important aspect of their culture.

Communication

Syrian refugees were maintaining various paths of communication with the outside world and with each other through firstly, broadcast media; secondly, mobile phone contact with their relatives in Syria and finally; face-to-face and mobile phone contact with other Syrian refugees around them. This was important as it provided them with a network of social support. In spite of having limited financial resources, Syrian refugees both inside and outside the camp were eager to have access to the media. The majority of our interviewees mentioned that they use media, such as television and radio, to find out about the current situation in Syria. Some said that they bought a television in Jordan to keep up with news, as well as to entertain their children. Also, the majority of our respondents answered that they call their relatives in Syria by mobile phone in order to find whether they are safe, which also functions as a two-way communication that keeps their relatives in Syria informed about the conditions in Jordan. Refugees were also sharing information about the conflict in Syria with other Syrians around them. Respondents in Za’atari complained about the lack of common spaces for them to gather, and that they were always trying to create such places in order to talk and spend their time together as part of their daily routine.

Additional to these three main findings, during the days that members of the research group were present in Za’atari, they noticed that the camp residents were expressing their opinions through graffitied slogans and drawings on walls, tents and other structures. Both political and surprisingly humorous in tone, these can be seen as an effort by refugees to cope with their situation; however, it might also be argued that this is more a reaction to the situation, rather than a coping strategy per se.

Overall, we came to the conclusion that Syrian refugees in Za’atari and Mafraq utilise their own cultural understandings of the world to base their methods of coping against the turmoil around them. Moreover, by understanding the contextual background for these methods, the international community can be better placed to constructively intervene to facilitate methods of coping that make sense to the refugees.

For the majority of this research group, this was our first experience in collecting primary data and our first visit to a refugee camp. In dealing with the challenges that arise in an unpredictable environment, we now appreciate the importance of patience, of cultural awareness and most of all, of being flexible in the face of the unexpected.

The findings detailed here were agreed by the group for presentation to HRH Prince Hassan bin Talal in December 2012 and for presentation to an audience at the University of York in January 2013. To meet academic requirements for the University of York each member of the research group produced an individual report based on the common data gathered during the field trip that was submitted for assessment as part of the MA in Post-war Recovery Studies. We are grateful to the PRDU staff for their help in facilitating our research and the trip as a whole, and to the staff and students of Al al-Bayt University, Mafraq, who generously offered their time to assist us during our stay in Jordan.
**Introduction**

The third group, covering education, protection and youth programs both within the camp and in Mafraq, split into three to explore the education programmes provided to school age children and any educational loss they may have suffered; an evaluation to evaluate the gender dynamics in the provision of, and access to, education; and a critique of the formal and informal institutions provided for young people and their impact. Specifically, the groups intended to explore the length of time for which children’s educations have been disrupted; how receptive is the registration/enrolment mechanism for children; how responsive is the current education programme (supply) versus the existing education needs (demand) in the camp, and what are the long-term development plans; to what extent are parents and children involved in school affairs (such as PTAs, SMCs); and how is the integration process proceeding. Incorporating pre-school age children, primary and secondary grades students, teachers and parents, it is anticipated that the research will be conducted through focus groups and one-on-one interviews. Equally, the group aimed to assess the formal and informal mechanisms in place to provide a positive environment for young people. In particular, the group intended to look at those who were about to or had exited the formal education system and evaluate the short and long term desires and aspirations of the young people, while assessing whether the refugee camp environment could bear an impact.

**Methodology**

In December 2012, our team of seven, researched education and child protection in Za’atari camp and the surrounding area of Mafraq. The team focused upon gathering qualitative data from interviews and focus groups due to our short time frame in the field. We did not interview or gather evidence from children directly for ethical reasons, instead we triangulated our research between parents, schools and (I)NGOs. The situation in Za’atari has changed significantly since our research trip and the writing of this report, information on the surrounding area of Mafraq is much less publicised yet one can safely hypothesize that the issues analysed in this report are not stagnant; they are ever evolving. This is not to say that our findings have less gravity, but to note that they are both specific to the time in which they were gathered and hold weight for future research. Protection, psychological wellbeing and education are all essential to children in emergency situations, ideally a child will have all three in their life, however a number of issues arose from our research that relate to either the provision for or quality of these. This report will consider protection, psychological wellbeing and education, it will be noted that these areas often interrelate, there are therefore multi-factorial causes and consequences to issues discussed.

**Research Findings**

Warmth and nutrition, these were two of the biggest concerns that parents had of their child’s protection. In one focus group mothers discussed their fear of the cold and rumours that they had heard children dying due to winter conditions. One woman said:

*It is very cold at night and it is beginning to get cold in the day. We do not have enough blankets and clothes for our children. I am worried that my children will get sick.*
Bedwetting in winter is of serious concern for parents who are not able to dry bedding and therefore keep their children warm. One must consider the winterisation of the camp and the financial situation of families: tents are too cold or flood, and families do not have the money to buy winter clothes and blankets.

Nutrition was of equal concern: women inside the camp complained that dairy was missing from their children’s diets. This was reiterated by another woman in the camp who also highlighted that the sugar content in food was high, that there wasn’t enough, and buying extra was expensive. Inside the camp rations comprise of “rice, bulgar wheat, lentils, oil and sugar…and bread… beans, tuna, tomato paste, hummous, halwa and tea” (UNHCR, 2013). While this covers carbohydrates and proteins it lacks the nutrients found in dairy as the mothers noted and vegetables. Outside the camp parents described their financial difficulty; one man said it was difficult to provide food for his children. There has been a nutrition assessment of Syrian children in Jordan, the outcome of which is a targeted infant feeding program (UNHCR 2012: 3) rather than one for children. Resources were found to be better inside the camp than outside for children, particularly due to high living expenses in Mafraq. On one occasion a mother stated to us that it was better in the camp as “I don’t have a dollar in my pocket… nobody cares about my children”.

Financial difficulties have resulted in some of the most pressing concerns for child protection, such as an increased likelihood of children entering child labour. One parent said “I have taken the decision not to send my son to school, so he can help earn the family money”. There are mechanisms in place to report incidents of child labour – this is mainly inside the camp and only for the more physically concerning forms of labour: kitchen and construction work. Early marriage has also been linked to financial pressures families are under; it is thought to provide a better life for the daughter and ease the financial burden on her family. Evidence suggests that culturally women do get married earlier in Syria, though this may be exacerbated by their current situation. Sexual harassment and abuse of children is more likely in female-headed households. Refugees suggested that marriage or temporary marriage would be the best way to safe guard from such abuse. However, this is not a practical or acceptable solution for women who have left husbands behind in Syria while others are recently widowed and simply want to live alone.

The psychological impact of fleeing from war was an issue for many parents and NGO employees. Parents often reported changes in their child’s behaviour, they are described as less cooperative, more inclined to violence and playing war games. They also suffer from bed wetting, night terrors, and crying. Violent behavior, anxiety and sadness are all indicative of Child Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Mandalakas, Torjesen and Olness 2005: 54). One mother described her children as being “…scared all of the time. If they hear a dumpster emptying bins or a plane flying, they run into the tent screaming.” Some parents report the resilience of their children: “they are behaving the same and as long as they are with their parents and family then they can cope”. As this parent suggests psychological trauma and resilience has been linked to affectionate and stable relationships in the family. This need for a supportive and affectionate relationship with an adult is not met for unaccompanied children; in 2012 there were 797 registered unaccompanied Syrian children in Jordan (UNICEF/Unite for Children 2012: 4).

School is very important for the psychological wellbeing of the child, providing a safe supportive, normalising environment, a sense of constancy and routine. Teachers in the camp have trauma training; this is not consistent with teachers outside the camp. In one Mafraq school there was a trained councillor present in school hours. One parent said:

*Often children hear traumatic and difficult things at home... so being in school is very important... to get away from this.*
Parents valued the school for its ability to restore normality of social play and interaction or a tool to preoccupy the child’s time – the value of this was sometimes focused over educational benefits.

Education in emergencies is essential for child development and continued learning; it needs to be accessible for children unfamiliar with the language or teaching styles and should prepare them for future education (INEE 2010: 81). We found that there was no guarantee of certification for return home. Children were following a Jordanian curriculum, the quality of textbooks provided were of significant concern to parents. Parents identified language as an issue: the Jordanian accent caused difficulty for learning, there were however Syrian teaching assistants in the camp. Education presents opportunity to educate children on relevant hazards in a crisis - in Mafraq, landmine safety was integrated into daily lessons. While schools provide shelter and a safe environment, no further measures were observed.

Schooling is provided until grade 12 or age 18. In 2012 there were 51,245 registered Syrian children in Jordan; 3,450 are registered in the Bahrain school complex, 18,245 in community schools (3,000 in the Mafrak governorate) and 2,500 on waiting lists (UNICEF/Unite for Children 2012: 2, 4). This leaves a deficit of 29,550 registered child refugees that do not have access to or are not attending school, without accounting for those who are unregistered. Due to large variations in the cited numbers of children in the camp and in Mafraq it is hard to put a figure on the precise number of children in and out of school in these areas. All our parent participants had children going to school, which may be reflective of our methodology, although not exclusively, we often reached parents through the school network. There are several barriers to accessing education, two of which have been previously discussed: child labour and child marriage. In addition to these barriers one must consider attitudes to the value of education; an NGO worker from within the camp described this as particularly pertinent:

Children and their parents from rural areas, particularly around Dara, want to learn a craft and become handymen rather than receive an education

Syrian families in Za’atari and Mafrak are much more likely to come from rural areas in southern Syria, these areas, as the NGO worker suggests, are less likely to send their children to school. However the parents we spoke to repeatedly stressed the importance of education, often ranking it as the most valuable thing for their children. It is therefore important not to generalise cultural considerations.

The situation for children in both Za’atari and Mafrak is both dynamic and evolving. Families and children face a multitude of difficulties, and it may therefore be stated that of the issues documented for children many have multiple causes and consequences, thus requiring coordination and development of three key study areas: child protection, psychological well-being and access to quality education. For many members of the team, this was their first research trip; it was a valuable and challenging experience that resulted in multifaceted learning outcomes.
SOCIAL COHESION

Introduction

The fourth group was assigned the task of researching social cohesion between displaced Syrians and the Jordanian host community both inside the camp and in the surrounding urban areas. The research team pursued the notion that a refugee camp could constitute an environment of isolation and exclusion, especially in the case of a closed camp, and that isolation could be supported by the absence of opportunities to build social cohesion between the refugees and the host community. Moreover, the news that informal efforts were occurring between the refugees and surrounding communities would be explored in terms of the perception of refugees and the mechanisms through which social cohesion is supported by local members of the host country. Retaining an open approach and with the assistance of the hosts at Al al-Bayt University, the hypotheses and objectives of the research adapted within the environs of the camp and the urban areas, yet through the fusion of the initial literature review and pre-field visit lectures bearing a focus on the Syrian conflict, the research aimed to strike a path of nuanced and timely scholarship.

Findings

Our group was assigned the task of researching social cohesion between displaced Syrians and the Jordanian host community both inside the camp and in the surrounding urban areas. The research identified two manifestations of social cohesion: positive cohesion and negative cohesion. Understood positively social cohesion is the presence of strong social bonds such as shared values, kinship and language. The negative dimension can be identified as an absence of latent social
conflict, for instance structural inequalities and disparities in participation. As the exclusionary nature of a refugee camp acts as a barrier to social integration and as social cohesion itself is such a long-term and subjective concept we chose to focus on three clear points of interaction between the two groups: intermarriage, trade and employment. These points of interaction acted as a framework for our research informing our methodology, objectives and respondent selection. This led us to our defining research question, ‘How do changing social and economic networks affect the continuous process of ‘social cohesion’ between Jordanians and Syrians?’

The group carried out interviews with international and local NGOs, government officials, Mafraq residents and displaced Syrians, both inside and outside the camp. We were struck by the receptivity and hospitality of the respondents and their willingness to share their experiences. We found strong evidence of already existing social cohesion and networks between the two communities due to shared culture, history, religion, language and values. Almost every individual interviewed, both Syrian and Jordanian spoke of the ‘brotherhood’ that exists between the two groups. Two other major factors have aligned to influence this established cohesion between Syrians and Jordanians; the first is the increased influx of forced Syrian migrants that shows no sign of decelerating. The second factor is Jordan’s pre-existing economic strains that affect its ability to host large numbers of forced migrants. These factors in combination are shaping new types of interactions between displaced Syrians and Jordanian host communities. As social cohesion is a concept defined by the perceptions of those within society we utilised a variety of qualitative approaches which hopefully yielded a much deeper and more rounded insight into our topic. Research was conducted both inside Za’atari camp and outside in the surrounding urban areas such as Mafraq.

Employment

Inside the camp

In the Za’atari camp, like most refugee camps the constrictions imposed by the nature of a closed camp stifle the productivity and therefore the economic welfare of refugees. We found that inside the camp there existed a strategic aim by NGOs to employ Syrian camp residents. Positions as street representatives are also available to refugees. This participation in setting up and maintaining camp services can be understood as fostering social cohesion between Syrians and Jordanians by creating a point of interaction that is not purely based on dependence. Furthermore it allows for a direct route of dialogue between refugees and Jordanian NGO workers aiding participation and creating potential for contribution. Additional benefits of employment within the camp revealed by our research were the creation of financial independence, improvement of the camp economy and provision of daily structure, increased accountability of refugees in their camp, which creates a feeling of ownership (for example to cleaning their own streets and to teaching their own children) and finally, it keeps young single men busy during the day.

Outside the camp

Due to the pre-existing ‘social bonds’ between the two nations Syrians are easily able to participate in the job market; neither language nor culture acts as a barrier to entry. Additionally familial ties can aid in the search for employment. Syrian refugees bring with them skills and resources that could benefit the Jordanian labour market and economy. However, the evidence we encountered suggests that due to pre-existing economic strains within Jordan and an already saturated labour market there is competition for jobs amongst Syrians and Jordanians outside of the camp.

There existed a perception that for every migrant who has access to economic opportunity, a citizen is denied such an opportunity. If this perception is not countered it could pose very real challenges to existing social cohesion. Despite this perception of Syrians taking jobs from Jordanians, the team found that Syrians find it hard to get jobs and are forced to do menial tasks because other
employment is unavailable to them. Syrians are taking the jobs that Jordanians do not want; these jobs are usually less well paid and less respected. If this trend continues then these income inequalities may develop into more deep-rooted structural inequalities that will undermine social cohesion.

**Trade**

The main street of the camp is lined with shops; these are UNHCR tents propped open to display fruit, vegetables, bread, toys and clothes. Coffee shops, shisha cafes and falafel stalls were also visible on the main street. The head of the camp security committee reported that there are currently around 50 shops in Za’atari camp. Two main reasons were given for becoming a trader: financial necessity and a desire to keep busy. Most had not been traders back in Syria, but had started once arriving in Za’atari. The supply networks are formed by Jordanians contacting Syrian traders or through networks between Syrians inside and outside the camp. These trade links appear to be financially beneficial for both Jordanian suppliers and Syrian traders.

Yet the competitive nature of business is not an ideal platform on which to build social cohesion, especially when normal market rules cannot apply. Supply and demand dynamics do not interplay naturally in the camp setting: need being a major motive on the Syrian side creates a captive demand. There also exists a potential monopoly on supply, as there are few other ways for Syrian traders to attain stock. A dichotomy between the perception of Jordanians in a business context versus how they are viewed as people and hosts was echoed by many of the in-camp traders. We were told that Jordanians charge higher prices and the traders feel pressured to buy the wares regardless and charge more themselves in order to make a small profit. The evidence we encountered suggests that this economic dependence on Jordanian suppliers is creating tension and unrest amongst Syrian traders.

**Marriage**

This is an extremely culturally sensitive issue; inter-marriage between Syrians and Jordanians (specifically Syrian women and Jordanian men, we encountered no evidence of marriage between Jordanian women and Syrian men) has been occurring for as long as these two nations have existed. The legal marriage age in Jordan is 18 but religious ‘informal’ marriages can take place at a much younger age. The head of the camp security committee estimated that there has been about 200-300 of these marriages since the opening of the camp. Out of the camp it is difficult to ascertain how many inter-marriages take place especially as many of them will be of an informal nature, however a volunteer for a Jordanian charity informed us that she was aware of 20-23 per month.

The initial reaction of most respondents when questioned about this phenomenon was to explain that it is a tradition and to reiterate the normality of it. However the fact that the social dynamics between the Syrians and Jordanians have shifted so dramatically since March 2011 means that this trend is now open to exploitation due to the built-in power imbalance between host community and refugee community. Whilst the integration of displaced Syrians families into the wider Jordanian community through marriage can be seen to foster pre-existing social cohesion, the influence of vulnerability and opportunity has the potential to create conditions that may make parents of young women or the women themselves feel pressured into marriage. These problematic conditions could foster resentment and the perception of exploitation on the Syrian side thus undermining social cohesion.

**Perceptions**
It is worth noting that respondents mentioned the changing nature of the Syrian/Jordanian bond. When asked how they felt the connection between Jordanians and Syrians had altered they replied that they felt Syrians had become ungrateful and rude. Issues concerning Syrians criticizing the Jordanian military and Royal Family were also raised. Additionally Syrians reported Jordanians becoming less welcoming. This trend could be an indication that the links of kinship and culture that currently inform the negative and positive social cohesion existing between Jordanians and Syrians are being eroded.

**Conclusion**

The findings of our research suggest that the relatively successful handling of the Syrian migration and the welcoming nature with which this has occurred is due to the pre-existing social cohesion between the two nations. However with the economic difficulties being experienced by Jordan the presence of Syrian migrants is stretching resources. The team was told by Mafraq residents that prices and rent have continued to rise since the influx of displaced Syrians began. Additionally spending prolonged periods in impoverished conditions or the camp where much of their livelihood depends on external aid agencies may compromise Syrians’ capacities for autonomous agency. This can undermine their trust in aid workers and the host community. These factors have the potential to undermine social cohesion through creating inequalities, exploitation and marginalization and positive social cohesion by fostering perceptions of rudeness and hostility.

Much relies on Jordanians continuing to offer hospitality and warmth to the Syrian migrants but this must be assisted with education and resources such as the expansion of government services to accommodate more users. Secondly, encouraging independent income of migrants through employment and trade is a method to re-instil self-determination and address the disparity of wealth and opportunities that can lead to social exclusion. Finally there should be more emphasis on community impact projects designed to benefit both Jordanians and Syrians. The trip was an eye-opening experience in terms of the reality of the Syrian forced migrancy and the challenges and complications of conducting academic research in conflict affected areas.
CONCLUSION

At the core of the visit and the report has been collaboration: not just on an academic and practitioner level, but also on a macro (international) and micro (domestic) level. The partnership between the University of York and Al al-Bayt University has provided an excellent foundation for further research exchange that should continue to augment the existing refugees, displacement and post-war recovery knowledge base. The success of the relationship, if replicated on a broader level, could facilitate a rich database of analyses and recommendations for future contexts.

As noted by His Royal Highness Prince Hassan Bin Talal, during the closing ceremony at the Royal Cultural Centre in Amman, as a host state the Kingdom lacks a template for addressing successive influxes of refugees. Given the unique characteristics of each conflict and the needs of the refugees fleeing, a definitive template could prove elusive. Nevertheless, a general framework could be nurtured through enhanced dialogue between organizations such as the JHCO and UNHCR, and universities holding strong foci on refugees and the displaced. In particular, the Refugees, Displaced Persons and Forced Migration Studies Center at the University of Yarmouk and the Centre for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, working alongside Al al-Bayt University would prove conducive to broadening the knowledge pool.

Likewise, combined international – and in the case of the PRDU, national – engagement with institutions such as the Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford, the Refugee, Asylum and Migration Network at the University of Glasgow and the Migration Studies Unit at LSE, would bring together researchers from diverse fields of migration, refugee and displacement studies through research and dialogue with academic institutions in Jordan. In turn, such dialogue would facilitate the development of fresh approaches to the challenges confronting the Kingdom and the organizations operating within the country.

Photo: MA students and PRDU staff with Prince Hassan bin Talal
Bibliography


