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**‘THE WAITING PLACE’:
REFUGEE RESILIENCE AND DOCUMENTATION IN JORDAN**

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List of Acronyms

MENA	Middle East North Africa region
MoPIC	Ministry of Planning and Cooperation-Jordan
JRP	Jordan Response Plan
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
3RP	The Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan
RP	Research Paper

Acknowledgements

"جئت إلى هذه الدنيا عنوة... لا البلاد احتضتني ولا أحد... أنتهي إلى قلب طاف في الهوى.. وإلى الحرية.. حلي
لا يساوم.. وغزالي في الريح سارحة" - ريم البنا

To the family that raised me, everything that I am and everything that I ever will be is because of you. I love you.

To the tribe that took me in, this year has been one of kinship. Thank you for your generosity. I appreciate you.

To my best friend, I am never alone because I have you. I adore you.

To the mentors who guided me through this journey, I admire you.

To my love, you stood by me through thick and thin. You are the '*nour*' of my eyes. I treasure you.

To all those who struggle to obtain documentation, I 'recognise' you.

Abstract

This research paper aims to present the deep disconnect between how refugees understand and strive to achieve their own resilience as opposed to how humanitarianism thinks and operates resilience. It seeks to concretely answer: ‘how do refugees strategize to become resilient in Jordan?’. To focus the scope of the question and answer it, this research paper builds on Hilhorst and Jansen’s understanding of humanitarianism as an ‘arena’ that is ‘shaped’ by actors ‘negotiating’ around the chain of aid. This will be done by exploring how refugees perceive their own resilience, and how they negotiate that resilience around the humanitarian arena in Jordan using documentation as a lens of investigation. This research paper will argue that refugees experience Jordan as an ‘arena of *crises*’, and their own resilience as the negotiation process to move from (and within) one crisis to another whereas documentation is a technology of humanitarian resilience governing.

Relevance to Development Studies

Resilience humanitarianism is rooted in development through the the Humanitarian Development Peace Nexus. While humanitarian ‘aid’ focused on temporary interventions, resilience humanitarianism on the other hand operates to increase ‘local capacities’ and ‘self-resilience’ which takes a development turn around the response corner. Resilience’s heavy focus on documentation for refugees brings in questions on how humanitarianism intersects with welfare provisioning in Jordan. As opposed to institutional resilience thinking, this research paper centers the experience of refugees who seek documentation in Jordan to rethink resilience.

Keywords

Refugee, Documentation, Humanitarianism, Resilience, Jordan.

Chapter 1

Introduction

“There are places that we love that do not love us in the same way” (Shannak, 2021)

The language that separates people and borders is very powerful. In legal terms, if a person stays in a country longer than what their visa allows, then they have ‘overstayed’ and can be banned from entering that country. A ‘welcome’ is a process, and in most cases, a privilege. This is the struggle of people attempting to escape humanitarian crises only to find themselves facing the challenging prospects of ‘recognition’. Refugees must be ‘recognised’ by humanitarian institutions in the countries they arrive at in the form of documentation. Documentation is vital for refugees to be able to have access to services they need to survive, and maybe one day, thrive beyond crisis.

Longing for recognition; a document that represents institutional protection and access where one can thrive beyond fears, is a familiar goal. Somehow, we all strive for a bubble of our own making, one that fits our dreams, one that loves us as much as we love it. What drove me to write this research paper is to understand how refugees negotiate the making of that bubble in Jordan.

1.1. Crisis, Resilience, and Documentation in Jordan

Jordan, described as an oasis of safety in a turmoiled region, is a small country that struggles with a harsh economic reality surrounded by crises over the years from neighbouring Palestine, Iraq, and Syria. Now after 11 years of the Syrian crisis, and most recently the Covid-19 pandemic impacts, Jordan struggles with poor infrastructure, a challenging economy, and public frustration “with youth unemployment rates reaching an unprecedented 48.1%” (World Bank, 2021). The government of Jordan continues to request the international community’s support in funding programming to deal with the refugee crisis in the country. The Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation’s (MoPIC) Jordan Response Plan (JRP) states that Jordan is “bearing more than its fair share of the response” to meet the needs of refugees (MoPIC, 2021; 1).

Resilience thinking has become increasingly at the heart of crisis response in the region, and more specifically in Jordan. Since 2015, the UNHCR and UNDP worked closely with the Jordanian government, among other governments in the region, on the Regional Refugee

and Resilience Plan (3RP) to respond to the refugee crisis (Kelberer, 2017). The Jordanian government states in its most recent official crisis response plan that “resilience interventions are of no less importance than humanitarian ones”, making the “humanitarian and resilience” pillar one of its two 2021-2022 main pillars (MoPIC, 2021; 1-8). The distinction made by the Jordanian government between “humanitarian aid” and “resilience” is highly linked to resilience’s focus on building local capacities, and its rootedness in the Humanitarian-Development Nexus as opposed to aid response (3RP, 2021; 3). Resilience cannot thus get more ‘official’ than this; an international regional refugee and resilience strategic plan, with a Jordanian government corresponding plan, setting in motion all crisis response related operations in the country. Resilience is now the official humanitarian response language in Jordan.

The large number of refugees in Jordan has made documentation a significant part of resilience response. The Jordanian government claims that the number of Syrian refugees is more than 1.3 million (MoPIC¹, 2020; 3RP, 2021; 5). UNHCR states that it has registered, as of September 2021, 670,637 Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2021). UNHCR also states that there are 758,330 refugees under “population of concern”, whereas there are 57 refugee nationalities (UNHCR, 2021; 1). The 3RP also states that there are still 633,314 who are “projected registered Syrian refugees by December 2021” meaning they have not yet obtained documentation (3RP, 2021; 5). The difference between an approximate 1.3 million and 758,330 is a gruesome number of undocumented refugees. While 83% of refugees in Jordan live in urbanised cities, and 17% reside still in the refugee camps, not having documentation means that thousands of refugees remain beyond access to basic services and institutional protections (UNHCR, 2021).

Documentation is a key tool, an obligatory passage point, for refugees to access services and assistance such as health, school, and legal work. The absence of documentation not only means lack of access to services, but also means that refugees who do not have it are at risk of deportation. This makes documentation a vital tool to the lives of refugees in the country. The 3RP puts documentation within its first strategic pillar ‘protecting people’, whereas resilience planning aims at increasing refugee documentation in Jordan (3RP, 2021). The 3RP states that “obtaining and renewing civil documentation remains a key to enable access to social services, employment and their [refugees] entitlements in the host countries”

¹ MoPIC stands for the Jordanian Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation that is responsible for the Jordanian Response Plan for the Syrian Crisis.

(3RP, 2021; 10). Documentation to integrate refugees within national welfare systems is the direction and course of action of the resilience humanitarian agenda.

1.2. Refugee Documentation in Jordan

I must disclaim upfront that this section is not a mapping of refugee documentation processes, rather a summary of the major documents refugees must obtain, and the overall process of obtaining some of them, to clarify the context. Although I am curious to conduct such a mapping study, it would require a completely separate research paper. This section aims to showcase the complexity of documentation and what that might mean to a refugee attempting to ‘legalise’ their status in Jordan.

What is meant here by documentation is two main processes: first, the process of seeking asylum and obtaining refugee status at UNHCR and second, the process of obtaining Jordanian institutional documentation. The latter is vital for legal status and the provision of services such as a Ministry of Interior Card (MoI), a birth certificate, a marriage certificate, a death certificate, etc. These two major processes are complex, closely linked and intertwined. When one thinks of documentation what comes to mind is a one solid palm-sized piece of plastic that has a name and a number. Documentation is not one product, it is a laborious process that entails social culture and institutional power. It represents a whole realm of discussions on how people understand and engage with governing systems, what they seek out of that engagement, and how they strategize to seek it.

“...it’s not like you register for asylum then you wait in line and then you might get an interview. You may register and that’s it, that might be the last time you interact with UNHCR” (Fisher, 2021)

There are two main ways in which UNHCR registers refugees in Jordan. The first, is an asylum seeker. When a person arrives in Jordan, and attempts to get registered at UNHCR, they will receive what is called an ‘asylum seeker certificate’. UNHCR says that an asylum seeker is “someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed” (UNHCR, n.d). This means that an asylum seeker is someone who is requesting to be ‘recognised’ as a refugee, but their request has not yet been processed by UNHCR. As Fisher² explains in the quote above, one cannot know how long it would take for UNHCR to recognise a person as a refugee. The second, is refugee status. To be recognised as a refugee, a person has to go through what is called a ‘refugee determination’ process. This process includes an interview

² For more details on the participants of this research paper see Chapter 2 Methodology

or a series of interviews where UNHCR officers ask questions to clarify whether or not a claim is legitimate. Also, if a person is to become eligible for resettlement, they will have to first be recognised as a refugee.

“The UNHCR refugee status is absolutely necessary. A person cannot have an MoI card if they do not have a refugee status certificate from the UNHCR. Any paperwork that needs to be done at the Ministry of Interior even a marriage certificate requires a UNHCR refugee certificate.” (*Mohammed, 2021)

The Jordanian government requires Syrian refugees³ to obtain a Ministry of Interior Identification (MoI) card. To have an MoI card refugees must go through a series of processes to authenticate certain documents such as a valid birth certificate, marriage certificate, legal crossing of the border, a proof of address, clearance from diseases, refugee status from UNHCR, among other documents. Various documents must be authenticated by various institutions. For example, a clearance from diseases must be done through the Ministry of Health, while a marriage certificate must be done through the Sharia⁴ court system. Furthermore, these documents are all linked to one another as the absence of one or two can take months to authenticate which may delay other processes when refugees attempt to access services. To visualise this, for example, if a Syrian couple give birth to a child in Jordan, the child cannot obtain an MoI card if he\she does not have a birth certificate, which also cannot be obtained if the couple does not have a valid marriage certificate from a court. *Mohammed⁵'s insight here gives a glimpse of just how complicated documentation can be, and how interlinked it is as a process. The insight of Fisher against *Mohammed's speak of the struggles thousands of people live through in Jordan to be 'recognised'.

1.3. Research Objectives & Question(S)

Research Objective(s)

The main objective of this research paper is to contribute to an understanding of humanitarianism as an “arena” where various actors, including refugees themselves, “shape” that arena through negotiating their interests around the chain of aid (Hilhorst, Jansen, 2013; 189).

Some other objectives include:

- Questioning how 'crisis' is understood as to frame an understanding of 'resilience' in Jordan
- Understanding 'documentation' as a negotiation tool, and a lens of investigation.

³ For more details see Chapter 4

⁴ Personal status law issues in Jordan are administered through Islamic (Sharia) and Christian courts.

⁵ For more details on the participants of this research paper see Chapter 2 Methodology

Research question

This research paper seeks to concretely ask: how do refugees strategize to become resilient in Jordan through documentation?

Sub question(s)

- How do refugees understand the crises they face, and thus understand their own resilience?
- How do refugees negotiate their resilience?
- How does that 'negotiation process' shape the humanitarian arena?

1.4. Managing Expectations

Before delving more concretely into the research paper, I would like to clarify that this research paper is limited in time and space and thus must remain focused. Here are some issues that may be mentioned by the research paper but will not be the centre of focus:

- This research paper will not delve into the history of 'resilience', it rather provides a contextual overview of why its important for documentation of refugees in a humanitarian setting.
- It will not delve into the differences of treatment between various nationalities of refugees, neither will it specifically address issues of race, gender or sexuality while it may mention them based on the insights of the participants. While all these issues intersect with how refugees experience the 'arena', the focus here is on documentation as a negotiation tool for resilience based on how refugees understand and aspire for it.
- It will not assess by any means the usefulness of various documentation as tool(s) of negotiating. It Will also not assess the differences between UNHCR's documentation processes, and the Jordanian government documentation process. It simply showcases how documentation serves as tool(s) of negotiating.
- It will not delve into the nature of relations between international humanitarian organisations and the state of Jordan.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Discussion

2.1. Where is this RP Centred?

This research paper centres its questions of inquiry around resilience humanitarianism and documentation. The point of departure of this research paper is to build on understanding humanitarianism as an “arena” that various “actors” including humanitarian institutions and refugees “negotiate” their interests around the chain of aid (Hilhorst, Jansen, 2013; 189). The research paper thus understands documentation as a ‘negotiation’ tool and a lens of investigation.

The space humanitarianism occupies is not limited to managing and supervising physical camps in Jordan, rather integrates development approaches to crisis response, moving itself towards occupying a political territory beyond a physical one (Hilhorst, Jansen, 2013). Humanitarian operations, where previously solely associated with the provision of first aid “temporary” services for crisis affected populations, now expand beyond “impartiality, neutrality, and independence” towards resilience through documentation (Hilhorst, Jansen, 2013; 187). Documentation is addressed by humanitarian actors, INGOs and national (government and non-government), as a necessary prerequisite to access to welfare services and acts as an obligatory passage point to services. Resilience thinking within humanitarianism is derived from “ecological adaptability” debates on withstanding “instability” (Jonathan, 2013; 38). Resilience is thus related to how communities “adapt to externally imposed change” (Jonathan, 2013; 39). This shift from humanitarian ‘aid’ thinking towards resilience humanitarianism comes from a perspective on crisis in which crisis is “the new normality” as opposed to an “extraordinary” situation (Hilhorst, 2018; 1).

Drawing from governmentality, this research paper seeks to explore how the documentation process of refugees shapes their decisions to strategize to obtain their own resilience. To simplify, governmentality is particularly useful to analyse structures or “technologies” that exists as tools that govern (Rose, et.al, 101). Humanitarian institutions thinking and implementing resilience create knowledge on crisis and refugees in relation to other groups and/or systems such as host communities. This makes resilience humanitarianism highly related to governance. This would also allow for an analysis on how actors within the humanitarian arena interact with one another during the process of documentation itself as technologies of the documentation process. What this research paper seeks to understand through governmentality is how refugees internalise knowledge produced on their own resilience and what they do with that knowledge meaning how they strategize to pursue, or even bypass documentation (Rose et al, 2006; Hilhorst, Jansen, 2013). The research paper thus can address how refugees obtain documentation and the “conditions of service delivery” shaped through the various actors in this arena (Hilhorst, Jansen, 2013; 189).

Documentation is addressed by humanitarian actors (government, non-government, and international) as a pre-request to welfare whereas obtaining the right documentation leads to leading a resilient life. This makes documentation concretely a story of resilience. Resilience is generally defined as capacities to thrive after crisis beyond immediate aid rather through development (Chandler, 2015). Chandler argues that interventions through aid bring up debates on “conflict and poverty” which can be political regardless of which causes the other (Chandler, 2015; 2). Thus, a shift to resilience was a deliberate process of thinking and planning for interventions “depoliticises” security interventions (Chandler, 2015; 2). Indeed humanitarianism’s shift from dealing with crisis through aid due to viewing it as an extraordinary situation towards operating through resilience due to viewing it and its aftermath as the new normality, is a political decision (Hilhorst, 2018; 1-2).

Resilience thinking allows an international intervention to escape the embarrassment of its political nature and continue to exist through its rootedness in development. Resilience as a strategic thought process is an “active response to historically situated problems... [that] shape new technologies of power” (Chandler et al, 2020; 3). Deconstructing resilience’s rootedness in neoliberal governmental rationalities as suggested by Chandler et.al, means knowledge production processes on crisis affected populations is aimed at resilience ‘planners’ to thrive despite crisis while maintaining an ‘apolitical’ positionality. Taking a development turn around the crisis corner allows interventions to arrive at massive population solutions reapproaching structural problems even if crisis continues. While the research engages humanitarianism as an arena, and documentation as a negotiation tool, documentation’s rootedness in resilience allows the RP to explore the starting points of ‘resilience’ to the various humanitarian actors. How refugees negotiate obtaining or not obtaining documentation, how they are navigated through UNHCR’s and government systems to obtain it by local actors, how various actors (local, international, and government) interact with one another, are among the questions that guide this RP to flesh out even what crisis and thriving beyond crisis means to those actors to better understand how ‘resilience’ is strategized, manifested, and shaped within the humanitarian arena.

I must disclaim that documentation when meaning asylum status is indeed ‘temporary’ based on the official memorandum of understanding between UNHCR and the state of Jordan. Being granted refugee status (asylum seeker certificate) in Jordan is time bound depending on how long it takes for a refugee to have a refugee status determination (RSD) interview by UNHCR, and lasting approximately 6 months after recognition (UNHCR, 2013). This means that after granting recognition to a refugee, UNHCR must arrange for either return or resettlement for the refugee (Stevens, 2013). However, first, temporary does not at all mean impartial, neutral, nor independent. Since Jordan has neither a domestic refugee law, nor is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the state’s relationship with UNHCR is a complicated and confusing one with continuous push and pull on the roles and responsibilities between the two actors (Stevens, 2013; 13). For example, UNHCR when

carrying out refugee status determination applies “its own eligibility criteria”, and there is still no consensus among the two actors on how “refugee” status should be defined despite having an official memorandum of understanding (Stevens, 2013; 13).

Second, documentation for welfare is still an expanding humanitarian space as UNHCR states in its plan overview of 2021 that it aims, in partnership with the state of Jordan, at integrating “refugees into national social protection systems” such as health and education as a key priority area of operations (UNHCR, 2021; 4). UNHCR and UNDP forged, in 2015, a regional strategy called the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), one of the UN’s largest operations in the MENA region, that seeks to address the unique challenges that crisis affected populations in multiple countries of the region, including Jordan, face due to crisis and displacement. The 3RP states that one of its main strategic pillars is to promote access to national protection systems for refugees through ‘social protection’ focusing on civil documentation to enable access (3PR, 2020). Understanding humanitarianism as an arena means examining how various actors “negotiate the outcomes of aid”, how they strategize to obtain a particular outcome, and moreover “interpret the context, the needs, their own role and each other” (Hilhorst, et.al, 2013; 260). Thus, this RP seeks to further explore documentation as a “negotiation” tool, not between UNHCR and the state of Jordan as entities, rather by recipients of aid, and the workers in aid such as UNHCR and other local actors, perhaps even workers at front desks at the Ministry of Interior (Hilhorst, Jansen, 2013; 189). Whereas the RP attempts to pull the threads of Jordan’s humanitarian arena specifically between its official “language”, being that of resilience as its “official purpose” and “legitimization process”, and the everyday politics/struggles of aid, to construct a ‘negotiation’ story of documentation (Hilhorst, Jansen, 2013; 188).

Looking at humanitarianism as an arena where multiple actors, including the recipient of aid, shape its reality through everyday politics of aid is relevant to thus understand how refugees navigate and ‘strategize’ to fulfil their needs through a perspective of everyday resistance (Hilhorst, Jansen, 2013; Hilhost, 2018; Vinthagen, Johansson, 2016). Everyday politics here encompasses all interactions within actors that shape how documentation is understood, obtained/not obtained, and navigated to result in resilient lives within the humanitarian arena in Jordan; the “the deliberate or implicit political dimensions of everyday life” (Kerkvilet, 2009; 227 as cited Hilhorst, 2013, 1). Whereas everyday resistance can be defined as the non-collective forms of action done by “lower classes” to “manifest” or navigate “their political interest” (Scott, 1989; 33). While the correlation is simple, “where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault, 1978; 95 as cited in Vinthagen, Johansson, 2016). This RP draws on these concepts to visualise ‘where’ refugees are negotiating, ‘whom’ they are negotiating, and how that negotiation process shapes the arena.

The RP seeks to build on the concept of humanitarianism as an arena by examining documentation as a negotiant tool. This will be done through reflecting on the concept of governmentality as

to engage the various humanitarian arena actors' technologies and their interactions, as well as exploring 'whose' questions of inquiry and how does such knowledge on the 'resilience' of refugees occur, and how refugees understand their own resilience within crisis. Legitimising the humanitarian space of documentation as 'resilience' unavoidably makes resilience a "framework that informs governance" and by extension the humanitarian arena in Jordan and its actors (Chandler, 2014; 47). The RP aims, by contextualising an understanding of humanitarianism an arena, to contextualise an understanding of "resilience as an ontology" (Chandler et al, 2020; 7).

2.2. Works Echoed Through the RP

There are a few concepts that, I believe, need to be established. These concepts will not be explored in depth, but are echoed throughout the research paper.

At a time where humanitarianism is operating within the peacebuilding development humanitarian nexus, it is worth here specifically discussing Escobar's Planning in Development concept. The epistemology of planning allows for a better understanding on strategizing for resilience, as development is imbedded in creating an ideological infrastructure that correlates a human's very value within development making planning a necessary tool for intervention (Escobar, 2010; 2019). Alongside establishing an understanding of planning there must also be an understanding of 'othering', as to engender an ideological infrastructure is a necessity to create a "corresponding reality" (Said, 2013: 5). Planning allows government entities to manage and distribute roles according to a development roadmap towards opening more horizons for interventions, as a government's purpose becomes a "guarantor of progress" as to remedy issues of poverty in local communities (Escobar, 2010: 146). Whereas having to meet "basic human needs" legitimises planning at the heart of development's conquest (Escobar, 2010: 151).

Documentation to solidify resilience is worth critically understanding how 'documentation' is within a humanitarian scope of operations to begin with. Legibility is "central" to "statecraft" (Scott, 1998, 19). Legibility means being empirically in touch with population to "remake" their reality through categories that support enforcement of law (Scott, 1998, 20-21). To this end, Scott argues that one of the main elements to "state-initiated social engineering" is "administrative ordering" that operates through "tools" such as identification for provisioning (Scott, 1998, 21-22). While the essence of the RP is not to delve into theories on state nor state crafting, it does however acknowledge that this lens is worth echoing behind the veil of documentation for resilience.

Taking a step back, understanding the “moral purpose” of “empire” shapes an understanding of how knowledge is constructed; to transform societies towards a universal way of life that moves societies from backwardness to modernity (Duffield, Hewitt; 2009; 6). Humanitarianism as a realm of knowledge construction “underplays” the cultural political and liberal processes that justify interventions in conflict regions (Duffield, Hewitt; 2009; 2). As while progress as a language “is derived from colonialism”, as humanitarian international actors playing a large role in creating this knowledge have a theoretically neutral mandate, this knowledge is, thus, not associated with an imperial political and cultural agenda of “progress” hence resilience planning and strategizing is internationally respected and encouraged, as well as understood as ‘apolitical’ (Duffield, Hewitt; 2013; 4). This progress is framed within humanitarianism as development, whereas ideas on the basic minimum opportunity that all humans must enjoy extended itself to colonies beyond colonialism and maintained itself through humanitarian development interventions (Duffield, Hewitt; 2009; 6).

Such a perspective can be at times be dismissive of the the agency of refugees themselves. It is still relevant when examining the humanitarian shift from first aid to protection to development to resilience. There is an undeniable repackaging of stories told on behalf of large populations of crisis affected people, especially refugees, through every new regional and national strategy, and through every interaction between humanitarian actors that continues to shape the humanitarian arena in the country. When examining humanitarianism in Jordan through governmentality, one cannot ignore the stupendous effort that goes into documenting “trends” giving social, political, and economic “phenomena” a sense of “constant” that cannot cease to exist (Duffield, 2006; 4, 2005; 146). An analysis of trends in aim of presenting solutions that involve tackling the livelihoods and wellbeing of refugees through “contemporary humanitarian interventions” is no different from past imperial notions such as the role of missionaries and is using a new language for reproducing the same colonisation (Duffield, Hewitt, 2009; 9).

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1. Lens, Positionality and Tools

The motivation to write this paper comes from my own experiences which also inform my reflections and decisions throughout this research journey, from its design, fieldwork to this written piece. On a professional level I have worked for nearly 8 years in the humanitarian field in Jordan specifically with issues of access to justice, including issues on refugee documentation. I have a first-hand understanding of the context and systems in Jordan, how people access documentation, and the implications of the absence of it. Being a Jordanian myself, growing up in the rural areas of north Jordan, I speak the language and understand the dialects of the participants in this research paper. I also have a deep understanding of the social norms mentioned or described by the participants. On a personal level, I am a Jordanian who was born in Kuwait, and whose family moved back to Jordan due to the gulf war in 1990. Although I have a Jordanian father, I have a south Indian mother, and due to this, my half-sister and half-brother were unable to stay in Jordan because they did not have the documentation that allows them to. This separation took its toll on my family until this day. Since the issue of documentation is a matter I am deeply passionate about, and have lived in many forms through out my life, I cannot remove my professional and personal positionality from the analysis.

My positionality also informed my methodological approach. Inspired by my passion to understand documentation in the humanitarian field, this research takes a qualitative approach that allows me to go beyond generalisations but instead to focus on stories and experiences from those who live and embody humanitarianism everyday. Following this aim, this RP is inspired by an ethnographic sensitivity approach whereas the “embodiment, experiences, senses, and emotions” of the participants are observed and guided the direction of the paper (Sutela, et.al, 2016; 56). While this research paper is limited in size and time, this is by no means a full-fledged ethnographic study and is rather inspired by ethnographic approaches to knowledge construction. In this sense, “multi-sited” ethnographic methods also inspired the RP in order to “track” documentation through various actors’ experience with refugee documentation (George, 1995; 95), or as George calls it: ‘following the thing?’ (George, 1995; 106). Tracking documentation through the experiences of those who sought it themselves as refugees, those who support refugees in obtaining documentation, and those

who study and document the struggles of refugees, allowed me to follow the meaning and impact of documentation in refugees' lives in Jordan.

3.2. Main Sources

This research is built mainly on primary data as it was important for me to take their voices as a point the departure. Secondary data was also consulted in order to complement the analysis. For this reason, this documentation tracking process meant that some participants were identified from the beginning of the research paper design, and others I was introduced to through other participants (snowball sampling) or secondary data. I conducted seven semi-structured online interviews, six of which I was able to use for this research paper. I had conducted an interview with an officer from UNHCR- Jordan who works with refugee status determination. UNHCR did not give me permission to use the content of the interview. Since the absence of this insight did create silences for the research paper, those silences will be addressed in the conclusion section.

The actors involved are refugees who sought documentation themselves, people who work at local and international organisations to support refugees obtain documentation, and one researcher and writer who documents the stories and lived experience of refugees. As an Arabic and English speaker I would like to clarify that almost all the interviews conducted were done in Arabic. Some interviewed were conducted in both Arabic and English, and one interview was conducted completely in English. I must admit that translating to English when transcribing was tricky, as Arabic is a more descriptive, expressive and poetic language. Translating to English was not always sufficient in getting across the richness of experiences and emotions involved in the process.

Following are the participants of this research paper and how they supported the construction of this research paper:

***Amal:** is a Syrian refugee, mother of five children residing in Amman-Jordan since 2014. Amal has not only sought refuge in Jordan, but also moved from Al Za'atri refugee camp to Amman. This means that she and her family went through multiple documentation processes making her insight deeply relevant.

***Mohammed:** is a Syrian refugee who used to work at UNHCR when he lived in Dara'a-Syria before 2011, and who thus became a refugee overnight when he crossed the

Jordanian border. He currently works with a local organisation as a facilitator supporting refugees in obtaining documentation among other forms of support. His insight comes with both technical knowledge of the systems and understanding of refugee status in the country as well as his prior work with UNHCR.

***Nidal:** is a Palestinian-Jordanian case worker who works at an international organisation that supports refugees with various services including obtaining documentation. She has vast knowledge and experience in documentation processes for Syrian, and non-Syrian refugees.

Hadeel Abdel Aziz: is the founder and executive director of the Justice Center for Legal Aid (JCLA), a local, non-government access to justice organisation. The organisation advocates for various issues regarding the resilience and wellbeing of refugees in the country and provides documentation services for refugees. She has a local understanding on how resilience is implemented, as well as works very closely with international and government organisations having a technical understanding of resilience strategies and implementation.

Lina Shannak: is a local researcher, journalist, and ‘storyteller’ with over 10 years of experience documenting human rights stories and issues related to refugees living in urbanised settings in Jordan. In the past year, she interviewed 30 refugees for conducting research. Her research takes place in impoverished and marginalised neighbourhoods of Amman making her knowledge rich and insightful on the ‘neighbourhood’ level.

Betsy Fisher: is a US based immigration lawyer who works with the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP). She has over 10 years of experience in resettlement cases for refugees from various countries, including Syrian, Iraqi, and other nationality refugees from Jordan. Being from the field of humanitarian resettlement, she works very closely with UNHCR and other international mechanisms on issues of refugee rights. Upon her request, I would like to disclaim that all opinions expressed by Betsy Fisher during the interview were in a personal capacity, are her own personal thoughts based on her experiences, and do not reflect the opinion(s) or position(s) of the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP).

Secondary Sources

“Transit in Amman” Podcast Episode: The episode features a Sudanese refugee who tells his story which includes his documentation journey. The podcast called Bhub-حب

meaning ‘with love’ is about unusual love stories. This specific episode is about the complicated feelings towards “the uncertainty of living in a city that does not love you” in the same ways in which you love it (Shannak, 2021). Lina Shannak, one of the participants of this research, is the producer of this podcast episode. I requested to interview her after I heard the podcast.

Other Secondary sources include: UNHCR\UNDP Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) 2021, UNHCR’s publications such as website pages, published fact sheets, regulations, strategies, etc. I also used the Jordanian Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) Jordan Response Plan (JRP). This is the Jordanian government’s main response plan to the Syrian crisis in collaboration with local, and international humanitarian entities.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

Safety of Participants

Due to my positionality I have witnessed the sensitivity of the topic. In fact, documentation is a very delicate matter to the participants given that it impacts their legal status in the country. For this reason, the identities of refugees who took part in the study, and one case worker’s have been concealed for their safety. Those whose names have been changed for the purpose of the RP will appear with a star for clarity*.

I had communications including calls, and messages that proceeded all interviews to elaborate on the purpose of the interviews and the research paper. For the participants who did not know me, I introduced myself and allow them to decide whether or not they wanted to take part in the study, after clearly disclosing the nature and purpose of this research. Since I knew some of the participants on a personal and professional level, it was easier to begin working on some of the fieldwork interviews, which also implied a high degree of responsibility in ensuring their safety.

Working in this field provided me the ability to select the information that should not be disclosed in the study. Thus, some of the insights from the interviews were omitted if the content puts the participants at the risk of identification, or if it was at the request of any of the participants. Since the interviews were conducted online, upon finishing the analysis sections of this research paper, the raw data (recorded interviews) were deleted.

The participants' quotes were sent to almost all participants for their comments and consent. The only exception to this was one of the refugee participants who was facing difficulty getting in touch due to family personal commitments. I discussed her insights with her case worker to ensure her safety and that her identity remains concealed.

Reflections on Awareness of Positionality:

I would also like to clarify that I am very aware of the “final power of interpretation” I had during this process (Gilbert, 1994; 94). Not only due to interpreting from Arabic but also due to my knowledge and experience with legal issues concerning refugee documentation in Jordan. During one of the interviews with a refugee participant, I realised while in the middle of the conversation that she and her husband will be facing a legal dilemma. I called her case worker after the interview to ensure that the problem is addressed.

I am also aware that due to Covid-19, conducting an interview online was something all participants were used to. If I had conducted this same research last year, I might have had technical or communication issues that I did not have during the fieldwork. Being online could have created anxieties on issues of safety and consent such as being recorded without knowing, or saying something that could cause problems with authorities. This allowed me to have a more front row seat understanding of trust.

Chapter 4

Perceptions on Crisis and Resilience

“Amman is beautiful, I love it. But when I look at my life, I do not hate Amman, I hate myself. What am I doing here? I have done nothing with my life! But as a city, it’s beautiful” *Amir (Shannak, 2021).

In recent years the response to the refugee crisis in Jordan has been dominated by a language of resilience. This shift from an aid mindset to resilience thinking is at the centre of every humanitarian intervention in the aim that the local government, systems, and local communities in Jordan will eventually be able to manage refugee related needs beyond the crisis for over 1.3 million refugees in the country⁶.

*Amir is a Sudanese refugee currently living and working in Amman. Like thousands of refugees in the country, his words speak volumes of what it is like to move from a state of chaotic indiscriminate conflict to a void that is unknown and unfamiliar, surrounded by uncertainty. This chapter seeks to explore how crisis is understood by humanitarian actors, especially refugees themselves, as to construct an understanding of resilience. While international humanitarian organisations paint the dominant picture on the crisis lived and felt by millions, refugees’ experiences and aspirations tell a different story.

This research paper understands humanitarianism in Jordan as an “arena” of crises, whereas actors “negotiate” their political interests (Hilhorst, Jansen, 2013; 189). It will explore how powerful humanitarian actors such as international organisations, namely UNHCR, and the Jordanian government, negotiate an understanding of crisis thus determining resilience interventions. It will also explore how refugees, as humanitarian actors, understand their own crises, and thus understand their own resilience. The chapter serves to establish that refugees are not recovering from a past crisis, rather living a whole new set of crises in Jordan. To rethink how crisis can be perceived and thus how resilience can be understood, this chapter provides the lens of documentation as a central tool of investigation.

⁶ See Chapter 1

4.1. Understanding Resilience through Crisis

Institutional Recognition of Crisis

The relevance of resilience, and how it is conceptualised as well as implemented, is in the humanitarian shift towards replacing aid with resilience. While humanitarianism existed historically to respond to crisis, this shift from aid to resilience brings with it a new ‘institutional’ understanding of response to crisis and thus of crisis itself. This research paper views humanitarianism in Jordan as an “arena” whereas the “everyday practices” of various agencies including humanitarian aid actors, government and non-government entities, and refugees themselves, continue to “shape” it (Hilhorst, 2018; 2). This negotiation process, the continuous shaping of the arena, means that actors do not only shape how crisis is responded to, rather what crisis is to begin with (Hilhorst, 2018).

“What is challenging about resilience is the way humanitarianism is run to begin with. When one-third of humanitarian funding goes to management and administrative support it becomes a self-perpetuating machine with hierarchal structures that need to be maintained. They will never invest in programs that can solve problems” (Abdel Aziz, 2021)

Power to negotiate the definition and criteria of crisis does not occur in a vacuum. International interventions are never apolitical and are justified through technologies creating knowledge that “underplay” a political colonial project (Duffield, Hewitt, 2009; 2-4). While maintaining that this research paper does not intend on delving into humanitarian coloniality, it recognises that the dominant definition of crisis, and thus outlining interventions to respond to crisis, are deeply institutional and never apolitical. The major voice of UNHCR and other large international responders to crisis are predominant, unavoidable, and institutionally legitimise international interventions.

Speaking ‘resilience’ in humanitarianism looks specifically at the impact of crisis as manageable, and resolvable whereas resilience can be understood as a set of meticulous strategic interventions to deal with the aftermath of crisis. It must be recognised that “crises are not self-evident. Humanitarian crises attain their specific realities through the language and practices in which actors negotiate the meaning of crisis” (Hilhorst, 2018; 2). When one picks up a humanitarian report and comes across the word ‘resilience’, the first thing that comes to their mind is that crisis is a thing of the past. UNHCR says on its official website “After 10 years of crisis, life is harder than ever for displaced Syrians. Millions of Syrians have been forced to flee their homes since 2011” (UNHCR, 2021). The strategic overview 2021-2022

of the Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan by UNHCR and UNDP states “the Syria crisis will soon mark its tenth anniversary” (UNHCR, UNDP, 2021). Resilience thinking within humanitarianism is understood as a shift from viewing crisis as an “exceptional” situation towards accepting it “as the new normal” (Hilhorst, 2018; 1). Predominant humanitarian language treats crisis as an event -or a series of events- that occurred in the past which produced devastating aftermath that need to be overcome from here on. Documentation within UNHCR’s regional resilience strategy is concretely identified as a tool to achieve resilience in response to crisis for refugees in the region including Jordan⁷.

“The problem with the absence of documentation is that it stays with you your whole life. A baby boy with no birth certificate will turn 18 tomorrow and marry outside the court and have undocumented children. Its generational” (*Mohammed, 2021)

“Refugees definitely understand the importance of documentation. In the beginning of the crisis, they did not know. Now a lot of people know the importance of documentation and they seek it.” (Abdel Aziz, 2021)

“When it comes to the UNHCR documentation, I think refugees really care about it. The people I have met are very aware of UNHCR.” (Shannak, 2021)

“I think if getting children vaccinated does not require a birth certificate people may not get it for their newborns. But since getting vaccinated requires the child to have a birth certificate they do it” (*Amal, 2021)

The power to negotiate a dominant understanding of crisis entails the ability to bring forth an agenda of response. The existence of ‘the loudest’ apolitical humanitarian definition of crisis underplays the institutionalisation of resilience which brings with it an institutionalisation of crisis. Humanitarian resilience “derives its meaningful character from its relation to governance strategies” that allow it to institutionally recognise and define crisis, and thus, response to crisis (Jonathan, 2018; 3). By defining crisis, defining resilience as a response to crisis, and establishing documentation as a tool to achieve resilience, this humanitarian arena is shaped predominantly by actors moving from aid service delivery for crisis, towards imbedding key institutions that reproduce themselves for refugees to achieve resilience, most significantly UNHCR. What the participants showcase above is that refugees are indeed very aware of the importance of documentation. This awareness makes a humanitarian organisation the key driver of resilience through documentation. Thus, this reproduction is imbedded

⁷ See Chapter 1

through documentation, ensuring refugees seek to attain proof of existence as to be eligible for basic services.

Refugee Perceptions on Crisis\Crises:

When I started my fieldwork, I realised that I arrived with the assumption that refugees fled crisis and are now in Jordan trying to rebuild their lives from the ashes of a disaster left behind. I stand to be corrected by the findings of this research paper's fieldwork. It showcases the various ways in which refugees experience and understand crisis or crises, and thus understand their own resilience as opposed what is institutionally recognised.

“The fact that refugees have gone through very traumatising events in their home countries and have found ways to keep on living, that is resilience. A lot of them are unable to work, not getting any aid, any medical care, are living in fear, but they still find ways to cope, that is resilience. I am not saying this in a positive way, resilience is very disturbing. No human being should go through that. I believe that acts of resilience that refugees need to go through makes resilience a very fragile state, I feel like any minute they could explode. People who went through all that can be romanticised, but they are forced to survive, they have to find ways to do it. The pressure is unbelievable and unbearable. Because they do not know what is going to happen and are stuck in a country where they can't work, and they might be deported. UNHCR says that they cannot be deported, but many refugees are deported, and nobody cares. They do not feel safe whatsoever. They are under so much stress and face discrimination especially Sudanese refugee. When I hear their stories, I see that the pain is unbearable. I see it, I feel it” (Shannak, 2021).

As Shannak so passionately explains, refugees in Jordan are not recovering from a past crisis, rather living a whole new set of crises in the country. The significance of understanding humanitarianism as an arena in Jordan is in its focus on how “actors” perceive the situation they are going through which informs how they “respond” to their surrounding challenges (Hilhorst, Jansen, 2013; 189). This research paper recognises that entities such as UNHCR “command powerful positions on who are largely able to define and give meaning to the crisis event” (Hilhosrt, 2018; 3). But when we understand humanitarianism as an arena of actors, we challenge dominant international actors' assumption that crisis occurred in the past whereas resilience thinking begins where crisis is ‘the new normal’. What refugees live today is a reality of crises in Jordan whereas everyday they are threatened by poverty, lack of health and other services, and deportation. Their crises are far from being called a harsh past.

“What is safety? Sleeping a whole night without being bombed or shot at?” (Shannak, 2021)

“I think resilience is where refugees can live a dignified life without being threatened to be deported to a country where it will jeopardise their safety, where they can work and earn, where they

can access education, basically where they access all their rights without discrimination without being afraid to be deported any minute. That is where they have moved on” (Shannak, 2021).

The humanitarian arena in Jordan is an arena of crises whereas refugees continue to struggle to move from (and within) one crisis to another. To construct an understanding on how refugees perceive their own resilience, their perception of crisis must be established. This is especially relevant when acknowledging that entities such as UNHCR have the political power to “selectively choose risks for attention”, as “some risks are easily elevated to the status of crisis” while others simply do not (Hilhorst, 2013; 3). The crisis of war refugees faced in their home countries might have been left behind, but the crises they face in Jordan in order to survive that past indeed constitute a violent present. This violent present can be described as the process of negotiating moving from (and within) one crisis to another; and is completely disregarded when speaking about ‘resilience’. While the next chapter (Chapter 6) will delve more into how refugees negotiate moving from (and within) crises through documentation, what is examined below is how refugees experience crises in Jordan and how this violent present dismantles the definition of crisis currently attached to resilience.

What if my ‘past’ crisis is not recognised?

“Being registered with UNHCR can be the only piece of paper that has your name on it and shows that you exist or your relation to your family”. (Fisher, 2021)

Not all ‘past’ crises faced by refugees are institutionally recognised. One’s ability to get documentation needs institutional recognition of the crisis one arrived from, which ties their resilience to their past. The government of Jordan did not ratify the 1951 refugee convention, thus Jordan does not have international obligations towards refugees⁸. Beyond the ambiguous relationship between the state of Jordan and UNHCR, this causes refugees to strategize to get the services they need based on how the crisis they have escaped is institutionally recognised. The many political, and governance related reasons why certain refugees can be recognised by UNHCR and by the government as such⁹, and why others cannot, are beyond the scope of this research paper. The matter remains that without institutional recognition of the crisis refugees fled, there is no assurance refugees will be eligible for the documentation that allows them to access services. This can be observed in the difference between certain Syrian refugees as well as non-Syrian refugees like Sudanese refugees for example.

⁸ See Chapter 1

⁹ See Chapter 1

“This is only for Syrians. All Syrians must have an MoI¹⁰ card if they are outside the camp. Also, this is for Syrian refugees who came to Jordan before January 1st 2018. After this date any Syrian refugee arriving in Jordan has to get a UNHCR refugee document and must have a valid Syrian passport. But those who came after 2018 and cannot have an MoI card will be denied many things like education because most schools do not accept a Syrian passport, even if they may make an exception for primary schooling. Labour is the same story, the condition of having a valid work permit is having an MoI card” (*Mohammed, 2021)

“*Amir’s aunt told him that he can obtain a medical visa and travel to Jordan from Sudan and within 6 months he would be able to be resettled to another country where he can build a safe future. Where he can work, get married, and have a big income” (Shannak, 2021)

The experiences of refugees such as Syrians who arrived after January 2018, or non-Syrian refugees, showcases that they are not fully able to pick up their lives beyond crisis when they cannot be eligible for documentation to begin with. Beyond delving into the specificities and differences various refugees face in treatment in Jordan, what stands out here is that humanitarian resilience aims for refugees to live passed crisis as though their crisis ended once they have reached the country. While certain Syrian refugees who arrived before 2018 may have a valid ‘past crisis’ to the government and UNHCR, *Amir on the other hand, a refugee who arrived from Sudan through a medical visa then claimed asylum at UNHCR may or may not be recognised as a refugee. Unlike Syrian refugees, his past crisis is thus not recognised in the same way. Refugees are still struggling to have their past crises institutionally recognised to exist without being threatened with their livelihoods or deportation with little to no access to services. If they can obtain documentation, they can negotiate better for receiving the services they need, if they cannot obtain it, they will have to negotiate for the services they need beyond the margins of a legal status.

What if my ‘past’ crisis is recognised?

“We used to be eligible for aid but not anymore. I do not know why, they said there are families more in need of the aid than yours. There was a lady who did a home visit and asked us a lot of questions about what we eat, I told her listen I do not count how many bites my children take. She started filling something out on her devise I was not able to see what she was filling out. They do home visits almost every year, those are the very upsetting and rude questions. They ask how much potato you eat in a week or in a month, tomato, bread, chicken. How would I quantify what my children eat? I do not count how many mouthfuls they take. For one hour and a half they ask these questions can you believe it! Last time I told her [the UNHCR case worker] I do not know, when I buy food, I try to find

¹⁰ Ministry of Interior Identification card for Syrian refugees. See Chapter 1

discounts then I buy food. She then insisted I tell her would I spend 1 or 2 JD¹¹s [less than 3 Euros] on potato. Is she serious?.. *sigh...what can I say...Al Hamdulillah¹²” (*Amal, 2021)

Even when recognition of a past crisis refugees fled exists, while there is some degree of access through being documented, there is no assurance that services will continue to be delivered if refugees need them. *Amal is a Syrian refugee whose been living in Jordan with her five children since 2015, and while she has all relevant documentation, she does not always have access to services. She patiently tried to put up with questions she felt were intrusive and degrading in the hope that she does not need to worry about feeding her children. Beyond defining crisis, humanitarian actors such as UNHCR have the power to prioritise whose crisis must be responded to.

“Sometimes a police officer may stop you in the street, if you do not have your documents, you can be in trouble. It is better to stay on the safe side” (*Amal, 2021)

“...Now his [her husband’s] documents were taken by the authorities. He was detained *lowered her voice and whispered* he was taken by the general intelligence. Well... because he has siblings in the Syrian army, and he was not allowed to speak with them. His brother called, and he spoke to him. Then he [her husband] was taken to the **** camp. He was given a camp document.” (*Amal, 2021)

Documentation can serve to protect one from falling further and deeper into challenges, or softens the blow of certain challenges, but it does not ensure the basic means to build a life ‘beyond crisis’. If UNHCR or the government systems does not acknowledge a person, they may never have institutional access to any services. But even if a refugee is able to claim institutional recognition of their previous crisis, that ‘refugee status’ it treated as a privilege and not as a right. *Amal’s husband lost his urban refugee status, he was branded a different type of refugee and sent to a camp for crossing the lines of what is to be the privilege of a recognisable past crisis and what is beyond the protection interest of the state and UNHCR. That is also yet another layer of how refugees experience the crisis of living in Jordan and how they must squeeze to fit a specific kind of criteria of crisis otherwise their journeys will be unrecognised.

¹¹ The currency in Jordan is Jordanian Dinar (JD). 1 JD is approximately 1,22 Euros.

¹² Al Hamdulillah is an Arabic phrase meaning “thank God” or “Praise be to God”. Muslims have a culture of thanking God for good and bad occasions alike believing that there is a reason for challenges we face in life.

The tight rope crisis

If a refugee does not have the right documentation, they are under no protection from any entity, be that governmental or non-governmental. This abandonment, living beyond the margins of an institutionally recognised ‘crisis’, is a crisis no entity will claim. Aside from response or “what can be done”, what makes recognition of a crisis political is the power to focus attention; ‘which problem’ is “whose” problem (Hilhorst, 2013; 5-6). Refugees must walk a tight rope to ensure their mere existence in the country is not threatened. Refugees spiral struggling to negotiate through various crises such as the lack of ability to obtain a legal job, inability to access health, inability to access school, living in danger of deportation among many more. With one crisis leading to the next, many refugees find their daily crises institutionally unrecognised.

“One day during work I saw the police coming, and while I was running away, I jumped from a high wall and suffered from a ripped muscle in my leg” *Amir (Shannak, 2021).

“the problem with trying to adapt is that it forces people to accept injustice rather than being able to claim a right. Adaptation cannot be called resilience” (Abdel Aziz, 2021)

“Many refugees venture into working illegally. With one mind on trying to maintain work, and another mind on the street for fear of being caught by the government officials” (Shannak, 2021)

The experiences of refugees bring us to a new way of understanding crisis and thus resilience. Refugees are not attempting to live beyond a crisis of the past rather to survive through the crisis that is Jordan by negotiating their way between various crises they face in country. Living in uncertainty everyday can drive refugees towards exploitation and illegal markets whereas their legal status, if they had one, would most defiantly be jeopardised. *Amir was able to escape a police raid at work, but now he has no income, no access to health, and an aching body. With no documentation, if *Amir is caught by the authorities, he may be deported back to Sudan.

Documentation as a crisis

Documentation in and of itself forms a significant barrier to refugees whereas they negotiate whether or not to seek it, how to seek, and what to do when it is not enough. While documentation is deeply linked to institutional recognition of a previous crisis, refugees’ current crises are not recognised as such, preventing them from being able to access the resources needed to build a life of dignity and leaving crisis in the past.

“Aside from UNHCR’s documents we needed to obtain security identification from the Ministry of Interior. We were told we needed them when we tried to register our children at school. Anything you do here you need to have your MoI card. They require you to have proof of an address, if you do not have a rental contract then you have to bring a copy of the ID card of the owner of the building to the UNHCR and they give you a document that can replace a proof of address. Then after that they ask you for a certificate called clearance from diseases. We went to the Ministry of Health for that. Then we went to the police station and gave them all of this to be able to get the MoI card. It takes months.” (*Amal, 2021)

Documentation is a costly and laborious processes to obtain the needed clearances, documents such as a rent agreement, a valid marriage certificate, a family book, among many other required documents¹³. As it is outlined in the context of this research paper, documentation is an obligatory passage point which is the only way in which refugees can exist legally in the country, have any access to services, or eligibility for resettlement. Based on *Amal’s insight, many refugees may never be able to get an MoI card, what would they do if they ran away from a refugee camp and are illegally in an urban setting? Or if they do not have a valid address or proof of rent? Furthermore, seeking documentation can be a catch-22 situation for refugees whereas for example they cannot obtain the right documentation and thus cannot work legally, and if they work illegally, they will never be able to obtain legal documentation.

Refugees understand the crises they came from, and the crises they face in Jordan in a very different manner than what is presented on humanitarian institutional tables. The crises they face a far from left behind, and are not necessarily recognised, and thus, are not and will not be responded to. Documentation is tied significantly to an institutionally recognised ‘past’ crisis, with little to no assurance that it would support refugees in rebuilding their lives. When contextualising understanding the humanitarian arena to Jordan through the experiences of refugees with documentation, it is experienced as an arena of crises. Those who obtain documentation, and those who do not, attempt to negotiate moving from (and within) one crisis to the next.

Refugee Perceptions on Resilience:

“I am not only a caseworker, I am also a third-generation refugee, I come from a displacement background as a

¹³ See context Chapter 1

Palestinian, and resilience is a huge part of my identity. I think resilience is resistance” (*Nidal, 2021)

Understanding resilience through the lens of documentation is exploring the “governing” of resilience, or “what resilience is doing” (Joseph, 2013; 40). While resilience is now at the centre of crisis response for refugees in Jordan, that implies two major issues. How crisis is defined, and how thus resilience is outlined and implemented. The dominant story of resilience that has been told within the humanitarian arena in Jordan is that refugees must obtain documentation to overcome the institutionally recognised crisis they fled. It thus emphasises an “individual responsibility” on refugees to manage their circumstances and rebuild their lives from the ruins of what they escaped (Joseph, 2013; 38). This puts the responsibility of obtaining documentation on the refugee themselves, and not on UNHCR nor the government of Jordan. It also removes those institutions from the responsibility of dealing with the crises occurring in the lives of refugees due to the absence of documentation.

Refugees have a different story to tell, they persist to survive through crises they face in Jordan that are yet to be institutionally recognise, and dream of a better future far away from the country.

“When UNHCR and other international organisations talk about resilience, they are talking about ways refugees can survive where they are ideally without international help, and without showing up on the borders of Europe. Making sure people are just not desperate enough to become migrants outside of their region. Soon you will see millions of dollars going to Pakistan. If governments in Europe can keep Afghans in Pakistan, then they won’t walk to Hungary” (Fisher, 2021)

“When we came to Jordan, we came on the hope that we will be resettled immediately. Of course, I want us to leave. At least my children would have a future. They will have an education. Now my children go to school, but they do not learn anything. In the West children have rights. Even if they are not good at school, they may have an opportunity to harness a talent. There are more opportunities in the West” (*Amal, 2021)

“Actually, I am really happy after all this time I am only waiting for a phone call now. My wife and I interviewed to be resettled in *****. I hope we leave soon” (*Mohammed, 2021)

The narratives of refugees inform that humanitarian resilience manifests as an attempt at making sure Jordan is refugees’ final destination for those dreams. Refugees view Jordan as a ‘waiting place’ of crises that they tiptoe through and hope to be resettled in another country. It is indeed not a deep a secret that “resettlement states concurrently introduced more restrictive asylum policies and enacted containment approaches that aimed to keep refugees in their regions of origin” (Kelberer, 2017; 155). Refugees fleeing wars and disasters want the chance to work, live with dignity, send their children to school, and build a future.

It is not ‘apolitical’ that resilience strategies are implemented through documentation for refugees whose past crisis is institutionally recognised.

“For resettlement, our MoI cards are not useful. So many people were able to be resettled without MoI cards. But if you are living in Jordan, you cannot do anything without an MoI card. It is very necessary for living in Jordan.” (*Amal, 2021)

Those narratives confirm that documentation is a tool that prevents people from falling into trouble with Jordanian authorities rather than somehow enhance refugees’ ability to rebuild their lives after crisis. Refugees struggle to acquire the right documentation needed to work legally, access health or send their children to school as they may or may not obtain them. Even when they do indeed obtain documentation, they may or may not receive the needed support through it.

“Resilience as a concept can be used in a pernicious way. What my clients persistently say is they want to live somewhere where they can go to school, work, being safe and the opportunity to improve themselves and that will mostly never be the case in Jordan” (Fisher, 2021)

“The plane landed in Amman, and at the immigration officer asked me, where are you going? I told him I do not know, I am going to Amman. I have a relative who has a residency here whom I am meeting at the centre of Amman. My relative will take me to the hospital. I am not sure how and why I said that. The officer said, welcome to Jordan. That moment I felt relieved. That’s it... all my dreams came true” *Amir (Shannak, 2021)

“Amir’s first destination was the UNHCR. He went to get registered” (Shannak, 2021)

“Even though the process is exhausting and draining, refugees keep going back to UNHCR to apply for documents, they need it for resettlement.” (Shannak, 2021)

To refugees, documentation can only be a tool for resilience if it leads to resettlement. The crises refugees face in Jordan force them to aspire to live in a place where their mere existence is enough to be recognised human beings. This does not speak of an idealisation of the West, it rather uncovers the lack of institutional protections refugees face in Jordan that threaten them on a daily basis.

UNHCR says in their frequently asked webpage “Resettlement is not a right, and there is no obligation on states to accept refugees or stateless people for resettlement” (UNHCR, n.d). UNHCR declares that resettlement must be considered a “complement to – and not a substitute for – the provision of protection where needed to persons who apply for asylum” (UNHCR, n.d). While Jordan did not ratify the 1951 refugee convention, the state of Jordan

remains under no international obligation to respond to the increasing needs of refugees. At the same time, donor countries continue to produce 'resilience' strategies to ensure refugees do not knock on its doors.

The next chapter explores how refugees strategize to achieve their own resilience from (and within) crises, and how powerful humanitarian actors, on the other hand, negotiate resilience to manage refugees through documentation.

Chapter 5

Negotiating Resilience

“People living in transit can neither run away, nor stay... You cannot go back to your home country, and cannot wait any longer” (Shannak, 2021)

In the last chapter, it was discussed that humanitarian resilience is planned and implemented based on an institutionally recognised ‘past’ crisis. Only through a recognised past crisis can refugees have documentation needed to access services. Refugees struggle to obtain documentation, or struggle to dodge authorities if they do not. Their understanding of resilience unveils the inability of resilience humanitarianism to respond to refugees’ conception of resilience that is based on their own unrecognised crises. Refugees aim for safety and opportunities which is reflected in their aspirations for ‘resettlement’ making Jordan a ‘waiting place’ of crises as they struggle to survive the long wait.

This chapter intends on exploring how refugees, as humanitarian actors, strategize to achieve their own resilience from (and within) crises in Jordan. It will do this to understand how refugees comply with, and/or challenge resilience humanitarianism. The chapter also explores how powerful humanitarian actors such as international organisations, namely UNHCR, and the Jordanian government, negotiate resilience interventions to manage refugees. The aim of this chapter is to dig around the ‘frictions’ that shape this humanitarian arena as a result of these negotiation processes. The chapter serves to establish that refugees negotiate the resilience humanitarian arena for their ‘own resilience’. The chapter seeks to showcase how this negotiation process affects the arena, and how the arena in turn affects refugees’ negotiation processes. This will be done through understanding documentation as a ‘negotiation tool’ for both refugees, and powerful humanitarian institutions.

5.1. Between Resilience Governing and Everyday Resistance

Where?

The purpose of this section is to understand ‘where’ refugees are negotiating their resilience. Documentation as a ‘negotiation tool’ allows us to explore the humanitarian arena, beyond geography, rather as a dimension of governing. Here, the conversation does not measure kilometres rather addresses power.

“UNHCR accommodates many requests from the Jordanian government not to give some refugees refugee status... like to certain nationalities such as certain Sudanese or Yemeni populations if their visa is expired. Logically, if refugees had a valid visa, why would they need to seek asylum or resettlement?!” (Abdel Aziz, 2021)

Beyond the need for documentation so refugees may ‘exist’ in the country, Abdel Aziz in her quote reveals that documentation represents the means for powerful institutions to push their own political agendas. Documentation can be understood as a technology of resilience governing within the arena of crises in Jordan (Rose, et.al, 2006; Hilhorst, Jansen, 2013). When the lack of documentation can cause deportation, resilience humanitarianism puts the responsibility of documentation, and thus resilience, on the refugees themselves making it an “individual responsibility” (Joseph, 2013; 38). At the same time, dominant humanitarian actors institutionally recognise certain ‘past’ crises, determining eligibility for documentation.

“We were taken to the Za’atri refugee camp. We were there for one week. That place is unbearable. There was no floor, it was a caravan built over the existing sandy earth, there were rats, if you need water you need to walk a good two kilometres to get it. Humans cannot live like this. It is exhausting. There was no electricity it works on solar power. The power runs out at 10 pm and then you won’t have electricity until the next day” (*Amal, 2021)

“We took permission to leave the camp for a week from the public security directorate office (police) at the camp. It’s called a vacation; you go to the police and ask for a vacation and they give you the ability to be outside the camp for a week. When we left the camp, we went to a Syrian family that we knew in Amman. We waited there until there was an amnesty period to fix our legal status. It took us approximately a month and a half. When we left the camp, we had no intention of returning.” (*Amal, 2021)

*Amal, like many other refugees, sought to move with her family to Amman to seek better opportunities for her children, and increase prospects for better income and services. Leaving conflict in Syria and landing in the Za’atri camp in northern Jordan was a new set of crises *Amal and her family were facing. By ‘negotiating’ a move to Amman, *Amal and her family are ‘responding’ to the Za’atri camp crisis. Through documentation, they navigate their way out of the camp crisis to move to another crisis that is Amman¹⁴. Refugees who reside in the camp have completely different documents than those residing outside the camp. The amnesty period gave *Amal and her family the opportunity to replace the camp documents with ones that allow them to reside in Amman. This strategic course of action

¹⁴ See Chapter 5

was a deliberate choice that cannot be undermined. It demonstrates the ability of refugees to challenge and shape a system that often perceives them as mere ‘aid’ receivers.

We here visualise how refugees respond to their own crises by negotiating the very humanitarian resilience governing systems. In fact, we can observe powerful “social response to crisis” on a more concrete level (Hilhorst, 2013; 5) as the “transition” from crisis “to crisis and back entails new ways of ordering and disordering of spaces, power, ritual, regulations, and interactions” (Hilhorst, 2013; 5).

“There was a woman in Al Azraq camp who left the camp illegally. Her sister, who was living in Jordan at the time, went back to Syria and gave her a personal MoI¹⁵ card. She was pregnant and had to give birth and her case was urgent so when her child was born it was registered to her sister’s name. When the authorities found out she was accused of perjury. She was lucky, there was an amnesty period through which I was able to help her correct her paperwork” (*Mohammed, 2021)

“...They burden us with document after document for no reason. Even to get the medical clearance from diseases, my husband bribed the health Ministry employee at the counter 5 JDs [6,10 Euros] per certificate. I didn’t even go with my husband he went alone. I never actually did the test.” (*Amal, 2021)

Resilience governing that aims to manage “people who move around” see them as a problem that needs to be identified and solved (Scott, 1998; 1-3). The “humanitarianism space” in Jordan is “constructed” to make resilience its “legitimisation process” for resilience governing (Hilhorst, Jansen, 2013; 188). Resilience governing thus does not seek to support refugees in accessing services they need, it rather seeks to have access to refugee populations to manage. The insight of *Amal allows us to learn that the value of documentation to refugees is about what documentation ‘does’ rather than what it ‘represents’. This challenges the legitimacy of resilience governing and bureaucracy.

When various actors respond to crisis, and more specifically refugees, they make decisions based on their “interpretation of the needs of the situation” making their reactions hard to predict by any system (Hilhorst, Jansen, 2013; 189). While resilience governing views people as a problem that needs to be solved, people view it similarly, as a problem that needs to be dodged. What *Mohammad informs here is that people will respond to their own crises if systems refuse to recognise them, using the system’s tools, here being documentation. The urgency of services needed is telling of the crises they face in urbanised settings, whereas refugees will risk criminalisation, which is highly likely to lead to deportation, to ensure they

¹⁵ See Context Chapter 1

have access to services now. Refugees in Jordan ping-pong between entities for recognition in order to access services. If that does not work, they will take crisis response into their own hands. What is demonstrated here is moving from the crisis of Syria, to the crisis of Al Azraq camp, to the crisis of illegal urban settling and attempting to access services for a newborn. Refugees are negotiating their way from one crisis to the next. When the responsibility of resilience is put on individuals to seek, they will, to put it crudely, figure out a way to do it.

“When things are difficult people are forced to adapt. When they adapt, problems occur. A refugee who runs away from the refugee camp cannot find legal work with dignity. They will be constantly in fear of being caught by the police. No matter what horrific work environment they are facing, they will never be able to complain” (Abdel Aziz, 2021)

The crisis of war refugees faced in their home countries might have been left behind, but the crises they face in Jordan in order to survive that past indeed constitute a violent present. However, this violent present does not mean that they become passive actors in this arena of crises. On the contrary, this violent present can be described as the process of negotiating their resilience from (and within) one crisis to another. This negotiation in Jordan has taken many forms that can be understood within “everyday politics”, whereas refugees strategize and take action to seek their resilience through documentation (Scott, 1989; 33; Kerkvliet, 2009; 232; Hilhorst, 2013; 1; Hilhorst, 2018; 3). These strategies and actions can be daily decisions done in the aim of obtaining documentation for services, bypassing documentation systems and avoiding authorities, and/or strategizing to gain resettlement.

Whom?

I believe that there are some semi-organised group actions that cannot be overlooked. Such actions take us from ‘where’ refugees are negotiating their resilience, towards understanding ‘whom’ they are negotiating that resilience with.

Resilience governing is less about supporting refugees thrive beyond crisis, and more about managing the numbers and types of refugees allowed in the country, lacking in real accountability mechanisms. Since documentation can be understood as a technology of resilience governing, examining refugees’ actions through “everyday politics” (Hilhorst, 2013; 1) brings to the surface a resistance to resilience governing and an ‘agency’ of aid. Lack of recognition of a past crisis is a huge risk of deportation. Such a risk is not just another challenge, it is indeed a life defining issue that encourage refugees to seek proper documentation by ‘any means necessary’.

“...I was in the bus and there were police officers and army officers. I checked google on my phone and the news said the Jordanian government is deporting hundreds of Sudanese refugees... I knew then that they were sending us back to Sudan” *Amir (Shannak, 2021)

*Amir is talking about witnessing the event of 2015 when around 800 Sudanese refugees protested in Amman in front of the UNHCR building for nearly a month before they were detained by the police, put on buses, and deported back to Sudan. Sudanese refugees were in an open protest demanding eligibility for refugee status and access to services from UNHCR. A New York Times report says that the Jordanian Minister of Information confirmed that Sudanese refugees came to Jordan on “medical visas” and are now asking for “refugee status” which they are ineligible for (Sweis, 2015; n.d). Human Rights Watch reported that the Jordanian government told the press that “asylum conditions do not apply to Sudanese” people (Human Rights Watch, 2015; n.d).

“When we were in the bus, the police threw gas at us, we were suffocating. There were children and young people on the bus. They took us all to the hospital. I ran away from the hospital back to Amman”. *Amir (Shannak, 2021)

*Amir described that the bus he was on was taken to a hospital by the Jordanian authorities. He then took the opportunity to escape the incident and return back into the city. While his ‘past’ crisis in Sudan and present crises in Jordan are yet to be recognised enough to prevent his deportation, he returns back to the ‘waiting place’ in the hope that he’ll be able to live a life of dignity without fear one day. Most recently in March 2021, the Jordanian government deported Yemeni refugees as well. Human Rights Watch reported that those refugees were deported due to attempting to “apply for work permits and regularise their immigration status in the country” (Human Rights Watch, 2021; n.d).

The acts mentioned above challenge resilience governing by putting the resilience responsibility back onto institutions that have yet to recognise the crises various refugees face in Jordan. In the incidents above, all refugees’ attempts to get documentation that gives them minimum safety were met with punishment and abandonment. What *Amir and Abdel Aziz allow us to visualise is that resilience is a governing system that is challenged by refugees. Refugees do not stay actionless and attempt to hold institutions responsible for following the rules these same institutions set. This agency is how refugees use documentation as a negotiation tool while it represents a system of governance.

Although these acts may seem as a more organised form of resistance as opposed to “everyday forms of resistance” (Scott, 1989; 33), in response to lack of documentation and

services, these incidents are worth pondering. First, such incidents showcase how “practices of aid come about by a multiplicity of actors”, including refugees’ acts of resistance against powerful “aid paradigms” (Hilhorst, 2018; 3). Everyday practices of aid on a more individual level are indeed very powerful, but such semi-organised resistance are deeply relevant as to understand ‘where’ refugees negotiate resilience, and ‘whom’ they negotiate.

Refugees are often put in a position the recipients of aid where their agency is disregarded. It must be attributed to such acts of resistance the significant change in the language of humanitarian resilience since 2015 as opposed to the 2021 3RP. The UNHCR, UNDP Regional Strategic Overview 2021-2022 of the 3RP says that its approach is to “promote resilience for all, guided by the principle that no one is left behind” (UNHCR, UNDP, 2021; 9). Now, when UNHCR says that no one should be left behind, it is indeed cornered into accountability. Such a principle provides an opportunity for further analysis on the relations, and more specifically, ‘frictions’, between the state of Jordan, UNHCR, and refugees, whereas there are more questions to be asked. These questions can include accountability to whom, by whom, and how does this change resilience governing in Jordan.

5.2. Resilience Governing ‘Strikes Back’

This section aims at following the discussion in the previous section to push the ‘where’ and ‘whom’ questions a bit further towards how resilience humanitarianism governs through documentation.

“The hardest thing about working with resettlement is that there are fewer opportunities for resettlement than the number of people who need it” (Fisher, 2021)

Resilience is imbedded through documentation as a set of strategies to govern and manage the affairs of refugees while maintaining an ‘apolitical’ positionality despite a political agenda (Scott, 1998; Duffield, Hewitt, 2009; Chandler, 2015; Jonathan, 2018). This agenda may appear ‘apolitical’ because its presented by international organisations that claim neutrality ‘impartiality, neutrality and independence’. When resilience within humanitarianism is linked to documentation, it is the key enabler of opportunities which is indeed a deeply political realm¹⁶. While the official language of resilience speaks of regional self-reliance and living beyond crisis, refugees struggle to have their past crises recognised to be eligible for

¹⁶ See Context Chapter 1

documentation, as well as, struggle to adjust their documentation to receive services needed. If refugees cannot have documentation, or if it is not enough, they attempt to survive the decisions they make to bypass the system in this ‘waiting place’ hoping for resettlement.

Negotiating resilience every day is a violent reality whereas refugees’ response to their own crises are powerful enough to push resilience governing humanitarianism to respond back. Resilience is put forth as the strategic humanitarian agenda to enable refugees to rebuild their lives after crisis within their regions of origin away from the borders of the West¹⁷. This apolitical positionally and political agenda is where I believe the securitisation of resilience governing is situated. Documentation is also a tool for securitisation.

The ‘crises’ “arena” in Jordan can be understood as a ‘waiting place’ of geographical “containment” (Hilhorst, Jansen, 2013; 189; Duffield, 2008; 145). While the official purpose of resilience is imbedded in “self-reliance” whereas its communities responsibility to withstand and thrive beyond crisis, resilience governance is a “technology of security” (Duffield, 2008; 146).

“The UNHCR’s 2006 published resettlement handbook in chapter 6 lists seven criteria or reasons why people would be considered for resettlement. There are detailed definitions and criteria. One of the problems is that millions of people would meet these criteria while only a few thousands would be resettled. While this does not explain how they [UNHCR] choose [refugees for resettlement], I believe that a lot of the emphasis on which populations chosen is by the preferences of the resettlement governments.” (Fisher, 2021)

The aspirations of refugees showcase that they understand their own resilience as resettlement¹⁸, and Jordan as a ‘waiting place’ they need to survive until they are able to achieve it. While humanitarian crises are linked to security concerns such as terrorism, resettlement is viewed as a threat to western countries. While this section does not seek to delve into human security and terrorism, I make this turn to point out that humanitarian response moves “human security” from a domestic local level to the level of international agenda making it a “relation of international governance” (Duffield, 2006; 12-13). Since resettlement is an issue of western security that needs managing, the securitisation of resilience manifests through documentation (Duffield, Hewitt; 2009).

Resilience governing strategies seek to keep refugees away from Western borders and in their regions of origin¹⁹. While resettlement can be a deeply political issue for countries of

¹⁷ See Chapter 5

¹⁸ See Chapter 5

¹⁹ See Chapter 5

resettlement, resilience governing can be understood within “containment” whereas documentation is a “fence” that separates “populations supported by regimes of social protection” and “those expected to be self-reliant” (Duffield, 2008; 146-151). There are frictions to be observed between refugees struggling to get their ‘past’ crises institutionally recognised²⁰, while resilience governing contains refugees ensuring that access to documentation that supports the provisioning of services does not lead to mass resettlement.

“...Basically, it’s an interrogation. A two-by-two meters room with cameras. They ask you a lot of questions like did you take part in the revolution or were you in the army. They ask about your family members. They ask about your marital status. Then, they file your information through scanning your iris. Every year I go to update my information. They retrieve my file through scanning the iris” (*Mohammed, 2021)

“In the beginning the UNHCR was helping everyone. Now it is not like that anymore. Every year I go to the UNHCR to update my information. I had updated my passport three times already at UNHCR. Before things were with less restrictions now you have to have official Syrian documents even if they are outdated, and still UNHCR will not give you refugee status immediately” (*Mohammed, 2021)

“I heard that now certain cases, like if you used to work for the Syrian army and lied and did not mention that in the UNHCR refugee determination interview, your status will be determined through a committee of 5 parties, the police, the intelligence, refugee affairs department, ministry of interior, and UNHCR. This security committee decides whether you can be a refugee or if you must be sent to Al Azraq camp” (*Mohammed, 2021)

The emergence of resilience response that imbeds documentation moves humanitarianism from its original mandate of apolitical impartiality and neutrality towards a political “statecraft” role through understanding documentation within “legibility” (Scott, 1998; 2). The “legibility of a society” allows the “state” to reproduce itself through various means of organising targeted populations for governance, in this case, humanitarianism through documentation (Scott, 1998; 5). The UNHCR processes of documentation as described by *Mohammed is deeply securitised through highly surveilled databases. This securitised statecraft process is indeed internationally “desecuritized and depoliticised” when associated with a ‘neutral’ and ‘apolitical’ humanitarian organisation (Chandler, 2015; 2). Resilience’s purpose has thus almost “explicitly” been framed as a means “to decrease demand for resettlement” whereas documentation as the sole obligatory passage point to services becomes the wall that only very few refugees can penetrate for resettlement (Kelberer, 2017; 161).

²⁰ See Chapter 5

“I submitted more than one appeal, but nothing happened. In any case I cannot go to UNHCR these days no one can get inside. You think if I go now because I am in need something they would let me in? no one can go in” (*Amal, 2021)

*Amal has been trying to get in touch with UNHCR for purposes of her family’s status. The description she gives does not merely address inaccessibility; it speaks about a humanitarian barricade. By navigating crises through documentation, refugees demonstrate individual and social power to influence the humanitarian resilience arena. This influence ‘shapes’ resilience governing securitisation as to manage inconvenient acts of negotiation. Resilience humanitarianism is less interested in local capacities to thrive, rather in system’s capacities to manage and contain. This deeply political resilience agenda exists to keep refugees away from the West undermining how this implies ‘politics of abandonment’.

Chapter 6

Conclusion(s)

“Wombs were our homeland until we became estranged by the act of birth” Ibn Arabi (Alwan, 2016)

I was told that research can be personal, and never truly understood it until I had to write this research paper. Before I left to the Netherlands from Amman, a friend of mine gave me a fiction book called “Small Death” by Mohammed Hasan Alwan as a parting gift. Somehow this quote stuck with me the more interested I became in exploring humanitarianism, development, and crises. Complex systems and knowledge built around one existential question; is there truly a place one can call home?

Documentation remains key for refugees in Jordan, it is an obligatory passage point to access vital services and avoid deportation due to an illegal status. Documentation appears in the 3RP as a core strategic objective that may enable the resilience of refugees ensuring their social protection²¹. Since the resilience of refugees in Jordan has been tied to their documentation within humanitarian interventions, this research paper aimed at understanding better the experiences of refugees around documentation. It sought to concretely answer: how do refugees strategize to become resilient in Jordan?. To focus the scope of the question and answer it, this research paper built on an understanding of humanitarianism as an “arena” that is shaped by actors “negotiating” around the chain of aid (Hilhorst, Jansen; 2013; 189). This was done by exploring how refugees perceive their own resilience, and how they negotiate that resilience in the humanitarian arena in Jordan using documentation as a lens of investigation.

I Stand Corrected by the Fieldwork:

When I started conducting the fieldwork, I did not realise that I had a crucial assumption. I thought I knew what crisis was. The dominant resilience humanitarianism language in Jordan presents ‘resilience’ as a response to crisis considering crisis a thing of the past that refugees need to move on from. In order to build an understanding on how refugee view their own resilience, I had to explore how they understand crisis. The research paper found that the resilience humanitarian arena in Jordan is understood and experienced by refugees as an ‘arena of crises’. To refugees, documentation is a tool that helps them negotiate their way

²¹ See chapter 1

from one crisis to yet another crisis, rather than from crisis to resilience. The difference between those who have documentation, and those who do not, is the type of crises they are able to negotiate their way out of.

Refugees may have left the crisis of war behind when they arrived to Jordan, but they are not yet at a place in their lives where they can attempt to ‘thrive beyond crisis’. Refugees are facing another set of crises geographically, mentally and emotionally. To refugees, Jordan is a ‘waiting place’ and not their final destination. Waiting to live in a country where they are not in constant threat of deportation. Waiting to be able to live a life of dignity regardless of their ‘past’ institutionally recognised crisis by powerful humanitarian actors. Waiting to have access to services, legally work, and legally reside in the country²². Refugees are tired of walking on eggshells, treated as unwelcomed guests in the house of a short-tempered host.

“While the government will continue to resist asserting rights and promote opting for aid, humanitarian organisations are simply reenforcing that” (Abdel Aziz, 2021)

Due to how refugees experience crises in Jordan, they associate their resilience with resettlement. They believe that if they are resettled, they will have access to better services, be able to work and make a good income, and not live in fear of deportation. They want their ‘past’ crisis to be recognised as to be eligible for documentation, and to avoid deportation until they can obtain needed services and strive for resettlement. What these aspirations truly speak of is not an idealisation of the West, rather the lack of reliable institutional protections in the country. To them Jordan is a temporary place and they do not associate their resilience with it. Refugees’ interactions with powerful humanitarian actors showcases that resilience humanitarianism is a system of governance aimed at managing refugees and containing them in Jordan through the securitised fence of documentation²³. Resilience humanitarianism in Jordan burdens refugees with the responsibility of becoming resilient on their own. The Jordanian government and the international community abandon refugees to a ‘whose problem is it’ diplomatic game, leaving people to be pushed and shoved between entities and in a very vulnerable situation. I believe if ‘resilience’ is truly to mean the ability to move beyond crisis, then we need to move beyond resilience governing, that ‘is’ the crisis.

²² See Chapter 5

²³ See Chapter 6

I Digress:

I was asked by a friend ‘what is the alternative’. It is interesting that when we begin to understand problems our first reflex is to find a solution. I recall a zoom webinar during the beginning of the pandemic 2020 in which Arundhati Roy was participating. She said: undoing injustice is like unknitting hundreds of layers of threads of complicatedly woven systems of oppression. There is no one solution to documentation issues for refugees but there are places to start.

If the international community does not want to bear the weight of refugees, it should not be waging wars where refugees come from. Refugees today bear the consequences of ‘whose problem is it’ politics. Also, the government of Jordan has yet to ratify the 1951 refugee convention which may lead to documenting refugees through government institutions rather than through an international organisation such as UNHCR. When state systems protect people, they can contest them and hold them accountable- more or less. At least, there are pathways to do so. When UNHCR denies a refugee recognition, there are no real mechanisms to contest it. Some might argue that a refugee determination interview can be contested, but that does not apply to merged processes²⁴. Refugees should not continue to bear the crisis they came from and the crises they face in Jordan all at once due to the shortcomings of systems meant to protect them.

I Remain Curious to Explore:

The ISS research paper is an opportunity to explore with caution. We must, at the end of the day, choose very narrowly what to focus on. To this end, I remain curious to explore a few intriguing issues that came up during the fieldwork that I could not explore in this research paper:

More can be explored using documentation as a lens of inquiry in resettlement as to understand refugee determination processes better. The processes themselves are very ambiguous starting from securitised filing systems, to the length of the interview, to the interview itself. How long does it take? What type of questions are asked? By whom? For what reasons? To assess what? Why?. Understanding UNHCR processes through a lens of

²⁴ A merged process is one in which a refugee is assessed for refugee determination and resettlement at the same time. The outcome of this process cannot be contested.

securitisation of documentation would be very informative. A procedural analysis such as this one should be investigated with refugees. Not only to inform on the process itself, but how the process impacts their lives, and how they strategize to go through that process.

While refugees continue to be punished while attempting to comply by the very rules set out by systems such as trying to legalise a work permit, the political nature of 'whose problem' can be addressed better. The 'diplomatic' relationship between UNHCR and the state of Jordan are deeply problematic. The fact that refugees in Jordan rely on an international entity to negotiate with the Jordanian government on whether or not their 'past' crisis and current crises should be recognisable is an issue worth investigating further.

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