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Transnational mobilities during the Syrian war

An ethnography of rural refugees and Evangelical humanitarians in Mafraq, Jordan

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PhD in International Development

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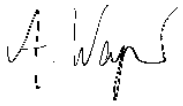
Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own. Some ethnographic vignettes and sub-sections appear in modified form in three publications which were released at about the same time as this thesis (Wagner 2017; Wagner 2018a; Wagner 2018b).

Signature: 

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Abstract

This thesis explores how conflict and closed borders have reshaped transnational mobilities in the Levant since 2011. It draws on fourteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in Mafraq, a provincial town in northern Jordan, in 2016/17. At the time of my research, Mafraq was home to ca. 100,000 locals and similar numbers of Syrians. The timeframe of the study coincides with a specific moment of the humanitarian response in Jordan when stricter encampment policies had exacerbated legal insecurity for urban refugees and the dwindling of international aid had heightened the importance of grassroots and faith-based organisations to Syrians' daily survival.

The thesis speaks to recent debates on "mobility" in the Anthropology of Humanitarianism, Forced Migration and Middle Eastern Studies. It captures intersecting transnational networks of two populations that often remain invisible to policymakers and academics: marginalized rural Syrians that come from, migrate and flee to remote borderlands in the Levant, and Evangelical humanitarians who operate mostly under the radar of the mainstream aid industry and host states. To make sense of the spatial deployment of refugees and Evangelical aid workers during the Syrian conflict, current displacement has to be understood in the context of more longstanding mobility schemes in the Middle East and beyond. My thesis examines the experiences of displaced people and those who assist them through a transnational lens. It does so by studying old and new cross-border flows of people, as well as practices and resources that help poor Syrians survive and Christian charities turn into professional aid providers.

From an epistemological point of view, my thesis demonstrates that the study of refugees trapped in exile can heighten our understanding of mobilities in territories that have become inaccessible to anthropologists because of conflict. From a conceptual perspective, it helps us comprehend that forced migration is not a one-way street, but often embedded into more complex patterns of movement, including those of aid providers. Lastly, through revisiting connections between transnational mobility, labour and legality, the thesis highlights global convergences between control mechanisms of humanitarian governance of the displaced in the Global South, and the policing of mobile populations in the Global North.

Lay summary

Although the Syrian conflict that started in 2011 is one of the most mediatized humanitarian crises in recent history, we know little about how refugees chose where to go, and about the faith-based grassroots organisations that assist them in neighbouring Arab countries. This thesis draws on fourteen months of ethnographic research conducted in 2016/17. It explores the cross-border movements and support networks of Syrian refugees and Evangelical (Christian) aid workers who now live and work in Mafraq, a provincial town in northern Jordan. Through extended interviews, my thesis captures flows of people, goods and money that have long remained under the radar of states and humanitarian agencies and do not appear in official statistics about labour migration and international aid to Jordan. We tend to think of war as a disruptive force – my research shows that refugees' and Evangelical aid workers' networks in the Middle East and beyond are surprisingly robust and have sometimes even been intensified by conflict.

After 2011, poor Sunni Muslim peasants from remote areas in central and northern Syria sought refuge in Mafraq because they were already familiar with the town through previous experiences of labour migration. Today, they often work with the same local employers. Their lack of work permits, as well as Jordan's restrictive policies on refugees' freedom of movement, means that they are exposed to exploitative working conditions in the informal economy and threatened by deportation to Syria. Exchanging money, spouses and information with relatives abroad holds refugee families together, despite closed borders in the Middle East. European and Jordanian Evangelical humanitarian organisations in Mafraq receive funding and unpaid volunteers from fellow believers in Western Europe and North America, in the tradition of ties that date back to the 19th-century travels of missionaries to the Middle East. More recently, Evangelical aid workers accessed new sources of funding when they learned to communicate with the mainstream aid industry.

My doctoral thesis challenges our understanding of forced migration as a one-way street – displacement is often embedded into more complex patterns of movement, including those of aid workers. My findings also allow me to intervene in current policy debates in Europe about the distinction between "migrants" and "refugees". The example of rural Syrian populations in Mafraq shows that in one's lifetime, a mover can switch between categories.

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This thesis is dedicated to my brave Syrian friends Nour and Kholoud and their unruly daughters.

Introduction: A tale of two (or more) cities

In early 2016, I moved to Mafraq, a border town in northern Jordan. Most mornings, one could hear the muffled sound of the bombings on Daraa in southern Syria. But the nearby war did not only make itself *heard* in Mafraq. Streets, schools and hospitals were crowded with newcomers and NGO logos blossomed all over town. By virtue of being one of the places proportionally most affected by the mass influx of Syrians, Mafraq had been transformed into a humanitarian hub. In 2018, the UN Refugee Agency's (UNHCR) statistics counted circa 84,000 refugees (UNHCR 2018c), although the town's mayor estimated their number at closer to 100,000 at the time of my fieldwork (personal communication, 2016). Mafraq's population had literally doubled. It was thus symptomatic of the urban nature of displacement in Jordan.

Figure 1 Syrian design on my front door in Mafraq (Wagner 2016)

The first trace of Syrians' presence in town, however, was found in an unexpected place and had nothing to do with refugees. As it happened, a more complex story about Syrian lives began to unfold at the front door of the tiny house that I was renting on the outskirts of Mafraq. On the day I moved in, a local friend proudly shook the keys under my nose, before proceeding to open the courtyard gate. While struggling with the antique-looking lock, he pointed out the wooden gate's tile design and its faded blue and white colours to me. "This is Syrian," he explained. The door had been produced by a Syrian carpenter before the war. On subsequent walks through Mafraq, I spotted similar wooden doors, all of them bearing testimony to Syrians' longstanding economic activities in the place. I could not help noticing the irony of this chance find: these days Mafraq locals often complained about a sense of alienation caused by the mass influx of "strangers". Yet previous exchanges with Syrians had occurred in the intimacy of people's doorsteps.

I was also expecting to find refugees from particular *places*. After all, nearby Zaatari Camp, the largest refugee camp in the Middle East and a short bus ride away from Mafraq, hosted mainly Syrians from Daraa province in southern Syria (REACH 2013a). In March 2011, peaceful protests in Daraa had been met with violent repression by the al-Assad regime, starting the descent into a spiral of violence that turned into the Syrian war. In Mafraq, aid workers and locals told me about the tribal and kinship links, as well as geographical proximity, that had pushed people from Daraa to seek refuge across the border. Only, when I went looking for them, they were not there. I certainly met many Syrian families who had fled from the regime bombings – only from places much further north. As it turned out, most refugees in Mafraq came from rural areas in Homs and Aleppo governorates. People who had spent their previous lives close to the Lebanese and the Turkish borders had chosen to cross a country in turmoil to seek refuge in the south.

Adnan's story is a case in point. In fall 2014, he took the decision to leave Jabal A-Hoss, a cluster of villages in rural Aleppo, when the house next to his son's school was shelled. One boy in Adnan's extended family was shot in the stomach and died, and another one lost his arms. Adnan and his loved ones fled to Damascus, and then to Daraa, a day trip away from Aleppo. A pick-up took them to the Jordanian border at sunset where Adnan discovered hundreds of people waiting to enter the neighbouring country. During a seemingly endless night in the no man's land between Syria and Jordan, his wife and five children only had two blankets to protect themselves against the biting cold. In the middle of the night, Adnan woke up to the sound of a girl crying and gave her one of them. The next morning, trucks brought the family to Zaatari camp, a place from which they quickly escaped to Mafraq. A red apple that a Jordanian soldier gave to the hungry children became a symbol of the family's way to safety.

Adnan had paid 100,000 Syrian Pounds (at the time, the equivalent of ca. 610 USD) to a series of smugglers to organise the family's trip southwards - three times the average annual income for an agricultural labourer from Jabal al-Hoss in the early 2000s (Imady 2014). He probably relied on his own meagre savings and support from family members to raise such a huge amount of money. Like most of my Syrian informants, Adnan's family did not have relatives in Mafraq. Why did he decide to cross a war zone and spend a fortune to

come to northern Jordan? Was there any connection between Adnan's unexpected presence in Mafraq and my beautiful front door?

Like many Syrians, Adnan relates to Mafraq and its people in more than one way. Before he returned as a *refugee*, he had once been a *labour migrant* in northern Jordan. Underneath the "humanitarian city", an older transnational space emerges that binds Syrians and Jordanian locals together not in a relationship of aid and asylum, but of labour: not as refugees and hosts, but as migrant workers and employers, artists and clients. This older transnational space persists until today. When my Syrian informants were displaced during the war, they chose to seek refuge in Mafraq because they were familiar with the town through previous seasonal migrations and hoped to find jobs on Jordanian farms. Other newcomers, American and European volunteers with various Evangelical humanitarian organisations, were drawn to the place because of its longstanding history of Christian mission. The town is inhabited and traversed by different populations – locals, Syrians and foreign Evangelicals – to whom it means different things. Mafraq's story today is a tale of two (or more) cities.

This thesis explores how conflict and closed borders have reshaped transnational mobilities in the Levant since 2011. It draws on fourteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in Mafraq, a provincial town in northern Jordan, in 2016/17. My study captures intersecting transnational networks of two populations that often remain invisible to policymakers: marginalized rural Syrians like Adnan who come from, migrate and flee to remote borderlands in the Levant, and Evangelical humanitarians who volunteer with the Mafraq Unity Church and VIVA, a European grassroots organization. (The next section and chapters 1, 2 and 3 deal with Jordan's incomplete and, at times, contradictory, refugee and migration statistics). We tend to think that war is a disruptive force. But my ethnography of Mafraq and its people proves that it also makes visible, and even intensifies, more longstanding transnational connections. To make sense of the spatial deployment of refugees and Evangelical aid workers during the Syrian war, current displacement has to be understood in the context of more longstanding mobility schemes in the Arab world and beyond. My thesis examines the experiences of displaced people and those who assist them through a *transnational* lens. It does so by studying old and new cross-border flows of

people, as well as practices and resources that help poor Syrians survive and Christian charities turn into professional aid providers.

The introduction aims to achieve the following: first, it situates my research at a specific moment of the refugee response in Jordan and discusses the particularities of Mafraq's multi-layered humanitarian landscape where faith-based humanitarian organisations operate mostly under the radar of the UNHCR and the host state.

Second, it sketches out how the transnationalism paradigm can be applied to the study of displacement and humanitarianism. On the one hand, Syrians' transnational *livelihoods* have not been disrupted but rather reconfigured by current conflict. A livelihoods approach provides us with a roadmap for grasping the complexity of Syrians' pre-war migratory and exilic existences and the interplay of economic and political factors in shaping (forced) migration. Against the backdrop of workers' precarity in the Global North and South[1], this section articulates the nexus between labour, mobility and (il)legality. On the other hand, faith-based humanitarian organisations in Mafraq dispose of specific transnational *support networks* which are rooted in older transcontinental traditions of missionary activity in the Arab world but have been reshaped by the influx of new aid-related practices, ideologies and resources. As their humanitarian activities are increasingly professionalized, Evangelicals struggle with fresh tensions when negotiating faith and aid.

The third section discusses how volunteering with two Evangelical organisations in Mafraq and living with a Jordanian host family has allowed me to gain insights into the perspective of refugees, the host community and Evangelical volunteers. It gives consideration to methodological challenges that occur in ethnographic studies in humanitarian contexts and weighs up issues of positionality that arise from my multiple roles in the field. The introduction ends by providing a brief overview over the seven chapters of my thesis.

[1] Throughout the thesis, I use the terms "Global North" and "South" in a heuristic way for referring to unequal patterns of wealth in the world: I do acknowledge that the "North-South" terminology has increasingly come under fire because it masks regional inequalities and rising prosperity in the "Global South". From a postcolonial perspective, it has also been criticized for perpetuating relationships of domination and downplaying the fluidity of roles of people in the "South" (e.g. McEwan 2009; Power 2003).

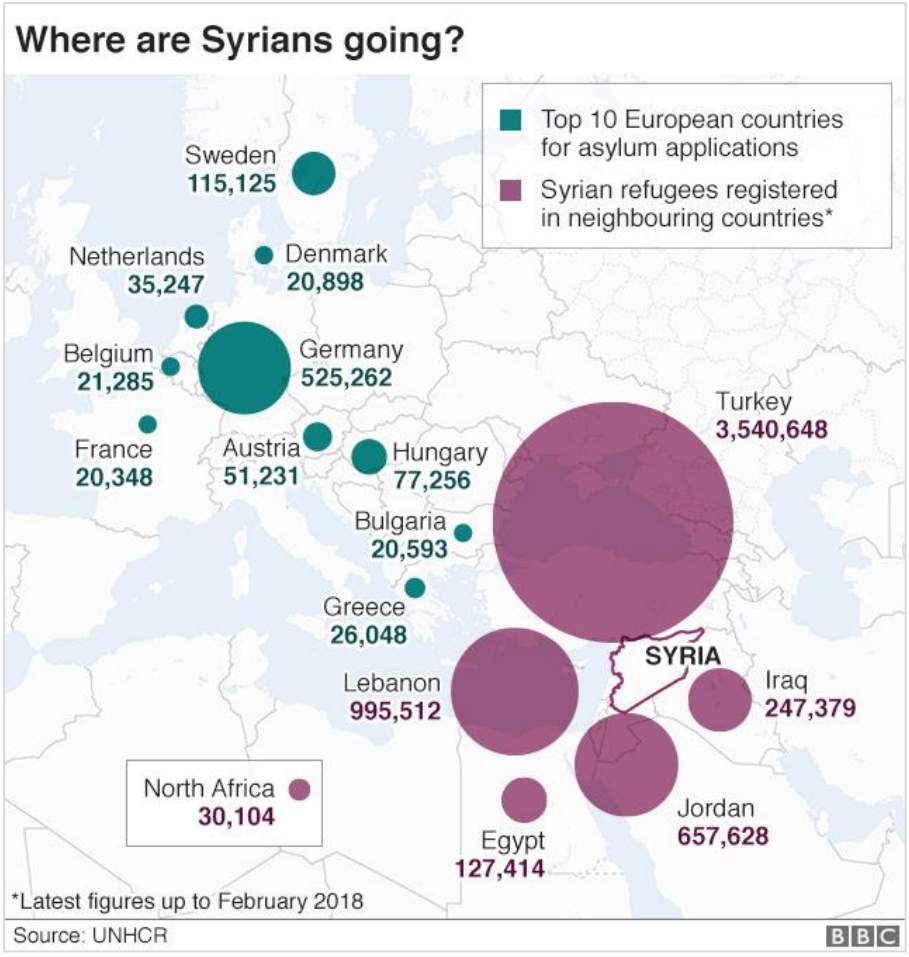

Figure 2 Major destination countries of Syrian refugees (Yahya 2018)

Displacement is nothing new to Syria and its people. In the 20th and 21st century, its territory has welcomed numerous waves of refugees from other countries, including Armenians, Lebanese and Iraqis (Chatty 2017, 2018). Oftentimes, refugee flows have been a by-product of state-building processes, for example in the large-scale displacement of Palestinians to neighbouring Arab countries following the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. Conversely, refugees have also played a constitutive role in defining modern-day Syria. In the 1930s, for example, incoming Assyrian refugees from Iraq were resettled to thinly populated north-eastern parts of the country. This allowed the French mandate authorities, then in charge of the nascent Syrian state, to extend their reach to a remote region and make Syria's hitherto only nominal borders a reality on the ground (White 2012).

The trend was reversed after 2011 when more than 5.6 million Syrians fled from the – still ongoing – conflict (UNHCR 2018c). Another 6.6 million have been internally displaced. The spatial distribution of Syrian refugees mimics broader patterns of forced migration around the world: most of the displaced reside in the Global South and in the vicinity of conflicts (Bank and Fröhlich 2018). As Figure 1 shows, most Syrian refugees have remained in the Middle East. In the Arab world, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraqi Kurdistan have received the biggest number of Syrians, between 250,000 and 950,000 refugees respectively (UNHCR 2018d). None of these countries is a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention, although the UNHCR provides protection and services to Syrian refugees within the framework of Memoranda of Understanding with Jordan (1998), Lebanon (2003) and Iraq (2016) (Frangieh 2016; UNHCR 2016).

In Jordan, the UNHCR registered more than 650,000 refugees, although the 2015 governmental census gives figures more than twice as much (Ghazal 2016). If one is to believe the UNHCR statistics, Jordan is the country with the second-highest share of refugees compared to its own population: 89 Syrians per 1,000 inhabitants. More than 80% of Syrians in Jordan live outside camps (UNHCR 2018b) and are highly concentrated in the north and in the capital, Amman (Figure 2).

It should not be forgotten that Jordan is also home to another sizeable refugee population that does not fall within the mandate of the UNHCR, but rather the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). According to recent UNRWA statistics, Jordan is home to more than 2.2 million Palestinian refugees (UNRWA 2019).[2] While most of them are Jordanian citizens, the Jordanian government arbitrarily withdrew nationality from thousands of people in the 2000s, ostensibly to maintain Palestinians' right to reside in the West Bank (Human Rights Watch 2010). Their case serves to show that even when acquiring a nationality elsewhere, Palestinians may fail to obtain legal security and remain "on the threshold of statelessness" (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016a: 301). Hence, one dimension of forced migration that this thesis explores (cf. chapter 2 on Syrian and Egyptian workers; chapter 3 on stateless children born to Syrian mothers out of wedlock) is that we cannot think of the citizen/non-citizen distinction as simply binary.

[2] Since the onset of the Syrian crisis, UNRWA has also assisted almost ten thousand Palestinians from Syria (UNRWA 2019).

Rather, the ambiguous and fluid nature of labels assigned to displaced populations suggests that "citizenship" is a hierarchy of belonging that is constantly renegotiated (Anderson and Hughes 2015).

Despite its location close to the Syrian border, Mafraq was initially overlooked by the institutionalized humanitarian system. Paradoxically, this was the result of the town's proximity to a refugee hot spot. When nearby Zaatari camp was established in June 2012, it received the bulk of attention from international aid agencies. Although many camp-based refugees subsequently settled in Mafraq, the local UNHCR sub-office only opened in August 2014. The initial gap in humanitarian service provision coincided with the mushrooming of local and foreign faith-based charities and grassroots organisations (Dickinson 2014). Jordan's lenient policy environment—European volunteers enter the country on a tourist visa—further encouraged the influx of smaller NGOs. While many Syrian refugees in Mafraq receive support from more than one organisation, a few – especially those without adequate humanitarian documentation – do not receive any assistance at all (cf. chapter 2).

The emergence of a multi-layered humanitarian landscape with ever-changing coalitions and turf battles has also been observed in post-tsunami Sri Lanka (Stirrat 2006) and in Greece during the mass arrival of refugees in 2015. Papataxiarchis' (2016) description of the shores of Lesbos at the height of the so-called "European refugee crisis", with their wild mix of aid workers, international volunteers, local fishermen, academics and journalists, rushing towards each newly arriving boat, reminds me of my volunteering experience in Mafraq: the co-presence of professional and "lay" humanitarians, phones in hand; the role of heartfelt hugs in breaching language barriers; and foreign volunteers' obsession with the "frontline" (Papataxiarchis 2016: 5). One stark difference remains: on Lesbos, volunteers were waiting for refugees who had just survived the dangerous crossing of the Mediterranean. In Mafraq, however, Syrians' exile had long turned into protracted displacement. They spent many days in the queue outside NGO centres to register for aid and trainings. But inside their humble homes, they also received new visitors: Evangelical humanitarians.

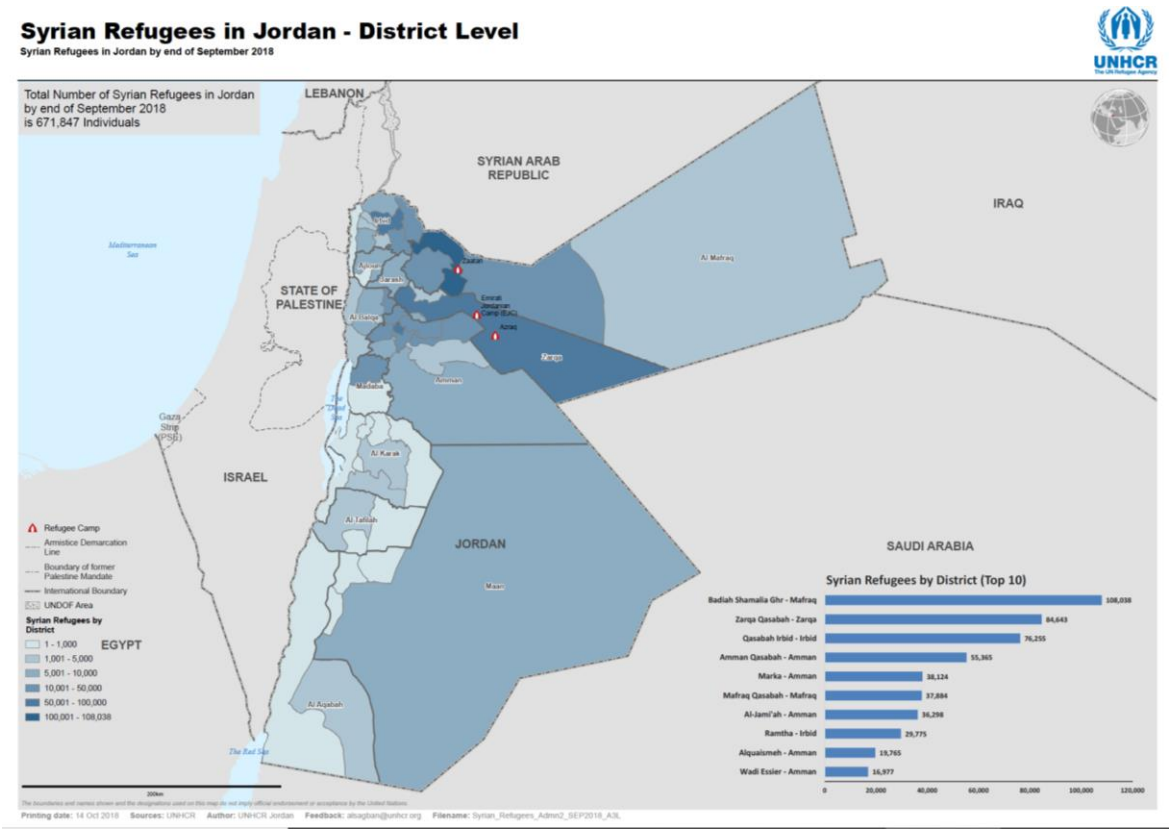

Figure 3 Spatial distribution of Syrian refugees in Jordan (UNHCR 2018a)

My fieldwork coincides with a specific phase in the host country's approach to "welcoming" Syrian refugees. Most of the Syrians in town arrived between 2012 and 2014. That year, new governmental regulations restricted Syrians' freedom of movement across the border and in urban areas, increasingly forcing them to live in camps (Achilli 2015). Since an ISIS attack in mid-2016, the Jordanian-Syrian border has remained permanently closed, despite a southward flux of refugees in summer 2018 when the al-Assad regime attacked remaining rebel enclaves in southern Syria (Specia 2018). While the number of Syrians in town has remained relatively stable for years, the dwindling of humanitarian resources, for example cuts to the World Food Programme's voucher system in mid-2015, has particularly affected refugees in urban areas like Mafraq (Bellamy, Haysom, Wake and Barbelet 2017). This has heightened the relevance of faith-based organisations to their survival.

Evangelical aid providers like VIVA and the Mafraq Unity Church, the humanitarian protagonists of this thesis, provide only a tiny fraction of all forms of assistance given to Syrian refugees in town. The complexity of Mafraq's NGO landscape makes it impossible to quantify aid at a local scale. While the UNHCR office counts circa 84,000 beneficiaries (UNHRC 2018c), Pastor Aissa, the head of the Mafraq Unity Church, estimates that his

congregation has supported half of the refugees in town at one point or another (cf. chapter 7). Through house visits and educational programmes, VIVA has reached several hundreds of Syrians, but assisting aid beneficiaries with money remains the exception (chapters 4-6). Financially, VIVA's contribution is thus a mere drop in the ocean and can hardly be compared to that of bigger aid agencies. By way of contrast, the UNHCR alone received USD 676 million for its Jordan operation in 2017 (2018e). However, it is telling that whenever I asked Syrian refugees in town about aid in Mafraq, they immediately mentioned the Mafraq Unity Church and – to a somewhat lesser extent – VIVA, together with the UNHCR. In this thesis, I argue that smaller faith-based humanitarian organisations matter not because of their budgets, but because they make a difference in present-day refugee sociality in Mafraq. While UN organisations and international NGOs have offices in town, VIVA and the Mafraq Unity Church exert a much greater *social* presence inside Syrians' homes – and lives.

Applying a transnational lens to the study of displacement

While this introduction lacks space for a comprehensive review of the concept of transnationalism that has emerged in Migration Studies since the early 1990s, it pays tribute to the important conceptual shifts it has operated in the ways we think about migration (for overviews, see Glick Schiller et al. 1992, Bauböck and Faist 2010, Faist et al. 2013). Migrants do not simply blend in with new places. Many simultaneously live and contribute to communities of origin and host communities, and some by-pass assimilation altogether (Portes et al. 2017).[3] Studies on transnationalism have turned the spotlight on the cross-border ties that bind these diverse locales together and how migration is actually *done*, i.e. the "transnational practices" (Faist 2010: 20) which migrants and those left behind engage in.

[3] This is often linked to a critique of two types of biases in the social sciences, a *sedentary* bias, where stasis and place are cast as "normal" and movement understood as an aberration from stability and order, and a *nation-state* bias, i.e. a tendency to conceive of mobility in relation to state borders. Both forms of bias have been widely discussed across a variety of disciplines, including Migration Studies (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002), Refugee Studies (Hyndman and Giles 2011), Social Anthropology (Malkki 1992) and geography (Agnew 1994).

This thesis situates itself in the continuity of historical and social science research on the *transnational* Middle East which highlights the region's embeddedness within old and new processes of globalization and the movement of people, but also resources and ideas at various scales: within the Arab-speaking world, in the Mediterranean region and across oceans to Asia, Africa and the Americas (Vignal 2017). Shami (1996) argues that Forced Migration Studies should acknowledge the force of transnational pan-Arab and Islamic identities. In the region, communities and homelands are not merely imagined within national, but also within much larger cultural and linguistic boundaries. More recently, Leenders and Heydemann (2012) have investigated the role of pre-war migration networks in mobilizing protests in Daraa in early 2011. Demonstrators were able to organize themselves quickly because they could capitalize on more longstanding circular migration systems.

A transnational angle on cross-border mobilities of Syrian refugees and Evangelical humanitarians has oriented my own research in three important ways. First, my thesis takes seriously "the multi-sitedness of migrants" (Faist et al. 2013: 1) and refugees. It demonstrates the emergence of *a transnational space of refuge* that has come to encompass Syrians' villages of origin, previous migration destinations and current places of exile in Jordan, the Levant, the Gulf and elsewhere. Geographers like Leila Vignal (2018) even speak of *Syria-s* in the plural, pointing out that Syria has long been a transnational space and a country of out-, in- and circular migrations (cf. Chatty 2018). Recently, Vignal argues, the "transnationalization" of Syrian borderlands has been intensified by greater population flows and the influx of humanitarian actors. Following Bornstein (2012) and Malkki (2015), I also understand the Evangelical enterprise in Mafraq as *a transnational space of aid* and as a crossroads for foreign volunteers, goods, development ideologies and religiopolitical agendas. Borrowing an expression from Bornstein (2012), the second part of my thesis thus investigates Evangelical humanitarianism as a transnational form *in Jordan*, not *Jordanian* humanitarianism (cf. Bornstein 2012: 12).

Second, thinking about displacement in terms of transnationalism brings into view the manifold *connections* that refugees maintain to other places, even when being trapped in refugee camps and other locales of exile. My findings highlight the heterogenous nature of Syrians' transnational ties, including employment and kinship networks and newly formed

relationships with humanitarian actors. They are upheld through phone calls and family visits, remittance-sending, marriage and employment contracts. By way of contrast, Evangelical humanitarians in Mafraq reach out to fellow congregations around the globe through marketing campaigns on websites and social media. In return, they welcome like-minded believers for short-term volunteering with Syrian refugees.

Third, this thesis does not romanticise transnational connections as a panacea for displacement and dispossession. It takes seriously the role of underlying power relations in regulating access to movement (Sheller and Urry 2006). Immobility and waiting are often understood as markers of subaltern lives (Bayart 2007; Creswell 2010), although Franquesa (2011) rightly points out that equating the mobile with the powerful risks becoming tautological when mobility – instead of sedentary lives – is taken for granted. Hence, he suggests shifting the focus from: who moves the fastest, to: who has "the capacity to manage the relation between mobility and immobility" (Franquesa 2011: 1028; cf. Jansen and Löfving 2009). These insights resonate with recent work in Migration Studies that departs from praising transnational connections as "empowering and liberating" (Al-Ali and Khoser 2002: 5), asking instead how transnational mobility contributes to people's livelihoods, but also risks trapping them in marginal positions. Nor does an increased focus on mobilities make thinking about space and places irrelevant. Mobility scholars emphasize how "all mobilities entail specific often highly embedded and immobile infrastructures" (Sheller and Urry 2006: 210), acts of "homing" (Sheller and Urry 2006: 211) and emplacement. Yet immobile infrastructure and homes are far from unproblematic. Anthropologists advise against romanticizing "homes", pointing out "the instabilities that may characterize people's attachment to territory in the first place" (Jansen and Löfving 2009: 6). Hence, my thesis does not only address the power relations that shape movement, but also those that shape home-making in rural Syria and in Mafraq.

On the one hand, my thesis asks how power unfolds *in space* and through mobility. That foreign volunteers, unlike Syrians, can travel freely to and within the Levant speaks to their greater financial resources and preferential position in unequal border regimes. Although the legal status of both foreign populations in Jordan is equally shady, European and American volunteers with VIVA and the local church can *choose* where and how long they are going to stay. While Syrian refugees who lack adequate humanitarian documentation

risk getting deported to refugee camps or even back to Syria, Westerners who overstay their tourist visa can simply pay a small fine at the airport in Amman when leaving the country. One way to make sense of their differential grasp of transnational connections is through *topological approaches t*hat do not treat "distance" as a geometric object but ask how social relationships and power inequalities inform the ways in which *distance* is experienced (Allen 2011). They go beyond ascribing some locations to the powerful and others to the powerless – Amman, Damascus and Washington, DC are not simply places where political and economic elites reside and Mafraq is not merely home to marginalized locals and refugees. Rather, power lies in the ability to reach out to others across a distance, to make one's presence - or absence – felt (Allen 2011). Evangelical humanitarians, for example, hope to gain Syrians' trust – and ultimately put them on the path to redemption - through demonstrating "presence" in Mafraq's streets and refugees' homes (chapters 4 and 5).

On the other hand, the thesis sheds light on the temporal dimensions of refugee governance and class relations in Mafraq. It draws inspiration from Bontemps' (2012) ethnographic study of Allenby Bridge, the only border crossing between Israel and Jordan open to Palestinians living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Bontemps shows that Palestinians experience space not merely in terms of distance – a mere ten km across the border – but also in terms of hours of transport and waiting. Her findings suggest that in displacement, even standardized bureaucratic routines might be lived as disruptive, an alternating stop-and-go between various waiting areas and check points, suspending our usual chronological understanding of time and sense of agency. Through its engagement with the growing literature on mobility and time, this thesis acknowledges that displacement and labour migration come with multiple experiences of waiting and stuckness. It asks how becoming a refugee disrupts *journeys* (e.g. chapter 1 on pre-war mobility circuits) but also puts *lives* on hold – especially with regard to young people's delayed transition to adulthood (Honwana 2012; e.g. chapters 3 and 6). A more balanced understanding of the relationship between power and mobility leads us to reconsider how waiting is lived and imagined by people on the move – as an extraordinary parenthesis in one's life that has to be restored (Elliot 2015), a mere loss of time filled with un-serious activities (Jeffrey 2008), a waste of time and money (Koshravi 2014) or as an active process,

a “waiting-as-event” (Gray 2011: 371) that one uses for (re)creating homes, family and community relations.

Several chapters of this thesis discuss the complex relationship between mobility and waiting: for some movers, waiting becomes a central component of the migratory process (Andersson 2014). Chapter 1 disentangles how Syrian labour migrants before 2011 balanced short- and more long-term aspirations of finding work abroad with starting and sustaining a family back home. Others, like the unemployed Jordanian youth unable to leave Mafraq, have developed a veritable “waiting culture” of carefree consumption *in situ* (Elliot 2015; cf. chapter 6). Whether mobile or immobilized, my interlocutors thus manage (or fail) to make stints of waiting meaningful and develop “agency-in-waiting” (Brun 2015: 19). The thesis also shows that speed is not always a privilege of the more powerful. Certainly, waiting is pervasive in Mafraq and Syrians often complain about it. “We wait all day and nobody ever comes”, is how a Syrian woman summarized her interactions with NGOs during a house visit. Perhaps surprisingly, Evangelicals in Mafraq also frequently get stuck. Their volunteering experience is light years away from the mystified image of cosmopolitan aid workers parachuted to sites of intervention and traversing “aid land” at high speed (chapter 4). In a more long-term perspective, Syrians also wait to return home. There is no doubt that “waiting” is a constitutive element of the displacement experience and migration processes more broadly (Elliot 2015) and occurs during all stages of the migratory process (Brunner, Hyndman and Mountz 2014; Turnbull 2016). Making people on the move wait is a way in which border and humanitarian regimes exert power over mobile populations (Andersson 2014; Mountz 2011). Several chapters of this thesis show that aid-induced waiting not only occurs in liminal spaces such as camps, but also in mundane locations such as the street (chapter 4), refugees’ homes (chapter 5) and the classroom (chapter 6).

What is more, the ethnographic study of “waiting experiences” allows us to counter sensationalist representations of refugees as immobile and passive – only recently, Betts and Collier (2017) described Zaatari Camp as having “reeked of lives on hold”. Kelly (2008) poignantly remarks that during the Second Intifada, “more time is spent watching TV, waiting for buses or preparing food, than it is shooting guns, hiding in basements or burning houses” (353). Without doubt, my Syrian informants also wait for many commonplace

things and spend much of their time with everyday routines. However, I also follow Kelly (2008) in emphasizing that during displacement, there is a thin line between the ordinary and the extraordinary, and social control exerted by the host state and humanitarian actors infiltrates mundane activities like working in pre-war occupations (chapter 2), getting married (chapter 3), hosting (chapter 5) and getting an education (chapter 6).

Research with people in detention centres and asylum seekers shows that waiting can be *strategic* (Koshravi 2014; Turnbull 2015; Rotter 2016) and using waiting time to one's advantage is often linked to the knowledge of rhythms (Andersson 2014). Syrians in Mafraq continue to find employment on the fields because of their longstanding knowledge of agricultural cycles (chapter 2). They have now familiarized themselves with the modalities of aid distribution by car (chapter 4). Introducing a temporal dimension into the study of waiting gives us a sense of how those who wait constantly reassess their situation and opportunities for action (Brun 2015). For example, chapter 3 discusses the case of Syrian women who give up on waiting for suitable spouses from among their kin to marry "out" and "up". And Syrians are not alone in the waiting room: highly educated locals from Mafraq's struggling middle class go on living with their parents while looking for jobs in the humanitarian sector (chapter 6).

Syrian refugees in Mafraq: From a crisis narrative to histories of precarization

There is a growing consensus that neither migration nor return tend to be a one-way street. Circular migration systems are well documented for certain geographic contexts such as Southern Africa (Potts 2010) and India (Deshingkar and Farrington 2009). For many migrants, ongoing movement might prove more advantageous than definitive return to their places of origin (Jeffery and Murison 2011). A non-linear understanding of mobility has also been applied to the study of displaced populations. A number of scholars have investigated the importance of transnational livelihoods for returning refugees from Angola (Bakewell 2002), Ethiopia (Hammond 2004), Afghanistan (Monsutti 2008), Bosnia (Jansen 2008), Sri Lanka (Van Hear 2002) and Iraq (Chatty and Mansour 2011; Iaria 2010, 2011).

This type of research is often intended as a critique of the sedentary bias inherent to national and supranational refugee policy frameworks, including the UNHCR's voluntary

return program. A common approach in humanitarian action aims to restore refugees to formerly *sedentary* existences, through return or resettlement elsewhere. This risks overlooking returnees' longstanding mobility histories and strategies, but also ongoing insecurity and violence in their places of origin (Monsutti 2008, Scalettaris 2009). Instead of returning home, some refugees may also engage in onward labour migration (Van Hear 2006) or education abroad (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014, 2015b). Hence, transnational livelihoods do not only represent a precondition to return when conflicts end, but also to rebuilding lives. My doctoral thesis looks the other way, by asking how *previously* established transnational livelihoods have informed Syrians' flight trajectories and survival tactics in exile. To investigate how my informants access and circulate resources through cross-border networks, and how mobilities of people, money and information are related to more localized forms of employment and marital strategies, my research adopts a livelihoods approach.

Livelihoods approaches in the study of displacement

Macro-political explanations focus on "civil war" or "open violence" as causes of displacement. But that tells us little about the actual circumstances of people's flight, the interplay of economic, political and environmental factors in shaping displacement and what motivates people's decisions about leaving and potential destinations (Sheller 2018). Bank, Fröhlich and Schneiker (2017) argue that violence can occur at all stages of the migration or displacement process, and that our understanding of violence should be broadened to include *structural* violence. A more nuanced view of the relationship between mobility and violence allows us to highlight less visible state-led forms of violence, for example the results of (failed) agricultural and neoliberal reforms, that have fuelled displacement within and from Syria. To capture multiple forms of violence, Lindley (2010a) suggests engaging in a "micro-sociological analysis of conflict-related mobility" (3). One conceptual framework that gives us the necessary tools at hand is the livelihoods approach, the foundations of which were formulated in Chambers and Conway's (1992) seminal paper on the Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Approach (SRLA). It allows us to develop a holistic understanding of poor Syrians' various forms of assets, capabilities and survival strategies

before and after 2011 (Chambers and Conways 1992).[4] Which kinds of resources and connections my informants disposed of prior to 2011 explains why they engaged in specific types of menial, circular migrations and eventually returned to northern Jordan *as refugees* (chapter 1).

The livelihoods lens has much to offer to research on refugees, as it helps "avoid falling into the trap of seeing conflict as a single homogenous event" (Lindley 2010a: 19). By now, there are numerous studies on livelihoods and displacement. Jacobsen (2014) lists three ways in which refugees' livelihoods are different from those of other mobile or poor populations. First, refugees begin their lives in the host country from a position of multiple losses, including of loved ones, home and health. From a livelihoods point of view, scholars ask whether refugees can still access their assets in exile, and how their survival strategies have changed (Collinson 2003). Besides being cut off from material resources and income-generating activities, the displaced are often affected by restricted freedom of movement in the host country (Jaspars and O'Callaghan 2010). Second, Jacobsen (2014) points out that refugees often struggle with specific structural obstacles in the host country, including legal insecurity and the lack of the right to work. Revised versions of the livelihoods approach scrutinize people's interactions with institutions (De Haan and Zoomers 2005). Chapter 1 argues that, while governmental institutions were largely absent from my Syrians' villages of origin before 2011, the availability of free healthcare and elementary education was a decisive factor in preventing permanent settlement abroad. In exile, increasingly restrictive and securitized refugee policies of the host state have put a severe strain on Syrians' income-generating activities (chapter 2). Third, according to Jacobsen (2014), refugees also access new sources of income in exile, especially humanitarian assistance (cf. chapters 4-7).

By paying attention to the diverse types of resources that refugees bring and newly acquire in exile, livelihoods approaches can account for differential outcomes of displacement and the social stratification of refugee communities. Why do Syrians in Mafraq fare

[4] Contemporary adaptations of Chambers and Conway's (1992) framework have overcome its initial sedentary bias (Lindley 2010a). Although Chambers and Conway acknowledged the role of mobility in diversifying rural livelihoods, they framed rural-urban migration as a symptom of precarity. From this point of view, improving the sustainability of rural livelihoods implied encouraging the poor to return to rural areas, and enabling them to remain in the countryside. By way of contrast, this thesis draws on more recent livelihoods approaches that posit future mobility as a potential *solution* to disenfranchisement and displacement (cf. conclusion).

comparatively worse than refugees elsewhere in Jordan (cf. chapter 1)? Van Hear (2014) deplores that Forced Migration Studies hardly take into consideration how socioeconomic status shapes displacement trajectories and livelihoods in exile. The ability to move is reconceptualized as a type of resource which can be exploited in times of crisis (Van Hear 2014; Ihring 2016). Reversely, the most vulnerable populations are often those who are immobilized in conflict (Lubkemann 2008). Retracing the movements of the poorest segments of Syria's population – low-skilled migrant and refugee workers – brings to the fore their distinct resources and mobility strategies, making possible a multiscalar analysis that accounts for refugees' intersecting needs and inequalities (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2019). Hence, my thesis captures the displacement experience of a specific refugee demographic: low-skilled former labour migrants from the Syrian countryside.

A livelihoods lens is particularly suited to the study of Syrians in Mafraq because it uncovers the role of refugees' *non-monetary* resources, including transnational mobilities and networks. Acknowledging the role of cross-border kinship ties, through which dispersed families circulate resources, is not meant to present refugees' social capital as a panacea for precarious lives but rather highlight how transnational connections may reshape precarity. Omata (2017), for example, finds that relative economic stability for Liberians in a camp in Ghana cannot be ascribed to refugees' economic self-reliance, but rather to the steady influx of remittances from overseas. While the money also trickles down to those without family members abroad, it perpetuates social hierarchies among the refugees that predate life in the camp. In addition, kinship obligations and expectations of remittances may put considerable pressure on refugees who have made it to the Global North (Hammond 2010; Lindley 2010b; cf. chapter 3).

In addition, some refugees may become involved in transnational solidarity networks with other states and civil society organisations. Sahrawi refugee camps, for example, receive political and humanitarian support from various actors in the Global North and South that benefits both individual families and the Polisario, the camp leadership. Sahrawi children frequently study in Cuba and spend vacations with host families in Spain. For individual refugees, circular educational migration leads to building attachment with new places other than lost "homelands" and more permanent sites of refuge (cf. Gambian and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2017), and developing transnational identities across linguistic, cultural and

religious barriers (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2010). But refugee diasporas in third countries also become incorporated into their own leadership's and host states' nationalist projects (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013). In Cuba, providing free education to Sahrawi refugees and other displaced populations is part of the country's anti-imperialist struggle (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013). Back in the Sahrawi refugee camps in Algeria, the Polisario conveys donors' values of democracy and gender equality to external audiences (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014). Cross-border connections, new financial resources and refugees' self-representations tailored to the expectations of their foreign benefactors may go hand in hand (cf. chapters 5 and 7).

Furthermore, livelihoods approaches make possible a fine-grained analysis of conflict-induced mobility because of their attention to *scale* and *temporality*. Livelihoods are usually studied at the household level. This is crucial to understanding how my informants' complex pre-war mobility strategies were structured by gender, age and marital status. While household members migrated in different ways, the outcomes of their migrations benefited the family as a whole. And the rural poor's survival strategies often come with a delayed return of investment. Before 2011, young Syrian men frequently migrated to save money for the bride wealth (chapter 1), and today's refugees in Mafraq already save up for their return (chapter 3).

One major criticism of the livelihoods framework concerns its "pro-active, self-help image of the sustainable livelihoods approach for improving the lives of the poor" (De Haan and Zoomers: 30/31). A central concern of the livelihoods approach is how rural households deal with various types of shocks - this helps us go beyond the immediate effects of conflict and makes possible a historically situated view of various stresses (chapter 1). Displacement cannot be reduced to physical violence. It goes on affecting refugees' lives in exile through legal insecurity (chapter 2) and the erosion of kinship-based support systems (chapter 3). However, proponents of the livelihoods lens have been accused of overstating the impact of poor people's (non-material) forms of resources and the ways in which these can be converted into more tangible assets. In other words, there is a danger to downplay the role of power relations in determining access to capital and engendering processes of inclusion and exclusion (Baumann 2000; De Haan and Zoomers 2005). This is a concern I hope to address through turning the spotlight on the history of Syrian labour in the Arab world, in which workers' agency and vulnerabilities are closely intertwined.

Labour, mobility and (il)legality in the Arab world

This thesis goes beyond a narrow focus on conflict-induced displacement by drawing attention to wider processes of joint "migrantization" and "precarization".[5] In their study of mobilities in the aftermath of the Tunisian "Arab spring", Garelli and Tazzioli (2017) define the latter as "the politics that turn people into migrants, in juridical terms but also in spatial terms […] the processes of transformation that concern the economic and social condition of some people and that make it more difficult for them to stay in a certain place or to move" (72). The study of current displacement trajectories and refugee economies allows us to capture the transformation of more longstanding labour migration schemes in the region (Vignal 2018) – it also adds to academic critiques of present-day humanitarian livelihoods experiments that aim to enhance refugees' economic self-reliance.

On the one hand, migration governance has long been a contentious issue in the Arab world. Pan-Arabism was one of the leading ideologies from the 1950s to the 1980s, but its dreams of translating shared culture and language into a political community never came true. Experiments like the union between Egypt and Syria (1958-1961) failed. Until today, the Arab world lacks strong supranational institutions and policies. However, it has been argued that transnational labour migration has achieved de facto regional integration "from below" (Seeberg 2013; Thiollet 2017). But the lack of institutional frameworks and restrictive national immigration policies have produced a deeply fragmented "pan-Arab labour market" (Thiollet 2017: 30) that prevents migrants' settlement in host societies. In most countries, foreigners cannot be naturalized, and even longstanding migrant communities lack legal security, as evidenced by the mass expulsion of Palestinians from Kuwait in 1991 (Thiollet 2017) and of Syrians from Lebanon in 2005 (Seeberg 2013). As *refugees*, Syrians in Mafraq are exposed to new forms of legal limbo – but the role of illegality in producing cheap refugee labour has to be understood against the backdrop of their pre-war migration experiences and Jordan's hostile immigration policies.

[5] This type of argument resonates with research by anthropologists and political scientists that posits blurred boundaries between war and peace economies, and violence during and after conflict (e.g. Keen 2012; Nordstrom 2004).

On the other hand, Middle Eastern countries have recently turned into a laboratory for humanitarian programmes that foster urban refugees' economic self-reliance. Lessons from the 2016 Jordan Compact that granted Syrians in Jordan 200,000 work permits in exchange for advantageous loans and preferential access to EU markets have already been applied to Lebanon, Turkey and Ethiopia (Barbelet, Hagen-Zanker and Mansour-Ille 2018). However, by June 2017, only 54,000 Syrian workers in Jordan held work permits (ILO 2017).[6] There is now a substantial and critical body of literature on humanitarian livelihoods programming in displacement (e.g. Carpi 2017; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011). While the Jordan Compact was praised by some scholars as a paradigm shift (Betts and Collier 2017), combining humanitarian relief with more long-term development approaches actually dates back to at least the 1960s and was repeatedly rehashed in the 1980s and 1990s (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2019). Several comparative studies find that aid agencies' attempts at increasing refugees' self-reliance are hampered by an overly narrow focus on its *economic* dimension and on *individuals*, overlooking refugees' social obligations and survival strategies within extended kinship networks (Easton-Calabria et al. 2017). A review of ninety years of increasing refugees' economic self-reliance through settlement in agricultural zones, microfinance and vocational trainings in protracted displacement contexts around the globe finds that most humanitarian programmes have failed because they did not provide enabling conditions for refugee labour, overlooking weak host economies, insufficient arable land and, importantly, displaced populations' lack of rights (Easton-Calabria and Omata 2018). Instead of enhancing refugees' self-sufficiency, they might create more complicated relationships of economic dependency (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011b) and benefit poor locals more than refugees (Carpi 2017). What is more, the displaced' perspectives and aspirations are so far largely absent from the design of livelihoods programmes (Barbelet and Wake 2017).

[6] In March 2017, Alexander Betts and Paul Collier (2017) from the University of Oxford published *Refuge: Transforming a Broken Refugee System*, a book that caught considerable attention in the spheres of policy-makers and academics. In *Refuge*, the authors suggest reconceptualising refugees as "development actors" in countries close to home, where hosting them is cheap, presents fewer barriers to integration in terms of qualifications and culture, as well as fewer barriers to return. Syrian refugees should be employed in so-called Special Economic Zones (SEZ), a proposition taken up in the 2016 *Jordan Compact*. *Refuge* has received much criticism for its lack of refugee voices, contentious language and gross misrepresentation of the history of humanitarianism (White Forthc). It downplays existing barriers to getting refugees to work in SEZs, including lack of public transport, adequate qualifications and risk of labour exploitation (Lenner and Turner 2018), the bureaucratic nature of the work permit process (Jordan INGO Forum 2016) and the Compact's lack of applicability to countries like Pakistan, Iran and Chad, home to some of the world's largest refugee populations (Crawley 2017).

Critical evaluations of livelihoods programmes have led scholars to reformulate the question: instead of simply producing more (exploitative) jobs for refugees in host countries in the Global South, how could humanitarian action help create *decent* jobs (Gordon 2019)?

Through its focus on precarious Syrian livelihoods in fragmented Arab labour markets (chapters 1-2) and in the humanitarian system in Jordan (chapter 6), the thesis speaks to broader debates about the casualization of labour. Recently, the expansion of capitalism has been linked to the emergence of a new global "precariat" (Standing 2011) or, put differently, "a new global working class" (Munck 2013: 747). There is some disagreement in the literature about whether the "new poor" exhibit class consciousness of their own and have revolutionary potential, whether they should be considered, in Marxist terms, a productive "reserve army" or a non-integrable "lumpenproletariat" (cf. Munck 2013). But scholars concur that the nexus of insecure labour, legal limbo and mobility underpins new forms of precarity. Around the globe, workers join labour markets that are fragmented along ethnic, racial and gender lines. In the UK, for example, although the country recently criminalized modern forms of "slavery," exclusionary asylum and immigration policies engender a system of stratified rights for migrants with different types of legal status, putting the most vulnerable – refused asylum seekers – at risk of forced labour (Lewis et al. 2014). While many migrants work in the informal sector without work permits, written contracts, labour and social rights, even employees in the formal economy plug away at increasingly "flexible" jobs (Schierup, Alund and Likic-Brbori 2014). And workers' precarity extends beyond the job market, coming to encompass housing, welfare provision, legal status and lack of citizenship (e.g. Munck 2012; Neilson and Rossiter 2008). As they are increasingly prevented from organizing and joining unions, their opportunities for political representation and are struggle are equally limited.

These studies have inspired critiques of overly optimistic voices in the Migration and Development debate, challenging descriptions of migrants as agents of development who contribute to the economic and social betterment of families and communities' back home through financial, social and intellectual remittances (for a summary of the debate, see De Haas 2012). But migrants with lesser resources often end up in informal urban settlements and conditions of exploitative labour. Skeldon (2012) poignantly asks whether circular movement might lead to "migration out of poverty and into marginality" (51). However,

recent scholarship on precarious labour has been criticized for its Eurocentric bias. Most research on economic migration focuses on North-North and South-North movements (Chalcraft 2007), and studies on the casualization of labour are conducted against the backdrop of austerity policies and cuts to public welfare in the Global North (Munck 2013). Yet there are important parallels with the latest return of refugees' economic self-reliance and neoliberal forms of humanitarian governance. Against the backdrop of dwindling funding from the Global North, promoting refugee livelihoods may prove a "cost-effective exit strategy" (Easton-Calabria and Omata 2018: 1458) for international donors unwilling to continue supporting populations in need.

In countries like Jordan, however, precarity is not a new sociological phenomenon nor simply the outcome of neoliberal reforms. In the absence of welfare states, it has long been the norm for poor citizens (Sukarieh 2016) and low-skilled migrant workers like my Syrian informants (Lenner and Turner 2018). In pre-war Syria, for example, class distinctions and the quality of one's social networks divided poor and rich Syrian citizens and Iraqi refugees alike. Conversely, as long as the latter did not contest the authority of the Syrian state, their lack of citizenship hardly mattered, and they were relatively free to find employment in the informal sector (Hoffmann 2016).

This thesis offers case studies of two types of foreign "workers": of Syrian peasants, who have been a cheap mobile labour force with little rights in Jordan before and after 2011, and of Evangelical humanitarians who have recently turned into welfare providers, but also new employers of refugees and locals in Mafraq. It thus looks at low-skilled Syrian labour in Jordan's informal agricultural sector and in the aid industry, drawing comparisons with other exploited migrant workforces around the globe, for example Palestinians in Israel (Kelly 2006) and Hispanics in the US (De Genova 2002). Chalcraft (2007) argues that there is not necessarily an analytical trade-off between migrant workers' agency and their exploitation. Taking this thought further, my thesis highlights how Syrian workers take rational decisions at the household level and deal with community pressure, for example to get married and to provide for elderly parents. It also showcases their saving and investment strategies outside the formal banking system that they are largely excluded from. Moreover, my thesis acknowledges that migrant and refugee workers often do not simply operate in the informal economy, but rather at the intersection of informal and

formal sectors. In Mafraq's greenhouses, for example, Syrians find themselves at the beginning of a regional supply chain that delivers Jordanian tomatoes to places as far away as Dubai (chapter 2). Social exclusion coincides with workers' tacit inclusion into a cheap and exploitable workforce in Jordan's struggling agricultural business (cf. De Genova 2013). The thesis also takes seriously the humanitarian sector's emergence as a major employer in the Global South (Pascucci 2018; Sukarieh 2016) that subjects refugees and unemployed locals to an endless cycle of vocational trainings but fails to provide sustainable jobs.

Finally, my study demonstrates that processes of "displacement" and "emplacement" go hand in hand. Before 2011, migrant-receiving countries like Jordan successfully outsourced the *social reproduction* of low-skilled workers to Syria, their country of origin. In Marxist theory, social reproduction refers to the reproduction of the labour force, both on a daily and a generational basis (cf. Katz 2001). A core feature of global capitalism is the disconnect between *economic* and *social* reproduction. Forcing migrants to leave their families behind assures that the costs of social reproduction of the migrant workforce are born by countries and communities of origin. Katz (2001) points out a major paradox of global capitalism: while capital and humans are increasingly mobile, "social reproduction […] remains largely place-bound" (716) to migrants' communities of origin. Before 2011, it was cheaper for my Syrian informants to leave their families behind in the Syrian countryside where they had (limited) access to public services. But this was also cheaper for Jordan. After 2011, the host country has increasingly restricted Syrians' access to welfare outside camps, while refugees continue contributing to the informal economy.

Evangelical volunteers in Mafraq: Faith and aid as two transnational projects

In 2016, my ethnographic fieldwork was conducted with VIVA and the Mafraq Unity Church. A comparison between both Evangelical actors that I was able to volunteer with reveals important differences: mostly made up of local Jordanian Christians, the Mafraq Unity Church is anchored in northern Jordan's social fabric and shares cultural and linguistic bonds with Syrian refugees. It also has facilities of its own, having converted part of the church building into a refugee reception centre and, in recent years, acquired a school (chapter 7). By way of contrast, VIVA, a European grassroots NGO run by a small team from Amman, has a more fleeting presence in town and operates through day trips (chapters 4-

5) and employing Syrian teachers from the refugee community (chapter 6). Its interactions with refugees are often hampered by staff members and volunteers' lack of Arabic skills and ignorance of cultural codes of hospitality and gender. Without a permanent office in Mafraq, VIVA's humanitarian house visits to Syrians' homes are a convenient way of reaching as many Syrians as possible but cannot be reduced to mere practical necessity. That house visits epitomize VIVA's *relational* approach to aid is explored in chapters 4 and 5. Still, both organisations have much in common. In a majority-Muslim environment, they have prioritized development and humanitarian aid over missionary activities, although their faith shapes the ways in which aid is given and financed. Both are part of Evangelical transnational support networks, heavily skewed towards Europe and North America, and rely on the unpaid labour of foreign volunteers without a professional background or working experience in the humanitarian sector. By way of illustration, Maria, VIVA's member of staff that I accompanied most days, was a former primary school teacher whose knowledge of the aid industry was limited to short-term stints of volunteering with children in Jordan and South East Asia.

My research thus speaks to anthropologists' recent interest in how exposure to suffering elsewhere on TV and social media has enabled new forms of humanitarian engagement for the inhabitants of countries of wealth. There is now a rich literature on "volunteering tourism" that explores helpers' "white saviour complex", lack of cultural sensitivity and unsustainable forms of aid (e.g. Hutnyk 1996; Mustonen 2006; Mathers 2010). Malkki (2015) and Chouliaraki (2013), for example, explore the tension between altruistic deeds and self-interest that arises in "ordinary people's" humanitarianism. Their scholarship brings into focus the non-material dimension of aid. *Whose* emotional needs are being met when Europeans donate to charities, knit teddy bears or serve as volunteers abroad? In the context of the mass arrival of refugees to Greek islands and Athens since summer 2015, others have investigated new forms of horizontal solidarity between volunteers and aid beneficiaries (e.g. Rakopoulos 2016; Rozakou 2016). Sandri (2018) follows a group of young British volunteers working with migrants in Calais' infamous "Jungle" who are increasingly politicized through their everyday experiences in the camp and eventually take to campaigning against discriminatory border regimes in their home country.

We find a similar "hands-on" approach to aid among volunteers with VIVA and the Mafraq Unity Church. A focus on relationality and fulfilling *affective* needs is key to their dealings with Syrians. Intimate encounters allow volunteers and refugees to experience and share a whole range of emotions, including suffering and gratitude (chapter 5), hope for a better future (chapter 6) and repentance (chapter 7). Both parties frequently laugh and cry together and communicate across language barriers through heartfelt hugs. However, the boundaries between volunteering and tourism are sometimes blurred. Many short-term helpers combine their trip to northern Jordan with visiting the Dead Sea and the ancient ruins of Petra.

Different from volunteers in Calais and on Lesbos, though, Evangelicals in Mafraq are not interested in addressing power inequalities between host states, aid providers and beneficiaries, unjust border regimes or the root causes of Syrian displacement. They have travelled far – and paid from their own pockets - to support Syrians in Mafraq but are surprisingly uninformed about humanitarian policies in Jordan and the course of Syrian war. This is not due to mere lack of interest. Volunteers' activities in Mafraq do not aim to impact "everyday politics" but have to be understood against the backdrop of global religiopolitical projects. In the next section, a look at existing research on faith-based humanitarianism tells us more about the specific resources and political agendas that shape giving aid and, at times, missionary activities for VIVA and the Mafraq Unity Church. (To be clear, as a volunteer with both Evangelical organizations, I was not complicit in proselytizing.) It also highlights the tensions that they face when trying to retain their religious identity while they increasingly engage with mainstream development discourse and practice. As Pastor Aissa from the Mafraq Unity Church puts it: "We are a church, not an NGO!"

Faith-based humanitarianism in the Arab world

The eastern shore of the Jordan river is part of the historical heartland of Christianity. Today, though, Christians in Jordan are a splinter demographic: with an estimated population of ca. 140,000, Christians make up only 2.2% of the predominantly Muslim country. Almost two thirds of them are Greek Orthodox. Only 20,000 Jordanians are

Protestant Christians (Pew Research Center 2011).[7] In Mafraq, 2000 to 3000 locals, only a tiny fraction of its inhabitants, are Christians, dispersed across different churches. The town's – and Jordan's – Syrian refugee population is almost exclusively Muslim. And yet Christian beliefs play an important role in the humanitarian response in Mafraq. Needless to say, faith and aid in the Arab world have long gone hand in hand – it is important to note that in Muslim-majority societies, Christian and Muslim charities have had different histories and shapes. Today's Northern-led aid industry is historically rooted in Christian charity and philanthropy (Redfield and Bornstein 2010). Conversely, 'developing' the Middle East through building hospitals and schools has accompanied North American and European missionary endeavours since the 19th century. They became even more prominent after Arab states had gradually gained independence after the First World War and begun to control proselytising activities on their territory more tightly (Murre van-den Berg 2006). In the 20th century, faith-based organisations have also played an important role in the humanitarian response to various crises in the Middle East. In 1948, American Quakers were among the first to provide emergency relief to displaced Palestinians in Gaza (Feldman 2007). In the Levantine context, Hamas' electoral successes in Palestine in the mid-2000s triggered new research on Islamic and Christian charities. During the Second Intifada, for example, Islamic charities provided vital healthcare services in remote parts of Palestine, inaccessible to mainstream NGOs (Challand 2008).

However, faith-based humanitarianism in the Arab world cannot be reduced to the rise of political Islam. As in the Global North, it has to be understood in the context of neoliberal reforms and shrinking welfare states. Civil society actors, among them Islamic and Christian organisations, stepped in and began to provide public services to the poor (Challand 2014). Therefore, we should not think of Arab states and faith-based civil society actors as on opposing ends. In Jordan, Islamic preachers and religious functionaries have been incorporated into governmental bureaucracies and are tightly controlled by the authorities – they are also on the state's payroll (Antoun 2006). In Syria, the number of registered charities tripled between 2000 and 2010, in parallel with its transition from a centralized to a market-led economy (Ruiz de Elvira 2015). Christian charities, with their support for the

[7] Christians' rights are safeguarded in Jordan's constitution and electoral system: they have freedom of religion, and personal status laws and educational institutions of their own. In parliament, nine out of 130 seats are reserved for Christians. They also frequently occupy positions in cabinet, the administration and the military (Maggiolini 2015).

al-Assad regime and close ties to Western donors, enjoyed preferential treatment from the state. Ruiz de Elvira's (2012) ethnography of *Terre des Hommes* Syria illustrates the hybrid nature of many faith-based organisations. Originally established in Damascus in the 1960s by a Catholic priest, it later rebranded itself as a development actor with an interfaith agenda. During the wars in Iraq 2003 and in Lebanon 2006, Syria became a refugee-hosting country and *Terre des Hommes* Syria partnered with various UN agencies. In 2008, 95% of its beneficiaries were Muslim.

Recent years have seen a revived interest in faith-based humanitarian responses to displacement (Ferris 2011; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011a; Ager and Ager 2015). In the Jordanian context, Ababsa's (2014) report on Islamic charities during the Syrian refugee crisis draws attention to alternative agendas outside the human rights framework and Gulf states' funding. In Mafraq, VIVA and the Mafraq Unity Church work alongside – and sometimes in cooperation with – international Christian NGOs like Caritas and World Vision, other grassroots Evangelical NGOs, independent missionaries and even Islamic charities. This illustrates the great diversity of faith-based actors with regard to scale, histories, funding and degrees of adherence to humanitarian neutrality and impartiality (Ferris 2011). What all of these have in common is their embeddedness in transnational support networks (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011c) and access to shared spiritual identities, alternative sources of funding and a large pool of – often unpaid – volunteers (El Nakib and Ager 2015).

Evangelical aid providers in Mafraq

Mafraq Unity Church's and VIVA's humanitarian engagement thus unfolds against the backdrop of centuries of Christian charity in the Middle East and, more recently, in modern Arab states. In the case of the Mafraq Unity Church, acknowledging its Evangelical identity is straightforward. It is the 20th-century offshoot of an American-led, global Evangelical movement and the church frequently welcomes volunteers from other congregations in the US, but also Europe and the Global South. Church officials are also outspoken when it comes to prioritizing "mission" over "aid". The final part of chapter 7 explores the pastor's religiopolitical ambitions of recentering Christianity to the Global South, and Jordan in particular.

Representatives of VIVA, however, are less open about the religious underpinnings of the NGO. Its official website and Facebook page offer no indication of its religious affiliation, vaguely stating that VIVA considers itself "politically and denominationally independent" and its activities are informed by the "tried and tested humanitarian and Christian values" of their home country. This reflects the ways in which NGO workers introduced the organisation to me during our first encounter. In January 2016, I met with Clara and Sophia, two sisters in their thirties, at a Starbucks café in an upscale neighbourhood in West Amman. Both seemed energetic, modern and even "hip", young adventurous women with a pragmatic approach to helping people in need. Together with Clara's husband, the couple's three young children and Maria, the head of VIVA's new home-schooling project, they shared a house in West Amman. Clara and Sophia explained that VIVA was a volunteer-led grassroots organisation that provided emergency relief and education to Syrian refugees in Mafraq, a place they had chosen because of its position on the fringes of the international humanitarian system. They also told me about VIVA's founder, a successful entrepreneur with pre-existing business contacts in Jordan, who was hoping to set up more long-term livelihood projects for poor Syrians and Jordanians. That VIVA representatives were cautious when it comes to admitting their religious affiliation in Jordan is not surprising. Proselytization is illegal in Jordan (El Nakib and Ager 2015), and during my fieldwork, some of VIVA's activities were monitored by members of the Jordanian secret service. Downplaying its religious background also allowed VIVA to attract a diverse range of volunteers from Europe, including out-spoken atheists, although avowed Christians were usually in the majority.

My interest in VIVA's religious background was sparked by a disagreement between short-term volunteers during an "outreach mission" in April 2016, the modalities of which I discuss below. By then, I had noticed that volunteers occasionally prayed at Syrians' homes, and that Maria was very pious. In passing, she had mentioned her affiliation with *The Gathering* network, and I was curious to know more about it. I was alone in a car with Gabriel, a driving instructor by profession and in his mid-forties, when he suddenly became emotional: "We're not Christians. Everything bad is because of the Christians. Because the Christians have failed. Even *The Gathering* Church was renamed into T*he Gathering* Network." Gabriel did not intend to deny his Christian identity but rather object to the institutionalization of Christian beliefs which, he felt, had prevented him from putting them

into action: “We do what is written in the Bible. We don't listen to any church. When God tells us something, we do it.” When I asked him about the relationship between VIVA and *The Gathering*, he replied: “VIVA *is* the network.” Michaela, another volunteer, and her young daughter boarded the car. Intrigued, I decided to take the conversation further: “Are you also with the church?” Michaela unexpectedly put her guard up: “Why are you asking? VIVA has nothing to do with the church. There is just a lot of personal overlap.” Gabriel objected: “But sometimes lovely friends like you support us and the church.” But Michaela was quick to emphasize: “But we are here with VIVA [not with the church]!”

A quick online research reveals a description of *The Gathering Church* on a website about independent churches that is run by mainstream Protestant denominations in VIVA’s country of origin. The available information is sparse. *The Gathering* is portrayed as a “neocharismatic church” and part of the global Evangelical alliance. Between 1998 and 2008, the year of its dismantlement, it grew from 50 to ca. 400 members and set up a system of local “home churches”. Monthly celebrations brought all members together and the church’s founder humorously described their congregation as “the guys with the Bible and the barbecue.” Some parishioners also engaged in missionary activities in Africa. From the website, we learn that its founder had previously trained as a missionary in London and opened two churches of a major Evangelical movement in Canada before returning to his home country.[8] After 2008, the church transitioned into a “network”. On its rudimentary new website, it spells out its underlying vision, against the background of a scenic sunrise in the mountains: “*The Gathering Network International* is made up of people who want to set an example of love and give themselves away with passion… Our inspiration and optimism are inspired by our personal relationship with God.” In 2010, VIVA was established as an independent foundation. In an interview, VIVA’s president, who is also the initiator of *The Gathering Church* and later *The Gathering Network*, justifies the

[8] In contrast with the reserve of VIVA representatives that I met in Jordan, its president – the founder of *The Gathering* - frequently appears on the media of his home country. In interviews, he is presented as a successful businessman with professional networks around the globe, on which he capitalizes to bring anything from pharmaceutical drugs to solar panels to Syrian refugees. Pictures show him in the company of development professionals. He denies having political interests but emphasizes his strong interfaith agenda: “I have many Muslim friends. We pray together.” For VIVA’s founder, doing business and doing “aid” go hand in hand: “Everything we do is shaped by Christian values.” It is also noteworthy that non-mainstream churches have a particularly strong presence in the mid-sized European town in which VIVA has its headquarters, from where its founder runs his business and where *The Gathering Network* operates a Christian school of its own. Alongside its networked structure, VIVA is thus deeply rooted in a region of Western Europe with a particular history of non-mainstream Christianity.

transformation of the church into a network: “We wanted to act instead of talking.” In the same context, he explicates the relationship between VIVA and *The Gathering*: “There is no [mandatory] membership [of VIVA]. Members of the network receive invitations from VIVA, for example to join outreach missions to Jordan, to get engaged in humanitarian aid or elsewhere. That’s it.”

VIVA’s current activities in Mafraq are framed as explicitly apolitical. The NGO comes from a European country known for its long tradition of impartial humanitarianism and its national legacy is explicitly referenced during conferences and press interviews. That does not mean that VIVA members do not care about politics at all. Its website reads like a bucket list of conflicts in the Middle East, including Palestinian refugee camps, terrorist attacks in Israel, civil wars in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. It boldly states that “political and military approaches to achieving peace have failed” and vaguely warns of “radical forces on both sides”. In response, friendship between VIVA members and aid recipients is advocated as a means for “shaping worlds of peace”, the organization’s official slogan. For example, VIVA runs artistic “reconciliation projects” involving young Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians, not with the aim to address underlying issues of justice and power, but to “pacify” young Arabs.

Over time, I got a clearer understanding of VIVA’s Evangelical identity. In her home-schooling project with young Syrian refugees, Maria taught the children Christian songs that had been translated into Arabic. In November 2016, I witnessed an informal service with Christian pop songs in English and VIVA’s mother tongue. At one point, Sophia got up from her keyboard. She began to clap her hands enthusiastically, ejecting joyful cries. While she gradually got louder and louder, she visibly entered a trance. Finally, in early 2017, I attended a conference of VIVA supporters in their European hometown. It provided a platform for speakers well-known in Evangelical circles, including a neuroscientist advocating for the links between science and scripture.

What pertains to my argument here is that VIVA’s permanent staff members and many volunteers brought to the humanitarian enterprise specific practices and a solid support network that date back to their time at T*he Gathering Church*: a scripture-oriented understanding of religion; an anti-institutional stance; a networked organisational structure with a focus on social activities; and experience with proselytization. North America plays

an important role in steering – and funding – Evangelical communities worldwide and VIVA has personal and ideological ties with this part of the world. Its founder first gained missionary experience in Canada, and VIVA's social activities draw inspiration from the English-speaking Christian entertainment industry. Most of the songs that children in Maria's home schools learn are originally from American Evangelical pop bands. But VIVA also capitalizes on the longstanding presence of missionary activities in the Arab world. Clara and her husband had previously lived with a Christian charity in Egypt. On the ground, the Mafraq Unity Church is VIVA's preferred cooperation partner, and one of its more regular volunteers, a European woman in her sixties, had worked with an Evangelical charity for disabled children in Syria for more than a decade before 2011.

"Giving with no strings attached"? Evangelical volunteers' difficult relationality

Redfield and Bornstein (2010) argue that faith-based humanitarianism allows us to rethink the relationship between aid providers and recipients: religiously motivated "social and relational assistance […] differs both from a generalized care of strangers […] and from the neutral, impartial ideals of secular humanitarianism as advocated by the UN" (10). VIVA and the Mafraq Unity Church pursue an approach to aid that is premised on proximity, authenticity and direct contact, and conceived in opposition to more institutionalized and bureaucratic forms of assistance. Instead of making Syrians wait in the queue outside NGO centres or subject them to bureaucratic procedures, they emphasize personal encounters, most prominently through the practice of house visits.

For Evangelical organizations in Mafraq, *individuals*, not institutions, lead the humanitarian response. The church's aid "business" is run by several dozens of Jordanian volunteers and foreign visitors from fellow congregations around the world. On its website, VIVA criticizes that humanitarian action is often delegated to bigger organizations: "The individual can achieve more than you think." This is reflected in the composition of VIVA's core team in Amman – four primary school teachers with no working experience in the development sector – and its recruitment strategy of volunteers who, according to its website, are not "development professionals but those willing to devote some of their resources – strength, skills and empathy – to people in need". Importantly, delivering material forms of assistance is not the main purpose of these visits. VIVA's website clearly states that

"material help does not solve the actual problem". Instead, aid delivery sets the stage for the fulfilment of Syrians' spiritual needs and the organisations' religiopolitical agendas. (Chapter 7 explores how this specific form of relationality has also been factored into the church's fundraising appeal towards mainstream development actors.)

But establishing close ties with Syrians in Mafraq is far from straight forward and often hindered by budgetary and linguistic constraints. *Practical* limitations to how much VIVA and the church can give leads them to check-up on Syrians' actual "neediness" and sometimes translates into outright accusations of aid fraud. And the intertwinement of spiritual and material forms of aid also lays bare a more *conceptual* tension inherent to Christian compassion. While volunteers want to give unconditionally, exemplifying ideals of universal compassion, they also believe in the transformative power of human relationships. By doing good, Christians hope to put sinners on the path to redemption. Consequently, expectations of Syrians' accountability to their benefactors complicate "giving with no strings attached" (chapters 5 and 7). A concept that helps us think through the tensions that Evangelical humanitarians face in Mafraq is "detachment" (Candea 2010; Candea et al. 2015). In the 19th century, objectivity became a landmark of scientific rationality. More recently, feminist and postcolonial scholars have revealed the ideological underpinnings of epistemic distance, claiming that it obscures underlying power relations and entanglements with colonial and patriarchal projects. These critiques have inspired political campaigns for democracy and participatory action. But they also risk naturalizing a relational worldview: is everything, and everybody, related? Therefore, Candea (2010) puts forward the alternative concept of "detachment", not as the opposite of "relatedness", but rather to draw attention to "the broad spectrum that lies between complete lack of connection […] and actual 'intersubjectivity'" (244).

Contrary to some of Candea's (2010) study subjects, Evangelical volunteers in Mafraq do not consciously engage in "micro-practices of detachment" (Candea 2010: 248). On the contrary, they try to maximize relationality because they understand it as a remedy not only to Syrians' present suffering, but also to their wider spiritual deprivation and sectarian strife in the Middle East. Still, their practices often have a similar effect: detachment from those they deeply care for. I do not claim that Evangelicals' relationships with Syrians in Mafraq "fail" or are insincere. Instead, the second half of this thesis asks how relationality

between volunteers and refugees is produced and where its limits lie. The study of VIVA's practices of driving (chapter 4), house visits (chapter 5) and education (chapter 6) highlights the messy and sometimes contradictory negotiations of proximity that volunteers get entangled in. The final chapter sheds light on tensions between the Mafraq Unity Church's inclusive actions and anti-Muslim rhetoric: why do volunteers resent those they are trying to save?

Methods and the researcher's position in the field

The third part of the introduction turns to research methods and issues of positionality in the field. Ethnographic research for this thesis was conducted in Mafraq, Jordan, between 2015 and 2017. Before my doctoral studies, I was already familiar with the Levant, having spent six months in Palestine and Jordan in 2013 as an intern with a German NGO. For my PhD, I initially planned to study displaced populations in Amman. In summer 2015, I undertook a two-day scoping trip to Mafraq, upon the invitation of Pastor Aissa, the head of the Mafraq Unity Church. The details of this visit are narrated below. The little that I saw, and the disproportional impact of Syrian displacement on northern Jordan, made me decide to switch my field site to Mafraq. I was also interested in the town because of its contradictory status as a "remote crossroads". Located at the margins of national territory, it has a reputation as a Bedouin backwater. Economic deprivation, high rates of unemployment and the absence of touristic sights make Mafraq an unattractive place even for locals. However, it is also well-suited to the study of Syrians' mobility histories because of its proximity to regional transport arteries, including the now-defunct Hijaz Railway, the highways to Damascus and Baghdad, and the Syrian and Saudi border.

In January 2016, I moved to Amman and initially stayed at the German Protestant Institute for Archaeology, a German research institution akin to the British Institutes in the Levant. Initially, I planned to volunteer with the Mafraq Unity Church. After lengthy discussions, the church refused. In February 2016, I began volunteering with VIVA whose contact I had received from a fellow European student. From February to December 2016, I lived in Mafraq and worked as an unpaid interpreter with VIVA. In summer 2017, a two-month language scholarship from the British Institute allowed me to return to Amman. While I took Arabic classes on weekdays, I travelled to Mafraq on most weekends to spend time

with my host family and conduct short stints of follow-up fieldwork. A one-day excursion to the south of the Jordan Valley, together with Dr Carol Palmer, the director of the British Institute, gave me further insights into migrant labour in the agricultural sector in Jordan.

Below, I discuss my engagement with two Evangelical organisations in Mafraq as well as my experience of living with a Jordanian family. For each group of informants that I interacted with, I specify which *kinds* of people I had access to – foreign and Jordanian aid workers, volunteers, Mafraq locals and Syrian refugees – as well as issues of positionality and consent. To each party, I fulfilled slightly different "roles": to VIVA representatives, I was a PhD student, interpreter and refugee activist. To the Mafraq Unity Church, I was a volunteer and (lapsed) Christian. To my host family, I was a dutiful daughter and student. To Syrian refugees, I was a VIVA member of staff and, for some, a close friend. Quite unexpectedly, my religious affiliation became a contentious issue. Born in post-socialist East Germany, I had nominally been raised a Protestant Christian, but never given it much thought. In Mafraq, being a Christian – and the *right* kind of Christian – was important to VIVA and the Mafraq Unity Church. Maria, one of Mafraq's staff members, tried to include me into prayers during house visits (cf. chapter 5) and once sent me a postcard, expressing her hopes that I might "find God". But my Christian identity also mattered to my Muslim host parents who found it easier to accept that I adhered to a different religion than me being an atheist. To fend off any attempt at converting me from Syrian and Jordanian Muslim friends, but also to retain my close ties with the church, I regularly attended its Sunday service.

With regard to VIVA and the Mafraq Unity Church, all names are changed. At times, their description is deliberately kept vague. (For instance, I chose not to disclose the European country of origin of VIVA's members of staff and volunteers.) Both the NGO and the church have a secure legal status in Jordan, and high-ranking church officials are all Jordanian citizens. But some of their members engage in covert, and sometimes open, missionary activities, which is illegal in Jordan (El Nakib and Ager 2015). As for Syrian refugees, all names and some case studies have been altered to make informants unrecognizable. This is to avoid any negative effects that the publication of my findings could have on their eligibility for humanitarian assistance and treatment after return to Syria. While it is highly unlikely that my Syrian informants, most of whom are barely literate in Arabic, could ever

read this thesis, I honour promises of confidentiality by withholding intimate details. By way of contrast, I refer to members of my Jordanian host family by their real (first) names because they explicitly encouraged me to do so.

Crossing linguistic and gender barriers

Before I introduce the organisations that I volunteered with, I explain how my Arabic skills and being a woman allowed me to circumvent gender barriers in the field. By the time I began fieldwork in Mafraq in February 2016, I was fairly fluent in Levantine Arabic, although far from fully proficient in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). During the first year of my PhD, I had been enrolled in an intensive Arabic study programme in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Edinburgh, including ca. 20 hours of weekly classes in MSA and Levantine dialect and a one-month summer programme at a partner institute in Amman. My Arabic skills were key to the volunteering experience as neither VIVA's permanent members of staff nor most short-term volunteers spoke the language. Except for a young local man in Mafraq, VIVA had no other bilingual volunteers on the ground. Since its focal points in the refugee community were often women who preferred interacting with members of the same sex, I soon became a central node in the communications between the organization and its female beneficiaries. (A heated argument with Maria that I narrate in chapter 5 provides insights into the limitations of my role as an interpreter. When I refused to translate her prayers during house visits, Maria threatened to kick me out of the programme.)

All interviews in humanitarian and non-humanitarian settings were conducted without the help of local research assistants. Recruiting Jordanian interpreters would have raised additional challenges, given Mafraq locals' insufficient level of English, even among university students. What is more, available English speakers were mostly men. Hiring a male interpreter would have severely restricted my access to Syrian homes. Like other female anthropologists in the Middle East (see, for example, Schwedler 2006), I found that being a woman facilitated my interactions with married and unmarried Syrian women, as well as their male family members. Although spending alone time with men would not have been appropriate, I could interview them in the presence of my female friends. Social events *outside* the home were usually gender-segregated, both for locals and Syrians.

During engagement parties, weddings and funerals, my freedom of movement was thus restricted to the women's side.

Through living with a Jordanian host family, I further improved my knowledge of local dialect and soon began to speak "Bedawi", Mafraq's vernacular dialect. More than an ethnic affiliation, it is associated with a set of conservative values and lifestyles, Jordanian heritage and codes of hospitality (Bellem and Palmer 2016).[9] Speaking "bedawi" dialect denotes backwardness in bigger Jordanian cities - in Mafraq, it allowed me to demonstrate belonging. When I returned from occasional weekends in Amman, my host brothers often teased me for switching to "madani". It was important to them that I spoke like "us". But their dialect also had a gendered dimension. It is a marker of masculinity, especially among the younger generation. Girls from Mafraq make a point of speaking "madani", considered softer and more appropriate for females, especially in formal contexts. That I picked up "bedawi" quickly might be related to the fact that there were no women my age in my host family. Jordanians in Mafraq were usually charmed by my knowledge of local expressions, but young female Syrians scolded me for "speaking like the Jordanians", a dialect that they considered provincial and unwomanly. But conversing in local dialect also set me apart from Jordanian aid workers who used "madani" in professional contexts.

Volunteering with Syrian refugees

My engagement with the Mafraq Unity Church and VIVA comes out of the specific challenges that I faced when preparing to undertake anthropological research in Mafraq. The absence of public meeting spaces and its conservative culture made it hard for me to befriend refugees or locals. Instead, aid providers served as gatekeepers to the refugee community. Conducting house visits as an unpaid interpreter appeared to be a time-efficient way of establishing contact with a large number of potential informants.

[9] My host family was quick to point out that they did not consider themselves "Bedouins", a term reserved for tribes further to the East. At the same time, "bedawi" dialect set them apart from speakers of "madani", the urban dialect that is associated with inhabitants of Amman, and particularly Palestinians, and of "fellahi", the language of sedentary farmers further to the West. Until modernity – in the form of the Hijaz Railway and the Mossul-Haifa pipeline – reached Mafraq in the early 20th century, most of its inhabitants had made a living from shepherding and limited attempts at farming. While inhabitants of Mafraq, like Jordanians all over the country, have long turned to white-collar professions, the generation of my host parents nostalgically remembers childhood summers spent in their grandparents' tents.

The Mafraq Unity Church

I first visited the church during Ramadan 2015. I had received the contact details of Pastor Aissa from a student-led NGO in Edinburgh and had been invited to stay for two days. Our first encounter tells a lot about mismatched expectations on both sides. The pastor, a Jordanian man in his fifties, came to pick me up from the local bus station in his car but did not immediately recognize me. While he was looking for a white Western female, I had put on a headscarf and baggy clothes at the recommendation of my Jordanian friends. After a zigzag drive through Mafraq's windy souq, I was dazzled. Only later did I realize that we could have walked to the church building in a mere five minutes.

I was immediately taken by the pastor's demure smile, his comprehensive view of the refugee situation and his command of English. Before Pastor Aissa got involved in the church, he had initially trained as an engineer. His professional background seemed to inform his pragmatic approach to running a church, but also giving aid – the pastor was always ready to discuss the practicalities of hiring Syrian tilers, and his Facebook stream included numerous pictures of him on the construction site of the new church building. Far from being an ascetic theologian, Pastor Aissa was a hands-on manager. During Sunday service, I would soon get to know him as a passionate preacher as well. With dark circles under his eyes, Pastor Aissa looked forever tired. While we were speaking, his teenage children and other church members kept popping in. The busy scene gave the impression of an honest family man, sacrificing his private life and health for assisting Syrians. In fact, much of the church's success with various partners relied on his charismatic persona. At night, Yusuf, a sturdy middle-aged Mafraq local who was in charge of the aid distribution to Syrian families, invited me to join a delivery round with young American volunteers. To enter refugees' houses and put their women at ease, the men had to bring a female with them. On that first night in Mafraq, I was shell-shocked by the destitution I witnessed inside Syrians' homes; a windy route through Mafraq's dusty outskirts and the suffocating heat also left me completely disoriented. When, overwhelmed, I began to cry, Yusuf put on a CD of romantic Arabic love songs, that he sang along to for the rest of the drive in a raspy, energetic voice.

After I had moved to Mafraq for a year in early 2016, I had many more occasions to hear Yusuf sing, as he led the chant during Sunday service. I soon learnt that Yusuf was the most famous person in town, at least among Syrians who often referred to the church as "Yusuf's church", or simply: "Yusuf". Besides, I quickly understood that refugees were far from being helpless. Many scraped out a living by working in the informal sector, engaging with multiple aid providers and accessing resources from kinship networks. Clearly, this more complex picture was not what the church had wanted me to see on my first visit.

Given the church's embeddedness in Mafraq's social fabric and the humanitarian response, it seemed reasonable to apply for a stay as a long-term volunteer for the sake of my doctoral research. Upon my return to the UK, I stayed in touch with the American volunteer in charge of coordinating foreign visitors. He asked me to provide a 'profession of faith' to the church. In November 2015, I sent a lengthy email in which I laid out my religious upbringing, my father's employment in a Protestant hospital and previous volunteering experiences. However, the church rejected my application on vague terms. Apparently, I had failed to match its Evangelical convictions. As a consolation, the pastor invited me to attend service on Sundays. During my research, I struck an informal arrangement with Yusuf. Since I met many Syrians through my volunteering activities, Yusuf occasionally accepted demands for food parcels that I transmitted. On one occasion, the pastor himself unbureaucratically provided financial support for hearing aids for a Syrian boy who I had encountered through VIVA. In 2016, I arranged another four formal meetings with the pastor. On three of these occasions, I was accompanied by European academics who had come to Mafraq for informal scoping trips, and interviews were conducted jointly.

I thus interacted with the pastor, Yusuf and other members of the church in my various capacities: as a research student, as an NGO volunteer and as a member of their parish. Importantly, I did not use my contact with the church to conduct research with Syrian *refugees*, but rather on how a local institution carved out a niche for itself during the humanitarian response. While I spoke Arabic with some members of the congregation, I used English for communicating with church officials and foreign volunteers. Interlocutors were told about my doctoral research on Syrian refugees' mobility histories in the region and the reason of my stay in Mafraq. As many short- and long-term members of the Mafraq Unity Church were highly educated, explaining the background of my study was not

complicated. Consent was obtained verbally and repeatedly. However, although I always emphasised to church members and foreign volunteers that I was collecting data for my doctoral thesis, boundaries were often blurred, especially during informal chats after Sunday service. It is likely that many church members perceived me foremost as a fellow Evangelical volunteer. To the pastor, my main informant, however, it was clear that I was a Christian, but not an Evangelical. Therefore, I knew the church as an insider and an outsider. My position at the intersection of academic research, faith-based and secular humanitarianism mimics the overlapping networks that the church so aptly navigates. The final point I make here is that communication was not a one-way street for the benefit of my PhD research. Church officials had a vested interest in showcasing their humanitarian achievements, as integrating (presumably Christian) foreigners into the church was central to their globalised outreach strategy to audiences and potential funders in the Global North (chapter 7).

VIVA

When I first met Clara and Sophia in January 2016, they were delighted to hear about my Arabic skills and invited me to join VIVA's activities in Mafraq as a volunteer. Soon, I was permanently assigned to their new team member, Maria, who had arrived in Jordan at the same time as myself and knew Mafraq very little. As an interpreter, I took part in two types of activities: so-called "outreach missions" with foreign volunteers from Europe, and weekly meetings with teachers, trainings and school camps in the context of Maria's home-schooling project. (In October and November 2016, I also accompanied VIVA on two week-long "outreach missions" to Azraq camp, Jordan's new high-tech facility for Syrian refugees in the Eastern desert. As findings from these trips are not included in the thesis, they are not further discussed below.)

On average, volunteering with VIVA kept me busy two or three days a week, and sometimes more. I did not receive a salary, but the organisation covered my transportation costs. During "outreach missions", lunch was provided for all volunteers. During two week-long trips to Azraq camp, VIVA offered me to stay at their private home in October 2016 and, together with other volunteers, at a Christian guest house in November 2016. At the

end of 2016, Maria and other staff members presented me with 200 JD (ca. 282 USD) in appreciation of my work with VIVA.

Outreach missions

I took part as an interpreter in four rounds of "outreach missions" in February, April/May, October and November 2016. Each round lasted one or two weeks and brought in up to two dozen volunteers from Western Europe, almost all of them from VIVA's country of origin, for daily visits to Syrian homes. There were two discernible age groups: young people in their mid-twenties to early thirties, often couples, sometimes with young children; and older married couples in their forties and fifties, who sometimes brought their teenage offspring. Many volunteers worked in social professions. They were teachers, nurses and social workers in children's and retirement homes. The majority were avowed Christians. Some had been funded by their own congregations in Europe to travel to Mafraq, while others were affiliated with *The Gathering*. At times, the organisation was accompanied by Iraqi Christians from Amman who volunteered with various NGOs while waiting for resettlement to the US. But VIVA also attracted very different people, which testifies to its great appeal to potential volunteers with a similar profile: (mostly) young, hip and casual, with a hands-on mindset and an interest in refugee issues. Once, I spent a week with a young left-wing Israeli woman who had travelled from Tel Aviv to Jordan to contribute to the humanitarian response. We meticulously guarded her Jewish identity from Syrian aid beneficiaries. All in all, I encountered ca. sixty short-term visitors, some of them during more than one "mission". In chapters 4 and 5, I discuss what happens during a "typical" house visit with VIVA volunteers. During "outreach missions", small teams were assembled afresh every morning and my encounters with volunteers were mostly fleeting.

Foreign visitors were aware from the onset that I was working with VIVA to gather data for my doctoral research. At times, VIVA staff emphasized my identity as an "academic" when asking me to give briefings about Syrians' situation in Jordan to newcomers. However, the fact that my position—situated somewhere between an unpaid interpreter, scout, and occasional teacher—was never set down in writing reflects the NGO's informal ways of operating. Its staff showed little interest in discussing my findings. This was not the result of their indifference, but rather the fact that we spoke different "idioms of development" and

framed Syrians' needs differently. Before my PhD, I had worked briefly with a UN agency and was thus familiar with mainstream development discourse. By way of contrast, VIVA's interactions with Syrians in Mafraq were informed by a "language of the heart" that I will explore in chapters 4-6.

During "outreach missions", every team visited two to four Syrian families in Mafraq per day. Many of them had never received assistance from VIVA, although staff members and returning volunteers also used the opportunity to meet with families that they had previously "befriended". As Maria's home-schooling project progressed, short-term volunteers were also invited to observe classes. All in all, I entered more than fifty Syrian households as an interpreter. In chapter 5, I explain that fellow volunteers often had little interest in conversing with Syrians, which gave me more time for asking questions of my own. My double role as a researcher and NGO volunteer posed specific challenges in terms of my position in the field that I addressed in the following ways: when asking questions beyond my role as an interpreter, I told my Syrian counterparts about my "study on refugees and their lives in Mafraq" and I explained the nature and aims of my research program in the UK, using appropriate language. Potential interlocutors were told that any data collected for the sake of my research would be anonymized and would not be used in a way that could compromise their continued relationship with VIVA or their legal situation in Jordan. All informants, but especially females, were assured that information about domestic issues would not be shared within the refugee community. Because of Syrians' low levels of literacy and fear of repercussions from Syrian secret services, the humanitarian sector and the host state, consent was obtained verbally. However, despite my explanations about my double role as a volunteer and a researcher, it is not unrealistic to assume that informants were hoping for further support. While I offered my help with humanitarian bureaucracy, providing information about refugee services and negotiating with NGOs on Syrians' behalf, I could not deliver the more continuous financial support that they were aspiring to, or influence VIVA's funding decisions.

As VIVA representatives struck up close friendships with a handful of Syrian families in Mafraq, I began to visit some of them on a regular basis, often together with fellow volunteers. One family that I became particularly close to was Naila's. Their working experience in Jordan informs chapter 2 on refugee labour. Naila's youngest sister, a bright

14-year old, had befriended Clara and sometimes accompanied VIVA's visits to Syrian homes as an unpaid interpreter. Maria had initially planned to enlist Naila and another unmarried sister as teachers in her home-schooling project. Later, VIVA occasionally paid the girls to produce cheap plastic jewellery that VIVA volunteers sold back in Europe. My ties with Naila's family went beyond interactions in a humanitarian context. Almost every week, I visited the family home for a chat or lunch. Once, Naila and her sisters even organised a sleep-over for me. I also attended the wedding of Naila and one of her sisters and rushed to congratulate her other siblings on their new-born babies. Although Naila's father encouraged me to consider myself "his daughter", my relationship with the family was remarkably different from that with my Jordanian hosts and overshadowed by recurrent demands of assistance and money. I once bought Naila's father a winter coat, but I could not usually give in to their requests.

Maria's home-schooling project

From February to December 2016, I was also assigned more closely to Maria, a woman in her early thirties, while she was establishing a home-schooling project. Syrian women were recruited to teach Syrian children from their neighbourhoods inside their own living rooms. Every week, I accompanied Maria for two or three whole days while she observed classes, organized trainings and visited her pupils' families. Twice a year, we organised week-long school camps for all students, all in all ca. 80 children between the ages of six and fourteen. Besides teaching activities, these school camps included first-aid and drama courses, football games and barbecues in the countryside. On my own, I arranged trips for selected classes to a heritage museum in Irbid and a children's festival in Umm al-Jimal, an archaeological site outside Mafraq. Teachers and their families also received special "treats", for example visits to restaurants and a trip to the Children's Museum in Amman. Besides translation, I was in charge of coordinating with local transport companies. Chapter 6 examines new forms of economic agency, but also dependency, that teachers developed throughout the project. Here, suffice to say that its main protagonists, ca. ten female and two male teachers and their families, became my main informants within the Syrian community. Some of them, like Tamam, Adnan, Baher, Khadija and Layan, frequently appear throughout this thesis. On average, I visited each teacher's family at least every two weeks, either with Maria or on my own. "Official" VIVA visits were often short and coupled

with teaching activities, and Maria rarely stayed for lunch or informal chats. By way of contrast, my "private" visits usually had some NGO-related motivation – for example, handing over new teaching material – but provided opportunities for shared meals and afternoons spent together. For some teachers that I was particularly close with, I also attended family events, for example Tamam's engagement party and wedding.

My double positionality as a VIVA volunteer and a doctoral student was exacerbated in my interactions with participants of the home-schooling project. On the one hand, my Arabic skills and availability in Mafraq forced me to take on the role as a mediator between VIVA and the teachers. They regularly contacted me with questions for Maria, often for an advance payment. In return, Maria forwarded me voice messages in Arabic. On an ordinary day, my phone buzzed from the early morning until midnight. All teachers knew that I was an unpaid volunteer. But they (rightly) assumed that as a UK-based PhD student, I had greater financial resources than themselves. Instead of asking me for money, they tried to capitalize on my preferential *connection* with VIVA. In urgent cases, teachers summoned me to their homes to ask me to intervene on their behalf. Khadija, for example, implored me to have VIVA send money to her elderly in-laws who were stuck in Syria and unprepared to face the winter. Before her wedding, Tamam asked VIVA to pay for dental treatment.

On the other hand, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with most of the teachers for the sake of my PhD. At times, family members took part in the conversation. In multigenerational households like those of Syrian refugees in Mafraq, the presence of siblings, cousins and spouses was hard to avoid, but might have compelled interviewees to shy away from more controversial issues. Conversations were structured along some key questions about teachers' areas of origin, pre-war migrations, experiences of flight and life in exile. These usually lasted between one and two hours and were recorded with my phone. All interview material was anonymized. For now, it is encrypted and safely stored on my personal computer and a hard drive that only I have access to. For negotiating verbal consent and informing participants about the purpose of my study, I followed procedures similar to those during house visits. Teachers knew that these interviews were strictly separated from my volunteering activities with VIVA and that their participation would have no impact on their employment relationship with the NGO. Many of them felt grateful for my ongoing engagement with VIVA and were eager to support my personal research.

What emerged from the interviews was a gendered distribution of "speech": female teachers preferred speaking about domestic issues and memories of home. Male teachers like Adnan and Baher were more interested in educating me about Syrian history and society.

Over-researched, over-photographed?

At the end of this section, I would like to address two types of methodological problems that arise from choosing volunteering with humanitarian actors as an entry point to the field. First, it has been argued that refugees in the Middle East have been disproportionately targeted by academic research, usually with little improvements to their living conditions. Nayel (2013) poignantly calls out to American postgraduate students on a visit to a camp in Lebanon: "Palestinian refugees are not at your service!" After the Arab uprisings and subsequent displacement flows, Jordan stands out because of its political stability and lenient visa regime, making it an attractive research destination. Pascucci (2016) argues that academics often capitalize on existing humanitarian infrastructure, including the presence of NGO offices, interpreters and drivers, to access displaced populations. During the time of my fieldwork, volunteering with refugees was certainly the established mode of "entering the field" for fellow PhD researchers and more senior academics from the Global North. Their close engagement with the aid sector has a variety of consequences. As Pascucci (2016) rightly points out, many develop some esprit de corps. Although I mostly stayed away from the lively community of expat aid workers and international researchers in the capital because I permanently lived in Mafraq, I occasionally encountered them during events at European research institutions, for example at the British Research Institute and the Institut Français du Proche-Orient.

More importantly, in Mafraq, I met Syrian refugees who had been registered, assisted, questioned and trained repeatedly by big aid agencies like the UNHCR and Save the Children, grassroots organisations like VIVA and the Unity Church, and by Jordanian authorities. In this regard, humanitarian actors are more than simple gate keepers that regulate access to study informants. Syrians' ample experience with the aid sector shaped the very stories they told me – or chose to withhold – because they did not want to compromise access to further humanitarian assistance and because of their expectations of

what NGOs were hoping to hear. Kindersley (2015) retraces how "life stories" of the displaced emerged as a genre of its own in the mid-1970s in the context of the rise of war journalism, easier access to camps and the growing importance of refugee "testimonies" for mobilising humanitarian funding and human rights advocacy. By the late 1990s, they had turned into an established feature of humanitarian reports, supposedly restoring the agency of speakers and providing authentic and truthful information about displacement. Despite being drawn from refugees' "direct" speech, though, the life stories that NGO workers and war journalists collect tend to be informed by their *own* expectations about what constitutes meaningful "refugee" experiences and heavily edited. During house visits with VIVA in Mafraq, Syrian aid recipients often provided standardized refugee narratives about flight and suffering in exile that obscured alternative forms of economic agency and more complicated histories of belonging. (Chapter 5 asks how volunteers' urge to testify back home shapes real-life encounters with Syrians.) During first encounters, they also concealed livelihood strategies deemed unacceptable to Western NGOs, for example early marriage and child labour. To reach a more complex understanding of Syrians' living situation in Mafraq, I adopted various approaches. When I first met potential informants together with VIVA volunteers, I tried to arrange a follow-up visit to their homes without company. Being treated like a private "guest", not like an NGO worker, facilitated different discussions about family life and relationships. Chapter 6 provides an example of how Syrian women describe life goals differently in an NGO class and in the intimacy of their living rooms.

I also complemented informal and semi-formal interviews with *mobile* participant observation. In the context of social sciences' "mobility turn", researchers have called for new "mobile methods" that do justice to the interconnected and fluctuating nature of our study subjects (e.g. Büscher, Urry and Witchger 2011; D'Andrea, Ciolfi and Grey 2011; Fincham, McGuinness and Murray 2009). These days, anthropologists travel with their informants, but also follow objects across borders. Sadly, in a situation of ongoing strife in Syria, conducting a "mobile" ethnography had obvious limitations. My Syrian informants' villages of origin in their home country had moved out of reach, as had their former travel routes. What I could observe, though, were my informants' mobility habits *at the urban scale*. Foreign volunteers in Mafraq usually travel in cars, which necessarily restricts their understanding of alternative geographies outside "spaces of aid" (chapter 4). I thus made it

a point to spend as much time as possible *walking* with Syrians. Recently, anthropologists have paid much attention to the practice of *walking* because it provides new insights into experiential dimensions of navigating and inhabiting the "field" (e.g. Ingold and Vergunst 2008; Lee and Ingold 2006). Rather than a simple movement from A to B, "walking" involves specific forms of knowledge of the place and its people, orientation skills and interactions with fellow walkers, bystanders and authorities in urban space.

While walking interviews have long been used to investigate relational and embodied dimensions of urban space, a growing number of researchers have employed mobile methods to investigate fault lines between host, refugee and migrant communities. Back and Sinha (2018), for example, retrace the walks of undocumented youth in London. Writing against spectacular representations of migrants, they demonstrate how their study subjects' everyday lives in the streets combine moments of conviviality with experiences of violence and surveillance. Warren (2017) reminds us not to treat marginalized communities as homogeneous, challenging our understanding of walking as implicitly Eurocentric and secular. In truth, the leisurely promenade of the European, bourgeois, male flaneur might have little in common with the ways in which Warren's interlocutors, Muslim migrant women, move around a working-class neighbourhood in Birmingham, under the watchful eye of their families and religious community. Hence, Warren calls for "the need to pluralise mobile methods" (2017: 786). Through greater attention to gender, ethnicity and faith, walking methodologies can highlight how our informants become not only mobile, but also, at times, immobilized or excluded from certain parts of public space. Finally, mobile methods often aim to restore a sense of agency for marginalized population, turning them into "experts" of their familiar environment (cf. O'Neill et al. 2018). However, as Warren (2017) points out, it also risks replicating existing barriers to refugees' movements.

From a pragmatic point of view, walking with Syrians left a lot of time for informal chats. In Mafraq, streets are full of potholes and have no sidewalks, traffic is chaotic and female refugees wear cheap shoes, and even heels. Women also prefer walking in the company of others. Given strict gender norms, it would have been inappropriate for me to walk with Syrian *men*. Did houses in their Syrian village look like houses in Mafraq? Did their grandmothers also sit on the front porch at sunset? Did they grow similar trees in the courtyard? These were some of the questions I discussed with female friends during

leisurely walks. They often walked more slowly and more "femininely" than myself, and I had to adapt my pace to theirs. In her study of poor people in Cairo, Elyachar (2011) found that she "had to learn again how to cross the street" (85). Asking informants to teach me something as seemingly obvious as walking opened up new perspectives on their lives.

Through accompanying my Syrian informants on foot, I learned that walking in Mafraq could be many things: a marker of (low) social status (chapter 1), a site of resistance to power inequalities in the host country's asylum system (chapter 2) and the aid industry (chapter 4), and a means of liberation from the patriarchy (chapter 6). Walking with Syrians from one NGO centre to another tells us something about how Syrians are socialized into Mafraq's current humanitarian "order of things". Given the mushrooming of humanitarian infrastructure in Mafraq, is the town slowly transforming into a camp akin to nearby Zaatari, and does Syrians' visible presence in the streets contribute to this?

A second methodological problem that is closely intertwined with generic refugee "life stories" concerns the visual representation of my informants. This thesis does not include pictures of Syrian refugees (or volunteers), although VIVA and the Mafraq Unity Church, like many other aid providers in Mafraq, frequently publish photos of beneficiaries on their Facebook pages. These pictures are usually taken without Syrians' explicit consent and no information is given about their future use. Appearing online can have severe repercussions for Syrian women, including house arrest, beatings and getting banned from further NGO

Figure 4 Mafraq, street view (Wagner 2017)

activities by male family members. (In chapter 5, I discuss more in detail the role of pictures in VIVA's fundraising and recruitment strategy.)

Visuals are an important component of competing narratives on refugees in the media, policymaking and in aid agencies' reports, although the displaced themselves have little control themselves over the ways in which they are represented. Malkki (1996) famously described that pictures of refugees in humanitarian and mainstream publications foreground undifferentiated bodies and suffering, preferably of women and children, while obscuring the root causes of displacement and signs of refugees' agency: "humanitarian practices tend to silence refugees" (Malkki 1996: 378). Decontextualized pictures of refugees are used by advocates of stricter immigration policies to stoke fear and resentment, and by pro-refugee NGOs to "humanise" displacement. That aid providers and host states consider *visible* suffering a precondition for refugees' deservingness of assistance is explored in chapter 5 which looks at VIVA's eligibility criteria for aid. Instead, whenever possible, I include pictures of *spaces* where Syrians interact with their compatriots, the host community and aid providers (cf. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2017; Howden 2018). In doing so, I hope to do justice to my informants' lived experience of navigating and inhabiting different locations that have become meaningful to them, for example workplaces (chapter 2), streets (chapter 4), homes (chapter 4) and NGO centres (chapter 6). Showing *places* instead of people also aims to restore my informants' sense of normalcy. In Mafraq, displacement has long ceased being exceptional. It is an everyday reality for different communities, locals, refugees and those who support them.

Living with a Jordanian host family

Volunteering with VIVA and the Mafraq Unity Church gave me access to Syrian refugees and Evangelical volunteers, mostly from abroad, but it told me little about locals. There were few Jordanian helpers, usually from upper-class Amman, and I only encountered them in humanitarian settings. By way of contrast, living with a *local* family in Mafraq allowed me to explore the host community's perspective on Syrian displacement. It gave me important insights into the local history of Syrian-Jordanian relations and the more recent struggles of the town's inhabitants. It is a common practice for ethnographers to negotiate their entry into the field by becoming "family" to their hosts (e.g. Abu-Lughod 1986). In Mafraq, calling

somebody “a daughter” or “an aunt” is a widely used idiom for framing friendly relationships with non-kin. “Treat her like your sister”, my Jordanian host brothers were told by their father, to dissipate potential rumours about the presence of an unrelated female in their house. But my engagement with Oday’s family went far beyond formulas of politeness.

In January 2016, a former Arabic teacher put me in touch with a young Mafraq local. Oday was in his mid-twenties and the oldest son of three, all of them undergraduate students at universities in Mafraq and Irbid. He had volunteering experience with American and German NGOs and was eager to socialize with foreigners, a much rarer sight in Mafraq than in Amman - he thus invited me to his parents’ house. What was a supposed to be a mere visit of courtesy turned into a longstanding friendship that lasts until today. Oday and his father, whom I always referred to as Abu Oday, helped me find and furnish an apartment in Mafraq. In February 2016, I moved to the north and began volunteering with VIVA. As I was busy most days, we soon established a routine. Every night, I visited Oday’s family around 6 pm and stayed until 1 am, when Abu Oday drove me home. I thus regularly joined the family for dinner and late-night snacks. On Fridays and Saturdays, Jordan’s weekend, the family took me out for all-day barbecues to the countryside.

Abu Oday, a former sales manager, and his wife Mona, a high school teacher for maths and physics, were both in their early fifties and already retired. Like many locals, they mostly stayed at home and received visits from family members who resided in Mafraq and Amman. Their daily routine changed little and was only punctuated by regular prayers. My host mother got up early to see her sons off to university. Most of her time was taken up by reading news on her phone, following up on religious debates on Twitter and doing chores inside the house which she rarely ever left, except for visits to her parents’ and married sisters’ homes nearby. My host father was more mobile - he was also the only family member allowed to drive their precious new car. Abu Oday was responsible for doing the shopping and often gave his sons a lift. At night, he played cards with other men. As university students, Oday and his brothers were on campus most days, and often met up with male friends during the evening. This rhythm changed when the first two sons graduated. While struggling to find jobs, they spent many months at home, sleeping the day away and becoming increasingly frustrated. For the younger generation, Mafraq was a

place where one could live a comfortable life in one's family home, but which was hard to leave.

Their respective pensions allowed my host parents to afford a car, smartphones, a flat screen TV and regular shopping trips to local malls. While two of their sons had received scholarships from prestigious universities, they could afford to pay for their third son's studies. Except for day trips to Amman and the Dead Sea, however, the family lacked the resources to go on vacation elsewhere in Jordan or abroad. As a young man, Abu Oday had repeatedly travelled to Syria and Iraq. In the 1990s, he took his wife and young children to Damascus, a trip that stuck with Mona because she watched a Syrian couple get up and dance in the middle of a restaurant – a shocking sight to conservative Jordanians. No family member spoke English or had ever visited places outside the Arab world, although some of their uncles and cousins had. Except for Oday, they had had little or no exposure to "Western" foreigners like myself before fate – or rather, a phone call - brought us together. However, like many locals, my host family had undertaken *umrah*, the pilgrimage to Mecca. Bidding farewell to those preparing for *umrah*, or welcoming back those who had just returned, motivated many visits to friends and family members and my host parents often took me along. Culturally, my host family certainly felt closer to its eastern neighbour than to nearby Syria in the north.

I soon became family. In the privacy of Oday's home, I was treated every bit as a beloved daughter. I had access to all rooms, including the kitchen. I could sleep and work on my computer, and others slept in my presence. "She's my long-lost sister from Germany, and now she has come home", the second son told his younger cousins. My host parents also encouraged me to use their respective family names when communicating with locals.[10] Mentioning my "tribal affiliation" opened the doors of local officials at the city hall. It also protected me from uncalled-for attention from male taxi drivers and shop owners. Much of the affection that I received came from the fact that my host parents had no female offspring. In Mafraq, grown-up daughters are especially close to their parents because they spend most of their time at home. At a time when their adult sons were graduating from university and about to leave home, I thus filled an emotional gap, especially for my host

[10] In Jordan, women keep their family name after marriage, but children take the father's name. My host parents' family names identified them as members of different sub-groups of the same tribe.

mother. However, during the first half of my stay, my constant presence at the family's house was kept a secret from most relatives. To family visitors, I was usually introduced as a visiting student from Germany. Finally, during the first night of Ramadan 2016, my host mother officially presented me to her parents and siblings. From then on, I was often referred to as "Mona's daughter".

In the Arab world, youth are not fully considered adults until they get married and have children of their own. In this regard, my position as a childless, unmarried woman made it easier for my host family to frame their responsibilities towards me as those of protection and care for a female *child*. Needless to say, our arrangement was still highly uncommon in Mafraq where locals did not usually "host" unrelated strangers, let alone non-Muslims. To further legitimate my presence, my stay was framed as an exchange with my *German* parents. Both families repeatedly exchanged letters in German and Arabic and my parents visited Mafraq in September 2017. The correspondence with my parents, both medical doctors, came with added prestige for my host family. It also changed my status from being an isolated individual – a stereotype many Mafraq locals hold about Europeans – to having a family *of my own*. It certainly made me more trustworthy.

But becoming an adopted daughter also came with new obligations. To be clear, my host family, although far from wealthy, had no financial expectations. On the contrary, I ate (and occasionally slept) for free at their house for all of 2016 and during follow-up visits in 2017 and 2018. This said, I occasionally found my host father work with VIVA and foreign researchers as a driver and helped my host brothers with writing CVs in English. Given Jordan's dire employment situation for graduates, my host parents were hoping that I might be able to facilitate contacts with the NGO world, one of the biggest employers in town. But they also understood the limitations of my position as a volunteer and my lack of access to bigger aid agencies. Instead of financial support, my host family expected me to *behave* appropriately. Encouraged by my host mother, I began to wear the *hijab* and, occasionally, long dresses in the street, and to fast during Ramadan. I also tried to live up to their strict codes of gender, including avoiding all physical contact with males, even harmless handshakes. Inside Mafraq, I shied away from all behaviour that might have been considered frivolous or obscene in the eyes of locals, for fear that it might reflect badly on my hosts. Members of my host family and unrelated strangers, even taxi drivers,

sometimes praised me for being “muhtarama” [respected], a compliment reserved for pious women. But different from Evangelical volunteers and church members, Mona never tried to convert me. We spent many evenings discussing differences between the Bible and the Quran.

My host family’s, and especially Mona’s, importance for this thesis can hardly be overstated and far exceeds the practicalities of my stay in Mafraq. Many a night, I came home with questions from a day of volunteering, and my host mother patiently explained to me Syrians’ and Jordanians’ customs. From her, I learned how to conduct myself at weddings and funerals, in the street and at other people’s houses, what to say and which gifts to bring. There are many moments during this thesis where her voice, rather than mine, provides an interpretation of the events that I observed – I have tried to highlight her perspective accordingly. The gaze of a lower-middle class Jordanian woman on Syrian peasants might have introduced a class bias into my analysis. When it comes to modes of sociability, though, refugees and locals were very similar. They shared a conservative version of Sunni Islam, restrictive norms of gender and hospitality towards strangers. From my host father, I learned a lot about Mafraq’s past and geography. All family members were extremely supportive of my research. To them, helping me get a PhD was a matter of pride, as higher education is valued highly among locals. Most importantly, my host family provided an emotional shelter and a sense of normalcy that allowed me to cope with disturbing and painful ethnographic data that I was confronted with as a volunteer on an almost daily basis.

For various reasons, it was not possible for me to permanently live at Oday’s house. In Mafraq’s highly conservative climate, staying overnight in a family with young men would have raised more than a few eyebrows. Moreover, space was limited. When I occasionally slept over, I shared a bed with my host mother. Instead, I rented a tiny house in the backyard of a friend of Oday’s on the other side of town. That the contact to my landlord was established through my host family assured that I could pay the standard “local” rent, i.e. 150 Jordanian Dinar (ca. 212 USD), per month. Renting a place of my own gave me much needed time to write field notes, usually in the afternoon between volunteering and dinner at Oday’s house, or late at night after my return. All field notes were immediately typed and coded in NVivo, a qualitative software programme. They were often based on

short notes that I had managed to take in a notebook or on my phone during volunteering activities and private visits to Syrians' houses. Sleeping on my own also gave me a sense of privacy. In Mafraq, Jordanians and Syrians are very sociable and do not enjoy "alone time". Having a private refuge allowed me to temporarily escape the pressure to conform with social norms, to exercise in my living room, wear Western clothes, sleep alone – or sneak a cigarette.

Overview of chapters

The first three chapters of this thesis analyse how Syrians' transnational livelihoods have been transformed by conflict and life in exile. *Chapter 1* tells the backstory of Syrians' displacement to Mafraq. Unfavourable climatic conditions and failed agricultural and neoliberal reforms under the Ba'athist regime forced small-scale farmers from central and northern Syria to become mobile well before 2011. From the perspective of the Syrian state, this solved the problem of an excess labour force. Remittances from migrant workers also strengthened the waning domestic economy. From Jordan's perspective, it provided a cheap and exploitable workforce. For some of my informants, pre-war mobility patterns combined voluntary labour migration and economic displacement after the eventual break-down of rural livelihoods in the late 2000s. The chapter ends by disentangling "strong" and "weak" forms of transnational connections that motivated some Syrians to seek refuge in villages in northern Jordan and others to flee to towns like Mafraq. *Chapter 2* looks at refugee labour in the informal economy in Mafraq after 2011. Syrians have re-entered highly segmented labour markets and capitalize on pre-war networks with Jordanian employers to find work in exile. Yet as *refugees*, they have experienced a severe drop in social status which is mostly felt in more exploitative working conditions. This said, the host country's current refugee reception regime perpetuates older forms of legal limbo for Syrians. Illegality becomes a tool for disciplining foreign workers and provides a cheap labour force to Jordan's struggling agricultural sector. *Chapter 3* argues that displacement and closed borders have not put an end to transnational "family-making" but even intensified existing kinship-based practices. That refugees remain embedded into cross-border kinship networks explains how populations with little assets survive in Mafraq: through their ability to pool and circulate available resources. While humans cannot travel, flows of money and information traverse borders more easily. But conflict has also created

new dependencies and entrenched old ones – transnational families may thus prove an ambivalent lifeline.

The second half of the thesis turns to Evangelical humanitarians' transnational support networks and the challenges that they face while their humanitarian activities become increasingly professionalized. *Chapter 4* takes us on a ride with VIVA staff members and volunteers in Mafraq. It invites us to see the city through their eyes - and car windows - while they try to locate the homes of Syrian aid beneficiaries. It explores how VIVA's grasp of urban space and mobility practices contribute to the production of the "humanitarian city", acknowledging that humanitarian knowledge penetration of space will always remain partial. *Chapter 5* leads us inside Syrians' living rooms during one of VIVA's humanitarian house visits. If we bid farewell to romanticized understandings of "hospitality", the concept describes how boundaries of belonging, between "hosts" and "guests", insiders and outsiders, are negotiated. That "hospitality" also functions as a scale-shifter between the local and the national makes it well-suited to the study of humanitarian encounters. Obliging Syrians to "host" volunteers puts them into a dilemma between showing *generosity* and *destitution*. Performances of suffering provide the raw material for future moving testimonies as part of VIVA's fundraising and recruitment strategies in Europe. During house visits, volunteers also weigh up Syrians' spiritual and material needs. Their expectations of refugees' accountability towards their benefactors complicate "giving with no strings attached". *Chapter 6* turns to educational activities provided by faith-based humanitarian actors: VIVA's English courses and religious classes at a local Quran school. Pointing out the mismatch between training contents and labour market needs does not capture the multidimensional nature of these forms of "education" at the intersection of capitalist economies, the development industry – and religion. The chapter draws on Foucault's theory of "subject formation" to explicate how Syrian women are co-opted into vocational trainings and piety movements underpinned by a similar emphasis on pro-activeness and self-discipline. It discusses how various "technologies of the self" allow participants of English and Quran classes to envision themselves as future career women and believers, while remaining sensitive to moments where the formation of neoliberal and pious subjects is disrupted by the realities of Syrians' pre-war and current dispossession. Finally, *chapter 7* asks why a small local church could turn into one of the main aid providers in Mafraq. The Mafraq Unity Church strategically appeals to secular and

Evangelical “international communities”, balancing acts of self-representation towards geographically, politically and otherwise disparate partners. The church’s increasingly hybrid nature – somewhere between a religious institution and an NGO - also underlies tensions between inclusive acts of Christian compassion in the present and more long-term missionary projects.

Chapter 1: Under the radar – precarious rural livelihoods and labour migrations in pre-war Syria

In broad daylight, I often went for a stroll with my female Syrian friends. Arm in arm, we walked to the souq, visited relatives and NGO centres. Evenings were spent at the house of my Jordanian host family who did not consider it proper for a young woman to wander around in the dark. At night, I observed Syrian women in the streets the way Jordanians see them: through a car window. Around midnight, my Jordanian host father usually drove me home to the little house I was renting on the other side of town, indignantly pointing out every woman that we passed: "Syrians! These are all Syrians!" It is this specific kind of nocturnal gaze that I would like to begin with. Syrian women's walking habits in the streets, an oddity to locals, give us a first hint at their places of origin and mobility histories.

For anyone living in Mafraq, distinguishing Syrian and Jordanian women was rather straightforward. What set the former apart were their black *abayas*, black face veils or, at times, henna-coloured hair peeking out from under their black hijabs. By comparison, local women wore long colourful coats. What Jordanians found particularly shocking was female Syrians' habit to go for a stroll after sunset, often in loud and joyful groups. Indeed, one would rarely ever spot a Jordanian woman in the streets at night. As my host cousin explained to me, Syrians and Jordanians had different "cultures", and Mafraq locals were quick to point out that they had "nothing in common" with the newcomers. Not that female refugees were more liberal than their Jordanian counterparts. On the contrary, both Syrian and local women took their faith very seriously. Religious expressions figured prominently in their speech and most of them prayed daily and kept the fast during Ramadan. They also shared strict gender norms that regulated women's outer appearance and limited their freedom of movement and social interactions with members of the opposite sex. How then to explain Syrians' practice of night-time walks?

I soon realized that Syrian women in Mafraq were not born city dwellers. Having grown up in tight-knit village communities where women's promenades had occurred more freely under the watchful eyes – but also under the protection – of their relatives, they were used to walking a different environment altogether. My Syrian informants fondly recalled nightly visits to the houses of their neighbours and cousins. In the countryside, the safe space of

their homes had extended to the entire village, made up of kin. By way of contrast, Mafraq's small-town society, although still bound together by tribal links, was increasingly fragmented by urban sprawl and the mass influx of migrant workers and refugees. My Jordanian host father deplored: "I don't know my neighbours anymore" – no wonder local women preferred to remain within the safety of their own four walls. If by "public space" we understand a space defined by urban anonymity, then Jordanian women shied away from the increasingly alien streets of Mafraq, while Syrians, until recently, had never navigated public space at all. Underneath the city, Syrian women were still walking the familiar village. And Jordanians' stereotypes were compounded by class dynamics. In Mafraq, walking was a marker of low social status, as those who could afford it preferred to use taxis and private cars. While locals equally enjoyed walking, it was reserved to Friday trips to the countryside. On the sidewalk, walking divided Jordanians and Syrians in Mafraq not along cultural, but rather along *class* lines.

But Syrians had not always been an alienating presence in town. My 50-year old Jordanian host mother had childhood memories of peddlers selling cheap clothes out of huge rucksacks and her husband had relied on foreign workers to assist with the olive harvest in the mid-1990s. The Syrians from these older stories were usually young, able-bodied men who came and went, but never stayed for long. Since 2011, though, Syrians have turned from a fleeting into a more permanent presence. When they sought refuge in Mafraq, former labour migrants brought their wives, children and the elderly. They became *neighbours* with whom locals were forced to share scarce public resources, including municipal water, hospital beds and schoolyards. In this regard, Jordanians' indignation about refugees' nocturnal walks reflects their unhappiness with Syrians' more permanent presence and tangible impact on their everyday lives – and the shifting gender balance of Syrian migration to Mafraq. Ultimately, what this ethnographic snapshot tells us is that by describing the relationship between Syrians and Jordanians in Mafraq as between "refugees" and "hosts", we miss out on a more complex history of inter-community relations, delineated along class lines, and the peculiar nature of the town's refugee demographic.

Drawing on my informants' memories of pre-war lives and evidence from anthropological studies and policy reports, chapter 1 tells the backstory of Syrians' displacement to Mafraq. Flight trajectories in the context of the Syrian war have to be understood in the continuity of more longstanding migration regimes in the Levant. As in the case of Syrian refugees in Mafraq, they might not be a radically new phenomenon, but rather an amplification of already occurring population movements. Following Garelli and Tazzioli (2017), I shift the focus from narratives about the Syrian refugee "crisis" to continuous processes of dispossession and "migrantization" that forced rural Syrians to become mobile well before 2011.

The first part of the chapter takes the reader to my informants' remote villages of origin. Seen through a livelihoods lens, Syrians' pre-2011 labour migrations to Mafraq and other places in the Levant and the Gulf were part of complex, household-based survival strategies. Both natural and man-made factors plunged my informants into precarity before the war. Syrian peasants from remote areas struggled with unfavourable climatic conditions, but also the outcome of failed agricultural – and later neoliberal – reforms under the Ba'athist regime. This is not to say that they had no agency in navigating socioeconomic developments. On the contrary, they repeatedly took strategic migration decisions that kept rural existences afloat.

Subsequent sections explore how Syrians' seasonal migration did not only benefit poor individuals and their families, but also migrant-sending and -receiving *states*. From *Syria's* perspective, it solved the problem of an excess labour force. Remittances from migrant workers also strengthened the waning domestic economy. From *Jordan's* perspective, it provided a cheap and exploitable workforce. Increasingly hostile immigration policies prevented Syrians' integration into the host society.

The third part of the chapter introduces a comparative perspective, exploring how my informants' pre-war migrations intersected with those of other rural populations and how economic and forced migration were intertwined even before 2011.

To make better sense of the spatial deployment of refugee flows after 2011, the chapter ends by disentangling different forms of transnational connections. It contrasts Syrian

refugees' support networks in urban Mafraq with those of compatriots who fled to villages in northern Jordan. While labour migrants had previously established "weak ties" with employers in Jordanian cities, other Syrians disposed of "strong ties". Kinship relations with Jordanian villagers made them prefer settlement in rural areas to urban locations like Mafraq.

Dispossession in rural Syria

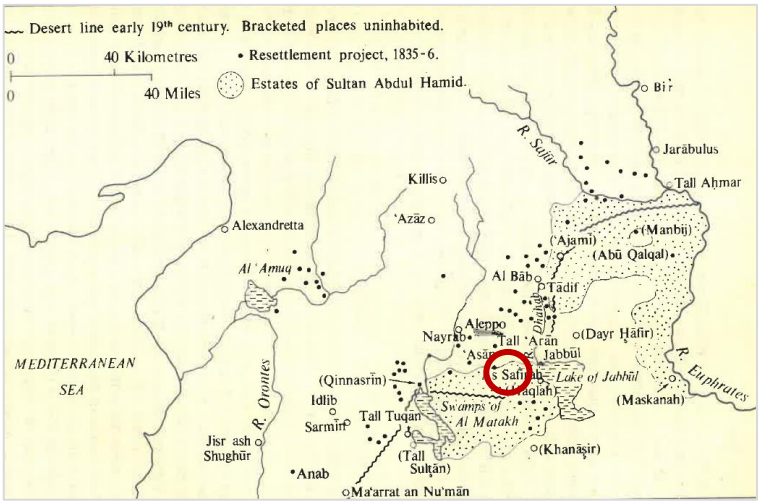

Figure 5 The "desert line" in the Aleppo area, early 19th century (Lewis 1987:16; additions by Wagner)

On his phone, Adnan showed me pictures of the earthen beehive houses that his native region is famous for. He and his family came from Jabal A-Hoss, a rural area in the northern Aleppo governorate, a day trip away from Daraa. Life was rough in remote places. As Adnan put it: "We have always been poor". Khadija, a cousin of his, laconically remarked: "Picking up vegetables from the ground was hard." In her village, nobody had the necessary qualifications to work better jobs.

The first section of this chapter looks at my informants' villages of origin. It argues that natural and man-made factors contributed to Syrians' vulnerability prior to 2011. Before the war, many Syrians in Mafraq were small-scale peasants. They lived in Jabal al-Hoss, a group of hamlets twenty miles south of Aleppo, and in Mheen and surrounding villages southeast of Homs. Wives and children usually worked as unpaid labourers on their families' farms. Applying a livelihoods approach to my informants' pre-war existences helps us disentangle the little possessions they had. My informants usually owned small amounts of sheep and land. As for movable material possessions, many possessed little beyond their wedding bands and managed to bring none when displaced. On arrival to Mafraq, their place of exile, their little jewellery was cashed in quickly.

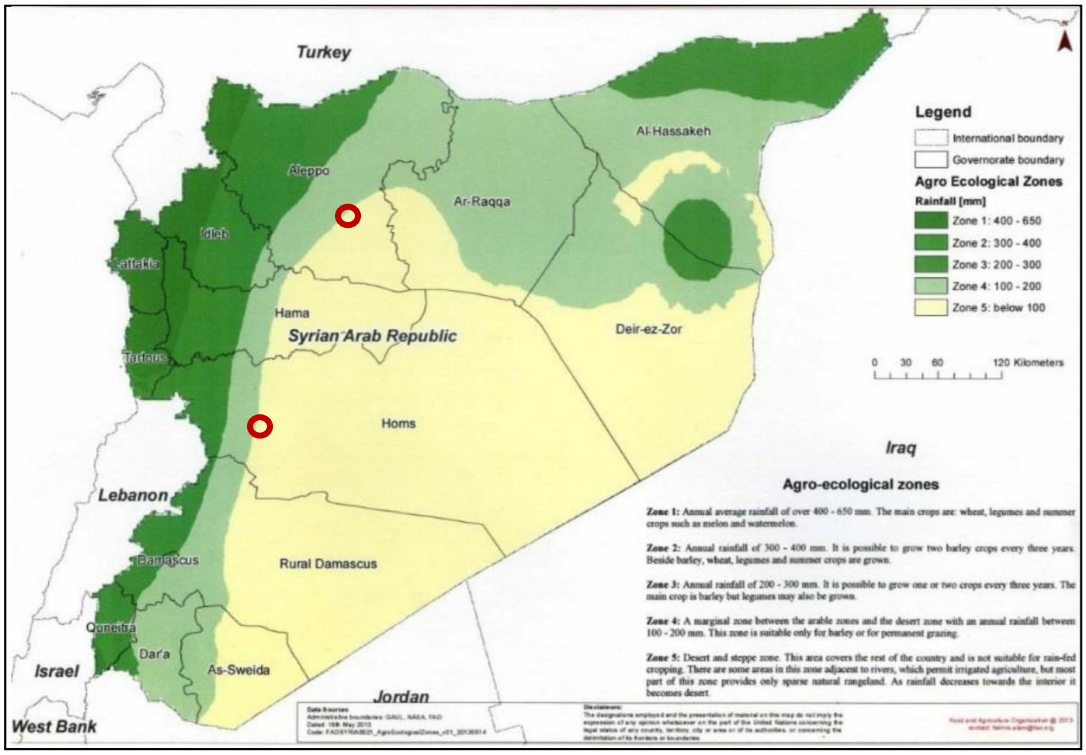

Figure 6 Agroecological zones of Syria (FAO and WFP 2016; Jabal al-Hoss and Mheen highlighted by Wagner)

A glance at both historical and contemporary maps reveals the position of Mheen and Jabal al-Hoss in a transitional climate zone. Lewis (1987)'s classic study on rural populations in Syria and Jordan paints a dramatic picture of rural life along the "desert line" (Lewis 1987: 15), the boundary between uncultivated and regularly cultivated territory. In the 18th and 19th century, travellers often found villages along the "desert line" abandoned and fields lying fallow. Besides recurrent droughts, villagers faced human threats, including tax-gatherers, marauding Ottoman soldiers and Bedouins, who in years of scarce rainfall raided nearby settlements to procure food and water for their livestock. Sedentary farmers often sought refuge in bigger villages and cities of the region. Some of them gave up on agriculture for good. Neither Mheen nor Jabal al-Hoss appear on Lewis' maps. However, a plan of the Aleppo area in the early 19th century (Figure 5) shows that As-Safirah, these days a provincial town and very close to Jabal al-Hoss, was located in the vicinity of the "desert line". A contemporary climatic map of Syria (Figure 6) also confirms the intermittent rainfall pattern in transitional areas in central and northern Syria, as well as the limitations it placed on agricultural activities. Farmers mostly grew barley and some types of vegetables. In a nutshell, Syrians in Mafraq originally come from rural areas where drought and conflict

predate modern times and have repeatedly caused temporary and more permanent depopulation.

Turning to my informants' own lifetime, their precarious livelihoods are also the outcome of failed agricultural reforms after Syrian independence. While the Ba'athist regime expanded infrastructure and public services to the countryside, the poorest segment of the rural population – people like Adnan's and Khadija's ancestors – failed to benefit from these measures. Until the mid-20th century, most Syrian peasants had lived at subsistence level. Lack of secure land tenure, asymmetrical relationships with influential land owners and heavy taxation by various regimes had all contributed to entrenched rural poverty (Batatu 1999). Land reforms in 1958 and 1963, instigated by the new Ba'athist regime, only partly succeeded in closing the poverty gap within Syria's rural populations and between village and city dwellers.[11] There is no doubt that quality of life considerably improved in rural Syria from the 1960s onwards. Electrification is a case in point: "As late as 1970 there was no artificial light in all but 218 of Syria's villages. […] But by 1992, thanks largely to the building of the Euphrates dam, no fewer than 7,630 villages, or about 95 percent of all villages, had been electrified" (Batatu 1999: 63). The Syrian state also made considerable progress with extending the road and telephone network, free healthcare and education to the countryside (Batatu 1999).

[11] The Syrian Ba'athist regime also relied on co-opting rural populations through career opportunities in state bureaucracies and the military (cf. Batatu 1999; De Châtel 2014a; McHugo 2014). Khalaf's (1991) ethnography of a village further to the East, close to ar-Raqqa, sheds lights on changed class dynamics in the Syrian countryside. During the laissez-faire economic climate of the late 1940s and 50s, merchants of Aleppo brought machines and investments. The mechanization of agriculture in the Jazira and the Euphrates Valley profoundly transformed locals' semi-sedentary lifestyles. As the cotton industry became embedded into the national economy, traditional sheikhs turned into feudal landowners and provided employment to their clansmen and to unrelated peasants. Through buying property in urban areas and higher education, the "cotton sheikhs" became an important mediator between the peasantry and the state. In the 1960s, under the new Ba'athist regime, they were initially side-lined while poorer farmers benefited from improved living conditions and jobs as teachers, students, workers and soldiers. Tensions between old and new elites in the village were eased after 1970 when Hafez al-Assad, the new leader, adopted a more reconciliatory stance. All in all, Khalaf's findings tell a success story of the Syrian countryside, albeit one with new social fault lines. But they do not necessarily contradict my diagnosis of impoverished rural livelihoods, as they draw on fieldwork in the 1970s and 80s, when the Ba'athist regime's promise of better lives to the rural population still held true. The study's publication predates Syria's economic opening and neoliberal reforms that hit poorer segments of the rural population particularly hard.

The belated arrival of public institutions to my informants' villages of origin gives us a taste of the relative absence of the Syrian state from their lives. Adnan measured the remoteness of his community in Jabal al-Hoss by the availability of schools. When he was a child in the 1980s, there was only one elementary school. His father, a well-respected man and wealthy to local standards, allowed him to continue his education in a neighbouring village and paid for the transportation costs – a solution out of reach for female students whose freedom of movement was more restricted, and who received hardly any schooling, or no schooling at all. At the time, Adnan was the first member from his family to study beyond elementary school. In the 2000s, the Syrian state slowly advanced into its rural hinterlands. On the eve of the war, it had established secondary schools even in remoter villages like his. Adnan's wife, ten years younger than him, began her education after 2000 and finished sixth grade. She was part of a new generation of female villagers with at least basic literacy. Adnan's recollections echo Batatu's findings on the mixed success of bringing education to Syria's peasants under the Ba'athist regime. While the number of rural primary schools more than doubled from 1964 to 1980, enrolment rates did not reflect educational quality: schools were often badly equipped and teachers poorly trained. Many students dropped out because teaching hours did not take into consideration agricultural cycles, and girls usually did not go on studying beyond primary school. Thirty years after the Ba'athist agricultural reforms, 12% of male peasants aged ten and above were illiterate, a number four times as high for rural women (Batatu 1999).

Agricultural reforms also dramatically impacted patterns of land tenure, not always to the benefit of the rural poor. Between 1960 and 1972, the number of holders of small plots (<10 ha) increased from 17% to 24%, while the number of big plots (>300 ha) dramatically decreased from 37% to 7%. As a consequence, the structure of the rural workforce changed: more peasants were self-employed or worked as unpaid helpers on their family's grounds, while less people found paid employment in agriculture. Small-scale farmers also remained the most vulnerable to recurrent droughts and crop failure, forcing them to diversify rural livelihoods and, sometimes, lease their lands to large-scale farmers and urban investors (Batatu 1999). As Imady (2014) aptly puts it, the Ba'athist reforms transformed "feudal [into] capitalist landowners" (82) but failed to empower the very poor.

Since the 1990s, the final chapter of my informants' pre-war lives was shaped by Syria's transition from social experiments to crony capitalism and the emergence of an excess workforce: the rural (and urban) poor. Rapid population growth plays a major role in this: between 1970 and 2000, the number of rural inhabitants more than doubled, from 3.5 million to 7.9 million. By 2000, more than 40% of them were under 14 years old and began to aspire to different lives. Infrastructural and educational reforms had increased literacy rates and created a young population not interested in the traditional agricultural profession, but that was still outside the regime's clientelist networks that would have granted them access to white-collar jobs (Imady 2014.) Since the late 1980s, market liberalization and neoliberal reforms put additional strain on precarious livelihoods. Power and wealth were increasingly concentrated in the hands of a small clique of businessmen, many of them with personal ties to the Assad family. When the welfare pact between the Syrian regime, now socialist merely in name, and the rural population started to crumble, a youth bulge which could not be absorbed by the agricultural and public sector, once traditional sources of employment, fuelled mass unemployment and massive rural-urban migration (Azmeh 2014). Since 2000, almost 300,000 people entered the labour market every year – in 2002, the ILO estimated youth unemployment at over 70% (Schmidt 2006). Various policy reports from before the Syrian war confirm that within rural Syria, extreme poverty was concentrated in eastern and northern governorates (SCPR 2013) – not incidentally, this is where most Syrian refugees in Mafraq come from. In the 2000s, rural Aleppo and, to a certain extent, rural Homs, lagged behind other governorates with regard to schooling, literacy rates,

1.1. Jabal al-Hoss: Major Indicators[25]	
Area:	157,000 ha
Average Rainfall:	150-250 mm
Ground water:	Aleppo as a whole is a poor basin
Land Quality:	Over 80% of land requires derocking
Population:	208,000
Villages:	156
Population structure:	51% under 15 – 92.9% under 40
Families:	23,000
Average Family size:	7.78
Illiteracy rate	58%
Percentage of literate population which had completed primary school education:	Men: 16% Women: 10%
Percentage of population with access to medical services:	12.2%
Percentage of population with access to electricity:	66%
Percentage of male heads of households who:	
-work exclusively in agriculture	31.8%
-work in both agriculture & other jobs	31.2%
-work as laborers in factories	15.1%
-work as government employees	4%
-work as entrepreneurs	1.7%
-migrated in search of job opportunities	19.3%
Average Annual Income:	$198 (less than one-sixth of the national average)

Figure 7 Socioeconomic indicators of rural development in Jabal al-Hoss in the 2000s (Imady 2014: 87)

the availability of drinking water, electricity and modern sanitation (SCPR 2013).

We know very little about places like Mheen and the Jabal al-Hoss area before 2011. Omar Imady, now the Deputy Director of the Centre for Syrian Studies at the University of St Andrews, worked as a consultant with UNDP on a microfinance scheme in Jabal al-Hoss from 2002-2009, at a time when the Syrian regime was opening up its economy and territory to outside markets and international development actors. Imady's articles provide rare insights into living conditions in the countryside (Seibel and Imady 2003; Imady 2014). One report introduces the area as hardly fit for farming: "Jabal al-Hoss with its 157 villages is one of the poorest areas in Syria. The villages are known for the beauty of their houses in the shape of mud domes; but life is harsh, given the rocky surface of the land and the dry climate" (Seibel and Imady 2003: 4). Educational and income indicators also paint a dire picture of the people of Jabal al-Hoss (Imady 2014; cf. Figure 7). In the mid-2000s, villagers were mostly young, poorly educated and had a high birthrate. Their annual income was less than one sixth of the national average. Daily wages in the informal rural economy amounted to ca. 2 USD for women and 4 USD for men (Seibel and Imady 2003). Male heads of households had to complement farming with other types of work, including in factories and abroad. Their access to public services like schooling and healthcare were limited. Even in the 2000s, infrastructural improvements like electrification had still not reached all households. But the UNDP did not only choose Jabal al-Hoss because of its poverty. The area had previously hosted an – ultimately unsuccessful – derocking project, and its remoteness was far from complete. Conveniently close to Aleppo, it had already attracted the attention of international development agencies.

The UNDP's microfinance project established *sanadiq* (sg. *sanduq*) – locally managed saving schemes in accordance with Islamic banking principles, i.e. without interest rates. It targeted peasants without access to loans from the Agricultural Cooperative Bank, the sole official financial institution in the region, because they lacked collaterals. Over seven years, more than 4,000 inhabitants of Jabal al-Hoss took part in the scheme. With an average household size of seven, it affected ca. 28,000 people. Given the area's limitations on agriculture, many took to growing mushrooms inside their beehive-shaped houses. In 2001 alone, locals produced one ton of mushrooms. Repayment rates were extremely high and the scheme was successfully emulated in other parts of Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. Sadly,

state institutions like the *Fund for Integrated Rural Development of Syria* (FIRDOS), under the patronage of Syria's first lady Asma al-Assad, failed to provide the necessary support. A badly-fitted 2007 law on microfinance led to the ultimate abandonment of the project, testimony to the Syrian regime's suspicion about local activities outside the political and the security establishment.

Imady (2014) is quick to point out that the failure of the *sanadiq* did not directly cause the 2011 uprising. However, he situates it in the wider context of an authoritarian regime that increasingly failed to provide for its rural subjects:

> *The rural inhabitants of Syria in the 1980s could comfort themselves by pointing at the roads that were paved, the schools that were built and the electricity that was delivered to their rural areas. In 2011, all they could see was the immense divide between the lifestyles they pursued in their rural towns and villages and between those pursued by the middle and upper-middle class in Damascus and Aleppo. (Imady 2014: 112)*

In Mafraq, none of my informants mentioned the *sanduq* scheme or other development activities to me. It is possible that neither them nor their villages of origin were included into the programme. Still, project reports and Imady's later academic work give us some insights into poor villagers' ways of handling household finances before the war. First, the *sanduq* scheme's low stakes and gains speak to the modesty of villagers' lives: they hardly ever accrued assets. One man sold one of his daughter's earrings, so he could take part in the scheme. A female entrepreneur used the initial credit to buy a calf. The short-term nature of loans – between three and six months – tells us that farmers did not plan ahead beyond one agricultural cycle.

Second, 41% of the borrowers from *sanadiq* were women, many of them illiterate and often left to their own devices by absent migrant men. Therefore, it seems that many female peasants, although not formally educated, were *financially* literate before the war, at least to a certain extent. These were skills that they could later capitalize on in Mafraq while managing remittance networks (chapter 3). But this does not imply *financial*

independence for women. In fact, the scheme deliberately sought to provide livelihoods to female adolescents to allow them to put off marriage and childbearing.

Third, in the absence of access to formal banking services, many villagers resorted to informal money lenders. These were present in most villages, but often plunged poor farmers into a spiral of debt. Imady (2014) reports interest rates as high as 100%, and one of the explicit goals of the *sanduq* scheme was to help participants emancipate themselves from brokers. After 2011, the formal banking sector mostly collapsed, especially in opposition-held areas. However, existing informal financial structures persist, allowing refugees to lend support to relatives back home (chapter 3).

Syrians' pre-war migrations from the household perspective

Despite their apparent lack of resources, my informants were all but devoid of agency. One way in which entire families from the Syrian countryside survived was through circular migrations of their various members. Adnan's story illustrates how pre-war mobilities were organized through kinship and village networks. Together with male relatives from his village of origin, he first came to Mafraq in 2000 when he was sixteen years old to work as a tiler for some months. Back then, he entered Jordan without a proper work visa. He explained to me that this kind of occupation was had not been covered by sector-specific permits. Other informants confirmed that before 2011, Syrian workers frequently took advantage of lenient visa regulations which allowed them to stay in the country for up to three weeks. Over time, I noticed that many of my Syrian acquaintances had come to Mafraq for work before 2011, mostly men, but also some women. A pattern emerged of multiple cross-border trips back-and-forth, sometimes for as short as a week, sometimes for several months. Yet what is at stake is not some romanticized form of Bedouin nomadism, but rather a highly modern form of labour migration.

Migration as a livelihood strategy should not be understood at the individual, but rather at the *household* level: male family members, but also some women, migrated repeatedly at different stages of life, to places inside and outside Syria. Young single men from rural areas sought work in agriculture in the Jordanian and Lebanese borderlands, often for as short as a week, and during breaks from school and university studies. Many also found short-term

employment on construction sites and in restaurants in Beirut, a spell of freedom from conservative village norms fondly remembered by several of my acquaintances. Proudfoot describes a similar scenario for young working-class men who were drawn to the Lebanese capital to generate remittances for families back home, while simultaneously acquiring a degree from a local university. They also eagerly adopted a Beiruti cosmopolitan identity, showing off (fake label) Western-style clothes, exercising, and dating Lebanese women (Proudfoot 2015). By way of contrast, my male informants never stayed long enough to "go urban". But their financial strategies were also different, entirely focused on bringing money back home. As my informants described it, the ultimate goal of working abroad was to maximize savings to expand the family home in one's community of origin – often by simply adding another room to it – and to get married. After founding a family of one's own, informants' migration strategies changed. Often, they took their wives and children to work on farms in neighbouring countries or more prosperous areas in Syria. As a child, Adnan accompanied his parents and older siblings to the fields in northern Syria and later brought his own family. For him, picking olives alongside his relatives in the Afrin area, a region northwest of Aleppo famous for its olive oil, is one of his fondest childhood memories. Sharing food in the open brought several generations together and created a strong bond between family members. Many years later, when he and his wife found jobs in the olive harvest close to Mafraq as *refugees*, they kept up the tradition of late-morning picnics.

Older male heads of households also engaged in more permanent forms of migration. They found work as drivers, gardeners and in factories in the Gulf. The brother of my friend Tamam, originally from Mheen, a man in his mid-forties with three daughters, has spent the last fifteen years working menial jobs in Saudi Arabia. While constantly sending remittances, he only visited his family a couple of times every year before 2011, usually at the occasion of Islamic holidays. I found it more difficult to conduct interviews with these older men simply because they were not usually present in Mafraq. As chapter 3 discusses more in detail, many of them have remained in the Gulf after 2011 and only see their families, now in Jordanian exile, a couple of times a year. Khalaf and Alkobaisi (1999), though, conducted fieldwork with Syrian migrants in Abu Dhabi, one of their main destinations in the Arab Peninsula. Their findings further confirm the patterns that I have described so far: low-skilled workers usually travelled together with other male kin, with

whom they often cohabited in cities in the Gulf. They used their income from work abroad to acquire land and houses in their villages of origin. This is also where they found their future spouses, whom they supported from abroad after the wedding. Importantly, they incurred a greater "social debt" (Khalaf and Alkobaisi 1999: 286) to family members back home. Migration to the Gulf was more expensive and required the help of middlemen from their kinship networks who were already successfully established in destination countries and could procure work visas. As workers stayed away for longer, they also had to entrust their wives and children to the care of relatives more permanently. In return, this created stronger obligations towards an extended circle of relatives, the repercussions of which are still felt in Syrian families in present-day Mafraq (cf. chapter 3).

TURKEY
IRAQ
LEBANON
JORDAN
SAUDI ARABIA
ISRAEL
Mediterranean Sea
Beirut
Damascus
Amman
Aleppo
Latakia
Hamāh
Ḥimṣ
Tripoli
Tartūs
Jbail
Sidon
Tyre
Haifa
Nazareth
Irbid
Jarash
Nablus
West Bank
Ramallah
Jerusalem
Dead Sea
Hebron
Mafraq
Az Zarqā'
As Salt
Ar Ruwayshid
Al Mayādīn
Dayr az Zawr
Ar Raqqah
Ar Ruṣāfah
Tadmur
Palmyra
As Sukhnah
At Tanf
Al Qā'im
Abū Kamāl
Ḥadīthah
Khān al Baghdādī
Ḥīt
Ar Ruṭbah
Tirbil
Mosul
Sinjār
Al Ḥasakah
Al Ḥawl
Ash Shaddādah
Al Bi'āj
Al Ḥaḍr
Ceylanpınar
Ra's al 'Ayn
Tall Abyaḍ
Akçakale
Manbij
Al Bāb
Aleppo
Afrin
A'zāz
Kilis
Gaziantep
Şanlıurfa
Birecik
Nizip
Suruç
Karkamış
Jarābulus
Maydān Ikbis
Çobanbey
Kırıkhan
Reyhanlı
Antioch
Samandağı
Yayladağı
Iskenderun
Karataş
Osmaniye
Kadirli
Dörtyol
Kazıklı
Ceyhan
Adana
Tarsus
İncirlik
Kahramanmaraş
Gölbaşı
Adıyaman
Kâhta
Araban
Siverek
Diyarbakır
Bismil
Batman
Kurtalan
Siirt
Şirnak
Cizre
Silopi
Zakho
Midyat
Mardin
Kızıltepe
Şenyurt
Viranşehir
Nusaybin
Al Mālikīyah
Darbāsīyah
Al Qāmishlī
Tall Kūjik
Rabī'ah
Dahūk
Tall Tamr
Tall 'Afar
Sinjār
Al Bi'āj
Ash Shaddādah
Ar Raqqah
Ath Thawrah
Buḥayrat al Asad
Buḥayrat al Qādisīyah
Buḥayrat al Mawṣil
Euphrates
Tigris
Atatürk Barajı
Ceyhan Nehri
Seyhan Nehri
Nahr al Khābūr
Nahr el Litani
Jordan
Gulf of Iskenderun
Ḥamāh
Ḥimṣ
Salamīyah
Maṣyāf
Ar Rastan
Al Qusayr
Aş Şawwānah ash Sharqīyah
Sab' Abār
Dayr 'Aṭīyah
Qārā
Yabrūd
Zabadānī
Baalbek
Zahlé
Sirghāyā
Dūmā
Qaṭanā
Darāyyā
Burqā
Al Qunayṭirah
Shaykh Miskīn
As Suwaydā'
Dar'ā
Buṣrá ash Shām
Ṣalkhad
Az Zalaf
Irbid
Ar Ramthā
Aş Şafāwī
Azraq ash Shīshān
Turayf
Al Qurayyāt
Mādabā
As Salt
Nahariyya
Fiq
Lake Tiberias
Golan Heights
Jaffa
Ramla
Gaza Strip
Ḥafar al Bāṭin
Ḥā'il
Al Jawf
Tabūk
Al Qaṣīm
Ar Riyāḍ
Al Madīnah
Makkah
Jīzān
Najrān
Abhā
Khamīs Mushayṭ
Al Bāḥah
Ash Sharqīyah
Al Ḥufūf
Al Jubayl
Ad Dammām
Al Khubar
Ra's Tannūrah
Ra's al Khafjī
Al Wafrah
Al Kuwayt
Ḥafar al Bāṭin
Al Jahrah
Kuwait City
Mubārak al Kabīr
Ḥawallī
Al Farwānīyah
Al Aḥmadī
Al Fuḥayḥīl
Al Jahrah
Umm Qaṣr
Al Başrah
Az Zubayr
Abū al Khaṣīb
Al Faw
Shaṭt al 'Arab
Khawr 'Abd Allāh
Persian Gulf
Gulf of Oman
Strait of Hormuz
Qeshm
Hormuz
Lārestān
Jahrom
Fasā
Dārāb
Kāzerūn
Būshehr
Bandar-e Lengeh
Bandar-e Kangān
Asalūyeh
Khalīj-e Fārs
Kūh-e Dīnār
Kūh-e Hazārān
Kūh-e Jupār
Kūh-e Kamārij
Kūh-e Kūhbanān
Kūh-e Laleh Zār
Kūh-e Shahsavārī
Kūh-e Tang-e Rāhdār
Kūh-e Tang-e Sarmeh
Kūh-e Tang-e Vāshī
Kūh-e Tang-e Zāgheh
Kūh-e Tang-e Zardū
Kūh-e Tang-e Zīrāb
Kūh-e Tang-e Zīrāb
Kūh-e Tang-e Zīrāb

For male Syrians born in the 1980s who had access to better education, menial and other income-generating activities were increasingly intertwined. Figure 8 illustrates the multiple movements of a family from Hawarin, a village close to Mheen. I befriended the parents when both began working as teachers with VIVA, the NGO I was volunteering with. Baher, the husband and now in his mid-thirties, had benefitted from being the youngest son, largely free from caring responsibilities for his kin, and Mheen's strategic location along the Homs railway. Both allowed him to attend university in Homs city and acquire a master's degree. His unusually high qualification in his remote village enabled him to work as a teacher upon his return when he installed himself permanently with his elderly mother and young wife. However, as a teenager, Baher had not shied away from manual labour. During semester break, he and his male friends from the village had travelled to Beirut to work on construction sites – his only memory of the metropolis is walking on its famous Corniche at night. Baher was an on-and-off migrant in the 2000s, but his parents' generation had already been mobile in the region at least as early as the 1980s. Baher's father, as well as his young wife's father, used to work in Kuwait. Other men of the village travelled to Mafraq and the Bekaa Valley for shorter stints.

Josepha Wessels might well be the only anthropologist to have accompanied farmers on their annual internal migrations in northern Syria. Her doctoral thesis (2008) provides a snapshot of rural Syrians' lives in the run-up to the war: of increased water scarcity, dwindling incomes from farming and sheep husbandry, and intensified out-migration. In the late 1990s, Wessels had moved to a rural area south of Aleppo to study renovation projects of *qanats*, ancient irrigation systems rehabilitated by the inhabitants of Syrian villages in the early 20th century, but recently forsaken. She found that the abandonment of *qanats* was related to conflicts over customary use and ownership and a depletion of groundwater resources through intensive farming and the use of pumps. Migration rates were particularly high in areas where *qanats* had fallen out of use, although the exodus had started as early as the 1970s. Significantly, her findings are drawn from the in-depth study of one village in Jabal al-Hoss. Her description of her field site as a remote, underserviced place echoes Adnan's memories of home. In 1998, when Wessels first visited, there was no electricity or modern water supply in the village. It also lacked a mosque, and classes in the local primary school took place only intermittently. The village counted 122 inhabitants.

Wessels had even lived in one of the beehive-shaped houses that Adnan nostalgically showed me pictures of on his phone.

Wessels managed to record the villagers' annual migration cycle: alone or accompanied by their families, peasants migrated in spring and summer and returned to their turfs for autumn and winter. Wessels findings confirm my informants' recollections: range and duration of labour elsewhere were conditioned by gender, age and marital status, and migration was usually circular, not permanent. Jobs abroad were found through personal networks and family ties, and villagers often returned to work with the same employers. In spring, young single men found work in sheep shearing with Bedouin tribes. If they were lucky, they could obtain a visa for Saudi Arabia and shear the sheep flocks there. In summer, entire families took their own sheep to graze north to Azaz, a town northwest of Aleppo and only twelve miles away from Afrin. Having accompanied a family on their annual summer migration, Wessels recalls that they struck an agreement with a local landowner, working for free in exchange for pasture for their flocks. She also witnessed the olive harvest in Afrin that Adnan told me about. Other heads of households left their families behind during the summer to work on construction sites in Beirut. To save money for the bridewealth, young men frequently found employment in construction in Syria or abroad.

From my informants' memories of pre-war mobility and Wessel's and Khalaf and Alkobaisi's studies, a complex pattern of cross-border movements emerges. Migrations were highly gendered and conditioned by age and marital status. Different types of mobility occupied distinct roles in the household life cycle – they were linked to preparing for marriage, raising children, caring for the elderly and preparing for one's own old age. They also came with different temporalities: older male heads of households stayed abroad for much longer than anybody else. Interestingly, informants from Mheen and Jabal al-Hoss, although from different governorates, engaged in similar patterns of movement. Therefore, these findings are probably not specific to their regions of origins but seem to reflect wider mobility strategies of poor rural populations in pre-war Syria and other Arab countries. For example, ethnographic evidence of seasonal migration of peasants to Lebanon, Jordan and Saudi Arabia also comes from Annika Rabo's work on Raqqa province (Rabo 2008, 2010) and southern Morocco (De Haas 2008).

While labour migration is a common phenomenon in most of the Arab world, in some contexts, it leads to a long-lasting split of migrant families. By way of illustration, wives of absent migrant men in Central Morocco spend years waiting for family reunification and moving to Europe. By virtue of their marriage to men abroad and their long-term dealings with the migratory process, they acquire the status of "migration expert" in their home communities (Elliot 2016). However, this is not what happened to my Syrian informants. Although they migrated frequently, it was usually for short stints. They also had a clear sense of where *home* lay – in the village – and hardly considered themselves nomads. Chalcraft (2009) argues that spatial proximity, open borders and the availability of social security back home in Syria created a condition of "prolonged unsettlement" for migrant workers in Lebanon. While Syrian workers were attracted by higher wages in neighbouring Lebanon (Chalcraft 2005) and Jordan, they found it cheaper to leave families behind and access public services in their home country. But home was also a place of refuge where they could retreat to and "sit out" crises in their destination countries. By way of illustration, in 2005, hundreds of thousands of Syrian workers briefly left Lebanon when the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, presumably orchestrated by the Assad regime, triggered anti-Syrian protests (Chalcraft 2005).

Lastly, additional insights into what motivated rural Syrians to go abroad before the war comes from asking those who could afford *not* to migrate. In Mafraq, I also encountered families of rural origin who had never engaged in labour migrations prior to 2011. Like former labour migrants, their educational levels were low, they had huge families and comparatively little access to public services in their villages of origin before the war. However, as the following example shows, they had disposed of more and *more varied* material resources than pre-war movers. On a cold winter's day in December 2016, I spent a memorable afternoon with Riffat and her family, hunched around a single gas oven and kneading bulgur, minced onions and ground beef to prepare *kibbeh*, a Syrian signature dish. Elbows deep into the kibbeh bowl, I listened as Riffat's life story unfolded before me. Riffat, now in her late thirties, mother of eight and panting heavily with her newest pregnancy, was born in Kuwait, where her father worked as a driver and her mother as a cook. When she was six years old, her family returned to her native village, a small community close to Sadat, a Christian town southeast of Homs. Riffat dropped out of school in her final year to get married to a neighbour. The biting cold on the day of my visit reminded her of the

heavy snowfall on the morning after her wedding night. All but her last two children were born inside the family home.

Yet, to local standards, Riffat's family was not poor before the Syrian war. She and her husband owned twenty-five dunums of land (i.e. 2.5 hectares) and fifty cows, but also goats, sheep, chicken, rabbits and even pigeons, in addition to olive, almond and pomegranate trees. In their own butcher's shop, they sold meat and milk. Riffat proudly recalled that they never had to buy anything as they could produce most types of food themselves. Her teenage sons had vivid memories of operating milking machines and riding motor bikes in the countryside.

To me, this kind of life, with little education, the burdens of multiple child-bearing and heavy labour for grown-ups and children alike, sounded tiresome, but not so to Riffat's children. "Life was good there", her sixteen-year old son insisted. "There was *nizam* [order]. Girls were not allowed to go out on their own, there always had to be a male relative with them." From their recollections, what emerges is a stable, well-off life in the village, amidst an extended and loving family and framed by conservative societal norms, but also distinct from other rural populations. What pertains to my argument is Riffat's explanation of why, despite living close to the Lebanese border, the family never sought seasonal work in the neighbouring country: "We had our *own* ground to work on." I do not claim that informants like Adnan who engaged in circular labour migration prior to 2011 were landless. Adnan's father owned ca. 100 dirham in land (ca. 10 hectares) - but he also had many children. Seasonal migrants like Adnan, often a younger son, usually retained small parcels of land in their village communities of origin that they always came home to and built new houses on, in which they invested the returns of their migrations abroad and where they were planning to settle down in old age. But it was also land in a semi-arid region that could not feed them and their children all year round. Besides bigger and fertile plots, what made the entirely sedentary lives of Riffat's family possible was their access to modern farming technology. Her family had successfully diversified their sources of income *in situ*, by producing and selling dairy products, meat and vegetables.

Syrians' pre-war migrations from a macro-economic perspective

For families like Adnan's in Jabal al-Hoss and Baher's in Mheen, Mafraq was only one foreign destination among many. Pre-war statistics about Syrians' migrations are incomplete, but they give us a flavour of the wide-spread presence of Syrian workers in neighbouring countries. According to estimates of the World Bank, there were almost one million Syrian emigrants in 2010 (quoted in Seeberg 2013). In 2013, three of the top five countries of Syrian settlement were Saudi Arabia – home to 26.2% of long-term Syrian migrants -, Lebanon and Jordan (MPC 2013b). However, there are no comprehensive and recent statistics available for Syrians in the Arab Peninsula (Fargues and Fandrich 2012; Kawakibi 2008; MPC 2013b), nor do available data include seasonal migrant workers in neighbouring countries like Lebanon (MPC 2013a), estimated at 300,000-500,000 (Mehchy and Doko 2011), i.e. 5.5 to 9.2% of Syria's working age population in 2010.

Seasonal migration was also factored into Syrian policy-making in the region, as evidenced by the country's bilateral agreements on temporary low-skilled labour migration with Lebanon (various, 1990s), Qatar (2003 and 2008), UAE (2008), Jordan (2007) and Kuwait (2008) (MPC 2013b). Some countries share a complex history with Syria. Lebanon, for example, was not only the preferred destination of most low-skilled Syrian workers. It was also under military occupation by its stronger neighbour from 1976 until 2005, and the Assad regime retains strong political ties with Hezbollah, an important Shi'a Islamist political party (Yacoubian 2006). By way of contrast, Syrians' pre-war migration to Jordan was certainly less contentious and also occurred at a much smaller scale. Below, I argue that both the Syrian and the Jordanian state benefited from poor peasants' cross-border movements.

From the perspective of the *Syrian state*, seasonal migrations of its poorest citizens resolved the problem of its youth bulge and an excess workforce. Migrant workers' remittances also made an important contribution to a weak domestic economy and dwindling public services, allowing the regime to postpone long overdue reforms (Seeberg 2013). In 2006, Schmidt described the Syrian economy as follows:

> *The economy that Bashar al-Asad [sic] has inherited consists of a medium-productive agricultural sector, a small and weak industrial sector, and the oil sector. It is strengthened by remittances from Syrian workers abroad, adding roughly 15 per cent to incomes.* (Schmidt 2006: 92)

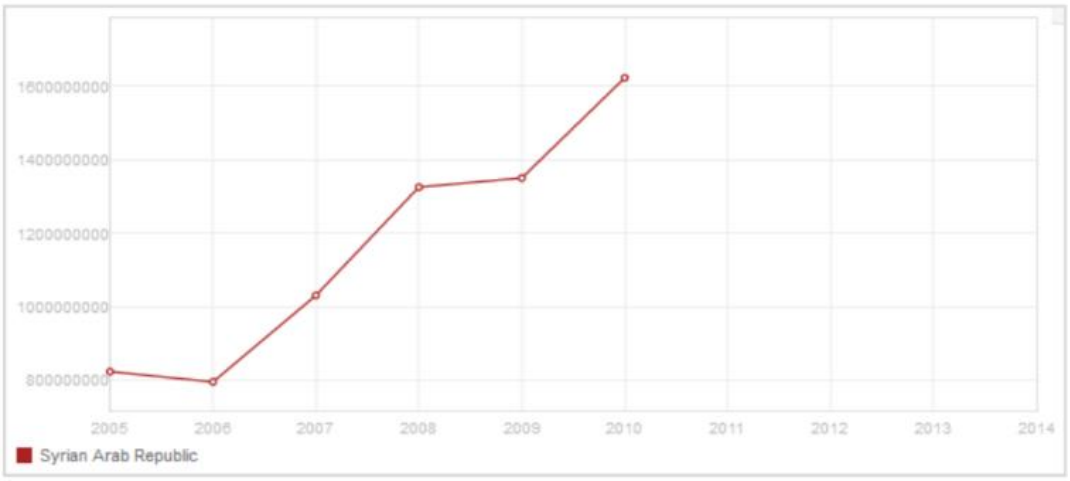

Figure 9 Remittances to Syria in USD 2005-2010 (World Bank 2015, in Dean 2015: 7)

In Migration Studies, the role of remittances in furthering development has been discussed abundantly. De Haas (2012) notices a shift in the migration policy debate in the 2000s when aid agencies and national governments began to praise remittances as a major contribution to development in migrants' countries of origin. This reflects increasing labour mobility and the surge of individual payments to family members abroad, but also greater visibility, as remittances are increasingly sent via formal banking channels.

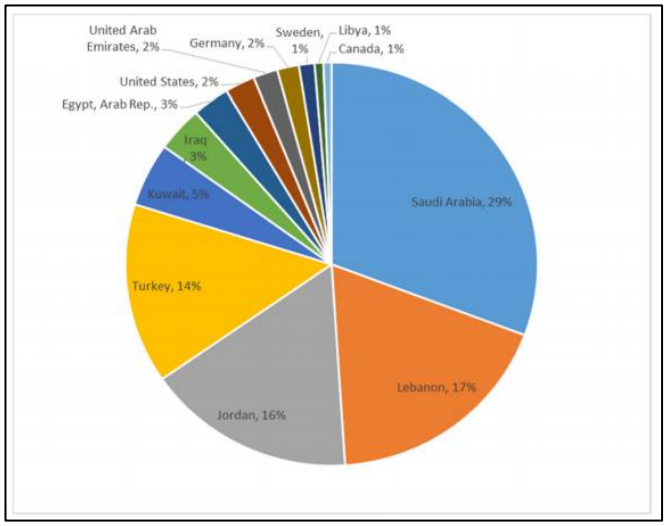

Figure 10 Sources of remittances to Syria (World Bank 2015, in Dean 2015: 7)

Pre-war Syria was no exception to this. In the four years before the onset of the Syrian Civil War, formally recorded remittances doubled (Figure 9). In 2010, they reached USD 1.6 billion, i.e. 2.4% of the Syrian GDP – 93% came from other Arab countries. One third alone was sent by Syrians working in the oil economies on the Arabian Peninsula (Figure

10). The greater *visibility* of remittances to Syria is also an effect of the opening of private banks and the new availability of financial services, except to the very poor.

Proponents of remittances' role in fostering development have praised them as less bureaucratic and corrupt, more direct and faster than official development assistance. Critics have pointed out that, while remittances doubtlessly benefit individuals, they also risk reinforcing existing inequalities, as members of the poorest families often cannot afford to send migrants abroad. Moreover, receivers often spend the money on private consumption instead of developing their communities. Policymakers' increased interest in remittances also has to be understood in the context of neoliberal development paradigms that emphasize the role of markets and individuals, while understating the role of states, in bringing about development. Remittances alone fail to remedy "more structural development constraints such as misguided macro-economic policies, socio-economic inequalities, authoritarianism, corruption and legal insecurity" (De Haas 2012: 16). Overpraising their impact might encourage migrant-sending states to devolve responsibility for social and economic reform. It also downplays exploitative working conditions of low-skilled migrants in labour-receiving countries.

While it is difficult to gauge what Adnan and Baher spent the revenues from their various travels on, we do know that both eventually returned home and married young women from their villages. Baher's university degree in teaching allowed him to find employment in a school in his native area. As the youngest son, he could bring his wife to his parental home where they lived with his elderly mother. For those without formal qualifications, like Adnan, circular migrations continued after marriage. Now they often brought their families. Neither of them had the financial means to become "agents of development" in their villages of origin.

From the perspective of *host countries* like Jordan, Syrians' seasonal migration gave them access to a cheap and exploitable workforce that hardly used any public services at their destination. In fact, my informants' pre-war circular mobilities are largely absent from official Jordanian immigration statistics. In her contribution to the comprehensive *Atlas of Jordan*, Francoise De Bel-Air (2013) draws attention to the discrepancy between ca. 230,000 registered work permit holders from other Arab countries, and an estimated total of 800,000 foreign Arab workers. Before 2011, *legal* Syrian migrant workers made up a tiny percentage of work permit holders in Jordan – they mostly worked in manufacturing, construction and trade (Figure 11). Given the informal nature of employment in agriculture, these figures might grossly understate the (intermittent) presence of Syrians on Jordanian fields. A 2015 ILO reports estimates the number of Syrian workers in the Hashemite Kingdom prior to 2011 at 160,000, although it is unclear whether this includes only Syrians with proper work permits or the entirety of Syrians in the Jordanian economy.

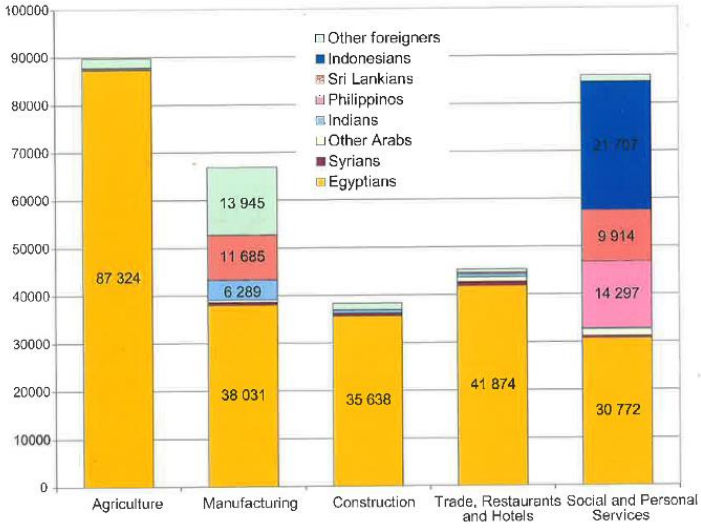

Figure 11 Legal migrant workers in Jordan per nationality and sector in 2009 (De Bel-Air 2013: 251)

A look at Jordanian immigration policies reveals that they were deliberately designed to keep Syrians' and other migrant workers' stay temporary and push them into the informal sector. This "non-policy of migration" (Van Aken 2005: 118) helped keep a struggling rentier state afloat (De Bel-Air 2008). In the 1970s, remittances from Jordanian white-collar workers in the Gulf had led to considerable upward social mobility of Jordanians back home, but also to the decrease of domestic manual labour, especially in agriculture and construction. Jordan opened its doors to migrant workers, initially within the framework of Pan-Arab policies. This resulted in a segmentation of the labour market between white-collar local and blue-collar foreign workers. However, many Jordanians returned home during the oil crisis in the Gulf states in the 1980s, and the mass-scale repatriation of

Jordanian-Palestinians after the Second Gulf War caused soaring unemployment rates of up to thirty per cent in the early 1990s. Structural adjustment policies and the shrinking of the public sector put additional strain on Jordan's labour market, provoking the tightening of immigration policies and attempts at indigenizing labour. As early as 1984, Egyptian workers were thus required to obtain work permits. A decade later, migrant labour was restricted to certain low-skilled sectors. While Jordan still relies on menial migrant workers, it has also prevented migrants from overstaying their welcome, by keeping them in legal limbo, irregularizing huge segments of foreign labour, issuing employer-bound visa and excluding them from the trade unions. As Jordan lacks proper national asylum laws, Syrian refugees after 2011 were subjected to the same asymmetrical migratory policies as other foreigners, at least until the introduction of the Jordan Compact in February 2016 (cf. chapter 2 and conclusion). And Jordan's hostile stance on low-skilled workers is not exceptional. Similar restrictive policies have been implemented in the Gulf where Arab migrants increasingly compete with cheaper workers from Southeast Asia (Thiollet 2017). Even in Lebanon, where the Ba'athist regime was de facto in control in the early 1990s, it made no effort to improve Syrian workers' rights (Chalcraft 2007).

Syrian workers in Jordan were not only cheap because they usually worked in the informal sector. They also did not put a strain on public services at their places of work, which is of particular relevance to already underserviced agricultural areas like Mafraq and the Jordan Valley. Migrant-receiving countries like Jordan successfully outsourced the *social reproduction* of low-skilled workers to Syria, their country of origin. In Marxist theory, social reproduction refers to the reproduction of the labour force, both on a daily and a generational basis (cf. Katz 2001). A core feature of global capitalism is the disconnect between *economic* and *social* reproduction: while welfare states in the Global North are increasingly on the retreat, restrictive visa regimes allow migrants to come for work, but not to stay long enough or bring their families to benefit from public services. Forcing migrants to leave their families behind also assures that the costs of social reproduction of the migrant workforce are born by countries and communities of origin. My findings on Syrian migrant labour in Jordan and other Arab countries show that wealth inequalities and restrictive policies *within* the Global South drive similar migration patterns. Katz (2001) points out a major paradox of global capitalism: while capital and humans are increasingly mobile, "social reproduction […] remains largely place-bound" (716) to migrants'

communities of origin. To Adnan and Baher, it was cheaper to leave their families behind in the Syrian countryside where they had (limited) access to education and public healthcare. But this was also cheaper – for host states like Jordan.

The *other* Syrians: Intersecting mobility schemes and rural populations on the move

But my Syrian informants were not the only peasants on the move. Batatu (1999) underlines the heterogenous nature of Syria's rural population that differ along religious and ethnic lines, according to region of origin, proximity to urban centres, social organization in clans and access to land. The next section describes how my interlocutors' mobility schemes intersected with those of other rural Syrians working in Jordan prior to 2011. While living in Mafraq, I occasionally came across Syrian refugees who took advantage of the complementary agricultural seasons in Mafraq and the Jordan Valley. Having tilled the fields in Mafraq from spring to autumn, they would then relocate to the Jordan Valley, where the harvest starts in earnest in September and lasts all winter. In Jordan, where only 12% of the country's surface can be cultivated (Demilecamps 2013), a comparison of modern agricultural production in Mafraq and the Jordan Valley provides further insights into migrant lives on both sites (Van Aken 2005). Post-independence, both areas have been subject to intensive rural modernization. Governmental planning, international aid and land reforms fuelled a shift towards large-scale farms and waged labour. Improved irrigation and new technologies, in particular greenhouses, created a need for more manpower. However, the gradual disappearance of Jordanian male labour was accompanied by gender shifts in the workforce – with poor Jordanian women increasingly seeking employment in agriculture, especially in the Jordan Valley – and the mass arrival of migrant workers, mainly Egyptians, but also Pakistanis and Syrians. Since the 1980s, recurrent market crises and overproduction have turned agriculture in Jordan into a losing business. Hence, the need for *more* workers has coincided with attempts to lower labour costs.

Descriptions of Egyptians' lives in the Jordan Valley resemble my Syrian informants' recollections of working and saving strategies in Jordan prior to 2011. Men of both populations migrated several times during their life cycle, often saving up for major

milestones such as engagements, building a house or paying for their children's education. To maximize their savings, Egyptians in the Jordan Valley did not spend money in coffeeshops. However, I was puzzled when it came to their living situation. On a trip to the southern edge of the Jordan Valley, I learned that migrant workers – both Egyptians and Syrians – lived in tents on site, with hardly any interaction with the local community. As Habib, my Jordanian guide, a local in his mid-thirties, explained, exchanges were limited to occasional shopping trips into town, reserved for heads of households: "The father comes into the souq at night and buys food for the entire family." He emphasized the high degree of mobility in Syrian workers' lives: "They load up their trucks, they go wherever is work." I was intrigued: did Syrians' mobility circuit encompass more than one station in Jordan? However, when I presented my hypothesis to Mahmood, a Syrian informant from Jabal al-Hoss and, as we will see in chapter 3, highly knowledgeable about Syrian labour in Jordan, he was appalled: "*Our* people would never accept to live in tents", he insisted. "*We* are used to living in houses." According to Mahmood, prior to 2011, Syrian migrant workers in Mafraq, mostly from the Aleppo and Homs governorates, always rented houses in town. Since they returned to Mafraq as *refugees*, they have preferred to remain in Mafraq all year long, despite the availability of jobs in the Jordan Valley in the winter months. Instead, during this time, Syrians in Mafraq rely on doing other odd jobs and humanitarian assistance.

Who were these *other* Syrian migrant workers that Mahmood was so keen to distinguish himself from? As I returned to Jordan in summer 2017 – and thus during the agricultural off-season – I did not encounter any Syrians in the Jordan Valley. Talking to locals, I received different responses. Rumour had it that they mostly came from Daraa. However, from personal experience in Mafraq, I knew that Jordanian farmers rarely interacted with migrant workers on a personal level, and often had little information about nor any interest in their employees' places of origin. Mahmood told a different story. In his eyes, they were nomadic Bedouins from the Hama region, accustomed to living in tents. Hence, evidence of the presence of other Syrian migrants in the Jordan Valley should serve as a warning not to treat rural populations as a monolithic block. In Syria, and later Jordan, these encompassed both sedentary and nomadic people with different, albeit at times overlapping, migration histories and survival strategies.

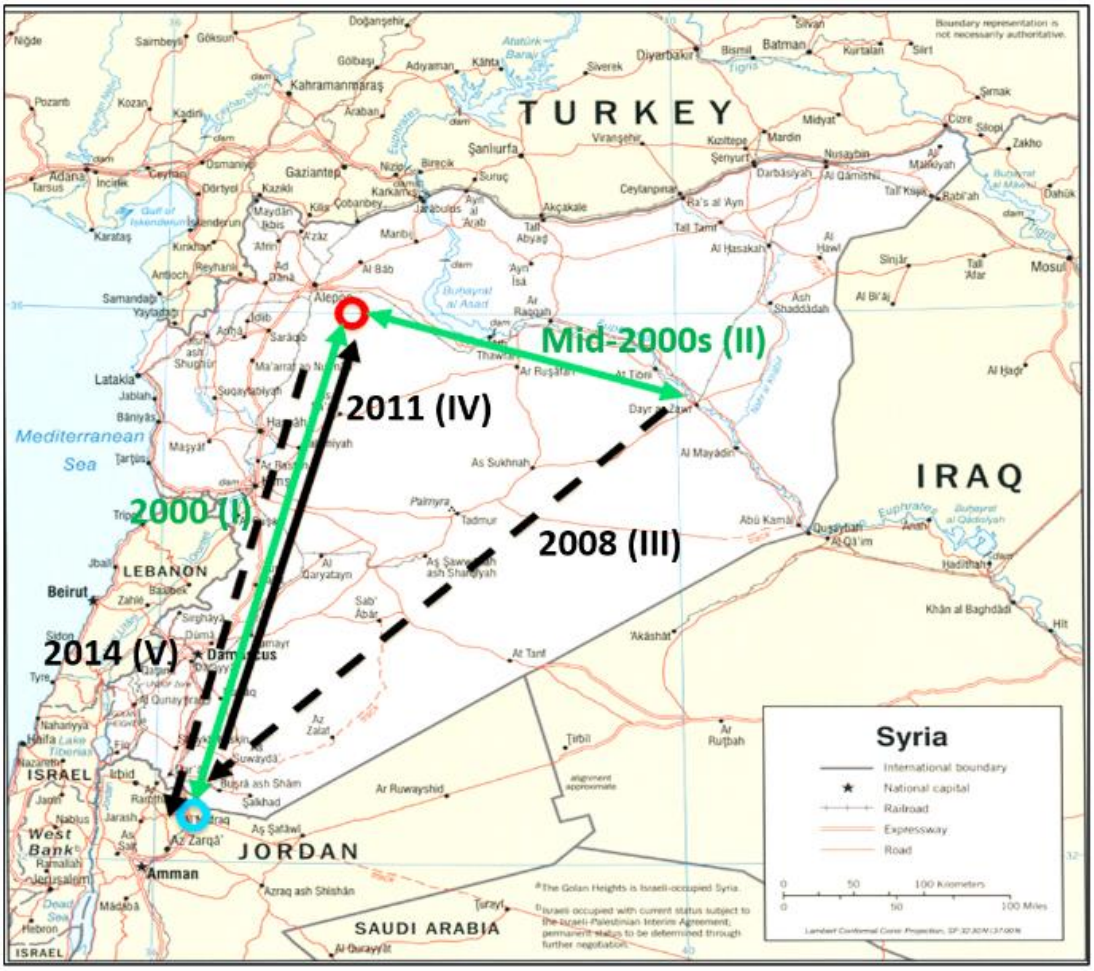

Figure 12 Adnan's travels 2000-2014 (Map: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency 2007; additions by Wagner)

To complicate the picture even more, some of my Syrian informants in Mafraq were displaced *before* coming to Jordan as refugees. Pre-war mobility patterns combined voluntary labour migration and economic displacement after the eventual break-down of rural livelihoods in the late 2000s.

Figure 12 retraces Adnan's travels between 2000 and 2014. Green arrows indicate *labour migrations*; black arrows refer to trajectories of internal and cross-border *displacement*. A brief glance at the map reveals a complex and circular pattern of movements for my informants where "voluntary" and "forced" migrations were intertwined and led him to the same *destinations*.

We already know that Adnan first came to Mafraq as a teenager in 2000 to work as a tiler for a couple of weeks (arrow I). However, he soon returned to his native village in Jabal al-Hoss where he eventually married a neighbour's daughter, ca. ten years younger than him. In the 2000s, Adnan worked for several years as an agricultural labourer in the Deir ez-Zor region, an intensive farming area in Northeastern Syria (arrow II). However, intensive irrigation required a lot of water, and water supplies gradually dwindled. In the late 2000s, the price of diesel, necessary to operate water pumps, went up. As a result, farming mostly came to a halt, which triggered a mass migration of agricultural laborers to southern Syria. "From Daraa to As-Suwayda, it was all tents!", Adnan remembers, although his family was lucky enough to rent a cheap house in Daraa (arrow III). For three years, Adnan and his family commuted between Daraa, where they regularly found work on the fields, and their village of origin in northern Syria, until the peaceful demonstrations in Daraa in spring 2011 heralded the beginning of the Syrian uprising. Adnan remembered seeing the marches, and being surprised, as Daraa tribes were known to side with the regime. However, he also felt no connection to the nascent revolution. To stay out of trouble, he took his family back north to Jabal al-Hoss (arrow IV). In November 2014, the bombing in rural Aleppo intensified and they fled to Mafraq (arrow V).

In his own words, Adnan had thus become a "refugee" well before 2011. In recent years, climate change and the effects of a severe 2006-2010 drought have gained prominence as potential triggers of social unrest in Syria. I was all the more surprised that Adnan and other Syrians in Mafraq dismissed this hypothesis quickly. "There have always been droughts, and we have always been poor", Mahmood explained (cf. Fröhlich 2016). In reality, both migration and the social uprising were driven by a complex and explosive combination of failed agricultural reforms and neoliberal policies, dwindling rural economies and cronyism (Fröhlich 2016). My informants' experiences of pre-war economic struggles match findings from De Châtel's long-term ethnographic fieldwork in the Jazira, Syria's Northeastern governorates, which, paradoxically, was both the country's breadbasket, but also its poorhouse (De Châtel 2014b). Like my informants, De Châtel cautions against declaring climate change the main factor behind the Syrian war. Holding nature responsible diverts attention away from long-term unsustainable agricultural policies, loss of natural resources and the regime's unwillingness to acknowledge and remedy mismanagement after 2000. De Châtel paints Northeastern Syria as a region where large-scale socialist projects like the

Euphrates Basin Project, a hydropower and irrigation scheme, and state-led farms failed to decrease rural poverty and social inequalities. Instead, intensive irrigation, helped by the use of diesel pumps, depleted groundwater, undermining small- and medium-scale farming. After 2000, liberalization policies, the privatization of state farms and worsening water scarcity put many farmers out of work, resulting in a thirty-three per cent decrease of agricultural labour. Many former peasants resorted to wage labour in the industry and in services, and unemployment rates rose to more than 30% in 2007 (Aita 2009). Economic stagnation was compounded by a youth bulge, the decrease in oil production and the depletion of oil reserves (Fröhlich 2016). For Adnan and many others, cuts of diesel and fuel subsidies in 2008 and 2009 eventually made farming impossible, causing a mass exodus from Northeastern Syria. Note, though, that data are scarce, and there is little evidence to back up the figure of 1.5 million internally displaced *before* 2011 that has been propagated by humanitarian practitioners and scholars of the region. More realistically, the number of displaced people was in the hundreds of thousands (Fröhlich 2016; Selby, Dahy, Fröhlich and Hulme 2017). Therefore, Adnan's migration strategy of moving his entire family to Daraa is not unique. The novelty of internal economic displacement in Syria from the late 2000s on lies in the fact that, while rural men had always engaged in seasonal migration to bigger cities and other agricultural areas, they now took their families with them. This is echoed by Fröhlich's (2016) research with Syrian refugees in Jordan: in the late 2000s, Syrians from rural areas in the north of the country moved southwards along established migration corridors. However, migration flows intensified and while some of the educated youth went to cities, many peasants relocated from rural to rural areas.

I do not claim that the drought and internal displacement were a direct cause of the later uprising. Fröhlich (2016) argues that internal migrants lacked the social capital to organize social movements, but also the emotional attachment to the Daraa region where the uprising began. In a similar vein, Adnan laughingly fended off my questions about the protests in Daraa. "This was not my home", he said. "I had nothing to do with it." Rather, retracing Adnan's pre-war displacement illustrates the fact that for many Syrians of rural backgrounds, recent cross-border flight was only the last episode in a much longer history of disenfranchisement and forced movements inside their home country.

Loss of rural livelihoods after 2011 and flight to Mafraq

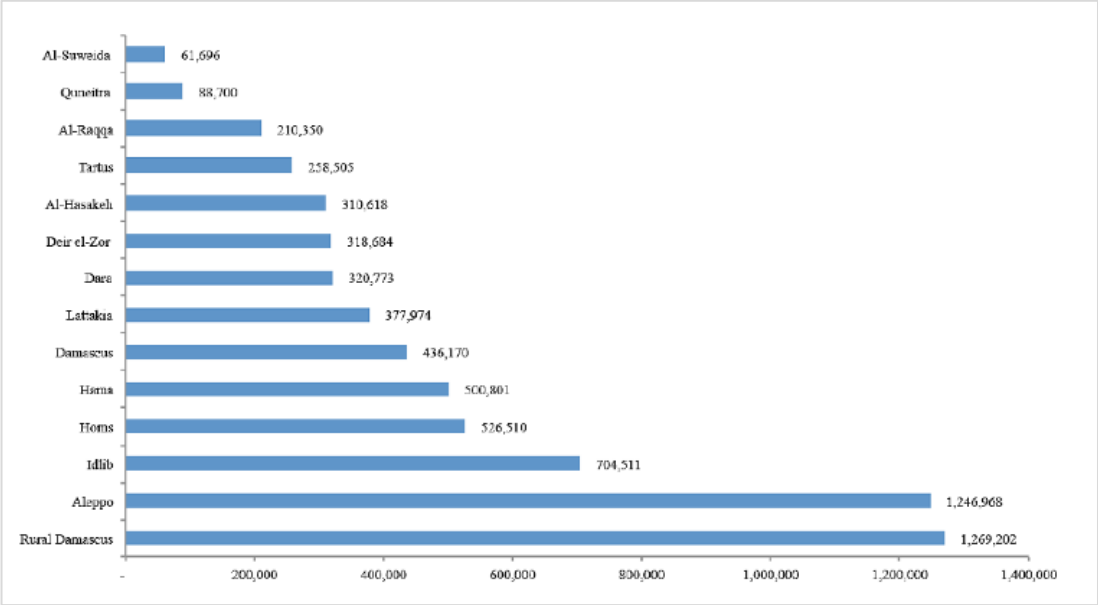

Figure 13 Internally displaced population by governorate, 2015 (UNESCWA and University of St Andrews 2016: 26)

My Syrian informants usually left their villages of origin in a hurry when fleeing from the Syrian war, without further preparations or the time to gather assets. In conversations, they are deliberately vague about the exact reasons of their flight, although it is known that at least some villages in the Jabal al-Hoss area were involved in anti-regime demonstrations (Imady 2014).

In general, refugees in Mafraq and elsewhere in Jordan avoid discussing their own involvement in political activities on either side of the Syrian conflict, due to widespread fears of Jordanian and Syrian secret services in Mafraq, potential repercussions for relatives left behind and for refugees outside the country, should they decide to return. Many recall running away from the bombings by regime forces and hiding in basements. One Syrian woman from the Homs area graphically described how a daytime air raid had left her new-born daughter paralyzed with shock. Only when picking up the mute child, she realized her daughter was still alive. Informants from both Mheen and Jabal al-Hoss pointed out to me the proximity of military facilities to their villages, which made them a preferential target for regime and opposition forces. For example, the village of Hawarin close to Mheen, where Baher comes from, is located close to a military arsenal. As a child, Baher watched trains transporting weapons on the nearby railway to Tartus, a city on Syria's

Mediterranean coast. When the fighting between the Syrian army and oppositional groups got closer, most of the village's inhabitants, ca. 25,000 people, went on a march to a village fifteen miles away. During the evacuation, only one woman and one child got killed. Baher and his family spent one and a half month in the neighbouring village – they never saw their house again. One of Baher's brother stayed behind. Months later, he sent him pictures of its ruins when regime soldiers returned to Hawarin. As much of rural Homs was destroyed and many villages evacuated, Baher and his family entered Jordan in early 2014.
Information about cross-border displacement is seldom disaggregated with regard to refugees' governorates of origin. However, figures of *internal* displacement reveal high rates of conflict for Homs and Aleppo governorates, my informants' regions of origin (Figure 13).

However, open violence is not the only factor that caused rural populations to flee the country. From policy reports, we also know that Syrian farmers, specifically, lost their livelihoods *because* of the conflict. Between 2010 and 2015, farming GDP fell by nearly 60%, and the total area under cultivation was nearly halved, from 6 million to 3.6 million hectares. This was due not only to military operations and the physical destruction of farms. Rising transport and irrigation costs, the lack of fuel and the impact of economic sanctions all affected already precarious livelihoods for peasants like my informants. As a result of the farming crisis, food prices inside Syria skyrocketed, with a ton of wheat selling in Damascus at nearly the triple of the global average in 2015 (UNESCWA and University of St Andrews 2016).

But Syrians in Mafraq are much more outspoken when it comes to the circumstances of their actual flight. Some were internally displaced for weeks or even months on end before opting to come to Jordan. However, most people's experience mimics those of Adnan, whose memories of a rushed escape and seemingly endless night in the Jordanian-Syrian desert were reproduced at the beginning of this thesis. Most people's narratives focus on the things they left behind: family and wedding pictures, a woman's favourite dress; one's favourite olive tree in the courtyard. In a situation of mortal fear and with little time to weigh up alternatives or pool resources, my informants chose to come to Mafraq, a place already known to them. Here, I am by no means suggesting that before 2011, whole Syrian villages had migrated to Mafraq. Rather, when the civil war broke out and regime bombings

forced my informants out of their regions of origin, entire communities, often bound together by kinship ties, managed to capitalize on transnational connections with Jordanian employers previously established by some of its members.

Thus, refugee movements have to be studied in the continuity of longstanding migration processes. As in the case of Syrian refugees in Jordan, they might not be a radically new phenomenon, but rather an amplification in scale of already occurring population movements. Converging evidence comes from the study of displacement in various geographic contexts, for example from Sudan (Kindersley 2015) and Somalia (Horst 2006). After the 2003 Iraq war, Iraqi refugees in Jordan followed in the footsteps of compatriots who had left after the toppling of the Iraqi monarchy 1958 and the Gulf War 1991, although the composition of the refugee population somewhat shifted along class, religious and ethnic lines (Chatelard 2010). Further away, refugees and labour migrants cross the Afghan-Pakistani border alongside each other, often more than once, at different times in their lives and for mixed reasons: “People may leave Afghanistan for protection-related reasons, but seek work in Iran or Pakistan” (Monsutti 2008) – an observation true of many Syrians in Mafraq who crossed the border not only to seek safety, but also to reactivate employment networks in exile.

Although many Syrians migrated widely in the Levant before 2011, for some of them, the connection to Mafraq proved to be a *preferential link.* Structural and more coincidental reasons motivated them to capitalize on this connection – and not others – in times of conflict. There is anecdotal evidence that some Jordanian employers proactively reached out to former Syrian farm workers, inviting them back on their lands. Mafraq rumours, relayed to me by the pastor of the Mafraq Unity Church, have it that a local Jordanian organized buses to bring rural populations from the Homs governorate during the Syrian army’s Homs offensive in spring 2012, going as far as helping them to obtain identity documents before their departure. Positive personal working experience and knowledge of

transport routes equally affected Syrians' decision to seek refuge in northern Jordan.[12] Many informants also highlighted the importance of a shared language and a conservative form of Sunni Islam. Linguistic and cultural differences made it less attractive to them to flee to multi-ethnic, liberal Lebanon or non-Arabic-speaking Turkey. Finally, geopolitics and barriers to movement also played a role. Although many of my informants have relatives in the Arab Peninsula, the Gulf States have kept their borders closed to refugees and restrictive visa regulations prohibit family reunification. The course of front lines at the time of their flight also prevented some of my informants from travelling to nearby Lebanon.

The camp, the city – and the village? 'Who goes where' revisited

On a winter day in Umm Quais, a picturesque small town in the far northwest that overlooks the Sea of Tiberias, I finally found the refugees from Daraa governorate in southern Syria that I had so desperately been looking for at the beginning of my stay. They, too, had very good reasons for not seeking refuge in a mid-sized town like Mafraq, but in much smaller – and inconspicuous – places. Today, the UNHCR's Syria Regional Refugee Response Portal only distinguishes between camp- and non-camp-based refugees, without differentiating between urban and rural sites of refuge. While some scholars argue that the international humanitarian community overlooked refugees outside camps until the mid-1990s (e.g. Ward 2014), Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2019) puts into perspective the international community's recent "urban turn". Urban displacement has been increasingly researched since the 1990s, becoming the subject of dedicated UNCHR policies in 1997 and 2009 (Kagan 2013). Yet, humanitarian assistance to refugees outside camps started much earlier. In fact, Chambers' (1981) seminal livelihoods approach was developed in response to an urban *bias*, i.e. a disproportionate emphasis on refugees in urban, as compared to rural, areas. (Chapter 4 looks at how this pattern is replicated by an Evangelical NGO in Mafraq

[12] Although research interest in the role of pre-war labour migrations in steering Syrian displacement is still scarce, at least one other study finds similar movement patterns. Lagarde and Dorai (2017) trace back the economic and, later, forced migrations of the inhabitants of Deir Mqaren, a village 20 km northeast of Damascus. In the 1990s, men of the village established a successful cross-border trade with dried fruits and sweets. At its height, the business employed ca. 300-400 traders who rented apartments in big Jordanian cities. After 2011, young men fleeing conscription found refuge and employment with the help of their more permanently established male relatives in Jordan and were able to send remittances back home. When the situation in Syria deteriorated, traders used their knowledge of travel routes and contacts in the Jordanian security forces to bring their wives and children to safety.

that limits its services to urban refugees within easy reach.) Hence, some voices within the humanitarian sector have long acknowledged that refugees reside in diverse spaces, including camps, cities, peri-urban areas and rural settlements.

Similarly, anthropologists have highlighted differences between "encamped" and "urban" refugees. Malkki (1992, 1995) famously demonstrated that they think differently of displacement and national identities. In her study, Hutu refugees in remote camps in Tanzania reformulated the refugee experience as a mythic narrative. Camp inmates constituted "a nation in exile" (Malkki 1992: 35), a group of people thrown together by fate whose epic journey would eventually culminate in their return to the imagined homeland, and whose "purity" was preserved by their isolated living conditions. By way of contrast, self-settled Hutus in urban areas adopted multiple identities in their interactions with the host community. Kibreab (1999) criticised Malkki for interpreting urban refugees' identities as "cosmopolitan", overlooking the importance of hiding one's ethnic or religious belonging from hostile locals.

As Agier (2016) points out, these anthropological debates are mostly about identity-formation in exile. By way of contrast, I approach the study of encamped and urban refugees from a different angle: with regard to pre-existing transnational *networks* that have brought refugees to these respective locales. From this point of view, what if – at least in the Jordanian case – the distinction between camp and urban life does not capture the variety of refugees' experiences in exile? From my research in Mafraq and occasional day trips to villages and small towns like Umm Qais, I learned that not all refugees originally from rural areas who now live *outside* the camps in Jordan experience displacement in similar ways. Another important fault line emerged: between the *city* and the *village*, Syrians living in smaller and bigger towns like Mafraq, and those in much smaller settlements like Umm Quais. Why Syrians moved to either of those tells us much about the *diverse* nature of transnational networks rural refugees capitalized on in times of war, but also about their lives in exile.

In Umm Qais that day, my chaperone, a Jordanian tourist guide and amateur archaeologist in his forties, introduced me to Abu Jafar's family, Syrian refugees who were also his relatives. Later, in his own home, he proudly declared: "In 1969, Abu Jafar came to eat in

this house." Abu Jafar, his wife, two daughters and three sons, were originally from Tafas, a town less than forty miles away from Umm Qais as the crow flies. They fled to Jordan in 2012. Having spent more than two years in ar-Ramtha, a town adjacent to Jordan's most important border crossing with Syria, they moved to Umm Qais, joining another dozen Syrian families there who all came from villages in the Daraa governorate, small places like Jassim that I had never heard about, but that sounded familiar to Jordanians who had grown up alongside the northern border.

What Abu Jafar had in common with my informants in Mafraq was his rural background. Before 2011, most people in Tafas were farmers, although Abu Jafar also complemented his income from agriculture with a small business, bringing in goods from Turkey via Tartus, Syria's second biggest port. In Umm Quais, however, Abu Jafar's living conditions were remarkably different from Mafraq standards. There, a cramped two-room apartment was rented out for 150JD a month. Oftentimes, pipes were leaking, windows and doors were broken, and walls were made from bare concrete. In Umm Qais, Abu Jafar paid a similar rent for a spacious two-floor house with eight rooms that his family had lovingly furnished with beds and carpets. In addition to the "madafa", the traditional living room where guests are received, the house also had a sunny veranda. Inside, the walls were painted in warm shades of yellow and gold. Over breakfast, I sat next to Abu Jafar's wife. I could not help wondering about the fact that she was still wearing her wedding band and a golden bracelet, a rare sight in Mafraq where most of my friends had sold their jewellery a long time ago. His wife also praised the variety of fruits and vegetables she found in local markets – a diet much more varied than for some of the Syrian poor in Mafraq who survive on two to three falafel sandwiches a day. Although the younger sons complained about lack of work, they were usually able to make a living on odd jobs in the village, often by laying floor tiles. The only type of humanitarian assistance the family received were the World Food Programme's food vouchers. Unlike the Mafraq poor, they did not sell them on the black market, but brought food from shopping malls in Irbid, the nearest city. Over the course of a day, my Jordanian guide took me to meet other Syrian families in Umm Qais, most of them related to Abu Jafar and the local villagers. Sipping lemonade on the terrace of another refugee-host in the late afternoon, my gaze wandered over the green mountain valleys below the village. Syrian refugees in Mafraq often complained that they had trouble breathing, that there was no fresh air in the shabby desert town. Umm Qais, with its

spacious houses and verandas, airy views and abundant nature, was a place where one felt less confined, less assaulted by dirt, destitution and mistrust. Why was their experience of exile in Jordan so different? The answer lies in the nature of Abu Jafar's pre-war ties to Um Quais, a place that he was bound to not through employment, but through *kinship* networks.

From the moment of Abu Jafar's arrival, support from Jordanian relatives shielded him and his family from Jordanian authorities. They only spent two days in Zaatari Camp before their Jordanian relatives bailed them out. In ar-Ramtha, frequent labour patrols had put his sons at the risk of deportation. By way of contrast, in the village, there was hardly any presence of the Jordanian state, and young Syrian men easily found jobs with Jordanian relatives and acquaintances. Greater security and access to livelihoods in Um Qais allowed Abu Jafar and his descendants to get by without humanitarian assistance. This is not to say that Abu Jafar's family had no interest in interacting with the humanitarian system. One of his sons, newly married, was hoping to qualify for resettlement to Canada. Very different from Syrian refugees in Mafraq, aid to them represented an opportunity for better futures in the long run, not a critical lifeline in the present.

The comparison between Syrian refugees in villages and cities throws into relief the differential impact of transnational connections in informing displacement trajectories and livelihoods in Jordan. They also shape opportunities for coexistence with locals. Chapters 2 and 3 investigate the increasing class divide between Syrians and Jordanians in Mafraq, palpable not only in more exploitative working conditions, but also diminished rates of inter-marriage. By way of contrast, the effect of stronger kinship ties with locals is also strongly felt in everyday interactions. In tiny Umm Qais, there was no sense of alienation. "We all know each other", my guide explained. Syrian and Jordanian children attended school together and there were no incidents of bullying or sexual harassment in the streets. Both my Jordanian guide and my Syrian hosts were quick to underline what they had in common, not what set them apart: "The same language, the same customs", as Abu Jafar explained. My Jordanian guide even valued the presence of Syrians, a thought unthinkable to my local host family in Mafraq: "Thanks to the Syrians, one remembers the old ways. […] In modern times, nobody cares about things like this. [He points at the remainders of the

sumptuous breakfast we just shared.] In Jordan, everybody stays at home and only prepares food for themselves."

In a nutshell, the comparison of a mid-sized town and a village, Mafraq and Umm Qais, reveals that *where* Syrians from similar socioeconomic backgrounds sought refuge and *how* they fare in exile depends on the type of pre-war transnational connections that they could resort to in times of conflict. Naturally, much of Umm Qais' greater success in integrating newcomers can be attributed to the smaller influx of refugees, the lesser pressure on public services and the – beneficial – absence of Jordanian authorities. Yet it remains that rural refugees with strong *family* ties in the host country – often originally from the Jordanian-Syrian borderland – sought shelter in *villages*, rather than more anonymous urban areas. In villages, strong support networks then allowed them to rebuild their lives more quickly and become economically self-sufficient. By way of contrast, refugees in Mafraq, originally from central and northern Syria, disposed of weaker employment linkage. They benefited from their knowledge of local labour markets and employers, rather than tangible financial support, free housing and land provided by relatives.[13]

Conclusion

The first chapter provides an answer to why some Syrian refugees chose to seek refuge in Mafraq after 2011. Many of them, especially men, had worked there before the war as *seasonal migrants*. More longstanding processes of "migrantization" and dispossession forced Syrians into mobility but prevented them from staying abroad for too long. A spatial lens allows us to understand how "migrantization" created connections between remote

[13] This is not to say that Syrians' lives are always better in villages, nor that family ties are the only reason to move to the Jordanian countryside. On the contrary, when these are lacking, Syrians in the village are even worse off than those in urban centres like Mafraq. The situation of Syrians living in informal tent settlements on farming ground is a case in point. On my frequent trips to the border a couple of miles outside Mafraq, I often spotted weathered makeshift shelters along the road, faded clothes dangling from lines hung up between tent poles, wells and pylons. Employed by Jordanian farmers, some Syrians trade their labour against a plot where they can pitch their tent. In the open, they do not have access even to basic services such as water and sanitation, and their children usually join them in working on the fields. Off the main roads, they are also rarely, if ever, visited by humanitarian organizations. During the agricultural peak season in summer 2014, almost 6,000 Syrians lived in tents in Mafraq governorate, more than in the rest of Jordan taken together (REACH 2013b). These Syrian workers found themselves in exploitative relationships with their Jordanian employers – the latter were not *family*.

places in the Levant. There is no doubt that the Syrians who now find themselves in Mafraq were far from cosmopolitan travellers. As one Syrian woman put it: “Mafraq was the only place we knew in the world”. However, this chapter showed that this is only partly true. Before the war, my informants engaged in multiple migration strategies, and household members moved in different ways at various stages of their life. Ultimately, focusing on Syrian migrants-turned-refugees brings to the fore how various forms of displacement, including cross-border, conflict-induced movement and domestic, economic displacement intersect with each other and they unfold in the Levant.

The chapter also told a story of unfulfilled promises: in Syria, pro-poor and agricultural reforms provided rural populations with access to public services but also entrenched a different form of poverty, one less characterized by threats to peasants’ immediate survival but by the absence of opportunities for upscaling existing livelihoods. In his research on hustlers and day labourers in Addis Ababa, themselves the sons of rural-urban migrants, Di Nunzio (2017) shifts the focus from what these men are *excluded from*, to what the socialist regime and life in the big city provide to them: free education, cheap housing and goods. Pro-poor policies, he argues, often pursue “a politics of limited entitlements” (Di Nunzio 2017: 91), alleviating symptoms of poverty without addressing structural conditions of precarity. The men in his study could not benefit from public education because they lacked the financial resources for additional private tutoring and the personal networks for securing decent jobs upon graduation. In a similar vein, decades of Ba’athist reforms in Syria failed to abolish power inequalities between small-scale farmers and wealthy landowners, and educational gains did not translate into different types of work. Although some of my male informants, now in their mid-thirties, were increasingly educated beyond primary school, they usually lacked the networks of patronage to land white-collar jobs. Ineligible for formal loans, Syrians’ meagre savings from work abroad were used for small-scale investments: another room, a wedding, a car. Therefore, seasonal migration equalled movement without upward social mobility (Vigh 2006).

Finally, similar findings with rural Syrian populations displaced to the Lebanese borderlands (Leila Vignal, personal communication, April 2017) hint at the existence of broader spatial patterns of how pre-war labour migrations have shaped displacement trajectories in the Levant. Reversely, a close-up on Mafraq brings to the fore a layered landscape of

displacement where Syrian refugees are far from being the only refugees in town. In the early 1990s, Mafraq welcomed ca. 10,000 Palestinian returnees from Kuwait. In 2003, dozens of Iraqi families from Fallujah sought refuge in the town. As they had deemed it fruitless to register with the UNHCR, they have managed to stay under the humanitarian radar until today. What they have in common with Syrian refugees is a more longstanding affiliation with the place: men from Fallujah had worked as truck drivers on the Iraqi-Jordanian highway and were thus familiar with northern Jordan before moving their families to safety there. Syrian newcomers to Mafraq joined a mosaic of displaced populations, many of them former labour migrants, a situation reminiscent of Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh's (2016) recent work on the influx of Syrians into Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.

This chapter introduced major themes – informal labour, illegality and kinship networks – that have shaped my informants' lives and movements until today. This is not to say that Syrians' pre-war struggles as *migrants* and as *refugees* are the *same*. Subsequent chapters revisit how older forms of disenfranchisement and transnational connections have been reshaped by conflict and displacement. Pre-war employment ties brought Syrians to Mafraq, but they did not expect to stay for long. During the first months of their exile, many of my Syrian acquaintances followed the news closely, trying to spot opportunities for return. By the time of my fieldwork in 2016, though, many refused to watch reports on the Syrian conflict on television. In the next chapter, I ask how Syrians' "prolonged unsettlement" has turned into "forced settlement" in Mafraq and how migrant workers became "refugees".

Chapter 2: Refugee labour and illegality – loss of social status, exacerbated legal limbo and Syrian workers "on the run"

For a long time, I unsuccessfully tried to gain access to the farms where many of my Syrian informants were working. Once a Syrian family I had planned to accompany fell out with the Jordanian owner of the bus that transported them to the fields. Another time, a Jordanian farm owner had promised me access to his greenhouses but pulled out at the very last moment. Clearly, refugee labour was a sensitive topic, and none of the Jordanian employers and the middlemen who organised transport to the fields felt comfortable with having foreign observers around.

To give me a taste of the reality of agricultural work, my Jordanian host family took me on a day trip to an uncle's olive grove half an hour west of Mafraq in November 2016, in the middle of the olive harvest. My host uncle, a successful engineer in civil aviation in Amman, had inherited five dunum of land from his father in the family's village of origin. Amidst an undulating landscape covered with almond and olive trees, he built a two-story house where he took his wife and children for weekend trips. Now that his two older daughters were at university, they rarely visited anymore. My host aunt kept repeating to me: "We only came because of you today". Farming had long vanished from their middle-class existences. For years, they had been hiring Egyptian workers to do the olive picking for them. During my visit, we were assisted by two middle-aged Egyptians in their 40s or 50s. Both had been residing in a village down the road for decades. They received a monthly salary of 200 JD (ca. USD 282) to take care of an absent owner's property.[14] To complement their income, they also took on jobs on other farms. As I learned from my host aunt, there had been Egyptian workers in this remote rural area as early as in the 1980s; many had brought their families and stayed all year long. However, her surprise was telling when I asked her where exactly the Egyptians came from. "Why would you want to know this? We hire them, but we never ask them where they are from." She did not think it appropriate for me to talk to the men, who modestly kept a distance from our family.

[14] The official Jordanian minimum wage rate is 220 JD, i.e. ca. USD 310 (Minimum Wage 2018).

That day, I realized why olive picking had been such a source of pride and happy childhood memories for Adnan, a Syrian man from Jabal al-Hoss whose story I told in the previous chapter. “This is family work”, my host mother aptly put it, as we were moving in synchrony from tree to tree. It is the kind of work where men and women, old and young from the same family, work alongside each other, taller ones brushing olives off branches, others holding open huge plastic bags and collecting the remainder from the ground. When done in the community of one’s loved ones, it is often accompanied by light chatter and joking. Having sweated together, we rested in the afternoon sun on the front porch. In the early evening, we took the outcome to a local olive press some villages further. Like most Jordanians living abroad, I later took a huge canister of home-made olive oil back with me to Europe.

At the same time, Adnan, his wife and 12-year old son were also picking olives elsewhere in the Mafraq region. However, they gave up after a couple of days. The poor pay was not worth it. Egyptian workers on my host family’s land were paid 7.5 JD (ca. USD 11) for every *shawl*, the equivalent of roughly 50 kg, i.e. two huge plastic bags full of olives. Some miles away, Adnan’s family only earned a third of this.

My Syrian friend Naila often found employment in greenhouses in the desert east of Mafraq. Her family had first come as workers in 2009. Until the onset of the Syrian war, they had travelled back and forth between northern Jordan and the outskirts of Aleppo, where the family had worked and lived on site of a chicken factory. Hard labour from an early age had made up most of her life even before the war, but like in Adnan’s case, the presence of her family had made it more bearable. One of the rare pictures of her childhood shows a 15-year old smiling shyly while hiding among olives trees. Prior to 2011, work in agriculture was tough, but also provided a sense of meaning and community to my informants.

Back in Mafraq in 2016, when the harvest was particularly poor, Naila’s elderly father managed to procure jobs for himself and three unmarried daughters throughout the entire season, alternating between different employers. While many Syrians complained about the scarcity of jobs, he had wide-spread professional networks, built up over years, that he could rely on. But work was no fun. Every morning at 4am, he and his daughters joined a

mass of female and underage workers. A bus picked them up from home and they did not return until the late afternoon. Different from men, Syrian women and children, some of them as young as ten, were known to be less targeted by labour patrols. They were also cheap. In 2016, Naila and her sisters earned JOD 5 (ca. USD 7) a day each, some of which went to the owner of the bus. The strenuous work – gathering fruits and sorting products into pallets, rudely pushed forward by Egyptian foremen – frequently made Naila's teenage sister faint. They usually worked six days a week, even during Ramadan, when hard labour was compounded by fasting. Thick black face veils were meant to protect the girls not only from the blazing sun, but also unwanted glances, as sexual harassment against Syrian women was common. Naila's entire family had to stop working when her father, their only male company, broke his hand.

The second chapter looks at refugee labour in the informal economy in Mafraq after 2011. It builds on the argument I introduced in the previous chapter: Syrian refugees in Mafraq capitalize on pre-war networks with Jordanian employers to find work in exile. Former peasants, they still work in agriculture, as well as other menial jobs. Yet, as *refugees*, Syrians in Mafraq have experienced a severe drop in social status, a phenomenon that El Miri and Mercier (2018) describe as a "déclassement social". This is obvious in the ways in which Mafraq locals like my host family and even refugees from different class backgrounds talk about my informants, whom they associate with a range of stereotypes, including petty crime, huge families, and a lack of hygiene. One day, a Syrian teacher in the NGO I was volunteering with, a woman who had obtained a university degree in Damascus before the war, told me about her (Syrian) students: "You know, […] these families from Homs, they have a lot of children. They need to have children every year. […] Their culture is different from our culture." Most importantly, though, social degradation is felt in more exploitative working conditions, including greater dependency on Jordanian employers and middlemen[15], lower salaries and sexual harassment. Adnan and his family, Naila and her sisters, experience it on the fields every day. Other Syrian workers are exposed to a similar treatment in Mafraq's restaurants, supermarkets, construction sites and quarries.

[15] Many of these middlemen are Syrians themselves. As they are at the intersection of professional and kinship networks, their role will be discussed in the next chapter on "transnational family-making".

A macro-economic explanation leaps to the eye. Syrian refugees have re-entered highly segmented labour markets in Lebanon and Jordan (El Miri and Mercier 2018). When Mafraq locals complain that Syrians took their jobs, this is only partly true. Admittedly, the unemployment rate among Jordanians increased from 14.5 to 18.5% between 2011 and 2017 (Yahya, Kassir and El-Hariri 2018), and already underdeveloped areas like Mafraq were most affected (Hüser 2016). However, refugees mostly work in sectors which are not attractive to locals, including construction and agriculture, in Lebanon also as domestic workers.[16] According to an op-ed in the English-speaking J*ordan Times*, only 3-4% of workers in agriculture are Jordanians (Anani 2017). A frequently mentioned reason for that is Jordanians' "culture of shame" that stops young locals from working in menial professions. An economic assessment conducted by the ILO refutes sociocultural reasons, citing poor working conditions and low pay instead (ILO 2014).[17]

As in the case of Adnan and Naila, Syrians are often recruited along lineage lines and families work together. The massive influx of refugees has led to a surplus of foreign labour, heightening the competition among Syrians and other migrants – in Mafraq, mostly Egyptians – and decreasing Syrians' bargaining power. Jordanian employers aptly play out the different labour forces against each other by introducing wage differentials and working hierarchies among migrants. While the arrival of Syrian refugees willing to accept lower wages has pushed other low-skilled migrant workers with equally shady legal status further

[16] Female Syrian refugees in Mafraq are highly conservative and adhere to strict gender norms, which prevents them from working as cleaners and carers *inside* Jordanian households. Strong stereotypes against Syrian women as dirty and uneducated and the availability of cheap domestic workers, mostly from Bangladesh, also explain why female refugees usually resort to working on the fields, where they are accompanied by male family members. Employment in restaurants and shops is only open to men, even in places that also or uniquely cater for female clients.

[17] Another way in which Syrian refugees impact Jordan's economy is through investments into existing and the opening of new companies. According to the Jordanian Investment Board, Syrian investment in the country in 2012 and the first half of 2013 rose to more than USD 200 million, compared to USD3 million in 2011. However, critics bemoan that Syrian shops and restaurants mostly cater to and employ compatriots (Simon and Al-Masri 2014). I did not systematically collect data to examine this hypothesis, but anecdotal evidence from Mafraq confirms the presence of Syrian entrepreneurship. By way of illustration, my Jordanian host father told me that a wealthy Syrian had invested into a big supermarket in the city centre. There were also a handful of new Syrian sweetshops in town. However, business arrangements involving foreign investors are often complex and shady, making it hard to gauge the extent of Syrian business activities. For example, I once met a Syrian businesswoman who successfully ran a small textile and soap factory in Amman, delivering products to major hotels in the capital. As she employed female Syrians, many of them skilled workers from textile factories in Aleppo, she successfully branded her business as a "social enterprise". However, it was registered in her Jordanian cousin's name.

into the informal economy (Hartnett 2019), many Syrians, like Adnan, earn less than established Egyptians. In 2015, the average monthly income of Syrian workers was below Jordanian minimal wage (Yahya, Kassir and El-Hariri 2018). Others find themselves at the bottom of the migrant hierarchy, subject to the orders of foreign foremen, like Naila. That does not imply that Syrians bring no skills at all to the Jordanian labour market. While "low-skilled" migrants are often reduced to their *physical* labour power, Syrians' specific agrarian skill sets are recognized and appreciated by Jordanian farmers. A 2014 assessment of the tomato industry around Mafraq finds a division of labour between Egyptians and Syrians:

> *Egyptian workers remain more skilled and efficient in the early stages of agricultural production, which include soil preparation, fertilization and seeding. However, Syrian workers are more preferred in harvesting and post-harvest handling stages, which include picking and handling the harvested crop and performing crop sorting and grading processes.*
> (ILO 2014: 11/12)

The main argument this chapter proposes is that new forms of labour exploitation that Syrian refugees in Mafraq are exposed to cannot be studied in isolation from their insecure legal status in Jordan. The host country's current refugee reception regime perpetuates older forms of legal limbo for Syrian workers. As I argued in the first chapter, Jordan's lenient border controls and hostile immigration policies fuelled irregular circular labour mobility long before the war. Hence, refugee "illegality" is not a mere side-effect of the current crisis, but the outcome of established labour migration regimes. The chapter borrows from De Genova's (2002) approach to denaturalizing migrant "illegality" by drawing attention to the socio-political *processes* that *make* migrants illegal. On the one hand, immigration laws are not set in stone – rather, they are the outcome of historical processes. Like Jordan's policies on Syrian labour after 2011, they keep adapting to new realities on the ground. On the other hand, far from neutral, immigration laws actively produce inequality between migrant workers and citizens. I show that a similar kind of reasoning can be applied to other mobile populations such as refugees.

Exposing Syrians to legal limbo as *refugees* and exploiting them as *workers* has to be understood in the context of broader discussions on foreign labour and hostile immigration

laws around the world. Throughout the chapter, I point out possibilities for comparison with Central American workers in the US (Coutin 2000; De Genova 2002), Palestinians in Israel (Kelly 2006), policing and racial segregation against ethnic-minority youth in France (Fassin 2013) and people of colour in the US (Goffman 2014). Some of these studies deal with migrants, others with disadvantaged citizens – what all have in common with Syrians in Mafraq is a focus on a specific *demographic*: young low-skilled men.[18]

The chapter begins by putting refugee labour in the informal economy into the wider context of legal limbo for urban refugees in Jordan. The first section deals with the multiplication of refugee documents and policies at the hands of the two protagonists of the humanitarian response, the UNHCR and the Jordanian state. That regulations at times contradict each other and are not coherently enforced makes Syrians' legal presence complicated. Their illegality is not all-encompassing but only becomes relevant in specific interactions.[19]

The second part of the chapter demonstrates how Syrians' legal insecurity at a *national* scale engenders specific mobility experiences and practices at the *urban* level, including the frequent occurrence of identity checks at the workplace and on long-distance buses, hiding and mobile labour tactics. I emphasize the spectacular nature of these acts of surveillance, arguing that they enforce a particular *social*, rather than a *public*, order between Jordanian employers and a defenceless refugee workforce. Following De Genova (2002), I claim that verifying Syrians' refugee documents and work permits does not really – or, in most cases –

[18] It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore how urban segregation engenders new constructions of masculinity for young Syrian men (cf. Ingvars and Gíslason 2018 on Syrian men in Athens). While pre-war mobility was highly gendered and a way for men to accumulate resources for marriage and later providing for their families, unemployment, stuckness and aid dependence in exile call refugees' "manliness" into question. Unfortunately, my research is limited by the fact that in Mafraq's gender-segregated society, I rarely had access to young Syrian men on their own or opportunities to accompany them in public space.

[19] Note that this chapter does *not* deal with the effects of the 2016 *Jordan Compact* – simply because its new work permit scheme seemed irrelevant to my informants. Until late August 2017, I only met two Syrians in Mafraq with a valid work permit – one of them Layan, an NGO worker (chapter 3), the other Mahmoud, a Syrian labour broker who had worked in Jordan for the last ten years already and held a stable job with a local transport company (this chapter). In Mafraq, refugees from rural backgrounds engage in short-term, seasonal labour, especially in agriculture, and frequently change employers. Hence, more permanent, employer-bound work permits are of little interest to them. Similarly, offering refugees manufacturing jobs and housing inside remote industrial zones has failed, as they lack both the qualifications to work in factories and refuse to be disconnected from public transport, access to relatives and employment elsewhere.

aim at deporting the noncompliant to camps and Syria. It is not a gesture of exclusion against Syrian workers in Jordan's informal economy; rather, it strives to "socially include them under imposed conditions of enforced and protracted vulnerability" (De Genova 2002: 429). I go on to argue that much of Jordan's deportability threat against Syrian workers comes from the fact that refugees themselves embody it. As one Syrian man is quoted in a policy report: "We walk in fear" (Norwegian Refugee Council 2016: 15). Reversely, some Syrians use mobile and fleeting techniques to reassert themselves as economic actors in public space.

Third, a glance at the tomato business in Mafraq helps us determine the economic value of illegal refugee labour. Following the travels of Jordanian tomatoes to the Gulf reveals that in Mafraq's greenhouses, Naila and her kin find themselves at the beginning of regional supply chains, only part of which are located in the informal sector. Cheap, rightless and abundantly available refugee labour keeps afloat otherwise unsustainable agricultural production in northern Jordan.

In the conclusion, I discuss the broader relevance of researching refugee workers in the Middle East to studies of social segregation in the Global North.

Guests with a twist – Syrian refugees' legal status in Jordan

Baher and his wife Rania lived very close to the railway track, but on the wrong side of it. To me, the rails were a reminder of Mafraq's glorious past. It had once been a stop on the famous Hijaz railway. But these days, the tracks also separated the respectable part of town from Hay Hussein, the poorest neighbourhood and home to many Syrians. On my first visit, Baher did something that many of my Syrian hosts had done before him: he laid out numerous legal documents on the carpet. Before my eyes, paper and plastic traces of an odyssey through various parts of Jordan, but also different types of legal status, unfolded. First, there were voucher cards from the family's three-month stay in Zaatari camp in early 2014. Upon their arrival in Jordan, Baher, Rania and their two children were listed in the camp. From this time, Baher kept an expired UNHCR registration sheet, a document Syrians in Jordan refer to as "fauwadiya", that indicates Zaatari camp as their place of residence. But the family did not stay long, and many of their vouchers were never cashed in, as they

arranged with a smuggler to help them leave the camp without permission. After two more months in Mafraq, the family relocated to Madaba, south of Amman, where Baher worked for a month in construction, before getting hired as an Arabic teacher. He never had a work permit. In October 2014, he received a text message from the UNHCR office in Mafraq, asking him to pick up new vouchers. On the way north, he was arrested and brought to Zaatari camp, from which he escaped on his own a week later, again without permission. Subsequently, the family relocated to Mafraq. In the meantime, Baher's wife Rania had succeeded in reregistering with the UNHCR in Mafraq town for herself and her children, now three of them – another daughter had been born in Jordan. Therefore, she received a second "fauwadiya", naming her and the children, this time indicating their place of residence as "urban". On the basis of this second UNHCR document, Rania and her children – but not Baher – can claim monthly food vouchers worth JOD 10 (ca. USD 14) for each person.

An up-to-date "fauwadiya" in an *urban* area is also a precondition for obtaining a plastic identity card from the Jordanian Ministry of Interior, a so-called "hauwiya". The latter gives Syrians in Jordan access to public healthcare and education, but also serves as proof of residency outside the camps. In practice, the "hauwiya" assures urban refugees' freedom of movement on Jordanian territory, but they are also district-bound and lose their validity when Syrians move to another part of the country. Still, in 2015, Baher presented the first, expired "fauwadiya" from Zaatari Camp to Mafraq's police station and, unexpectedly, obtained a "hauwiya" like the rest of his family. By the time of my fieldwork, only their youngest daughter, baby Halima, had not received her own identity card yet. Despite the surprising leniency of Jordanian authorities, the UNHCR in Mafraq was unable to follow suit and update the family's "fauwadiya". After several unsuccessful visits to their office, Baher was told to keep a low profile, as he risked getting deported again – this time not to Zaatari camp, but to Azraq, Jordan's new high-tech facility in the eastern desert. Consequently, Baher could take his children to Mafraq's municipal hospital when they were ill, but not seek treatment for himself. Despite his valid "hauwiya", he avoided contact with Jordanian authorities and public services whenever possible. Thankfully, VIVA, the NGO he worked with as a teacher, did not ask for official documentation or a work permit. Officially, Baher was an unpaid volunteer.

But the various identity documents that Baher spread out in front of me that day did not only tell the story of his personal encounters with Jordanian and humanitarian institutions. They also reflect different stages in Jordan's refugee policies since 2011.

Like many of its neighbours, Jordan is not a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention. Iraqi and later Syrian refugees have been received as "guests" (Achilli 2015; Mason 2011). Chapter 5 examines the hospitality discourse of state and non-state actors. Here, suffice to say that, although the UNHCR operates on the ground, the host country does not officially recognize Syrians as "refugees". Jordan's open border policy gradually gave place to stricter encampment policies in 2014 and the closing of remaining crossings in 2015/16. Since 2012, all refugees were first referred to Zaatari Camp. Although they officially needed a sponsor to bail them out, many left the camps informally and subsequently managed to transfer their UNHCR registration to an urban centre. This is what allowed Rania to obtain a second UNHCR registration sheet for herself and her children. They were not alone in doing so - by November 2015, at least 160,000 Syrians had left Zaatari camp, and by September 2016, 17,000 newcomers had fled from Azraq (Norwegian Refugee Council 2016). In July 2014, the Jordanian authorities forbid the UNHCR to provide documentation to Syrians outside the camps without proper sponsorship. In early 2015, the bail-out process was suspended altogether. Simultaneously, in 2015, the Jordanian Ministry of Interior began to register Syrian refugees outside camps as part of an "Urban Verification Exercise" (Achilli 2015). By the time of my fieldwork in 2016, more than a year later, there were still long queues outside Mafraq's police station where Syrians had to present themselves for a biometric eye scan and equipped with proof of residency, an urban "fauwadiya" and a health certificate. As always, rules were not written in stone. Some Syrians in Mafraq had paid and received the necessary health certificate without ever taking the test.

Baher was luckier than others. By August 2016, one third of urban Syrian refugees had not received a "hauwiya" yet, often because they had left the camps informally and failed to register with an urban UNHCR office (Yahya, Kassir and El-Hariri 2018). But the Jordanian authorities were also directly involved in plunging Syrians into illegality. Besides proof of registration with the UNHCR, local police stations also requested *Syrian* identity documents. However, until 2013, Jordanian border police had frequently seized passports, ID cards and

even marriage certificates and family booklets[20] from newcomers. Until the practice was suspended in early 2014, around 219,000 documents had been confiscated – by August 2016, 179,000 had been returned to their owners, often through local police stations and during the "Urban Verification Exercise". But many had also been lost, and the Syrian embassy in Amman charged prohibitive fees of USD 400 for a new passport. Other refugees could not afford the still substantial fees of USD 200 for a passport renewal. Similarly, those who had turned 18 in Jordanian exile did not have Syrian documents of their own, as in pre-war Syria IDs had only become mandatory at the age of 18, and most only appeared in their parents' "family books" (Norwegian Refugee Council 2016). As a consequence, Syrians often found themselves with only some of the necessary paperwork and local Jordanian police officers had much leeway. Bribery was rampant. In despair, some Syrians turned to forgery. At least in the early days of the Syrian influx, a black market for alternative humanitarian documentation flourished, and many Syrians in Mafraq lost all of their savings on counterfeit UNHCR registration sheets. With the professionalization of documentation, frequent renewal and the division of responsibilities between the UNHCR and local police stations, this market seems to have dried up.

In her study of asylum seekers in Athens in the 2000s, Cabot (2014) argues that legal documents are "regulatory technologies that render both citizens and aliens visible or legible to state power" (43). In the case of Syrians in Mafraq, their *hauwyia* and *fauwadiya* also make them legible to the UNHCR and other humanitarian actors. In theory, applying for these documents should set in motion a predetermined course of legal and bureaucratic procedures. In practice, it often creates chaos - legal documents end up having the opposite effect, making asylum seekers "illegible" to the authorities if they become associated with legal limbo. Cabot's research on the "pink card", the identity document for asylum seekers in Greece, reveals a number of contradictory practices of governance and misunderstandings on both sides. Although newcomers can apply for asylum in the Greek province, they can only obtain the "pink card" in Athens, and officers in charge freely decide how long the card will be valid. Like the Jordanian identity card, the Greek "pink card" has to be presented during police controls and thus reflects the ambiguous relationship of asylum seekers with the police, "providing protection from the very

[20] In Syria, newly-weds are issued a governmental "family book" (kitab al-ayla) when they register their marriage. Importantly, it is used to record the names of all children.

authorities that distributed it" (Cabot 2014: 50).[21] In Athens, the "pink card" grants their holders freedom of movement and access to free healthcare, but other public institutions often do not accept it. On the other hand, some asylum seekers understand the "pink card" as a temporary residency permit. In a similar way, obtaining a Jordanian "hauwiya" did not end Baher's insecure legal status, but only further complicated it. His case shows that Jordanian policies were often contradictory and only selectively enforced. Different from Athens, staff in hospitals and schools In Mafraq are familiar with Syrians' "hauwiya", but Baher was too afraid of legal repercussions to try his luck. His legality was always *partial*.

In her study of Central American migrants in the US, Coutin (2000) shows that her informants struggle to negotiate their legal status with various institutions at the municipal, the state and the federal level. "Legal" towards some, but not all of them, they get entangled in "graduations of existence" (Coutin 2000: 27). The same is true of Syrian refugees in Mafraq: depending on the documents they have, they might have a "legal" status with regard to Jordanian authorities, the UNHCR, both or none of them. Different types of documents grant access to different types of services, and while technically a Jordanian ID card ("hauwiya") presupposes a registration with an urban UNHCR office ("fauwdiya"), some refugees like Baher have the former, but not the latter. Nor are refugees without any type of documents totally helpless: many smaller NGOs and especially faith-based organizations like the one I volunteered with have made it a deliberate policy not to ask for proof of identity.

The proliferation of refugee documents leads some, like Baher, to complain that they are "not really here – only my body is here". However, the "disjuncture between physical and legal presence" (Coutin 2000: 29) is only partial: Baher's illegality only becomes relevant in specific situations that force him to – temporarily - erase his presence, e.g. when refusing to seek treatment from public hospitals. And it depends on whom you ask: according to the Jordanian immigration authorities and Mafraq's municipality, Baher resides in Mafraq. For the UNHCR, he still lives in Zaatari camp. As for Syrian authorities, they recorded him as "wanted" because Baher had not completed his military service before fleeing to Jordan.

[21] Both the Jordanian "hauwiya" and the Greek "pink card" also involve the gathering of biometric data, further turning them into instruments of surveillance (cf. Cabot 2014).

This also explains why legal documents become such an important prop in personal storytelling. Baher was not the only Syrian in Mafraq who asked me to have a look at his various proofs of identity. When they obtained their new plastic *hauwiya*, my female Syrian friends proudly presented it to me. Cabot (2014) finds that asylum seekers often refer to, or physically produce the "pink card" when narrating their encounters with Greek authorities. In these stories, the "pink card" captures conflicting emotions: a sense of vulnerability and waiting, but also of entitlement and even of home and belonging. In an analogous manner, Baher did not only show me the documents to illustrate his fears and frustration. It also allowed him to tell me a story, not only about his family's wanderings and ordeals in Jordan, but also about his own agency in the face of an opaque and hostile asylum system. A handful of legal documents enabled him to present himself as a family man who had braved the Jordanian authorities more than once to make a living for his family. And waving his *hauwiya* at me was also about manifesting entitlement – the inconspicuous plastic card proved that Baher had the *right* to reside in Mafraq.

Amidst all this confusion about Syrians' legal status in Jordan, it might not come as a surprise that various aid agencies offer free legal counselling to refugees in Mafraq. The UNHCR office in town, in line with its core mandate, offers physical and legal protection to Syrian refugees, including complaint mechanisms for education and sexual exploitation. In practice, however, it predominantly deals with certain limited aspects of the law, i. e. registration issues and custody cases. The UNHCR usually refers beneficiaries to ARDD, a Jordanian civil society organisation providing legal representation for free. (The ICMC, an international NGO with an office in Mafraq, provides similar legal services.) During a visit to ARDD's Mafraq office in summer 2016, I was told that it mostly dealt with marriage and birth certificates, prerequisites for obtaining UNHCR registration sheets and Jordanian IDs. It welcomed on average more than one case per day, noting that it caters to Jordanians, Syrians and other nationalities alike. A Jordanian law student conducting an internship at the local Sharia court also confirmed that while Syrian litigants were common, the court

mostly concerned itself with family and custody issues.[22] Legal implications that arise when Syrian families fall apart in exile are further dealt with in chapter 3 that looks at the reconfiguration of Syrians' kinship networks through displacement.

On Baher's carpet, there was *one* type of legal document that I looked for in vain. Although he has almost constantly worked in Jordan since his arrival, he has never held an official work permit. Before 2016, only 5,000 Syrian refugees had one of the precious documents – they were hard to obtain, restricted to menial sectors and came with prohibitively high fees. At the London Conference in February 2016, Jordan was promised substantial humanitarian support and preferential trade agreements with the EU in exchange for temporarily waiving the application fees and issuing 200,000 work permits for Syrian refugees, i.e. ca two-thirds of the adult refugee population of ca. 294,000 – the so-called "Jordan Compact". But uptake was slow and by December 2016, only 32,000 Syrians had acquired new permits (Bellamy, Haysom, Wake and Barbelet 2017). In the conclusion, I engage in a broader discussion of the Jordan Compact. For now, suffice to say that until late August 2017, I only ever met two Syrians in Mafraq with a valid work permit: one of them an NGO worker, the other a Syrian migrant who had worked in Jordan for the last ten years already and held a stable job with a local transport company – we will meet both of them in the next chapter. However, *not* having a work permit was not a mere bagatelle. On the contrary, those who get caught working in the informal economy risk getting deported to camps and even Syria – it might even affect their loved ones.

[22] If Baher fell victim to crime, the situation would be even more complicated. In that case, he would probably prefer to stay clear from Jordanian police as he might risk the discovery of his lack of urban "fauwadiya" and thus arrest and deportation. But then, for most sorts of crime, Mafraq locals would not resort to the police either. An additional factor widely overlooked in studies on Syrians' legal insecurity in Jordan is the presence of a parallel tribal justice system for locals. As previous research shows, tribal justice in Jordan, rather than disappearing, has been embedded into the modern nation-state and locals appeal to it even for serious incidents like fatal traffic accidents (Watkins 2014). My female Syrian friends often complained about catcalling, groping and even rape by Jordanian men, but hardly ever reported them. When asked how a local family would deal with molesters in the street, my Jordanian host mother's response was telling: "We would go talk to his [i.e. the molester's] family." While my Syrian informants in Mafraq confirmed the existence of similar informal conflict resolution mechanisms in their home country and the role of community elders in justice mediation is well documented in Zaatari camp (Sullivan and Simpson 2016), nowhere from my own fieldwork does it emerge that Syrians, excluded from local kinship networks, were able to recreate tribal connections of their own in Mafraq or could appeal to the local tribal network. Hence, Syrian victims of crime were doubly excluded: from police action, but also from established mechanisms of informal conflict resolution.

In sum, due to the multiplication of legal documents – Syrian passport, “fauwadiya”, “hauwiya”, work permit – refugees find themselves hopelessly entrapped in degrees of illegality. Even families who are officially registered with the UNHCR and the Jordanian Ministry of Interior stay away from the police, as most count among them one or more men working in the informal economy. Nobody’s papers are ever “perfectly in order”. In many ways, this is not an unfamiliar situation to Syrian workers in Jordan. What is new, though, is the co-presence of the UNHCR as an additional provider of legal documents and services, and the threat of getting deported to camps or a home country in turmoil.

In some cases, the continuity between pre-war and current legal limbo is laid bare when present-day humanitarian protection gets muddled up with older visa infringements, with unforeseen consequences for Syrians’ freedom in Jordan as refugees. In the first chapter, we followed Adnan, a man from Jabal al-Hoss who had first travelled to Mafraq informally as a migrant in 2000. After re-entering the country with his family in 2014, he registered with the UNHCR and was issued humanitarian documentation both by the former and the Jordanian authorities. However, Adnan’s teenage adventure finally caught up with him in July 2017 when he was suddenly arrested in the streets of Mafraq and had to spend ten days in various prisons all over Jordan. It seemed that an old file with his name had resurfaced, marked with "Prohibited from re-entry" – a late repercussion of his former casual economic activities in the country. Police officers threatened Adnan with deportation to Syria. Fortunately, the UNHCR Protection Unit was able to assist him and get his files in order. In 2016/17, deportation for men like Baher and Adnan was not an abstract threat. Next, we turn to two everyday experiences of identity checks that disproportionately affect Syrian *men*.

Terrorists and criminals – Syrian men’s everyday experiences of identity checks

This section discusses checks on the long-distance bus from Amman to Mafraq and at Syrians’ workplaces. These acts of surveillance involve different types of documentation: Jordanian identity cards (“hauwiya”) and work permits. They also bring Syrians together with different representatives of the Jordanian state: buses are stopped by armed police forces, whereas work permit checks are conducted by Ministry of Labour patrols (Bellamy,

Haysom, Wake and Barbelet 2017). Both single out young Syrian men in front of others - for at the heart of policing aliens is the ID check as spectacle, or, as Fassin calls it, “the theater of law enforcement intervention” (Fassin 2013: 108).

I never witnessed labour patrols in action inside Mafraq, as these often occurred inside restaurants, shops and the vegetable souq. The closest I got was when a young Syrian man, no more than a teenager, climbed the wall between the adjacent coffeeshop and my backyard in broad daylight, begging me to hide him from the labour patrols inside the restaurant. However, I frequently heard from Syrian men and their families about their encounters with labour patrols, and the hiding strategies they adopted in return. *Taste of cement* (Khaltoum 2017), a recent documentary on Syrian refugees working on construction sites in Beirut, is a powerful visual testimony of these new forms of hiding that workers are forced into. The movie portrays young Syrians whose fathers already engaged in labour migration to Lebanon. However, night-time curfews on refugees force Syrian newcomers to live in the basement of the skyscraper they are currently building – they only ever catch a glimpse of Beirut from the top of a scaffolding. And refugee labour also erodes pre-war identities. A young Syrian imagines that as his hands become callused, he loses his fingerprints.

While informal Syrian workers’ lives in Mafraq are not that extreme, they frequently engage in moderate forms of hiding. Many resort to irregular working hours and night-shifts and stay away from the streets, reminiscent of techniques of labourers in the informal economy elsewhere. Palestinians in Israel, for example, circumvent checkpoints and major roads (Kelly 2006). Characterizing Syrian men in Mafraq as a “community on the run” borrows an expression from Goffman’s (2014) seminal monograph on young Black drug dealers in poor neighbourhoods of Philadelphia. Obviously, Syrians in Mafraq are no criminals – however, “being on the run” has become not an exceptional state, but rather a part of everyday life for young men. Passing for somebody else, e.g. by imitating Jordanian dialect, is another way of going unnoticed. As numerous fathers and husbands refrain from income-generating activities for fear of being deported, children and women are pushed into low-skilled, unsafe and badly paid labour, mostly on the fields, but also in quarries and other places – there is a common perception among refugees that the latter do not get deported, although adolescent boys are sometimes sent to the camps for punishment.

More generally, Syrian men also refrain from spending too much time in public spaces and in the streets.

However, I did get first-hand experience of identity checks on long-distance buses, as I frequently used public transport to travel back and forth between Mafraq and Amman. During these checks, Syrians were not asked to produce work permits but rather their Jordanian "hauwiya". On the way north, the bus, a proper coach, was occasionally hailed by transport police on the highway. Having come to a halt, it was entered by armed police forces. The first time this happened to me, I was petrified: with a tourist visa and a headscarf, what business could I possibly have close to the Syrian border? But nobody cared, as police called out for "young guys' IDs". Although I was the only visibly foreign person on the bus, like all other women, children and older men, I was never checked. Having collected plastic ID cards from male youth, police officers then retreated to their cars or shacks outside, presumably to doublecheck with existing databases. Eventually, they got back on the bus and returned the documents to their owners, calling out young men's names aloud with no regard to their privacy. During my first check-up in summer 2015, I was frankly scared by the rough tone and the weapons. Like my fellow passengers, I soon got used to it over the following months. During the vetting, sometimes as short as fifteen minutes, sometimes as long as an hour, others would take a nap, play or talk on their smartphones. Holders of IDs found to be faulty had to leave the bus and wait in the burning sun until they received security clearance. No part of the procedure was ever explained. The pastor of Mafraq's Evangelical church told me that police officers were looking for "terrorists". This certainly reflected the opinion of the wider public – it might also explain why ID checks target the bus connection to Mafraq, as most Syrian refugees are concentrated in the northern governorates and Zaatari Camp is located very close to the Syrian-Jordanian border.

But then, identity checks on buses and at the work place, scary as they may be, do not always lead to deportation. When my bus got stopped by Jordanian police, I never experienced that a passenger was arrested on the side of the road. Moreover, these checks did not occur on a regular basis. In all of 2016, when I took the bus from Amman to Mafraq at least once a week, we only got stopped a handful of times on the highway. In a similar vein, labour patrols frequently catch Syrians without work permits, forcing them to sign a

pledge that they will abstain from informal labour in the future – in Mafraq, however, most Syrians return to work despite one or several of these "warnings". And Jordanian employers in Mafraq did not seem too concerned. Many, like the owner of a well-known chicken restaurant where a friend's 19-year old son worked, had informants among the labour patrols. When a visit was imminent, they would ask Syrian workers to leave the work site for some hours, until it was safe to return. Given the many practical loop holes, was the deportation threat not as real after all as Baher and Adnan made it sound to be?

Deportation – or deportability?

To be clear, deportations of refugees to the camps and even Syria *do* happen and are well documented. While Jordan is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, it is bound by customary international law to the principle of non-refoulement. The country also ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, international organizations concur that hundreds of Syrian refugees, including children, wounded men and refugees with UNHCR certificates, have been deported to Syria (Human Rights Watch 2017) and the camps (Achilli 2015). After the end of my fieldwork, deportations to Syria spiked in early 2017. More than one-third of several thousand refugees who went back to Syria between January and April 2017 were forcibly deported, allegedly on security grounds. However, eight deportees interviewed by The Associated Press claimed that they had been moved for no apparent reason other than staying in touch with relatives in ISIS-controlled areas of Syria (Voice of America 2017).

During my fieldwork, I witnessed a handful of deportation cases from Mafraq to Syria as well as to Azraq and Zaatari camp within Jordan. In December 2016, I sat down with Baher and Rania for a more formal interview. Outside, a cold wind swept through the streets of Mafraq, whirling up the dust and plastic bags. Inside, we huddled under blankets and around the small stove. Baher had just launched into a long-winded discussion of pre-war life in Hawarin when his phone rang. As soon as he picked it up, his face went pale. After the conversation had come to an end, he asked me to stop the recording, and explained. He had just heard that two families from Hawarin, one of them with a new-born baby, had been deported to Syria. Some days earlier, their teenage sons had been arrested, allegedly for playing video games and making contact with "suspects" online – often a covert

accusation of Islamist activities. What surprised Baher was that the families in question had been among the better-off in town. They had even recently bought a house in Mafraq. “We are all afraid now”, Baher explained. “We are from the same village!”

Far from making ID checks less threatening, their infrequent and random nature adds to their power. In fact, the force of policing lies not in its permanence, but in its *unpredictability*: as the example of Baher’s extended kin shows, it can target anyone, and at any time. A comparison with West Bank Palestinians crossing the Green Line[23] to work in warehouses and on construction sites in Israel tells us more about the selective reinforcement of border regimes. Not only are Palestinians frequently subjected to controls at check-points, on buses and in the streets. Moreover, check points, supposedly marking the Green Line, change locations, are not always manned or seriously guarded. While buses with Palestinians sometimes pass right through, other times, they have to wait or take long detours. Kelly (2006) reminds us that the border is not always there. Rather, “the border regime’s meanings and implications are produced through various ad hoc interventions” (Kelly 2006: 83). In a comparable manner, not the predictable rhythm, but the mere possibility of identity checks kept Syrian men in Mafraq in line.

Here is where refugee *labour* comes in – the deportation threat has to be interrogated with regard to the kind of workers it produces: “It is deportability, and not deportation per se, that has historically rendered undocumented migrant labour a distinctly disposable commodity” (De Genova 2002: 438). In his study of Central American workers in the US, De Genova (2002) notes that US immigration and border authorities cannot possibly intercept and send back *all* illegal migrants – there are simply too many of them. And US economy also relies on the availability of a cheap migrant workforce, especially in menial sectors like agriculture and factory work that are hardly attractive to American citizens. The parallels with the Jordanian case are obvious, as the overwhelming majority of Syrian refugees are employed in the informal sector, mostly in jobs where they compete with Egyptian migrant workers, not Jordanians.

[23] The Green Line refers to the demarcation line set out in the 1949 armistice between Israel and its neighbouring countries. During the 1967 war, Israel captured territories beyond the Green Line, including the West Bank.

Therefore, what identity checks achieve is rarely *actual* deportation – rather, they serve to turn Syrian workers into "a disciplined and manageable object" (De Genova 2002: 425). I suggest reading ID checks for Syrians as instances of what De Genova (2013) calls the "Border Spectacle". Bordering practices do more than simply excluding irregular migrants. They also strive to produce a maximum of visibility through spectacular actions and sensational reporting – in turn, this serves to justify even more extreme measures, higher walls and longer detention. Singling out Syrian men on public transport and at the workplace has a similar effect: it makes them look like budding terrorists in the eyes of fellow travellers, and like potential criminals in front of Jordanian colleagues and superiors. On the surface, ID checks are about making Jordan a safer and more law-abiding place; but they also have another effect – they produce certain people and a certain kind of order. With regard to immigrant youth in Paris' suburbs, Fassin remarks:

> *Stops and frisks represent a pure power relationship that functions as a recall to order – not to public order, which is not under threat by youngsters […], but to a social order, which is one of inequality (between the police and the youth) and injustice (with regard to the law and simply to dignity) that has to be impressed in the body.* (Fassin 2013: 92).

On the one hand, the arrested learn what bystanders – the host community and its authorities – think of them. Momentary detention requires new temporal depth, as a series of fleeting arrests creates a continuous narrative of "dangerous" Syrians in the eyes of the public. On the other hand, the arrested internalize the gaze of others: "'Become what you are!' they are ordered" (Fassin 2013: 8). Fassin's description of docile immigrant men rounded up by French police officers – "they know they only have the right to remain silent" (Fassin 2013: 92) does not fail to remind me of the motionless young Syrians, patiently waiting on the hard shoulder of the highway until they were allowed to get on the bus again. While cigarette consumption is common everywhere in Jordan, extreme smoking might be another way in which Syrian men relieved tension. Quite tellingly, one of my Syrian friends smoked most when at his workplace, a popular kebab shop where he served as a waiter. Most of his monthly 90 JD salary – one third of official Jordanian minimal wage – was spent on cigarettes and food inside the restaurant, a substantial part of his income that flew back into his employer's pockets. A more extreme, but equally common

occurrence, is that of depressed Syrian men refusing to get up and leave the house for days, sometimes weeks on end – I sometimes witnessed these cases during house visits when desperate spouses appealed to NGOs for medical and financial support. For men, precarity, fear of arrest and of falling short of their roles as household providers may translate into literal paralysis.

But what on the surface appears as a spectacle of exclusion is also accompanied by tacit, but not less suspicious, inclusion. While migrants' illegality is fetishized in public, they also serve as a cheap and easily disposable labour reserve for labour-receiving economies. Making Syrians visible as "others" to the host community and Jordanian employers only serves to emphasize their legal vulnerability, lack of citizenship – and thus exploitability. Indeed, research with Jordanian employers in Zarqa, Jordan's second biggest city, shows that they have little incentives to regularize Syrian labourers: while employers of informal workers have to pay a fine, if caught, they do not pay social security for their hidden staff and can dispose of Syrians quickly (Bellamy, Haysom, Wake and Barbelet 2017).

Syrians in Mafraq, on the other hand, have no labour rights. Stories of withheld salaries and underpayment are frequent. For example, I befriended the family of a 15-year old man who earned as little as three JD a day working in a local pharmacy – the equivalent of two packs of cigarettes. That legal insecurity and labour exploitation go hand in hand is far from unusual. Kelly (2006) finds that Israeli employers frequently use Palestinian workers' lack of work permits to blackmail them with menaces of arrest, withholding severance pay and accident insurance from them. Absence of work permits also puts Palestinians at risk of being detained on Israeli territory where Israeli labour courts are located. My Syrian informants report similar threats from Jordanian employers. In case of injury, Syrian workers are usually let go and have to pay for treatment themselves – as a volunteer with a well-known NGO, I was frequently approached by refugees struggling to pay for surgery. For instance, the 18-year old brother of the teenager mentioned above suffered a severe cut to his hand while operating a machine sealing plastic cups. When I visited his family at their apartment, he was wearing a plaster cast. That very morning, he and his mother had just returned from a private doctor in Irbid who had performed surgery, to no avail. While he had been charged 30 JD for a simple x-ray, his mother expected to pay an additional 15 JD for changing the cast – all in all, one third of their monthly rent. The Jordanian owner of

the factory provided no support. An in-depth study of Mafraq's tomato business sheds further light on the economic value of illegal refugee labour to Jordanian employers.

From the kitchen to the greenhouse: Mafraq's tomato blues

Tomatoes are a staple of Syrians and Jordanians' diet in Mafraq. Like many vegetables, they are bought in great quantities. My Jordanian host father, in charge of shopping in the family, brought home several days a week one or more huge plastic bags full of tomatoes, and my host mother used them in almost all dishes: in salads and sandwiches, stuffed with rice and meat – a delicacy called "mahashi" - or fried with potatoes and onions, her sons' and my favourite late-night dish. Tomatoes also had a strong sensorial presence outside the home. In vegetable shops, I was often put off by their maggoty appearance. In the streets, I tried to avoid crates of left-over tomatoes, rotting in the sun. Yet the example of Mafraq's tomato production helps us better understand the role that Syrian workers play in Jordanian agriculture.

To begin with, refugee labour is often more than simply "illegal" – rather, it is located at the interface of the formal and the informal sector and integrated into existing transnational markets. In her study of a refugee-led scrapyard in a working-class neighbourhood in Beirut, Saleh (2016) demonstrates that Syrian workers are embedded both in a specific locale and in worldwide economic circuits. On the one hand, they scavenge old metallic items from people in the area and dumpsters. On the other hand, their Syrian foreman follows up on price fluctuations on global metal markets online to sell at a higher price. In a similar vein, refugee labour in agriculture in Jordan benefits a regional economy. Less than 5% of Jordan's surface is arable (ILO 2014). Extremely water-intensive, agriculture makes up only 3% of Jordan's GDP. 2016, total agricultural exports were worth JD 530 million (ca. USD 748 million), compared to more than JD2 billion (ca. USD 2.8 billion) in imports (Anani 2017). Still, vegetables are among Jordan's main exports, behind potassic fertilizers (7.7%) and textile products (5.8%); almost all of them go to the Gulf countries. The United Arab Emirates, for example, receive 155,000 tonnes per year, including courgettes, sweet pepper, aubergines, cabbage, green beans, cauliflower and lettuce (Oxford Business Group 2017). Tomatoes alone represent 2.3% of Jordan's exported goods (OEC 2018) and 45% of all exported vegetables (Mustafa 2017), making Jordan one of the biggest tomato exporters

in the world (ILO 2014). Jordanian producers cater for domestic and foreign clients alike: in 2012, 57% of home-bred tomatoes left the country (ILO 2014).

As stated above, local farmers refused to talk to me or let me visit their greenhouses. However, we know about the intricacies of local tomato production in Mafraq from a 2014 ILO assessment. It finds that greenhouses and open fields around Mafraq occupy a pole position in Jordan's tomato business. 18% of the country's tomato-cultivated area are located in Mafraq governorate. Reversely, while farmers in the region also produce cucumber, water melon and other types of vegetables, more of 40% of agricultural products in the area are tomatoes. Most of their success comes from the right timing and climatic conditions. In the governorate's dry, warm weather, tomatoes in the area can be harvested between June and December every year; from September to November, no other Jordanian region produces tomatoes. They are mostly grown in the open, although local farmers have recently taken to more advanced technology. In 2014 alone, they erected more than 2000 new greenhouses. Much of their produce is shipped to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The problem with tomato production in Mafraq, "traditional and low-tech" (ILO 2014: 15), is that it is a losing game. Most farmers have small plots and incur high input costs for electricity, raw materials, fertilizers and mulch – some of the latter come with high import tariffs. Low ground water levels require the use of expensive pumping equipment. Nor do Mafraq tomatoes yield high profits. For one thing, their quality is rather low, due to the limited and inadequate use of fertilizers and the lack of cooling facilities. As I could observe in local supermarkets, they do not last long on the shelf. Moreover, local farmers stick to the same varieties and conventional production methods, with little knowledge of regional markets or interest in marketing strategies. That export tomatoes are not sorted according to size, colour and shape in Mafraq, but only in Dubai, further cuts prices. Most importantly though, local producers do not sell directly to retailers or exporters, but rather to wholesale markets in Amman, Irbid and Zarqa – and the latter set the price.

As the case of tomato production in Mafraq shows, an analysis of refugee labour cannot stop short at the "illegality" of mobile populations. Following the travels of the Jordanian tomato from Mafraq to Amman and Dubai reveals that Syrians' exploitative working

conditions have to be understood in the context of a more or less profitable cross-border trade in agricultural produce. Thus, refugees' informal, badly paid and localized activities feed into a much broader, and at least partly formal, food industry - Syrian workers in Mafraq are located at the starting line of a regional economic chain. This said, they are also at the bottom of a fragmented and hierarchical domestic economy, one step below Egyptian foreman and Syrian middlemen (cf. chapter 3), and two steps beneath Jordanian small-scale farmers. Those who exploit Syrians directly are equally on the losing end. To put it differently: cheap, rightless and abundantly available refugee labour keeps afloat otherwise unsustainable agricultural production in northern Jordan.

How Syrians reassert themselves as economic actors in public space

Even before 2011, Syrians in Mafraq usually engaged in economic activities without proper work permits. However, imposing much stricter penalties on informal Syrian labour – punishable by deportation - has increased the power differential between refugee workers and Jordanian employers. It has also pushed male workers into hiding. Thus, their absence, or only transient presence, in public space has to be understood as a result of Jordan's refugee and migrant labour policies. A recent policy report quotes a Syrian man in Jordan who does not have a Jordanian ID card as saying: "If he leaves the house, he feels like he committed a crime" (NRC 2016: 15). Much of the power of making refugees illegal comes from the fact that Syrians internalize their own illegality - "being on the run" becomes an embodied condition. But with this kind of analysis, there is a risk to portray Syrians as pure victims of urban power inequalities and read their mobility practices as completely predetermined by police action and the fear of it. Yet Syrian men's economic agency also unfolds in the interstices of policing, not as overt resistance, but taking the form of quiet encroachment and flexible and short-term occupation of public space.

In Mafraq, Syrian workers reassert themselves as economic actors in public in ways that are both mobile and fleeting enough to escape arrest. First, male refugees are well-known for riding bicycles, an activity frowned upon by locals, except for younger boys. Like Syrian women's black abbayas, bicycles have thus become an identity marker of Syrian men. In the near-absence of public transport in town, this allows Syrians to bypass expensive taxis, but also to be more flexible towards employers.

Second, street cars selling sweets are a regular sight in the city centre (Figure 14). Besides candyfloss, fried batter soaked in syrup, not unlike Spanish churros, are sold as *karabeej halab* ("Aleppo sweets"). While vendors are men, the preparation of sweets takes place at their private homes and involves the entire family, including wives and children. This makes the production very cheap, while also hiding it from labour patrols. Selling sweets, a typically "Syrian" activity in Mafraq, taps into to traditions of their pre-war presence in two important ways: first, older generations of locals like my host mother keep memories of ambulant Syrian vendors selling clothes out of their rucksacks; their itinerant comings and goings date back at least to the 1970s and 1980s. Second, there has long been a veritable cult of Syrian cuisine – particularly ice cream and sweets – in Jordan, as evidenced by the mushrooming of successful Syrian sweet shops and ice cream parlours in Amman after 2011. Most importantly, though, these tiny street cars bring back into the public eye Syrians' existence not as "refugees" or "criminals", but as – at least tolerated – salesmen.

Figure 14 Syrian street car selling sweets in Mafraq (Wagner 2016)

A final, albeit quite unusual example, is that of a hemiplegic Syrian man in a wheelchair whom I often passed on Mafraq's main shopping street. I never paid much attention to him until, by pure chance, I met his wife, also a Syrian, during an NGO house visit. The encounter stuck with me as in Mafraq, people with disabilities are often hidden by their families and rarely marry. By way of contrast, I learned from his wife, herself of small stature, that the two of them had met on Mafraq's streets and decided to get married and establish an independent household of their own. Day after day, she prepared small boxes with chewing gum and sweets for her husband to sell from his wheelchair. His appearance appealed to Islamic traditions of charity, sheltering him from harassment on the street. The couple also knew that as a middle-aged, disabled man, he was unlikely to be arrested by labour patrols targeting predominantly young, able-bodied workers. Through capitalizing

on his apparent immobility in a wheelchair, the couple had found a sustainable source of income.

Conclusion

In the second chapter, I argued that the loss of social status that Syrians in Mafraq have experienced after 2011 is intertwined with the degradation of migrant to refugee labour. Even before the Syrian war, most Syrian migrants in Mafraq did not hold work permits. However, the multiplication of refugee documents has made it much more complicated for Syrians to become and remain "entirely" legal. Spectacular ID checks that disproportionately target young refugee men reiterate their status as *non-citizens*. Stricter penalties on informal labour have increased the power differential between refugee workers and Jordanian employers and forced Syrian men into hiding. Ultimately, by illegalizing refugee labour, Jordan's humanitarian policies have thus created a docile and exploitable workforce. Comparisons with Hispanic workers in the US and Palestinians in Israel reveal important convergences regarding the role of migrant labour in economies in the Global North and in middle-income countries like Jordan, which are increasingly integrated into the circuits of global capitalism. The case study of tomato production in Mafraq shows that refugee labour contributes to cross-border trade circuits in the food industry. However, their direct exploiters, Jordanian small-scale farmers, are equally on the losing end of the regional economic chain.

To conclude this chapter, I discuss parallels with two types of literature on segregation: the urban poor in "neoliberal" cities in the Middle East, and racial profiling in France and the US. A comparative outlook supports my argument that the exclusion of refugees in Mafraq is less about wealth, class or race differentials, but rather about insecure *legal* identities. On the one hand, I described towards the end of this chapter how Syrians reassert their economic agency through fleeting and mobile forms of labour. Bayat describes a similar scenario of quiet encroachment when discussing the return of the poor to the "neoliberal" city, by which he means increasingly privatized and segregated urban environments. Public space turns into "the site of a protracted battle for hegemony" (Bayat 2012: 122). By evicting slum dwellers and street vendors, public authorities try to prevent the urban poor from making active use of space that they are supposed to use only in a passive way.

However, the urban subaltern fight back by quietly encroaching on public space, "through direct actions in the very zones of exclusion" (Bayat 2010:5). This might include illegal tapping into electricity networks and water supply, but also setting up temporary stalls on the sidewalks. It is certainly true that Syrians and Jordanians in Mafraq are divided along class lines, and many of the former cannot afford the pleasures available to locals: trips to coffeeshops and restaurants, but also private education for their children and additional water delivery to make up for the unreliable municipal supply. But then, Mafraq is not Cairo, Tehran or Amman – some of the cities that Bayat has studied. The wealth differential between locals, migrant workers and refugees is much less pronounced than in other Middle Eastern cities. There are no fancy shopping malls off limits to refugees, nor do Syrians live in slums or outside the walls of gated communities. In the absence of *spatial* segregation, Syrians and Jordanians live alongside each other.

On the other hand, what male Syrians in Mafraq have in common with young Blacks in the US (Goffman 2014) and ethnic-minority youth in France (Fassin 2013) is the first-hand experience of being the target of everyday policing, and the avoidance strategies that ensue. In all of these cases, legal insecurity is key. One might assume that Jordan, not a signatory to the Geneva Convention on Refugees, might find it easier to curtail the rights of displaced populations. However, in Philadelphia, young Black men's previous or ongoing entanglements with the law prevent them from accessing legal aid and other types of public services, including medical treatment, voting and documentation – despite them being US-Americans (Goffman 2014). This invites more general reflections about states' use of "illegalization" as a tool for cementing social hierarchies not only when it involves foreigners, but also among their own citizens.

In Paris and Philadelphia, racial profiling is a method for targeting young disadvantaged men, and darker skin immediately puts their informants at a higher risk of frequent and sometimes violent identity checks. The problem with applying this analysis to Mafraq's situation is that, different from the case of Jordanian and Syrian women, local and refugee *men* look alike. Youngsters usually dress in fancy, if fake label, jeans and T-shirts; older men prefer more formal pants and shirts. Only some Syrians' cheap plastic sandals might betray them, as Jordanians never wear them outside the home. This said, without doubt, certain differences between refugees and locals are socially legible. After all, my study of ID checks

reveals gender and age profiling – they single out young men – and labour patrols target sites where one would expect low-skilled foreign workers, rather than Jordanians: restaurants, shops, quarries and fields. These visible differences determine how certain populations are targeted by policing. Ultimately, though, Syrian men in Mafraq are identified with the help of their *legal* documents, as the fault line between locals and refugees is bureaucratic.

Much of the force of the "illegalization" of refugees in Jordan comes from the *selective* enforcement of existing policies. When Baher presented himself at Mafraq's police station, law enforcement officers overlooked his expired and inadequate UNHCR registration sheet. Adnan, on the other hand, almost got deported for minor infringements on Jordanian labour law before 2011, although he had successfully registered with the UNHCR in the meantime. But restrictions on foreign mobility and labour are also unequally implemented with regard to different types of non-citizens. Chapters 4-7 turn to a different kind of transnational space: Mafraq as the crossroads of old and new Evangelical missionaries and aid workers. Like other citizens of Western European countries, short-term volunteers of VIVA, the grassroots NGO I volunteered with, frequently overstayed their tourist visa. Its permanent staff members had lived in Jordan on temporary visas for years before applying for permanent residency. Meanwhile, they openly engaged in volunteering and even paid humanitarian activities, yet never feared arrest or deportation. Different from male Syrian workers, always on their guard against police and labour patrols, they travelled to and within Mafraq much more freely.

But before that, we turn to a different type of pre-war connections that have long secured the survival of marginalized rural populations like my informants from Mheen and Jabal al-Hoss. While Syrians' kinship networks had expanded across borders for decades prior to 2011, transnational family-making has been reshaped more recently by displacement and life in exile.

Chapter 3: Refugees can't travel, but money can - Remaking the transnational family in times of closed borders and protracted uncertainty

In 2016, most of my Syrian informants had been living in Mafraq for three to four years. Yet it appeared to me as if they were simultaneously inhabiting more than one place, their village of origin and their Jordanian exile, but also other locations they had never visited in person. What bound them to these sites was an incessant stream of conversations with numerous relatives, left behind in Syria and displaced elsewhere, maintained on WhatsApp, Viber, Skype and other free communication services available on cheap mobile phones. This endless flow of personal information often seemed to gain the upper hand over everyday life in Jordan. This becomes clear in the example of Um Mehdi, an illiterate woman unable to find her bearings in Mafraq, but expertly navigating transnational connections with loved ones in Lebanon and Germany.

Um Mehdi, a Bedouin woman in her mid-twenties from Babr Amr, a poor suburb of Homs, was often disoriented. A former labour migrant to Syrian borderlands, she remembered working on fields abroad, but could not recall the names of villages in the Beqaa Valley where her husband had taken her most summers. Being a refugee turned into an equally bewildering experience. After an odyssey that had taken her family to Damascus, Aleppo and Raqqa, she finally found herself in Jordan. Unable to read signs, she had little understanding of Mafraq's confusing network of streets and could not tell apart the Jordanian capital and other cities. Her lack of experience in dealing with authorities, the absence of birth certificates for her five children and her strong Bedouin dialect made it difficult for her to navigate the complex system of humanitarian assistance in town. During visits to NGO centres and doctors, I often spoke on her behalf, as Jordanians found my heavy German accent easier to understand than her rural idiom. Most of Um Mehdi's days were spent in her damp living room, in the comforting company of two friends from her neighbourhood back home in Homs.

On a bus trip to Irbid, an hour's drive away, I had to correct my first impression of her supposedly isolated existence. That day, I had organized an appointment with an

audiologist for her youngest son. On the bus back to Mafraq, Um Mehdi exchanged WhatsApp voice mails with her mother who lived in an informal refugee camp in Lebanon. Some weeks earlier, Um Mehdi had shown me a video of an elderly NGO worker strumming a guitar in her mother's tent. The subject of today's communication was our trip to Irbid and her son's condition. She also shared a picture of me that she had taken earlier in a cab. In return, her mother sent me her greetings, and Um Mehdi put the phone on my ear, so I could hear her voice. For the brief duration of our virtual conversation, distance and closed state borders were suspended.[24] Um Mehdi, lost in Mafraq's urban maze and barely able to communicate even with Jordanians, kept track of events in her mother's stay in another country and allowed her to remain part of her grandchildren's lives. She also followed up on the various steps of her brother's asylum process in Germany, congratulating him on milestones like a first language certificate. While Um Mehdi's illiteracy was a handicap to her in everyday life, it did not restrict these manifold exchanges which were deeply meaningful to her. Instead of writing messages, she simply recorded them.

The emotional importance of these links cannot be overestimated. Like Um Mehdi, other Syrian informants in Mafraq showed me pictures of their villages of origin and relatives left behind. Following a beloved niece's wedding on WhatsApp or Skype made refugees feel that they still belonged *somewhere*, essential to coping with the strong sense of isolation that befell many in Mafraq. But transnational information flows also allowed refugees to keep track of the course of the war: to learn about damage, lost property, killings, but also prospects for return. During the final phase of the siege of Aleppo in the second half of 2016, I occasionally attended wakes "in absentia", organized by Mafraq-based Syrians to honour relatives who had died back home.

These messages did not only have a sentimental, but also a more tangible economic value, as the better-off, such as Um Mehdi's brother, were also expected to share their income from the German welfare state with worse-off siblings and parents in the Levant. The

[24] While mutual visits among refugees from the same village or area were common *inside* Mafraq, high transportation costs and lack of public transport made it harder to visit family and friends elsewhere in Jordan. Trips to Azraq camp are a case in point. While many of my informants had relatives in the camp, its strict entry and exit regulations and its remote location closer to the Iraqi border made visits highly expensive. Refugees in Mafraq had to hire private cars, paying as much as 25-50 JD (ca. 35-71 USD) for a day trip, and often returned after having been allowed to communicate with family members only through fences.

current chapter investigates the transnational kinship networks that Syrian refugees in Mafraq sustain, their virtual and material dimensions.

It is a common trope that war tears families apart. During the Syrian war, many have found themselves displaced inside and outside their home country and separated from their loved ones. However, Syrian refugees in Mafraq already engaged in "making family" across borders well before 2011, as mobility was a key livelihood strategy for the poor in rural Syria (cf. chapter 1). Rather than stretching kinship networks, the mobility of various household members kept families together and allowed to them to accumulate resources, as long as they remained firmly centred in villages of origin in Mheen and Jabal al-Hoss. After 2011, the gradual hardening of the Syrian-Jordanian border has disrupted longstanding mobility circuits. For the first time, Syrians in Mafraq were prevented from returning home as they pleased, converting a lifelong situation of "prolonged unsettlement" (Chalcraft 2009) into "forced settlement". The question I ask in this chapter goes: how do refugees access resources from within kinship networks in exile when their members are stuck inside Syria, in Jordan and other countries? I argue that flight and closed borders have not put an end to transnational family-making, but rather reshaped and even intensified existing kinship-based practices. That refugees remain embedded into cross-border kinship networks explains how populations with few assets survive in Mafraq: through their ability to pool and circulate available resources, including money, but also jobs, suitable spouses and information about humanitarian aid. While humans cannot travel, flows of money and information traverse borders more easily, although often informally. However, this chapter does not romanticize my informants' practices of transnational family-making. While cross-border kinship networks have been expanded, these days extending from villages in Syria to sites of refuge in camps and urban areas in neighbouring countries and far-away Europe, conflict has also created new dependencies and entrenched old ones – transnational families may thus prove an ambivalent lifeline.

The chapter begins by contrasting Syrians' use of transnational employment and kinship networks at various stages of their flight, arguing that the latter become important when refugees deal with the "protracted uncertainty" of everyday life in exile. It then turns to three types of resources that refugees access through kinship networks: money, jobs and

marital partners. The second section explores the rearrangement of remittance patterns after the closure of the Syrian-Jordanian border, highlighting parallels with other humanitarian contexts, for example with Somali refugees' money-sending practices in Dadaab camp. The third part discusses the ambivalent role of Syrian labour brokers in providing a source of income, but also exploitative jobs to their next of kin. The chapter ends by revisiting Syrians' marital strategies, arguing that, contrary to aid agencies' and policymakers' fearmongering, the practice of "early marriage" predates the current crisis, at least among rural populations. Not early marriage, but rather increased divorce rates between underage spouses testify to the erosion of kinship structures, with severe legal repercussions for themselves and their offspring. Some Syrian women turn involuntary spinsterhood into a resource. By marrying older middle-class men outside their kinship group, they access new financial resources that eventually benefit their entire family.

Family support helps Syrians deal with "protracted uncertainty"

In this chapter, I expand on the idea that Syrian refugee capitalize on pre-war transnational connections during displacement. To disentangle different types of networks that they rely on at various moments of their flight and life in exile, I draw on Horst and Grabska's (2015) distinction between "radical and protracted uncertainty" (1). Becoming a refugee comes with different temporalities – the speed and haste of the flight, and the more protracted waiting in long-term displacement. In each stage, refugees experience different forms of uncertainty. On the run, they must cope with "radical uncertainty", i.e. the lack of reliable information and unpredictable futures. As I described at the end of the first chapter, most of my informants fled in a hurry when the regime bombings destroyed their villages, leaving all their possessions behind. Several years into life in Jordan, refugees now face a different form of uncertainty:

> *Protracted uncertainty is characterized by a great level of predictability with regard to the everyday present, but by an equally great level of unpredictability when it comes to people's perceptions of a future solution for their problems.* (Horst and Grabska 2015: 14).

Syrians' hopes of imminent return have long faded – they expect to stay in Mafraq for years to come. At the same time, worsening employment opportunities due to a surplus of foreign labour in Jordan, loss of social status and exacerbated legal insecurity all contribute to the unpredictability of their lives. This is compounded by the more recent dwindling of humanitarian aid.

Of course, "protracted uncertainty" is nothing new to my informants, long used to dealing with climatic hazards and the exclusion from Syria's formal economy and public services. How they cope with uncertainty *as refugees* has to be understood in the context of their pre-war livelihood strategies. Putting Horst and Grabska's distinction between "radical" and "protracted uncertainty" into conversation with my findings on Syrian informants' transnational ties tells us that they dispose of diverse networks, appeal to them in different situations and for different types of resources. During the acute phase of the flight, they capitalized on pre-war connections with Jordanian *employers* to seek refuge and work in Mafraq. Once their stay in Jordan has become more permanent, they resort to the same networks to access casual jobs in the informal sector. Additional support from *Syrian relatives* allows them to compensate for the insecurities of everyday life in exile.

The burden of a phone call – refugees as senders and receivers of remittances

In chapter 1, I argued that prior to 2011, remittances from workers abroad represented a valuable resource not only to migrants' families, but also to the weak Syrian economy. Here, I take this argument further by looking at my informants' remittance-sending practices once they became *refugees* in Jordan. Despite abundant research on remittances' role as a driver of more long-term development, their importance as a more immediate lifeline for displaced populations remains insufficiently studied. Scholarly work on Somali refugees' transnational networks, often emerging from Dadaab camp in Kenya, remains a notable exception. At first sight, Mafraq and Dadaab camp, on different continents and more than 2000 miles apart, seem hardly comparable. The four Dadaab camps together currently host almost 240,000 registered refugees (UNHCR 2017), many of them since 1991 when the civil war in Somalia pushed many people across the Kenyan border. By comparison, the refugee "crisis" in Mafraq seems almost modest. Less than half as many

Syrians have lived in town for the last five years, not in makeshift shelters, but in proper housing. What both places have in common, though, goes beyond the inhospitable semi-arid climate and the burning sun of the steppe. Despite their location at the margins of national territories and road networks, Mafraq and Dadaab camp are deeply embedded into transnational networks. Naturally, one should not lump together Somali pastoralists and poor rural populations in Syria who, despite their frequent circular migrations, understand their pre-war lives as fundamentally sedentary. But for both, their high degree of mobility might have played a similar role: a life insurance against recurrent uncertainty. Prior to 2011, poorer Syrian farmers resorted to temporary out-migration to cope with dwindling agricultural productivity and rising unemployment in their regions of origin. Similarly, Somali pastoralists have used mobility to endure a volatile climate and frequent droughts. In the absence of a functioning Somali state, they have long grazed their flocks "past or above nations" (Horst 2006: 35) and state borders.

In displacement to Kenya, "transnational livelihoods" (Horst 2006: 127) have become a reality for many Somali refugees stuck in the camps. Traditional networks have been widened beyond the Somalis' customary grazing grounds in Africa and destinations of labour migration in the Arab Peninsula. Through resettlement and (irregular) migration further away, they have come to include Europe, Northern America and Australia. The availability of modern communication technology allows refugees who remained in the camps to occupy a position at the intersection of information and money flows, both on the receiving and the sending end. Financial support from relatives in Africa and overseas complement humanitarian assistance in the camps and can be mobilized in times of emergency. But kinfolk abroad also retain a say in refugees' life decisions on the ground, and existing networks often determine where refugees go next. In the first chapter, I outlined the transnational space in the Levant that rural Syrians have built through multiple labour migrations. Compared to Somalis' connections that span the entire globe, it appears more circumscribed. Due to the shorter duration of the Syrian Civil War, the slow rate of UNHCR-led resettlement to Europe and North America and the hardening of state borders in the Levant and on Europe's fringes, Syrians' transnational kinship networks "only" encompass neighbouring Arab countries of exile and main refugee destinations in Europe, including Germany and Sweden. Yet important similarities remain which serve to highlight the continuity between pre-war cross-border mobility schemes and monetary practices in

transnational support networks in times of conflict. Like Horst (2006) in her study on Somali refugees, I found it impossible to estimate the volume of remittances refugees in Mafraq send and receive, even at the household level. My Syrian informants were reluctant to reveal sources of income, for fear of losing humanitarian assistance. This is compounded by remittances' irregular nature. At least on the Syrians' side in Mafraq which I could observe more directly, refugees are struggling to survive and pool resources through a combination of informal work, aid money and support from family members and neighbours, none of which comes on a permanent and foreseeable basis. This said, following the money sent across borders allows us a glimpse at how refugees' support networks evolve.

Figure 15 Syrians' migrations patterns before 2011 (Map: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency 2007; additions by Wagner)

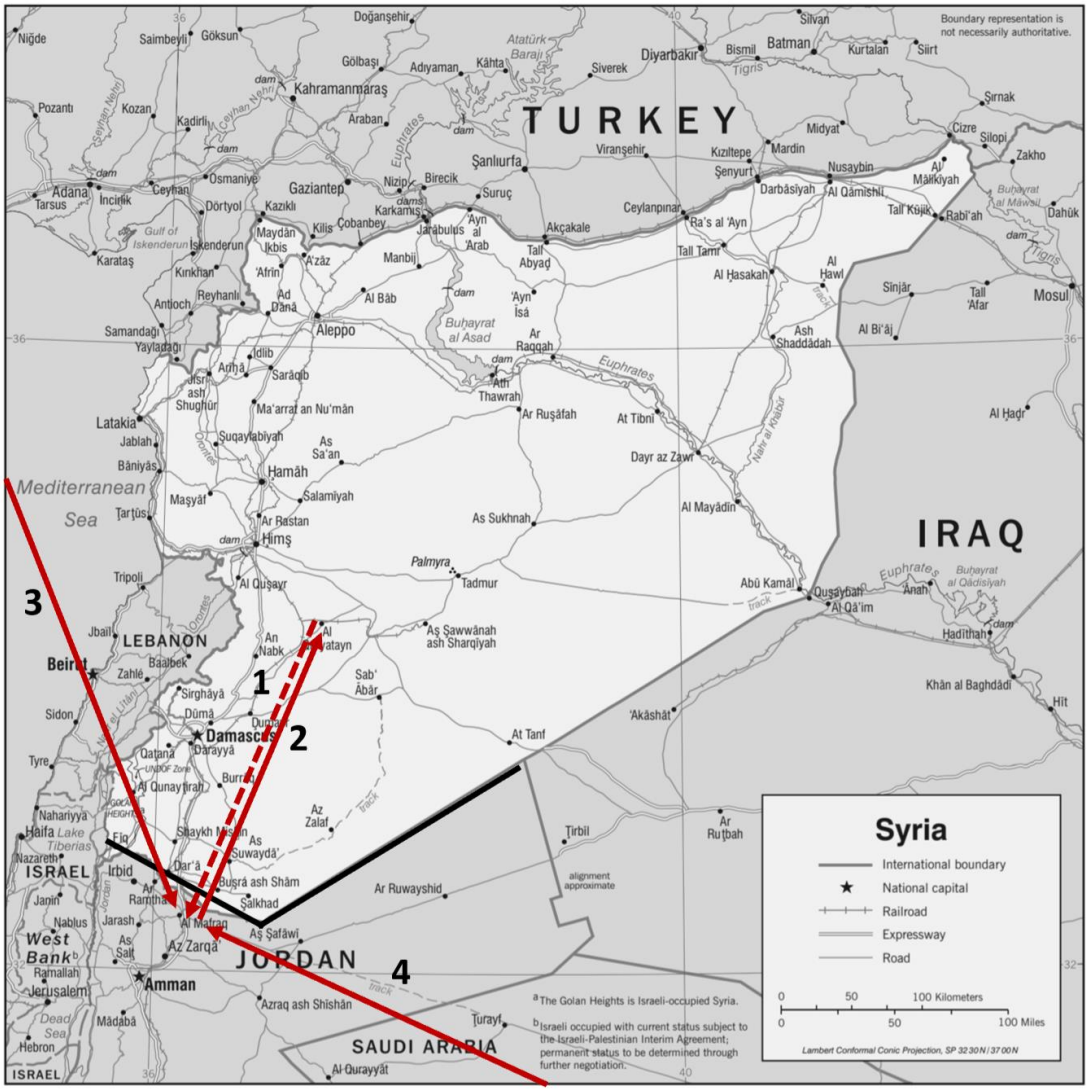

Figure 16 Syrians' flight and remittance-sending patterns after 2011 (Map: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency 2007; additions by Wagner)

Taking the example of Syrians from Mheen in the Homs governorate, Figure 15 contrasts Syrians' pre-war migrations with remittance-sending and -receiving patterns after 2011. As I argued in the first chapter, before the Syrian Civil War, Mafraq constituted one destination among others for Syrian seasonal migrants (left side of Figure 15). After 2011, some Syrians from Mheen capitalized on the existing connection with Jordanian employers in Mafraq to get their families to safety there (right side of Figure 15, arrow 1). Since 2014, the hardening of state borders has prevented even occasional returns. However, while Syrians cannot travel, their money still does.

First, access to aid money in exile, which my informants often transfer to relatives in Syrian villages of origin via informal channels, has allowed refugees to replicate pre-war

remittance patterns, albeit at a much smaller scale (Figure 15, arrow 2). Many of my informants feel a moral obligation to support family members left behind, but also that this is what is expected of them. “When we go home, they will ask: What did you bring?”, one of my friends explained. Besides cash and rental assistance, aid agencies often provide refugees with furniture and household items, including stoves, mattresses and carpets, and many recipients resell humanitarian goods. In the eyes of aid workers, but also fellow Syrians and the host community, this is part of a cynical strategy of asserting one’s neediness in the eyes of NGOs. However, in a multi-layered and confusing humanitarian landscape like Mafraq, where many grassroots NGOs lack tangible criteria for assessing refugees’ needs, this behaviour would be far from illogical (cf. chapter 5). What is more, aid workers overlook Syrians’ remittance-sending strategies, quite similar to those of migrant workers before the war. Earlier on, we saw that Syrian migrants in Mafraq never intended to stay and thus tried to maximize their savings, planning to spend their salaries in their village communities of origin. Having returned to Mafraq as “refugees”, this is what they still do, the caveat being that today’s funds are mostly raised from intermittent humanitarian assistance, not waged labour. That Syrian refugees continue *behaving like migrants* also explains a common Mafraq stereotype. Perhaps not entirely without justification, Syrian women have a reputation for buying expensive jewellery in Mafraq’s gold souq, which has led to a sharp increase of the gold price. Many members of the host community interpret this as a sign of decadence, but also Syrians’ pretence of hardship. But from a *migrant’s* point of view, acquiring easily transportable assets without potential loss of value becomes part of the preparations for one’s eventual return.

I asked my friend Khadija, a cousin of Adnan’s, how she sent money to her husband’s elderly parents back home in Jabal al-Hoss. “It’s someone from the village”, she replied – the money-broker in question was a distant relative of hers. In fact, Syrian refugees in Mafraq make use of the *hawala* system, a century-old system of money transfer in the Middle East and Asia in parallel or outside the formal banking sector. Figure 16 provides a schematic depiction of the processes involved: usually, neither the money nor the sender’s contact person physically move. Rather, the money-broker contacts his local representative in the destination area who then hands out the money to the payee, minus a transfer fee

usually paid for by the sender. Especially in times of conflict, the exchange is based on trust instead of written agreements. As in Khadija's case, senders, recipients, brokers and various middle-men often come from the same extended family. These small-scale kinship networks are on one end of a wide spectrum of *hawala* brokers, ranging from sole traders to multinational corporations with branches in various countries. Nor are all of them informal: before the uprising, some hawala agents had registered with the Syrian government. However, those operating in opposition-controlled areas after 2011 either suspended their business or had their license revoked (Dean 2015).

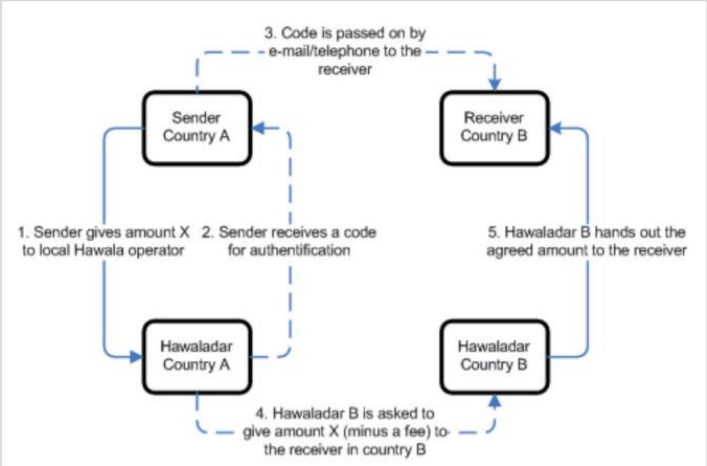

Figure 17 Present-day use of mobile phones and email in the hawala system (Wang 2010: 10)

As I explained in the first chapter, extremely poor rural populations like those from Jabal al-Hoss frequently relied on informal and expensive money brokers even before the war because they were often excluded from the formal banking system. Therefore, their remittance-sending practices from Mafraq have to be understood in the continuity of more longstanding monetary habits. Even in Jordanian exile, thanks to family bonds, the informal services that Khadija and her family used proved astonishingly reliable. A study with Syrian refugees in Irbid, a neighbouring city of Mafraq, found that 36% used individual businessmen and 21% relied on family connections to transfer money into Syria. Most deposits were made in cash and usually reached their destination within three days. In three quarters of all cases, the money always or almost always arrived correctly. Informal agents also had a greater outreach: while registered money-transfer services were mostly confined to urban centres, the former also delivered money to more remote rural areas (Dean 2015).

Since the collapse of the formal banking system in huge parts of Syria, these informal financial structures have received great attention from international humanitarian actors.

As conflict and the aversive stance of the al-Assad regime prevent aid agencies from accessing most of the country, many rely on local partners to deliver aid. In 2014 alone, thirteen of the biggest aid agencies transferred USD 16 million to Syria. On the other hand, counter-terrorism experts have pointed out their role in money-laundering and financing extremist groups (Beechwood 2015). What my ethnography of Syrian refugees' monetary practices in Mafraq shows is that, although their remittances might be too small to be of any macroeconomic importance, they represent a lifeline for the rural poor left behind in Syria.

Second, Syrian refugees in Mafraq do not only send remittances, but are also at the receiving end from supportive families. On the one hand, new remittance routes reflect the emergence of Syrian diasporas elsewhere, e.g. in Germany, where many refugees in Mafraq have relatives (Figure 15, arrow 3). On the other hand, existing support networks are partly reoriented towards new destinations. Before 2011, older male heads of household often resided in the Gulf more permanently as legal migrant workers. At the onset of the Syrian civil war, this subgroup remained abroad. Not subjected to displacement, these men never obtained refugee status. However, family visits and remittance flows have been redirected to their relatives' places of exile in Jordan (Figure 15, arrow 4): instead of assisting their families in Mheen, fathers, uncles and grandfathers in the Gulf now wire money to Mafraq. The money is usually transferred to Jordan via established financial services companies, as evidenced by the long daily queues in front of the Mafraq office of Western Union. As it is deducted from Syrian workers' salaries in the Gulf, it seems to arrive on a more regular basis. I heard about a woman who received JOD 400 (ca. USD 564) every month from her husband, a migrant worker in Kuwait. For many Syrians, such as my friend Tamam, remittances from a brother in Saudi Arabia pay the monthly rent. A study with Syrians in urban Jordan and Zaatari camp also confirmed that refugees mainly received financial support from relatives working in the Gulf (REACH 2017). These connections are also upheld in person, as Syrians residing on the Arab Peninsula are not subject to the same travel restrictions as those registered as "refugees" in Jordan. Hence, they continue to move more freely, and visitors from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait – often a father, uncle, brother or husband - are a common occurrence in Mafraq.

Third, a final example of emerging remittance corridors concerns the exchange of urban and camp-based refugees in Jordan. Syrians in Mafraq often support their relatives in Azraq and Zaatari camp with money, but also clothes and sanitary goods. Sometimes aid workers like myself who enjoy easier access to the camps are asked to take material gifts in, although this is, strictly speaking, forbidden.

In sum, what emerges is a complex picture of surprisingly robust transnational kinship networks, in which Syrian refugees are both givers and receivers. While people's movements have been disrupted by hardened state borders and changed legal status – the transition from migrant worker to *refugee* – they continue to send and receive money. What is new is the diversification of sources of income. Besides waged labour in the formal and informal economy, humanitarian assistance has emerged as a main form of financial capital.

Baher's case illustrates that Syrians in Mafraq often find themselves at the intersection of overlapping family networks. When I ask him whom they would turn to in case of an emergency, he cannot think of anybody at first, but then remembers his father-in-law. Originally from Mheen in the Homs governorate, Baher's father-in-law has worked as a driver in Kuwait for the last seven years. He has twenty children from three wives, two of whom are currently in Azraq camp in Jordan, among them the 45-year old mother of Rania, Baher's wife. One of Rania's stepmothers is waiting in Rukban camp in a no man's land between the Syrian and the Jordanian border. Two of Rania's brothers and a sister have also sought refuge in the Aleppo governorate. As Baher confirms, Rania's father supports all of them, and remittances are received in Syria, Mafraq and Jordanian camps. For example, Rania's father recently sent money when her youngest daughter was down with bloody diarrhoea and the family had to take her to the hospital for treatment on a daily basis. In return, Baher, a teacher with the NGO I was volunteering with, also transfers money to his own relatives inside Syria, usually in small quantities and on an ad hoc basis. "You know, some people cannot leave Syria... Their situation is very bad... When we have some leftover money, 20, 30 JD (ca. USD 28-42) I send it to them... We only buy the necessary, but we survive. When I have 50 JD (ca. USD 71), I send it to my family in Syria." The money makes its way inside Syria with the help of informal brokers who take a huge commission, up to 10% of the entire sum.

Remittances, then, represent a critical lifeline for some Syrian refugees in Mafraq. The comparison with the Somali case indicates that for both refugee populations, the use of remittances somewhat changed after displacement. Before the war, they were often invested in consumption and marriage plans back home. Post displacement, financial support is often a life saver and spent on basic needs and emergencies (cf. Horst 2006). Syrian refugees in Mafraq hardly send money to their relatives back home, or use the remittances they receive themselves, for more long-term investments. As the example of Baher shows, they repeatedly remit and obtain small amounts of money. A Syrian money-broker in the UK who transfers financial support from Syrian diasporas in Europe back to their country of origin, confirmed to me: "These are not huge sums. These days, nobody builds a house in Syria anymore." In the context of an ongoing conflict, framing remittance-sending in terms of "development" thus misses the point – money flows across the Syrian-Jordanian border usually assure their recipients' sheer survival.

However, obligations towards relatives back home might also be an important factor in preventing Syrians from making savings in exile. When they come into the possession of smaller sums, they often pass them on. Unable to build a financial safety net, refugees thus remain exposed to the adversities of life, a situation compounded by the irregular nature of seasonal employment and humanitarian assistance. In a similar vein, Hammond (2011) finds that sending remittances represents a huge financial burden to Somali refugees in Maine, the United States, some of whom have to give up their studies or work several jobs to fulfil their relatives' financial expectations back home. In her book *The Early-Morning Phone Call*, Lindley (2010b) graphically describes the pressure on Somali refugees in London to remit money to their family in Somalia and elsewhere in Africa. Through recurrent phone calls, close relatives, but also other members of their extended kinship network remind them of their financial obligations towards the worse-off. Many UK-based Somalis support a great number of people in the Horn of Africa, to the detriment of their personal life plans. But like Um Mehdi's conversations with her brother in Germany, these calls do not only result in material contributions to refugees' livelihoods, but also represent important affective and relational work that binds transnational families together. Often, though, the demands exceed remitters' means, and some of Lindley's informants end up changing their phone number.

Thus, it appears that transnational kinship networks contain considerable conflict potential, especially when conflicts over the redistribution of resources lead to marital strife and falling out with kinfolk abroad. In Mafraq and the Levant as a whole, rural Syrians' more restricted networks within the region and lack of access to stable employment might limit the circle of relatives they can reasonably support. My informants therefore often receive and send financial support from and to close kin, including parents, children and siblings. In her study of Somali refugees in Dadaab camp, Horst (2006) finds mixed evidence of gendered patterns of remittance-sending, In Mafraq, senders are often women, which can be explained by female refugees' preferential access to NGOs in town. During house visits, grassroots humanitarians and volunteers prefer handing over money to mothers, not male heads of households (cf. chapters 4,5 and 7), and NGO-led vocational trainings, which often come with a small financial bonus, mostly target women (cf. chapter 6). Sometimes, however, the pressure on female providers becomes so huge that support networks effectively break down, as we will see in the case of Layan in the next section.

Old jobs, new dependencies

The third section deals with Syrians' strategies for accessing jobs in the humanitarian sector and in agriculture in Jordan through kinship-based networks. It argues that activating family ties may entrenches existing dependencies, depending on the segment of the labour market that Syrians aspire to enter. On the one hand, demands for jobs put pressure on Syrians who have been successful in finding employment in the humanitarian sector in Jordan. On the other hand, Syrian middlemen exploit their next of kin in agricultural production.

Layan's story illustrates how Syrian women gain access to humanitarian money and other resources and how their distribution is negotiated with her husband and the wider family. Layan, an extroverted woman from the Mheen area in the Homs governorate and mother of two, was the main provider for her children and husband. She had left school at the age of fourteen to get married, a life trajectory not uncommon in her village of origin, and had successfully established herself as a focal point for various Christian NGOs in Mafraq, thanks to her excellent networking skills, but also the availability of a spare room in her apartment in central Mafraq that she readily opened up for NGO gatherings for free.

Hosting strategic meetings of various aid organizations and Evangelical missionaries allowed her preferential access to information about aid and employment programs, but also access to jobs in the NGO sector. When I met her, she was involved in running several kindergartens for Syrian children dispersed all over the city. In 2016, she was the only Syrian in Mafraq I knew who had an official work permit, obtained for her by her employer, an international Evangelical organization with abundant funds.

Over time, I became aware of the pressure that fellow refugees from her extended family exerted on Layan. Not only did Syrians keep strong connections with their relatives back home. As entire villages had relocated to Mafraq and Jordan together, Layan's obligations also extended to dozens of family members in the town itself. While she had procured employment for several young Syrian women as teachers in the ever-expanding kinder garden business, not all of them related to her by blood or qualified instructors, she also fended off other supplicants, sometimes over many weeks and through the use of white – and not so white – lies. In one incident, she kept playing hide and seek with Baher, a distant relative of hers and to whom she had promised a job in the kindergarten. In the end, she called and falsely informed him that the NGO he was currently teaching for prohibited him from taking on an additional job in the humanitarian sector. When Baher passed the phone to me so I could verify her claims, she played ignorant. Only later did it occur to me that her delaying tactics fulfilled a specific purpose: ending her social responsibilities towards her next of kin without losing grface or confronting them in the open. However, the pressure of social networks came to a head when Layan's husband, a volatile character, broke her hand over a fight on the distribution of NGO resources to his relatives. The next day, Layan handed in her notice to her employer. But she soon returned to her job. Although Layan brought financial aid and employment opportunities to her kinship network, her husband seemed to retain the upper hand when it came to their distribution.

At times, affective ties across borders inspire concrete employment and travel plans of *people*, despite the bureaucratic and war-related obstacles in their way. On an autumn day in 2016, I found myself pleading with Baher in the back of a car. Aware of my research on the humanitarian landscape in town, he wanted to know whether I knew of any organizations conducting cross-border aid, as he was hoping to join one of them to return to Syria. There, he wanted to find his mother and sister who, internally displaced

northwards, had recently been caught in a severe bombing in the countryside close to Aleppo. What followed was a very emotional exchange. Convinced of the seriousness of his intensions, I pleaded with him not to ignore his responsibility for Rania and their three children, two of them of fragile health. “God will provide”, he said. “One of my sisters lost five children in the war. Another one six. I want to see them again before they die." We both knew that due to new Jordanian regulations, he would not be allowed to re-enter Jordan or else would be deported to Azraq camp, a place that he dreaded. To facilitate border crossings, Baher had decided to go back to his country of origin as an aid worker. Many refugees occasionally spoke of return, even when their villages of origin were still under fire. Very few ended up going. Yet travel plans to a country in turmoil testify to the inner conflict that Syrians in exile find themselves in: their obligation to find jobs that allow them to juggle responsibilities towards different family members in various places in exile and back home.

But NGO jobs are not the only form of labour that is redistributed through kinship networks in Mafraq – family bonds also assure employment in agriculture. While some Syrians like Naila’s father (chapter 2) have good connections with Jordanian employers, many rely on the help of labour brokers. Many of these middlemen are Syrians themselves. Often those who relocated to Jordan earlier and on a more permanent basis, they assume the role of mediators between newly arrived Syrians and Jordanian employers, with considerable power in their hands. A look at the networks that Mahmood, one of these agents, managed to build, gives us an impression of his dense web of relations with local economies and migrant workers, and how business interests might trump family obligations. As Syrian labour brokers like Mahmood are situated at the intersection of transnational work and kinship networks, a study of his employment practices brings up a theme that was already discussed in the previous chapter: the role of (il)legality in shaping the circumstances of Syrian labour in exile. However, his case is included here to accentuate the ambivalent nature of refugees’ *kinship* networks: in a fragmented and hierarchical informal economy, Syrians become complicit in exploiting their compatriots.

We already met Mahmood in the first chapter – as he was involved in organising Syrian labour before and after 2011, he was able to tell different groups of foreign workers apart. Mahmood’s life as a young man resembles the life stories I have presented so far, with

hard, menial labour and frequent migration experiences. From the same extended family as Adnan in Jabal al-Hoss, Mahmood worked in Lebanon as a young man, before coming to Jordan circa ten years ago, alternating between jobs in agriculture in the Mafraq area and working as a driver in East Amman. Quite unusually, he also brought his beautiful wife to live with him in the foreign country. After 2011, he moved from Amman to Mafraq. When his Syrian village of origin came under fire, he invited his elderly parents, siblings and their families to seek refuge in northern Jordan, a story that his sister Khadija confirmed to me: "We came to Mafraq because I already had a brother there."

I had first come to know Mahmood, a stout, jovial man in his mid-forties, in my capacity as an interpreter. At the time, he was working as a bus driver for a local transport company, and I often hired him for school trips with Syrian children. However, on a return visit in summer 2017, I got to see a different side of him, making me realize that I had greatly underestimated his standing in the community. That day, Mahmood greeted us at the entrance of the shabby ground-floor apartment that he and his wife shared with one of his sisters and her family. Having visited many times before over the previous year, I was surprised to find that the flat's formal living room, set apart for receiving guests, had recently been refurbished with new plush furniture and carpets. I was accompanied by a young American entrepreneur hoping to start an agricultural project and create employment for Syrian refugees in the area. I had met the American in Amman some days earlier. When he told me about his plans, I gave Mahmood a call and we were immediately invited. Introduced to the scheme, Mahmood was enthusiastic. He assured us that he was the perfect cooperation partner as his papers were "in order" and because of his extended networks: "Andi haraka bil souq", he said, which literally translates to: "I'm moving/mobile in the market." Besides having the necessary humanitarian documentation, Mahmood was one of the lucky few refugees in Mafraq in possession of a proper work permit, provided by his employer. He went on to impress us with his detailed knowledge of working processes in Jordan: "How many workers should I bring you? Do you want men, women or children? Should they live on site?" And he quickly calculated salaries and living expenses for different types of labourers in his head, before turning to potential buyers, wholesale markets in Amman, container and pallet sizes and different types of vegetable and fruits. What about export, we asked tentatively, having destinations in the Gulf in mind. Mahmood suggested various arrangements with Syrian and Jordanian export companies,

including obscure trade routes for exporting to Iraq via Saudi Arabia, or even to Israel. While my head was spinning with the unexpected wealth of information, one of Mahmood's principles stuck with me: his insistence on employing only Syrians. In his eyes, Jordanian workers were lazy and stubborn, insisting on regular working hours and holidays, while Egyptians were all thieves.

Mahmood's hiring preferences allow us to draw conclusions about the nature of the networks he managed to sustain and build over a ten-year spell abroad. On the one hand, he had established business contacts in the entire region. Presumably, the Jordanian employers and potential customers he suggested were heads of companies he had worked for in the past. On the other hand, those tilling the fields would be recruited from within the Syrian community, most likely from his large extended family. Mahmood's disapproval of Egyptians also speaks to the competition between different segments of the foreign workforce in Jordan. Like other Jordanian employers, he did not hesitate to play out different migrant and refugee populations against each other (cf. chapter 2).

Mahmood's *legal* security was key to his central position in Syrian-Jordanian employment networks. A comparison with middlemen in Palestine sheds further light on the peculiar relationship that labour brokers like him develop with the law. In Kelly's (2006) study of workers from the West Bank, many rely on labour contractors from their own villages to seek employment in Israel. The latter often take advantage of legal documents, including foreign passports and Israeli driving licences, that increase their freedom of movement, but also leeway for business activities beyond the Green Line. They also procure the necessary permits for Palestinian workers from the Israeli military. Sometimes, these documents are obtained in shady ways, as successful labour contractors are often suspected of collaborating with the Israeli army. As one of Kelly's case studies shows, Palestinians with official work permits have rights towards labour contractors and their Israeli employers – in theory. However, lack of access to Israeli courts and power dynamics within their villages of origin prevent them from *enforcing* them. By way of contrast, Syrian labour brokers like Mahmood, who equally dispose of the necessary legal documentation to do business, thrive on refugees' irregular status in the Jordanian economy. Without Jordanian work permits, that hardly anyone in Mafraq has, most Syrians have no labour rights to begin with. Studying the role of Syrian middlemen like Mahmood provides insights into how some

refugees are more apt to capitalize on pre-war networks with Jordanian employers than others, and how, as a consequence, existing power hierarchies are cemented within the refugee community and kinship groups. To Mahmood, fellow Syrians are a mobile resource, people whose longstanding survival strategies he can exploit. No wonder a power broker like Mahmood could afford new furniture for his living room – but he also had to decorate in a manner befitting his social status, to set the stage for the reception of supplicants asking for jobs.

Teenage divorcees and valuable spinsters – marital strategies in exile

In the final part of this chapter, I turn to two instances of break-down of Syrians' kinship networks: high rates of inter-Syrian divorce and of spinsterhood. While frequent divorce exposes young brides to deeper precarity, delayed marriage may prove beneficial to some Syrian women who engage in "strategic" waiting and opt for getting married to older Jordanian men from the (lower) middle class. The failure of old and the emergence of new marital strategies provide insights into the role of continuity and rupture in kinship-based survival strategies during displacement.

In the NGO world and international media, forced marriage of under-aged Syrian girls has sparked much concern and alarming statistics are frequently cited. In 2015, brides between the ages of 13 and 17 made up almost 44% of all newly-wed Syrian brides in Jordan, an 11% rise compared to 2010 (Sahbani, Al-Khateeb and Hikmat 2016). I soon began to doubt that this was uniquely caused by displacement and made it a habit to ask the mothers of teenage brides at which age they had got married in Syria. It turned out that most of them had tied the knot even earlier, some of them as young as 13. Confirmatory evidence comes from a study on Raqqa province in northern Syria shortly before the war. Rabo (2008) compares urban and rural ways of family-making. She finds that remaining single is increasingly acceptable for both men and women in urban Raqqa, partly because young men are frequently unemployed. In the countryside, however, young men receive land from their families, marry young and have many children. However, what is true of both populations, urban and rural, is that "marriage and parenthood is how both women and men become regarded as adults" (Rabo 2008: 131). For rural Syrians in Mafraq, marrying among one's kinfolk is another way of strengthening their social networks, and a core

element of the normative life course in the countryside. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that, contrary to wide-spread rumours about Syrian girls marrying older men from the Gulf, teenage girls in Mafraq usually marry fellow Syrians from their extended family. Potential spouses are usually only a few years older and do not have a steady job — a constellation that helps perpetuate poverty (Laub 2017). In many cases, marital arrangements are made even when one party is still in Syria or has been displaced to another country. For example, many Syrian men in Mafraq wait for their female cousins to arrive from Lebanon.

That Syrian weddings are a common occurrence in Mafraq can be explained by the availability of suitable spouses from within one's extended kinship networks, but also by the low costs of ceremonies themselves. While the newly-weds sometimes rent wedding halls in Mafraq, celebrations often take place at home. Guests are only served soft drinks and cake and wedding dresses are rented, not bought. Naila and one of her sisters got married at the same time, and both of her wedding dresses were brought from Zataari camp where the rent was even cheaper. While her sister's white dress cost 50 JD (ca. USD 71), Naila's new husband could only afford to rent a cheaper (40 JD, ca. USD 56), greenish dress for her.[25]

However, as Dina Zbeidy (2018) in her research with Syrian women in Wihdat, a Palestinian camp east of Amman, shows, early marriage cannot be entirely explained in economic terms. More than simply "cheap", it also has important affective and aspirational dimensions: young brides and grooms seek to establish families of their own to deal with their grief over the death and separation of their loved ones. Marriage also allows them to emancipate themselves from their parents, and young girls show considerable agency in arranging matches for themselves. In conservative Mafraq, being a wife does not usually come with more material resources, as most families are struggling to fulfil their basic needs. However, it confers onto young women a considerably higher social status. Reversely, unmarried Syrian girls often complained to me that most of the household chores fell on them. One night, I stayed over at Naila's place. I slept in the girls' room and we chatted until the sun rose again. After the morning prayer, she and her three unmarried

[25] By way of contrast, weddings among Mafraq's Jordanian middle class can run into the thousands or even tens of thousands of Jordanian Dinars, and usually comprise a ceremony in a posher wedding hall or hotel, a hand-made dress, full-blown catering and a honeymoon abroad.

sisters got up and began tidying up the family apartment – it was 5am in the morning, and this was the first on a seemingly endless list of domestic tasks.

Young Syrians' problem consists less in finding marriage candidates – after all, entire villages fled to Mafraq together – but rather in the elevated risk of divorce. Some years before I met her, Naila's first marriage had ended during her honeymoon when her husband beat her so severely that she fled to her parents' house, leaving her dowry behind. It took her two years to finalize the divorce papers and she never retrieved her belongings. In my work as an interpreter with VIVA, I frequently came across Syrian teenage divorcees like Naila. Lawyers at the local ARDD office, an NGO affiliated with the UNHCR that provides legal aid to Syrians in Mafraq, explained that they mostly dealt with documentation and marriage issues. My Jordanian neighbour, an intern at the local sharia court during my fieldwork, also confirmed that divorce cases involving Syrians, especially Syrian minors, occupied a lot of the court's time.

The problem of "early divorce" is compounded by the fact that many Syrians perform marriage ceremonies with religious sheikhs, but fail to record them in Jordanian courts, a longstanding practice tolerated by the Syrian state (Rabo 2008). The legal age of marriage in Jordan is 18, although exceptions can be obtained for girls as young as 15. Since 2015, Jordanian authorities have tried to impose minimal age limits by fining sheikhs who perform illegal marriage ceremonies. During a house visit, I also came across a case where the UNHCR had stopped the resettlement process for an entire family because they had married off their daughter at the age of 16. In reality, though, early marriages and divorces are still common among Syrians in Mafraq, and adolescent girls are often unable to obtain a proper divorce and to register children officially born out of wedlock (Dean 2016). Waiting for one's divorce certificate had become another standard experience among my female Syrian interlocutors.

Several factors seem to drive up divorce rates, including cramped living conditions. While living in multi-generational households is a common practice among rural Syrians (Rabo 2008), newly-weds in Mafraq are often assigned a room in the apartment of their in-laws. I was taken aback when the oldest son of a friend in her late thirties, herself pregnant with her ninth child, joyfully announced that he would soon force his mother to empty a corner

of the crammed flat for his future bride. In addition, many young men are unemployed and spend their days at home and with friends, reversing traditional gender roles. During a house visit with the NGO, I met a 17-year old Syrian woman with a toddler and newly pregnant, who gained 5 JD a day (ca. USD 7) working in agriculture. On her return home, she had to hand over her meagre earnings at the front door. Her unemployed 20-year old husband smoked two packets each day, the equivalent of half of her salary. She also held much grief against him as another baby had died of asthma, a condition she ascribed to his heavy smoking. While this might be an extreme case, male unemployment is quite common among Syrian refugees and puts a huge strain on marriages. While kinship networks still exert social control over their members in exile, obliging them to redistribute resources and job opportunities with Jordanian farmers and Western NGOs, there is no denying that it is greatly diminished in Mafraq's greater anonymity. They also tend to be eroded through strong competition over jobs and frequent moving within Mafraq and to other places in Jordan and abroad.

However, there is also a sizeable subgroup of Syrian women in their late twenties and early thirties who have passed the suitable age for marriage because of years of displacement and the partial disconnect from social networks. These women have had to revise their marital strategies, although turning to Jordanian men as potential spouses is far from straight forward, as refugee and host populations in Mafraq are divided along class lines. For Jordanians, this makes a Syrian bride less attractive, at least for a first marriage. This is not to say that transnational weddings had never happened in the past. Members from Mafraq's small Druze community, originally from Swueida in southern Syria, used to bring wives from their area of origin. Here, marriage alliances were formed along ethnic and religious lines. Mostly, transnational marriages before 2011 seemed to have happened when the class gap was diminished. For instance, Naila's eldest sister, who lives in Manshiya, a village outside Mafraq, married a poor Jordanian before the onset of the Syrian war. Her husband is a low-ranked soldier and serves with the Jordanian army in the desert, often for weeks at a time. In the village, Naila's sister and her two children inhabit the ground floor of a house that is owned by her Jordanian in-laws. While clearly not destitute, she is far from well off and the apartment is scarcely furnished. However, even first marriages between lower-class Jordanians and Syrian women seem to have stopped after 2011. As Naila's sister explained to me, "suddenly, Jordanian men could find Syrian women

everywhere, so they stopped marrying them". That Syrian women stopped being suitable first wives even for poorer Jordanians fits the description of social "déclassement" by El Miri and Mercier (2018) evoked in the previous chapter.

While becoming a local's *first* wife is thus prevented by class barriers and new social stigma, unmarried Syrian women in Mafraq have found another way to capitalize on the rupture in their social circles and life plans, becoming the *second* wife of older Jordanian men instead. This is far from being an individualistic escape – rather, marrying "out" usually benefits the bride's entire family. Some Syrian women are talked into these unions by their parents. The story of one of Naila's unmarried sisters is a case in point: for weeks, her family received visits from a Jordanian man, a 50-year old Jordanian from Irbid city, who was already married but had only one daughter. While the girl had taken an instant dislike to him and refused him repeatedly, he kept returning, promising her a house of her own. The bride against her will complained to me: "My family is expecting me to get married because he promised to help us." But revising one's marital strategies can also be an instance of "agency-in-waiting" in Brun's sense (2015: 19). Some Syrian spinsters like Tamam show considerable determination in seeking out similar matches. I met Tamam through my NGO work; she was a resolute, strong woman in her early 30s, her family's spokesperson and lifeline to the outside world, be it in the souq, with neighbours and the humanitarian scene. Unsurprisingly, my friend showed similar boldness when arranging a marriage for herself. How the union was organized tells us a lot about the power dynamics between Syrian women in Mafraq and absent male family members – it reveals how financial and decision-making power are intertwined, and how men assert their presence and rank in the family across geographical distance and borders.

Having passed the suitable age for marrying a Syrian by at least five years, Tamam was acutely aware of the prospects for social mobility coming with a match from outside her own community. The opportunity arose when she befriended a local woman whose brother – a middle-aged Palestinian lorry driver once divorced – wished to remarry. Enticed by the possibility to move to a middle-class neighbourhood in West Amman, and, all the dutiful daughter, to gain financial support for the wider family, she decided to become an older Jordanian's second wife. For that to happen, she had to gain her family's approval. Sadly, her father, whom she had accompanied to Mafraq, was already in his nineties and suffered

from dementia. In his place, her older brothers, migrant workers in Saudi Arabia, had become the family's decision-makers. Tamam liked to show me pictures of her siblings in front of luxurious pools and gardens in the Gulf. In reality, they were factory workers and drivers, but their income paid the rent for two spacious joint apartments in Mafraq, home to Tamam, her elderly parents and unmarried sister, as well as her brothers' spouses and children. I occasionally met the brothers on their rare visits to Mafraq. They were jovial, imposing men in their forties, dressed in the long white Saudi thobe that is worn by Arabs from the Gulf, but also many Mafraq locals. One of the brothers had only recently married a teenage girl from Homs city, affectionately teased by Tamam for being a proper urbanite, and not a peasant like herself. After the wedding, the new sister-in-law had taken to wearing the niqab upon her jealous husband's request. Most of the time, though, the brothers were absent, and Tamam and her female relatives ran a joyous and, at times, turbulent household.

When it came to Tamam's marriage, though, her oldest brother, on vacation from Saudi Arabia, took the lead. He negotiated the *mahr*, the payment made to the bride in Islamic societies, with the prospective groom, signed the wedding papers in Tamam's name and imposed his own schedule. The wedding had to take place in summer 2016 before his return to the Gulf. Otherwise, the eager groom would have had to wait long months until the brother's next trip to Mafraq. Because of her brother's pressure on the groom, Tamam's wedding night turned into a disaster – in the eyes of the guests, it also firmly put her in place as a second-rate wife. Without prior explanation, neither the elderly groom nor his relatives showed up for the party in a cheap wedding hall in Mafraq. After what felt like an eternity of tedious dances, artificial excitement and very real tears, but in truth lasted less than two hours, the feast came to an end. Traditionally, the bride would now be led by the groom's relatives to her new home. Relieved, the female guests put on their abayas and veils, readying themselves for bidding farewell to Tamam before a car would take her to Amman. Through the narrow staircase, we pushed to the street, only to find that inside the car awaiting the bride was – her older brother. It is hard to describe the wounded expression on my friend's face while we awkwardly struggled to shove the ample skirt of her dress into the car. It is important to understand what exactly went wrong – and what did not. Contrary to Hollywood comedies about runaway brides, the groom's non-appearance did not stop the marriage. As in many Arab Muslim contexts, the marriage

papers had been signed a week earlier in Sharia court by the groom and Tamam's brother. Ceremony or not, the two were already – and would remain – married on paper. If cancelling the union was not an option, what did the groom's affront aim to achieve? My Jordanian host mother's take on the scene was telling. To her, the real offense was not the groom's absence at the party – a mere spectacle and amusement for the female guests – but the failed spatial and figurative transition into the groom's home, an act of border-crossing necessary to become "family".

As Tamam later explained to me, her husband had failed to appear because he had still been in mourning for his recently deceased mother. Islamic tradition and respect for his own family had prevented him from honouring his new wife. At the same time, though, his absence immediately made clear the power differential between a Jordanian middle-class family from the capital and disenfranchised refugees. Incidentally, this impression was confirmed when I later visited Tamam in her new home in Amman. Amused, she pointed out to me dozens of pregnancy tests that her new female in-laws had brought. "It's only been a week", she laughed. But the joke was lost on me, as this was what she had been married for: a cheap fix for a middle-aged man's sexuality and reproduction. Materially, though, her new Jordanian in-laws provided what was expected of them. During my next visit to Tamam's relatives in Mafraq, I noticed the brand-new furniture in the living room of her absent brother's flat. Soon, her mother and teenage cousins frequently stayed at the couple's apartment in the capital for days on end. Marrying "out" had granted Tamam access to new wealth that she distributed generously among her loved ones. Male members of her husband's family even asked for her younger cousins' hand, a request declined by Tamam's conservative brother. The bond also increased her freedom of movement as Tamam's husband encouraged her to venture out into West Amman on her own and start taking taxis and even driving lessons. A male relative from her husband's side would sometimes give Tamam a ride to return to Mafraq for short visits, and weekend getaways to the Dead Sea with her husband often involved one or more members of Tamam's family. Finally, the unlikely match also generated new venues towards citizenship, but also forged new – shared – identities. Married to a Jordanian citizen, Tamam now found herself in a much more stable legal situation. Her unborn son – as she told me in late 2017 when she was finally pregnant – would be a Jordanian citizen and thus have free access to higher education and the labour market. Tamam and her husband also found new ways to

bond over the displacement experience. Early into the marriage, he told her: “You are like us [the Palestinians]. You had to flee from your country.”

An incident a year later revealed that she had not been alone in approaching the marriage with social mobility in mind. In November 2017, at a time when I had long returned to Scotland, I received a string of desperate text messages from Tamam, by then four months pregnant. Her husband, a long-distance lorry driver, had somehow got stranded in Armenia. Taking advantage of his greater proximity to EU borders, Tamam asked me whether I could procure him with a Schengen Visa and help him travel to Germany where he was planning to apply for family reunification. To little avail, I tried to make Tamam understand that, notwithstanding the practical obstacles to sponsoring her husband’s visa, as a Jordanian, he did not qualify for refugee status in Germany. “But I am Syrian, and so is my unborn son!”, she exclaimed. Apparently, the young family had planned to capitalize on her Syrian citizenship to access asylum and a better life in Europe. A year into their marriage, Tamam had become to her husband what he had always been to her: a mobility resource, a means for moving more freely in space and on with one’s life.

Conclusion

In chapter 3, I argued that support from transnational kinship networks enables Syrian refugees to cope with the uncertainties of everyday life in protracted displacement, which mostly revolve around finding complementary sources of income. Sharing jobs, money and marrying amongst kin are not new. They were long-established livelihood strategies of rural households before the war and often related to mobility. Before 2011, young men from the same family worked with the same employers abroad and migrated together. Despite their frequent absences, they usually married girls from their kinship group and reinvested their savings from work abroad in their villages of origin. I also pointed out how displacement and stuckness in exile have changed gender roles and shifted relational hierarchies. In Mafraq, Syrian women have gained access to a new type of wealth: humanitarian aid and jobs with NGOs. Reversely, men’s working situation in the informal economy has worsened, while women are not threatened by deportation. Oftentimes, wives’ salaries from working on the fields and with NGOs pays the rent. Still, it seems that husbands, fathers and brothers retain the upper hand when it comes to deciding how resources are distributed:

money, employment opportunities, even a sister's hand in marriage. With regard to Syrian labour brokers, their compatriots' lack of work permits and labour rights facilitates exploitation between next of kin.

On a final note, Syrians' pre-war mobility strategies were firmly anchored in a specific locale – the village. What happens if the village is lost? Ghannam (2002) understands transnational practices of family-making as "techniques for the production of locality" (24). Far from being relegated to the virtual sphere, migrants are still bound to specific *places*. Her intriguing study of young Magdy, an Egyptian migrant worker in the 1990s, is a fine example of what keeps families together across distance. Communication through letters and audiotapes, remittance-sending and decision-making within the family went hand in hand. Ever the dutiful son, Magdy's income went into the renovation of his parents' apartment in Cairo. But he also had a say in – and expressed clearly in his tapes and letters – what exactly the money should be used for. Asking a son to invest in his family's property back home assured that he would remain in his parents' life. Reversely, his relatives continued to play a role in his own. In Magdy's absence, his family found him a bride, prepared the wedding, bought and furnished the newly-weds' flat, all of which was made possible by the money that he kept wiring to them. Naturally, transnational family-making did not proceed without friction. In case of conflict, Magdy and his relatives resorted to the audiotapes that served as material proof of jointly taken decisions.

Magdy's important role in joint family decisions cannot fail to remind us of the strict rule that Tamam's brothers exert over their female relatives from Saudi Arabia, or Baher's father-in-law who aptly provides for the families of his various wives and children in- and outside camps in Jordan from Kuwait. But Ghannam's absent Magdy also left enduring *material* traces in his relatives' lives, in various apartments and, ultimately, the city. That Magdy claimed some form of presence despite his physical absence had a significance beyond his private life. Through contributing to visible changes in the built environment, Egyptian migrant workers also asserted themselves in lower-class neighbourhoods in Cairo, vis-à-vis negligent and sometimes openly hostile governmental institutions. Remaking one's apartment was also a political act of the urban poor. By way of contrast, Syrian refugees in Mafraq frequently changed houses and owned hardly any furniture, at least at the time of my fieldwork. While their relatives' support was clearly felt in their everyday lives, it seldom

had long-lasting effects. Usually, it secured their immediate survival in case of emergency. Ultimately, “locality” seemed to be produced, not in Mafraq, a place of exile that hardly felt like home, but rather in the endless exchange of pictures of destroyed villages and relatives elsewhere.

In the first three chapters, I argued that conflict and displacement have reshaped my Syrian informants’ pre-war labour migration ties to Jordan and transnational kinship networks. This type of analysis foregrounds how Syrians continue accessing different types of resources despite their legal limbo in exile. However, Syrians’ lives in Mafraq are not only shaped by the lack of Jordanian citizenship and the absence of social and labour rights vis-à-vis the host state and local employers. In the gravitational field of local and foreign aid organizations, they have also been redefined as *humanitarian* subjects. Taking the example of VIVA and the local Mafraq Unity Church, the final four chapters of my thesis turn to Syrians’ interactions with faith-based humanitarian organisations.

Chapter 4: Glimpses of the "humanitarian city" – VIVA's mobility strategies in Mafraq and the visibility of aid

When I first moved to Mafraq, I was struck by the absence of familiar logos that decorate shopping streets all over Jordan: McDonalds, Dunkin' Donuts, Pizza Hut… As my Jordanian host brother aptly put it: "People don't have the money to pay JD 5 (ca. USD 7) for a coffee here." The absence of well-known food chains hints at Mafraq's location at the margins of global capitalism. Recently, though, a different set of international labels has sprung up on buildings in town, one that indicates its new-found position on the radar of the international humanitarian community. UNHCR, UNICEF, Caritas, Save the Children, but also local NGOs and Islamic charities – many of them have offices in the city centre, often in marginalized neighbourhoods like Mafraq's infamous Hay Hussein. NGO logos in urban space also represent important reference points for grassroots and faith-based organizations like VIVA who do not have a permanent presence in town but drive to and through Mafraq on a regular basis. Their knowledge of humanitarian landmarks helps them get their bearings in the town's chaotic traffic.

How VIVA members find their way around is closely related to how they "do" aid. Instead of forcing refugees to come to them, volunteers deliver aid to their *homes*. House visits are the corner stone of VIVA's activities in Mafraq and its main mode of interaction with Syrians. That VIVA encounters Syrians inside their homes is partly motivated by practical reasons – the lack of an office of their own. More importantly, they put VIVA's *relational* approach to aid into practice.[26] Only, how does VIVA locate Syrians in a town with (almost) no street names?

In February 2016, VIVA asked me to join a one-week "outreach mission" where circa thirty European volunteers, in teams of three to five, visited Syrian families in Mafraq. At 9am, we

[26] To be clear, faith-based organisations like VIVA were not alone in conducting humanitarian house visits. I sometimes knocked on a Syrian's door only to find a *Jordanian* representative of the UNHCR inside – often young veiled women - dressed in a vest with the agency's logo, equipped with paper and pencil. Since 2013, these regular visits have assessed Syrians' eligibility for cash assistance in urban areas (UNHCR 2017a). They are much more formal than those of VIVA and comparable faith-based organizations, which often involve playing, dancing, the serving of snacks and drinks and the exchange of gifts. VIVA members were also usually foreigners and dressed casually, often in T-Shirts.

met in front of Mafraq's public library and split into "teams". Each group was assigned an "interpreter", usually locals or Iraqi Christians from Amman who did charitable work while waiting for resettlement to the US. Other interpreters were staff members or regular volunteers like myself. Short-term visitors from Europe often brought their families. Adult spouses were distributed across different groups, but children stayed with their parents. Each team was given a car, a mobile phone with a local number and a list of Syrian families to pay a call on. These lists had been compiled during previous "outreach missions" and VIVA events – often, Syrians approached Western-looking volunteers in the street to pass on their contact details. In theory, none of the refugees on today's list had received a house visit from VIVA representatives before. We would all meet again for lunch around noon and at 5pm, before VIVA's staff members and visitors would return to the Schneller school, a Christian guesthouse north of Amman, for the night. This was to be our daily schedule for an entire week.

On the first day of the "outreach mission", I found myself in a car crammed with food parcels in huge cartons, IKEA bags full of second-hand clothes, blankets and toys. With me were Maria, the staff member I usually translated for, and Gabriel, a short-term volunteer from VIVA's country of origin. In the morning, I had also met Gabriel's wife, Sarah. A portly couple in their fifties, they ran a restaurant in Western Europe and already had grandchildren. Like most of VIVA's visitors, they conversed in a strong regional dialect that I struggled to understand. Both spoke little English and Sarah walked on crutches but their excitement to be in Jordan made them forget about their difficulties. In the car, Gabriel explained to me that he had considered volunteering in Greece but lacked the necessary skills. "Other organisations ask for qualifications. For instance, you need to be a doctor or fluent in English. That's what is great about VIVA: what matters is the *heart*."

In the early days of my volunteering experience with VIVA, my grasp of Jordanian dialect was still shaky. But as I was the only "resident" of Mafraq in the car, my tasks included locating Syrian recipients' houses. As the guide, I was entitled to the front passenger seat, a prime position allowing me to spot relevant places and to interact with helpful locals through the car window. Because of its limited budget, VIVA could not afford to hire local chauffeurs. The driver next to me was a European staff member or a short-term volunteer, waiting for my instructions.

A drive through Mafraq usually began with a phone call to a Syrian family on the list. A standard dialogue went as follows: “Good morning. Is this Abu Mohammad’s house? How are you doing? I hope you are well. I am calling from VIVA. We are a European organization that provides aid to Syrian refugees in Mafraq. We would like to come and visit you at home. Are you at home right now? Could you tell me where you live?”

Chapter 4 takes us on a ride with VIVA staff members and volunteers in Mafraq. It invites us to see the city through their eyes - and car windows - while they try to locate the homes of Syrian aid beneficiaries. It is hardly a coincidence that Gabriel explains his affective engagement with volunteering in the back of a car. European participants like him travel to Jordan, Mafraq, and even Syrians’ homes to put Christian compassion into action and establish a personal connection with those whom they assist. House visits supposedly enable authentic encounters across cultural, linguistic, geographical and political barriers. They give volunteers and Syrians an opportunity for casually spending time together, getting to know each other and, hopefully, establishing a more long-lasting connection. And turning refugees into “hosts” is meant to suspend power inequalities between aid providers and recipients, allowing volunteers and Syrians to meet each other on equal terms, or quite literally: on the same carpet. But house visits are also central to VIVA’s fundraising strategy and, ultimately, its economic survival *as an NGO*. In this regard, volunteers’ publicly shared recollections back home are as important as their physical presence in Mafraq. After their return to Europe, highly motivated participants often take it upon themselves to raise additional donations and recruit new volunteers. Many come again, often bringing their friends and family, and returnees develop close relationships with certain Syrians, but also with VIVA’s permanent staff members (cf. chapter 5). However, as I sketched out in the introduction, VIVA’s emphasis on relationality is far from unproblematic, and its members often get entangled in moral dilemmas and inevitably engage in “micro-practices of detachment” (Candea 2010: 248). A study of VIVA’s knowledge of urban space and mobility practices aims to illustrate these tensions.

This chapter aims to answer the following questions: first, how did VIVA volunteers navigate Mafraq and find Syrians’ homes? Second, how did their mobility strategies

contribute to making Mafraq a "humanitarian city" and, in return, shaped the spatial practices of Syrian aid beneficiaries?

The opening sections deal with the *visibility* of aid in Mafraq. The first part argues that humanitarian action has superseded older ways of thinking about Mafraq's urban space and Syrians' presence in town. The omni-presence of NGO logos invests the cityscape and its inhabitants with a specific meaning: as a place and people "in need". The second part revisits Agier's theory of "city-camps". Has Mafraq turned into a "*humanitarian* city" – or even become more like a camp?

The third section addresses the limitations of "humanitarianizing" Mafraq. A study of VIVA's mobility strategies reveals that their knowledge of Mafraq and control of the situation is far from complete. Getting back into the car with Gabriel and Maria gives us an impression of the practical relevance of humanitarian landmarks to VIVA's movements in town. Driving to Syrians' homes is supposed to realize a relationship premised on closeness, but one that is stretched by small acts of "detachment", such as imposing one's schedule, commuting, sticking to major roads and staying inside cars.

The final part of the chapter turns to the spatial practices of VIVA's counterparts in the streets - Syrian *women* – which are shaped by volunteers' habits of house visits and driving around. For representatives of VIVA and Syrian women alike, urban space is fragmented, confusing and structured around a handful of familiar humanitarian landmarks and public institutions. However, there are huge mobility inequalities between grassroots aid workers *in cars* and Syrian women *on foot*. To get a sense of how Syrian women overcome their "slowness" in public space, the chapter looks at their practices of stopping VIVA cars and reconverting their private living rooms into semi-public "NGO centres".

Humanitarian branding – covering up the "old" Mafraq

The visibility of humanitarian action in Mafraq is an outcome of the peculiar local history of the refugee response. It is the consequence of the city's initial position at the margins of the institutionalized humanitarian system, paradoxically favoured by its location in the vicinity of a refugee hot spot like Zaatari camp, and the mushrooming of local and foreign

faith-based charities and small NGOs (cf. Introduction). As a result, Mafraq is now home to a multi-layered humanitarian landscape where UN agencies coexist alongside grassroots organisations. Stirrat (2006) argues that in the co-presence of many aid providers, organizations feel pressure to be *seen* as making an impact. In Mafraq, the use of NGO logos outside offices, on cars and even aid beneficiaries' bodies allows aid providers to assert their presence in public space.

Living in Mafraq, I could not fail to notice the sheer *visible* presence of aid. Bigger structures like the Emirati Field Hospital (Figure 17) have turned into well-known monuments and are easily recognizable by the long waiting queues outside their gates every morning. Some agencies like UNICEF operate offices in more than one neighbourhood (Figure 18). By extension, a handful of non-aid related businesses have also become affiliated with the humanitarian response. Some local supermarkets accept refugees' WFP food vouchers as payment (Figure 19) and Syrians retrieve cash assistance from the UNHCR and the International Red Cross via eye scan at selected banks (Figure 20). The presence of turnstiles and gated entry doors indicates that this is a place where Syrians regularly gather to wait. Other places are only temporarily converted into NGO centres. For example, World Vision, a Christian NGO, rents a local kindergarten several days a week to offer free pre-school education to Syrian children (Figure 21).

Figure 18 Emirati Field Hospital, Mafraq (Wagner 2016)

Figure 19 Joint Save the Children and UNICEF office (Wagner 2016)

Figure 20 One of several local supermarkets where Syrians can pay with WFP food vouchers (Wagner 2016)

Figure 21 Cairo Amman Bank, Mafraq city centre, where Syrians retrieve cash assistance from the UNHCR and the ICRC (Wagner 2016)

Figure 22 A local kindergarten turned into Syrian pre-school by World Vision Germany, a Christian NGO (Wagner 2016)

"Humanitarian branding" is pursued not only on buildings, but also on objects and even people's bodies. My Jordanian host mother recalls that in the early days of Zaatari Camp, refugees often resold products from the camp in town to make some much-needed cash. Mafraq's sidewalks were covered with milk cartons with humanitarian labels. Years later, one still finds the UNHCR logo on tarpaulin and blankets that poor Jordanians bought from Syrians and used to repair leaking roofs and draught-proof doors. Many NGO-run educational programmes give out items with their logos on them, and Syrian children wearing T-Shirts and bag packs with UNICEF or other humanitarian signatures are a common sight. In the early years of the Syrian refugee influx, these goodies were distributed quite indiscriminately. One day, my Jordanian host mother surprised me by saying that her 12-year old nephew had received a similar bag. That the children of comparatively well-off Jordanians also exhibited NGO logos blurs the boundaries between locals and refugees, at least in the eyes of those unfamiliar with Mafraq's finer social distinctions.[27]

Various scholars have argued that the big urban projects of modernity entail superseding more organic ways of thinking about space and that local histories of belonging have been flattened in colonial (Mitchell 1991) and, later, capitalist (De Certeau 1984; Lefebvre 1991)

[27] Although the bullying of Syrian children was a frequent occurrence, local youngsters did not seem to associate wearing backpacks and clothes with NGO logos with social stigma, or fear of being mistaken for a Syrian. Rather, Syrian and Jordanian children relied on other cues to identify each other. Due to Mafraq's double-shift educational system, locals went to school in the morning, while Syrians were taught in the afternoon. Syrian children could also be identified by their cheap clothes and plastic sandals that Jordanians only wear inside the bathroom.

cities. This type of analysis tends to pit the bottom-up perspective of city-dwellers against urban planners with a supposedly panoptic vision and a total grasp of space, be they colonisers, governments or corporations.

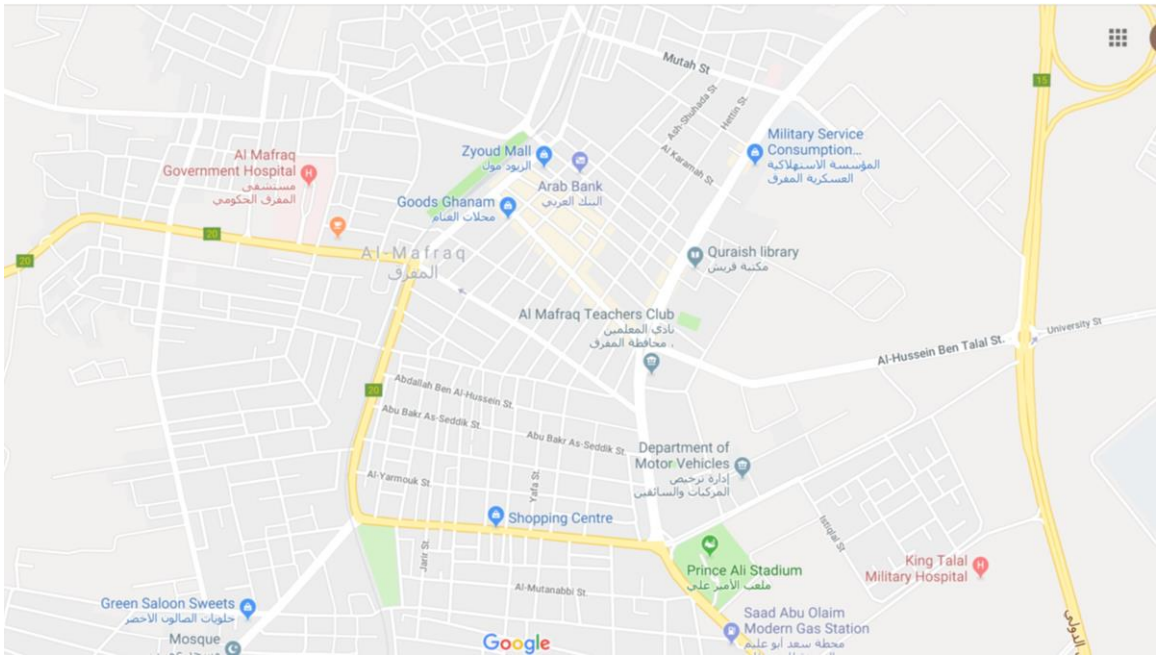

Figure 23 Online map of Mafraq (Google Maps 2018)

Although VIVA members were probably not aware of it, they entered an urban environment that had been colonised several times before. A look at Google Maps (Figure 22) does not reveal an archaic village or a medieval medina, but rather a modern city, made up of chessboard-like neighbourhoods, the result of urban growth during the 20th century when Jordan was under Ottoman and British rule, before becoming an independent state. Foreign states and economic actors have shaped Mafraq's layout. As part of the Ottoman Empire, it became a stop on the Hijaz Railway - until today, the tracks dissect the city. Its original mud houses were replaced by multi-storey buildings after the influx of Christian engineers and new job opportunities for locals that came with the Mosul-Haifa pipeline, owned by the Iraqi Petroleum Company – "Iraqi" only in name, but owned by British and other Western firms.

In his study of 19th-century Egypt, Mitchell (1991) argues that the European colonial project did not only unfold through brutal force, but also through the introduction of new forms of representation and mapping. Building model villages and cities was meant to facilitate the establishment of modern institutions – schools, hospitals and the military –

but also the surveillance of their inhabitants and their economic exploitability. Reordering space aimed at standardizing social processes and clearing up "chaos", establishing visible hierarchies, and, ultimately, making urban space "legible" (Mitchell 1991: 45). Mafraq's geometric street grid is a legacy of these endeavours and VIVA members like Maria stuck to its linear, modern shopping streets, afraid of getting lost in denser neighbourhoods. Quite ironically, they moved in the footsteps of former colonial powers.

For additional conceptual armoury, this chapter looks at the seminal work of Lefebvre (1991) who argues that space is not simply a neutral container for social life, but rather constituted through the interplay of built environment and social processes. Lefebvre distinguishes three ways of thinking about space that together produce "social space" (40) – the three are interwoven, but often interact in conflicting ways. "Representations of space" (Lefebvre 1991: 38) are how urban planners and scientists visualize cities, often as maps. In the contemporary city, an abstract and panoptic representation of space is usually the dominant mode of thinking about the urban. By way of contrast, "representational spaces" (39) are spaces that are made meaningful through being invested with signs and symbols. "Spatial practice" (38) pertains to the ways city dwellers move about their city, i.e. actual instances of navigation, movement, waiting and stillness. Lefebvre's spatial triad is frequently used in critiques of neoliberal urban development and gentrification projects, often to point out conflicts of interests between city-dwellers and urban planners (e.g. Fyfe 1996 on Glasgow; Kam Ng et al. 2010 on Hong Kong).

However, this chapter does not seek to mechanically apply Lefebvre's triadic model to the study of Mafraq but rather draw inspiration from it to explore the tension between the great visibility of stationary and mobile forms of aid – NGO logos and VIVA volunteers in cars – and the limitations of humanitarian knowledge penetration and "branding" that become apparent in aid providers' and beneficiaries' actual spatial practices. In other words, it asks: has all of Mafraq turned into a "humanitarian city"?

Since the 1980s, academics have interrogated the spatialities of aid, humanitarians' limited knowledge of the field, the impact of humanitarian infrastructures on local economies, and their role in exacerbating power imbalances between aid workers and beneficiaries. Studies of space are often embedded into wider critiques of aid's allegedly neutral and apolitical

nature. Yet much of the existing research focuses on places that bear little resemblance to a sleepy mid-sized town like Mafraq: remote rural and high-risk areas. Duffield (in Tschirhart 2011) and Smirl (2015) investigate the humanitarian compound, a recent development in the context of heightened perceptions of danger and increasingly securitized aid missions. Walled humanitarian infrastructure reinforces the physical separation between humanitarians and their targets, together with new technologies of remote control and management. Connections between compounds also superimpose new pathways and trajectories over existing local infrastructure, as aid workers move "within a protected archipelago of international space made up, basically, of a series of fortified aid compounds and guarded amenities linked by secure transport corridors" (Duffield, in Tschirhart 2011: 8).

However, unlike the UNHCR, most international organizations and grassroots NGOs in Mafraq do not hide in compounds. Bigger aid agencies like Caritas, IMC and ICRC, but also local churches and Islamic charities possess offices of their own. Smaller NGOs like VIVA come to Mafraq several days a week and drive around freely. And VIVA certainly does not consider Mafraq dangerous. Unlike outside the UNHCR office, Syrians were never subjected to security checks at any of the VIVA events I helped organizing. Hence, my analysis is less concerned with high walls, but rather with the great visibility of NGO logos and grassroots volunteers in cars.

Revisiting Agier's theory of "city-camps"

Until now, I have focused on the perspective of humanitarian actors. But what about the people who actually inhabit Mafraq, locals and Syrians? I suggest that one of the effects of hypervisible aid is that even residents, some of them with many years of living or visiting Mafraq, have begun to conceive of the place as a site of *refugeeness*. To make sense of Mafraq's hybridity as an urban area and a part of "Aid Land" (Mosse 2011), I revisit Agier's study of refugee camps where he adopts the gaze of urban anthropology on "city-camps" (Agier 2002: 318).

Agier understands camps as a specific form of humanitarian management that serve the "socio-spatial organization of the controlling and distancing of undesirables" (2011: 179).

Interning a great number of strangers together wipes out their pre-war identities and social networks. Yet subjecting encamped populations to spatial segregation has unintended side effects, as it creates anonymity, heterogeneity and opportunities for new forms of sociability - the pre-conditions of modern city life. As sites of emergency relief turns into places of permanent residence, they become increasingly urbanized. Idiosyncratic place names, informal businesses and distinct neighbourhoods emerge, but also new social hierarchies among the refugee population. Agier's theory is modelled on Dadaab Camp in Kenya and Palestinian refugee camps in the Middle East which have existed for decades and often been incorporated into expanding cities. These days, Al-Wahdat camp in southeast Amman, for instance, looks like any other lower-class neighbourhood in the Jordanian capital. In later writings, Agier (2014) also detects an urban logic in informal and temporary refugee camps like Patras in Greece and Calais' infamous "Jungle". In a similar vein, news reports and academic research on Zaatari Camp close to Mafraq have focused on the emergence of informal economies, epitomized by Zaatari's famously bustling shopping street "Champs-Elysées" (e.g. Dalal 2015). However, Agier argues that camps can never fully become cities because of their lack of political recognition and insecure legal status: "everything is potential, but nothing develops" (2002: 334). To truly inhabit a city means to have opportunities for political action and ultimately for citizenship, but also to escape a liminal temporality: to be allowed to stay for good.

Somewhat provocatively, one might ask whether the strongly felt presence of sedentary and mobile humanitarian actors has pushed Mafraq to develop into the opposite direction: is the town becoming more like the archetypical form of humanitarian governance - a camp? At first sight, its urban mess has little in common with the uniform rows of white containers in nearby Zaatari camp. Due to their sheer numbers, Syrians live amidst the local population. If there is spatial segregation, it only becomes palpable in certain places of consumption, e.g. coffeeshops and more expensive restaurants, where Syrians work as waiters and cooks, but cannot afford to spend their free time. Most importantly, Syrians' movements are not curtailed by fences, and buses to Amman and other cities leave every couple of minutes. But then, there are NGO logos everywhere, and VIVA's driving practices are not unlike those of foreign aid workers in camps and high-risk areas, characterized by an intermittent presence, a constant coming and going, and high mobility differentials with refugees. And Mafraq bears some resemblance to camps if we understand the latter in

Agier's sense, i.e. as places of "dis-identification" (Agier 2016: 463) and multiple losses: of Syrians' pre-war history in town and forms of belonging that are different from being a "refugee" in Jordan, e.g. as employees, frequent border-crossers, even occasional marital partners.

On the one hand, the erasure of Syrians' pre-war presence runs through refugee families themselves, opposing men and women, but also older and younger generations. By way of illustration, Naila's father, Abu Mohammad, a spry man in his sixties, sometimes offered to walk me home from Al-Lufdein, the neighbourhood beyond the railway where his family lived. On the way to my little house on the other side of town, we had to cross the vegetable souq in the city centre. As my watchful host parents repeatedly told me, the hesba, as it was called in local dialect, was no place for young women. Its arcades and windy alleyways were home to local thugs and rough men who worked as vegetable vendors. Abu Mohammad, though, had no qualms about taking me there. Like a whirlwind, he led me through the hesba's maze, stopping once in a while to pick up a handful of tomatoes or some eggplants. With a smile, he bid me farewell when we stepped back into the sunlight of an ordinary shopping street. Having worked in and around Mafraq for a decade, he clearly knew his way around.

By way of contrast, Abu Mohammad's children walked a different Mafraq. Naila, one of his younger daughters in her early twenties, was particularly shy. She would often ask me to accompany her, so she could visit NGO offices in town. This gave me the opportunity to see Mafraq through her eyes. On an ordinary day, she would take me to a garment store to try on a dress at the edge of the souq and then lead me up the stairs to the office of a Jordanian NGO where she had taken a course on landmines. With no pre-war working experience in town, her mental map of Mafraq was thus reduced to a few favourite shops, but mostly various humanitarian locales where she queued for aid or took classes. Obviously, her movements in town were also curtailed by greater restrictions on females' freedom of movement. But many younger Syrians like herself, male and female, began to perceive Mafraq – and her compatriots that moved within in – mostly in relation to aid.

On the other hand, the visibility of humanitarian action in Mafraq makes Syrians lose their status as economic agents in the eyes of the locals. Besides the presence of foreign cars,

cornered by Syrian women in the streets, Jordanians are often put in the role of spectators when humanitarian house visits unfold. On arrival, I frequently found the Jordanian landlord or neighbours at the doorstep. Poor locals asked for help and sometimes VIVA left them a food parcel, regardless of nationality. Once, the owner of a house tried to enter his Syrian tenants' flat by force and I had to shut him out, in front of a refugee woman, her eight children and astonished volunteers. In the eyes of my Jordanian host family, and many others, the visibility of aid indicated its abundance and easy availability. To locals, it suggested that Syrians comfortably lived off humanitarian assistance. This obscured the irregular nature of aid delivery to individual refugee families and other ways in which they struggled to make a living, e.g. through work in the informal economy or kinship support networks.

One might conclude that life in humanitarian Mafraq has similar effects like a camp. Humanitarian actors impose a spatial and visual order and mobility patterns of their own, and aid's prominence in the cityscape obliterates pre-war histories of belonging and economic activities. "Dis-identification" is compounded by the lack of political agency, an effect not of the practices of foreign organizations like VIVA, but of domestic asylum policies: as Syrians in Jordan cannot acquire citizenship, Mafraq will never fully be their city. In this regard, Mafraq is not a "humanitarian *city*" in Agier's sense – as a site of nascent political action and new modes of sociability. Rather, the town has turned into a "*humanitarian* city" in which Syrians are reduced to recipients of aid rather than economic agents, spouses or bearers of rights, in the eyes of aid workers, locals – and often their own.

VIVA's mobility strategies: Car dependency and road bias in humanitarian spaces

The third section of this chapter demonstrates that not all of Mafraq has been "humanitarianized". A look at VIVA's mobility practices reveals that its volunteers did not merely navigate a dehistoricized, homogenized "space of aid" whose parameters had been set by more mainstream aid agencies. Rather, it highlights that humanitarian knowledge penetration of space is always partial and that VIVA volunteers often lost control while driving around in a fragmented version of "Aid land".

To begin with, VIVA hardly had a panoptic vision of Mafraq's road network. Its members certainly did not look at the town on maps, satellite pictures or from the top of a skyscraper, like De Certeau's (1984) urbanists. During an ordinary day of volunteering, Maria struggled to pinpoint locations on an online app that only provided a rudimentary map of Mafraq. She often gave up, relying on my memory or endless rounds of phone calls instead. Unfortunately, available maps of Mafraq were mostly useless. Google Maps or OpenStreetMap, for instance, tell you little about what it is actually *like* to drive in Mafraq. Despite the town's mostly geometric structure, most of its arteries are one-way streets, forcing drivers into frequent detours and causing considerable traffic jams during the day. That not all drivers adhere to traffic signs often only adds to the confusion. Google Maps also indicates a handful of urban monuments and institutions. Some of them, such as the Teachers' Club, are hardly known to anyone other than locals working in the public sector. Others, although familiar to VIVA and Syrians in town, are missing. Online street names do not match the names actually used by locals, Syrians and aid workers, and on the ground, there is hardly any signposting.

This said, more mainstream humanitarian actors certainly used maps and or had access to more professional mapping tools. During a visit to the local office of the International Rescue Committee, a well-known international aid organisation, I noticed huge and detailed maps of Mafraq on the wall. The town was subdivided into coloured districts according to the area's shelter needs. Statistical and geographical information combined steered the IRC's humanitarian response. By comparison, staff members and volunteers of VIVA did not use maps in planning their house visits. The lists of potential aid recipients that each volunteer team received on each day of "outreach" were not disaggregated by neighbourhood. They only contained names, often incomplete, phone numbers, and sometimes the number of children. A day of volunteering could literally take us *anywhere* in town and I could never plan a route in advance. How did VIVA volunteers find their way around?

"Can you tell me where you live?" Back in the car with Gabriel and Maria, I was expecting to receive increasingly detailed directions, from the name of the neighbourhood to the exact

location of the house. By 2016, Syrian refugees in Mafraq were so used to receiving house visits from various grassroots organisations that they showed little surprise at the impromptu phone call of a female foreigner and knew the procedure well enough to play along with my instructions. Initially, my interlocutors would indicate the area they lived in, e.g. “Hay al-janoubi”, and sometimes specify how I should access it, for example: “when you come into the neighbourhood from Jerash circle…” This first step was seldom difficult. Mafraq’s neighbourhoods were limited and I was soon familiar with all of them. Once inside, it soon got trickier. “Inside Hay al-Janoubi, go to the Mosque of the Iraqi martyrs. Turn right and pass the Quran school next to the kindergarten. You know, the one where they also give out aid to Syrians? Then continue to Aisha Mosque. Take the second street right. My house is the one next to the electricity pole – the one with the blue door.” Here, the directions are represented as an uninterrupted flow of information. In reality, though, they resembled a verbal ping pong between Syrians and myself, sustained over a series of brief phone calls.

Needless to say, I got lost most of the time. I often struggled with the speakers’ Arabic, either because I did not understand the vocabulary they were using, or because I did not know the places mentioned. To make up for my confusion, I frequently enlisted helpers on the streets and in nearby grocery stores. I often passed them the phone, so they could talk to Syrian aid beneficiaries directly. Male Jordanian shopkeepers were most helpful when it came to locating institutions of public life, especially mosques and schools. I relied on Syrian women – recognizable by their black *abayas* – to direct me to nearby NGO centres. Although driving from one end of Mafraq straight to the other takes no more than fifteen minutes, it sometimes cost me an hour to find my interlocutors’ homes. At our destination, Syrians often greeted us at the front door. Women sent children to pick us up on the street. Short-term volunteers like Gabriel got out of the car and began unpacking the trunk. Male Europeans greeted children and Syrian men with a handshake or a high-five.

Following a VIVA car from Mafraq’s public library, this morning’s meeting point, to Abu Mohammad’s house, illustrates the importance of humanitarian landmarks, frequently mentioned during phone calls with Syrian beneficiaries. From a purely practical point of view, European VIVA volunteers stuck to NGO logos – in Latin script – that were easily

recognizable. Maria and I got to know many mainstream NGO centres when renting rooms for our home-school's summer camp or organising English classes. Sometimes, we turned to international aid agencies like Save the Children. On other days, we cooperated with Jordanian NGOs. Despite VIVA's anti-institutional approach, its members' knowledge of certain parts of town was thus informed by the presence of more established aid providers that the organization partnered with.

What the brief introductory exchange with Syrians over the phone also reveals is that it left little time for additional information or negotiating the terms of the visit. When Syrians missed a call or were not at home, we moved on to the next family on the list. Sometimes the VIVA staff member in charge accepted to return for a visit on a later date during the same day or week. When the phone number was dead, the recipient's name was crossed out and no further inquiries were made. In my experience, most Syrians were available. Hardly anybody ever declined a visit. In the following, we will look at other ways in which VIVA's car use curtailed their interactions with Syrian refugees besides imposing their own schedule, and limited their exposure to Syrians' lived reality in Mafraq.

First, like foreign development professionals who worked with the UNCHR and other big agencies, VIVA's four permanent staff members lived in Amman. Short-term volunteers were hosted at the Schneller school, a Christian school with a guesthouse located in Marka, on the road between Amman and Mafraq. During "outreach" weeks, visitors had to leave the town by sunset at the latest and VIVA did not usually work on weekends and during Islamic holidays. To short-term visitors, day- and week-time Mafraq seemed to be a hot and crowded place. This impression was reinforced by the sense of urgency that results from short-term volunteering. Helpers from abroad who only came to Jordan for a week or two wanted to visit as many Syrians as possible. But then, they had no opportunity to experience Mafraq's "other face", the change of rhythm in urban life at night and during Ramadan, when city bustle calms down and the town turns into a much quieter, at times even deserted version of itself. That VIVA did not have a permanent presence on the ground also meant that staff members often missed out on non-aid related events that structure Syrians' lives, including weddings and funerals.

Second, even inside Mafraq, NGO members and volunteers rarely walked. Rather, the car window turned into the mobile barrier between refugees and lay aid workers. Smirl (2015) asks how humanitarians' car use shapes the relationship with aid recipients. She argues that white SUVs have become emblematic of emergency relief in crisis zones around the world. The sight of SUVs has been charged with numerous, and sometimes contradictory, ideas, including safety, capitalism, adventurism and wealth. "However, to the Third World, it has arguably come to represent the petroleum-fuelled inequality […]. More recently, the SUV may also be seen as a symbol of hybridity and the co-option, by local power brokers, of Western elite dominance" (Smirl 2015: 101). While VIVA did not use SUVs, their vehicles' green license plates identified them as rental cars. Female drivers without a headscarf and in a Western attire also made NGO cars stick out. Much of the rest of Smirl's analysis holds true for these more inconspicuous aid vehicles. In a town littered with garbage and left-over food, being inside a car automatically dampened Mafraq's outside heat, noises and smell, allowing VIVA members and volunteers to move around inside a little bubble, at least temporarily detached from the outside mess.

Third, experiencing Mafraq by car distorted volunteers' perception of the town's *geography*. VIVA members usually limited their visits to places easily accessible by car inside Mafraq town and stuck to the larger traffic arteries that they were familiar with. When I rode a car with Maria, she often made significant detours to regain one of Mafraq's three parallel shopping streets: *Sharia Baladiya*, *Sharia Jerash* and *Sharia Ashrin*. In the early 1980s, Chambers (1981) described the "roadside bias" (5) of rural developers who preferred tarmacked roads and rural areas close to urban centres. As a result, "the poorer people […] tend not to be seen" (Chambers 1981: 7). In northern Jordan, many refugees came from poorer suburbs and villages to register for aid, but VIVA's operations were restricted to Mafraq city. Sometimes, potential aid recipients told me on the phone that they lived further away. Often, the staff member in charge refused to venture out into rural areas, for fear of getting lost and losing too much time in the countryside. VIVA's path dependence also introduced a second type of bias: volunteers had less opportunities to explore more affluent neighbourhoods of Mafraq where Syrians were less likely to reside. Nine months into my fieldwork, I realized that Maria, who had begun working in Mafraq at roughly the same time as me, had never been inside the centrally located souq, an area of

intense business activity. Therefore, VIVA's selective knowledge of the town might have led staff members, but especially volunteers, to overestimate poverty levels.[28]

Fourth, distancing oneself from "the field" was also realized through smaller gestures. Upon their arrival to Jordan, VIVA volunteers were briefed about road safety and food. For the drive from and to Amman, several NGO cars usually drove in convoys. Short-term volunteers were told not to accept tap water inside Syrian households or eat on the street. Back in the car, they would often produce antiseptic gel and ritually pass it around among each other. These precautionary measures were harmless and not taken in bad faith. Still, they applied a sanitary logic to "refugees" and their life worlds, marking them as potentially "infectious", polluted and dangerous – a striking contrast with the affective economy of grassroots and Evangelical volunteering (cf. chapter 5). Taken together, small gestures produced Mafraq as a separate "space", and crossing "borders" was highlighted through innocuous rituals. For example, during week-long "out-reach missions", the end of the day was often celebrated by getting an ice cream at a local gas station on the highway outside Mafraq. To me, this daily treat was associated with fatigue, but also immense emotional relief, having left destitute living conditions and exasperated and demanding Syrians behind, at least until the next morning.

In sum, it appears that for VIVA, driving in Mafraq came with numerous restrictions which went against its aspirations of greater *relationality*. How volunteers experienced urban space limited the ways in which they could get to know Syrians and their lives. VIVA's inconspicuous practices resulted in spatial distance and emotional detachment between staff members, volunteers and Syrians, effects akin to those of the mobility practices of more mainstream humanitarian actors. This apparent contradiction invites further reflections about the mobility of humanitarians versus the mobility of humanitarian *technologies*. Scott-Smith (2018) recently argued that humanitarians' fascination with

[28] VIVA's permanent staff, with their emphasis on creating a presence on the ground and becoming involved in Syrians' lives, still developed a more fine-grained understanding of Mafraq's urban and humanitarian landscape than foreign development *professionals*. Over time, VIVA established working relationships with other international and local organizations in town, and sometimes rented their localities for trainings or meetings. As VIVA's local focal point was a young local man who adhered to the Mafraq Unity Church, it had particularly close connections with this institution. By way of contrast, a foreign staff member of Mafraq's UNHCR office that I interviewed was unaware of the existence of this church, after all the aid provider best known to refugees in town. And an international staff member of the Doctors without Borders hospital in nearby Irbid, which technically also caters for refugees from the Mafraq area, only knew the Emirati field hospital, i.e. an international humanitarian (and medical) structure.

mobile technologies reflects aid's intertwinement with wider neoliberal agendas and its focus on individual survival, rather than addressing underlying structural causes of poverty and displacement. In response, he suggests "introducing *stickiness* […] into our theoretical vocabulary, […] to demonstrate how fluid technologies come in a range of forms, from those that are expansive, frictionless and mobile (but also unstable and unsettled), to those that are firm, constrained, and bounded (but also paternalistic and inflexible)" (Scott-Smith 2018: 7). Importantly, stickiness is understood not only in a material, but also in a behavioural sense. "Sticky" humanitarian technologies limit the range of possible behaviours of aid recipients. Following Scott-Smith, one might say that car-bound aid distribution in Mafraq increased VIVA's range of movements but restricted and codified Syrians' reactions. The standardized dialogues which unfolded over the phone, an example of which I reproduced in this section, show that even mobile forms of assistance were deeply ritualized. And VIVA's *mobility* led to Syrian *paralysis*, as potential aid recipients had to wait at home for the relieving phone call.

However, I am also interested in overlooked "stickiness" in a metaphorical sense. Notwithstanding obvious mobility differentials between Syrians and members and volunteers of VIVA, the latter hardly resemble the mystified image of cosmopolitan aid workers parachuted to sites of intervention and traversing "aid land" at high speed. On the contrary, a closer look at their mobility practices reveals frequent experiences of waiting and disorientation. This is the direct result of VIVA superficial knowledge of Mafraq's urban geography. Its representatives navigate a cityscape that remains mostly opaque to them.

Syrian women's "mobile waiting" and shifting the boundaries of public space

VIVA's practice of driving in Mafraq has another important effect: it cements mobility inequalities between providers and recipients of aid, between well-meaning volunteers in cars and Syrians on foot. This is thrown into sharp relief if we compare VIVA's knowledge of urban geography and mobility practices with those of their counterparts: Syrian *women*.
In Mafraq, Syrians' interactions with the humanitarian system are gendered. Mostly women register for aid at NGO centres and with mobile aid workers. This reflects men's fear of getting arrested in the streets, but also their daily schedule – many are simply too busy working in the informal economy to stand in the queue or chase cars with foreigners. But

many aid providers also consider Syrian women “better” and more reliable aid recipients (in chapter 6, I further explore VIVA’s and other faith-based organisations’ female empowerment agenda).

Like VIVA, Syrian women were striving for more closeness in the aid encounter, not because they sought a more authentic and personal connection, but rather to maximize material benefits. And they also seemed to find their bearings in similar ways: by relying on humanitarian landmarks. Like Naila, whom we met earlier, many of my female acquaintances were able to point out NGO offices even in remote neighbourhoods of Mafraq but were ignorant of well-known urban features known to locals. For example, Nadia, a refugee woman involved in VIVA’s home-schooling project told me about a municipal warehouse for textbooks where she had acquired learning material for her Syrian students - a place none of my Jordanian acquaintances had ever heard about, not even my host mother, herself a retired high school teacher. However, the same woman was unaware of the location of the “Amman bus station”, Mafraq’s major transportation hub located close to the city centre.

At first sight, Syrian women spent a lot of time with stationary waiting outside NGO offices – a by-product of many aid agencies and NGOs’ strict schedule of providing assistance, as they had fixed dates and days for refugee registration. Waiting inside and outside offices and in the streets also brought about new forms of networks and solidarity among refugees. My female Syrian friends frequently told me about other women they had met in the queue outside the Emirati Field Hospital, at the local church or at the Caritas office, and struck a conversation with. Information about new aid agencies and NGO programmes in town were often circulated among those who waited – mostly women – and new friendships were later sustained on WhatsApp. Therefore, normalizing waiting for aid led to the emergence of a female Syrian counter-public that made it possible for women to socialize with others beyond their restricted kinship networks and outside their homes – for short stints, but repeatedly.

Nevertheless, female refugees did not only passively “wait in the queue”. After half a day of house visits, we usually took a break on the side of the road. Oftentimes, volunteers and VIVA staff remained in the car, passing around home-made sandwiches, packed-up sweets

and water bottles. However, we rarely stayed long, as the car was quickly surrounded by Syrian women and children, knocking on windows and waving UNHCR documents at us, with hand-written phone numbers on them. “Are you doing registration [tasjil]?”, they inquired. To buy us a moment of calm, I collected contact details and made vague promises of return. In VIVA’s office in Amman, these women’s contact details were later added to the growing list of Syrians waiting for a house visit. Some day in the future, sometimes after a month, sometimes half a year later, they would receive a phone call similar to the one described above.

A frequent sight in Mafraq, fully veiled Syrian women, often in groups, roamed the streets, trying to spot groups of Western foreigners or anybody suspected of being the representative of an aid organization. The probability of such chance encounters was low and Syrian women spent much time meandering the streets. Still, this type of aid-seeking behaviour reveals that waiting and movement are not mutually exclusive and that “mobile” waiting can be turned into a proactive survival strategy, a spatial practice allowing women to stake claims to aid.

When I was with members of VIVA and got trapped in the streets, I usually rather gave in and collected registration sheets than fend off supplicants raising their voices and tugging at my clothes. This is not to say that I considered Syrian women violent. Having befriended many of them, I was acutely aware of their frustration and perceived helplessness. Catching aid workers outside their cars was often the only opportunity for interacting with them face-to-face. It temporarily suspended the physical and imagined distance that even well-meaning volunteers like those from VIVA imposed on refugees.

Discussing “mobile waiting” in terms of De Certeau’s opposition of *strategy* and *tactics* helps us understand *why* Syrian women’s walking practices were so efficient (cf. De Certeau, Jameson and Lowitt 1980; De Certeau 1984). For De Certeau, *strategy* refers to the panoptic practices in which the police, but also urban planners, public authorities and the military conceive of the city. As I argued before, this does not reflect how VIVA perceives the city or plans its humanitarian interventions. But stark mobility and wealth differentials between its members and Syrian refugees prevail. In return, *tactics* are the ways in which

those without power respond to and circumvent strategy. Not a coincidence that one of De Certeau's favourite examples is walking, as opposed to driving, or even flying.

To be clear, Syrian women who gathered in the streets did not intend to stage political protests, denounce the unjust distribution of aid or power inequalities between foreign helpers and refugees. Their intentions were much more mundane and embedded into their everyday lives, a seemingly endless cycle of registering for and waiting for aid. They simply tried to get their names on VIVA's list. What made "mobile waiting" a powerful example of *tactical action* was not Syrian women's high degree of organization or their "dangerous" appearance, but rather their grasp of the *rhythms* of giving aid. While they had no control over aid workers' schedule, they could still create a temporary disturbance of humanitarian flows by lying in wait for cars with foreign-looking passengers. The cumulative effect of these actions allowed them to voice their claims – and often their complaints.

Still, Syrian women on foot could not possibly be faster than VIVA volunteers or bring cars in motion to a halt. Usually, they tried to spot house visits in their neighbourhood or to make contact with volunteers when they stopped at a shop or a restaurant. Others reframed the set-up of the encounter altogether, by forcing aid workers to meet them on a different terrain. To this purpose, they sometimes extended the boundaries of public space into places they had greater control of: into their own living rooms.

Previously, I pointed out that smaller organizations like VIVA could not afford to rent permanent venues in Mafraq. Finding in-door meeting space, sheltered from male onlookers, was particularly valuable to NGOs working with children and women (cf. chapter 6). In this case, Mafraq's strict gender divide and norms turned into an advantage for Syrian women able to provide a resource that VIVA could not do without, by opening up their living rooms to its gatherings.

Figure 23 shows a collection of women's shoes outside Layan's apartment, taken on the occasion of a gathering of Syrian teachers employed in VIVA's home-schooling project. In chapter 3, we met Layan, an ingenious woman from a village in the Homs governorate who established a preferential connection with not only one, but several Evangelical organizations in town, including VIVA. This allowed her to access jobs in the humanitarian sector that she could redistribute to her next of kin. Much of Layan's success came from the fact that she opened up her apartment to meetings of VIVA and other organisations. (It was also a place of survival work where the family worked together to produce candy floss and sticky sweets, sold by Layan's husband and sons in the street.) In turn, Layan's living room became a training centre for Syrian women, most of them unmarried girls, and a makeshift primary school. Over a duration of several months, Nadia, a Syrian widow from Homs and a university graduate in French literature, taught a mixed group of more than ten children between the ages of four and fourteen reading, writing, math and basic English. That Layan's living room temporarily turned into a semi-public space was evidenced by the fact that women usually kept their headscarves on and the rest of the apartment was off limits to visitors. Inviting NGOs in did not only allow Syrian women to overcome mobility differentials and restrictions on female movement. It also came with tangible short-term benefits. VIVA contributed to its regular meeting space by providing blackboards, cushions and carpets. Finally, Layan's living room was also a place where Maria and I frequently brought short-term volunteers to introduce them to VIVA's home-schooling project. Often, our visitors were teachers themselves and had brought textbooks and wooden games from Europe. By opening up her living room, but also by making sure that the educational material stayed behind after volunteers' departure, Layan managed to occupy a central role in VIVA's activities. Unlike the complaints of Syrian women in the streets, we could not simply ignore her requests. When Layan called me and summoned me to her flat, I came

Figure 24 Women's shoes outside Layan's apartment (Wagner 2016)

straight away. She thus managed to reverse the usual schedule of VIVA's humanitarian house visits. In Layan's case, the Syrian host imposed *her* timetable on her foreign visitors and forced aid workers to become mobile.

Conclusion

The fifth chapter discussed the relationship between the visibility of aid and VIVA's mobility strategies. It argued that Mafraq's urban space has been "humanitarianized" – but only to a certain extent. For VIVA, *driving* around makes possible "outreach" missions to Syrians' homes. For Syrian women, *walking* around allows them to stop foreign aid workers – or anybody who looks like them – and sign up for assistance, the precondition to receiving house visits. However, members of VIVA and Syrian women do not simply populate an existing humanitarian "stage" that has been set by aid agencies with a more permanent presence and more substantial funds. Mobile elements like foreign-looking volunteers in rental cars and the black abayas of Syrian women fluttering in the hot wind, quickly gathering and dispersing, have also become part of the scenery and therefore contribute to the town's appearance as "humanitarian." In Mafraq's streets, and under the watchful eye of locals and fellow Syrians, short-term visitors from Europe first turn into "aid workers", and Syrian women into "aid recipients". While VIVA's and Syrian women's activities do not leave material traces, they have an important performative function, signalling to locals and Syrians alike how roles in the humanitarian encounter are distributed, and ultimately that Syrians and foreign visitors relate to the town in a relationship of aid. In this regard, aid providers have indeed reordered space in Mafraq: through stationary NGO logos that have become important landmarks for humanitarians and Syrian refugees alike, and mobile aid workers in cars (and the Syrians who chase them) that have become part of the cityscape. This said, through their car windows, VIVA volunteers only perceive flashes of the humanitarian city - more often than not, their superficial knowledge of the town leads them astray. Although house visits are meant to put into practice VIVA's longing for authentic and close encounters with refugees, they produce new forms of distance and immobilize their Syrian counterparts. In sum, disentangling VIVA's various engagements with space allows us to problematize their practices of giving aid, ask how they unfold in the streets and how they remake Mafraq as a "humanitarian city".

Nevertheless, an analysis of mobility inequalities between VIVA representatives and Syrians cannot stop short at the urban level. From the start, wider legal and wealth differentials overshadow the encounter between foreign helpers and refugees. A final anecdote illustrates how wider legal inequality plays out inside VIVA's cars which frequently turn into spaces of exception outside the Jordanian law. In fall 2016, I was racing on the highway parallel to the Syrian border in a car with Maria and Baher, a Syrian teacher in VIVA's home-schooling project. We were on our way to Irbid, a nearby town, for a tour of the local archaeology museum. Baher's students travelled on the rusty minibus that followed us. In the rear-view mirror, I saw them dance and clap their hands, together with the other teachers. Baher, though, had preferred to stay with me and I could sense him fidget around in the back seat behind me. As we learned in chapter 2, Baher's papers were not in order and the presence of a foreigner promised some sort of protection. Shortly before Irbid, Jordanian traffic police brought us to a halt. Maria wound down the window and a young officer with a moustache peeked in. I playfully ran my fingers through my hair and explained that we were aid workers and on our way to a children's activity. He laughed and waved us through. Nobody's papers got checked, but this short encounter might well have had severe, and potentially lethal, consequences for Baher. Had he got caught without a proper ID and a work permit, he would have risked deportation to Azraq camp or even to Syria. Maria and myself, however, had nothing to worry about, although as foreigners on tourist visas our legal status in Jordan was equally ambiguous. But we had been stopped many times before, usually on the highway between Mafraq and Amman, and knew what to expect. As blond European women, we were the frequent target of police controls, but our fair hair turned into a laissez-passer. Officers were usually more interested in a minute of innocent banter than seeing Maria's passport, driving licence and registration papers for the car. On the rare occasions that they did ask for paperwork, they only took a quick glance before handing it back to us. No-one ever seemed to notice, or pointed out, that Maria's tourist visa had expired months earlier. As a European, she could just pay a small fine – one Jordanian Dinar for each day of overstay – at the airport in Amman when leaving the country.

The incident sheds further light on Jordan's unequal treatment of different foreign populations and the alignment of migration regimes with foreign affairs. In chapter 2, I argued that Baher's illegality in Jordan was never absolute but only became relevant in

specific situations and vis-à-vis certain Jordanian authorities. In other words, his illegality was graded. A comparison between Baher's illegality and that of Maria and myself shows that a similar reasoning can be applied across different groups of non-nationals. The Jordanian state uses some foreigners' legal limbo – usually of low-skilled workers in the informal economy like Syrian refugees and Egyptian labour migrants – as a tool of discipline. At the same time, it generously overlooks the shady legal status of supposedly wealthy European visitors. In contrast to Syrian refugees, VIVA members can enter Jordan as they please and move freely inside its territory. In Mafraq, Syrian workers and those without paperwork frequently go into hiding. By way of contrast, volunteers' humanitarian activities are widely tolerated by local authorities, although most are not officially registered with VIVA and their prayers at Syrian homes sometimes come dangerously close to - illegal - proselytizing (cf. chapter 5).

The next chapter takes us inside Syrians' living rooms, and to the very moment when VIVA volunteers and refugees finally encounter each other in person.

Chapter 5: VIVA's house visits and "hospitality" – Christian compassion, social control and performative refugeehood

On a grey winter day, I shared a car with Maria and three visitors who had arrived from Europe only two days earlier for one week of volunteering in Mafraq and Azraq camp. The two men, an accountant and a graphic designer who had recently spent a month in Lebanon were in their early thirties. The third person was a retired nurse. She had travelled the Arab world numerous times and even worked in Iran during the revolutionary year of 1978/9. It was the beginning of the Christmas season and all of them were highly motivated to do what they had come to Mafraq for, giving *presents*, in line with VIVA's mottos, "Give your heart as a present" and "We want to give ourselves".

Having picked a random name on a long list of potential aid recipients, we ended up visiting Zahra's family in Hay al-Janoubi, the lower middle-class neighbourhood where my host family lived. We were greeted by Zahra outside a three-storey building resembling a Greek villa, with a dirty white-washed facade and fake marble columns. From the outside, it looked better than many other Syrian habitations that we had visited. So far, we had seen rough brick shacks, basements, huts erected on roofs and even tents, pitched in courtyards in the city centre. From the inside, Zahra's pseudo-Greek dwelling looked less divine. A narrow corridor led past the bathroom and the kitchen to the messy salon, its dirty floor covered with worn-out mattresses and piles of blankets. A cheap flat screen TV and some flower decoration adorned the walls. We were greeted by a chilly breeze, coming in through a broken window. These days, I found it increasingly hard to remember individual families. On most days, we conducted three or four house visits in a row, and the shabby apartments, stories of flight and survival began to resemble each other.

In the living room, the matron of the family gestured us to take a seat, while a teenage daughter left to prepare tea. Surrounded by some of her eleven children, as well as other female relatives and friends, Zahra reminded me of many middle-aged Syrian women I had met this year. A stout stature, bad teeth and weather-beaten skin betrayed her rural origins. Before the war, she had married a day labourer and lived in a tiny apartment in as-Sfire in the Aleppo province. A black dress hid her plump figure, but also numerous layers of pyjamas and thick socks, worn against the ever-encroaching cold of Mafraq's winter. Once

everybody was seated, Zahra invited us to talk. As an introduction, and in line with our usual procedure, I translated Maria's short speech about the purpose of our visit and the services that VIVA provided: food parcels, education, sometimes medical aid. Zahra was told that we had come to get to know her and her family - that Europeans had been affected by the pictures of the Syrian war on television and deeply cared about refugees. Today's volunteers introduced themselves but did not ask the names of their Syrian interlocutors. In the meantime, strong black tea was served in little glasses. To the amusement of our host, Maria asked for tea without sugar. Sometimes, volunteers refused to drink tea or furtively took a sip from their own water bottles. I engaged Zahra in a conversation, asking her a lengthy list of questions, mentally ticking off all the information required to decide about further visits, and later inquiries related to my own research. Zahra replied willingly and in great detail. At times her friends chipped in.

Maria and the volunteers had stopped listening to the translation a long time ago. They began to distribute small Christmas presents, lovingly wrapped up back home, and the sweets that their home country is famous for. To the grown-ups, they offered body lotion, soap and paper napkins, prompting Zahra's sister-in-law to stare at me in disbelief. I was afraid she might find the cheap present offensive, so I explained that these were "special napkins, for guests". In the meantime, Maria handed over birthday cake candles to Zahra, explaining in her broken Arabic: "You could bake a cake and organize a special day for the entire family!" Once the gift distribution was over, the male volunteers began to play card games with the children, including the older teenage daughters. Maria tried to maintain a conversation with several women at a time, while also playing with the younger ones. There was considerable motion in the room, children jumping around, gift wraps torn open, presents abandoned after a glance. I could hardly keep up my conversation with Zahra. When we departed for another house visit half an hour later, we left behind a chaotic scene. In the car, volunteers told me that they were very happy, but also a little taken aback by Zahra's reiterated demands for money.

After they return to Europe, many of VIVA's short-term volunteers share their experiences in newspapers, on the radio and social media, including VIVA's Facebook page and homepage. On a local news website, Emma, a middle-aged woman from a small provincial town, fervently explains why VIVA's house visits have nothing to do with "refugee tourism":

"Wherever you go, you receive a friendly welcome. Thanks to locals who volunteered as interpreters, we could really communicate. […] It doesn't really matter *who* comes to visit [from Europe] – what matters is that *somebody* does!" According to Emma, Syrian refugees in Mafraq are grateful that they have not been forgotten and that someone "shows an interest in them". After the end of her trip, she stays in touch with some of the Syrians that she met during these house visits: "I talk to them on a weekly basis. Many of them use an online app for translation, and that's what makes our conversations possible. Recently, I received a message saying "Happy New Year" for my birthday. It made me smile – but then, they didn't really get it wrong. Coming to think about it, it was the beginning of a new year of my life."

And house visits are a life-changer, not only for Syrians who rely on aid as a major source of income. On their website, VIVA promises its short-term visitors that a trip to Jordan would "broaden their horizons". In the same article, Emma goes on to reflect on the impact that volunteering has had on her: "I found it hard to come home and go back to everyday life in our country." Her teenage daughter, who accompanied her to Mafraq, explains that her first-hand experience of poverty has made her aware of her privileged life. "Sadly, you get used again fairly quickly to coming home to a full fridge and being allowed to go to school."

The description of VIVA's visit to Zahra's home and volunteers' statements in the media reveal that there are ample opportunities for communication stumbles and mismatched expectations about the gifts that volunteers bring and the assistance that Syrians require, the stories that the hosts would like to tell and those that guests are interested in hearing, and the moral value, but also the performative character of these encounters. In recent years, the encounter between aid providers and recipients has frequently been approached through the lens of the *gift exchange* (e.g. Da Silva and Blanchette 2008; Hattori 2003; Korf et al. 2010; Kowalski 2011; Mawdley 2011; Rozakou 2016; Samuels 2013). In the tradition of Marcel Mauss, anthropologists have called into question the role of aid as a "disinterested" gift, showing that foreign assistance is often embedded into power struggles, gets its recipients entangled into relationships of dependence and forces them to perform "gratitude". The rhetoric of the "gift" certainly does figure prominently on VIVA's website, but also in volunteers' everyday conversations. In her study of Lutheran medical

organizations in the US, Halvorson (2012) demonstrates how the language of blessings binds volunteers and material donations together "in a divinely orchestrated gift economy" (221): goods, but also volunteers are treated as "gifts" and understood as "embodiments of divine agency" (227).

By way of contrast, this chapter looks at VIVA's house visits through a *hospitality* lens. It adds to existing studies on Syrian displacement that have investigated *hospitality* practices of refugee-receiving states and local communities, drawing attention to a hospitality constellation in which *local* hosts are replaced by VIVA, a European Evangelical organization, altogether. By using "hospitality" as an alternative theoretical framework through which I explore the different tensions that VIVA's practice of humanitarian house visits engenders, I shift the focus of the debate to the role of *boundaries* and *performances*. If we bid farewell to a romanticized understanding of "hospitality", it involves processes of inclusion and exclusion, acts of border-crossing and reaffirming borders, and how boundaries of belonging, between "hosts" and "guests", insiders and outsiders, are negotiated. In the first section of this chapter, a brief review of relevant anthropological literature reveals that hospitality is a "deeply hierarchical form of inclusion" (Rozakou 2016: 188). Hosts impose their rule over guests by enforcing spatial boundaries and choreographies. But hospitality also functions as a scale-shifter between the local and the national. This makes the concept well-suited to the study of interactions between displaced populations, host governments, locals and aid workers. A study of VIVA's volunteers as "guests" in the hospitality encounter with Syrians sheds additional light on their conflicting engagements with Syrians and their "micro-practices of detachment".

After a more general discussion of the applicability of the "hospitality" concept in the humanitarian context, subsequent parts of the chapter turn to VIVA's own hospitality practices. The second section discusses volunteers' small acts of infringement on the hospitality code that allow them to "contain" the hospitality encounter and Syrians' demands for aid. Ultimately, who is in control of these meetings are not refugee hosts – but their *guests*.

The third section turns to the *performative* dimension of VIVA's house visits. Obliging Syrians to "host" puts them into a dilemma between showing *generosity* and *destitution*. I

revisit Boltanski's theory of a "politics of pity" in communicating distant suffering, arguing that volunteers' first-hand experience of Syrians' plight and their later testimonies to a European audience cannot be studied in isolation from each other. The urge to testify back home shapes real-life encounters with Syrians. The set-up of house visits forces refugees to perform generic "suffering" in front of foreign volunteers, which provides the raw material for future moving testimonies. These performances draw a line between those who suffer and their compassionate audience, but also, more practically, between Syrians who perform "well" enough to receive aid, and those who fail.

The fourth section looks at the religious dimension of VIVA's house visits. It explores how staff members and volunteers weigh up Syrians' spiritual and material needs, and how tensions between a romanticized understanding of Christian compassion and expectations of refugees' accountability towards their benefactors complicate "giving with no strings attached". The chapter ends by asking why VIVA volunteers, despite their many frustrations and misunderstandings, do not experience "compassion fatigue" but rather become part of a self-fuelling "compassion machine".

The conclusion puts into conversation the role of house visits in the refugee response in the Global South and in immigration control in the Global North. It highlights a global convergence of social control strategies that operate a shift from mobile populations' rights towards their "deservingness" - the latter has to be demonstrated through repeated performances of "good" refugee- or migranthood.

Contextualizing "hospitality" in the study of displacement

In Mafraq, humanitarian house visits occur within a cultural context where hospitality is highly valued, where a man's social status is measured by his ability to entertain guests (Abu-Lughod 1986; Shryock 2012) and splendid performances of hosting are a competitive and gendered way of cementing social hierarchies and local elites (Meneley 1996). Recent critiques of hospitality are often grounded in Jacques Derrida's theory of "hostipitality" (Derrida 2000a), a portmanteau term combining "hospitality" and "hostility", that captures the tension between a commandment of unlimited hospitality – unless the host be denounced as greedy – and the host's need to remain in charge of the events under his

roof. This leads to a paradoxical situation where, by granting unlimited hospitality, the host risks abolishing his own mastery, and thus the foundations of his ability to receive guests (Derrida 2000b).

Derrida's approach has informed a tradition of critical thinking about the relationship between hospitality, sovereignty and colonial legacies. Yet to make sense of the intertwinement of *concrete* practices of inclusion and exclusion, I suggest turning to the work of anthropologists who have long been aware of the aporia at the heart of hospitality. Julian Pitt-Rivers famously defined hospitality as a framework for the "problem of how to deal with strangers" (Pitt-Rivers 2012: 501) – it makes generous receptions the right way of receiving a potentially dangerous other. Successful performances of hospitality render the stranger's threat harmless through intricate choreographies and imposing spatial boundaries (Pitt-Rivers 2012). "When a Jordanian says, 'My house is your house', he does not mean all of it. He means that part which forms the stage for hospitality" (Shryock 2012: S24). Hospitality spaces are thus uneven; doors might be shut and guests' mobility contained.

Anthropologists have also pointed out the double role of guests in households and nations (e.g. Herzfeld 1987). As Pitt-Rivers remarks about his fieldwork in Andalusia: "For I was not only a stranger to the local community but to the national community" (2012:512). In Jordan, hospitality has become a major feature of post-independence national identity, to the extent that its commodified version figures prominently in the heritage industry (Shryock 2004). But it also informs an increasingly restrictive refugee response. Like many of its neighbours, Jordan is not a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention. Iraqi and later Syrian refugees have been received as "guests" (Achilli 2015; Mason 2011), a choice of words to be understood in the context of repeated displacement of Palestinians to Jordan since 1948, for whom the term "refugee" was long reserved in official discourse (Mason 2011). A recent news article exemplifies the extent to which the guest discourse has permeated policy and public talk about displacement: "Population stands at around 9.5 million, including 2.9 million guests", a headline of the *Jordan Times*, Jordan's English daily newspaper, ran in January 2016 (Ghazal 2016).

In the context of the Syrian civil war, the concept's role as a scale shifter between the local, the national and the international has gained prominence with academics, humanitarian and policy actors. Neighboring countries' hospitality for Syrian "guests" has received much praise as an indigenous alternative to the Western human-rights based regime, anchored in mutual cultural and religious traditions (El-Abed 2014), shared histories, such as the Ottoman legacy of ethnic and religious minority networks (Chatty 2017a), Pan-Arab ideology (Mason 2011) and, on the local level, through processes of refugee-refugee solidarity in contexts of overlapping displacement (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016b). Critics point out that applauding host states' generosity risks masking their lack of commitment to international refugee law, and coincides with an alarming tendency to downgrade refugee protection worldwide (Crawley and Skleparis 2017). Hence, studies have explored the role of hospitality discourse in staking political claims to contested territories and unloading refugee protection on third parties in Jordan (El-Abed 2014; Stevens 2013) and Lebanon (Janmyr 2017), and the discrepancies between hospitality rhetorics, practices of exclusion and power struggles between hosting and hosted communities (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016b; Mason 2011).

So far, critics of refugee hospitality have focused on host states (e.g. Mason 2011) and aid organizations within refugee camps (Bulley 2015) and detention centers (Rozakou 2012). However, the hospitality of humanitarian actors in urban settings has hardly been addressed, a laudable exception being Estella Carpi's study of NGO-sponsored hosting of refugees in a Lebanese border town. In Akkar, older cultures of cross-border exchange and solidarity were lost when NGOs started paying local families for hosting Syrian refugees, converting hospitality as a moral duty into a short-term and commodified tool of humanitarian aid (Carpi and Senoguz 2018).

Leaving aside Lebanon's more complex multiethnic demographic make-up and its legacy of Syrian occupation, what Mafraq has in common with Akkar is a longstanding history of Syrian labour migration, although dehistoricized approaches to humanitarian hosting rarely acknowledge existing connections between Syrians and their hosts. In both cases, the institutionalization of hosting turns Syrians with whom locals have long intermittently cohabited into "others". It also obscures refugees' legal limbo in Lebanon and Jordan, emphasizing instead their need to perform as "good guests" in the host country. In contrast

to commodified hosting in Akkar, however, VIVA's practice of humanitarian house visits in Mafraq turns the tables. It forces Syrians to be "good *hosts*", not towards locals, but foreign volunteers. Taking hospitality seriously implies acknowledging the tension between inclusionary and exclusionary processes that it captures. This allows us to shed light on specific forms of social control that humanitarian house visits generate and perpetuate.

Taking the host hostage – how VIVA volunteers *contain* the humanitarian encounter

Philosophical and anthropological studies reveal that hospitality is all about *control* and how hosts contain potentially unruly guests. More recently, philosophical thought has shifted the focus from "bad hosts" and the ways in which they exclude their "guests" to the flipside of unlimited hospitality: By swapping around the power dynamics inherent to the hospitality encounter, guests may take the host hostage (Baker 2010). This line of reasoning can be fruitfully applied to VIVA's humanitarian house visits. Even though visits to refugees are meant to reverse the host/guest hierarchy that Syrian aid beneficiaries are subjected to in Jordan, they might still lead to volunteer-guests taking control over refugee-hosts. In Athens, volunteers framed their visits to squatter buildings occupied by refugees not as a humanitarian, but as a political act intended to give back agency to non-citizens. Still, they put pressure on squatters to move into more permanent dwellings. Thus, they restored them to a sedentary existence inside homes, the very precondition to the enactment of hierarchical hospitality encounters (Rozakou 2012). Analogously, I argue that, while containment in refugee camps and detention centres are flagrant examples of control exerted upon refugees, VIVA engages in more subtle strategies of dominating the host-guest encounter.

Different from middle-class Jordanian households in Mafraq where one finds a sumptuously furnished reception room, most Syrians can hardly afford to set a room apart for fulfilling their hospitality duties. Guests are received in the ordinary living room, equipped with mattresses and cushions. However, similar restrictions on their movements apply. It is unthinkable that guests would gain access to other parts of the apartment without permission, especially rooms where women are unveiled. Yet I frequently witnessed volunteers leave the living room. More than simple instances of negligence or ignorance of

cultural norms, these infringements of domestic space are also motivated by check-ups on refugees' actual, presumably "hidden" possessions - not as far-fetched as it might sound in a town where Syrians frequently resell humanitarian goods (cf. chapter 3). But spatial boundaries are also overstepped at a micro-level. Male volunteers sit next to teenage daughters, unconsciously crossing gendered barriers. And to a Syrian friend's great dismay, one of the foreign guests dared to serve herself tea from the kettle – a task reserved for the host.

Volunteers also "contain" temporal aspects of the humanitarian encounter. Volunteer-guests often interrupt customary choreographies, e.g. by refusing refreshments. More broadly, Syrians are confined to long spells of waiting for the relieving phone call. As one frustrated Syrian woman complained to me: "We sit at home and wait, but no one ever comes". Since numerous aid organizations in Mafraq engage in house visits and deliver similar services, many refugees lose track of the agencies they signed up with, adding to the sense of confusion when aid teams arrive. Not that "waiting" per se is always pathological. Successful hospitality even relies on the opportunity to return the welcome at a later time (Pitt-Rivers 2012). However, while volunteers are usually offered drinks, withholding contact information – as well as the distance to Amman where permanent staff members of VIVA reside – assures that the favour cannot be repaid. Nor does waiting for aid disrupt otherwise fulfilled lives. In chapter 2, I argued that on-off work in the informal economy sets the rhythm for many Syrians' lives. Men, women and children alternate between waiting, boredom and long working days on the fields, construction sites and in restaurants. Younger women are busy with volunteering and taking NGO classes for the duration of a week or two (cf. chapter 6). During house visits, Syrian women often complained that "one should have something to do". Therefore, waiting for VIVA did not necessarily disturb Syrians' schedule, as most potential beneficiaries were at home anyway. Rather, it contributed to a wider temporal logic of disruption and unpredictability that Syrian refugees were subjected to in the informal economy and by the humanitarian system.

Conflicting performances: the *suffering host*

Alleviating the physical, and increasingly also the psychological, suffering of others is at the heart of humanitarianism. That is what sets it apart from related endeavours like

"development", which focuses on the *economic* dimension of crises, and human-rights based approaches that target their *legal* side (Redfield and Bornstein 2010). How humanitarian actors deal with suffering has much to do with how they negotiate proximity – or distance – to their beneficiaries. An emerging body of literature investigates the role of distance in conditioning the humanitarian response (Kennedy 2009). Are we more inclined to give to those close to us in space, but also socially and culturally? Can we only comprehend the suffering of those who are like *us*? In this regard, VIVA's *relational* approach to aid, aiming to maximize closeness with Syrians, differs from "a generalized care of strangers […] and from the neutral, impartial ideas of secular humanitarianism as advocated by the UN" (Redfield and Bornstein 2010: 10).

In turning to the *performative* dimension of hospitality, the third part of this chapter addresses another dilemma that VIVA's volunteers faced in Mafraq. They expected to see genuine suffering. But Syrians were caught in an awkward situation: between their obligation to be *generous*, as hospitality is a corner stone of their cultural and religious beliefs, and the need to demonstrate material (and, as we will see in the final part of this chapter, also "spiritual") *destitution*, so they could qualify for more and future assistance. When follow-up visits occurred, Syrian hosts often tried to restore indigenous codes of hospitality by serving splendid lunches– a heavy burden on their wallets, as one of my friends admitted. In Mafraq's living rooms, assessing, witnessing and performing suffering was therefore far from straightforward. And the representation of Syrians' suffering also played an important role in VIVA's media outreach strategy and volunteers' online testimonies back home. Therefore, this section brings together what volunteers *saw* and how they *communicated* their experiences afterwards. It adds to wider discussions about the commodification of suffering for organizations' marketing material and refugee advocacy in the Global North (e.g. Pupavac 2008).

From the start, representations of Syrian suffering in the media were a central component of volunteering with VIVA. Many short-term visitors admitted to me that watching news about the Syrian war had first arisen their interest in helping refugees. Indeed, Syrians' plight has received unprecedented amounts of coverage from mainstream media. It is also considered "the first social media war" (Doucet 2018: 142) of our time. In his book of the same title, Luc Boltanski (2004) asks how spectators deal with "distant suffering" when

there is no opportunity for direct action. Drawing on Hannah Arendt, he analyses a specific form of politics premised on distant suffering, a "politics of pity" that emerged in the Age of Enlightenment in the 18th century. Boltanski presumes that witnessing the misery of others, even remote, cannot fail to move us, creating a sense of moral responsibility. However, choosing an appropriate course of action is not only complicated by spatial separation, but also by the unpredictable reactions of others. For someone watching the news about Syria in Western Europe, it is impossible to know if and how other members of a faraway audience will respond. One possible reaction is sending money. Big organizations like the UNHCR and Save the Children frequently appeal to the public in wealthy countries to donate for their humanitarian programmes. Its caveat is that financial support is highly impersonal and abstract. Simply relying on big aid agencies to fix suffering elsewhere squares badly with VIVA's anti-institutional and individualistic mindset.

Besides paying, another form of commitment that Boltanski discusses more at length is pursuing a "politics of pity" in the public sphere through *speaking out*. In order to arouse the pity of the audience and motivate more people to take action, the speaker cannot simply deliver a factual report of distant suffering. It must be depicted in concrete and personalized ways, e.g. through the close-up of a starving child. Nevertheless, speaking in the public sphere also requires acts of *distancing*: to be credible, the speaker must present herself as impartial and assume the role of "an uninvolved spectator" (Boltanski 2004: 34). In doing so, she proves the "purity" of her motivations, untainted by obligations to family or friends or personal interest. For a "politics of pity" to be efficient, speaking about distant suffering thus combines more general statements with hyper-singular snapshots of suffering: "it is that child there who makes us cry, but any other child could have done the same" (Boltanski 2004: 12).

At first sight, VIVA volunteers did something very different. By travelling to Mafraq, they broke through the TV screen and created opportunities for direct interventions into Syrians' lives which are out of reach for most ordinary Europeans. But they also did not want their commitment to Syrians to end there. Through testimonies to potential donors and volunteers back home, they remained involved in VIVA's activities. As I argued in the introduction, the personal connections between VIVA's staff members and volunteers within the same religious network also encouraged more long-term commitment. In

speaking up in the public sphere in Europe, they engaged in a "politics of pity". Realising that the latter necessarily combines acts of detachment and connection helps us understand the tensions that arose during VIVA's house visits and the types of "hospitality" that volunteers hoped to see. While the distance between foreign volunteers and beneficiaries seemed to be momentarily collapsed, it was actually reified by performances of suffering that enabled future speech acts informed by a "politics of pity" back home. Therefore, I now turn to acts of distancing that occurred even when spectators and the suffering found themselves in the same room.

First, VIVA's house visits were conducted in a way that made it difficult for volunteers to listen to *individual* stories of suffering. As an interpreter, my role was to translate for European volunteers who had travelled thousands of miles – and spent considerable amounts of money – for being face to face to Syrian refugees. But most volunteers did not ask questions beyond the standard exchange of refugees' first names and regions of origin. In the middle of a conversation, guests would often blow up balloons, play with the children or initiate prayers. As my initial example of a visit to Zahra's family demonstrates, this often led to the break-down of the dialogue with the hosts. As the interpreter, I found myself in the uncomfortable situation where there was hardly anything to translate.[29]

Second, these visits created an "emotional imperative" to be complied with: refugees had to create an affective connection with the one-time guests for the sake of survival, and were expected to show diverse, positive and negative emotions: despair, gratitude and joy. A friend cynically remarked about another Syrian woman: "She kept her living room deliberately shabby and furnished it with worn-out mattresses only. When organizations visit her, she starts crying and complaining about her suffering and poverty." In return, overly emotional behaviour encouraged volunteers to give out hugs; some were moved to tears themselves. Syrians also often showed us torture marks and "martyr diplomas" issued to widows and orphans by Islamic charities. But many volunteers took pictures of smiling

[29] I do not insinuate that Syrians perceived house visits as violent. In a dull town like Mafraq, many enjoyed them because of their entertainment value. As one Syrian woman confessed to me, receiving foreigners was also cheaper than hosting fellow Arabs, as the former were unaware of cultural codes of hospitality. "You don't even need to serve them tea", she giggled. Sometimes, Syrians turned the table and began to take pictures of volunteers. Like Um Mehdi, whom we met at the beginning of chapter 3, these photos were then circulated among family members in different sites of displacement all over the Middle East.

Syrians – often children -, proudly holding their new belongings. VIVA's website shows students of Maria's home-schooling project, lined up with their new back-packs that they had received during an "outreach" mission. Other photographs celebrate the instant connection between Syrians and volunteers. I once took a picture of a Syrian man arm in arm with the daughter of a short-term visitor from Europe, posing for the volunteers' cameras. The host's fatherly gesture suggests that for the duration of a visit, Syrians and their guests stopped being strangers to each other, instead embracing each other as friends and even "family". This invites further reflections on how exactly volunteers encountered Syrians and later represented them in their testimonies.

Boltanski (2004) discusses several "topoi", or registers, employed by those who speak of suffering in the public sphere: *denunciation*, *sentiment* and *aestheticization*. The latter presupposes a completely detached and unemotional stance of the observer and is hardly relevant to VIVA's volunteers. They certainly did not visit Syrians because of the "sublime" appearance of their suffering. *Denouncing* refugees' plight, on the other hand, would have required attention to the reasons of Syrians' exile, singling out their persecutors or wider structures of inequality. But then, VIVA's representatives were not interested in the power dynamics of the Syrian conflict or the humanitarian response in Jordan.

Instead, their testimonies adopted a "topic of sentiment" (Boltanski 2004: 77) that directs the focus away from the causes of Syrian displacement to "the unfortunate's gratitude inspired by the intervention of a benefactor" (77) – hence numerous portraits on VIVA's Facebook page and website of happy Syrian families and children with their new "gifts" or during playful activities. In addition, the sentimental register places the *speaker* at the centre of the encounter. In the interview from which I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, we learn more about how *Emma* felt than about the reactions of her Syrian counterparts. With her own affective reaction, Emma vouched for Syrians' suffering or, as Boltanski puts it, her "emotion creates truth" (82). In return, her heartfelt testimony was supposed to trigger a "chain of emotions" and move her audience back home.
In other words, a "politics of pity" that takes the shape of emotion-laden testimonies is as much about the spectators as it is about those who suffer. This helps us understand an apparent contradiction to VIVA's *relational* approach to aid. In the interview, Emma explained that it did not really matter *who* visited Syrian families as long as *someone* did.

How could the organisation build meaningful connections between foreign volunteers and Syrians if the former were interchangeable? Maybe we should flip Emma's statement around. It certainly mattered to *her* and her daughter that *they*, and not someone else, had witnessed Syrians' plight with their own eyes. After all, they had been willing to sacrifice the equivalent of thousands of pounds, as well as their holidays, to travel to Mafraq. Rather, Emma and her daughter could have visited *any* refugee family because it was the volunteers' testimony – not the Syrians' – that would be heard and potentially have an impact in their country of origin. I do not discard the possibility that some volunteers established more longstanding ties with *specific* Syrians. But to put it bluntly, most Syrians were relevant to VIVA's house visits to the extent that their *individual* suffering provided an illustration of refugees' *overall* situation in Mafraq - the raw material for moving tales to a European audience. The singularity of the suffering person was effectively erased.

Chouliaraki (2013) takes the argument about the prominence of the spectator's feelings in the contemporary aid industry even further. Looking at popular forms of solidarity such as celebrity humanitarianism and aid concerts, she argues that ordinary people's acts of solidarity are informed by consumerist lifestyles under late capitalism. Chouliaraki proclaims a shift from a politics of pity à la Boltanski, that involves watching and speaking out about the suffering of distant "others", to a politics of irony, where moral sentiment is inspired by watching others like us. What makes Chouliaraki's approach a less adequate conceptual lens to explore VIVA's practices is its postmodernist assumption of a loss of "grand narratives" and the commodification of all aspects of life. The narcissistic spectators she describes consume aid-related products because it allows them to indulge in diffuse "warm and fuzzy" (19) emotions and "'feel good' altruism" (4). But volunteering with VIVA does more than that. Although it clearly has a "feel good" component, it also remains embedded into VIVA's Evangelical world view – as the final section of this chapter will show.

However, Boltanski's analysis of the "politics of pity" has another dimension, one more closely related to the workings of the aid industry and how one becomes "eligible" for aid. Representing aid workers as *compassionate* and refugees as *suffering*, and a focus on the *visible* dimension of suffering, is far from unique to the humanitarian context in Mafraq. As early as the 1890s, American Evangelicals capitalized on improved communication

technologies to publish moving imagines of the Indian famine in Christian newspapers and raise donations. Curtis (2012) ascribes to Evangelicals a central role in the advent “pictorial humanitarianism” (159), although even at the time, the depiction of aid beneficiaries as hapless victims was far from uncontroversial among believers. Beyond the confines of religion, the entanglement of moral sentiment with assistance is central to contemporary humanitarianism. Against the backdrop of a shift from a regime of human rights to a regime of compassion, where humanitarianism relies on principles of charity rather than justice, "generosity" rather than "entitlement", demonstrating one’s suffering has become central to accessing aid – an argument most famously developed by Didier Fassin (2012). Despite VIVA’s anti-institutional approach, its practices had effects similar to those of mainstream humanitarian actors like the UNHCR. This becomes clear if one looks at how volunteers made decisions about future support for Syrians.

For despite their sentimental, and sometimes comical, appearance, VIVA’s house visits had potentially severe consequences. Not only the language barrier, but rather the entire setup – brief visits, a focus on playful activities rather than talk, disrespect for family hierarchies and boundaries coupled with ignorance of the humanitarian landscape in Mafraq – made it impossible to evaluate Syrians’ needs. Oftentimes, volunteers were confused about the number of household members and ties between people present in the room. Therefore, decisions about follow-up visits were often based on “mutual liking” and visible suffering instead on tangible assessment criteria. *Refugeeness* turned into a performance where neediness had to be demonstrated through short stereotypical narratives of flight and life in exile, but mostly visual markers of destitution: crying, sighing, a slumping posture.

Despite VIVA’s anti-institutional approach, this is similar to the curtailing of refugees’ first-hand experience by the categories of the UNHCR’s (and others’) humanitarian bureaucracy. Narratives of suffering are central to authenticating claims to asylum and assistance, but what constitutes a credible story is far from self-evident. For example, refugees have to tailor their accounts to legal and bureaucratic categories during UNHCR resettlement interviews (Sandvik 2009), and NGO reports construct “refugee identity in terms of a knowable constellation of physical and economic needs” (Rajaram 2002: 253). Even reports meant to give voice to aid beneficiaries often rely on decontextualized visuals (e.g. Malkki 1996) and quotes (Rajaram 2002), “positive counter-stereotypes” (Pupavac 2008: 287) of

suffering instead of individual life stories, and NGO staff frequently downplay their own role in compiling refugee narratives (Rajaram 2002). Consequently, what is at the stake is not so much the truthfulness of refugees' narratives, but rather how the workings of the humanitarian system "choreograph suffering and empathy" (Sandvik 2009: 241).

In sum, during VIVA's house visits, Syrians were encouraged to perform suffering and a related set of emotions – despair, joy and gratitude - in spectacular ways. If enacting "hospitality" involves negotiating belonging and reaffirming boundaries, then these performances drew a line between those who suffered and their compassionate audience, but also, more practically, between Syrians who performed "well" enough to qualify for future assistance, and those who did not.

How much house visits relied on Syrians' fulfilling the role of welcoming, but humble and bravely suffering hosts became clear every time they failed to play along. On a visit to a *local* family, whose name VIVA had received from the Jordanian welfare services, the oldest son of the house began to flirt with me and make crude jokes about marrying a foreigner. At the time, I felt appalled, and even a bit assaulted. That was not what I had come for, with best intentions in mind! Trembling, I told Maria afterwards that I would never visit this family again. With hindsight, I realize that as a Jordanian man, he must have felt embarrassed to be treated "like a refugee". Changing the tone of the conversation was an attempt at asserting himself as an equal – and, given the cultural context, as a male provider – in front of foreign women who had cast him as "needy".

Other aid recipients refused to offer refreshments and formulas of politeness. In February 2016, we paid a visit to a one-room apartment in Hay Hussein where the matriarch of the house did not bother to put on the stove, leaving volunteers to freeze on damp mattresses. Children jumped at the plastic bags that we had brought and drew out clothes and toys, leaving their visitors to anxiously guard their "gifts". When leaving, I was handed a sack with children's clothes that we were supposed to offer to the next family. In the doorway, a newly arrived woman began rummaging through the garments without introducing herself. Finally, she threw everything back, without deigning to talk to me. Declining communication and even gifts, let alone shared performances, disrupted the hospitality script that the volunteers and myself had come to expect. In the final part of this chapter, I

come back to how volunteers dealt with frustrating situations like this that occasionally arose during house visits.

"Talking faith" and the pitfalls of Christian compassion

House visits and the performance of Syrian suffering have an important religious dimension. In Europe and North America, humanitarianism is rooted in the Christian tradition of charitable giving to the poor and the outcast (Redfield and Bornstein 2010) and this religious heritage figures prominently in VIVA's rhetoric and practice. Conversely, those who engage in "relational" house visits in Mafraq are usually members of VIVA, the local Mafraq Unity Church or other Christian organizations. VIVA's staff members and some volunteers sometimes prayed at Syrians' houses, often for good health. "Talking faith" – which at times got dangerously close to proselytizing – is what set VIVA apart from other grassroots organizations in town. Therefore, the final part of this chapter looks at what house visits are actually *about*. It questions whether VIVA's donations fulfil Syrians' *material* needs and asks whether the actual "purpose" of house visits lies in covert missionary activities. The chapter ends by discussing the pitfalls of volunteers' romanticized idea of Christian compassion and giving "with no strings attached".[30]

From a livelihoods perspective, VIVA's material assistance hardly made a contribution to Syrians' survival in Mafraq. To an individual Syrian household, visits were infrequent and unpredictable. Most families were only seen once. Certainly, food parcels represented a lifeline for the poorest segment of the refugee population, and for those cut off from their kinship networks. A Syrian woman who lived in abject poverty with her five children and had been abandoned by her husband recited a proverb to me: "When you have something, everybody is your friend. When you're poor, nobody comes. A stranger is better than all of your relatives." But then, better-off refugees, those who could assure their daily survival and rely on relatives in times of emergency, struggled with different challenges. Most of all,

[30] Apart from occasional trips to VIVA's "warehouse", a single room at the Schneller School in Marka where short-term volunteers were accommodated during "outreach" mission, I was rarely involved in sorting newly arrived donations. From VIVA's staff members, I knew that second-hand clothes, toys and learning material were shipped to Jordan in containers or transported by plane. Food parcels were bought from a Jordanian company. Most of the time, I saw the goods for the first time in the trunk of a car on the day of delivery.

they desperately needed cash to pay Mafraq's rising rents. However, VIVA provided second-hand clothes, imported from their home country, and food parcels, although these goods were cheap and easily available on local markets. And Western clothes often did not meet Syrian women's taste. Inundated with sweaters, my friends passed them on to me. Sometimes, recipients took offense at goods they considered degrading, such as shampoo or plastic jewellery. Toys were supposed to represent a more personalized "gift", but Syrian children, accustomed to plastic gadgets, often disliked "pedagogically valuable" wooden games from Europe and quickly abandoned them.

As VIVA presented itself as an NGO, Syrians expected material aid and money. The following encounter illustrates the frequent mismatch between their understandings of assistance. During a house visit, Maria asked a Syrian couple: "Is there anything you need?" She then turned to me: "Ask them, what is their *heart's* desire?" To which the wife replied: "The most important thing for us is to be at ease." Later, her husband explained in hushed tones that their biggest problem was the rent, but we did not give him any money. When we left, Maria told the woman to take all the clothes that we had brought. Surprised, her husband asked: "Don't other people need stuff, too?" Clearly, Maria and her Syrian counterparts had different ideas about the right types, quantities and the value of donations. Maria's emotion-laden choice of words made it difficult for Syrians to openly state their request for money. But VIVA did not simply misconstrue Syrians' needs. Rather, an economic rationale about the "usefulness" of donations was trumped by moral considerations (cf. Halvorson 2012).

In her study of a food bank run by an American church in Florence, Trundle (2014) finds that volunteers prefer giving food to people in need because it represents "the more virtuous good, a more essential symbol of poverty, need and charity, as well as Christian hospitality" (125). In a similar vein, VIVA did not usually support refugees financially, although some volunteers chose to spend money from their own wallets. These were

usually small sums, between JD10 and 20 (ca. USD 14-28), and often with a specific purpose, e.g. to buy new mothers milk powder or diapers.[31]

The Christian symbolism of VIVA's donations and their practical *irrelevance* allow us to reconsider their role during house visits. From VIVA's perspective, the actual delivery of goods was not crucial to forging the close connections it was aspiring to. This becomes clearer if we compare VIVA's practices with faith-based organizations that emphasize acts of choosing and sorting humanitarian goods as the moment when *egalitarian* relationships with their future recipients are built. Halvorson (2012), for example, studies two American Lutheran organizations in Minneapolis that send discarded medical supplies to Madagascar. These organisations also explicitly aim to treat aid recipients as equals and acknowledge their medical expertise. While VIVA brings *people* and stresses personal encounters, the organisations in Halvorson's study deliberately send "useful" medical technologies instead of missionaries. However, they get embroiled in complex "series of value conversions" (213) at the intersection of medical-legal risk and humanitarian economies. Hospitals can claim tax credits for donating medical waste – therefore, NGO action makes useful discards "valuable" again. But their recommodification is also accompanied by moral and religious discourse. Before sending supplies off, American volunteers sort donations and discard "junk". Useful donations are understood as "embodiments of divine agency" (227) and careless sorting is invested with a language of sinful behaviour. This creates ambiguities about the ontological status of these donations, oscillating somewhere between "junk", "useful" supplies and "divine gifts".

VIVA's "gifts" were recommodified as Syrian recipients sometimes resold the content of food parcels and clothes, which ranged from expensive multifunction travel jackets to worn-out T-shirts. But VIVA members did not seem to be aware of this or not particularly

[31] Volunteers also bring other types of non-monetary gifts, often with a more personal note. In recent years, scholars have questioned the role of altruism and self-interest in motivating humanitarian action. In her study of the affective economy of giving aid, Liisa Malkki (2015) argues that unwanted goods still fulfil somebody's needs: "the neediness of the helper" (Malkki 2015: 8). She points out the difference between humanitarian commodities and gifts, the latter the result of unpaid domestic (and often feminine) labour. Knitting blankets and toys, but also bringing their own discarded clothes allowed volunteers to imagine an affective relationship with Syrians in Mafraq. It was often authenticated through pictures of refugees and their new "gifts". On other occasions, I witnessed members of VIVA offering painting material and even an ukulele to Syrians that they had developed a friendship with – notwithstanding the fact that the latter often struggled to pay the rent. In this context, volunteers truly brought *themselves*, or rather a token of themselves, as a gift.

bothered. Some, as in the initial vignette, even brought pretty paper napkins. But then, the house visits were not about *the use value of material aid* after all. This was made clear to me during a fight I had with Maria after half a year of volunteering with her. In summer 2016, I told Maria on the phone that I would not translate her prayers at Syrians' homes anymore. She answered that she had noticed my discomfort but strongly believed in the healing power of prayer. "We have seen many wonders already." The following day, she came to pick me up alone. In the car, she told me that she had thought about our conversation a lot, and that I did not seem to understand what VIVA's activities were *really* about. To her, praying was much more important than aid delivery. She had assumed that Clara and Sophia had told me about the prayers at our first meeting. Maria suggested that I should stop doing house visits at all, and only work with her on the home-schooling project. I replied that I did not consider myself a worse Christian than herself and that I thought that our values were not that different after all. I also told her about my fear that Syrians might feel coerced into listening to prayers inside their own home. But Maria persevered. If Syrians were not interested in prayers, they could always refuse. One family had openly asked her to stop. Finally, I argued that I would rather talk to the grown-ups and give them an opportunity to share their stories. Maria objected: "They will only go on complaining. This only reactivates old trauma." She added that during one house visit, Syrians had felt interrogated. "They were asked all these questions!" The rest of the day, we hardly talked to each other. However, my knowledge of Arabic and Mafraq's windy streets soon trumped ideology and I continued working with VIVA – and Maria - without translating religious content.

That VIVA's house visits were not *primarily* about giving material aid contradicts its self-understanding as a professional aid provider. Researchers concur that this tension is characteristic of faith-based humanitarian actors with a hybrid nature, somewhere between a church and a professional NGO (Ruiz de Elvira 2012). But claiming that what Syrians had to *say* was not important, and even harmful, also openly contradicted VIVA's *relational* approach to aid. Maria seemed to pursue a different approach to establishing relationships with her Syrian counterparts: through well-meant prayers and gestures, not through actual conversation. This has much to do with how she framed the root causes of Syrians' suffering, and how she weighed up refugees' spiritual and material "needs". Farah's case illustrates that VIVA's house visits often addressed both together. Its

representatives brought material support *and* prayers, although it was presumably the former, rather than the latter, that opened Syrians' doors.

In November 2016, some months after our discussion, Maria was in Mafraq in the early morning but seemed reluctant to take me along to a house visit: "We're going to pray for a woman." Finally, she gave in and picked me up from home. In the car, she proudly told me that Farah, today's host, "had had a vision. She saw Jesus!" In the street outside Farah's house, we met with Clara, Jacob, their young European intern and a Syrian volunteer. Together, we entered the flat, carrying in food and clothes. Together with her two young sons, Farah, a woman from Homs in her late twenties, lived on the ground floor of a run-down building on Hay Hussein's main street, in Mafraq's poorest neighbourhood. There was only one room, a moist and freezingly cold chamber with high ceilings, from which plaster trickled down on us. Since Farah's husband had been deported to Syria six months earlier, the family had been left without a breadwinner. Farah had not paid the rent, electricity had been cut and she had outstanding debts of JD 155 (ca. USD 219) in the supermarket next door. Under so much pressure, her children's and her own health had deteriorated. Her older son had severe anger issues, hitting anyone and anything in his way. Farah herself suffered from recurring headaches and insomnia, and pills did not alleviate the pain anymore. After a short conversation, Maria told Farah in English (without translation): "I want to pray for peace. These [referring to her survival and health struggles] are small things, but she needs bigger peace." While praying, she rested a hand on Farah's knee and the women held hands. After a short prayer in their native language, Jacob, Clara and their intern seamlessly switched to an English song, "Your love changes everything". I later looked up the song – it was by United Pursuit, an American Christian worship band.

From VIVA's perspective, prayers were at the heart of a humanitarian approach informed by Christian compassion.[32] Maria's belief in the impact of her prayers was so strong that they did not have to be translated or explained to Farah. This makes us understand better what kind of relationship Maria had in mind: not a mutual exchange, but rather a hierarchical one-way interaction where Farah's participation was not necessary beyond a basic performance of suffering and gratitude.

A comparative look at Elisha's (2008, 2011) study of two mega-churches in Tennessee tells us more about volunteers' idealized understanding of Christian compassion. Elisha's analysis deals with the frustrations of white, middle-class Evangelical volunteers from the suburbs struggling with ungrateful aid beneficiaries. Often, their counterparts were uneducated people of colour from a working-class background and marginalized areas. In the eyes of Elisha's volunteers, they frequently wasted assistance, left jobs and went back to drinking and drug abuse. Most shockingly, though, they rejected their benefactors' good advice.

Volunteers' annoyance was rooted in their contradictory motives which can be traced back to core tensions of Evangelical theology, between Christian compassion and expectations of accountability. Volunteers wanted to give unconditionally, exemplifying ideals of universal compassion. However, giving "with no strings attached" was complicated by their belief in the *transformative* power of human relationships. By doing good, volunteers hoped to put sinners on the path to redemption. Narratives of individual suffering and salvation are

[32] From *Farah's* perspective, the question is not whether her "vision" that prompted the visit and her passive participation in the prayer were genuine. Without doubt, she was both psychologically battered and in dire need. As close contact with an unbureaucratic aid provider like VIVA could prove a lifeline, and she had to make sure that VIVA remained favourably disposed towards her. In her study of Sahrawi refugee camps in Algeria, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2011c) discusses how Muslim refugees tailor self-representations to the interests of secular, Evangelical and Muslim donors. For example, the Sahrawi camp leadership foregrounds an Islamic identity when dealing with Algerian authorities, and interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance when appealing to American Evangelical organizations. In a similar vein, Syrian refugees like Farah pragmatically engaged with VIVA's prayers to assure further assistance. In a conservative Islamic context, prayers during house visits did not cause mass conversions. Nor were Syrians necessarily interested in discussing theological finesses. As Baher, a Syrian teacher, told me with a grin: "Most refugees are simple [i.e. uneducated] people. They never even studied the Quran." This said, prayers often seem to hit a nerve. Their emotional set-up, combined with songs, hugs and gestures of affection, certainly fulfilled some Syrians' *affective* needs. Maria often prayed for those who were gravely ill. Other volunteers told me about an incident where Clara had prayed with a group of Syrian girls during a house visit. Sitting in a circle, they had rocked and talked themselves into religious ecstasy and uncontrolled sobbing.

central to Evangelical theology and figure prominently in church service. Aid beneficiaries were expected to accept the divine "gift" and begin a life in accordance with Biblical virtues. From a worldly point of view, volunteers' activities were also informed by the individualistic and liberal worldviews of the white middle-classes. Because Evangelical volunteers idealized Christian compassion and its effects, they downplayed class differences and racial discrimination that might have prevented aid beneficiaries to follow their good example. Their actions even reinforced them:

> *The relationship that exists between suburban churchgoers and "the people we serve" takes shape within an established structure of social inequality, and evangelical standards of accountability reflect ever-present power dynamics. If the practical implications of compassionate social outreach include taking risks, breaking cultural barriers, and "loving the unlovable," the imperative of accountability reinforces benign suspicion as a privilege of power and affluence.* (Elisha 2008: 175)

At first sight, VIVA volunteers are recruited from a similar demographic as Elisha's informants, and like American Evangelicals, they believed in the redemptive power of their activities. House visits did not just aim at alleviating *material* suffering. Prayers also addressed Farah's "bigger [spiritual] needs" and, as I laid out in the introduction, contributed to VIVA's more long-term agenda of interfaith "reconciliation" in the Middle East. Class, wealth and legal differentials, however, set volunteers apart from Syrian refugees in Mafraq, and VIVA's blindness to structures of inequalities even exacerbated them. Mobile forms of aid delivery forced refugees to wait at home, sometimes indefinitely, and some, like Farah, entered a hierarchical relationship where she had to comply with missionary activities in exchange for assistance.

What about VIVA members' frustrations? As Maria lamented, many Syrians were more interested in "complaining" than in receiving prayers, often overstated their needs and hid their belongings. And yet, Evangelical volunteers in Elisha's and in Mafraq reacted differently to the disappointments that they faced in interactions with the recipients of their good deeds. In Tennessee, many felt "compassion fatigue" (Elisha 2008: 155) – in the church context, this does not refer to diminished emotional responsiveness to suffering,

but rather to emotional exhaustion. Eventually, some of Elisha's volunteers cut ties with specific protégés who had "failed" them. Volunteering with VIVA, on the other hand, seemed to be somewhat addictive: many participants chose to come more than once, often bringing family members and additional donations on their return. If they uttered criticism, I certainly was not privy to these conversations. Unlike for Elisha's study subjects, volunteering with VIVA turned into a self-fuelling "compassion machine".

One reason for VIVA volunteers' continuing enthusiasm might be their "shallow" engagement with Syrians in Mafraq. Elisha's church volunteers addressed poverty and suffering at their front door and often entered long-term relationships with the people they supported. This was hardly possible for VIVA volunteers who parachuted into an unfamiliar sociocultural context and did not stay for long. Their commitment to *individual* Syrians was certainly less important. Rather, the format of humanitarian house visits allowed them to visit *many* Syrians briefly over a duration of only two weeks. In some ways, this reduced potential frustrations – several times a day, volunteers witnessed a warm welcome and moving performances of suffering inside Syrian homes. The hospitality framework set the stage for this.

Second, social media play an important role in sustaining VIVA's volunteering cycle. Back home, volunteers were encouraged to contribute to VIVA's website and Facebook page. These testimonies uniformly describe a positive, life-changing experience of "shared humanity". On the website, a male volunteer is quoted as saying:

> *Opening our hearts allowed us to speak the cross-border language of love. One's social status, origins and religions were not important, and I was deeply moved by the community that we build.*

What is missing from these statements are moments of power play, frustrations, bewilderment and miscommunication that frequently occurred during house visits and that I described above. VIVA's promotional material provides a normative and idealized narrative about the workings of Christian compassion. It tells old and new short-term volunteers that acts of compassion could cross borders and cultural barriers and provides affective instructions about how volunteers should expect to *feel* during a visit to Mafraq.

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn on anthropological and philosophical literatures to argue that, if we bid farewell to romanticized understandings of "hospitality", the concept captures the tension between concurrent processes of inclusion and exclusion. That makes it well-suited to the study of power dynamics inherent to the humanitarian encounter. Using "hospitality" as a lens through which we explore VIVA's practice of house visits helps us understand volunteers' conflicting engagements with Syrian refugees, their longing for authentic, equitable and personal relationships, but also practices of detachment. Budgetary and time limits, but also cultural and linguistic barriers restrict how much and what VIVA volunteers can give. Through small acts of spatial and temporal control, they manage to "contain" Syrians' demands for aid. What volunteers expect to *see* – and talk about back home - also shapes their interactions with refugees. Encouraging Syrians to perform generic "suffering" conflicts with their hosts' values of hospitality. Likewise, it makes it difficult for volunteers to get a more nuanced understanding of Syrians' experiences of flight and displacement. The deindividualized and apolitical representations of suffering that house visits engender are not unlike those produced by mainstream humanitarian bureaucracy. Finally, the relationship that volunteers aim to build with Syrians during house visits is inspired by a romanticized version of Christian compassion that downplays power inequalities between aid providers and recipients. However, giving "with no strings attached" is complicated by volunteers' concurrent expectations of refugees' accountability towards their benefactors.

To conclude, I reiterate an argument made in this and the previous chapter. Despite its anti-institutional approach, VIVA engages in practices similar to those of more mainstream humanitarian actors. These practices mostly revolve around the *control* of its beneficiaries. Depoliticized, decontextualized and compassion-inducing encounters with refugees are not specific to grassroots Evangelical organizations, but rather a core component of the moral economy of humanitarian action at large.

A comparison with Humphris' (2017) study of house visits of child welfare workers to Roma families in the UK reveals some important commonalities across geographic and institutional contexts. While Roma migrants from Eastern Europe can legally work in Britain,

they lack access to social rights. During welfare encounters, social workers assess Roma women's parenting capacity. While a positive outcome makes them eligible for social assistance, a negative evaluation forces them to choose between leaving the UK or losing their children. Therefore, house visits encourage specific performances of "motherhood" in accordance with welfare workers' culturally situated understandings of what being a "good British mother" entails. Humphris (2017) argues that these visits constitute a process of "bordering", effectively shifting the UK's border from its territorial frontiers into migrants' living rooms.

The house visits of welfare workers employed by the British state have much in common with NGO hospitality in Mafraq - both turn the *home* into a site where access to the services of states and transnational entities like VIVA is negotiated. In the absence of tangible assessment criteria, and impaired by cultural and linguistic barriers to communication, recipients demonstrate "deservingness" through repeated performances of good refugee- or migranthood. These performances extend into their family lives, as Syrians in Mafraq are also frequently addressed as parents and providing them with appropriate food and toys for their children is high up on many volunteers' priority list. Finally, both encounters occur in a complex juridical environment where recipients find themselves in legal limbo as non-citizens and are kept in doubt about their entitlements to social assistance.

Therefore, the comparison points to a global convergence of *hosting-related mechanisms* of social control around issues of movement that actors as diverse as a European faith-based NGO and the British state engage in. As Carpi and Senoguz argue, hospitality turns into "a […] discursive strategy to enhance socio-spatial control" (2018: 1). It allows states and humanitarian actors to assert their rule over mobile populations by regulating their access to social welfare. The study of institutionalized house visits in the Global North and South demonstrates that this form of social control comes with *indirect* forms of containment. After all, neither Syrian refugees in Mafraq nor Roma migrants in the UK are interned in camps. Rather, house visits oblige them to be permanently available for surprise check-ups at home, instigating new forms of containment at the *urban* level. Evidently, "waiting" is a constitutive element of migration governance more broadly (Mountz 2011; Andersson 2014). The temporal logic of humanitarian house visits shows that waiting not only occurs

in liminal spaces, such as refugee camps and detention centres, but also in locations as mundane as refugees' homes.

In the next chapter, we turn to another component of VIVA's activities in Mafraq: English classes for Syrian women through which volunteers and staff members try to shape futures that look – just like *theirs*. "Educating Syrian women" has to be understood at the intersection of faith and capitalist economies. VIVA's English classes do not only come with the promise of white collar-jobs. They also invite Syrian students to envision themselves as part of a new group of friends: the Evangelical community.

Chapter 6: Work hard, pray hard? The making of aspirational refugees in Evangelical and Islamic trainings for Syrian women in Mafraq

"What are your dreams for the future?", Maria asked the group of young Syrian women that squeezed around her in the hallway of *OperationLife*, an international NGO that had lent us its facilities for one of VIVA's week-long English-classes. Despite its location on the outskirts of Mafraq, some fifty women, as well as a handful of men, had found their way to the centre.

Some weeks earlier, Maria and I had met with Valeria, the head of Mafraq's *OperationLif*e office. Maria introduced VIVA as a European NGO that provided emergency relief and education to Syrian women and children but ran on a tight budget. Its faith-based background was not mentioned. Valeria graciously accepted to host us for free because VIVA's focus on women seemed to resonate with her own organisation's mission. Half Jordanian, half Spanish, she was eager to demonstrate to her European interlocutors that her activities in Mafraq lived up to international development standards. Valeria herself was fluent in several foreign languages and her younger staff spoke some English. She gave us a quick tour of the one-floor bungalow that hosted *OperationLife*, pointing out expensive equipment, computers and cameras. The house was surrounded by a small garden where, as elsewhere in Mafraq, hardly anything blossomed. But painted tires spoke of previous arts activities for children. A huge red sign with the NGO's name greeted newcomers.

Afterwards, Valeria got me in touch with Hayat, *OperationLife*'s director at the national level. At a meeting in Amman some days later, Hayat explained her organisation's hands-on approach to educating youth and women. Various classes brought together young Syrians and Jordanians, and volunteers could obtain funding for their own initiatives. Refugees, in particular, were encouraged to take on a more proactive role in the host society and teach their Jordanian counterparts "typically Syrian" skills such as handicraft and carpentry. To Valeria and Hayat, VIVA, a volunteer-led, education-focused NGO, seemed to aspire to similar things.

Back at *OperationLife*'s Mafraq office some time later, Syrian women waited for the arrival of their English teachers in the early morning, sitting on the small wall that surrounded the

centre, sharing sweets and stretching their toes. *OperationLife* was a solid 30 minutes-walk away from the city centre, and many women took pride in wearing elegant shoes with heels, bravely circumventing the holes in Mafraq's pavement. This week's students ranged in age from ca. 14 to 50, the majority of them female refugees who had been recruited during house visits and among the mothers of children from Maria's home schools. Some of *OperationLif*e's young Jordanian volunteers had joined the class. Syrians and Jordanians got along well and were similar in age - most of them were in their early and mid-twenties – but their lives and dreams for the future were remarkably different. Young Jordanians were usually unmarried and still lived with their parents. As university students, they volunteered with *OperationLife* to embellish their CVs with much sought-after working experience in the development industry. Their Syrian counterparts had usually barely finished high school and were already married or engaged. Syrian women did not expect to work outside the house, except on the fields.

Short-term volunteers from Europe taught the eager students in four different rooms. Most women were absolute beginners, but so were some of the foreign volunteers. In chapter 4, we shared a car with Gabriel, a man in his mid-fifties and the owner of a restaurant back home. His wife, Sarah, came to Mafraq twice in 2016 to teach Syrian women English. She was a motherly type and already had grandchildren of her own - but she hardly spoke any English. Laughingly, she sometimes turned to me: "How do you say that again?" Other volunteers, like Emma, were professional high school teachers and proficient in English. They had lovingly prepared little cards with English pronouns, numbers, colours and objects, that students were expected to name and line up in simple sentences. The class rooms looked like those of professional NGO centres elsewhere in town. Chairs were arranged in circles around flip charts, and walls were adorned with motivational slogans and dreamy oil paintings of dark-eyed women, misty landscapes and wild horses, contributed by the centre's volunteers. The yearning for a better and more beautiful world spoke from these amateurish pieces of art. But it was also nurtured during English lessons when Syrian students were asked to envision their future lives.

The two previous chapters discussed VIVA's practice of humanitarian house visits and how volunteers responded to what they perceived to be Syrians' immediate *material* and more

long-term *spiritual* needs. Framing these visits as encounters between "hosts" and "guests" was meant to facilitate egalitarian relationships. In truth, they perpetuated older hierarchical forms of Christian charity, where Syrians had little agency beyond engaging in affective performances of destitution and gratitude.

By way of contrast, chapter 6 turns to another set of VIVA's activities – *educational trainings* for grown-up women – where refugees' agency was key, and Syrians were expected to become eager students. Working in the informal economy, chasing after and waiting for aid took up much of Syrians' time. Getting an education was another staple of their everyday lives. Most of my Syrian acquaintances were constantly busy with studying English, the Quran and IT, sewing and hairdressing, even wedding photography. Local churches and mosques, Jordanian and international NGOs all offered similar programmes. As many of them lasted no longer than a week, refugees completed one course after another, exchanging information about upcoming events on WhatsApp and accumulating official-looking certificates, usually issued by humanitarian actors themselves. Most of the classes either specifically targeted or were mainly attended by young women.

Over time, I began to doubt the ultimate value of so much educational bustle. There was a blatant discrepancy between refugees' bold aspirations and the actual knowledge and skills that these trainings provided. Learning how to cook and sew might have led to odd jobs in the informal economy. But often organisations did not seem to have conducted needs assessment of the local market at all. For example, Mafraq was already home to several Jordanian wedding photographers and newly trained Syrians would not have been able to afford the required technology. But refugees also hit more structural barriers to economic self-reliance that I discuss in chapter 2 and in the conclusion. Limited access to the formal labour market – restricted to low-skilled jobs and requiring work permits difficult to obtain – and to higher education makes it unlikely that Syrians could put newly acquired professional skills to use (Lenner 2016). What is more, at the time of my fieldwork, return to Syria and finding employment at home was no more than a distant prospect. Actual jobs on either side of the border seemed out of reach. A Syrian woman jokingly remarked to me: "We learn English so we can receive foreign [NGO] visitors." As aid workers from secular and faith-based organisations seemed to agree that educating Syrian women was a laudable endeavour, I started to wonder: educating refugees – what *for*?

I answer this question by comparing educational programmes for Syrian women run by two faith-based humanitarian organisations in Mafraq: VIVA's English courses, where I repeatedly volunteered as a teacher, and Quran classes at the local Jaqut charity, where I conducted one day of fieldwork in May 2016. Both are peculiar projects of "self-making": they convey various techniques – including aspirational daydreaming and veiling – that allow female students to envision themselves both as prospective teachers and good believers. While VIVA's English-classes are explicitly career-building and implicitly religious, Quran classes at the Yacut Charity are explicitly religious, but also implicitly aim to foster Syrian women's teaching careers. Hence, pointing out the mismatch between training contents and labour market needs does not capture the multidimensional nature of these forms of "education". They have to be understood at the intersection of capitalist economies, the development industry – and *religion*.

Numerically speaking, Syrian women are an important part of the refugee demographic in Mafraq. 51% of Syrians are female, and more than one quarter are young women under the age of 18 (UNHCR 2018c). But educating Muslim women is also highly symbolic. Feminist scholars argue that since the events of 9/11, the "Muslim woman" has turned into an object of fascination for development professionals, Western orientalists and Islamists alike (Abu-Lughod 2002; cooke 2007). Her importance comes from being a *liminal* figure. For all sides, she has come to signify a boundary: between free and unfree societies, or between pious communities of believers and the unbelievers. Depending on who uses her, she is coded as a symbol of either positive or negative Islam. The veil, in particular, has come to function as "a marker of essential difference that Muslim women today cannot escape" (cooke 2007: 140). Ascribing women's plight to a difference in "culture" or "religion" obscures more complex power relations and histories of domination, including the legacy of imperialism and global capitalism. It also conceals the role that well-meaning observers play in maintaining women's oppression, e.g. through Western states' support for authoritarian regimes in the Arab world. As Abu-Lughod (2002) points out, saving Muslim women implies saving them *from* something and *to* something. I suggest that Syrian women's *faith* matters to those who educate them. This chapter explores the diverse adversities that Evangelical and Islamic trainings supposedly save Syrian women *from*: destitution, isolation, but also, in complicated ways, patriarchy. It also underlines the particularity of faith-based humanitarianism that saves women *through* a combination of economic agency and

inclusion into a religious community, although Evangelical and Islamic humanitarians weigh up these two components differently.

The first section introduces the conceptual tools that allow us to make sense of the technologies that help Syrian women aspire to futures as career women *and* good believers. I draw on Foucault's theory of "subject formation" to explicate elective affinities between capitalist economies and piety movements: an emphasis on their members' pro-activeness, accountability and self-discipline. The section ends by briefly acknowledging critiques by feminist scholars and anthropologists of religion about the risks of a strictly Foucauldian approach to simplify women's subjectivities and practices. As subsequent sections show, educators' exercises of "self-making" are frequently disrupted by Syrian women's struggles in exile, conflicting ambitions – and search for fun.

The second section takes a closer look at the career-building dimension of VIVA's English classes: Maria's "daydreaming" exercise. Asking Syrian women to envision professional careers should be considered a "technology of the self" in Foucault's sense because it produces proactive students. But dreaming often gets complicated, which hints at moments where the formation of "neoliberal" subjects is disturbed by the realities of Syrians' pre-war and current economic disenfranchisement.

The third section turns to the spiritual dimension of VIVA's teaching and the double use of "dreaming up one's future" as a technology for producing career women *and* future believers. Through volunteer testimonies, Syrian women are asked to picture themselves as members of an idealized (and unspecified) group of "friends" – the Evangelical community.

The final section adds a comparative perspective by discussing how Syrian students at a local Quran school balance Islamic instruction, access to aid and teaching jobs. The Islamic Jaqut Charity imposes strict rules on its students, most of which revolve around bodily appearance. This section draws inspiration from Mahmood's (2005) seminal work on veiling as a "technology of the self" for making pious women. However, it tries to avoid feeding into the classical debate about veiling as a technology of emancipation or control. My point here is not that veiling makes better believers, but rather that it increases Syrian women's *economic* agency.

Big aspirations, small anxieties – Elective affinities between piety movements and neoliberal capitalism

Implicitly Evangelical and explicitly Islamic trainings for Syrian women in Mafraq exhibit important structural convergences. Both aim to create pathways for Syrian women into the formal labour market in Jordan, but also to integrate them into their respective religious communities. In insisting on commonalities, not differences, I contribute to critiques of contemporary anthropological scholarship on religion that has been accused of plotting essentialized versions of "Western liberalism" and "Islam" against each other.

> *New atheists are taking issue with Islam in very radical and sweeping ways, declaring Muslims to be essentially incapable of rational reflection and moral action. In a more sympathetic vein, Muslims' moral and legal traditions have become the key focus of an emerging critical anthropology of secularism. Although mutually antagonistic, these two (mainly Western) approaches to Islam and secularism share a wider political and intellectual sensibility that is a striking reminder of Orientalism's construction of the East as the foundational Other the identity of the West, be it as a vilified object of hate or as the starting point of sophisticated academic critique of liberalism.* (Schielke 2012: 302)

Taking up Schielke's (2012) advice to avoid reproducing binary Orientalist tropes, I argue that Evangelical and Islamic teachers in Mafraq operate on shared *experiential* ground: faith-based humanitarianism has to be understood against the backdrop of religious revivals in Muslim and Christian parts of the world. Since the 1970s, religious discourse and piety have turned into a pervasive "idiom of morality and subjectivity" (Schielke 2012: 312) in places as diverse as Egypt and the US. Christian and Islamic revival movements are rarely discussed together, although they have much in common, including a more scripture-oriented understanding of religion and a return to conservative values, an emphasis on purity and moral sentiment – and grassroots activism. Anthropologists of religion have noted the coincidence of religious revivals and shifts in the economic landscape, namely the resurgence of 19th-century laissez-faire economic liberalism, now termed "neoliberalism"

(e.g. Rudnyckyj 2014; Schielke 2012).[33] This is not to claim that pietists have suddenly turned "neoliberal".[34] Rather, there are important elective affinities between piety movements and capitalist economies. Supposedly secular English courses and explicitly religious Quran classes in Mafraq are both shaped by an emphasis on their students' pro-activeness, efficiency and accountability. They all rely on learners' willingness to improve and police *themselves*. Foucault's theory of subject formation helps make sense of how people are co-opted into these diverse economic and spiritual regimes. Foucault describes a modern form of power that is not coercive and does not rely on disciplining people, but rather on encouraging them to discipline *themselves*. Instead of precluding free will, this "softer" form of power enables *certain* forms of agency. Hence, social norms and power structures are not external to the individual but constitute it: "modern forms of power tie the subjectivity (conscience, identity, self-knowledge) of the individual to that individual's subjection." (Cruikshank 1999: 21). People inhabit power through engaging in "technologies of the self" (Foucault 1988). However, as Foucault (1987) concedes, the "practices [of self] are […] not something that the individual invents by himself. They are patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group" (122).

The strength of Foucault's framework lies in its applicability to a variety of contemporary contexts. With regard to the effects of neoliberal reform, Ferguson argues that replacing punishment and control with incentives has led to the production of the rational homo economicus, i.e. the kind of citizen who carefully weighs up risks and operates "as a miniature firm" (172). From a feminist perspective, scholars have asked what the "neoliberal *woman*" might look like. In the US context, Rottenberg (2016) discusses middle-class women's attempts at maintaining their value on the labour market through delaying motherhood. On the other side of the social spectrum, Cruikshank (1999) takes on the myth of the "Black welfare queen". Her critique goes beyond exposing misconceptions about poor Black women as fraudsters or demanding more opportunities for their political participation. Rather, she asks how the "Black welfare queen" is *produced* through the

[33] As Ferguson (2010) points out, there is a variety of definitions for "neo-liberalism". Here, by neoliberalism, I understand a macro-economic doctrine centred on private enterprise, free markets and a retraction of the welfare state.

[34] Max Weber (2013 [1905]) famously argued that the spread of the Protestant ethic in Northern Europe facilitated the advent of capitalism because it popularized values such as hard work and progress, and activities such as entrepreneurship, trade and the accumulation of wealth.

welfare state's accounting and audit practices. Eligibility criteria and administrative procedures are designed in ways that make welfare fraud almost inevitable and include a series of double-binds that oblige welfare recipients to give their "consent".

Hence, religious and neoliberal modes of subjectivation do not exclude each other. In the rest of the chapter, I demonstrate that similar modes of subjectivation centred on fostering *female spiritual and economic agency* shape VIVA's English classes and religious activities in the Quran school. A similar sense of "being in the world" informs Syrians' entanglements with religion, the labour market and the development industry. As *humanitarian subjects*, Syrian women are subjected to endless trainings that aim to upgrade their skills. As *believers*, they are encouraged to engage in constant self-reflection and self-discipline. The advent of "pious neoliberalism" (Atia 2012: 102) and the newly-found role of the religious idiom in the workplace illustrates these convergences. In Indonesia, factory owners enrol management and workers in Islamic corporate trainings that reframe religious rituals such as fasting as "a directive for self-control and individual accountability" (Rudnyckyj 2014: 119). Against the backdrop of Indonesia's transition from state-led development to market liberalization, these trainings seek to produce efficient and accountable workers and, ultimately, increase the factories' profit.

In addition, there are important similarities between *affective* economies of neoliberal capitalism and consumerism, and religious revivals: those caught up in them never feel "quite right", never do or achieve "enough", a state of existence that Schielke (2015) calls "aspirational, a life in the future tense" (55). Schielke's (2015) study with short-term Salafi activists reveals that greater piety does not always result in self-assurance and peace of mind but rather continuous doubt and self-questioning.

Having introduced the conceptual foundations, this chapter thus takes a Foucauldian perspective to investigate the "technologies of the self" through which female refugees begin to aspire to becoming *career women and good believers*. What makes them eager participants in various educational programmes? The second and third sections look at the economic and the spiritual side of VIVA's "dreaming exercises" during English classes. The final section revisits veiling as an alternative "technology of the self" in the Quran school. The chapter transposes insights from feminist scholarship on the formation of neoliberal

subjects in the US into the refugee context: economic empowerment alone does not remedy underlying structural inequalities, and welfare handouts and strict rules do not preclude Syrians' active participation in humanitarian economies and spiritual communities. Rather, they enable *certain forms* of female agency.

In doing so, the chapter acknowledges limitations of Foucault's theory of subject formation. The framework helps us understand how people realize *ideals* of personhood, be they successful entrepreneurs, superwomen or pious believers. But it tells us little about the diversity of real women's experiences, subjectivities and practices, and instances when processes of subject formation are disrupted. A strictly Foucauldian approach risks reducing women's agency to socially prescribed forms of free will. From a feminist perspective, Deveaux (1994) bemoans that a dualistic account of power dehistoricizes and obscures more complex webs of relationships and obligations that women find themselves in. By way of illustration, Syrian women in Mafraq are not only shaped in trainings of well-meaning faith-based aid providers. They also answer to the expectations of their spouses, extended families, the Jordanian state and the UN system. And even very pious Muslims might simultaneously pursue more worldly endeavours like romance and consumption. I borrow from Schielke (2012) the concept of religious "bricolages" (314), arguing that my informants' lived struggles in Syria and in exile, personal disposition and spiritual knowledge all inform their complex, sometimes messy and inconsistent, entanglements with faiths of all sorts. My ethnography of English and Quran classes in Mafraq reveals that Syrians' attempts at becoming careerwomen and good believers are historically situated and can only be understood against the backdrop of Mafraq's specific humanitarian context.

The daydreams of future teachers

Back in *OperationLife*'s Mafraq office, Maria assembled an advanced English class composed of the teachers of her home-schooling project as well as other women with a particularly close relationship with VIVA. As all rooms were taken, we had to escape into the hallway, crouching over a tiny desk. As Maria spoke little Arabic, she asked me to join. Today's English lesson was about *dreams of future lives*, but the women spoke mostly in Arabic, waiting for my translation.

Tamam, a Syrian woman in her late twenties and a dedicated member of Maria's home-schooling team, went first. She explained that before the war, she had hoped to become a teacher. But her parents had not wanted her to leave her natal village to attend a four-year college in a bigger city. Instead, she had trained as a nurse closer to home. From Tamam's perspective, working with Maria helped her fulfil her long-cherished career plans, making her feel that her life was moving forward once again, after years of stalling in exile: "When the Syrians came here, everything stopped. But now they have been here for four years… They start over again."

Maya, born in Mafraq and in her early twenties, came next. On her mother's side, she was a distant cousin of Tamam's. Her father was a local Jordanian who had married his Syrian wife three decades earlier. In many ways, Maya's future looked more promising than that of her fellow students. She had Jordanian citizenship and recently finished undergraduate studies in French literature at the local university. Working with Maria's home-schooling project paid her some pocket money before her imminent move to Bahrain, a wealthy Gulf state where her fiancé lived. Still, Maya replied miserably: "I don't have *any* [dreams]." Hesitantly, she added that she might continue her education with a master's degree and a PhD but had not decided upon a subject yet.

Bushra, another Jordanian teacher, chipped in affirmatively: "Everything stopped!" Like Maya, she seemed to refer more to her personal career impasse than to the Syrian war. Bushra's family lived in a huge house, almost a villa, in the same middle-class neighbourhood as my host family. Her father had retired from the army with a high rank and several of her brothers were also in the military. Bushra herself had a degree in Disability Studies but struggled to find a job in Mafraq. Before Maria enlisted her for the home-schooling project, she had mostly stayed at home, caring for her frail mother. My surprise must have shown in my face. Maya and Bushra were the only two Jordanians at the table. They had university-level education and came from financially secure and, in Bushra's case, even wealthy local families. And yet they seemed more pessimistic than their Syrian counterparts.

Riffat, a good-humoured mother of eight and newly pregnant, quickly changed the tone of the conversation. "I always wanted to work in a kinder garden!", she said, but there had

been no such institutions in her home village in Syria. In Mafraq, her growing family occupied a flat in one of the new high-rise buildings. Her own children played on the stairs and in the field behind the house with those of other Syrian families, and Riffat's door was always open to her new neighbours. "In a way, I have my own kinder garden now", she smiled.

Finally, Nawal, a newly married Syrian woman, explained that she had failed to reach the necessary grades in her high school exams to become a doctor. Her mother had advised her to opt for journalism, as one of her aunts had been a radio presenter in Syria many years ago. Nawal was very short, but bursting with life, and we believed her when she added: "When I was a child, I had a beautiful voice. And I was very loud." Before moving to Amman in 2010, shortly before the onset of the Syrian war, she had enrolled at a university in Damascus for some semesters. Later that day, I found her chatting with Valeria and the centre's Jordanian volunteers about *OperationLife*'s new citizen journalism project.

During the class, Tamam signalled me excitedly that she wanted to tell me a secret. In the afternoon, Maria and I visited her at home. Impatiently, Tamam took me aside: "Maybe I will travel to Germany in August!" Over the last days, a possible match with a Syrian relative in Düsseldorf had appeared on the horizon. Her future spouse, the holder of a German passport, had a small business selling cars. "Everyone who knows him speaks highly of him!" As we learned in chapter 3, Tamam eventually opted for a Jordanian truck driver from Amman and her travel plans to Europe never materialized. But her confession that day demonstrates that Syrian students of English simultaneously harboured other dreams that had little to with *jobs*. In these dreams, they also envisioned themselves in a scenario of upward social mobility – but it was obtained through marriage, and sometimes travels, not through getting an education.

After seeing Tamam, we stopped by for a coffee at the house of Khadija, another Syrian teacher in VIVA's home-schooling project. Khadija might have echoed some of the girls' sombre mood earlier that day. Unfortunately, she could not make it to class, as she had been stuck with her two young daughters and a sick husband at home. To comfort her, Maria brought out her violin and performed some pieces in Khadija's damp living room. The music resonated from its bare walls and the toddlers' wide, round eyes were fixed on the

instrument. For Khadija, it also evoked childhood memories of her own. Back in Jabal al-Hoss, she had distinguished herself from other girls by her bookishness, devouring textbooks about Mozart and Beethoven before an early marriage put an end to her studies. "What do *you* dream of, Khadija?", Maria asked. "*Walla ishi* [nothing]", she replied. "I don't have dreams now. What am I supposed to dream of? The circumstances are hard." Turning to me, Khadija continued: "Dreams change a lot when you grow up. Remember what you wanted when you were a child? All I wanted was a huge box of chocolate! Now all I want is for the family to be okay, and for the circumstances to change."

This section looks at the *economic* dimension of the dreaming exercises that Maria and other VIVA teachers conducted during English classes. Dreams, in VIVA's sense, were far from being a private affair or a merely psychological state. Rather, I understand "dreaming up the future" as a "technology of the self" in the Foucauldian sense that encouraged Syrian women to envision themselves in future white-collar jobs - for example as teachers - or, at the least, in wage labour.

When it comes to fostering female economy agency, a faith-based NGO like VIVA had much in common with more mainstream development organizations like *OrganisationLife*. Valeria invited VIVA to use their premises because she felt that English classes fit her organisation's focus on professional skills and refugees as proactive members of the host community and in the local labour market. That Maria's students answered her question without hesitation with their *professional* (and not, for example, marital) plans, indicates what they perceived to be the purpose of these trainings: career-building. As teachers of the home-schooling project, they had already established a relationship with VIVA as an *employer*. Up to ten Syrians, most of them women, were paid to teach one or two small groups of children of primary-school age inside their own living rooms. Their maximal salaries were less than two thirds of the Jordanian minimal wage (JD 268, ca. USD 378), as Maria believed that money should not be their main motivation for partaking in the scheme. Improving their English was only one of the trainings that Maria regularly encouraged them to attend. Once a month, Maria organised workshops in Tamam's or Nawal's living room where she familiarized her employees with contemporary teaching methods from Europe, using wooden toys, string, paint and even pebbles. When teachers left the programme, she also

issued them printed certificates that they could include into their applications for future jobs with other NGOs. Like other make-shift schools for Syrian children, Maria mostly hired women. The only two male teachers in the programme were Baher, the husband of a female teacher, and Adnan, VIVA's sole contact in a remote village outside Mafraq. Her hiring criteria did not correspond to those of other schools for Syrian refugees run by more mainstream organisations like Save the Children and UNICEF. Many of Maria's teachers had not finished high school in Syria, and some were struggling with basic maths and Arabic orthography. But for Maria, the teachers' dedication and enthusiasm trumped professional qualifications.

Maria's vision of female futures through English classes and employment in her home-schools resonates with the dominant strand in mainstream development discourse and practice that understands "female empowerment" as restoring women's economic agency and financial self-reliance. In Development Studies, there is a vast body of literature showing how neoliberalism has informed the aid industry since the 1980s, leading to an increasing managerialization of aid and a new focus on accountability, impact and measurable project indicators (e.g. Barnett 2011). Women are a key target of neoliberal development projects, as evidenced by the mainstreaming of concepts like "gender equality" and "female empowerment" in development indicators such as the Millennium Development Goals. Cornwall and Rivas (2015) deplore that contemporary advocates of "women's empowerment" have been alienated from wider struggles for social justice. While "gender" had found its way into development programming by the mid-1990s, the latter mostly bypassed concurrent academic debates about the intersections between "gender", "class" and "ethnicity". In the development industry, gender is often reduced to "women" and oppositional, hierarchical relationships between men and women. Older rights-based approaches, e.g. those of community psychology and popular education in the Global South since the 1970s, have been side-lined. From a purely market-oriented perspective, refugee women are considered a better *investment*. Displaced women are co-opted into aid programmes because they are considered "more hardworking, more caring, more responsible and more mindful of the environment than men" (Cornwall and Rivas 2015: 399). Conversely, men are often branded as pre-modern perpetrators of domestic violence, powerful gatekeepers within the refugee community or emasculated troublemakers (Olivius 2014, 2016).

“Dreaming up one’s future” as a career woman, I suggest, has to be understood as a “technology of the self” that allowed Syrian women in VIVA’s English classes to envision themselves as one of these strong, entrepreneurial, hardworking women, as neoliberal subjects par excellence. Dreaming exercises that linked the past and the present had a strong motivational effect. They made newly-trained “teachers” like Tamam aware of the limitations of their pre-war lives and their novel opportunities in exile. They also conveyed a sense of linear progression: “Everything stopped… Now Syrians are starting over again!” The immediate future was pictured as a series of more trainings and classes with Maria, or, for the more fortunate like Maya, additional university degrees.

For some participants, the language of career dreams became a more general idiom for thinking about the future and interactions with the humanitarian system. In previous chapters, we encountered Naila, an unmarried woman in her early twenties who still lived with her parents and siblings and often worked on the fields. VIVA had struck a particularly close relationship with her family. Naila and three of her younger sisters regularly took part in English classes and received house visits from staff members and volunteers. VIVA also occasionally paid them a small salary for making cheap jewellery that volunteers sold back home, presumably to other members of VIVA’s network. On many of these occasions, the girls were questioned about their dreams for the future, and they began to envision careers in the humanitarian sector. Nine months into our friendship, Naila asked me to accompany her to a course on removing landmines, operated by a Jordanian NGO. Previously, I had come to know her as a deeply devout and shy person, who wore the face veil and did not take taxis on her own for fear of interacting with male strangers. To my great surprise, I now watched Naila chat away freely with the male Jordanian instructor. Some days later, she spread out the newly obtained certificates on the carpet in her parents’ living room, proudly handing me one after the other. Her enthusiasm was moving. It reminded me of the earnest look on the school girl’s face in her sole childhood picture. Naila, who had never worked outside her family, suddenly dreamt of working for an NGO and contributing to Syria’s reconstruction after the war. “I wish!”, she exclaimed.

And yet, Syrians’ occasional refusal to partake in these day dreams indicates that the formation of neoliberal subjects did not always go smoothly. While enthusiastic about becoming a teacher, Tamam was also ready to give up her newly-found job to join a

potential spouse elsewhere. Professional and marital plans often clashed, as did educational activities outside and inside Syrians' homes, family obligations and restrictive gender norms. This indicates more fundamental problems with reductionist approaches to empowering women as *economic* actors. By shifting the burden of (self)-development on female Syrians' shoulders, humanitarian action introduced a distinction between "good", aspirational refugees – those who actively sought out and participated in educational programmes – and those who did not. Making "women work for development, rather than making development work for their equality and empowerment" (Cornwall and Rivas 2015: 398) overlooked their complex livelihoods and longstanding histories of disenfranchisement.

Syrians' socioeconomic status before the war shaped the daydreams that they allowed themselves to indulge in. While some of the women in my English class had nurtured dreams of professional careers as nurses and journalists before 2011, most of them, who like Riffat and Khadija came from remote rural areas, had never envisioned taking up wage labour at all. Furthermore, the low salaries in the home-schooling project meant that Syrian women had to be able to *afford* working as a teacher. Many of the teachers were the sole providers for extended families. Khadija, for example, paid the rent for herself, her two young children and her disabled husband. A substantial part of her salary was sent to her in-laws in Jabal al-Hoss every month. Tamam was the sole bread-winner for her elderly parents and an older, unmarried sister. Although Nawal's husband held a job as a waiter in a nearby restaurant, he spent almost all his money on smoking and food at his workplace, leaving her to pay for accommodation, food and medical costs – she was also newly pregnant. From the start, Maria's *moral* economy of employing Syrians because of their heartfelt dedication to the project thus clashed with the teachers' more pressing financial concerns. As a result, some of them simultaneously relied on the assistance of other NGOs, as being a teacher did not translate into having a sufficient income, and the little money they earned was often passed on to family members. As Khadija poignantly put it, what was there to dream about in the context of extremely insecure lives? Kinship obligations also had other, sometimes unexpected effects. Farida, whom we will meet below, had to give up teaching because her parents and siblings felt overwhelmed by the daily intrusion of young students into their living room. This echoes Huang's (2017) findings from the "iAgent" project in rural Bangladesh where unmarried young women constantly had to renegotiate

their position in village hierarchies. As mobile NGO workers providing digital services, they were highly valued. But they were also obliged to sell cheap commercial products, putting them on a level with ordinary hawkers. As "social entrepreneurs", they were expected to recruit new clients from within their kinship networks in which they occupied the bottom ranks because of their gender and marital status. As a result, working with an NGO often exacerbated women's precarious livelihoods, and the little income they earned was used for the family household, not for private consumption or further business.

And working with VIVA only went so far. Maria's training "certificates" were not accepted by other NGOs and thus contributed little to Syrian women's employability in the humanitarian sector, let alone in Jordanian schools. In the absence of proper work opportunities, being a "refugee" became the actual job. Syrians in nearby Zaatari camp have come to rely on cash-for-work programmes with NGOs as their sole source of income (Tobin 2016). In humanitarian Mafraq, refugee women scraped together a meagre income from house visits, NGO classes that came with small financial incentives and badly paid volunteering and teaching activities.

Participants of Save the Children's job trainings for impoverished youth in Amman openly denounced similar inconsistencies in the classroom (Sukarieh 2016). They pointed out that "self-made" entrepreneurship was prohibited by their lack of social networks and financial resources and questioned the underlying political agenda of US-funded development programs. Students' protests about teaching content even led to the temporary break-down of the programme. Syrian women in Mafraq, by comparison, never rioted in English classes or other trainings. Their lack of higher education might have made it more difficult for them to critically question the NGO-led education that they were offered. But their economic dependence on VIVA was also more exacerbated. Attending VIVA's English classes allowed them to stay in touch and strengthen their relationship with the organisation without setting them on the path towards financial independence. Instead, Syrian women were caught up in a circle of NGO hand-outs and trainings which ultimately assured their ongoing participation in the humanitarian system.

Please come to my birthday party – dreams of the Evangelical community

VIVA's English classes did not only aim at refugee students' labour market integration – they also offered them an ideal, and implicitly Evangelical, *community*. Asking Syrians to envision themselves as part of this community went beyond assisting them with realizing their *individual* career dreams. Personal mentorship played an important role in VIVA's educational programmes. In this regard, it mattered little that some volunteers like Sarah were hardly qualified for teaching English. More important than her linguistic skills, her personal dedication and warmth shaped her interactions with Syrian students. But members of VIVA also invited Syrians to take part in more organised exercises of "community-building" where dreaming up possible futures, again, emerges as a key "technology of the self".

In April 2016, one of the English classes ended on a somewhat different note. All students were asked to join Maria in *OperationLife*'s main office. As they crowded into the room, Maria, a slender figure, leaned against the central desk. Next to her stood Valeria, the Jordanian director of Mafraq's *OperationLife* office, who translated her words into the local dialect. Valeria's powerful voice filled the room and quickly silenced the chatty bunch of women. Maria announced that she was going to talk about friendship. She recalled her lonesome youth in a mountainous part of Western Europe, with hard work on her parents' remote farm and hardly any friends. I do not remember her exact words that day, but the part of her narrative that stuck in my mind was an image of bleak, empty fields. One of Maria's sole positive childhood memories was playing the violin, surrounded by her family – a hobby she later kept up in Jordan when she joined VIVA's small "band" and regularly organised concerts for Syrians in the local town hall.

In Maria's timid and her interpreter's vigorous voice, her story continued. Maria described how she had left her home village and attended teacher's college in a nearby town, a profession she found deeply fulfilling. As an adult, she also found new *friends*. While other VIVA staff members and volunteers in the room nodded encouragingly, she went on to describe the joys of companionship. Jo, one of VIVA's more regular volunteers in his late thirties and a professional pilot, took over, recounting memories of a birthday. He was a handsome man and his female audience, including Valeria, was smitten. "People who work

with VIVA have been friends for ten years!", he exclaimed. "It made me really happy to be part of this family." He underlined that what had brought him and his friends together was not family ties, but shared lives. "We experienced a lot together. This connects us on a much deeper level." Like Maria, he linked a story of friendship to a narrative of personal change: "I already did a lot of bad things. For example, when you hurt someone with words." Forgiveness, for Jo, only made sense in the context of his religious beliefs. Gradually, he slipped from narrating his personal experience into a story about an undefined community, "us", and about forgiving on a more existential scale.

> *We believe that there is a God that created us. Who made us for a purpose. We always try to see the purpose for this person… This makes it easier to forgive. I try to see everyone as creations of God. It doesn't matter if you're smart or not. It makes you fly.*

In the translation, Valeria added: "It doesn't even matter whether you're Christian or Muslim." Jokingly, she turned to Jo: "So where is our invitation?" "Invitation to what?", he asked in a perplexed tone. "To the birthday party, of course", she replied, amidst the laughter of her Syrian audience. Jo gave her a smile, before continuing in a more earnest tone: "It helps to have a shared vision… You can't change the past. We live *for* the future, but we live *in* the present." Again, Valeria offered her own interpretation of his words, addressing the volunteers in English: "This is very important for these people. To learn forgiveness!"

At first sight, Maria and Jo presented a model of friendship hardly available to Syrian women usually confined to their kinship networks. While some of the Syrian teachers employed in the home-schooling project had befriended each other and stayed in touch on social media, conservative gender norms and care responsibilities limited how often they could see each other in person. Many of them also had young children of their own or looked after their elderly parents. In Mafraq, Syrian women did not usually "choose" their friends freely. As I argued in chapter 3, refugees' transnational kinship networks also had an important socioeconomic dimension. Resources accessed from next of kin complemented other insecure forms of income, a lifeline that most Syrians could not do without.

Still, Maria's vivid and honest depiction of her own loneliness resonated with Syrians' sense of isolation in exile, the loss of loved ones and the disruption of pre-war social networks. All over the room, I heard women mutter approvingly. Despite their vastly different lives, Maria's story had evoked common experiences. That we all crowded in one office, having shared a long day of English classes, numerous jokes and sweets during the breaks, only added to this. This suggests that the *setting* of Maria's and Jo's narration was as important as their actual message. It built on a preestablished sense of community between Syrian (and Jordanian) women, VIVA members of staff and volunteers. Significantly, they spoke in public and in the context of an educational course. Hence, their private testimonies were framed as "education". Maria's story also linked breaking free from one's family and finding new friends to becoming a *teacher* more explicitly.

It is worth dwelling on Valeria's understanding of Jo's words. In her translation and comments, she conveyed a more general message about interfaith reconciliation and female empowerment of Syrian refugees. Earlier, I explained that for both Evangelicals and pious Muslims, mundane activities and language were saturated with religious references. Mentions of Quranic examples and religious proverbs figured prominently in the everyday speech of my Syrian informants. This might explain why Muslim women like Valeria and VIVA's students did not feel alienated by volunteers' talk about "God" in the midst of an English class. However, Jo and Maria did not simply have a "universal" community in mind. To them, it mattered a lot that their audience would eventually become Christian. Drawing on Elisha (2008, 2011), I argued in the previous chapter that salvation narratives are common to Evangelical theology and that Evangelicals believe in the *transformative* power of their good deeds and personal examples. In this regard, the "teacher-friend" was the Evangelical role model par excellence, an ideal figure that combined professional, affective and spiritual aspirations. It is worth mentioning that barbecues used to be a trademark of Jo's and Maria's now-dissolved church, many of whose members had become involved with VIVA. On an information website run by mainstream Protestant denominations in their country of origin, the church was even referred to as "the guys with the Bible and the grill". Unbeknownst to their Syrian and Jordanian audience, Maria and Jo thus referenced seemingly mundane leisure time activities that took on a religious meaning in the context of VIVA's Evangelical community.

Although Syrian women were not explicitly asked to day-dream that day, VIVA's testimonies worked in ways akin to Maria's career dreaming exercises. In Jo's speech, references to the future were common: "we live for the future, but we live in the present". As in daydreams about future jobs and studies, the female audience was encouraged to make connections between present, past and future and to imagine time as a progression towards a better life. While the past was associated with strife and loneliness, the future was pictured in rosy tones as a series of communal events that they could easily relate to. Women from a conservative Muslim background and tight kinship systems were told that personal change was possible and cutting old ties did not necessarily lead to total isolation, but rather the discovery of a new and better community. In a seemingly mundane language of friendship and birthday parties, Jo and Maria thus paved the way for the most radical decision that Syrian women in Mafraq could possibly take: changing their religion and, most likely, losing their family and support networks along the way.

Nevertheless, "dreaming up the future Evangelical community" did not seem to leave a lasting impression on the Syrian audience, as evidenced by Valeria's comments. As far as I could observe, VIVA's students certainly never considered converting. As a "technology of the self", these daydreams might have unsuccessfully targeted Syrian women because, despite their general approval of the value of friendship, they failed to grasp the religious dimension. On VIVA volunteers, though, "dreams of community" had a much stronger effect as they reactivated connections and positive memories within their faith group. Perhaps, nurturing these dreams contributed to the formation not of good *converts*, but of good *missionaries*, as they allowed VIVA members to go on envisioning a Christian Mafraq in the not-so-distant future, despite the numerous obstacles to proselytizing Syrians.

Veiling as an alternative path towards female *economic* agency

The final part of this chapter contrasts my analysis of "dreaming up one's futures" as career women and Evangelical Christians as *technologies of the self* in VIVA's English classes with findings from a visit to a Quran school. For one day in spring 2016, I was able to accompany Farida, a student at the centre and a former teacher in Maria's home-schooling project. While studying English with VIVA openly addressed livelihoods and career paths but was intertwined with more subtle ambitions of converting Syrians, Quran classes emphasized

adherence to a strict form of Islam. But they also offered Syrian students access to new skills and sources of income. A tour inside the Islamic Jaqut Charity allows us a peek into a morning class where cheerful banter, prospects of hell and redemption got mixed up with students' material aspirations.

At 8:30 precisely on a mild day in May 2016, I picked up Farida from her parents' apartment in a middle-class neighbourhood in Mafraq. She was already waiting impatiently, as usually dressed in a black *abaya*, a black face veil and black gloves. Unsure about what to wear for the occasion, I had opted for loose trousers and a black hijab covering most of my upper body. On my arrival, I realized that this was far too revealing in the eyes of my conservative hosts. In the pleasant warmth of the early morning, we strolled along Mafraq's deserted streets towards the wealthier suburb of Shweike, hoping to catch a bus on the way. At the next roundabout, a taxi full of fully veiled women stopped beside us. Despite their cheers, we failed to squeeze in and had to wait for the next. The Jaqut Charity was located in a new two-storey sandstone building, easily recognizable by a big nameplate above the main entrance. Its Islamic affiliation was immediately visible on its outside walls and in intricate pieces of Quranic calligraphy inside the class rooms. At the front door, a second, smaller plate announced "welcome" (in Arabic) and, underneath, it contained two more words, *ihsan* – "charity" – and *itqan*. The latter means "mastery" or "perfection". In the Quran, it is used to describe the Creation as proof of the artistry of Allah. However, command over one's body and mind was also what Syrian students hoped to acquire at the centre.

As the guest of honour, I was asked to meet the sheikh who ran the centre and, incidentally, the only man allowed to enter it. As I later learned from my host father, he was a well-respected Jordanian imam, known for his great piety and his beautiful voice. On Fridays, he often led the prayer in Mafraq's biggest mosque. He was also highly respected among his students, although the daily instruction was ensured by female teachers. Farida was eager to take part in the meeting as she had never met him in person before. That day, I encountered a mild man in his fifties whom his whole attire – short trousers and a long beard - and demeanour identified as a highly conservative Muslim. During the one-hour conversation, he piously kept his eyes on the ground to avoid my gaze. When I mistakenly grabbed a glass of water with my left hand, considered impure by strict believers, Farida gently scolded me.

The conversation that ensued oscillated between humanitarian marketing and serious attempts at conversion. As the sheikh pointed out, the centre welcomed 300 to 350 students per teaching semester. Each of them came twice a week for three-hour shifts. To some of them, the charity also provided food parcels and, depending on the season, other types of assistance. As many students were related, only one person per family was eligible for aid. While most teachers were Jordanian women, Syrians who enrolled for several semesters and successfully passed the final exams could become teachers themselves and receive a small salary.

My first impression of the centre was of a women-only space, full of outspoken teachers and students, laughter and discussions. But the sheikh's explanation of the importance of educating women rested on a binary representation of females as both weak and strong, vulnerable and responsible. According to him, women were confined to their husbands' house, while male spouses could move more freely for work and travel. Women were also at the mercy of men who might divorce them at any time. Despite their economic dependence and inferior position in a patriarchal system, motherhood conferred to women an almost mythical status, as they became "um al-balad", the mother of the nation. The sheikh repeated to me a famous Arabic proverb, "paradise lies under the feet of your mother". However, the mother's role went beyond giving birth to her individual family and the nation and also encompassed their *social* reproduction. "The mother is a school", he said, indicating that she was also responsible for her children's education. What kind of education was at stake became clear when the sheikh linked the displacement experience more explicitly to new-found religiosity. Having lost their home country, belongings and family members, refugees were thrown back to their relationship with Allah and the afterlife. Hence, the value of educating women did not lie in their social advancement per se. Rather, studying the Quran allowed them to fulfil their religiously prescribed role as teachers of Islam, and professional advancement was seemingly limited to the sphere of religion and family life.

When the couple's youngest son came in during the meeting, I received a spontaneous demonstration of the sheikh's words, as the boy was told to kiss his mother's feet and hands. His wife took an active part in the conversation, and the sheikh also repeatedly addressed Farida, who was sitting next to me. Despite the strict gender segregation inside

the centre, our shared interest created a discursive sphere where women could speak up – on certain issues. Although I had introduced myself as a researcher and an NGO activist, my potential conversion became central to the discussion. The sheikh's wife complimented me on the hijab. As the Islamic holiday season was fast approaching, she expressed her hopes to see me wearing the niqab after Ramadan, "so that you become respected and good". To strengthen my position, Farida exclaimed: "Ann loves doing good. If she was as Muslim, she would surely go to paradise." It was meant as a compliment. But Farida's words made me understand that despite the well-meant banter, my interlocutors believed that I would be eternally damned and that my morals were dubious, indicative of the clear boundaries that the sheikh and his followers drew between believers and non-believers.

Subsequently, the conversation took a turn for the mundane, as the sheikh began discussing opportunities for cooperation with "my" NGO. Excitedly, he showed me a brochure with pictures of other welfare activities, including children's classes, and "guests" of the centre from Saudi Arabia and Qatar – an indication of where the centre's generous funding came from. He then took me on a tour through the centre. I briefly entered three different classes for adults and one girls' class. At every turn, our appearance caused hectic veiling, as women rushed to cover their faces in the sheikh's presence. Outside each classroom, the sheikh's wife put a bundle of 50 JD (ca. USD 54) notes in my hand that I was told to distribute to students. Each student was given the equivalent of one third of most refugee families' monthly rent. Getting drawn into yet another parade of the centre's financial endowment made me uncomfortable. All in all, I handed out thousands of Jordanian Dinars that day. Slightly exhausted, I joined Farida in her class. I counted 26 students and five small children. Most of them were young women in their twenties and adhered to the strict black dress code inside the centre. Only one fifth of them wore coloured head scarfs, and a single one, an older woman from Daraa, donned the long, coloured coat that most Jordanian women wore in Mafraq. The two classes I attended focused on Sunan al-Fitrah, Muslim hygiene regulations, about toilet etiquette and how to clip one's nails. The advice given was extremely detailed and practical: which foot should one use when entering and exiting the bathroom? But the classes were far from dull, as students and teachers were soon engaged in a lively discussion. During the break, we bought chips and popcorn from a female vendor. After class, we waited for the bus outside and students asked to take selfies with me. Many of them took off their face veil right

outside the sheikh's office to get a better picture. Quickly the solemn atmosphere dispersed and we all squeezed into the bus, giggling and shouting.

Quran classes at the Islamic Jaqut Charity imposed a whole set of strict rules, most of which revolved around bodily appearance, on their students. And yet, I suggest that following these rules enabled Syrian women to reclaim two distinct forms of agency: as religious and economic authorities in their families. In this regard, my ethnography corroborates findings from Mahmood's (2005) famous study of the grassroots women's piety movement in Cairo. Mahmood (2005) resorts to Foucault's theory of subject formation to argue that Muslim women carve out niches for themselves *within* Islamic patriarchal discourse, whose very norms are constitutive of their experience of the "self". This approach reveals a fundamental difference between progressive feminist politics in the Global North, which also inform much of the development industry, and "Islamic feminism". Proponents of a neoliberal take on women's empowerment like *OperationLife* and VIVA understand women as atomistic individuals who benefit from "self-improvement" through acquiring new skills. By way of contrast, Islamic feminism frames women as part of social networks at various scales, including the family, the nation and the Muslim Ummah. Not surprisingly, Syrians in the Quran classes I observed were always addressed in relational terms as "mothers" and "sisters". Mahmood contends that binary logics of subordination and resistance fail to grasp the entirety of women's acts: "norms are not only consolidated and/or subverted, […] but performed, inhabited and experienced" (Mahmood 2005: 22). One example Mahmood provides of norms becoming *habitual* is the practice of veiling. That all students and teachers at the Jaqut Charity wore the face veil could hardly be overlooked. Farida confirmed that students were encouraged to don the veil, and that she had only begun to wear it herself in Mafraq. As Mahmood (2005) points out, the veil is more than a mere symbol of religious devotion of one's inner self. Rather, the process of veiling is a "technology of the self" in the Foucauldian sense. Women *become* pious by *behaving, speaking and dressing* piously.

Many of my discussions with Farida echo Mahmood's argument: wearing the veil made her a better believer and bestowed upon her a greater sense of *spiritual* agency. There was no doubt that Farida, like the majority of my Syrian acquaintances, held stereotypical and

negative views about Western “permissiveness”. One day, she shared with me her family’s dismay that her brother had observed “people having sex on the bus” in Vienna where he lived as an asylum seeker. It turned out that he had merely witnessed a couple exchanging kisses. Farida and her sisters were also concerned that Syrian children might be exposed to sex education in Austrian schools. One might object that loose gender and sexuality norms were no more than a distant threat in Mafraq’s conservative society. But for Farida, wearing the face veil was a way of asserting her religious freedom, not only against some imagined and distant “West” that had infiltrated her brother’s life, but also against the oppressive state of her home country that she had personal memories of. When Farida talked about “freedom” – in dropping the “religious” – she actually referred to her conservative Islamic dress code and the availability of Quran classes in exile. In Syria, the ban on wearing the face veil in public institutions had come to symbolize a wider lack of civil rights: “Do you know why the Syrian revolution started? Because there was no freedom.” Like many Syrians, she remembered hearing whispers about the brutal clamp-down on the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1980s. When I mentioned that in Germany, wearing the niqab was frowned upon and interpreted as a sign of oppression, Farida was appalled: "So why would [women] not have the freedom to wear what they want?!"

Veiling also increased Farida’s freedom of movement in urban space - she donned the face veil and even black gloves every time she left her parents’ house. As Abu-Lughod (2002) points out, full face veiling can be understood as a “mobile home”. In societies in which families form the core social structure, this protects women from the gaze of strangers by “signalling to all that they [are] still in the inviolable space of their homes, even though moving in the public realm” (785). Similarly, enrolling in Quran classes and accepting the conservative dress code that came with it heightened students’ mobility in Mafraq. The location of the centre on the outskirts of town forced young women to discover new neighbourhoods and take taxis and public transport on their own – mobility experiences not usually part of their daily lives confined to their parents’ and married siblings’ homes.

Where my analysis diverges from Mahmood’s is with regard to Farida’s other motivations for wearing the veil. In fact, it also heightened her *economy* agency and gave her access to a new income-generating activity: a teaching job at the Jaqut charity. This was particularly important to her as her family had previously forced her to give up a teaching job with

VIVA. From a livelihoods perspective, the prospect of aid and future employment were an important economic incentive and also increased the girl's standing in the family. But sometimes, spiritual and economic ambitions clashed. For example, Farida disagreed with the sheikh that female education should be limited to matters of faith. She was an eager participant in the English classes I privately gave at a friend's place and taught herself French at home with the help of textbooks. A curious person, she was ready to overstep the narrow boundaries with non-Muslim strangers and men that a conservative Islam imposed on her. On Facebook, she chatted with young men from all over the Arab world, and her interest in the "West" extended to real life. One day, I was in the company of a male British researcher. In the street, we ran into Farida, who was keen to demonstrate her English skills to my friend and engaged him in a lively conversation. And Farida was well aware of these contradictions, trying to balance conflicting ideas about women's social roles. Over breakfast some days after my visit to the school, Farida explained to me that women should stay at home and devote their lives to childcare: "The Quran protects women. They are weak and cannot do tough physical labour outside the home." Confining women to family life squared badly with Farida's own upbringing inside the city of Homs where she had been enrolled in a B.A. in French literature before the war. Confronting her with her own example, I objected: "What about talented female students at university?" Farida eagerly replied: "Of course, if they are smart, they should be allowed to work." On a different occasion, she told me that she refused to get married and would rather continue her university studies, although this was no more than a faint prospect in Jordanian exile.

In sum, veiling allowed Farida to reclaim spiritual agency. But framing the practice as a "technology of the self" for making pious women falls short of describing how she *also* carved out opportunities for economic empowerment, the mishmash of emancipatory, political, professional and private dreams that Farida nurtured and the variety of places where she pictured herself in the future: at the Quran school, at the university, at home and on the Internet.

Conclusion

Chapter 6 discussed educational programmes run by two faith-based humanitarian organisations in Mafraq that targeted a similar demographic: young Syrian women. VIVA's

English classes and Quran classes at the Islamic Jaqut Charity have to be understood at the intersection of capitalist economies, the development industry and faith. Evangelical and Islamic humanitarians sought to provide female refugees with pathways towards economic self-reliance but also to include them into their respective religious communities. Drawing on Foucault's theory of subject formation, the chapter argued that the classes' popularity relied on the making of *aspirational* refugees. Syrian women were encouraged to engage in "technologies of the self" such as *dreaming up one's future* and *veiling* that allowed them to envision themselves simultaneously as future career women and good believers. But the formation of neoliberal and pious subjects frequently clashed with their struggles in exile and every time Syrian women went off script, nurtured alternative and conflicting dreams -– or simply wanted to have some fun.

This type of reasoning resonates with Kipnis' (2008) critique of ethnographies of "neoliberal self-making". Drawing on his research on audit culture and performance reviews in socialist China, he calls out anthropologists for too easily describing technologies of self-optimization and self-discipline as neoliberal tools. Imposing a specifically Western, historically-bound model of capitalism on all forms of self-making, he argues, obscures the role of "technologies" of the self in other cultural contexts and eras, as well as people's contradictory engagements with the ideal subjectivities that they are meant to acquire. As my ethnography of trainings for Syrian women shows, even explicitly career-oriented programmes like VIVA's English classes are never exclusively about neoliberal self-making, but also about something else: for example, about faith.

On a final note, the mixed success of NGO trainings in Mafraq invites more general reflections about the relationship between education and *waiting* that marginalized young Arabs are exposed to. Young Syrians' educational experience in exile bears uncanny parallels with Jeffrey's (2010) study of lower middle-class men in northern India who have the resources to acquire higher education but lack the social capital to find matching jobs. It seems all too easy to draw comparisons with the situation of young Syrians who, despite amassing home-made NGO certificates, keep being excluded from the formal labour market and higher education. A cycle of endless trainings and NGO trainings turned into "timepass", "what one had to do because more meaningful ways of engaging with the world were unavailable" (Jeffrey 2010: 471).

While failing to translate into long-term employment, humanitarian action unintentionally reproduced a different type of youth experience equally characteristic of the globalized world in which flexible labour markets demand easily disposable workforces. Displaced or not, many highly educated young people find themselves in a situation of recurring short-term contracts and training, ongoing job and existential insecurity (Standing 2011). What is striking about Jordan is the coexistence of young populations with starkly different socioeconomic profiles, yet equally prone to *timepass*. Young Syrian peasants and middle-class Jordanians met in VIVA's English classes and worked together as teachers in Maria's home-schooling project.

In a country where almost every fifth university graduate is unemployed (Middle East Monitor 2016), the humanitarian sector has grown into one of the biggest employers for young people. In her study with local aid workers in Lebanon and Jordan, Pascucci (2018; cf. Sukarieh 2016) finds that jobs in the humanitarian sector create new forms of precarious labour for Arab urban middle classes. Job insecurity and temporary contracts affect international staff, but they are also a reality for young Arab graduates attracted by high salaries and career opportunities in the NGO world. The latter are expected to bring specific types of expertise, including language and cultural skills and knowledge of local contexts. They usually start their career at the bottom of the employment hierarchy as "field officers". That direct contact with aid beneficiaries involves considerable amounts of care and affective labour goes unnoticed – and unpaid. In addition, those working alongside international staff often experience racism and islamophobia or feel compelled to engage in Western consumption patterns like drinking alcohol to advance their career. But the humanitarian sector's role as an employer also exacerbates existing class differences in host countries, for example between local aid workers and contractors.

My ethnography takes Pascucci's argument further by differentiating various types of precarious labour with NGOs for "place-bound" populations like locals and refugees stuck in exile. *OperationLife*'s Jordanian volunteers, all of them university graduates, are still waiting at the gates of the humanitarian sector. That Mafraq's own youth have poor English skills and are at a disadvantage compared to upper-middle class students from the capital makes it more difficult for them to turn unpaid volunteering into a proper job. Their predicaments have been described as "waithood". Unable to secure economic livelihoods, many Arab

men cannot afford to pay the considerable costs of marriage and housing (Brown et al. 2014; Dhillion, Dyer and Yousef 2011; Joseph 2011; Singerman 2007). As they fail to achieve markers of social adulthood, young men – and women - become stuck in a liminal state, somewhere between being children and grown-ups (Mulderig 2013). In Mafraq, for the displaced and locals alike, keeping oneself busy coincides with forever delayed meaningful futures. But "waithood" is something that young people need to be able to afford. It requires financial, educational and social capital and, most of all, parental support. Jordanian parents' salaries and state pensions pay for their offspring's unpaid internships in the humanitarian sector, but also trips to shopping malls, cafés and, occasionally, to private beaches on the Red Sea coast. Young Jordanians can wait a bit longer to find stable employment and get married. In my host family, most young men had years of volunteering experience with foreign-funded NGOs in town but eventually gave up and accepted a badly paid entry level position in the private sector.

But the humanitarian sector does not only create insecure jobs for locals. "Incentive-based volunteering" for refugees, to employ the terminology of big organisations like CARE, has become the norm inside and outside camps, and Syrians have grown used to receiving financial compensation for attending trainings. Even educational programmes of grassroots organisations increasingly blur boundaries between welfare handouts, job trainings and actual labour. Some of VIVA's English students were already precariously employed in its own home-schooling project, and the Quran school wooed participants with the prospect of future teaching jobs. In the meantime, young Syrians were constantly on the move, struggling to get by on a combination of odd jobs and humanitarian assistance – *frantic waiting* instead of idleness.

The comparison of young Jordanians and Syrians suggests that youthful populations from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds experience waiting in different ways. But even for refugees, being stuck in Mafraq may come with more than one temporality. In her study with asylum seekers and people in migrant detention in Oxford, Griffiths (2014) finds that her informants perceive waiting for deportation alternately as *sticky*, *suspended*, *frenzied* and *ruptured* time. The experience of time might thus be multiple, non-linear and contradictory. A common thread, though, is asylum seekers' subjective loss of agency. In a similar vein, my Syrian interlocutors felt that they had lost control over their time. Restless days at home, where refugees waited for humanitarian visits, alternated with long working hours on the fields and queuing outside NGO centres.

Chapter 7: Remapping the "Holy Land" from the margins - How a Jordanian Evangelical church juggles the 'local' and the 'global' in the Syrian refugee response

Mafraq's Christian population is tiny. Only 2000 to 3000 locals are dispersed across different churches - one of them is the Mafraq Unity Church. An offshoot of an American Evangelical denomination that originated in the 19th century, today's congregation is composed of only 120 locals and foreigners. And yet, its brand-new seat is one of the tallest buildings on Mafraq's high street, its tower adorned by a man-sized cross that looms over the roofs. On the street level, the entrance to the church is framed by kebab shops and fashion boutiques. During daytime, it is easily recognizable by the groups of fully veiled Syrian women, dressed in black *abayas*, who wait by the door. For the benefit of foreign donors, the modern building's construction process was accompanied by frequent updates on the church's Facebook page – in English.

The church's new visibility has to be understood in the context of its pioneering role in the local humanitarian response since 2011. To give an idea of the dimension of its engagement with Syrians, suffice to say that by the end of 2016, according to the pastor's estimates, the church had assisted almost 50% of the refugees in town – ca. 42,000 people. Especially in the early days of Syrian displacement, it was the first aid provider for many. In return, the arrival of refugees turned out to be a catalyst for the influx of new practices, ideologies, people and resources.

In the final chapter, I revisit once more the peculiar transnational support networks of faith-based humanitarian organisations. In chapters 4-6, we followed VIVA, a European Evangelical organization that navigates unknown terrain in Mafraq. In the previous chapter, we also contrasted VIVA's understanding of female empowerment with an Islamic version taught to Syrian women in local Quran schools, albeit with funding from the Gulf States. The final chapter turns to indigenous Christians, the members of a local Jordanian Evangelical church that has professionalized Christian charity since 2011, turning into one of the main aid providers in Mafraq.

The key contribution of final chapter is twofold: First, it disentangles the transnational connections that intersect in the Mafraq Unity Church and keep its humanitarian activities going. The Unity Church strategically appeals to secular and Evangelical "international communities", balancing acts of self-representation towards geographically, politically and otherwise disparate partners. Conversely, the chapter also demonstrates how two transnational projects – secular 'development' and Evangelicalism - unfold in a specific locality. Engaging partners with dissimilar agendas does not proceed without friction – therefore, the chapter highlights discrepancies in the way the church communicates with various audiences.

Second, I discuss the church's negotiation of its own "marginality". In the 1970s, World Systems Theory subdivided the globe into dominant core countries and underdeveloped peripheries and semi-peripheries (Wallerstein 2004), an understanding of the margins in terms of deprivation and exploitative labour that lingers on until today. More recently, anthropologists have suggested detaching "remoteness" from peripheral territories; instead, they investigate the social, economic and cultural processes that *produce* remote places (Andersson and Saxer 2016). From remote regions' disconnectedness, they have shifted the focus to the flows of people, goods and ideas that criss-cross them.

Geographically speaking, Mafraq, a mere fifteen miles away from the Syrian border, is certainly peripheral. High rates of youth unemployment, the lack of major industries and the thick local Bedouin accent add to its reputation as a rough outpost on the edge of the steppe. At times, church officials also make *strategic* use of the centre-periphery narrative, especially when communicating with potential donors. However, a binary understanding of Mafraq's position as a backwater at the margins of Jordanian territory, the international humanitarian system and the Christian world does not adequately describe how church members appropriate their "localness" in interactions with mainstream development funders and within a global vision of Evangelical Christianity.

The first section of this chapter addresses how after 2011, the church took the lead in the refugee response in Mafraq, tapping into a specific form of transnational discourse, networks and sources of funding: namely, mainstream development action. Alongside its transnationalisation, Unity Church remained deeply embedded in the local social fabric,

both as an employer to fellow tribesmen and through showcasing cultural sensitivity towards Syrian refugees. In the second part of the chapter, I attend to how being "local" becomes part of the church's humanitarian marketing strategy. Finally, I move to another scale to show how the church simultaneously appeals to transnational, Evangelical communities. Church officials relied on different *economic* and *spiritual* geographies of faith. While the church received financial support and volunteers mostly from Europe and North America, it turned to the Global South and, more specifically, to the Arab world, for *spiritual* matters. That allowed the pastor to rhetorically recentre Christianity southwards and expand the notion of the Holy Land, so that it comes to encompass Mafraq. In the last section, I revisit tensions between the church's heartfelt acts of Christian compassion and antagonistic attitudes towards Syrians, highlighting its complex understandings of refugees' "needs" and the temporality of the humanitarian response.

A church or an NGO?

In every interview, Pastor Aissa was quick to point out that despite its manifold humanitarian activities, the church had retained its religious character: "First, we are a church, not an NGO!" In a similar vein, the head of the church's informal school for Syrian children insisted: "All teachers in the school have ministry. This is ministry, not work". However, the pastor's office, where he received his interview partners, conveyed a different message. One wall was dominated by a huge whiteboard with the visiting schedule of the church's various short-term volunteers and international partners. With a sweeping gesture, the pastor invited visitors to check his bookkeeping and his workplace: "Everything we receive, we share it… My computer is always open, even my email."[35]

We might not expect accounting and human resources management to be among a church's priorities – however, Pastor Aissa and fellow church officials quickly learned the codes of mainstream development action when Syrian refugees started arriving in 2011. The Unity Church began to provide emergency aid, and, later, services complementary to those of the UNHCR, the leading organisation in the refugee response in Jordan. The UNHCR provides humanitarian documentation to all Syrian refugees and cash assistance to

[35] All of the pastor's and head of school's quotes were originally in English; language mistakes are their own.

the selected few. It also coordinates resettlement abroad and offers additional forms of protection. The Unity Church, by contrast, has established a wide portfolio of short- and more long-term services to refugees. As the pastor expertly put it: “We do relief *and* development”.

During our interviews, he recited these programmes almost mechanically - in the presence of European researchers, our conversations often took the shape of a marketing event. In 2016, the church provided monthly food parcels to between 400 and 500 Syrian families. By then, it had also given out so-called “welcome kits”, composed of basic furniture and cooking utensils, to 6,000 Syrian households, as well as 3,000 “winterization kits” with heaters and blankets. Many refugees had received financial support for medical treatment, including eyeglasses; the church also offered trauma and speech therapy. It ran an informal school for 160 Syrian children. In addition, the new church building on Mafraq’s high street hosted a community centre where English, sewing and handicraft were taught to mixed and women-only classes. The variety of educational programmes and medical services speaks to the diversity, and high degree of professional qualification of church members and volunteers. Interestingly, by late 2016, the church’s most ambitious undertaking was in real estate: its “Jordan Project” was supposed to provide rental units for Syrians and poor Jordanians, as well as employment for Syrian blacksmiths and carpenters. At the time of my interviews, planning was still in an early stage. Yet the pastor was already actively looking for investors.

The church did not only “do” development, its officials also “spoke” development jargon. During the interviews, the pastor liked to impress with statistics, for example, the average size of Syrian families in town, and describe certain types of refugees – Syrian women and children – as innocent victims of the conflict. That the church’s educational programmes predominantly targeted these demographics is not a coincidence. Rather, it reflects wider trends in the development sector that paint them as ideal aid beneficiaries (e.g. Cornwall and Rivas 2015; Malkki 2015; Olivius 2014). As critics have pointed out, depoliticized representations that focus on their suffering and lack of agency obscure the root causes of displacement. Although the pastor was highly knowledgeable about regional history and enjoyed teaching me about it, somehow, he never touched upon the origins of the Syrian civil war, neither in our interviews nor during Sunday service.

With all these activities, the church had gradually turned itself into a humanitarian hub. It cooperated with established aid providers and cultural institutions such as the British Council, and the pastor was eager to host coordination meetings with NGOs. For example, I once organised a roundtable with *Doctors without Borders* within the church. It was attended by the pastor himself, an American staff member in charge of volunteer coordination, Yusuf, as well as various Christian doctors and nurses. The aim of the meeting was to inform local healthcare providers about *Doctors without Borders*' preterm birth clinic and child trauma therapy in nearby Irbid and encourage them to refer Syrian patients to these services.

Finally, the church attracted major funding from mainstream aid organisations all over the globe, including Mercy Corps and a secular Malaysian NGO. Proudly, the pastor recounted his meeting with the Hungarian ambassador in Amman who had promised the church €10,000: "The ambassador himself came. He told me, the reason I come is because you have good reputation."

The gradual professionalization of the church's programmes of assistance mimics the trajectory of other religious institutions in Jordan. Corroborative evidence comes from Irbid where El Nakib and Ager (2015) mapped local Christian and Islamic communities and their involvement in the refugee response. Like in Mafraq, local churches in Irbid initially opened up community spaces to refugees and benefitted from their parishioners' religious motivations and readiness to volunteer. Over time, though, they established partnerships with various international organizations and began to speak and follow a secular development "script" (El Nakib and Ager 2015, p. 24). Some of the main pitfalls El Nakib and Ager's study found included a lack of neutrality and technical expertise, and a clash with international donors' human rights-based approach. As we saw, Mafraq's Unity Church pre-emptively addressed some of these concerns by emphasizing its high degree of accountability and adopting development jargon. This becomes especially clear if we look at the church's humanitarian marketing strategy, centred around its "localness".

Appropriating the "local"

In the past, humanitarian responses to conflict and natural disasters were planned and funded in the Global North, although most crises occurred elsewhere. However, over the last three decades, major donors and aid organisations have begun to acknowledge that local communities and institutions are often the first to provide assistance and should have a say in how it is organised. Robert Chambers' (1981) technique of "Participatory Rural Appraisal" pioneered incorporating the knowledge of rural populations into the design and management of development projects. By the early 1990s, participatory approaches and empowerment of aid beneficiaries had become standard tools of the development industry. Critics have pointed out that participatory action risks covering up and reinforcing existing power hierarchies within receiving communities, e.g. with regard to gender and class (for a summary of these criticisms, see Cooke and Kothari 2001). That a community organisation like Mafraq's Unity Church could establish partnerships with mainstream NGOs and attract substantial funding thus reflects more longstanding trends in the development sector's approach to aid. But it also echoes more recent developments, including austerity measures and funding cuts in the 2000s (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2018) and the outsourcing of humanitarian action to local NGOs in war-torn areas (Andersson 2016). Devolving responsibility and resources to indigenous aid providers makes up the UN's 'localization of aid' agenda and comes with a recognition of the diversity of local helpers. On the level of policy-making, the international community's commitment to localizing aid has also been enshrined in schemes that give special attention to community faith leaders, e.g. the UNHCR's 2012 'High Commissioner's Dialogue on Faith and Protection', its related 'Welcoming the Stranger' initiative with key faith leaders, and the 'Grand Bargain'. Agreed at the World Humanitarian Summit 2016, the latter committed more than thirty of the world's biggest donors and aid organization to allocate one quarter of global humanitarian funding to local and national aid providers by 2020 (Carpi 2018; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2018; Jayawickrama and Rehman 2018).

The church's popularity among Syrian refugees in Mafraq speaks to its rootedness in the community and the town. When asked to name the aid agencies most relevant to them, most Syrians would mention UNHCR and the Unity Church in one breath. Testifying to the

church's relationship of trust with the refugee community, Yusuf was frequently asked to intervene in their marital feuds, and Syrians treated him like a respected community elder.

To be clear, much of the church's success came from its greater accessibility. While the UNHCR office was located on the outskirts of town and behind high walls, the Unity Church could be found at the heart of Mafraq's most vibrant shopping street. In contrast to the practice of international UNHCR members to commute from Amman on a daily basis, church officials and many volunteers were permanently based in town. Seeking proximity to Mafraq's refugees was also enacted in other ways. Twice a week, Syrian women sat on wooden benches in the nave of the church, waiting for Yusuf to call up their names and register their needs. While waiting in the queue is a common experience for the displaced (Mountz 2011), it was made more bearable by allowing the women to wait inside as volunteers who served them tea played with their children in the church's common room.

Equally important were the house visits that church members and volunteers paid to refugee families. Every month, they entered between 500 and 700 Syrian households to deliver food parcels and furniture. Like VIVA, the church framed these visits as a more culturally sensitive way of handing over humanitarian goods as "presents" where members of the congregation and foreign volunteers Syrians not as refugees, but as respected hosts inside their own homes. As Aissa said, "it is our culture to visit somebody" – these encounters thus activated shared and cherished codes of hospitality. As the pastor emphasized: "Many speak *about* the Syrians, few speak *with* them – we know them one by one." Except for my first nocturnal trip through Mafraq, I never accompanied representatives of the church on these visits. However, the final part of this chapter gives us an impression of how they used these visits, at least occasionally, to talk about matters of Christian faith.

But church officials also turned "localness" into a selling point to development organizations and donors: it was presented as more sustainable, cost-efficient and coming with greater accountability. The pastor claimed: "Without the locals, relief would be wasted." At times, he seemed to secure "his Syrians" for the church, presenting humanitarian assistance in the Middle East as preferable to refugees' onward flight to Europe. "We are a small country. But having one million Syrians [in Jordan] is better than in

Germany. They cost less." Judging from the pastor's words, he was well aware of the international community's 'localization of aid' agenda. But he also used his knowledge of increasingly hostile asylum policies in Europe to his advantage, suggesting a possible trade-off to potential international donors: if the church received further funding, it would continue caring for Syrian refugees – and thus provide incentives for them to stay in Mafraq.[36]

At another level, insisting that "only a few of us, the Jordanians, can do it [i.e. giving aid to Syrians]" acquired an additional meaning in the context of kinship obligations and scarce local livelihoods. Many Jordanian church members donated their time to volunteering for refugees and hosting foreign visitors. But to locals, the church was also a provider. In a country where almost every fifth university graduate is unemployed (Middle East Monitor 2016), it created employment for fifteen to twenty Jordanian parishioners, often members of the pastor's tribe. Many of them taught Syrian children in the church's own school or were involved in the community centre. By helping refugees, the congregation also helped itself.

In sum, although Pastor Aissa insisted that the church had retained its religious identity, its activities, management style and fundraising strategy situated it on the playing field of the "international community" of aid agencies and foreign states.

Geographies of faith

On Sundays, however, I witnessed a different "international" community inside the church's makeshift navel in the half-finished building. By the end of 2016, the church welcomed forty long-term volunteers and short-term helpers from fellow Evangelical congregations all over the world. On average, it received one to three teams of up to forty

[36] Pastor Aissa's rhetorical strategy reflects Jordanian raison d'État. In an interview with the BBC ahead of the London Donor Conference in February 2016, King Abdullah of Jordan urged the international community to step up its support for Syria's neighbouring country, painting a dramatic picture of the impact of the refugee crisis and hinting at possible flows across the Mediterranean: "In the psyche of the Jordanian people I think it's gotten to a boiling point. […] Sooner or later the dam is going to burst." In contrast to Pastor Aissa, the King threatened donors more explicitly with the consequences of their neglect: "They [i.e. the international community] realise that if they don't help Jordan, it's going to be more difficult for them to deal with the refugee crisis" (BBC 2016).

foreigners every week, who slept in bunk beds on the top floor of the new church. Those who stayed longer often rented cheap apartments from Jordanian church members in the city centre. The bilingual Sunday service brought locals and foreigners together and celebrated their multicultural Evangelical community. It always began with singing in English and Arabic, followed by greetings to incoming groups: "Jordanians, Palestinians, Indians, one church!" One by one, incoming volunteers were called up by name and place of origin and introduced to the parish: "Welcome to those who bring us greetings from Washington, DC!" Visiting preachers also frequently delivered sermons, often together with Pastor Aissa. While his guests wore casual attire, the pastor was always immaculately dressed in a formal suit; together, they appealed to the expectations of different audiences, Jordanian Christians and foreign volunteers, in the same room.

In fact, the church's humanitarian activities can hardly be understood without recourse to its specifically *Evangelical* self-concept. As its pastor, Aissa, explained to me: "we don't follow liturgy. It's an Evangelical church. We sing songs every week. We focus on preaching." To him, being Evangelical meant that every Sunday, he provided a close reading of the Bible and discussed its relevance for parishioners' everyday lives; the service was livened up by testimonies from foreign visitors and catchy Christian pop songs. Hutchinson and Wolffe (2012) highlight additional dimensions: they argue that both transnationalisation and social activism are central to the Evangelical enterprise. Rather than defined by a fixed set of theological doctrines, they understand Evangelism as a heterogeneous style of Protestantism with a distinctively networked nature. As Hutchinson and Wolffe (2012: 224) point out, "it is evangelicalism's genius for creating trans-communal identities which makes it effective in high-change, socially fractured settings." In a similar vein, Pastor Aissa explained that humanitarian action in Mafraq was not merely local, but a global affair: "What happens here is not just for Mafraq; it's the work of God for the entire world. […] We are all partners in this ministry." He was convinced that the church's links to secular *and* non-secular transnational networks made its strength: "We do more than a small NGO can do, because we partner with *everybody*."

Interestingly, though, the church relied on different *economic* and *spiritual* geographies of faith. On the one hand, it received financial support and volunteers mostly from Europe and North America. By the time of my fieldwork, its American mother congregation had just

paid for a pick-up, land and a house for its new school building. A US-based Christian NGO had added a brand-new playground to this. The church also received gifts from individual believers. The pastor proudly told me the story of a 16-year old Austrian man who had collected €8,000 by himself and travelled to Mafraq in a wheelchair. "He gave me the money here in this office. It is amazing what God can do!" The Biblical symbolism of the example did not escape me. Whereas development jargon and balance sheets might have appealed to development professionals, powerful stories like this targeted the pockets of a different audience: fellow believers from the global Evangelical community. But the latter did not only support the church from a distance; they also frequently visited Mafraq for short-term volunteering, and their activities were not always in line with conventional development action. By way of illustration, a group of Chinese believers from the Netherlands once spent three days washing the feet of Syrian refugees.

On the other hand, the pastor turned to the Global South for *spiritual* matters. He was adamant about asserting Jordanian ownership of the church and liked to tell the story of its modest origins in a mud house – the church was *materially* made of the native earth of Mafraq and by native people from the area. The Mafraq Unity Church was established in 1948 by a Syrian Arab Christian who had fled from Haifa. Its first converts were not Muslims, but local Christians from traditional denominations, mostly Greek-Orthodox, who had come to Mafraq some decades earlier from small towns in the vicinity – Husn, Ajloun and Salt - to work as engineers for the Iraqi Petroleum Company on the nearby Mossul-Haifa pipeline. And the church's founders had another connection to Syria: tribesmen of the current pastor had migrated to present-day Jordan only a few generations ago from a Syrian village just across today's border. Prior to the 1960s, the newly established congregation gathered in a traditional mud house, the likes of which have now almost entirely disappeared from Mafraq's cityscape, until they could afford a modern church. While the original ground was purchased by its mother congregation, Pastor Aissa emphasized that the church had long been run by locals: "There have been no missionaries here for the last fifty years. We are independent!" But this was not entirely true. In 1965, an American doctor had founded a nearby sanatorium for chest diseases to deliver medical services, but also the gospel, to Bedouins in the area. Foreign medical staff from the sanatorium regularly attended the bilingual service on Sundays, and, as the pastor underlined, considered Unity Church "their church".

In many ways, the church's history is typical of more longstanding Christian missions in the Arab world. Since the 1990s, scholarly interest in missionaries' role in Middle Eastern history and politics has been growing. In the early 19th century, Catholic and Protestant churches in Europe and North America rediscovered the region as an area of interest, driven by a mix of worldly and spiritual ambitions, including a desire to visit and preserve the Holy Sites, eschatological expectations, and spreading Christianity. Often, they were implicated in colonial and imperialist projects of their home countries (e.g. Khater 2010, Sharkey 2011, Van den Murre-Berg 2006).

However, the pastor's speech acts also indicate *new* trends in Evangelical mission. At times, historical studies of 19th- and 20th-century missionaries have privileged their perspective over the experience of locals, as the former left a long paper trail behind them, including personal diaries and correspondence (Makdisi 2008). However, Pastor Aissa was not only telling his church's story - he was choosing to tell it in a *particular* way, emphasizing not transatlantic connections, but rather Arab networks. In subtle ways, he was shifting the centre of gravity of the globalized Evangelical endeavour away from the US, insisting on the church's longstanding linkages with Unity churches in Jerusalem, Syria and Iraq. These were backed up by kinship ties: as the pastor explained, the son of the founder of the Mafraq Unity Church had gone on to set up a Unity Church in Aleppo, and his grandson is now a pastor in Damascus.

Through his networks, the pastor also had a clear idea about where today's Christians could be found. During my fieldwork, he frequently attended Evangelical conferences elsewhere – quite tellingly, most of them in Asian countries like Malaysia and Thailand. Pastor Aissa's emphasis on Christianity in the Global South reflects the geographic distribution of believers today. In 1910, Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand and Japan were home to more than four times as many Christians as the rest of the world. One hundred years later, 61% of all Christians, i.e. 1.3 billion people, lived in the Global South (Pew Research Center 2011). It also resonates with wider tendencies in Evangelical mission towards the indigenization of southern churches and responsibility-sharing with locals. African and Chinese migrants, for instance, have been central to the revival and establishment of new Evangelical communities in Europe and the former Soviet Union (Hutchinson and Wolffe 2012).

The pastor's geographical vision, however, was even more specific. His aim was to recentre Christianity not only to the Global South but to the Arab world, and Jordan, in particular. In November 2016, I brought a British archaeologist to the church. Hearing about her academic background, the pastor launched into a lengthy explanation of the church's history that took us from the 20th century to the early days of Christianity. "[Jordan] was a Christian country. 100% it was Christian. In Rihab, in the west [of Mafraq], there is more than fifty churches." Naturally, only a few of these still exist. Rather, speaking to an archaeologist, the pastor was hinting at the spectacular discovery of the remains of an underground church – possibly the oldest church in the world – in 2008, widely publicised by Jordanian and international media, including Christian news outlets (Rihab Center for Archaeological Studies and Research 2008). His account of regional Christian history expanded the Holy Land of the Bible to the East, and beyond the Jordan River, so that it came to include Mafraq.

It is very likely that Pastor Aissa's appraisal of Mafraq's centrality to Christian heritage and territory drew inspiration from the Jordanian *national* project of branding the country as the original "Holy Land". Middle Eastern countries like Israel and Jordan have long used archaeology and religious tourism to define their national identity. In her study of the two papal visits to Jordan in 1964 and 2000, Katz (2003) argues that hosting the Pope in Amman – not Jerusalem – allowed the Hashemite monarchs to extend the notion of the Holy Land to the East Bank. However, by the time of the Pope's second visit in 2000, his travel route had somewhat changed, as Israel's 1967 occupation of the West Bank had caused the loss of major holy places in Jerusalem and Palestine. Instead, it included recently "discovered" locations of Biblical significance, including Bethany Beyond the Jordan, the presumed site of the baptism on the eastern shore of the Jordan river. Jordan, a majority-Muslim country, thus rebranded itself as the "Sunrise of Christianity". But remarkably, many Greek Orthodox Christians and Muslims also cheered for the Pope in the streets. Expanding the Holy Land to the East was about more than securing Jordan's territorial claims. It sought to cement its standing in the international community in the aftermath of 9/11. Through an ecumenical state discourse, e.g. the joint Sunni-Shia Amman Message in 2004 and the foundation of inter-faith institutions like the Royal Ahal al-Bayt Islamic Thought Foundation and the Royal

Institute for Interfaith Studies[37], Jordan sought to present itself as the bearer of a moderate, peaceful and tolerant Islam (Maggiolini 2015).

That Israel might well be the blind spot on Pastor Aissa's mental map of the Holy Land is something I can only allude to in passing. Many American Evangelicals, especially from the political Right, support Israel's occupation of Palestine, as the Jewish presence in the region seems to fulfil their eschatological expectations. However, this squares badly with Jordan's official endorsement for Palestinian autonomy, and the emotional involvement of Jordanian society, many of them of Palestinian origin. On a more personal level, the pastor had also been displaced himself from Palestine as a young boy. Born in 1965 in Jericho to a (non-Palestinian) father who worked as a policeman in the local prison, he had to relocate to Mafraq after Israel's occupation of the West Bank. The pastor liked to joke how Mafraq's primary school had refused his birth certificate because it was in Arabic and Hebrew. But when a researcher that I accompanied likened him to Syrian refugees, he corrected him quickly: "Internally displaced!" Some permanent members of the congregation were also Palestinians. I never had an opportunity to touch upon this sensitive issue in our interviews; however, it seemed to me that mentions of Israel were outright avoided during the Sunday sermon, which was usually attended by dozens of American volunteers.

Therefore, national interfaith discourse informed Pastor Aissa's choice of words, but it did not include Jews, but only Christians and Muslims. He justified opening the church doors to non-Christian refugees: "We show them respect, that they are welcome. Even though they are Muslims." Nevertheless, I suggest that Pastor Aissa's ecumenical rhetoric goes beyond accommodating sensitivities in a Muslim-majority town or paying lip service to secular donors' agendas and Jordanian raison d'État respectively. In the next section, I argue that taking him seriously allows us to reconsider a tension at the heart of Christian compassion,

[37] These institutions disseminate the Hashemite state's moderate version of Islam through conferences, publications and trainings for members of Jordan's civil society. Officially independent non-governmental organizations, both are under the patronage of Jordanian royalty. The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, established by the late King Hussein in 1980, provides a forum for the academic study of Islamic thought and civilisation. "Moderation and tolerance" figure prominently among the Institute's values on its website. The Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies was established in 1994. With funding from the European Union, it seeks to implement the Amman Message in Jordan. As the domestic partner of the Anna-Lindh-Foundation, a network of civil society organisations dedicated to promoting intercultural dialogue in the Mediterranean region, it also organises trainings on cultural and religious diversity and the rule of law.

and how it plays out in the acts and attitudes of church members and volunteers towards Syrians.

Christian compassion and different temporalities of "saving" Syrians

The final part of this chapter deals with contradictions that arise between the church's commitment to humanitarian assistance and its missionary ambitions, between heartfelt acts of support and antagonistic attitudes towards Syrians. In the introduction, I sketched out a tension at the heart of Christian compassion. Witnessing the suffering of a stranger should compel Christians to action. Faced with the mass influx of destitute refugees and the absence of conventional aid agencies, the pastor and his congregation took humanitarian assistance into their own hands. Initially, Christian compassion transcended boundaries, and Syrians' religion did not matter. Over time, though, church members' more *long-term* goal of converting local and Syrian Muslims to Evangelical Christianity became more prominent and shaped their humanitarian endeavours. As I argued in chapter 5, this has much to do with Evangelicals' understanding of refugees' accountability to their benefactors which complicated giving "with no strings attached" (cf. Elisha 2008). Volunteers believed in the *transformative* power of human relationships: by doing good, they could put sinners on the path to redemption. Indeed, narratives of individual suffering and salvation are central to Evangelical theology. They also figured prominently in church service. Hence, Syrian aid beneficiaries were expected to accept not only *material* donations, but also the *divine* "gift", to begin a life in accordance with Biblical virtues, and to eventually convert.

In Jordan, the law prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing Muslims (El Nakib and Ager 2015). Yet, the church was non-compliant with state doctrine in this regard. Referring to Mafraq's conservative Muslim-majority population, the head of the church-run school told me: "we need ministry in this area,'" in order to counteract overwhelmingly "'closed [-minded]' Muslims." In another instance, a young English-speaking volunteer spoke up during Sunday service, addressing Christian attendants: "We want Mafraq for you, we want Jordan for you [to be yours]." In this regard, church members' hidden and not so hidden apprehensions of Syrians reveal a continuity with conceptions of Muslims as "the other" that shaped older missionary projects (Murre-Van den Berg 2006).

The set-up of the aid registration ceremony was charged with religious connotations. Holding the biweekly events inside the nave was perhaps practical, as it was the biggest room in the building and could accommodate huge crowds. But its symbolical dimension was equally striking. Yusuf's desk was based on a tiny stage in front of the altar, at the same spot where Pastor Aissa spoke to the congregation on Sundays. From an elevated position, he called up one woman after the other, interrogating them about their living conditions and needs, before taking a decision about further house visits and assistance. Fully veiled Syrian women waited patiently for their turn under a cross, often for several hours, and for the word of a church member, speaking to them from above. Yusuf's verdict about aid, if not a sermon, acquired a similarly sacrosanct quality: for many Syrians in Mafraq, support from the church directly contributed to their daily survival. However, I could not tell whether the open religious symbolism offended Muslim refugees' sensibilities. The Syrian women I met on a winter day in February 2016, many of whom had travelled to the church from Mafraq's outskirts, seemed worn out, tired and freezing in inadequate clothes. They formed a remarkably impassive and compliant audience.

Foreign volunteers also engaged in covert (and sometimes less covert) conversion of Syrian refugees; often, proselytizing was coupled with the promise of aid or educational activities for children. In October 2016, I accompanied members of an American Christian NGO that had sponsored the school's playground to the classroom. Syrian children, all of them Muslim, were told: "I want you to paint a picture about yourself or a place where you meet God … for kids in America who are *just like you*, so they can pray for you." How exactly American children were similar to young refugees was not explicated, but the instructions that Syrian pupils received suggested that all of them believed in the same God and were part of the same religious community – a message readily accepted by an audience of primary school age, with hardly any knowledge of Islam or its distinction from other religions. On the same occasion, American volunteers also performed a play about a Biblical scene with little verbal interaction, but imaginative props, including wigs and costumes. Their young spectators were enchanted. Rather than through explicit Bible lessons, volunteers thus introduced religious content through playful activities and blurring boundaries between Islam and Christianity, encouraging young Syrians to envisions themselves "just like them" – i.e. as Evangelical Christians.

Through my NGO volunteering, I befriended a Syrian family that frequently received American volunteers inside their home and studied the Bible with them; I even met the father of the family on Easter Sunday inside the church where he had participated in the celebrations. It is important here not to deny Syrians agency in these missionary encounters. This particular family, for instance, never converted and seemed to play along to retain the favour of volunteers who were *also* in charge of aid delivery (cf. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011c on refugees' strategic engagements with Evangelical missionaries in refugee camps). In another example in August 2016, I witnessed a mesmerizing scene. During Sunday service, a young Syrian woman dressed in a black *abaya*, identifiable as a Muslim by her veil, was led to the altar. She carried her four-year old son. While passing the rows, she exchanged friendly greetings with two female Western volunteers. The pastor explained that the woman had asked him to pray for her son who regularly fainted. In front of the congregation, the pastor, another Jordanian and a South African visitor all put their hands on the child and prayed for his health. It is difficult to assert the extent of opportunism on the part of the Syrian refugees in these exchanges. They were certainly not cunning actors, but rather struggling to learn and respect their Christian (and often foreign) benefactors' codes, whose assistance was a lifeline to many.

In spite of the seemingly harmonious sociality between church members and Syrian refugees, what struck me were the former's antagonistic world view that underpinned their encounters with Syrians, especially when it seemed to clash with the church's official inclusive rhetoric, as stipulated by mainstream development discourse and Jordan's interfaith state reasoning. In informal conversations, many church members revealed a veritable siege mentality, strangely at odds with the peaceful cohabitation in Mafraq's streets. For example, Yusuf frequently told me not to walk around in Mafraq on my own, insinuating that the presence of Syrian refugees constituted danger, although my host family considered it perfectly safe. When I told a female Jordanian church member that I was staying with a Muslim family, she was aghast, but changed her opinion abruptly upon hearing my host mother's name. Before her retirement, it turned out, she had been a secretary in the high school where my host mother had been a well-respected and beloved teacher, and she remembered her fondly. Jordanian church members involved in aid delivery frequently depicted Syrians as not trustworthy, spiritually starved and estranged even from each other. Pastor Aissa deemed house visits a more culturally sensitive form of

aid delivery. But he also justified them as a way of checking up on refugees' hidden belongings, arguing that aid fraud was common (cf. chapter 5). These encounters testify to the tensions between harmoniously shared everyday lives and more abstract conceptions of difference.

Arguably, some of these negative attitudes reflectd class differentials between the Syrians and the Jordanians that predate the current crisis. However, church members' anti-Muslim criticisms had went beyond this history of labour migration. In 2016, the church's most visionary undertaking was to build rental units for poor Syrians and Jordanians through its "Jordan Project". During our interviews, the pastor often discussed the real estate project in *economic* terms; it was supposed to provide cheap housing, but also additional livelihoods for carpenters, blacksmiths and construction workers. However, he also presented it as an alternative to Islamic charities' housing projects. In Mafraq, the latter provided free apartments and assistance to widows and orphans, often with funding from the Gulf (cf. Ababsa 2014). In return, they restricted their beneficiaries' freedom of movement, and some Islamic charities encouraged under-age girls to get married quickly. Economic considerations aside, Pastor Aissa thus framed the church's "Jordan Project" as a remedy to the spread of Wahabi Islamic beliefs. Without proper evidence, he rhetorically discredited Islamic humanitarian organisations: "I have no proof. Sometimes it's a business; a lot of money from the Gulf came without any formal channels", suggesting that donations from wealthy private donors on the Arab Peninsula, unaccounted for by the Jordanian state and the international aid sector, fuelled Islamist activities.

I found it difficult to gauge whether local Christians in Mafraq were *actually* exposed to the implied and expressed religious discrimination in their everyday lives, as I mostly interacted with them within the church confines and during church events. Broader anti-Muslim sentiments were also expressed by foreign missionaries who had relocated their families from as far away as South Korea and South Africa. When I visited a South African family in their house in the souq, I stumbled upon a lively birthday party of local Christian and Muslim neighbours. Although even short-term volunteers had numerous opportunities for peaceful interactions with Muslims in Mafraq, they also perpetuated the persecution narrative. A German visitor once addressed the congregation by praising its courage: "I imagine that your life is so much harder than my life in Germany. The attacks that are

coming are not against us, they are against Jesus." Which attacks he was referring to remained unclear; presumably, he was hinting at the persecution of Christians in neighbouring Iraq and Syria. Another German engineer in his early thirties who had come to Mafraq with an evangelical organization was visibly disappointed when I told him that Jordanian Christians lived in harmony with their Muslim neighbours. "I thought that I might be beheaded here on the street!"

In sum, to make sense of contradictions between church members' and volunteers' inclusive actions and antagonistic discourse, it is important to keep in mind that giving aid simultaneously took place on different *temporal and spatial scales*, and that much like members of VIVA, church representatives framed Syrians' needs in more than one way. In the short term, the church provided for its Syrian counterparts' *material* needs for food, healthcare and basic education – humanitarian assistance in Mafraq was a localized endeavour, embedded in indigenous social fabrics and cultures. But for an Evangelical crowd, providing *material* aid necessarily remained incomplete. While it kept Muslim refugees alive in Mafraq, they were still at risk of damnation in the afterlife. Hence, in a long-term perspective, the church understood refugees' *spiritual* deprivation as a much more pressing concern, one that exceeded everyday survival and centred around their *eternal* salvation. In this sense, "saving" Syrian refugees became detached from Mafraq as a specific locality and part of spreading the gospel at a global scale. Through leading by example (and sometimes open proselytizing), Evangelical humanitarians tried to bridge the gap between the two dimensions of aid, hoping that their beneficiaries would eventually emulate them – and convert.

It might well be that this is where faith-based humanitarianism most poignantly departs from "conventional", secular humanitarianism with its timeless focus on the present, understood as a series of distinct emergencies around the globe. When the crisis is seen to end - or social media and international donors avert their eyes -, the caravan of UN agencies and big NGOs moves on to the next catastrophe. By way of contrast, Pastor Aissa and his church seem to be in for the long run because they have a more complex understanding of the temporal depth of the "emergency". To them, the influx of refugees certainly caused a crisis in an already underserviced, marginalized area. But it was also an opportunity. By saving Syrians *now*, they also hoped to save them later – and for real.

Conclusion

The final chapter corroborates existing research on faith-based humanitarianism about the importance of religious networks through which human and monetary resources are circulated and accessed. Faith makes a difference to how (and by whom) aid is financed, organised and delivered. My case study also adds another chapter to the history of American mission in the Arab world. Far from being reducible to "a [subdued] minority or […] an extension of Western Civilization" (Rowe 2010: 472), members of the Mafraq Unity Church show a considerable degree of agency in navigating secular and non-secular transnational connections. Within these networks, the church negotiates its marginal position.

The church markets its *rootedness* in northern Jordan to secular donors and aid agencies, tapping into the humanitarian sector's recent "localization of aid" agenda. Emphasizing its location at Europe's *periphery* adds to the church's geopolitical importance for this specific audience. Speaking to Evangelical communities worldwide, though, the pastor underlines the *global* importance of giving aid. In doing so, he rhetorically shifts the latter's centre of gravity to the Global South and moves Mafraq closer to the geographical and historical centre of Christianity. The church's increasingly hybrid nature – somewhere between an NGO and a religious institution – also underlies tensions between inclusive acts of Christian compassion in the present and more long-term missionary projects. To wrap up my argument, the dynamism of the Unity Church comes from its being "people 'in-between': in-between classes, in-between countries, in-between continents, languages and cultures" (Hutchinson and Wolffe 2012: 275).

Critics of the aid industry's turn towards the local bemoan that devolving responsibility to southern actors might not come with adequate funding, and risks prioritizing some partners over others, thereby reproducing imperialist connections and local power structures (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2018). Yet the study of the Mafraq Unity Church shows that partners on the ground *strategically* engage with funders' priorities, by learning how to speak managerial, inclusive and localized "development scripts". It also reveals the conceptual limitations of the 'localization' agenda: given the flows of funding and volunteers that reach Mafraq from elsewhere, it is hardly possible to know what purely "local" aid provision

would look like – in fact, the boundaries between external and indigenous actors have long been blurred (Carpi 2018). Nor is the Mafraq Unity Church representative of the town's inhabitants as its members make up a tiny fraction of the local population.

Most of all, my case study helps us understand that "development" is not a homogeneous project; rather, it brings together diverse actors – European governments and local communities, the US and the Gulf states, secular NGOs and faith-based humanitarians – with different agendas and codes. In response, church members have engaged in multiple, and sometimes conflicting, discursive strategies. Some of these contradictions include the following questions: is giving aid in Mafraq a local or a global affair? Are Syrian refugees innocent victims or risk being corrupted by Islamists? Is Mafraq located at the centre or at the margins? One way to think about these discrepancies is in terms of the "friction" produced in encounters between the local and the global (Tsing 2005). Most global projects do not unfold smoothly on the ground, nor are local realities simply integrated into – or heroically resist - global structures. Rather, southern actors get entangled, but also carve out spaces for agency within them. Although it resorts to globalized discourses and practices, the Mafraq Unity Church must thus be understood within its specific historical and geographic context. Despite its polyglot congregation, it remains deeply embedded in tribal fabrics and Jordan's peculiar state-building project. But "friction" is not merely a sign of deficiency; rather, it also results in new forms of culture and power. For example, pre-war class inequality between Syrians and Jordanians has now been reformulated by the church in religious terms.

On a final note, I would like to return to the pastor's georeligious vision of the Levant. Erecting the highest building in town heightened the church's visibility on a *local* scale, to fellow Jordanians and Syrian refugees. More importantly, live-streaming the construction to foreign Evangelical congregations, welcoming volunteers in Mafraq and representing the church at religious conferences abroad served to pinpoint its central position on the map of global Christianity. Of course, mapping the "Holy Land" is nothing new to Jordanians. Sixty miles south of Mafraq, the famous Madaba Map is the world's oldest remaining depiction of Jerusalem and the boundaries of the Holy Land, from Palestine to the Nile Delta. But anthropologists and geographers agree that mapping is not a disinterested intellectual or aesthetic exercise; rather, it is an instrument of power (Lund 2003). In truth, policymakers'

"cartographic anxieties" (Saxer 2016: 112) *produce* territory, and nowhere is this more obvious than in my region of interest. It is certainly remarkable that missionary activity around Mafraq has taken place in such close proximity to the Syrian-Jordanian frontier, the outcome of the 1916 Sykes–Picot Agreement which divided the region into French and British spheres of influence and generated a new set of states and often contested frontiers. Until the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, vast stretches of the border close to Mafraq were hardly more than an imagined line in the sand, and frequently crossed in both directions for visiting family and seeking work on the other side. In a similar vein, when foreign volunteers in Mafraq claim "Jordan for you", what is implied is the reshuffling of the borders of (and the enlargement of) Christian territory.

But importantly, Pastor Aissa's mental map is not merely static, nor is it flat. It goes beyond redrawing the boundaries of Christianity on a map. Rather, much like the original Madaba Map that served as a hands-on travel guide to pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem, the pastor's vision is shaped by, and inspires, Evangelicals' concrete travels. Contemporary maps are informed by an understanding of the world as a fixed mosaic of nations, with clearly defined boundaries. We tend to think of my informants as "citizens", "migrants", "expats" and "refugees", according to their position in the nation-state framework, and imagine mobility as "border crossing, as though borders came first" (Lund 2003: 1062).

But Pastor Aissa's vision of the Christian world, as well as the earlier Madaba map, suggests that different maps are possible – maps that do not obscure or exoticize movement, but factor it into the depiction of travellers' journeys. I wish I knew how to put the alternative geography that Pastor Aissa sketched out in his sermons and interviews on paper – after all, Global Evangelism is a similarly "mobile order" (Hutchinson and Wolffe 2012, p. 276). At the least, Aissa's map would have to be multi-scalar – it would trace connections from Mafraq to surrounding villages in present-day Jordan and Palestine, to Middle Eastern capitals, the American Midwest, South Africa and Malaysia. Moreover, it would be oddly shaped, with Mafraq close to the pulsating heart of the Holy Land, bulging towards the East to include the edges of the Jordanian steppe. And how would one even represent the *virtual* spheres in which the church also operates? All of this makes being a "native" a complicated story, one in which rootedness and mobility go hand in hand.

Conclusion: Displacing displacement

In April 2018, I returned to Mafraq to pay a visit to Um Khaled, the mother of Adel, a young man in his mid-twenties and one of my key informants. In the three-room house that Um Khaled shared with Adel, she offered me tea and dates, while her two-year old granddaughter turned my bag upside down. Um Khaled, a feisty woman in her sixties, was originally from Aleppo and had later lived in Damascus. Although not exactly cosmopolitan city dwellers, Um Khaled and her son were quick to point out the differences between themselves and Syrian peasants in Mafraq. A successful textile business had secured the family a comfortable life before the war. In exile, Adel worked long shifts as a waiter to furnish their apartment with new curtains, a splendid bed room and air conditioning.

Um Khaled was also ethnically Chechen. In the late Ottoman era, refugees from the North Caucasus, including Circassians and Chechens, had been resettled to Syria and what was then called "Transjordan" (Hamed-Troyansky 2017). Since Jordan's independence, many have served in the army and the security forces. 150 years later, Um Khaled capitalized on these ethnic ties, which now span several states, to find employment in Amman, shortly before the onset of the Syrian conflict. She brought with her Nawal, a young Syrian Arab woman who had been Adel's tutor back home. Um Khaled had promised Nawal a job as a teacher in a private school in Amman, but somehow the deal did not work out. While her protégée grew impatient, Um Khaled began to regret her offer, as 19-year old Adel, madly in love with Nawal, soon followed her to Jordan. Um Khaled was scandalized: she had wanted her son to marry a Chechen woman. Furious, she returned to Syria. While their home country plunged into turmoil, the newly-weds struggled to make a living, first in Amman, later in Mafraq, where a Syrian aunt of Nawal's had married a local some forty years earlier. When Nawal began to work as a teacher in VIVA's home-schooling project, our paths crossed. She showed me pictures of the sumptuous living rooms of her husband's Jordanian Chechen relatives in Amman who invited them over for Ramadan and occasionally supported them financially. When I befriended Nawal and Adel, they had also registered with the UNHCR and obtained ID cards from the Jordanian Ministry of Interior, which gave them access to certain forms of humanitarian assistance, including food vouchers and free medical treatment at the Emirati Field Hospital when Nawal got pregnant.

During my fieldwork, fate struck Adel twice. First, his older brother and his entire family were killed in a bombing in Aleppo. Then Nawal died while giving birth to their first child. Dumbfounded by his loss, Adel returned to Amman where, once again, the Chechen community took him in. A Syrian Chechen woman nursed his baby daughter while Adel worked and lived in an upscale hammam in West Amman, run by the same Jordanian businessman who had already employed him in a restaurant in Mafraq. When I returned to Jordan in summer 2017, he had changed locations yet again. After two months of fruitless attempts at tracking him down, he finally replied to my messages: once more, Adel lived in Mafraq, now with his infant daughter – and his mother. How Um Khaled had managed to travel to Jordan at a time when more than 80,000 refugees were denied entry at Jordan's north-eastern border (Pasha 2018) remained unclear to me. Presumably, transnational Chechen networks, contacts in the Jordanian security apparatus and a substantial bribe had facilitated her trip. Upon arrival, Um Khaled had registered with the UNHCR in Mafraq. However, she did not intend to stay for long. In her living room in Mafraq in April 2018, she told me about her father's military service during the French mandate – in the late 1930s! Um Khaled had brought historical documents from Syria and was planning to apply for asylum at the French embassy in Amman on the basis of her father's affiliation with the former mandate authorities.

In my doctoral thesis, I retraced the movements of two dissimilar kinds of people that I encountered in Mafraq in 2016: Syrians from remote rural areas and Evangelical humanitarians. In the conclusion, I sum up what my research contributes to the study of displacement and migration in the context of the Syrian conflict, and how its findings might also speak to legal anthropologists.

My thesis sought to understand my informants' pre-2011 and current cross-border mobility schemes, and how they have relied on diverse transnational networks to support themselves and their endeavours. It found that Syrian refugees today capitalize on existing connections with local employers, established during pre-war seasonal labour migration to Jordanian borderlands, to find work in the informal economy (chapters 1-2). After 2011, border closure disrupted Syrians' customary mobility circuits, but they continue to circulate remittances, spouses and information about humanitarian assistance within kinship-based

networks in the Levant. To former labour migrants, family-making across Middle Eastern borders was a reality long before they were displaced to Jordan *as refugees* (chapter 3).

By way of contrast, Evangelical humanitarians in Mafraq are embedded in transnational networks not only at a regional, but at a global scale (chapters 4-7). To access funding and support from unpaid volunteers, VIVA and the Mafraq Unity Church tap into transcontinental ties with Evangelical communities in Western Europe and North America whose roots date back to the 19th-century travels of missionaries to the Middle East. VIVA volunteers, although new to Jordan and unfamiliar with its culture and history, received practical support from indigenous Evangelical organisations and individual missionaries who had worked in Syria before the war. In Mafraq, Evangelicals' presence dates back to the conversion of local Christians in the 1940s and the foundation of an American sanatorium for chest diseases in the 1960s. More recently, VIVA and the Mafraq Unity Church managed to expand their humanitarian operations because they intensified connections with fellow congregations around the globe – they also accessed new sources of funding when they learned to communicate with the mainstream aid industry. The expectations of foreign donors and short-term helpers shape the ways in which aid is given: VIVA volunteers stage encounters inside Syrians' homes that produce moving testimonies for European Christians back home (chapter 5), and the Mafraq Unity Church balances diverse acts of self-representation towards secular NGOs, foreign governments and its mother congregation in the US. For spiritual matters, though, Jordanian Evangelicals turn to fellow believers in other Arab countries and as far as Southeast Asia. While Evangelical humanitarianism remains a transnational project, the emergence of new geographies of faith centred on the Global South speaks to the emancipation of the Mafraq Unity Church from older traditions of "Western" mission (chapter 7).

Ethnographic research allows us to fill the gaps of mobility histories in the "transnational Middle East" (cf. Arsan, Karam and Khater 2013). Through extended interviews with Syrian refugees and Evangelical aid workers, my thesis captures flows of people, goods and money that have long remained under the radar of states and humanitarian agencies and do not appear in official statistics about labour migration and international aid to Jordan. It provides new insights into the movements of people who are differently positioned in highly unequal mobility regimes – Syrian peasants without Jordanian work permits and

often no paperwork at all except for recently acquired humanitarian documentation, and Evangelical humanitarians with either Jordanian citizenship or powerful European and US-American passports. It also gives us a sense of the informal channels that my informants continue to use, for example for sending remittances into war zones.

But my doctoral findings do more than adding another piece to the puzzle of present-day Syrian displacement and the humanitarian response in the Levant. Following people like Um Khaled and Adel across borders and throughout their encounters with Jordanian employers and Evangelical aid workers allows us to retell the story of Syrian refugees in Mafraq in terms of *continuities*, not of ruptures, and to displace our understanding of forced migration as a one-way street. My thesis helps us understand that the emerging *transnational space of refuge* that has come to encompass locations as diverse as Syrians' villages of origin in Jabal al-Hoss and Mheen, refugee camps in the Middle East, Syrian diasporas in the Gulf and Europe and churches in the US and South Korea, cannot be reduced to conflict-induced mobility and the spread of humanitarian infrastructures. Rather, my informants' trajectories within it are preconfigured by more longstanding regional labour migration schemes and global religiopolitical projects.

In some important ways, Um Khaled and Adel differ from the majority of Syrian informants in this thesis. Before the war, they exhibited a more affluent socioeconomic profile. Different from the Syrian peasants that I interviewed, they had lived in big cities – first Aleppo and later Damascus – and gained a stable income from trade. When family members travelled before and during the Syrian conflict, they could rely on transnational ethnic-minority networks and the Chechens' close ties with the Jordanian state, a source of support that was unavailable to my poor Sunni informants. In other ways, though, their story is similar to those of many refugees in Mafraq: although they never led nomadic lives, Um Khaled and Adel are experienced border-crossers, used to migrating for economic, affective and conflict-related reasons. Like other Syrians, Adel had briefly worked in Lebanon as a teenager before the war. Labour migration (and love), not conflict, first brought mother and son to Jordan, although they later acquired refugee status and gained access to aid. In exile, Adel also built a lasting connection with a Jordanian entrepreneur that helped him find informal jobs in his employer's various enterprises in Mafraq and Amman, but like for many Syrians, working conditions were exploitative. In Mafraq, Adel

was charged a substantial part of his salary for the food that he consumed in the restaurant where he worked as a waiter (cf. chapter 2). In Amman, he stayed in an apartment that was owned by his employer – part of his pay was subtracted for the rent. During his marriage, his wife Nawal's income from teaching with VIVA complemented his meagre salary. Although Nawal was Muslim, she felt an instant connection with one of VIVA's older volunteers, a European woman in her sixties who had previously worked with a Christian charity in Maaloula, a famous Christian site in Syria, close to Nawal's home-town al-Nabek.

Applying a transnational lens to the study of displacement and faith-based humanitarian action during the Syrian war has revealed the following more general pattern: in the Levant, transnational networks of different sorts are surprisingly robust. They are not merely disrupted but rather reshaped – and sometimes even intensified – by conflict. However, Um Khaled's, Nawal's and Adel's travels do not merely illustrate broader mobility patterns. Theirs is also the story of those who bent the rules – and (mostly) got away with it. This is true of their choices in private life, but also of their interactions with the Jordanian state and the international humanitarian system. As a single woman from a conservative Sunni family, Nawal showed considerable agency in seeking employment abroad before 2011. Although most marriages among lower-class Syrians are arranged within kinship (and ethnic) circles, Nawal and Adel beat the odds. In Mafraq, Nawal and Adel did not live in a multigenerational household but in an apartment of their own – an unusual arrangement for both Syrians and Jordanians in town. Since his wife's death, Adel has been bringing up his daughter as a single father. With regard to policy labels, Nawal and Adel first came to Jordan as migrants but chose to present themselves as "refugees" to the host state, the UNHCR and smaller organisations like VIVA when Syrians' legal situation in Jordan worsened, but also when new types of aid became available through the humanitarian community. Um Khaled, now a grandmother, was able to bribe her way into Jordan but now receives aid from various NGOs. A proud Syrian and Chechen, she also recently rediscovered her identity as a colonial subject – and dreams of travelling to France.

My thesis showed that Syrians' movements across borders and inside Mafraq have been shaped by economic dependencies and restrictive national and humanitarian policies, including Syria's neglect of the rural poor and Jordan's hostile immigration and asylum politics. More recently, they have also been curbed by faith-based humanitarians'

idiosyncratic modes of interacting with refugees in urban space. Within these constraints, though, Syrians carve out space for independent action. Although Jordan has reinforced its encampment policies and imposes strict rules on humanitarian documentation for urban refugees, some manage to obtain documents they are not entitled to (chapter 2). Mobile vendors circumvent the ban on Syrian labour (chapter 2), spinsters find themselves husbands in unexpected places (chapter 3) and unruly aid recipients disrupt aid delivery in the streets (chapter 4), performances of gratitude inside homes (chapter 5) and well-meant attempts at making "model refugees" (chapter 6). On the other hand, not only Evangelicals, but also Syrians have learned the codes of the aid industry and provide NGOs with sanitized displacement narratives that will secure further assistance (chapters 4 and 7). Highlighting moments where rules are bent and broken helps us understand that Syrian life in Mafraq is not merely oppressive. It reveals that Syrians' engagements with the local economy, the host state, humanitarian actors and even their next of kin are complex, messy – and often contradictory.

"Here" and "there": A topological approach to the study of displacement

Conventional cartography fails us when we try to describe how Syrians experience transnational networks. Retracing on a map the various cross-border connections that intersect in Um Khaled's life tells us little about how a far-away European country like France could suddenly appear to her as close as her natal Aleppo. In a similar vein, pastor Aissa, the protagonist of my final chapter, simultaneously engages with fellow Evangelicals in the Midwest, South Korea and Syria, with seemingly little attention to scale.

One way to make sense of my informants' grasp of space is through topological approaches that allow us to reformulate "distance" not as a geometric object but according to how it is experienced (Allen 2011). Perceptions of proximity, presence and absence might have little to do with measurable distance. Topological approaches do justice to the ways in which the subjects of my study talked about "space" – not in abstract terms, but through references to concrete and everyday practices. For example, through sending remittances, Syrians manage to feel close to relatives dispersed to other places in the Levant and in Europe. The use of social media allows pastor Aissa to remain present in the lives of the church's

faraway donors, e.g. through live streaming the construction of its new building on Facebook.

Topological approaches to distance also allow us to rethink Mafraq's marginality. Centres and peripheries are not simply constituted by their position with regard to transport routes, patterns of economic activity and national borders but according to what travellers think that "matters". To my Syrian informants, the "known world" encompasses rural areas like Jabal al-Hoss and provincial backwaters like Mafraq instead of metropoles like Damascus, Amman or Beirut. To VIVA volunteers and pastor Aissa, Mafraq's proximity to the Holy Land cements its position at the heart of Evangelicals' spiritual geography.

Finally, thinking about "perceived" distance gives us a flavour of how power unfolds in space as "the ability to draw distant others within close reach or construct the close at hand at-a distance" (Allen 2011: 284). Ultimately, power lies in the ability to reach out to others, to make one's presence - or absence – felt. Reformulating a spatial approach to power in topological terms sheds light on how various state and non-state actors impact Syrians' everyday lives in exile. The second part of this thesis argued that the strength of Evangelical humanitarian organisations like VIVA, whose budget hardly compares to the funding situation of bigger aid agencies, lies in creating a *social* presence in refugees' lives. (At the same time, seeking proximity came with unintended acts of detachment. As the analysis of house visits in chapter 5 revealed, Evangelicals' heightened "presence" produced new forms of forced immobility for refugees.) A powerful way in which the Jordanian host state creates – partial – presences and absences is through selectively enforcing restrictive labour legislation. This results in a discrepancy between poor Syrians' physical presence and their absence as "legal subjects", or, as my friend Baher in Mafraq put it: "I'm not really here – only my body is here."

Syrian labour and illegality

My findings help deromanticize our understanding of how poor rural populations survive in the Middle East. Far from Bedouin nomadism, Syrian peasants engaged in modern forms of labour migration, temporarily escaping from and entering (mostly) rural economies weakened by failed agricultural and later neoliberal reforms. In Jordan, they have once

again joined the ranks of other foreign workers in the informal sector. My thesis has tried to avoid feeding into "crisis narratives" of the Syrian war and exile in Jordan, highlighting instead more longstanding socioeconomic and legal processes of "migrantization" that have forced my informants to become mobile and – at times – get stuck.

In exile, displaced populations tend to experience multiple human rights violations, including a lack of labour rights and insecure legal status (Verdirame and Harrell-Bond 2005). This thesis articulated the link between forced migration, labour and illegality. It argued that refugees' political and social exclusion in Jordan coincides with their tacit inclusion into a cheap and exploitable workforce. Therefore, Syrians' living situation in Mafraq and their insertion into the informal economy can only be understood against the backdrop of Jordan's specific legal framework.[38] The reception of Syrians is informed by more longstanding hostile immigration policies and more recent restrictive humanitarian policies that have brought about new forms of containment, both in camps and in urban areas (Steinberg 2019). What is more, these national laws and policies (as well as Jordan's lack of proper asylum legislation) have a huge impact on Syrians' lives in Mafraq not because they are consistent or clear, but because they are confusing and, at times, contradict international humanitarian protection schemes. Most importantly, they are selectively reinforced, as the case of Baher, a Syrian teacher from Mheen, and his collection of multiple legal documents shows (chapter 2).

Elsewhere in the Middle East, one finds additional evidence of how refugee-reception policies plunge Syrians into legal limbo and exploitative working conditions. In the Lebanese context, Nassar and Stel (2019) argue that the "institutional ambiguity" (44) of the country's response is not merely a symptom of a dysfunctional sectarian regime and limited state resources, but also a tool of humanitarian governance. Through constantly shifting regulations as well as heightened security measures, Syrians are forced to accept informal

[38] By way of contrast, Iraqi Kurdistan, which has welcomed 250,000 Syrian refugees, has pursued more "refugee-friendly" policies (Said 2016). On arrival, refugees could register with the Ministry of Interior of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and obtain an annually renewable residency permit – only valid in KRI – that gives them access to the formal labour market. However, most Syrians – and most Iraqis – work in the informal economy, although they do not face deportation threats or fines. While it is recognized that Iraqi Kurdistan stands out because of its strong ethnic and linguistic ties to a specific segment of the refugee population, Syrian Kurds, (Dionigi 2018), the example demonstrates that Arab host countries have implemented widely different refugee-reception schemes.

work and housing. Kivilcim (2016) considers Turkey's regime of temporary protection for Syrians a form of "legal violence" (Kivilcim 2016: 193) because it prevents them from accessing international protection and encourages exploitation of Syrian workers, especially women, in the informal economy. Here, the detrimental impact of refugee reception policies is caused not by their ambiguity, but by "legal inaction" (Kivilcim 2016: 204), i.e. the absence of regulations that specify the legal conditions of Syrians' employment under the temporary protection regime.

And keeping urban refugees in legal limbo produces wider insecurities: fear of employers and losing one's job or pay; fear of the security forces, arbitrary arrest and deportation; fear of losing humanitarian assistance. Hence, legal insecurity appears to be a disciplinary tool for keeping in check a numerically important foreign demographic: according to different national and international estimates, Syrians make up between 7% and 14% of the overall population on Jordanian territory (Ghazal 2016; UNHCR 2018b). So far, academics have critically reviewed more blatant forms of containment for Syrians, for example forced encampment policies in Jordan (Achilli 2015) and curfews in urban areas in Lebanon (Janmyr 2016). By way of contrast, refugees' legal insecurity – and the repercussions it has on their freedom of movement and labour rights in host countries in the Middle East – is an overlooked form of containment and hardly remedied by current humanitarian livelihood programming.[39]

A right to repatriation – or circulation?

In October 2018, while I finished writing my thesis, the Jaber border crossing between Syria and Jordan, a thirty minute-drive away from Mafraq, reopened after a three-year closure. When I visited my host family the following month, Syrian fruits and vegetables had already made their reappearance in shops in Mafraq and my host brother's friends had been

[39] While this section focuses on Syrians' limbo in Middle Eastern host countries, a similar legal lens can be applied to the study of structural violence in their country of origin. As open conflict seems to come to an end, the Syrian parliament passed Law 10, as well as a series of other laws, that facilitate the dispossession of refugees. Law 10 obliges residents to prove land ownership in areas cleared for reconstruction. However, many poor Syrians lack paperwork for their homes. In the outskirts of Damascus, more than 40% of the population lived in informal settlements in the early 2000s (Smiley, Hourani and Ahmad 2018). Besides bombings and arbitrary demolitions, discriminatory laws on land tenure appear to be another technology of reordering urban space along class and sectarian lines.

among the first Arab tourists in Damascus. That cross-border flows remained unequal was related to overlapping – and confusing - border regimes of nation-states and the international humanitarian system. For now, most travellers were Jordanian tourists and shoppers. While they could enter the neighbouring country without a visa, Syrians needed security permission from Jordanian authorities to go south. The situation was even more complicated for Syrian refugees: they had to obtain temporary travel documents from the Syrian embassy in Amman to go to their home country. By returning home, they also renounced their refugee status with the UNHCR. By the beginning of November 2018, 600 to 700 cars crossed into Syria every day (Hamou and Edwards 2018).

The reopening of the border started a new chapter in Syrian-Jordanian border economies - it also reconnected Jordan to the wider region. The highway between Amman and Damascus is part of critical transport routes that link the Levant to the Lebanese Mediterranean coast and the Gulf, with Syria as an important transit country. While renewed cross-border flows have revived local markets in struggling Jordanian border towns and encouraged Jordanians to buy cheaper products "on the other side", they have hardly benefited Syrians in Daraa where unemployment is rampant and prices have skyrocketed with the return of better-off Jordanian consumers (Edwards et al. 2018).

For now, ongoing conflict inside Syria and fear of persecution from the authorities – especially against draft evaders and protesters – make the mass-scale return of refugees unlikely (Hamou and Edwards 2018). Some, like Um Mehdi's Bedouin family, cashed in the few belongings that they had before the war and have no land to go back to. Young men like Adel fear going back because they are threatened by arrest and forced conscription. Others, like Tamam, have married locals and established a permanent life – and a new family – in Jordan. Amer and his family have been on the waiting list for resettlement to the UK for years and do not want to relinquish their chance of a better life elsewhere.

As my thesis argued, Syrians' pre-war cross-border mobility was a double-edged sword: a survival strategy of vulnerable rural households, but also a specific type of resource for disenfranchised populations devoid of other forms of assets. On a practical level, insights into refugees' pre-war mobility schemes should inform policy choices in the aftermath of the Syrian conflict. Instead of forcefully repatriating displaced populations for good, it might

be in Syria's (and Jordan's) best interest to reopen borders and allow returnees to keep being mobile in the Levant, as a way of recovering lost rural livelihoods. Academic insights into the complexity of refugees' movements are reflected in recent humanitarian discourse: major UN agencies like the UNCHR and IOM have acknowledged that facilitating mobility could become part of the solution to displacement (Long and Crisp 2010). Through the (non-binding) *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants* that the UN General Assembly adopted in September 2016, member states further committed to enhancing refugee mobility through "complementary pathways" in addition to refugee resettlement, including family reunification, labour and educational migration (OECD and UNHCR 2018). Sadly, policy-making at national levels speaks a different language. Forceful repatriation from Lebanon has put Syrian refugees at risk of internal displacement and detention upon their return (Sewell 2017). As long as policymakers think of the world in terms of borders and circumscribed territories, refugees are framed as an aberration of the order of nation-states (Malkki 1992) and expected to "stay put" in refugee camps or in the vicinity of their regions of origin (Hyndman and Giles 2011).

At the same time, Syrians' exploitation in the informal economy in major refugee-receiving countries like Lebanon and Jordan parallels the precarious lives of undocumented migrants around the globe. It is obvious that Syrians in Mafraq have heightened protection needs and require humanitarian assistance. Contesting policy labels has real-life consequences beyond academia, as neither "refugee" nor "migrant" are politically neutral categories. They are instruments of social control used by states to govern mobile populations – most often, to keep them out. The current reification of the refugee/migrant dichotomy coincides with an alarming lack of commitment of states to international refugee law, as evidenced by the downgrading of refugee protection worldwide (Crawley and Skleparis 2017). Examples include offshore detention of asylum seekers in Australia, the suspension of Syrian resettlement to the US and subsidiary protection for asylum seekers in Germany, which, among other caveats, comes with impediments to family reunification. In all of these cases, states, not international bodies, set the criteria for who is deemed eligible for full refugee status. Bureaucratic practices and a proliferation of similar-sounding labels and temporary residence permits obscure governments' efforts to restrict access to protection (Zetter 2007).

However, “refugee” might not be the defining *analytical* label for those who work informally in agriculture in northern Jordan alongside Egyptian and other migrant workers with equally precarious legal status. There is plentiful academic evidence from other geographic contexts (e.g. Bakewell 2008 on West Africa; Monsutti 2008 on Afghanistan) to contest the distinction between “refugees” and “migrants”. Ethnographic case studies like the one that I presented in this thesis provide further ammunition for pointing out a blatant *policy gap* in humanitarian action and immigration regimes around the globe. My findings tell us that the reality of population movements is messier than policymakers want it to be; that it is often difficult, indeed impossible, to tell “refugees” and “migrants” apart, as they tend to move alongside each other, in each other’s footsteps, and exhibit similar mobility and other survival strategies. The example of rural Syrian populations in Mafraq shows that in one’s lifetime, a mover can switch between categories, transitioning from being a migrant to being a refugee.

Fernandez and Olson (2011) find that the political struggle of irregular Mexican workers against openly racist immigration policies in Arizona is not motivated by their desire to gain US citizenship, but to remain mobile:

> *They are demanding the freedom to live, raise families and work across borders, and insisting on the right to participate in whatever public they are presently in, regardless of citizenship status.* (Fernandez and Olson 2011: 416)

Against the backdrop of Syrians’ longstanding presence in Lebanon, El Miri and Mercier (2018) similarly advocate for a policy alternative to refugee repatriation and resettlement – for a *right to circulation*. Corrupt justice systems and Arab countries’ lack of commitment to the 1951 Refugee Convention present huge legal obstacles to the realization of their claim. Still, this is where the radical potential of my findings on Syrians’ multiple mobilities lies: thinking of solutions to displacement in terms of movement, not of settlement, allows us to challenge common understandings of where people belong, how they contribute to these places and, ultimately, the meaning of citizenship. As I laid out in the introduction, current academic discourse on globalized economies and precarious labour is informed by case studies from the Global North. In countries like Jordan, however, opportunities for political and social participation are limited for foreign workers, refugees and most citizens alike.

Could we envision a way to end my Syrian informants' precarity that does not aim at their (faulty) citizenship in Syria or elsewhere but enables them *as border-crossers*?

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