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Perceptions of Dignity in Humanitarian Aid: A Postcolonial Critique of Syrian Refugee Response

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Perceptions of Dignity in Humanitarian Aid; A Postcolonial Critique of Syrian Refugee Response

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Jonathon Burne   **May 3rd, 2016**

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I. Abstract

This research investigates the perception of dignity and sustainability from Syrian refugees and local aid workers in the Jordanian towns of Karak and Mafraq, through semi-structured interviews conducted in Arabic and facilitated by a local translator. The study explores how these conceptions of dignity and sustainability differ from those that currently guide the international and Jordanian response to the Syrian refugee crisis, in the hopes of investigating a broader relationship between the international human rights industry and modern iterations of Western imperialism. An additional focus is the recommendations provided by refugees and aid workers on how the humanitarian response might be restructured to provide more sustainable and culturally-informed support to refugees. It was found that dignity was repeatedly described as a combination of self-sustainability, pride, and economic independence, and that the majority of participants expressed concerns that the current structuring of humanitarian aid hinders this combination vis a vis a strong dependency on aid (cash assistance) for livelihood. The recommendations for more sustainable aid emphasized employment opportunities for Syrian refugees and an institutionalized approach to psychosocial support programs. In the context of Western interventionism in the Middle East, these conclusions suggest a more historically-informed view of humanitarian aid and the broader political implications thereof.

Key Words: Regional Studies: Middle East, Development Studies, Political Science

II. Introduction

Since its birth, Jordan has been a nation of refugees. From Palestine to Iraq, Sudan and Egypt, and now Syria, the so-called "eye of the storm" has become a focal point of international attention - and international aid. The on-the-ground humanitarian regime of the Middle East is largely based in Jordan because of its strategic location, accessibility to English-speakers, and surplus of college-educated young professionals. Jordan therefore has an extensive history of dealing with prolonged refugee situations, with the Syrian crises being the newest phenomena the country has been forced to respond to. This makes Jordan a particularly illuminating case study for investigations into the relationship between human rights discourse and the applications thereof. Concerns for the long-term sustainability of humanitarian aid are proportionally related to the amount of time that critical need will be expressed, making the Syrian refugee response equally illustrative for explorations of long-term effects of such aid. Syrian refugees have been living in Jordan for over five years now, with an April 2016 number of 642,868 registered with the The Office of the High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR, 2016).[1]

With this School for International Training study abroad program focusing on the humanitarian response to the Syrian refugee crisis, I quickly become exposed to the human rights discourse that guides the humanitarian work of agencies such as the UNHCR. Our meetings with the UNHCR in Jordan and its headquarters in Geneva exposed how this rhetoric

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[1] For regular updates on the number of registered refugees, check the official UNHCR Jordan site: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=107

is internalized by the way the organization conceptualized its work; there was a pointed effort to self-identify as a moral and, therefore, apolitical organization concerned with the protection of refugees. However, this felt very contrary to the nature of refugee protection itself, as I had considered such work to be inherently political in so far as it necessitates diplomatic efforts. My questioning of this rhetoric inevitably lead to a broader investigation into the discourse that guided the UNHCR, and a critical view into how this discourse arose and for what purpose.

Simultaneously, after exposure to the organizations engaged with humanitarian work, I recognized that the buzzwords of dignity, sustainability, and empowerment that I intuitively valued were seemingly free from critique. It was as if their meanings were presupposed to align with that of the UNHCR, which became alarming considering the history of Western intervention in the Middle East; the question of how this supposedly apolitical industry of humanitarian aid related to the legacy of colonialism and imperialism became increasingly pertinent to me, both as a student of postcolonial development but also as someone who perennially expected to work for said industry. Therefore, I decided that the most effective way to dismantle this monopolization of thought was to engage directly with the intended consequences of this legacy - to target the institutionally and historically marginalized population on the receiving end of aid, the refugees, and provide them the platform to define and discuss this keywords of humanitarianism. This would provide me with a much more informed approach to humanitarian aid and the politics that drives it than I could learn in my Western educational institute, and would ideally provide a preliminary study that supports a deeper critical investigation into how Western interests shapes the international human rights regime.

The importance of this research is twofold; the theoretical approach that frames this research is based on a significant critique of Western hegemony as seen in the humanitarian industry and how it perpetuates civil strife in postcolonial regions of the world, and the data

collected includes recommendations from Syrian refugees and those that most closely work with them for making humanitarian aid sustainable according to real, long-term needs. The former has the potential to help identify causes of perpetual civil instability in these regions of world, which is necessary to identify solutions; the latter has the potential to further define what these solutions look like according to the populations that they are meant to support, and therefore dismantle the foundation of colonialism and imperialism - namely, institutionalized marginalization.

By exploring the relationship between the humanitarian aid industry and this foundation, this research provides a meaningful beginning to a much more extensive project of analysis. However, because of the many study limitations associated with data collection and theoretical framing, the scope of the research itself is small. The crux of the research and the source of its importance comes from its depth, and its attempt to resituate the human rights industry in its proper political context - and to investigate how real perceptions of need and terminology differ from the prescribed. The expected outcome is that there will indeed be a discrepancy; that the official definitions and expressions of terms such as dignity and sustainability will differ from the expressed conceptualizations of refugees and local aid workers.

Because my approach is focused on investigating how knowledge is used for political purposes, and my methodology is predicated on the exploration of varying conceptions of definitions, I am hesitant in providing any in the introduction. I provide a discussion of the terms I rely on, such as liberal human rights theory, neo-colonialism, and imperialism, in the literature review within their appropriate theoretical context. Therefore, the literature review has perhaps more space dedicated to it than the average SIT independent study project. However, this is the basis of my approach - to question how we question, and to understand the connection of rhetoric and application.

III. Literature Review

The approach to this literature review was multi-faceted. It begins with a broad background of liberal human rights theory and situates it in its political context; it then analyzes how The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) internalizes this rhetoric in the work that it does; it then analyzes the effect of this rhetoric in the work itself with a case study of Palestinian perceptions of the human rights industry in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPT); and finally, it investigates how human rights discourse might be reframed to better support goals of cultivating sustainability and dignity. This extensive investigation of the relationship between theory and practice informs the interview questions and the general approach to interviewing vulnerable populations such as refugees, in its appropriate political and historical context.

Human Rights as Political Discourse

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), a document crafted in 1948 by representatives of the UN General Assembly, has been historically hailed as the prevailing doctrine for human rights discourse. It claims itself to be "a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations" in so far as it acknowledges that "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world" (UDHR, 1948). These equal and inalienable rights are expressed in the following articles, which all revolve around the third article's claim of "the right to life, liberty and security of person" (Idib.,). According to a 2008

WorldPublicOpinion.org poll of 24 nations, the majority of 24 and the plurality of 2 nations favored the UN actively promoting these principles in member states. 70% of all participants supported more UN involvement (Council on Foreign Relations, 2009). This, along with common knowledge from living in the West, expresses a general confidence of what human rights are and how important they remain.

Michael Ignatieff, in his book *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry,* represents this general confidence in his minimalist understanding of what the goals of human rights should be. He claims,

> we may not be able to create democracies or constitutions. Liberal freedom may be some way off. But we could do more than we do to stop unmerited suffering and gross physical cruelty. That I take to be the elemental priority of all human rights activism: to stop torture, beatings, killings, rape, and assault and to improve, as best we can, the security of ordinary people. My minimalism is not strategic at all. It is the most we can hope for (Ignatieff, 2001).

For many, this understanding of human rights is intuitive; it is based in a conception of human equality that morally shuns human suffering and promotes a general standard of living that is deemed adequate for all. These broad based claims about the basic necessities of human life, and the components of living with dignity and virtue that flourish thereof, are heavily engrained into the social education of the leading humanitarian aid contributors such as the United States, Britain, France, and Switzerland; so much so that to question how this discourse of universal human rights perpetuates systemic suffering, oppression, and inequality would be to question the very moral fabric of society.

Yet this is exactly what is lacking in discussions of humanitarian crises such as the Syrian refugee situation in Jordan. Particularly at a time when global actors are becoming

increasingly interested with buzzwords such as sustainability, resilience, long-term solutions, dignity, agency, and self-sustainability, and with refugees as opportunities to be assets to development goals rather than burdens, an investigation into the political and historical context of this human rights discourse is vital. A theoretical understanding of this context is necessary in order to understand the frustrations shared by many recipients of humanitarian aid, and to conjecture about how such aid might be better structured for their benefit; in a broader sense, it is equally necessary to situate this aid in the political realm of the providers, in order to get a more accurate assessment of the previous questions.

       For this, it is helpful to start with the historical context of the political ideologies expressed through liberal human rights theory. This theory, as illustrated by the UDHR and the international humanitarian organizations that subscribe to it, follow a moralistic view of liberalism. This liberal view of human rights situates the individual as the subject of these rights in contrast to the institutions meant to guarantee them. As Tillman Clark argues in his paper titled "Human Rights and Radical Social Change: Liberalism, Marxism and Progressive Populism in Venezuela", the focus on the individual accompanies a capitalistic worldview of individualism and private property. The universalization of these rights, as attempted by the UDHR, is therefore a universalization of a particular worldview that is political by nature. Clark aptly describes this political nature by claiming that,

> when one speaks of liberal human rights theory, one is implying that human rights are to be respected insofar as they are reflections of a certain organization of society. What this amounts to, whether admitted or not, is a universal, global project of liberalism and the institutions it corresponds with. As such, it is a political project (Clark, 2010).

Further, he argues that "Liberalism is a historical movement the same as any. […] It has evolved into something different which can best be seen as […] a moralistic and ethical superiority discourse that seeks to impose itself in a form of humanitarian imperialism" (Ibid.,). This transition from a historical movement to humanitarian imperialism might be better described as the development of a new type of postcolonial relationship between the West and the rest of the world; cultural imperialism. John Tomlinson defines this as "the use of political and economic power to exalt and spread the values and habits of a foreign culture at the expense of a native culture" which, in the context of Western hegemony, is described by Herbert Schiller as "the sum of the process by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating center of the system" (University of Florida, Interactive Media Lab). Cultural imperialism, therefore, is predicated on the deepest type of power relation; one where a significant portion of collective identity is imported by the hegemon.

This view of human rights as political discourse is further explained by Wendy Brown in her piece titled "Human Rights and the Politics of Fatalism" which details her skepticism of the humanitarian claim to the apolitical. She argues that

> human rights activism is a moral political project and if it displaces, competes with, refuses, or rejects other political projects, including those also aimed at producing justice, then it is not merely a tactic but a particular form of political power carrying a particular image of justice, and it will behoove us to inspect, evaluate, and judge it as such. […] More precisely, human rights take their shape as a moral [and therefore apolitical] discourse centered on pain and suffering rather than political discourse of comprehensive justice (Brown, 2004).

Although Brown does not provide direct insights into what this "comprehensive justice" looks like, she aptly identifies the inherently political nature of conceptualizing human rights discourse as moral and universalizable. This political nature is based on exclusionary politics, as Clark argues; the question of, "whose conception of human rights are we universalizing," is implicitly answered by those in the position to dominate the discourse, and the answer is liberalism and its capitalist corollaries. According to Brown and Clark, and contrary to the official positions of the organizations that provide aid, this moral mask of liberal human rights discourse obscures its political agenda of monopolizing the conversation of development, basic necessities, and means to livelihood. The guiding rhetoric for Western regimes of humanitarian aid and global interventionist efforts therefore directly upholds the global liberal institutions built on Western imperialism - albeit implicitly.

Brown summarizes this phenomenon succinctly; "[liberal human rights discourse] is a politics and it organizes political space, often with the aim of monopolizing it. It also stands as a critique of dissonant political projects, converges neatly with the requisites of liberal imperialism and global free trade, and legitimates both as well" (Ibid.,). Monopolization is the goal of this discourse, and it attempts to shape the world into liberal capitalist conformity by elevating its rhetoric to the moral, apolitical realm. An informed understanding of this attempted domination of political space is crucial to deconstructing the cultural imperialism associated with the human rights industry, and critiquing how this affects the populations that the industry hopes to serve.

I argue that a deconstruction of this imperialism will illustrate a dependency relationship that resembles a neocolonial power dynamic between the so-called Global North and the Global South, and that this is a hidden goal of the primary global actors. Tying together the critical insights of Brown and Clark, against the generalization represented by Ignatieff, it appears that hegemonic human rights discourse fits into a broader development scheme that amounts to

making the rest of the world look like the West. This deconstruction is most clearly seen in the context of the work that The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) engages with, how it conceptualizes that engagement, and the effects that such a conceptualization has on the populations it hopes to serve.

The Paradoxical Nature of the UNHCR

Investigating the UNHCR allows a window into how this rhetoric is applied in practice, and some of the contradictions that exist within liberal human rights theory. Additionally, the UNHCR provides an apt case study for how these contradictions in practice deepen postcolonial ties of dependency. To begin, it is important to situate the work that the UNHCR does in the context of how it conceives of that work. The first provision of the organization's statute explains its two core purposes: "international protection […] to refugees who fall within the scope of the present Statute and of seeking permanent solutions for the problem of refugees by assisting Governments and […] private organizations to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of such refugees, or their assimilation within new national communities" (UNHCR, 1950). The second provision qualifies the nature of this work, according to the UN: "The work of the High Commissioner shall be of an entirely non-political character; it shall be humanitarian and social and shall relate, as a rule, to groups and categories of refugees" (Ibid.,).

The internalization of liberal human rights rhetoric is clear from these first two provisions. Firstly, as is represented by Ignatieff's minimalist view of human rights, the UNHCR was created out of a negative duty to refugees - a duty framed as protection from suffering and violence. Although Brown does not offer a view of comprehensive justice as an alternative to this moral view of human rights, she expresses a skepticism of Ignatieff's minimalism as a mask for a broader liberal agenda. This is skepticism should be applied to the UNHCR as an actualization

of this liberal agenda, and, as Brown suggests, should be engaged with politically as a form of political space. This leads to the second concern about how the UNHCR conceptualizes its work. It attempts to draw a distinction between a "political" character and a "humanitarian" or "social" character. Following the same line of logic expressed before, the humanitarian and social nature is seen to be above the political and free from it. This is dangerous for those motivated by human rights in two fundamental ways: in the wider scope it jeopardizes the integrity of the work by eliminating room for engagement with its cultural imperialist underpinnings, and in the narrower scope it prevents the work itself from being effective in bringing about solutions to the plight of refugees.

The first way has been illustrated by the previous section, which described the monopolization effect of liberal human rights discourse. It will be more helpful to focus on the second way here, using the UNHCR as a case study to see how the internalization of the liberal "apolitical" conception of human rights hinders the work that the organization does. David Forsythe identifies this is his piece that discusses the politics of being apolitical, and summarizes the concern anecdotally:

> More than a decade ago an experienced UNHCR practitioner and reflective thinker wrote about "the false distinction made between 'humanitarian' and 'political,'" and how UNHCR required "broad…political knowledge and diplomatic experience."62 Or as the present author wrote at that time: "To try to pretend that responding to refugee needs is a humanitarian and therefore non-political task is to limit those trying to help refugees to care and maintenance. This results not in 'durable solutions' but in dependency by refugees on their benefactors. The delicate task is to engage in a political process of influencing governments to make the choices necessary for voluntary repatriation plus some resettlement, without being charged with political interference in the domestic

affairs of states." […as] a global agency mandated to focus on the root causes of

displacement, it must practice humanitarian politics (Forsythe, 2001).

Humanitarian politics, according to Forsythe, requires an engagement with the political in so far

as the durable solutions sought by the UNHCR require cooperation with state actors; otherwise,

the relationship is one of dependency only. Alexander Betts, Gil Loescher, and James Milner

provide a similar rationale for engagement by arguing that the causes, consequences, and

responses to refugee crises are all embedded in and shaped by global political trends of

conflict, power rivalries, and the legacy of colonialism (Betts et al., 2008). They go on to argue

that the organization, if truly concerned with solutions, should become more politically-proactive

in its responses and develop greater capacities to deal explicitly with the diplomacy of asylum,

resettlement, burden sharing, and conflict resolution (Ibid.,).

These authors' arguments for deeper political engagement with the context of the

UNHCR's work is apt, and should be pursued for the sake of the second concern I shared about

the efficacy of the organization. However, there is a deeper, more theoretical value to this

engagement that is not explored here, which is the first concern. For example, Betts et al.

conclude their piece by stating "Inevitably, protecting refugees in a political world requires that

the Office walks a perilous path between the changing interests of states and the moral

authority of a protection mandate" (Ibid.,). In a similar sentiment, Forsythe claims that "it is

important to emphasize that UNHCR (and ICRC) neutrality is based on social liberalism. We

should not confuse "non-political" with "value-free." It is thus not surprising that humanitarian

protection agencies have persistent conflict with states […] States have a broader and more

collective agenda […] Humanitarian protectors, if true to their mandates, do not" (Forsythe,

2001).

These quotes summarize two general statements about the UNHCR: that it is a moral authority, and that it is not value-free in so far as its claimed neutrality does not equate to moral apathy. A deeper engagement with the political context would necessitate an investigation into these two claims: how is the UNHCR legitimated as a moral authority, and which values does it priorities? Contrary to Forsythe's concluding statement, the humanitarian industry does have a broader and more collective agenda that coincides with Western liberalism and capitalism. As explored in the previous section, the relationship between human rights theory and this Western hegemony is one of mutual legitimation and perpetuation; the humanitarian industry is an actualization of both in so far as it is guided by the former and predicated on the latter.

Connecting Theory and Reality: A Case Study of Disconnect

In order to understand the effects of this relationship on the work of the humanitarian industry (as guided by the UNHCR) and the populations that it supposedly serves, it is helpful to have another case study. Lori Allen conducted an extensive ethnographic investigation into Palestinian perceptions of the human rights industry in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPT). Her methodology was an inspiration for my own in this research project, and is highly insightful for understanding how this discourse guides the actions on the ground and the impacts thereof.

In the first few pages of her introduction, she sums up the general sentiment of the many Palestinian aid workers (ranging from organizations like the UNHCR to Al-Haq, a prominent law-based human rights organization) and recipients that she spoke with: "They conveyed a sense that concern for human rights was a pretense, a facade that everyone recognized as such but was feigning to keep up nevertheless" (Allen, 2013). In the following chapters she

explains how a common source of this sense has to do with the corporatization of the human rights industry and the subsequent profiting off of Palestinian suffering:

> The mushrooming of the human rights industry in the occupied Palestinian territory and the infusion of donor funds that has encouraged this have led to a professionalization of human rights work, but they have not resulted in any improvement in most Palestinians' political and social circumstances […] Largely at the behest of EU and US funders, the human rights industry has been utilized more and more as a technocratic tool, as if "human rights" were a set of skills that could be taught and mastered, regardless of any change in political framework […] It is the tainting of human rights by the human rights industry that so many in Palestine reject (Ibid.,).

According to her accounts, the importing of international aid workers and Western institutions of aid are seen as the main causes of disillusionment; for a significant number of Palestinians, these workers and institutions seem to be more concerned with profit and an expansion of aid infrastructure than the actual rights they are claiming to support. Indeed, the upholding of liberal human rights discourse has spawned an industry funded by the same countries that are responsible for perpetuating the same violations humanitarianism is trying to mitigate. Skepticism in light of this fact is necessary, especially in recognition of just how extensive this humanitarian infrastructure, or "NGO elite", has become in the oPT: Allen argues that "This "NGO elite" (Hanafi and Tabar 2005), whose members also enjoy a lifestyle replete with perks such as international travel and sometimes company cars, has garnered much criticism in Palestine and engendered among many Palestinians a cynical distrust of anything related to the human rights regime" (Ibid.,). The discrepancy between discourse and action, and the profiting by international (Western) individuals on that discrepancy, amounts to a type of cultural imperialism that burgeons on neo-colonialism.

A significant aspect of Palestinian frustration with this aid industry, and a crucial part of the imperialism/colonialism that funds it, is the aforementioned lack of engagement with the broader political context. In a conversation with an aid worker from Defense for Children International - Palestine, the worker expressed this frustration: "There is all this money for infrastructure and development aid, but no one is touching the occupation. We bring rice, but no one is talking about why Palestinians are hungry. We talk about violations, but we're not going to talk about the occupation as a whole" (Ibid.,). This disengagement fortifies the oppressive narrative of the humanitarian industry in so far as it helps to fortify the dependency relationship that Forsythe and Betts et al. warned against. Another Palestinian NGO aid worker summarizes the debilitating effects of the aid from UNHCR and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) on his society: "people have become dependent on handouts. They want us to be dependent. They don't want us to be a strong player. The whole region, they try to keep us down. This is colonialism in the real meaning of the term" (Ibid.,).

This is directly related to the apolitical project of liberal human rights discourse, as its moral emphasis on providing attention does not ask the question of why such protection is needed in the first place, resulting in an implicit legitimization of a dependency relationship. The other facet of concern that is not raised by Forsythe and Betts et al., the questioning of the liberal values inherent in this discourse that drives the UNHCR, is explained by Allen in reference to the cooption of moral economies in the countries that the international aid regime operates in. Similar to Clark's discussion of the liberal domination of how society is organized and Brown's claim about the monopolization of political space, Allen argues that in the context of the oPT,

The struggles of these human rights workers have emerged in the space of tension between transforming political economies and the accompanying changes in moral economies (cf. Shah 2010), and they are similar to what NGO actors confront across the global South. In Colombia, for example, NGO workers have faced similar pressures imposed by international donors whose demands for "professionalization" have resulted in the political co-optation of their social justice projects (Murdock 2008). Such demands have left Mexican NGO workers complaining that they have lost their shared sense of purpose and "moral commitment to solidarity," which they report has given way to enmity and competition (Richard 2009:182). (Ibid.,).

By expanding the scale to the so-called Global South more broadly, it is clearer to see how the iterations of modern-day colonialism have taken shape in the human rights industry. This leaves us with the question of what the proper plan of action for those still interested in altruism, particularly in the face of crises with drastic humanitarian need.

Dignity, Agency, and Long-Term Sustainability

For this, it is helpful to look at what liberal theory does have to offer in the context of critiquing cultural imperialism, and how we can adapt that to expressed regional needs. I will frame this in what I consider to be the most helpful theorist of liberal human rights theory, in the context of broader development theory, and then I will match this with the new rhetoric of the Jordanian response on sustainability and resilience.

Amartya Sen, a renowned economist affiliated with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, introduced an alternative to a materialist approach to development that he called the capabilities approach. The radicalness of this approach is its rejection of growth as the means and ends of development theory. In the context of addressing poverty, Sen argues

that it serves to "enhance the understanding of the nature and causes of poverty and deprivation by shifting primary attention away from *means* [such as income…] to ends that people have reason to pursue, and, correspondingly, to the *freedoms* to be able to satisfy these ends" (Sen, 1999). This contrasts greatly to the more simplified notion of development which demands economic growth as a remedy for the underdevelopment of countries; applied to the context of humanitarian aid, this approach allows for an investigation into the political and regional causes of humanitarian need instead of focusing simply on the provision of material aid. To Betts et al. and Forsythe's point, and the accounts presented by Allen, this approach is helpful also because of its focus on the individual as not just a recipient of aid but also as a complex individual that exists in a societal and cultural context that is largely ignored in the dominant rhetoric. Sen still presupposes the values inherent in liberal human rights theory and their adherence to Western standards of progress, and therefore lacks the deeper postcolonial critique of Western hegemony, but his approach nonetheless provides a more proper theoretical framework of approaching humanitarian aid. Brown and Clark do not attempt to provide this theoretical framework, and instead provide the vocabulary and theory to shape an investigation into frameworks in general.

Sen argues for the consideration of development as access to freedoms and expressing capabilities, such that objects such as income are useful only in so far as they happen to guard against the many deprivations associated with poverty. I argue that this approach is also applicable in the realm of humanitarian aid; the consideration of humanitarian aid, particularly in protracted conflicts such as refugee crises, not as a means to provide immediate needs but a long-term investment in individuals and their capacities to be agents of change in their respective conflicts.

In the context of humanitarian crises such as the Syrian refugee situation, this approach is the best that we have. It re-emphasizes the importance of viewing individuals in the political context as this political context is directly constraining their agency to be independent, self-sustaining individuals not reliant on humanitarian aid. Therefore, this approach, in the context of the critique of dominant liberal human rights theory, is what framed my research. This approach will also frame my analysis of the results.

IV. Methodology

My data is a compilation of ten semi-structured interviews: four with Syrian refugee families (in total comprising of 10 direct participants who shared answers) and six with humanitarian aid workers. These interviews were conducted in Arabic with the help of a translator. The questions were translated from English to Arabic during the conversation, and the participants responded in Arabic which was then translated back to English. All interviews were tape-recorded so that they answers could be transcribed during data analysis. The participants for the interviews were primarily convenience sampling with the assistance of the my academic director, Dr. Bayan Abdulhaq. Therefore, I relied entirely on the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (JOHUD) network in Mafraq and Karak. I traveled to the Mafraq JOHUD site on the 9th of April and conducted three interviews with aid workers and the four interviews with refugee families, and on the 11th of April I traveled to the Karak JOHUD site to interview three aid workers. The individual participants were again convenience sampled by the lead organizers that Dr. Abdulhaq chose to coordinate my visits; the refugee families were chosen by one of the aid workers whom I interviewed, who also accompanied me during my visits to them, and the aid workers were selected by the organizers. I believe that their methodology for selecting participants was based primarily on availability, as I spoke with individuals with varied backgrounds and institutional roles. I did not personally compensate any of the individuals that I spoke with; however, the Mafraq JOHUD office had prepared four gift baskets for the children of the four families I visited.

I chose to interview both Syrian refugees and aid workers that worked directly with Syrian refugees in order to investigate their perceptions on dependency and empowerment in the humanitarian aid they receive/offer. Semi-structured interviews were prioritized as the main sources of data collection as direct communication is most ideal for my research questions. My dual focus on empowerment and efficacy of humanitarian required giving individuals the space to express themselves as freely as possible; especially for vulnerable populations that have historically had (and currently have) systemic restrictions on such expression. This space allowed for a more nuanced discussion of how dignity and agency is cultivated from the perspective of recipients and providers, and allowed the conversations to flow into areas not necessarily covered by my questions.

In fact, this was one of the biggest obstacles of my research; trying to determine which questions to ask. After each interview, I revised my questions to become more narrow, focused, and clear. Part of this stems from my theoretical framework which prevents me from imposing my own definitions onto the research subjects. With each interview, therefore, I learned more about what it was that I was trying to study and was given more vocabulary to describe that in my questions. This was an obstacle because there are questions that I would have liked to ask the first few aid workers, and my refugee sample, that I could not. However, I believe that it reflects an internalization of my theoretical framework, and in terms of the ethics of research, I feel justified in sacrificing data for the empowerment and prioritization of my subjects.

Ideally, however, I would have had more than just two days of data collection. This represented another obstacle - access to my target populations. I imagine this was shared by most, if not all of the other researchers on this program, because of the time and exposure constraint. I would have also preferred a more diverse set of organizations to interview instead of relying completely on JOHUD. It would have been more illuminating to research workers from

the UNHCR or the UNRWA, as these two organizations are seen as the leaders for guiding humanitarian work with refugees. I recognize this as a research limitation and I relied more heavily on my literature review and material culture because of it.

Another obstacle faced was the fact that I needed to rely on a translator. This could have potentially resulted in the participants feeling less comfortable than if they were speaking directly to me, in Arabic. I attempted to mitigate this by providing as much information about my project as possible, by having the consent forms read to them, by ensuring that they could end the interview or refuse to answer any question at any time, and that the interviews were confidential and entirely optional. Additionally, before voice recording I sought their permission to do so, and to express their opinions in my research.

In order to maintain the integrity of my data, I thought it important to voice record and to match my notes with the transcriptions I conducted afterwards. In order to prevent any misinterpretation or misunderstanding of my data, I thoroughly listened to each interview and, with the questions that pertained most crucially to my research, listened through the answers twice to ensure accuracy. The typed transcriptions of my data are transcribed to the best of my ability and have been, without any sacrifice to the integrity of the participant, matched up as accurately as possible to the exact sentiments expressed by the interviewee. However, I recognize that there is a small margin of human error related to both the amount of data collected and also my bias as a researcher. I have, in correlation with my theoretical background, put extensive effort into acknowledging such error and mitigating such biases.

I thought extensively also about whether a questionnaire would be helpful in the data I hoped to collect. I drafted a survey and matched it as closely to the interview questions as possible; however, I came to realize that in the context of my research, my time would be better spent on interviews and analyzing material culture than distributing surveys. Because the crux

of my research is individual conceptions of the effects of humanitarian aid, which depends on individual definitions of loaded words such as dignity, agency, and sustainability, I found that there was not enough space in a questionnaire to hold these conversations. I could not have done both without sacrificing opportunities to interview. Therefore, and possibly necessarily so, my research is almost entirely qualitative. I do not think that this is a limitation because my research questions are almost entirely qualitative, but variegated research is typically better research nonetheless.

For my material culture, I chose to look at the official Jordanian position for the response to refugees, as expressed through King Abdullah's speech at the London Conference and the 2016-2018 Jordan Response Plan, both to have a frame of reference for my interviews and to investigate how the Jordanian government has internalized broader human rights discourse. I analyzed it as official documents that represented the intentional view of those in direct control of the Jordanian discourse and response. This was a helpful addition to my research as it provided a guideline to evaluate the relationship between discourse and action in the context of Jordan, and in the broader context of human rights discourse, it served as a tangible case study for how this discourse affects long-term conceptions of conflict resolution.

V. Findings / Results

The questions asked to refugees and humanitarian aid workers generally followed a similar logic: having the interviewee speak about their background, about their relationship to aid work (services they provide or receive), how feedback mechanisms work. However, the divergence came from a question that the researcher learned to ask early in the interview: why do refugees leave the camps? This question proved to be the most illuminating and began conversations that were insightful for the major research questions. Between the two populations, there were variance in answers, but within the populations there were recognizable themes. The majority of aid workers (four out of six) had claimed that the camps were essentially unlivable. Terms like "degrading" and "inhumane" were repeatedly used, while one aid worker described living in the camps as living in prison. When asked further about where these perceptions come from, all of them mentioned the enclosed spaces of the caravans, the strict borders of the area, a warden-like presence of the international agencies that distribute aid, and, perhaps most importantly, the lack of privacy. Privacy was also repeatedly mentioned in relation to dignity (one of the questions that I explicitly asked later in the interviews), and the majority of aid workers claimed that both of these qualities were lacking in the camps.

Workers referred primarily to the basic living conditions in the caravans being below-humane level in relation to this idea of privacy. One aid worker recalled hearing a story of three families living in one caravan, which is generally described as an average sized bedroom for one person. Additionally, another aid worker claimed that the toilets and showers are of a similar nature of communal sharing. They claimed that there might be ten or fifteen families

sharing one toilet and shower. Yet another discussed the kitchens, which were also communally based. Those that expanded on this answer of privacy all expressed the idea that privacy equated to having a designated space for an individual family, and not requiring sharing every basic necessity with others.

The same question was asked to two of the refugee families, who shared answers that differed to the aid workers'. The immediate answer for both families was safety; both expressed concerns of conflict and theft while living in the camps. One family recounted an incident in early 2015 where, after two months of living in the Za'atari camp, they returned to their caravan to find all of their personal items missing. They filed a report with the head UNHCR security office but the representatives responded that they could not devote the time and resources to finding their stolen items. Thanks to a family friend that lived next door they were able to recover some of the items that had been pawned off in the local market, but they did not recover all of their items. It was at this point that the family decided to try and find a Jordanian sponsor in order to leave the camp. The other family had recounted their fears of walking around the camp because of a prevalence of beggars and suspect individuals, and also told of stories they had heard about corrupt UNHCR and Jordanian security officers that harassed and abused some of their friends. When the researcher questioned further about the idea of privacy, both families agreed that this was a downside of living in the camp but did not express this as a primary reason for leaving.

Similarly, they had referred to the living conditions as not ideal and said that they obviously preferred to live in a less restrictive environment; however, one of the families, who had not been asked explicitly why they had left the camp but instead about the stresses of living in an urban host community, had talked about how they felt socially connected in Za'atari. They had mentioned how many of their neighbors who lived with them in Syria (Dar'a) had lived close to them in Za'atari, and having their community during the psychosocially difficult times of living

in the camps. The other families had reiterated what one aid worker had termed environmental challenges, which had to do with the weather and geography of the desert camps. This family said that the dust also affected their asthma and preexisting health conditions - the same aid worker claimed that many refugees complain of similar exacerbations with camp life. However, safety was the overwhelming concern. One family member had said that they were willing to wait a lifetime for Syria to become safe again, so long as they could survive in Jordan. Another family member had claimed, at the beginning of the interview, that politically they supported whatever faction made them feel safe.

While there was a discrepancy between refugee and aid worker answers to why families leave the camps, the aid workers also expressed this prioritization of safety for refugees once they arrived in host communities. When asked about some of the key values and considerations that they have in their work, every aid worker identified safety and security as a necessity. For five out of six aid workers, this answer of safety came before an answer of economic livelihood, privacy, or psychosocial support. The other aid worker had stated privacy and ensuring respect and equal treatment for Syrians and Jordanians alike as their main value; with the five other aid workers, these values were expressed later in the conversation. All aid workers had claimed that from their experience, refugees expressed higher concerns for safety once they were outside of the camps. They tied these fears to shared fears of social isolation and worries about integration with the host community, which slightly contradicts the majority of the refugee data which suggested that safety was a stronger concern within the camps. However, all families expressed similar social fears of isolation and integration.

Three of the four families expressed intense gratitude for their ability to leave the camp; one family expressed a longing for the sense of community they felt inside of the camp, and claimed that they had not found that in the year and three months of living in Mafraq. However,

all had claimed that they would not like to return to the camps. All aid workers confirmed this sentiment. One aid worker recalled a conversation he had with a Syrian refugee who claimed that he would kill himself, his wife, and his children if he was forced to return to the camp. This conversation was particularly illuminating, as it provided the most insight into the culturally-defined ideas of dignity and how humanitarian affects those ideas in the individual - one of the goals of the study. The explanation of this particular refugee's strong aversion to returning to the camps revolves around the broader idea of dependency discussed in the literature review. According to this aid worker, who had 12 years of experience of providing psychosocial support to Palestinian and Syrian refugees, independence and livelihood is at the center of Levantine conceptions of dignity. These conceptions centered on the idea of pride, of being able to provide for yourself and your family which, in their words, cannot be given but must be earned. They believed that Syrian refugees were largely dependent on cash assistance from organizations such as the UNHCR or United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), which both creates and exacerbates the psychological trauma associated with displacement.

The relationship between this cash assistance and feelings of dependency was another central theme in the data. All of the Syrian families relied on some form of cash assistance from the United Nations as their primary source of income. Similarly, all of the families interviewed expressed significant concerns about their economic situation, claiming that the aid they were receiving was not enough to live comfortably and adequately. When asked what their most significant concerns were, three families answered with paying for rent while the other answered paying for necessary medications. The family that expressed explicit concerns for medications also discussed some of the injustices of the United Nations. These injustices related to a seemingly-arbitrary and un-proportional distribution of aid for Syrian refugee families. One family

member said that one of their children is anemic and requires a special type of iron-calcium supplement. After submitting additional documentation for an increase in aid from UNICEF to pay for the supplement, their application was denied without any rationale or follow-up. The family has had to sacrifice and ration food supplies in order to afford the medication. When asked what could be done to make organizations like UNICEF more just, this family member claimed that these organizations should be more sensitive in their responses to refugee needs and should conduct more regular surveys to strengthen communication with those they are trying to serve.

The data from the other aid workers fortifies this concern of refugee dependency on cash assistance, and on these conceptions of dignity. All had agreed that cash assistance was necessary to provide for basic needs, but that this cash assistance was not sustainable. Similarly, the majority of participants defined dignity as equality of opportunity and livelihood, and saw pride as a central aspect of the idea; they agreed that the dependency on cash assistance was an obstacle to dignity. When asked about whether this dependency has increased since the conflict has started, three out of four aid workers said yes and one said no. Those that said yes argued that refugees lose hope over time, and therefore are more inclined to rely on aid for their livelihood. The one that said no argued that with time, aid organizations learned how to adapt to the needs of refugees and the refugees themselves learned how to adapt to their circumstances. Some expressed concerns about the fact that the refugee must have documentation and identification in order to receive cash assistance benefits, while others claimed that coordination efforts between non-governmental organizations needed to be improved in order to secure all sectors of need for refugees.

The follow up questions to this conversation on dependency was solution-oriented. When asked about what the ideal solution was to this issue of dependency, all aid workers and

two of the refugee families argued for more employment opportunities. The other two families argued for more cash assistance. The majority of aid workers expressed explicit concerns about employment competition between the Syrian and Jordanian population, yet all of them believed that this was the ideal solution. They had all expressed similar conceptions of the priorities of needs that refugees face, and the effectiveness of the humanitarian community to provide for these needs. The researcher has attempted to visually represent these needs in percentages according to their relative importance for the aid workers' conceptions of sustainable aid. The percentages are not verbatim representations but rather an aggregate extrapolation from conversations of balancing short and long term needs.

An aid worker argued that in theory, all of these needs can be met by the international community if there is effective coordination between the different non-governmental organizations that have specific services. If there is coordination and a sort of division of labor amongst these groups, they argued, then resources can be most efficiently allocated for the benefit of the refugee. However, they reiterated the importance of psychological health for the purpose of developing the capacity of the refugee to be self-sufficient in the other, more material necessities.
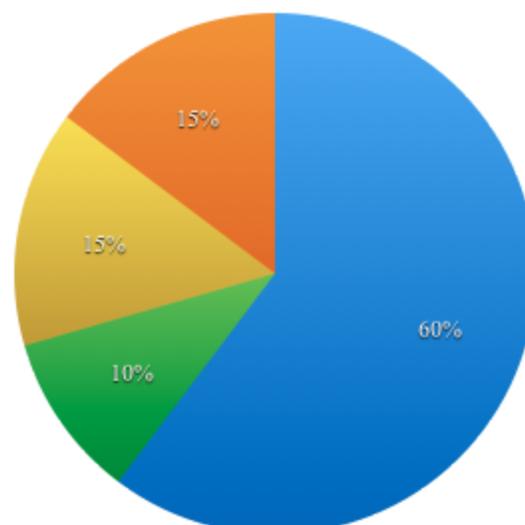
This could easily be a close opposite of the needs expressed by refugees, who had claimed safety, access to food, and access to health care as their primary concerns. A few aid workers had acknowledged this, claiming that the desire to seek psychological support is lessened when there are more immediate needs such as food or shelter present. However, the majority of aid workers recognized the longer-term need for psychological support if the refugees are to be independent and self-sufficient, and they recognized as well the role that economic independence plays in that self-conception. This was perhaps the most resounding finding; the conception of sustainable humanitarian aid having a strong focus on psychological health, and that psychological health being predicated on a culturally-informed view of economic independence and livelihood. Some of the aid workers framed this connection with the importance of equipping Syrian refugees with the tools necessary to rebuild their country once the conflict had ended. Again, in the context of the sustainability and long-term impact of humanitarian aid, this finding was critical.

In an attempt to gain a more official understanding of these interests in sustainability and long-term humanitarian responses, the researcher found it helpful to conduct a material culture on the Jordanian government's most recent publications on the refugee response. For this, the researcher analyzed the rhetoric used in the so-called Jordan Response Plan 2016-2018 (JRP), the most updated comprehensive framework that Jordan offers to the international aid community. The recent logic behind the JRP is summarized in reference to the previous installment:

> Over the past two years, Jordan has guided the evolution of the response from a mainly refugee response to a resilience-based comprehensive framework that bridges the divide between short-term refugee and longer-term developmental responses. The

> Jordan Response Plan 2015 (JRP2015) represented a paradigm shift in this respect […]
> Projects selected and prioritized within the scope of the JRP2015 have pursued a
> 'resilience' approach. That is, they have been broadly designed to enable households,
> communities, services and institutions to initially 'cope', gradually 'recover', and
> ultimately to strengthen and 'sustain' their capacities, thereby deepening their resilience
> to future shocks (JRP, 2015).

In the first few pages of the roughly 160 page document, the Jordanian Minister of Planning and
International Cooperation, Imad Najib Fakhoury, expresses the goals of this newest rendition of
the JRP:

> Realizing the 2016-2018 JRP is predicated on strengthening international solidarity to
> pursue a credible transition from emergency, through recovery, to longer term
> sustainability and resilience. To that end, the government has taken bold steps over the
> last 12 months to improve aid coordination, increase transparency, and strengthen
> accountability as a means of increasing overall aid effectiveness. I call upon our
> partners, including line ministries, UN agencies, the donor community and NGOs to
> support Jordan as it continues its efforts to forge a new model of response capable of
> meeting immediate needs while also safeguarding human development and fostering
> resilience to future shocks (Ibid.,).

These aforementioned keywords of resilience and sustainability are utilized here to mean a
comprehensive approach to the different sectors of the Jordanian government: "education,
energy, health, justice, municipal services, social protection, and water and sanitation" (Ibid.,
10). It emphasizes a rhetoric of fortifying those sectors so as to better address the pressures of
handling the refugee crisis, such as increasing employment of personnel related to each sector,
building more facilities, and ultimately adapting existing areas to better integrate the refugees

into them. This is indeed a shift in rhetoric from previous series of Jordanian refugee response, as those were developed under the pretense that the Syrian conflict would be short-lived and that the aid industry would be geared towards a short-term response. However, with the gradual realization that Syrian refugees may become a part of Jordanian society for longer than expected, Jordanian officials refocused their efforts towards this resilience and capacity building framework, and estimate that the JRP 2016-2018 will require US$7,987,632,501 in total for complete intervention (Ibid.,).

VI. Discussion & Conclusion

Discussion

The purpose of having one of the first questions of the interview be, "Why did you [the refugees] leave the camps?" was to introduce the ideas of dignity, humanity, and the potential lack of both in humanitarian aid work, by the participant's definitions. It is apparent that the access to humanitarian services in the camps is significantly better than in urban host communities. Therefore, the researcher wanted to ascertain what would compel a refugee to forgo access to those services and leave the camps, and had assumed that the answers would match up to those same ideas of dignity and agency. However, from the refugee data collected, this is not apparent. The primary reason given for leaving the camps was tied to security and safety, and not to explicit desires for empowerment, privacy, or the other reasons given by aid workers. There is difficulty in drawing generalizations from either population, due to sample size limitations; however, given the material culture and the extrapolations from frustrations with international aid organizations, it seems fair to view the search for empowerment as perhaps a more deep-rooted, less visible motivation to live in urban communities.

Perhaps the most central finding was the consistency in the definition of dignity across populations. While it is difficult to generalize from a small sample size, as will be discussed in the study limitations section, there was an overwhelming theme of pride, self-sustainability, economic independence, and the idea of equality between Jordanian and Syrian populations. This is especially relevant for the humanitarian aid that these populations administer and receive; another central theme was the dependence found on cash assistance from UN

agencies. The economic dependence on this form of aid is a direct obstacle to the cultivation of dignity and, therefore, the sustainability of said aid. In fact, over periods of protracted conflict such as the Syrian crisis, this type of aid increases dependence across generational lines. This has implications not only for future populations of refugees themselves but also for their country of origin. As one aid worker in Karak expressed, caring for the current needs of refugees is half of the concern. The rest of the concern is about when the crisis ends and Syria is ready to be rebuilt. A question that needs to be addressed is, who will rebuild it? In the context of the literature review, and given the historical precedence of Western influence in the region, global actors such as the United States will surely attempt to shape the country as they see fit. History has proven that this only breeds more instability, civil unrest, and eventual conflict - even (perhaps especially) when such intervention is guided under the banner of securing liberal human rights. Therefore, it is apparent that humanitarian aid should increase its focus on the development of refugees as agents of change and not simply recipients of aid, as the current structure of aid implies.

An overwhelming recommendation of how dignity would be secured in refugee populations, and how these populations might collectively and individually be empowered, was an increase in employment opportunities for Syrian refugees. While all aid workers expressed concerns ideally about a correlated increase in competition between Syrians and Jordanians who are looking for work, there was unanimous support for economic independence. Implicit in these conversations was the notion that support for this economic independence was necessary for sustainability. This appears to be true for supporting psychological aid as well; in fact, based off of the data, the two notions are significantly related to each other. The psychological health of Syrian refugees suffers because they are not able to work, and because their psychological health is suffering, they are more susceptible to other symptoms that the humanitarian industry

is attempting to provide for; depression, anxiety, familial issues, and of course the provision of material needs such as food, shelter, and health care. Thus, lack of employment catalyzes a self-perpetuating cycle that sustains a population in need of aid and incapable of providing for themselves. Referring to the theoretical discussion in the literature review of Western interest and hegemony, this developing of dependency is dangerously resemblant to neocolonial regional foreign policy, to the benefit of the international aid community and to the detriment of the populations it is supposed to serve.

Based off of the material culture, the Jordanian response to the refugee crisis seems to have internalized this liberal rights rhetoric. This can be seen in the apparent discrepancy of conceptions of sustainability. Unlike the official Jordanian conception of sustainability, as expressed as a bolstering of existing infrastructure, the conception of sustainability provided by aid workers necessitates a deeper shift in paradigm; one that takes the pressure off of the Jordanian government and, more importantly, the international aid community to provide for basic needs, and instead equips the individual Syrian refugee with the capacity to provide for themselves. The cultural tie of pride and employment, or self-sufficiency and economic independence, has immense implications for the structuring of humanitarian aid, redefines empowerment and resilience as something that cannot be distributed vis a vis an eye scanner. Instead, it is something that must be provided for by the host community by way of opportunities for the Syrian refugees to regain independence, and supported by the Jordanian government by way of policy that allows for the integration of Syrians into the formal economy.

In fact, it appears that a commitment to sustainability and the empowerment of Syrian refugees requires the type of political engagement referred to in the literature review, that is inherently lacking in liberal human rights discourse. This commitment requires action on behalf of the international aid community; advocacy on behalf of expanding employment opportunities

for refugees, pressure on major aid countries to increase their aid to the Jordanian government, and, perhaps more importantly, self-reflection on how their aid is contributing to dependency dynamics reminiscent of postcolonial development theory. Without embracing this political engagement, as Forsythe had suggested, the work of organizations such as the UNHCR will only deepen the dependency at the expense of the dignity of the individual.

It is clear that the majority of refugees and aid workers do not believe that throwing more money at the problem will solve it - at least not without a rigorous questioning of how that money is supporting refugee self-sufficiency. The language of the JRP mirrors that of dominant liberal human rights theory in its reliance on preexisting aid infrastructure that itself is an actualization of said rhetoric; therefore, while there are material needs that do require more financial support from the international community, the aforementioned fears of dependency will only be further confirmed if there is not a clearer emphasis on employment and psychosocial support. A clear example of this are the refugee camps themselves. Certainly there are immediate needs that an influx of international donor aid could remedy - buying bigger caravans, installing more bathrooms, building additional kitchen space. However, this would not be a sustainable use of funding unless it is presumed that the refugees will forever be dependent on humanitarian aid and will remain in the camps for the rest of their lives. As the interviews have suggested, a more sustainable use of funding would be to expand psychosocial support systems and to simultaneously increase efforts for refugee integration into the formal economy.

Conclusion

The approach of this research was heavily informed by the literature review, which allowed for a more comprehensive, human-centered conception of Syrian refugee needs. A crucial component of this approach was the intentional avoidance of imposing potential biases

of the researcher; instead of providing definitions and conceptions of dignity and sustainability, the researcher sought to ascertain culturally informed definitions provided by the target populations. In doing so, the researcher was able to evaluate the claimed goals of the Jordanian Response Plan – namely, the adaptation of existing aid structures and government sectors (education, health) to the long-term needs of Syrian refugees – in terms of its sustainability. The researcher found that, based off of the answers provided by both aid workers and refugees themselves, there is a paradigmatic obstacle of the JRP as it fails to provide opportunities for economic independence and enhanced psychosocial support. In fact, the data suggests that the JRP's current strategy of funneling international donor funding into the existing infrastructure might further erode the dignity of refugees by fortifying dependency relationships and deepening the conception of refugees as solely recipients of aid. Instead, it appears that a sustainable governmental approach to responding to the needs of Syrian refugees requires a strong emphasis on employment opportunities and long-term psychosocial support – and more theoretically, a reconceptualization of refugees as not helpless victims in need of protection (as liberal human rights theory conceptualizes them) and instead as agents of change and livelihood. The detailing of this emphasis, and how it is designed or implemented, is outside the scope of this research; however, it is highly recommended that there be further research conducted with a similar methodology to this study in order to guide such design and implementation.

Broadening the implications of this research to the international aid industry, the high levels of dependency reported by both refugees and aid workers should be investigated in the broader political context that this industry operates in. There are concerns that, in consideration of the history of Western intervention in the region, this industry is part of a larger political project of cultural imperialism and neocolonialism. Regardless, and contrary to official rhetoric of

organizations such as the UNHCR, this industry certainly does not operate outside of that political realm of global power dynamics. A more sensitive historical analysis might shed more light on the specifics of how humanitarian aid fortifies these power dynamics of Western hegemony and institutionalized dependency in postcolonial states; however, this research significantly suggests that such a relationship exists, for the benefit of the former and the detriment of the latter.

Indeed, it appears that this Western hegemony is predicated on the so-called underdevelopment of postcolonial states, so as to fortify the historical dependency dynamic. In this context, it is relatively easy to argue how the Western domination of discourse, whether it be human rights, humanitarian aid, or development, and its iteration in the international humanitarian regime, supports centuries-old legacies of colonialism. The aforementioned reconceptualization of the refugee, and the subsequent empowerment thereof, therefore has crucial implications beyond the individual; it becomes a conversation about the empowerment of a people that have been systematically subjugated, and the attempted reclamation of independence culturally, economically, and, most importantly, politically, from the West. As one aid worker argued, these refugees will someday return to their country, and they should be the ones rebuilding it for their own interest – not by the global hegemon, for the interest of the global hegemon. Humanitarian aid should then be structured to support these long-term interests, which requires a radical critique of the human rights industry that this research hoped to contribute to.

VII. Study Limitations and Recommendations

As mentioned throughout the findings, the major limitation of this research is time constraints. There was only a month to perform a literature review, collect data, and conduct analysis; therefore, the potential for a diverse and extensive sample size was severely hindered. The result of this was a reliance on convenience sampling from the same aid organization, and similar networks of Syrian refugee families. Further research would prioritize perspectives from a wider array of aid organizations that extended inter-sectorally, such as education and health care, and would include perspectives of international aid workers. These limitations make it difficult to generalize conclusions, which should a stronger focus for future studies.

Another consequence of the time constraint was a lack of appropriate time to revise interview questions. The nature of this research is that the vocabulary for interviews is developed after a few have been conducted; the researcher made a serious effort to disregard their own bias and instead rely on the conceptions of the participants. Therefore, some questions were not devised until the proper terms, definitions, concepts, and rhetoric was developed first. This came at the expense of a portion of the sample size, resulting in a smaller data pool altogether. Future research would ideally have more time to adapt the questions without taxing too much from the sample size. Additionally, future research would ideally have more starting resources and studies to model itself off of, such as this one, and will not have to devote such a significant amount of time and effort to establishing the theoretical approach to the research.

Future studies would also be advised to establish a stronger historical and political context to the humanitarian work in question, which would strengthen the deeper investigations into global power dynamics and the potential for such aid to play a role in conflict resolution. Unfortunately, this research did not have the space or time to conduct such a literature review, and instead decided to prioritize a theoretical instead of historical framework. More effective research will utilize a combination of both. The lack of an in-depth historical analysis of the UNHCR and its international impacts decreases the compelling nature of some of this research's conclusions and speculations about colonial and imperial power dynamics. This analysis would ideally be a comparative approach and investigation into other postcolonial contexts of the globe, such as in Latin America, Africa, or Asia, to see if there are cross-cultural themes of dependency and dominance.

Finally, the time and space devoted to establishing a cohesive theoretical background might have resulted in an overall convoluted or otherwise unclear structuring of the project and its scope. If this research is deemed legitimate and helpful, future studies inspired by it will not have to devote such time to the theoretical and therefore will have a clearer focus and more concise presentation. This will help be at the benefit of the conclusions and possible the data itself, as the scope of the project will be much more streamlined and narrowed for more particular investigations. This study attempted to connect theory and application with as much brevity as possible, but it is acknowledged that the large scope of the project impacts the presentation.

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