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Leila A. Ismaio
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**Lived Experiences of Temporary Permanence: The Syrian Perspective on Humanitarian
Response and 'Guest Status' in Jordan**

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SIT, Middle East, Jordan, Amman

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ABSTRACT

As the conflict in Syria has evolved into a long-term crisis, Syrian refugees have found themselves in a state of both temporality and permanence, frequently cited as being ‘stuck’. Syrians in Jordan, particularly, have fallen victim to this status, frequently labeled as ‘guests’, with corresponding humanitarian aid also reflecting this temporality. No studies have yet explored Syrian refugees’ perceptions and experiences with ‘guest’ status and its relationship with humanitarian assistance. The purpose of this study is to explore Syrian perception of ‘guest’ status and current humanitarian efforts in Jordan and see how this demonstrates and challenges the dichotomy present in Syrian refugee status of simultaneous temporality and permanence. Through ten semi-structured interviews with Syrians, followed by a thematic and inductive analysis, the data revealed six themes. Themes included the influence of gender on assistance, perceived lack of transparency from humanitarian organizations, impaired social interaction, instability of resources, shifting perspectives regarding ‘guest’ status, and future uncertainty. Additionally, narratives reveal a relationship between humanitarian assistance and Syrian status as aid has decreased due to perceived ‘temporal’ status, despite the elongated length of the conflict. All Syrian participants have no intention of returning to Syria in the foreseeable future, and despite many having been in Jordan for more than six years, this idea of finding stability and permanence is challenged by both physical and mental challenges associated with current unstable assistance and perceived status that have made Syrians simultaneously feel as if their lives in Jordan are temporal. This study works to shed light on the lived experiences frequently forgotten but just as powerful as policy assessment.

Keywords: Cultural Anthropology, Public and Social Welfare, Development Studies, Regional Studies: Middle East, Human Development

INTRODUCTION

As the Syrian Conflict enters its ninth year, what originally started as peaceful protests against the president of Syria, Bashar Al-Assad, has turned into a full-scale war with no end in sight. The conflict has left millions of Syrians vulnerable, fleeing violence into neighboring countries, starting what is commonly referred to as the ‘Syrian refugee crisis’. Jordan, remains one of the countries most affected by the Syrian crisis, hosting the second highest share of refugee’s pro capital in the world. Large numbers of Syrians in Jordan, in conjunction with already stressed economic and resource infrastructure, has created detrimental national challenges that will only continue if not addressed (Francis 2015). In Jordan, Syrians refugees are frequently cited as ‘guests’ where assistance is granted because of generosity rather than obligation (Seely 2015). Consequently, as the conflict enters a protracted state, this has spurred tension and public discontent as tensions rise between Syrian ‘guests’ and Jordanians who believe that Syrians have overstayed their welcome, taken advantage of their hospitality, and are responsible for current challenges in Jordan (Seely 2015).

Negative public sentiment towards Syrians has effected the government’s ability to respond effectively to the refugee influx (Francis 2015). As tensions rise, Jordanian citizens have called upon the government to limit hospitality and has resulted in the restriction of Syrians entering the country, closed border access, and stricter confinement (Francis 2015). The UNHCR reports that over 85% of Syrians in Jordan currently live below the poverty line (2018). Jordan

policies are a paradox that highlight this statistic as they continue to restrict the protection space for Syrians while also attempting to develop policy to reflect the protracted nature of the situation. Consequently, Syrians have attempted to negotiate this constantly changing status and adapt to their situation in Jordan to build lives for both themselves and their children.

Problem Statement

As the conflict in Syria has evolved into a long-term crisis, Syrian refugees have found themselves in a state of both temporality and permanence, frequently cited as being ‘stuck’. Syrians in Jordan, particularly, have fallen victim to this status, labeled as ‘guests’, with corresponding humanitarian aid also reflecting this temporality. However, as the nature of the conflict becomes elongated, Syrians have been forced to settle despite social obstacles. This paradox has proven problematic for communities as they attempt to negotiate this identity and create sustainable livelihoods in Jordan.

Significance

The findings of this study will be crucial in defining the future of Syrian refugees around the world as the refugee crisis has left millions in a state of impermanence, without solution. As the conflict in Syria persists with no resolve in sight. Focusing on the perspective of Syrian refugees, this study works to highlight the influence of temporality existent under Jordan’s guest perception of Syrians and corresponding humanitarian efforts that have presented refugee communities with obstacles. Few studies examine the implications of the Syrian refugee crisis explicitly from the perspective of refugees. This study will therefore rely on Syrian narratives working to amplify the voice of refugees and demonstrate the real application and influence of current social perceptions and efforts using lived experiences to describe the system of

displacement from lived experiences. Additionally, while literature exists on both the perceived temporality of the situation as well as on the growing permanence of refugee situation, there exists a gap in the literature regarding how refugees perceive and negotiated this complex dichotomy. This research comes at a critical time as the narrative has only slowly acknowledged the growing permanence of refugees as the conflict continues with no resolution and no recent literature regarding Syrian status since 2016. As the conflict continues, this study hopes to start dialogue and challenge the temporary perception with the hope that it could be used to help Syrians build sustainable futures for the foreseeable future of the conflict.

Purpose Statement and Specific Aims

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore Syrian perception of ‘guest’ status and current humanitarian efforts in Jordan and see how this demonstrates and challenges the dichotomy present in Syrian refugee status of simultaneous temporality and permanence. This study aims to use Syrian narratives to show how the current larger systems are being applied and interpreted by the relevant communities. Additionally, this study rests on the theory of *Structuration* developed by Anthony Giddens (1984) in which the creation and reproduction of a social system should be based on the analysis of both the structure and agent with neither taking precedence over the other. This theory advances the idea that social structures are created and changed through the exercise of the freedom of action. This will be interesting to test using the idea of ‘guest status’ as the Syrian crisis becomes more permanent. Has this perception remained throughout the years, or have Syrians been active agents in challenging this temporality and integrating? This theory will ensure that this study does not focus just on the overarching humanitarian and government structures in place influencing Syrians, but to also consider the influence and agency Syrians

have in integrating into Jordan and how they utilize humanitarian aid received. This study therefore seeks to understand how the relationship between Syrians and Jordanians have constructed a social system -comprised of perception and assistance- in Jordan using Syrian experiences.

Expected Outcome

While it is believed that perceived guest status and current assistance will be influential in Syrian refugee's experience in Jordan. However, because of the qualitative nature of this study, this study will not include a true directional hypothesis regarding what the effect of 'guest' status or humanitarian assistance will be. Entering the research without any preconceived notions and relying on the narrative of participants ensures that the study effectively relies on their lived experiences.

Researchers' Interest

As a child of refugee parents who fled Gaddafi's persecution, the right of refugees to be granted the minimum basic rights is personal. This positionality, and now privileged, stands as an obligation to ensure that other refugees are given their respective rights and are able to build a future for themselves and their children. The thematic seminars of this SIT program have shed light on the aims and challenges faced by humanitarian organizations helping Syrians through meetings with headquarters in Geneva, to branches of NGOs here in Jordan. However, frequently missing from the discussion is the experiences of Syrian refugees themselves. Inspired by a seminar based on the article 'Stop Stealing our Stories' by Pittaway and Bartolomei, I was motivated to create a study that emulates the proper ethics discussed in the article and ensure that this study relies on the narrative of participants.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature for this study presents the context, perceptions, and response of the Jordan, Syrian refugee crisis as it has evolved in order to better contextualize the purpose of this research:

Syrian perceptions.

Context and Perceptions

Jordan is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention, and consequently, all protection granted to Syrian refugees is an expression of Jordanian good-will, generosity, and piety. Initially, the Jordanian community was receptive to their Syrian neighbors demonstrating hospitality, solidarity, and tolerance for newcomers (Achilli 2016). However, from the beginning of the crisis, Jordan made it clear that protection would remain temporary, rejecting the idea of full integration (Olwan and Shiyab 2012). Seely (2015) in a report published by Generations for Peace attributes this context to be responsible for the ‘guest’ status of Syrians in Jordan where refugees are expected to cooperate and show gratitude for assistance and hospitality. This presents an interesting and almost temporal relationship between Syrian ‘guests’ and the host community that Seely (2015) argues results in ill will when either side fails to meet expectations. Studies like Achilli (2016) attribute growing tensions to be as a result of the protracted nature of the conflict aggravating relationships between the two communities due to diminishing local resources. Achilli (2016) argues that tensions are exacerbated by the widespread belief that Syrians are lavishly living off of international support and assistance while Jordanians remain stranded (Achilli 2016). Since 2016, assistance for Syrians has decreased significantly. No literature exists on the status quo regarding current relationships and

tensions, as Syrians continue to build roots in Jordan and international donor support for humanitarian aid has become limited and strained.

Response

In Jordan, humanitarian assistance programs targeting vulnerable populations can be grouped into four categories: cash assistance and vouchers; education; employment and empowerment; and protection (Roth et al. 2017). However, Burn (2016) describes how initial humanitarian aid distributed in Jordan reinforced the ‘guest’ narrative discussed earlier, and imposed temporary solutions. Humanitarian categories tend to fix people into certain categories, and for Syrians, it became a status that restricted their social mobility and ability to control their future (Burn 2016). This is particularly important to emphasize as it demonstrates the nature of dependency with aid that leaves communities unable to be self-sustainable. Burn (2016) describes how protracted displacement often leaves refugees feeling ‘stuck’ in a status of being displaced and argues that humanitarian assistance for Syrians, in urban centers, requires upgrading infrastructure, housing, and employment in a more long-term perspective. Betts and Collier (2015) emphasize this and urged Jordan to promote Syrian access to education, training, and the right to work; advocating for improving refugees in the short-term but also look at the prospects of long-term development. Additionally, current humanitarian assistance programs, in place have significant gaps. Cash assistance is often only provided ad hoc and one-off payments (Roth et al. 2017). Additionally, most regular transfers are granted for a limited period. As of 2017, only UNHCR and UNICEF were responsible for giving out consisted, unlimited time, cash assistance.

Meanwhile, most Syrian families remain stricken with debt due to lack of cash (Roth et al. 2017).

Developments

The British Embassy (2015) described how the protracted nature of the conflict has shifted the Government of Jordan's approach to be more long-term and sustainable, emphasizing the need to "build social cohesion and resilience in local communities with partnerships from international organizations" through plans like the 'Regional Refugee Resilience Plan' (3RP). More recent literature also reflects this shift. Kelberer (2017) introduces the 'Jordan compact' which describes and demonstrates a shift in status by committing to granting Syrians access to work permits through the Ministry of Labor, expanding educational opportunities for Syrians, as well as including additional protections and rights. The Jordanian Compact was modeled as a success of many levels and has been represented as a model for the long-awaited "sustainable refugee response" (Kelberer 2017). These studies show that the government and humanitarian aid organizations recognize that the conflict is no longer temporary. However, this does not mean that this has changed or altered response plans. Despite, the Government of Jordan's obligation to provide 200,000 work permits- enabling Syrian refugees to work legally, work permits only cover certain sectors and are tied to specific employers (Roth et al. 2017). In 2016, only one percent of all Syrians in Jordan had work permits (Achilli 2016).

Reality

Stevens (2016) shows a strong correlation between improved economic outcomes and the emotional wellbeing of urban refugee populations. However, emotional and financial constraints of exile have resulted in the collapse of Syrian social networks in Jordan (Steven 2016). These

constraints hint towards a discrepancy between proposed long-term initiatives and the reality of the situation. Therefore, The research presented shows the initial Jordanian perspective and consequential responses as well as how response has evolved, in theory. As the UNHCR (2018) report discusses, 86% of Syrians currently live below the poverty line despite the developments discussed above. This highlights a gap in the literature regarding how response plans have evolved and more importantly how Syrians currently regard the status quo. Literature in 2019 remains limited to discussions of current obstacles in healthcare and education rather than limitations to assistance and empowerment. Meanwhile, the narrative and perception of Syrians regarding current humanitarian assistance and ‘guest’ status is nonexistent. Therefore, this study looks at current response plans and ‘guest’ status perception and how this has evolved in light of the length of the conflict through the Syrian experience to highlight the application of the discussions presented.

Theory

Understanding Syrian narratives in relation to integration will give further insight into how Syrians negotiate factors such as ‘guest’ status and humanitarian aid efforts. Additionally, since this study looks to Syrian experiences utilizing the framework of duration, now that the conflict has evolved, length spent in Jordan hints towards potential integration. Ager and Strang (2008) provide a conceptual structure for considering what constitutes key components of integration. The areas identified include employment, housing, education, and health which are acknowledged by diverse stakeholders to be key aspects in integrating into a new society (Ager and Strang 2008). All which heavily relate to humanitarian aid efforts for Syrians in Jordan now.

Smyth et al. (2010) add to this discourse by complicating the debate to also acknowledge the role of institutional environments in conjunction with personal capacities of the settling population (411). Barriers such as language, cultural knowledge, safety, and security also play a role in the ability for refugees to integrate in addition to participation in the mentioned sectors. (Ager and Strang 2008). Successful integrational relies on all sectors of society including public bodies, religious leaders, and community support, all which must be examined using a multifaceted approach. Additionally, establishing relationships with local host communities plays an important role in fostering integration (Smyth et al. 2010). In addition to questions regarding 'guest' status and humanitarian assistance, interview questions took from these theories to better understand how either permanent and integrated or how temporary Syrians status is.

METHODOLOGY

In an effort to understand the perceptions of Syrian refugees, I embedded myself into three Syrian housing communities across Amman, Jordan and conducted interviews with any willing participants at their homes. The names of communities visited is being withheld to protect the participants and their families. My data is a compilation of ten semi-structured interviews: two Syrian men and eight Syrian women, all who happen to be widows living in Jordan. The interviews were designed with three major concept components. The first component was assessing the application and sustainability of humanitarian assistance from the experience of Syrians. The second component was understanding Syrians perspective of 'guest' status in Jordan and its implications. The third component sought to investigate the conjunction of humanitarian assistance and 'guest' status in affecting Syrians experience in Jordan.

Participants

The composition of this study's participants include Syrian refugees who fled as a result of the 2011 Syrian Civil War and currently reside in Amman, Jordan to see the experience of Syrians in an urban setting. This study relied exclusively on Syrians and their perspective as it hinges on their lived experiences with humanitarian assistance and 'guest' status. Only Syrians can discuss if and how 'guest' status has impacted them and their ability to integrate into Amman as the conflict continues to evolve. Therefore, this study is incomplete without their narrative. With regard to the 'gender' of participants, this study attempted to enlist an equal amount of men and women, however, due to accessibility, and a disproportionate amount of females participants, this study enlisted more females than men. Participants were located primarily using convenient sampling. Snowball sampling was also utilized to help locate Syrian communities in Amman.

Data Collection

This study collected qualitative data that was done in accordance with the research questions guiding the study. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, semi-structured interviews were utilized as my source of data collection reliant on direct communication. The interviews were all approximately twenty minutes and were conducted in Arabic with the help of a translator. Prior to interviews, all participants were given background information regarding the purpose of the research, briefed on the consent form, and given an opportunity to ask any questions before beginning. LRB approval was granted prior to starting interviews. All interviews were audio-recorded so that answers could be transcribed during data analysis, however, to protect the identity of my participants, I requested that participants not give me their

names. Only demographic information regarding age, gender, and years in Jordan were collected during interviews.

Interviews enhanced the study by giving participants agency and the opportunity to present their personal narratives without limitations which was integral to understanding the complexity of Syrians' status in Jordan and the delicate shift in response plans and its application as the conflict endures. Providing participants with a safe space to express their opinions freely and comfortably allowed for a more nuanced discussion of Syrians experience and perspective, something frequently restricted as a vulnerable population. This allowed conversation to flow and frequently ventured into areas not necessarily covered by my questions, however equally important in contextualizing issues discussed. None of my participants were compensated for their participation.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed manually and was followed by a thematic analysis. Extracted themes and categories based on "real data" were then confirmed by another analyst of experience who was hired for the purpose of this project to ensure reliability and help reduce the potential impact of bias. This process included a thorough inductive analysis of the participants' experience, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to better develop an overall picture of the problem under investigation.

Data Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of this data was established. Credibility was addressed through triangulation that included the use of both interviews and field notes. Additionally, credibility was addressed by ensuring that themes are entirely dependent on participants' narratives. A

member check method was also enlisted during and throughout interviews with participants to examine the extent to which the data collected reflected their words and emotions. This is imperative because this study is dependent on their perspectives and emotions. The dependability was maximized by utilizing another qualitative researcher who independently carried out coding and analysis of the transcripts to ensure that the findings are consistent and could be repeated. Consequently, all themes and subthemes were validated throughout the whole data analysis process and also ensured confirmability. Finally, this study provides thick descriptions and details of the data collection process, to show that the study's findings can be applicable in other contexts, therefore confirming transferability.

Obstacles

One of the largest obstacles encountered during data collection stemmed from the limited access to my target population. As neither a Jordanian or Syrian native, I was dependent upon my connections at the School for International Training for interviews and access to Syrian communities in Amman. Consequently data collected used convenient sampling and therefore, the study was not able to reach data saturation, which would have served as a better representation of patterns in the larger Amman. Despite this, utilizing convenient sampling focused the study on very particular populations often identified as vulnerable. Therefore, specifically looking at the needs of vulnerable Syrian refugees gave better insight into the reality of humanitarian assistance for those most dependent on it.

Additionally, due to the limited exposure and time constraints, integrating male participants into the study presented itself as another obstacle. While the study initially called for

an equal male to female ratio for participation, the lack of access resulted in significantly fewer male participants. However, the lack of men in these vulnerable Syrian communities, reliant on donor assistance, indicated a theme in the data regarding the relationship between humanitarian assistance and gender discussed in the findings.

FINDINGS

Themes	Meaning	Quotes
Influence of Humanitarian Assistance : Gender Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Widow women are more dependent on humanitarian aid -Women cannot work and raise their children -Living as a woman alone increases feelings of helplessness -Both male participants were employed and therefore found aid to be sufficient or unnecessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -“The hardest part is being a single woman responsible for an entire family. I have to choose between working and raising my children” -“My children are orphans and we are living here off of zakat and we depend on it because I cannot work. I have to stay home and take care of them and the house and there is no man here to work and provide for us.”
Perceived Lack of Transparency from Humanitarian Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Refugees are not being communicated to about the loss of aid -Refugees are unfamiliar with the system of assistance and therefore are constantly fearful -Fear of losing UNHCR cash assistance and food cards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -“ I also used to receive financial aid from the UNHCR for a 125JD per month and then they suddenly stopped it once. I have gone multiple times and complained and asked why they stopped it but nothing happened” - “We pay for our healthcare because we receive financial aid and we are afraid. There was a lady here who went to go get her child treated at a Jihaaz system [which provides free assistance] and when the UNHCR found out that they treated her daughter for free they stopped her assistance”.
Impaired Social Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Syrians have neither relationships nor established interactions with the Jordanian community -Distinction between Jordanian and Syrian spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Everyone has their own place; they stick to themselves and we stick to ourselves. We feel as if they don’t want to be involved with us. They don’t even say good morning to us. If we make any noise, our Jordanian neighbors say “we” [Syrians] are not allowed to do that.” - “They have their community and place and we have our different place and community”.
Instability of Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Humanitarian assistance has decreased and become more inconsistent as the length of the conflict has increased -Majority of aid is given by local donations (Zaakat) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “If we don’t get financial we start thinking about how we will have to move somewhere else. These last few months they thought they weren’t going to have enough funds and were going to have to

	<p>making it inconsistent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lack of dependency on current aid -Current assistance is not sustainable for the livelihood of Syrians in Jordan making Syrians feel as if their situation is temporal -Current financial assistance is more influential than Jordanian perspective in making Syrians feel as if their situation is temporal 	<p>leave but then last minute someone paid for our rent.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Financial aid concerns are what I fear the most but the schools and employment are minimal and not satisfactory to continue life here.”
Perception of Guest Status has Changed over Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Started as guests, then refugees, and now Jordan is ‘used’ to Syrians, in their own isolated spaces -Syrians perceive guest status as better than refugee status as it deems better treatment -Syrians feel as if they have put immense pressure on Jordanian community. -Temporality, a psychological battle for Syrians who feel isolated, lonely, and as if they are a burden. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “At the beginning, we were treated well. As if we were guests. But then after a while everything we did made life worst for Jordanians and they treated us badly, like a refugee.” - “I feel shy and feel as if I have become pressure on the country and don’t know how to make it better.”
Future Uncertainty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Syrian adults can’t imagine a future for themselves due temporal permanence. -Syrians are instead focused on the future of their children -Prevalent belief that Syrians need to go back to Syria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -“I dream of tar! There is no future. I am 24 years old, I should have a life but no my life is ruined. I just don’t care anymore” -“I can’t envision myself staying in Jordan or going back to Syria so I can’t even imagine anything when I think about the future”.

DISCUSSION

The research questions presented to participants sought to understand how ‘guest’ status and humanitarian assistance have affected the experience of Syrians and their ability to build sustainable lives in Jordan, using their perspectives. The questions therefore investigated: participants current financial situation in relation to current humanitarian efforts, their perspective on the status ‘guest’, and current engagements in Jordan that would indicate integration based off of Ager and Strang (2008) model. As expected, humanitarian assistance and ‘guest’ status were influential to Syrians experience in Jordan. Additionally, data regarding perspectives on humanitarian assistance and ‘guest’ status informed the research of a relationship between the two factors initially treated as distinct. ‘Guest’ status denotes a temporary state

which has consequently influenced the structure of assistance as it also remains temporal in nature, reinforcing the limbo experienced by all Syrian participants. The perceived status of Syrians as ‘guest’ has directly influenced the aid received by Syrian families as one participant noted,

At the beginning of the crisis Jordanians used to give us donations but as the conflict has continued over the years people have stopped giving us funds because they have started to believe that we need to go back to our country (Interview 1).

This connections relates to Achilli (2016) assessment that attributes growing tensions to be as a result of the protracted nature of the conflict which has influenced the distribution of aid. This is particularly concerning when assessing its implications on housing for Syrian communities where nine out of ten participants were reliant on funds from Jordanian donations to pay for rent. All nine participants raised concern about dwindling donations and fear regarding where their families will come next payment. While all Syrian participants made sure to emphasize how thankful they were for Jordanian hospitality, terms like “instability”, “fear” and “inconsistent” dominated the interview and illuminated central themes raised by the questions.

Perceived Lack of Transparency from Humanitarian Organizations

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is one of the largest organizations providing support to Syrian refugees in Jordan. Participants frequently cited the UNHCR as a source of assistance where eight out of ten participants who participated in the study were currently receiving some sort of help. Meanwhile, all ten participants had at one point received help from the UNHCR. The helped described by participants consisted of food cards and occasional cash assistance, however, all interviewees expressed how assistance from the

UNHCR has decreased significantly. This is exemplified by reports released by UNHCR (2018 2019) Jordan which estimated the financial requirement for 2019 to be USD 371.8 million an increase from 2018 which estimated USD 274.9 million. This increasing demand has been met with reduced donations exacerbating existing problems in Jordan regarding the Syrian refugee response. As of May 2019, the UNHCR had funded only 20% of required funding for current operations. Interviews contextualized this as participants who were recipients of aid were fearful of losing UNHCR food cards and cash assistance. One interviewee described how her and fellow Syrians in the community now are forced to pay for healthcare in the private sector because they fear going to the Jihaaz system will result in the UNHCR pulling funds:

We pay for our healthcare because we receive financial aid and we are afraid. There was a lady here who went to go get her child treated at a Jihaaz system and when the UNHCR found out that they treated her daughter for free they stopped her assistance (Interview 6)

Refugees are unfamiliar with the system of assistance and therefore are constantly fearful that their actions will result in the loss of aid from the UNHCR. Burns (2016) discusses how this is a common repercussion of humanitarian assistance as it works as a system that works to restrict the mobility of recipients. This raises concern as many participants cited this assistance as integral to their lives in Jordan. One of the two participants interviewed who no longer receive assistance from the UNHCR emphasized these grievances and expressed her confusion and frustration:

I have tried so many times to get help from the UNHCR or any organization, but they haven't given me any. I don't understand why. I now am forced to rely on my daughter who works as a

hairdresser, so she helps me, however, it isn't enough to support me and her and her son

(Interview 4).

Refugees are not only unfamiliar with the system of assistance but are not being communicated to about the loss of aid. This was one of the most dominant themes located in the data from interviews.

Instability of Resources

Consequently, Syrian refugees are living in a state of temporality, unsure of what actions may prevent them from receiving assistance and how their insecure financial situation will affect their future. This situation is best described by Burn (2016) which has labeled Syrians as 'stuck'. In addition to the assistance received from the UNHCR, nine out of ten participants described receiving assistance from local donations. Donations were described as money given from local community members and religious organizations and played a significant role in participants lives. A majority of aid from donations has covered housing, utilities, and water for these Syrian families. However, these local donations are inconsistent and cannot be relied on. One interviewee describes why aid is inconsistent in her interview and talks about how this inconsistency has affected her and her family,

We get donations from people in the community... sometimes people stop paying and others will start to help pay. If we don't get help from donations we start thinking about how we will have to move somewhere else. These last few months I thought we weren't going to have enough funds and were going to have to leave but then last minute someone paid for our rent (Interview 1).

This context of dependency on assistance and the lack of consistency has introduced a paradox as participants depend on aid but recognize that it is neither reliable nor sustainable. Current

assistance is not sustainable for the livelihood of Syrians in Jordan going into the future and this was recognized by all nine participants currently relying on aid from donors for housing. As Roth et al (2017) discuss in their article, cash assistance for vulnerable populations typically is provided an ad hoc. Even coping methods taken up by families who have felt the severe decrease in aid have not found sustainable solutions to the growing decrease in donations. One participant described how in just the last year, donations to help pay for rent and utilities has virtually stopped,

People have stopped helping us and I have had to start taking out those loans. Things are becoming harder, especially this last year. Donors are almost nonexistent in comparison to at the beginning. Donors would help for a month, two months a year or two years but we still haven't left and the conflict has become so long we have become forgotten (Interview 8).

Jordan is not sustainable on current assistance and families have been forced to take loans from fellow family members to have a roof over their head. Loans are not a durable solution to donations to provide stable lives for Syrian families here in Jordan. However, as literature as shown, most Syrians have been forced to take out loans and are stricken with debt due to lack of cash (Roth et al. 2017). All Syrian woman interviewed felt the implications of the growing instability of resources, a major theme discovered. One participant discussed these implications in a discussion regarding the importance of stability in providing a true home and symbolized its meaning through ownership,

Every person wishes they have a home and stability, but we don't have that. Every time we feel like we are in a place we are moved to another. Even if I go and buy a chair, I don't know where to put it because I know it will only be there temporarily. Everything is temporary. Where will we

stay tomorrow? We are currently sitting here temporary. I feel alright in the country, but I will never feel at home (Interview 3).

This instability in conjunction with the lack of sustainable solutions have left families feeling as if their situation is temporary despite all having lived in Jordan for longer than six years, and many for eight. While this study sought to understand the implications of humanitarian assistance and ‘guest’ status, and while they are relational, families frequently cited that these gaps in humanitarian assistance are what affect them the most and their ability to make a home in Jordan, more than their perceived status in the country.

Influence of Humanitarian Assistance on Gender

According to the UNHCR’s fact sheet, one of the organization's main activities sought to offer humanitarian cash assistance, targeting the most vulnerable refugees residing outside of camps in Jordan (UNHCR 2019). Through interviews, the research demonstrated a theme linking humanitarian assistance to gender. The vulnerable Syrian communities visited for the purpose of the study, reliant on donations to pay for rent and UNHCR support, revealed a disproportionate amount of women living in the buildings, all either widowed or with husbands still in Syria. This positionality was reflected in the study where eight of the ten participants interviewed were women. Meanwhile both men interviewed, while still vulnerable, expressed better financial security for themselves and their family that came from their employment opportunities. During interviews, female Syrian participants expressed some of the factors that have prevented them from obtaining work and have forced them to remain reliant on humanitarian assistance. One of the largest reasons cited by five out of eight participants was their inability to care for kids and work and therefore remain unemployed. As one widowed Syrian woman mentioned,

No. I have little children and don't have the financial capability to put my children in child-care so I have to stay home with them and there isn't any stable work that would allow me to be with my kids and able to provide for them financially (Interview 8).

This narrative reflects the experience of many other Syrian women who participated in the study who also felt as if they could not provide for themselves and their family because they had to stay home and take care of their children. Another factor discussed by participants included harassment in the workplace from male counterparts. As one interview describes,

I have been doing work from the house like cooking and cleaning. It's better to work from the house where we don't face any harassment. When I used to work outside the house, we faced so much harassment on the streets and at my job (Interview 5).

Women disproportionately face obstacles in securing financial opportunities due to obstacles like lack of affordable child-care and harassment and therefore have undertaken less secure opportunities from the home like sewing and cooking. However, these opportunities do not qualify as jobs and all women described these activities as not being sufficient. Consequently, assistance is perceived as imperative to the women interviewed to ensuring at least the very minimum basic necessities are met. One interviewee discussed current limitations in relation to the lack of work opportunities stating,

My children are orphans and we are living here off of zakat and we depend on it because I cannot work. I have to stay home and take care of them and the house and there is no man here to work and provide for us (Interview 6).

As this narrative demonstrates, these obstacles are emphasized by participants perception that men typically help in providing financially for their families since women also have to care for

children. Consequently, women participants described how important assistance is in ensuring they have the basic necessities. Otherwise, many participants discussed getting loans and help from neighbors and friends. However, the help given frequently was described as coming from a male figure. Several of the Syrian woman interviewed described getting help from their brothers or sons, however no participant mentioned a female helping financially support. Additionally, based off of participants experience with humanitarian assistance, the structures of assistance present for Syrian woman exacerbate this gender discrepancy. One participant described how she used to receive both cash assistance and a food card every month from the UNHCR, however, this last year they stopped giving her cash assistance because, “they say that my son is now a man” (Interview 7). Another participant discussed her experience with housing provided by a religious organization that held similar expectations for her son to be the one responsible for working,

At the age of ten our boys are expected to leave [the donor funded housing] and provide for the family or the whole family has to leave. I had to leave because of my son and the housing since has been the worst, donorship this year has stopped, and I am taking loans.

Current humanitarian structures and efforts have left widowed and single women alone to care for their children, dependent on assistance and at the mercy of others, while men have the expectation to work. Living as a woman alone increases feelings of helplessness, particularly for Syrian refugees who are already vulnerable.

This is validated by interviews with the two Syrian male participants who were both employed. One of the male participants described his job freelancing as a general trader in the production of leather, employed, he describes no longer needing humanitarian assistance or

receiving any. When questioned about his experience in Jordan, the participant responded, “ I have built myself a home here, I have a job here, in Syria I have nothing to go back to”

(Interview 9). Secondly, the second participant worked informally in the apartment complex for Syrians, and therefore had his rent consistently paid for. When questioned about his satisfaction with current assistance, the male Syrian participant responded,

We don't rely on humanitarian aid anymore. Life is so much harder without this assistance and we welcome it when we get it. However, we have adjusted and rely on ourselves for the most part. The only type of people who really get aid are mothers with children who are orphans because their fathers are dead (Interview 10).

As the final participant carefully points out Syrian men with jobs are no longer reliant on aid, however, the groups disproportionately affected by the growing and instability of humanitarian aid are women.

Perception of Guest Status

While the state of humanitarian assistance was perceived as far more pressing than Syrian status in Jordan, it still was significant in influencing the experience of Syrians. In addition to the relationship between humanitarian assistance and ‘guest’ status, interviews began to introduce a shift in perspective regarding Syrian status in Jordan, breaking from literature and introducing another important theme in the data. When asked about what it means to be a ‘guest’, all participants discussed it to be a feeling and state of the past. Many participants when asked what being a ‘guest’ would imply, many attributed it with words like ‘respect’, ‘hospitality’, and ‘welcoming’. However, no participant attributed their current status in Jordan to be that of a ‘guest’ contradicting the findings of Seely (2015). Rather, Syrians felt as if ‘guest’ status was no

longer relevant to their situation in Jordan. While this status may have been prevalent in 2015, all participants agreed that it was no longer applicable to their current situation. Instead one participant distinguished between being a ‘guest’ and a Syrian now in Jordan as their situation in the country has evolved,

At the beginning, we were treated well and respected. As if we were guests. But then after a while everything we did made life worst for Jordanians and they treated us badly. When you go out to the market you always hear talk from Jordanians (Interview 3).

Initially treated as guest, Syrian participants experience in Jordan described a shift in the attitude of Jordanians towards Syrians that has become much more hostile as the length of the conflict increased. One participant shared her experience with Jordanians as the conflict has evolved and recalled interactions with Jordanians,

Do you know what they tell us now? ‘Oh you are Syrian? Why don’t you go back? What are you still doing here’. That’s what Jordanians say about us now. Just yesterday I was at the supermarket and the man said ‘Wow Syria is such a beautiful country. What are you doing here? Why don’t you go back?’ Why is it his business? There is no safety in Syrian, we can’t go back (Interview 2).

Syrian participants are not allowed to be naive to their situation and frequently cited instances of hostility from Jordanians. It is this perception that has influenced the reduction of assistance previously discussed and increases insecurities faced by Syrians. As one participant stated, “we feel as if we have overstayed our welcome and it is hard because if we had a choice, we wouldn’t be here” (Interview 7). Instead, Syrian participants who described the diminishing idea of ‘guest’ instead described how they now felt as if they are a refugee now. A status described by

participants with a negative connotation. None of the literature found regarding Syrian status to have shifted. Instead, hostilities regarding status is consistently attributed to the temporality associated with 'guest'. Their experience with the word 'refugee' is not something they enjoyed being classified as. Instead, one participant even described the toll that being a 'refugee' put on her psychologically and described the difference between a 'guest' and a 'refugee' in depth,

You know, everything bad that happens in Jordan, they put it on us Syrians. We aren't even guests here. You don't do that to a guest. We are refugees. There is a difference between guest and refugee, a guest is someone who you welcome, a refugee is someone who you don't welcome. We are refugees. Deep inside me it is bad, it has destroyed me. We have come to another war, but it is a different type of war. This war is psychological (Interview 8).

As the conflict in Syria continues to evolve, it is not only Jordanians perspective that has changed Syrian participants also expressed their struggle in coming to terms with their new status in Jordan. Syrians described an internal struggle as they have attempted to negotiate both mentally and physically their new position in the country. However, interviewees also elaborated on this shift in perspectives not previously described in recent published literature. This hint in another shift is best exemplified in the perspective of one Syrian who stated,

Long ago they used to call Palestinians guests, right? And now look they are just part of the community. Now of course we were treated as guests but not anymore. Now they say, "why don't you go back to Syria?" but what are we expected to do? We cannot go back. Maybe we end up like the Palestinians who are now accepted. You never know. I think Jordanians have started to tolerate us (Interview 6) .

When participants were asked about if and how Jordans perspective has changed over time, 90% of refugees interviewed believe that Jordanians have started to ‘get used’ to Syrian refugees in Jordan. With that in mind, all participants believe that they are a growing burden on Jordan and frequently referred to themselves as “pressure”. As one participant put it, ‘We are not guests, we are pressure. I can’t explain how helpless I feel. I can’t go back to Syrian but I feel as if I cannot stay here’ (Interview 1). Syrians feel as if they have put immense pressure on the Jordanian community. As the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan continues to evolve, so has the perspective of and status of Syrians in the country. As seen through published literature, Syrians were identified and treated as ‘guests’ (Stevens 2016). However, perspectives have and continue to evolve, now transitioning from refugees, exposed to hostility, Syrians now believe they are becoming more permanent members of the Jordanian community.

Implications

Through the narrative of Syrian refugee participants, the role of humanitarian aid structures and Joranian perspectives in affecting the experiences of Syrian refugees in Jordan became apparent. Syrians, faced with financial constraints and internal struggles associated with ‘pressure’ and ‘guilt’ in conjunction with the extended nature of the conflict in Syria are living in a state of simultaneous permanence and impermanence. With the exception of one participant, all Syrian participants have lived in Jordan for over six years. However, despite the duration of their stay, the obstacles discussed have left so many Syrians feeling uncertain of what tomorrow holds. Syrians described themselves as feeling as outsiders, despite living in urban communities among Jordanians. This isolation described by Syrians is what Stevens (2016) describes as a result of a collapse in Syrian social networks as a result of financial constraints. As one

participant noted, “Everyone has their own place; they stick to themselves and we stick to ourselves. We feel as if they don’t want to be involved with us. They don’t even say good morning to us. If we make any noise, our Jordanian neighbors say “we” [Syrians] are not allowed to do that” (Interview 7). Syrians have neither relationships nor established connections or interactions with the larger Jordanian community. Meanwhile, there exists a distinction between Jordanian and Syrian spaces. As one Syrian woman noted, “they have their community and place and we have our place and community”. This sentiment was expressed in all ten interviews. Syrians have yet to integrate into Jordan, viewing themselves as distinct, however, with no plans to return to Syrian they remain ‘stuck’.

The paradox Syrians currently live in made discussions regarding the future difficult. Syrian adults can’t imagine a future for themselves due to the temporal permanence they currently live in faced with uncertainty regarding the future of Syria as one participant noted, “I can’t envision myself staying in Jordan or going back to Syria so I can’t even imagine or think about my future” (Interview 3). The implications of the growing conflict have left a generation of Syrians without aspirations or goals. Burns (2016) describes how often humanitarian assistance leaves refugees feeling out of control of their future harming future aspirations. Something found in interviews with all participants. Syrians described how they are focused on tomorrow, planning on how to cover rent and food if assistance is cut. This perspective has taken its toll as one participant, asked about her future responded,

I dream of tar! There is no future. I am 24 years old, I should have a life but no my life is ruined.

I just don’t care anymore. I am living for my children and their future now (Interview 2).

These sentiments were reiterated by many who when asked about their future, instead focused on the future of their children. Many had given up on hope for their generation, however, remained hopeful for their children.

CONCLUSION

As presumed, Syrian perception of humanitarian assistance and ‘guest’ perspectives both played significant roles in shaping the experience of Syrian refugees in Jordan. What was initially treated as two independent factors, was quickly revealed as correlational as humanitarian assistance remained vulnerable to ‘guest’ status. Over the last two years particularly, donations from donors has dramatically decreased due to the stereotype that Syrians should go home. However, during all interviews, no participant expressed a capacity to be able to go back to Syrian anywhere in the near future. What was not expected in the data was the particular impacts of decreased humanitarian aid. The first impact included the disenfranchisement Syrian women, many who are widowed and are forced to take care of themselves and their families with the lack of a male to help financially support the family. The second, included an increased sense of temporality as families described a lack of stability and transparency from organizations. Additionally, this study did not account for how and why ‘guest’ status would be influential. Participants now long to be classified as ‘guests’ as they instead currently struggle to break free from their identity as a ‘refugee’ but feel uncomfortable in Jordan where many Syrian participants labeled themselves as ‘pressure’ or ‘burdens’.

It is these obstacles that have presented Syrians with both physical and mental barriers encountered while living in Jordan that have not allowed Syrians to settled after years and years

of residing in Jordan since the conflict began. Syrians live in a state of temporality and yet try to build homes, at least for their children. This study worked to highlight their perspectives, and more importantly their narratives, so that light may be shed on their real experiences

STUDY LIMITATIONS

With the findings and analysis in mind, there are a number of limitations that must be addressed that compromise the ability of this study to reach definite conclusions and sufficiently either prove or disprove my hypothesis. Additionally, this study relied on the narratives and perspectives of Syrian refugee participants to shed light on their experience in Jordan. While general themes were able to be deduced, it is important to note that no two individuals have the same experience. Therefore, while the data collected from the study presented themes, they cannot speak for the experience of any other Syrian refugees.

With that in mind, the most significant limitation included time constraints. With only a month and a half to develop a literature review, collect data, and perform analysis, the research is not comprehensive. Due to the limited time available, only ten interviews were secured using convenient sampling from a similar network of Syrian refugee families in Amman and therefore data saturation could not be reached. Additionally the gender ratio of participants was skewed as the study enlisted eight females and only two males. For this study, random sampling would have provided the study with a more diverse sample size that enlisted far more Syrian refugees in Amman. This makes current data hard to generalize due to how populations were located. Meanwhile, another consequence of the time constraint was the lack of time to revise and adapt questions. When translated into Arabic, the questions were not checked for validity which resulted in questions devised without the proper rhetoric. For example questions regarding

‘guest’ status were lost in translation and frequently had to be rephrased during interviews.

Meanwhile, other questions remained unproductive to the discussion of this paper which should have been revised to better relate to the exploration of the study.

The language barrier between the researcher and the interviewee also limits the reliability of the research. While a Jordanian translator was used, this presented its own obstacles as Syrians may have been hesitant to talk about Jordanian hospitality with a Jordanian present. Additionally interviews could have been stronger had not been present. This is partially due to the fact that the research was unable to directly communicate with participants making the environment more tense and formal rather than just a conversation in which the researcher could ease the interviewees concerns. Additionally, the presence of a translator made it difficult for the researcher to ask clarifying questions, particularly in regards to the connotation of words used.

One final limitation addresses the potential of bias regarding Jordanian perspective of Syrians. While this study intentionally solely relied on the narrative and experiences of Syrians it is limited in the fact it does not include Jordanian thoughts and perspectives of Syrians. Therefore, it is important to note that this study does not stand as a representation of the Jordanian perspective and is instead limited by the lack of their perspective. However, this study instead focused on Syrians perspectives of Jordanian perspective.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To analyze the effects of humanitarian assistance and ‘guest’ status on the experience of Syrian refugees, this study exclusively engaged the perspective and narrative of Syrian refugees. In order to understand this issue more holistically, I recommend that a comparative study be done that enlists the perspective of Jordanians. Understanding Jordanians’ perspective regarding Syrians will allow the study to better understand how these behaviors and attitudes are affecting Syrians in Jordan. In doing so, this may better contextualize the experience of Syrians.

Additionally, a comparative study utilizing both Syrian adults and youth would be beneficial in understanding the implications of current physical and mental obstacles that have resulted in adult participants feeling as if their situation is temporary. Syrian youth have grown up in Jordan, therefore an exploration of their perspective and experiences would bring an interesting perspective to the discussion.

Finally, this research may be expanded upon by focusing specifically on the experience of widowed women, which this study revealed are disproportionately more reliant on humanitarian aid. A discussion with widowed women regarding obstacles preventing them from receiving financial security would better highlight gaps in current assistance and needed reforms. Along that vein, this particular focus would do well to enlist the opinion of humanitarian organizations to investigate what efforts and programs have been implemented specifically to target widowed women who seem most reliant on humanitarian aid.

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APPENDICES

Questionnaire

Gender: Female Male

Age: _____

How many years have you been in Jordan? _____

Questions for Syrian Participants Receiving Aid:

1. Do you currently have a job in Amman?
 1. If so, where do you work? Do you enjoy it?
 2. If not, why?
2. What organizations do you currently receive aid from?
 1. What type of aid do you currently receive?
 2. Does the aid received make a significant difference in your quality of life?
3. What are some of the barriers preventing you from receiving aid or attached to current assistance?

4. Has the type of assistance you have received changed over time? If so, how?
5. Do you think the aid you currently receive is sufficient to maintain your current lifestyle in Jordan?
6. Do you receive any assistance outside of humanitarian organizations?
 1. If so, who or where do you receive help from?
7. Do you feel comfortable and happy with the Jordanian governments' hospitality?
 1. Are you happy with the education your children receive?
 2. How happy are you with your access to healthcare?
8. Do you feel as though you are at home and welcome in Jordan?
 1. If so, could you see yourself staying in Jordan? Why?
 2. If not, what factors make you feel unwelcome?
9. When you first came to Jordan, did you feel like a guest?
 1. If so, by who?
 2. What did it mean for you to be a 'guest' in Jordan?
 3. What is your personal opinion regarding the stereotype that Syrians are 'guests' in Jordan?
 4. Can you describe any instance or interaction where your 'guest' status influenced the situation?
 1. If so, when did this instance happen?
 5. Do you still feel like a guest in Jordan?
10. Do you feel as if Jordan's perception of Syrians as 'guests' has changed as the situation in Syria becomes longer?
 1. How has this perception changed over time?
11. What do you believe to be the hardest part about living in Jordan as a Syrian now?
12. What are your relationships with your neighbors and greater Jordanian community like?
13. Would you go back to Syria if the situation in the country improved?
 1. If so, why?
 2. If not, why not?
14. When you think about the future, what do you envision?
15. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?



PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT TEMPLATE

Title of the Study: **The Temporary Permanence of Syrian Refugees: Influence of Syrians’ “Guest” status on Integration and the Corresponding Response Plans in Amman, Jordan**

Researcher Name: Leila Abdussalam Ismaio

My name is Leila Ismaio and I am a student participating in the School for International Training program.

I would like to invite you to participate in a study I am conducting as part of the SIT Study Abroad program in Amman, Jordan. Your participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and you will be given a copy of this form.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research project is to focus on Syrian perception of ‘guests’ status as the conflict has evolved and how and if this has influenced humanitarian assistance received by Syrians.

STUDY PROCEDURES

Your participation will consist of semi-structured interview questions and will require approximately thirty minutes of your time. Please note that this interview will be audio-recorded for data collection purposes, however, they will not be distributed anywhere. Participants can still participate in the study if they do not wish to be recorded.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study and no penalties should you choose not to participate; participation is voluntary. During the interview you have the right not to answer any questions or to discontinue participation at any time.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

While this study will not present direct benefit to individual participants, it hopes to benefit the greater Syrian community in Amman, Jordan by highlighting individual lived experiences and shedding light on current obstacles faced by the Syrian community

CONFIDENTIALITY

This study is anonymous. I will not be collecting or retaining any information about your identity. All interviews will be numbered instead of identified by name. Additionally, after interview data is analyzed, all data will be deleted off of my laptop and phone. However, during the data collection and analysis process, all information will be kept on my password protected devices and will not be distributed. The recipients of my published study include members of the School for International Training as well as my home institution. However, when the results of the research are published or discussed no identifiable information will be used. All participants also have the right to stop the interview at any point and to retract any and all statements if desired.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

“I have read the above and I understand its contents and I agree to participate in the study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older.”

Participant's signature _____ *Date* _____

Researcher's signature _____ *Date* _____

[This section should include other explicit consents for optional elements of the research procedures, such as audiotaping, videotaping, storing photographs for future use, or using the subjects' actual name in research publications.]

Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

_____ (initial) I agree to...

_____ (initial) I do not agree to...

Examples:**Consent to Quote from Interview**

I may wish to quote from the interview with your child either in the presentations or articles resulting from this work. [If a pseudonym will be used, include this statement: A pseudonym (fake name) will be used in order to protect your child's identity.]

Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

_____ (initial) I agree to...

_____ (initial) I do not agree to...

Consent to Audio-Record Interview

Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

_____ (initial) I agree to...

_____ (initial) I do not agree to...

Consent to have recordings played in public (if relevant): "I give my consent to be recorded and to allow that the recording be used in conference (classroom) presentation."

Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

_____ (initial) I agree to...

_____ (initial) I do not agree to...

RESEARCHER'S CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or want to get more information about this study, please contact me at lismaio@colgate.edu or my advisor Dr. Latefa Dardasat l.dardas@ju.edu.jo

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT proposals, this study has been reviewed and approved by an SIT Study Abroad Local Review Board or SIT Institutional Review Board. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant or the research in general and are unable to contact the researcher please contact the Institutional Review Board at:

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