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**Wellbeing in displacement
exploring the experience of young adult refugees from Syria in Jordan**

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Wellbeing in Displacement: Exploring the Experience
of Young Adult Refugees from Syria in Jordan

Zeina Amro

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Thesis submitted to Department of Global Health and Social Medicine, King's
College London, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

Abstract

This dissertation explores wellbeing of young adult Syrian refugees in Jordan. It aims to bring to the fore the conceptualisations, experiences, and practices of wellbeing among Syrians as they navigated their complex, uncertain, and strained lives. Specifically, I ask: How do young adult refugees from Syria experience wellbeing within a context of political violence, insecurity, and uncertainty? How do they conceptualise wellbeing verbally, visually, and experientially? How are notions of wellbeing actively created and negotiated in different social milieus, and how does this affect the lived experiences of young adult refugees?

My participants fled from the Syrian conflict which started in 2011, after peaceful protests were violently cracked down on, and the situation escalated to a violent civil war. Over the past eight years, the conflict has led to the displacement of millions of people, and Human Rights Watch reported that there were approximately 920,000 internally displaced persons in 2018. The surrounding countries – Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey – have received most of the refugees although they have started to close their borders turning many of them back. Until now, research has mainly focused on Syrian refugees' experiences of violence, displacement, and social suffering and their mental health outcomes, particularly post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety. Far less research recognises and investigates expressions of resilience, hope, and wellbeing. My dissertation builds on and expands this latter scholarly work by acknowledging that displaced populations' mental health is not merely defined by illness, but rather by complex experiences, practices, and emotions which include notions of wellbeing, hope, and strength.

I conducted my research mainly in Jordan's capital Amman and the town of Rusayfe located in the Zarqa governorate over a period of ten months between July 2016 and May 2017. In order to gain in-depth insight into my interlocutors' experiences, practices, and conceptualisations of wellbeing, I combined ethnographic methods such as participant observation and semi-structured interviews with participatory methods including photovoice and participant-led activities. I chose photovoice as a method as it allows participants to capture

stories and ideas visually and engage in critical dialogue in order to thereby produce shared knowledge. By utilising a participatory approach in conjunction with ethnography, I nurtured more collaborative relationships between my participants and myself. Thereby, it was possible to create a space for reflection and agency which allowed my participants to guide my gaze to aspects and dimensions of wellbeing which would have gone unnoticed with more conventional approaches to research.

My dissertation brings to light that the experiences and practices of wellbeing of Syrian refugees in Jordan were highly context dependent and, thus, dynamic and in flux. This I highlight by presenting their stories through a temporal framework from their decision to leave their home country, to their flight and arrival in Jordan, to their attempts to settle in the new host environment. My interlocutors explained how difficult it was to experience wellbeing initially as their lives were brutally disrupted and they found themselves “strangers” in a place they expected to be familiar. This led to disappointment, but also created a need to find ways for coping with their disillusioned expectations such as seeking familiarity and comfort among fellow Syrians rather than trying to fit into the host society. After a period of time in Jordan, many of my participants started accepting the protracted nature of their stay in the country. This, in effect, then led to what many recounted as *tahawwol* (transformation) which manifested in how they sought to move forward and un-pause their lives through recommencing social celebrations, establishing their families, seeking employment, and continuing their education. Yet despite recognising that they were finding ways to actively improve their lives and wellbeing, it became also clear that they were acutely aware of the challenges, obstacles, and exclusions that strained their wellbeing experience. Through my research, I highlight the visual, practical, and experiential dimensions of this notion of wellbeing, as well as particular “idioms of wellbeing” which reflect complex and, at times, contradictory experiences.

Recognising how refugees navigate and seek their wellbeing within displacement is crucial not only on an empirical level, but also on a practical one. As practitioners and policymakers attempt to facilitate their beneficiaries’ wellbeing, they should be aware of the concept’s complex, contradictory, and dynamic nature. Moreover, I encourage them to utilise a collaborative and participatory approach in order to develop a stance which foregrounds the

perspectives of beneficiaries which, in turn, could lead to designing interventions and programs that foster existing practices of wellbeing while, at the same time, making them culturally and socially meaningful and acceptable.

Acknowledgments - شكر و عرفان

I will start this acknowledgment section with the point in my own experience which put me on the path towards my PhD, and will follow this by recognising and thanking the people who have supported me throughout it.

This PhD is the culmination of experiences which started in 2013 while I was still a research assistant at the Institute of Community and Public Health at Birzeit University, Palestine. It was there that I first encountered the concept of wellbeing and its measurement, and where I started becoming inspired to research it. It was also there that I found encouragement and support to follow through on such an inspiration and met my current supervisor Dr. Hanna Kienzler. For this inspiration and for the connection with colleagues who I greatly respect I will always be thankful.

My connection to Dr. Hanna Kienzler started when I worked as a research assistant on a project she was undertaking in Palestine. It was then that I was first inspired with her and her work, and where she encouraged me to apply and helped me start this PhD. Since then she has continuously and tirelessly mentored and supported my educational and my professional journey in ways that I am sure I will continue reflecting on for many, many years into the future. For this relationship and for her amazing commitment, rigour, and honesty I thank her here, knowing fully well that these words will not encompass my gratitude. Her supervision, along with the supervision of Dr. Dominique Behague, have transformed my overall learning process, my writing, and conceptual thinking. My Second supervisor Dr Dominique Behague has been essential to thinking creatively about my own writing process and giving me the 'bigger picture perspective' when, at times, I would be lost in the details. To these wonderful supervisors I owe a great deal of my growth.

When arriving to London and to the department of Global Health and Social Medicine — then called Social Science, Health and Medicine — I did not know what to expect of the community I would be joining. I had no way of expecting a community of fellow students and lecturers who were not only easy to admire for their interesting and impressive academic achievements and work, but for their kindness and generosity in providing support and advice. I found in

the PhD students I studied with a group of people who were always ready to help with modesty and honesty; who were transparent and shared personal triumphs and trials of their own PhD journey; and who made my own journey less isolating. I could not have asked for a better group of people to have met. I hope to continue learning from and sharing experiences with these colleagues and friends in the years to come.

Beyond the professional and academic support I received, I want to recognize my amazing friends who have been immensely helpful in making sure I do not hide completely into my cave of work and who gave me space to vent and hosted me in their homes where they cared for me. Among them I want to especially thank Hedaia, Lucy, Dia – I am lucky that our lives in London coincided.

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Of course, I need to highlight that none of my work would have meaning, or substance without the Syrian people who welcomed me into their lives and shared their stories and time with me. To them as well to others who worked with them through organizations, I give the utmost respect and thanks. The people I worked with made me passionate about my work and made me aware of how important it is to face struggles with tenacity. I will never forget a moment of my work with them all. Thank you is not enough.

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Glossary

UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
PTSD	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
SWB	Subjective wellbeing
PWB	Psychological wellbeing
SDT	Self-determination theory
PTE	Potentially Traumatic Event
CYRM-12	Child and Youth Resilience Measure
ONS	Office of National Statistics
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
Mol	Ministry of Interior
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IDP	Internally displaced persons
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
WHO	World Health Organization

1.Introduction

“I’m not a refugee.”

We barely heard him the first time over the din of the nearby cafe and the chatting of the customers. We were sitting in a circle in the coffee shop’s adjacent gallery space, around 30 people gathered to hear and discuss the preliminary findings of my dissertation research on the wellbeing of refugees from Syria residing in Jordan. “The label doesn’t define me,” Rami continued. He was one of the first young men I met at the beginning of my fieldwork. His insistence seemed to contradict the story of displacement that animated his life and the life of his family. His grandparents were expelled from Palestine in 1948 along with 700,000 other Palestinians. They eventually settled in Syria, in Yarmouk refugee camp, only to be displaced once again after the outbreak of the Syrian revolution of 2011 and the subsequent civil war that gave birth to one of the greatest refugee populations in the twenty-first century. As a result, Rami was labelled a refugee twice; first because he was born in exile in Syria, and the second as a result of his flight to Jordan after the Syrian Civil War. All of these details in his life might scream “refugee,” and yet there he was, refusing to be reduced to that label. There were several more people in the room who shared his background, all nodding along enthusiastically. It became apparent that Rami had touched upon something that resonated with many who had gone through similar experiences. I asked him to expand on what he’d said, though he hardly needed an invitation. “Yes, I am a refugee,” he went on, unable to hide the disdain in his voice, and continued:

But that is not all that I am. I work, I am a husband, I like food. And I also happen to have fled from my home. But this doesn’t define me and how I experience things. Being a “refugee” means certain things are expected of you. The way you express yourself, the way you convey your emotions – in Syria, even in al-Yarmouk, I was allowed to hate the place I’m in; I was allowed to hate the way the tree in front of my house looked. But here, as a ‘refugee,’ you aren’t allowed these things. You have to act like you’re so grateful for the refuge you’ve been given. It imposes an expectation on what you should be feeling.

I open with this vignette not because the politics of identity among refugees will be the primary focus of this study – it is not – but rather to keep the voice of Rami and others like him prominent in the reader’s mind throughout the course of this dissertation. Rami’s resistance to having the label ‘refugee’ encompass the entirety of his lived experience made me pay attention to the importance of allowing the multiplicities of experiences within displacement to be prominent in my own research on wellbeing. This emphasis on making sure that various dimensions of the lived experiences must be engaged with to understand the overall experience was important to how I approached the stories of those who participated in my research. To explore and understand wellbeing I endeavoured to engage with these dimensions and highlight how they contribute to their overall wellbeing experience. I paid special attention to set my gaze where those who collaborated with me direct it to, and to utilize their own terms to reflect their wellbeing. It is through Rami’s and my other participants’ stories that I explore the experiences of wellbeing within the context of displacement. I approached this exploration of wellbeing through ethnographic and participatory approaches which allow an in-depth understanding of the various ways wellbeing is represented and experienced. Accounts such as these highlight the importance of reflecting and prioritising the voices of people and “researched communities” in any kind of ethnographic endeavour, a commitment which is all the more important when adopting the particular model of participant research that this dissertation seeks to emulate. I focused on explorations of wellbeing within the specific context of displacement and political violence as it allows for an exploration of wellbeing within a strained and complex context, one that usually shifts the attention of audiences, media as well as many academics to suffering and distress rather than wellbeing. By exploring wellbeing within this context, I hope to enrich our understanding of such difficult contexts and of how might a displaced community navigate strains to improve their experience of wellbeing.

Such personal experiences of war and displacement are not unique to today. The world we live in has always experienced periods with violent political struggles that force many to leave their homes and countries in search of safety and the possibility of a better life. Recent reports highlight that there are currently 68.5 million people in the world who have been forcibly displaced as a result of

violent conflicts and human rights violations (UNHCR, 2018)¹, and the numbers continue to rise every year. Among this 68.5 million are 25.4 million refugees², many of whom had to resort to clandestine travel on dangerous routes to flee the dangerous conditions in which they found themselves. This continues to be widespread, despite calls from humanitarian organisations, such as Amnesty International, to help displaced people by increasing resettlement options and other legal routes to safety, including humanitarian visas and family reunification (Amnesty International, 2015).

In 2017, 68 % of refugees worldwide came from just 5 countries: Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia (UNHCR, 2018, 3), with Syrians currently accounting for the largest forcibly displaced population. Although displaced Syrians have been granted refuge in over 120 countries, most of them (87 %) are hosted in nearby countries, namely Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan (Amnesty International, 2016; UNHCR, 2019). Their displacement is the result of the ongoing crisis in Syria, which began following peaceful protests against the Syrian government in 2011. Over the past eight years, the crisis escalated to what eventually became a violent armed conflict between the Syrian army and various opposition groups, all which have been aided and supported financially and militarily by international actors, including the United States, Russia and Iran (Human Rights Watch, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2019). Throughout the unfolding violence, the civilian population has been exposed to harsh military crackdowns along with extra-judicial detentions, torture and the destruction of homes and property. The armed conflict has devastated the whole of Syria and has led to high numbers of casualties³, injuries and the displacement of approximately seven million people from Syria itself (Internal Displacement

¹ This includes people who have been forcibly displaced (refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons) and those who have found a long-term solution (returnees), as well as stateless persons, most of whom have never been forcibly displaced (UNHCR, 2017, 61)

² Refugees are defined by the UNHCR as “individuals recognized under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol, the 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, those recognized in accordance with the UNHCR Statute, individuals granted complementary forms of protection, and those enjoying temporary protection. The refugee population also includes people in refugee-like situations” (UNHCR 2017, 61)

³ According to the Human Rights Watch Syria country report, there have been 511,000 casualties as of March 2018.

Monitoring Centre, 2017) and over five million refugees from neighbouring countries (Amnesty International, 2013; Fisher, 2014; UNHCR, 2017).

Research has shown that living through and surviving violence and displacement has a negative impact on people's physical and mental health that can persist long after the experience or extended period of violence and displacement itself. Communicable diseases spread widely as a result of disrupted access to health services, the destruction of health systems and unsanitary and crowded conditions in refugee camps (Giacaman, Husseini, Gordon and Awartani, 2004; Kalipeni and Oppong, 1998). In addition, war-affected populations have been shown to experience an increase in psychosocial and trauma-related conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety (Kohrt et al., 2012; Miller and Rasmussen, 2010; Tol et al., 2011, Weissbecker et al., 2019). In the case of Syria, the mental health problems experienced by the Syrian population include "(1) exacerbations of pre-existing mental disorders; (2) new problems caused by the conflict-related violence and displacement; and (3) issues in adaptation related to the post-emergency context, for example living conditions in the countries of refuge" (Hassan et al., 2016).

With regard to mental health in conflict-affected settings, much of the scholarly literature focuses on trauma-related health problems, particularly PTSD (Charlson et al., 2012; De Jong et al., 2001; Hassan et al., 2016; Kienzler, 2008, Murthy, and Lakshminarayana, 2006; Silove et al., 1997). This trend is also pervasive in mainstream media representations of the Syrian crisis and related to displaced persons. For instance, an article describing the situation and the future effects of political violence and displacement on children predicted that living through extreme insecurity and the experience of multiple traumatic events inflicts "catastrophic psychological damage" (Mis, 2015). Similarly, Murray began her report on Syrian refugees in Lebanon by stating that "many refugees from the country's civil war are [...] grappling with the invisible but severe effects of psychological stress and trauma" (Murray, 2015). Authors writing about initiatives and interventions for refugees tend towards a trauma-centric discourse, often in an effort to raise awareness and funds (Jordans et al., 2016; Schauer and Schauer, 2010). Coughlan (2015) notes, for instance, that for Syrian children the

war “has created trauma – they are all traumatised”. Moreover, it can be observed that some humanitarian organization focus the characterization of populations experiencing violence and displacement and their experiences of trauma as part of their calls for funding (Mental Health Today, 2017; UNHCR, 2018).

There is growing interest, however, in stepping away from a unidirectional focus on trauma and moving toward questions related to aspects of wellbeing such as resilience and hope (see for instance Almedom and Summerfield, 2004; Bonanno, 2004; Eggerman and Panter-Brick, 2010; Miller and Rasco, 2004; Miller and Rasmussen, 2010; Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008; Pedersen, 2002; Tol et al., 2011). This is part of a broader shift in thinking about interventions in refugee populations, where authors such as Derluyn, van Ee and Vindevogel argue for interventions which are based on “a systemic, strengths-based, culturally sensitive, relational framework” (Derluyn et al., 2019, 230). This, in their view, would allow not only for a focus on traumas experienced by individuals, but also for the broader context, strengths and resilience they demonstrate as they lead their lives (Derluyn et al., 2019). Overall, in this literature, wellbeing is largely conceptualised in a holistic way, in which people are able to function relatively normally and realise their potential despite different types of stressors, ranging from the everyday to the severe, as with the case of traumatic events (WHO, 2014). The concept of resilience is connected to wellbeing insofar as two of its main components are the ability to cope and adapt after experiencing traumatic events, and having healthy levels of psychological functioning (Bonanno, 2004). Hope, in turn, is identified as having an optimistic view of the future in the face of adversity (Hobfoll et al., 2007). Eggerman and Panter-Brick (2010) state, for instance, that hope is “founded on the expression of fundamental cultural values that give order and promise to life” (80), but also recognise that this sense of hope may co-exist with everyday adversity and social suffering. Although scholars often mention these concepts in conjunction with mental health, there is still little exploration of what these concepts mean in relation to wellbeing in different sociocultural contexts and, in particular, with regards to the experiences of refugee populations. Moreover, non-Western scholarly perspectives, as well as information about the lived individual and collective experiences of the populations in question, remain lacking in this area of research (Almedom and

Summerfield, 2004; Borwick, Schweitzer, Brough, Vromans, and Shakespeare-Finch, 2013; Pedersen, 2002).

My research aims to contribute to filling this gap in knowledge by having explored concepts of wellbeing in a more nuanced and contextually grounded manner. In this sense, I see my work as being in conversation with recent advances in the literature which push for a similar grounding in different sociocultural contexts (Cantekin, 2018; Hocking, 2018; te Lintelo, 2018; Yotebieng et al., 2018a). In particular, I conducted ethnographic and participatory research with young adult refugees from Syria in Jordan, inviting them to describe and analyse their lived experiences of wellbeing within the context of political upheaval and war. My research aimed to answer the following questions.

- How do young adult refugees from Syria experience wellbeing within a context of political violence, insecurity, and uncertainty?
- How do young adult refugees conceptualise wellbeing verbally, visually, and experientially?
- How are notions of wellbeing actively created and negotiated in different social milieus, and how does this affect the lived experiences of young adult refugees?

In order to contextualise my research I will first review the recent history of Syrian refugees, as well as the historical conditions that preceded their displacement. I will then engage with the literature on refugee trauma, suffering, and resilience in order to connect it to discourses on wellbeing and hope. My own research builds on these insights by specifically exploring the concept of wellbeing as experienced and conceptualised by young adult refugees who have endured violence in Syria, and continue to experience various forms of structural violence in Jordan. In doing so, my aim is to contribute to the academic literature that emphasises the need to examine wellbeing as a social experience deeply rooted in sociocultural structures and values (Camfield, 2012; Dodge et al., 2012; McGregor et al., 2007).

Historical background leading up to the Syrian crisis

Syria has a turbulent history characterised to a large extent by regime changes, colonialism and internally divisive rule that continues to reverberate through the current crisis. Syria became an independent state on 17th of April 1946, when France withdrew its troops from Syria, ending the French mandate⁴ (Seale, 1988, 21; Van Dam, 2017; Robson, 2017). The mandate system was established by the League of Nations following World War I when, in 1921, the Ottoman and German colonies were divided up between the Allied powers. The Ottoman Middle East was divided between Britain (Iraq and Palestine)⁵ and France (Lebanon and Syria). The mandate itself was conceived as a provisional arrangement for an indeterminate length of time, with the stated purpose of providing assistance as well as administrative advice to the populations in question leading up to their independence or self-determination (Fildis, 2011). Thus began the story of the modern nation-state of Syria as we know it today. The French Mandate in Syria lasted 23 years, from 1922 to 1946. It left a significant mark on the region, shaping the subsequent paths it would take, from independence, to the history of its various uprisings and political coups, to the rise to power of the Assad family, and to the conflicts in which the country is embroiled today (Philips, 2015)⁶.

The mandate was met with concerted resistance, particularly from the Syrians and Arabs in surrounding countries who espoused Arab nationalist sentiments. Chief among the leaders of the Arab nationalist movement was Prince Faysal Ibn Hussayn, who fought to maintain fragile control over Syria despite French occupation (Fildis, 2011; Seale, 1986). To weaken the influence and expression of Arab nationalism, the French Mandate in Syria encouraged separatism by reinforcing sectarian differences between various ethnic and religious groups, including Sunni Muslims, Shiite Muslims, Alawis, and Druze people, within Syrian society (Fildis, 2011; Philips, 2015, Van Dam, 2017). Separatism was also reflected geographically, such that Syria was effectively

⁴ At the end of World War I, the League of Nations appointed a Permanent Mandates commission of the League of Nations. The Commission's responsibility was to oversee process of administering the former German and Ottoman Empire's colonies. This included Syria since it was under Ottoman Rule.

⁵ At the time this included present-day Jordan (Seale, 1986)

⁶ France had de facto started its mandate over Syria from 1920, but the League of Nations formally awarded France its Mandate over Syria only in 1922

divided into four different “states” with different ethnic and religious compositions: Damascus, Aleppo, the Alawi state of Jabal Al-Duruz and the additional “administrative entity” of Sanjaq of Alexandretta (Van Dam, 2017, 6).

By 1945, in the wake of World War II and amid growing clashes between French troops and the Syrian independence movement, Britain put pressure on France to withdraw from Syria. Once France had formally left Syria in April 1946, the National Bloc – led by Sa’dallah al-Jabiri, Jamil Mardam, and Faris al-Khuri as prime ministers – governed the country. In the years following the withdrawal of the French, Syria witnessed a number of seismic changes, including the holding of elections, the rise of the Ba’th party founded by Michel ‘Aflaq and Salah al-Din al-Bitar, several presidential changes, either through elections or as a result of a coup, and the union of Syria with Egypt in 1956 in the form of the short-lived United Arab Republic (UAR) (Podeh, 1999). On the 5th of July 1956, the Syrian parliament voted in support of a federal union with Egypt, which culminated in the establishment of the UAR in 1958 (Kienle, 1995).

The move towards establishing a union with Egypt was motivated by a political climate characterised by threats of Israeli expansion as well as the expansionist intentions of Saudi Arabia and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (Kienle, 1995; Seale, 1986). Gamal Abdel Nasser, President of Egypt at the time, saw the UAR as part of his conception of “Arab solidarity” and in line with his efforts to align Arab states behind him against the great powers – specifically, Great Britain and France. Yet the UAR would come to meet a rapid end on the back of faltering Syrian-Egyptian relations (Seale, 1988). On the 28th of September 1961, the UAR dissolved after a coup led by Syrian lieutenant Colonel ‘Abd al-Karim Nahlawi (Podeh, 1999). During this period of instability, a secret military faction called the Ba’ath Party was founded by central military figures, among them Hafez al-Assad and his comrades Muhammad ‘Umran Salah Jadeed, Abd al-Karim al-Jundi, and Ahmad al-Mir (Van Dam, 2017, 14). The party rose swiftly to power, staging another coup against the then President of Syria Nazim Qudsi in March 1963 (Seale, 1988; Van Dam, 2017, 12).

In the following years, Hafez al-Assad rose in the ranks of the Ba’ath Party and became Commander of the Syrian Air Force. In 1966, he took part in a coup

that toppled the leaders of the Ba'ath Party and brought the mainly Alawi military faction to power, with Assad as Defence Minister (Seale, 1988). Only four years later, Assad led his own coup, known as the "Corrective Revolution"⁷, appointing himself as President of Syria. His reign was characterised by instability, particularly during the economic difficulties of the 1980s, as well as the increasingly repressive nature of the regime (Van Dam, 2017). The 1970s and 1980s also saw the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria forge an alliance with various Sunni religious opposition groups under the banner of "The Islamic Front in Syria", which was soon crushed after the regime orchestrated a bloody massacre in Hama⁸ in 1982 (Seale, 1988; Van Dam 2017). Following the massacre, the regime's grip on power tightened, and Assad continued to rule until he fell seriously ill and eventually died in 2000. His successor was his son, Bashar al-Assad⁹, who was 34 years old at the time. He had studied dentistry in the United Kingdom before circumstances placed him at the head of the Syrian regime, thus continuing his family's legacy (Seale, 1988).

Bashar al-Assad's reign has been characterised by strict and repressive authoritarianism, which provoked dissatisfaction and unrest among the population, eventually culminating in the demonstrations of the Arab Spring. In the final days of 2010, a series of uprisings in Arab countries broke out onto the world stage, sparked first in Tunisia after Mohamed Bouazizi, a young street vendor, who self-immolated in protest against the harassment and injustice he had experienced at the hands of his local municipality (Lageman, 2016, Noor, 2011). His act led many other Tunisians to speak out against the injustices they had witnessed and experienced in their country, demanding that the president and his family step down and be tried for corruption and protesting against increasing unemployment and repression of freedoms (Amnesty International, 2012). As a result of this civilian-led revolution, Tunisia's president Zein El-Abidine Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia on the 14th of January 2011, bringing an end to his 23-year dictatorship. The Tunisian revolution is now considered the first of many among other Arab countries. Protests in Egypt followed swiftly after Tunisia,

⁷ Also referred to as the Corrective Movement.

⁸ Known to be a Muslim Brotherhood stronghold at the time.

⁹ Basil, the eldest son was groomed to take power after the father, but Basil's death in a car accident in 1994 led Bashar to take power after his father's death.

leading to the ousting¹⁰ of Hosni Mubarak, while in Libya uprisings resulted in the death of President Muammar Gaddafi.

In Syria, protests in March 2011 began peacefully, with demonstrators calling for reforms and protesting oppression under Bashar al-Assad's dictatorship (Abouzeid, 2018). However, as the protest movement grew and hundreds of thousands of civilians took to the streets, they were met with the violent repression of the Syrian military. On 18th March 2011, one of the most memorable and transformative protests took place in Dera'a, located in the south of Syria, during which citizens called for the release of children detained for pro-revolutionary graffiti (Abouzeid, 2018; Marsh et al., 2011; Amnesty International, 2018a). In response to the peaceful protest, the Syrian army and security forces reacted by using live ammunition against the unarmed crowd. Similar crackdowns followed in towns and cities across Syria. Nevertheless, the protests continued for several months until the uprising transformed into a fully-fledged armed conflict, where the warring factions (the Syrian government and various militant groups opposed to the government) used war techniques such as barrel bombs¹¹ and airstrikes, resulting in a high number of civilian injuries and deaths (Abouzeid, 2018; Marsh et al., 2011; Amnesty International, 2018a).

As the conflict turned increasingly brutal, it also became more and more complex. Currently, various pro-government and opposition groups in Syria are being militarily and financially supported by other countries and non-state actors (Ruys, 2014). For instance, the opposition is benefiting from support provided by the United States¹², Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Arab Gulf countries, as well as France and the United Kingdom (Elgot, 2018, accessed 2019.03.10). On the other hand, the Syrian regime receives military support from Russia, Iran, and Lebanon's Hezbollah. Although much of this foreign intervention is justified by the objective of preventing human rights abuses and putting an end to the conflict, each of the intervening countries is motivated by its own strategic interests and geopolitical designs (Yee, 2018). One example is the rivalry

¹⁰ Mubarak resigned on 11th February 2011.

¹¹ Barrel bombs are 'improvised' explosive devices, in many cases packed with scrap metal. They have been used extensively (and indiscriminately) by the Syrian regime to target populated areas. (Pinheiro, 2016)

¹² in December 2018, his intentions of pulling 2,000 US troops out of Syria (Borger and Chulov, 2018).

between Saudi Arabia and Iran and the interests of both countries in influencing the politics of the region, which has manifested itself in the support for the opposing parties within the conflict (Amnesty International, 2018, 352; Human Rights Watch, 2019, 554; Human Rights Watch, 2016; Van Dam, 2017). These complex dynamics have fuelled violence, resulting in the destruction of homes and the deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and schools. Entire swathes of rebel-held areas, such as Eastern Aleppo, Eastern Ghouta and the city of Homs, have been demolished by the Syrian regime, resulting in the evacuation of thousands of civilians¹³. Moreover, civilians have been subject to arbitrary detention and torture¹⁴ at the hands of both the Syrian government and militant groups (Amnesty International, 2018; 3RP, 2017). The conflict has led to a high number of injuries and casualties, as well as mass displacement that has been described by some as the worst refugee crisis since World War II (The Economist, 2014). Furthermore, the civil war saw the widespread use of gender-based violence. A report released by the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria in 2018 found that rape was a common interrogation tactic used by government forces in over 20 detention facilities across the country. Additionally, the report states that “rapes and other acts of sexual violence [were also] carried out by government forces and associated militias during ground operations [and] at checkpoints” (UNHCR, 2018)¹⁵.

As previously mentioned, most of the Syrians who fled the country are currently being hosted in neighbouring countries. Turkey is host to 3,644,342 Syrians, Lebanon hosts 946,291, and Jordan hosts 670,238 (UNHCR, 2019). Historically, Jordan has been a host to displaced people from a number of countries as a result of various conflicts in the region since its inception in 1946. Among the refugees hosted are Palestinians, and more recently, Iraqi, Libyan and Sudanese refugees. Many Syrians fled to Jordan specifically because of the long-standing relationship between Syrian and Jordanian states and their

¹³ Various third-state interventions contributed to the violence perpetrated by the Assad regime and opposition groups the financial support and provision of arms and non-lethal assistance, for more information see Tom Ruys (2014).

¹⁴ As of August 2018, over 90,000 people were forcibly disappeared in Syria.

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/syria>

¹⁵ See: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=22833andLangID=E>

peoples. Jordan has been, and remains, a home for many Syrians' extended kinship networks, as well as cross-border friendships and tourist relations (Achilli, 2016; Chatty, 2017). Moreover, Jordan continues to be one of the more stable of the Arab countries in the region, especially in light of the unrest that swept across the region during the Arab Spring. It is also geographically close to Syria, sharing 379 km of border (Achilli, 2015).

The Syrian war has resulted in political instability also in the disruption of social networks, family disintegration, and personal hardship and loss. Moreover, literature increasingly highlights the war's detrimental impact on people's health, including their mental health. As my dissertation focuses prominently on mental health and wellbeing, it is crucial to review the literature focusing on various perspective from which mental health and wellbeing are conceptualised and written about in contexts of war and conflict.

Experiences of suffering and wellbeing within contexts of war and conflict

Armed conflicts, such as the one in Syria, are major causes of devastation as well as political, social and economic crises. Recent wars and conflicts are characterised by an increase in the civilian death toll and forced displacement of people, as well as exposure to violence, such as mass executions, torture, enforced disappearances and sexual violence (Kienzler and Pedersen, 2012; Pedersen, 2002; Wenzel and Droždek, 2018). Political violence and displacement also lead to suffering due the disruption of daily life, fragmentation of the social fabric, loss of family members and friends, lack of shelter and food, the shortage of basic needs and the destruction of local infrastructure (Hassan et al., 2016; Miller and Rasmussen, 2010). In order to better understand how the consequences of armed conflicts have been linked to mental health outcomes, I will, in the following, review the literature related to trauma, social suffering, and wellbeing. Thereby, I am able to highlight that scholars have overwhelmingly focused on exploring trauma and suffering when investigating the mental health of refugees, and that there is a need to further explore the full range of human experiences, including wellbeing, even within the distressing context of displacement. In doing so I intend to develop a solid foundation for the exploration

of experiences and conceptualisations of wellbeing among refugees from Syria in Jordan.

Trauma-focused approaches to understanding the mental health of refugees

Recent studies on the experience of trauma have focused predominantly on PTSD as being a principal mental health outcome for trauma survivors (Kreidie and Kreidie, 2016; Pedersen, 2002). In the recently revised *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-V), PTSD is classified under trauma and stress-related disorders “in which exposure to a traumatic or stressful event is listed explicitly as a diagnostic criterion” (DSM-5, 265). Traumatic events are listed to include military combat, violent personal assault, being kidnapped, being taken hostage, terrorist attacks, torture, incarceration as a prisoner of war or in a concentration camp, natural or manmade disasters, severe automobile accidents or being diagnosed with a life-threatening illness. Such events may be either directly experienced, witnessed or learned about through others, and can lead to the development of a range of symptoms (APA, 271). Symptoms resulting from the recollection of such experiences fall into four main criteria: intrusion, avoidance, negative alterations in cognitions and mood and alterations in arousal and reactivity.

Trauma-focused approaches to understanding the mental health of people affected by armed conflict tend to emphasise the direct relationship between exposure to the violence of war and negative mental health outcomes, particularly PTSD (Miller and Rasmussen, 2010). For instance, in a meta-analysis of conflict-affected populations, the prevalence of PTSD was found to be at 15.4% (based on 30 studies) and the prevalence of depression was at 17.3% (26 studies) (Tol et al., 2011). Other studies have suggested high prevalence of PTSD among refugees, but with wide variations in results ranging from 4% to 86% (Hollifield et al., 2002) or, in another case, between 20% and 74% (Solobodin and de Jong, 2014). Among Syrian refugees in Turkey, Alpak et al. (2014) found that PTSD was prevalent in 33% of their participants. Studies have suggested that the variance in prevalence rates is most likely due to methodological and contextual factors, such as the extent of exposure to adversity. A particular source of

concern has been the potentially limited accuracy of measurements, especially in refugee-focused research. Furthermore, it has been argued that PTSD may not be the most appropriate diagnosis for different refugee populations, as “culture and language complicate diagnosis, and polytrauma is pathogenic for disorders that are different compared with those found in non-refugee populations” (Hollifield et al., 2002, 618). Despite this critique, advocates of trauma-centric approaches to mental health among refugees continue to recommend methods of treatment which focus on relieving the symptoms through psychiatric models which emphasise individualised clinical interventions, such as medication and different forms of psychotherapy (Miller and Rasmussen, 2010).

Social dimensions of suffering and distress

Numerous transcultural psychiatrists and psychologists, as well as social scientists, have criticised the trauma-focused approach as a framework for exploring individuals’ and communities’ experiences of and responses to exposure to violence (Kienzler, 2008; Kirmayer et al., 2007). They argue for the importance of considering stressful social and material conditions such as poverty, inadequate housing, malnutrition, displacement, overcrowding and social marginalization, all of which may be caused or exacerbated by armed conflict (Miller and Rasmussen, 2010). The exaggerated focus on trauma deters attention of academics and practitioners from the above mentioned social and material conditions, thus limits the ability to consider them in interventions within these contexts.

Anthropologists have begun to capture these complexities through the concept of “social suffering”. According to Allan Young (1997), two types of suffering can be distinguished: the first refers to physical pain and expressing one’s consciousness of it, while the second relates to the social and moral aspects of life and is understood locally through society and the values each society holds. In other words, suffering as a social experience highlights the links between individual and societal problems and emphasises what “political, economic and institutional power does to people and, reciprocally [...] how these forms of power themselves influence responses to social problems” (Kleinman,

Das and Lock, 1997, ix). Social suffering as a concept is considered important as it allows us to examine health conditions as political and cultural matters and accounts for the social processes that are related to or may produce them (Kleinman et al., 1997; Farmer, 2004). Pedersen (2002) argues that exploring suffering without paying attention to its social, political and economic sources “often result[s] in immodest claims of causality, in the medicalisation of social problems and ultimately leads to the maintenance of social inequalities” (186).

Studies engaging with the concept of social suffering among refugees include Zarowski’s (2004) work in Ethiopia with Somali returnees. Zarowski notes that although Somali returnees may express distress and narratives of anger, these experiences are not necessarily pathological in nature, but rather reflect the political and economic problems faced by the wider community. She illustrates this by quoting a woman farmer saying:

When we repatriated to our homelands we didn’t get our farming lands... Our property is being eaten in front of us. That is how you see our people. Some are demoralized (*niyed jabay*), some became mad (*waalliy*). They are demoralized. Because our farming lands have been taken by force and still the government is eating the lands in front of us, and the hard situation we endured, because of that we became very demoralized. That is the problem, that is our problem (*dhibaato*) (196).

This particular quote illustrates how suffering can be deeply rooted in and influenced by social, economic and political contexts which are shaped by notions of homeland, property and employment, as well as violence, humiliation and insecurity.

Another ethnographic example is presented by Sara Lewis (2013), who describes how political violence affects the lives of Tibetan refugees in India. Lewis complicates the universal application of concepts such as trauma and PTSD by exploring the different ways in which Tibetans perceive suffering and how they live through adversity. She notes, “Tibetans actively deploy shared cultural understandings, often infused with Buddhist doctrine, to reframe the mental distress associated with loss, violence, and other distressing experiences. These cultural practices encourage letting go of distress rather than holding on

to or solidifying it” (318). To strengthen their resilience and create emotional flexibility and space, Lewis’ interlocutors exercised *lojong*, or mind-training techniques. Practicing *lojong* involves a shift from a focus on criticising a situation to turning inward, allowing people to “begin to see their problems in terms of their own minds, and not out there somewhere, they develop a broad and vast view. And this reduces suffering” (Lewis, 2013, 326). The key feature of *lojong*-style advice is to shift from criticising or changing the external situation to turning inward, seeing one’s own *samsaric*¹⁶ mind as the root of suffering. “Even if they don’t know anything about Buddhist philosophy,” explains one of her interlocutors, “when people begin to see their problems in terms of their own minds, and not out there somewhere, they develop a broad and vast view. And this reduces suffering” (326).

The understanding that mental health is intertwined with the social, economic and political fabric of societies has led several scholars to question individualised clinical interventions. Miller and Rasmussen (2010), for instance, recommend interventions that are more holistic by focusing on assessments of local stressors, addressing significant daily causes of stress before providing trauma-related clinical services, addressing the diverse forms of distress other than PTSD and, finally, considering sources of trauma other than conflict exposure. Importantly, this approach highlights that trauma and related disorders cannot account for the entirety of the experiences of those who have been subjected to political violence. On the contrary, individuals’ experiences are complex and varied, deriving from both individual and collective experiences, and requiring intersectoral approaches to treatment and care. These approaches involve intervention in legal, social, and medical sectors (Kienzler et al., 2018). Hence, these kinds of intersectoral interventions address the political, economic, social and medical factors underlying mental health. Based on these findings, I argue that it is crucial to consider the meaning of wellbeing for refugees despite and within the circumstances of their lives in Jordan. This would allow for an understanding of their needs and mental health beyond the confines of the subjectivation of the traumatised victim.

¹⁶ Samsara refers to “an endless cycle of rebirth fueled by the mind’s misperception of reality.” (Lewis, 2013, 318)

Wellbeing and resilience in the context of armed conflict

While much of the literature about the effects of armed conflict on mental health focuses on the suffering of those exposed, there is a growing body of research providing insight into issues related to wellbeing, resilience and hope. Although my research focuses principally on wellbeing, it is also crucial to understand the concepts of resilience and hope, as they are often used interchangeably with, or in addition to, wellbeing in scholarly and interventionist literatures. In the following section, I will provide an overview of all three concepts in order to then discuss how wellbeing and aspects of resilience and hope could serve as an important analytical framework for my own research.

With regards to wellbeing, there does not appear to be any consensus among scholars in terms of what the concept entails (Dodge et al., 2012). This is despite the fact that it has been explored within various disciplines ranging from philosophy to health, economics and development studies. Furthermore, wellbeing is not a new topic of interest to scholars; it has been discussed and contemplated philosophically since Aristotle, and even before as a main characteristic of human life – that is, as something all people strive to attain (Estes and Sirgy, 2017; Griffin, 1986). However, scholars have only recently taken an interest in exploring the concept of wellbeing through a systemic scientific lens (Diener, 2000). Since the beginning of the 2000s, psychologists and economists have endeavoured to measure and assess wellbeing as a means of influencing public as well as governmental policy (Taylor, 2011). Most notably, discussions surrounding wellbeing have moved away from efforts to define or understand the nature of the concept, to identifying the components and indicators of wellbeing and their measurability (Dolan et al., 2011; McGregor et al, 2015). This shift is important to understand as it influences modes of interventions geared toward enhancing wellbeing for individuals, including refugees.

In the literature, wellbeing has been variously related to concepts such as happiness, quality of life, satisfaction and flourishing (Camfield et al., 2008; Diener, 1984; Dodge et al., 2012). The broad range of approaches to studying wellbeing has led some researchers to argue that the concept is too difficult to

define, while others seem to have found a common language. While it is challenging to locate an agreed upon definition, the definition provided by McAllister (2005) encompasses the views of several scholars across a range of disciplines. He states that wellbeing is “more than the absence of illness or pathology [...with] subjective (self-assessed) and objective (ascribed) dimensions; it can be measured at the level of individuals or society; it accounts for elements of life satisfaction that cannot be defined, explained or primarily influenced by economic growth” (2). Using this as a working definition, I will briefly outline discourses on wellbeing related to subjective wellbeing and wellbeing as understood within public policy, development studies and psychology.

One of the main initiatives that shifted attention towards wellbeing in public policy and development internationally was the Commission established by the then French President Nicolas Sarkozy in 2008. The Sarkozy Commission, chaired by Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen and Jean-Paul Fitoussi, aimed to explore and recommend social and economic indicators that go beyond gross domestic product (GDP) to measure social progress (Stiglitz et al., 2009; White et al., 2012). One of the principal messages emerging from the resulting report was that there is a need to “shift (...) emphasis from economic production to measuring people’s well-being” (12). Stiglitz and his colleagues recognised that wellbeing is a holistic concept that incorporates feelings of satisfaction related to intersecting fields that shape people’s daily lives, including health, education, work, political voice and governance, social relationships and economic and physical insecurity. As for how wellbeing should be assessed, the Commission recommended that both objective and subjective measures of wellbeing be used to generate information about people’s quality of life. Conceptually, the report identifies several approaches for measuring wellbeing, one of which is known as subjective wellbeing.

Subjective wellbeing (SWB) is defined as “experiencing a high level of positive affect, a low level of negative affect, and a high degree of satisfaction with one’s life” (Deci and Ryan, 2008, 1). SWB has, in certain cases, been used interchangeably with happiness, whereby increasing one’s SWB would be seen as equivalent to the increase of one’s happiness (Ryan and Deci, 2001). To explore SWB, scholars have used quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method approaches. Within quantitative research, the focus has been on using measures

related to particular domains of life, such as material wellbeing, health, productivity, intimacy, safety, community and emotional wellbeing (Rojas, 2007), as well as questions relating to life satisfaction. However, the measures assessing SWB have been subject to debate. Among the primary concerns are the validity of the concept of SWB and whether SWB measures can be used as operational definition for wellbeing, as well as recognizing what types of social activities or domains of life, or goals would promote wellbeing (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Ryan and Deci (2001) suggest that what would follow such concerns would be the adoption of one out of three positions “first, one could accept both the hedonic view and SWB as its indicator. Second, one could accept the use of SWB as an operational definition of well-being but endorse a eudaimonic view of what fosters SWB. And third, one could both reject the measure of SWB as an indicator of well-being and argue against hedonic principles as the vehicle to produce well-being” (145). Thus these concerns have practical repercussions and the position one adopts would imply a choice which would endorse either a continuation of utilizing SWB measures, or utilizing a combination of hedonic and eudaimonic approach to understanding and measuring wellbeing.

Qualitative research investigating and exploring wellbeing has included ethnographic and participatory approaches such as interviews, participant observation, life histories and task-based activities such as body mapping (Camfield et al., 2009). These methods allow researchers to explore areas of people’s lives that are important but rarely measured (e.g. spirituality and social relations), as well as challenge the reliance on experts and proxies, favouring the direct experience and knowledge of participants and emphasising their roles in the research process (Camfield et al., 2009). Researchers have also argued that using and including qualitative methods in the study of wellbeing – both within the field of national and international development – adds depth to understanding people’s experiences, and complements and improves the accuracy of quantitative methods, and enhances explanatory power (Camfield et al., 2009).

Understanding context-specific conceptions of wellbeing and the priorities of individuals and communities is integral to the work of development agencies, as it legitimises and ensures the credibility of their development programmes and policy objectives (Camfield et al., 2009). Current trends in international

development point “towards conceiving ‘development’ as the organised pursuit of human wellbeing [...] broadening the notion of development from narrow economic conceptions to encompass human development and wider ideals such as participation and freedom” (Gough and McGregor et al., 2007, 4). Nonetheless, there seems to be a gap in the literature in terms of what wellbeing means for people who experience armed conflict and displacement. Instead, related discourses in the context of political violence and displacement are centred on the concept of resilience. This is not to say that wellbeing is not evoked in the literature – rather, it remains secondary to, or a sub-component of, the dominant discourse on resilience (Barber, 2013). For example, Panter-Brick and Leckman (2013) note that “resilience is the process of harnessing biological, psychosocial, structural and cultural resources to sustain wellbeing” (333).

As with wellbeing, various definitions have been used for the concept of resilience. A prominent definition is provided by Bonanno et al. (2007), who conceptualises resilience as:

The ability of adults in otherwise normal circumstances who are exposed to an isolated and potentially highly disruptive event such as the death of a close relation or a violent life-threatening situation to maintain relatively stable, healthy levels of psychosocial and physical functioning (...) as well as the capacity for generative experiences and positive emotions (671).

Research has shown that demonstrations of resilience in response to adverse and difficult life situations are not rare but are, rather, common reactions following exposure to traumatic events (Bonanno, 2005). Several researchers agree that a focus on resilience allows for a deeper understanding of responses to adversity by moving beyond trauma as a singular or dominant response. For example, Ungar (2013) proposes a social-ecological definition of resilience accounting for the complex contextual and cultural factors relating to positive development under stress. He argues that resilience is demonstrated when “individuals engage in behaviours that help them to navigate their way to the resources they need to flourish” (256). This, according to him, is made possible when people’s social ecology, made up of social networks, provides culturally meaningful resources. He concludes that resilience:

1) is not as much an individual construct as it is a quality of the environment and its capacity to facilitate growth; 2) that it looks both the same and different within and between populations; and 3) the impact that any single factor has on resilience differs by the amount of risk exposure with the mechanisms that protect against the impact of trauma showing contextual and cultural specificity for particular individuals (262).

An alternative approach to resilience is proposed by Eggerman and Panter-Brick (2010), who relate the concept to the notion of hope. In their study of children and their adult caregivers in Afghanistan, they examine how hope and distress are manifested. Specifically, the authors describe how culture shapes these experiences and, thereby, produces both a sense of both coherence and entrapment. They found that people established a feeling of coherence through cultural values such as faith, family unity, service, effort, morals and honor – all of which elevated individuals' sense of hope in spite of adversity. However, the authors also established that these sentiments coexisted with the experience of entrapment due to economic hardship, the inability to meet social obligations and having individual aspirations that potentially conflicted with cultural values. This study thus highlights the particular ways in which the intersections of social and cultural values as well as economic and political determinants shape experiences of mental health in conflict settings. Such research corresponds to calls for intervention that seek to improve mental health by incorporating a focus on sociocultural values as well as daily stressors.

In their introduction, Gough, McGregor and Camfield (2007) propose the need to challenge the assumption of the incongruence of studying the wellbeing of persons who suffer due to poverty. Similarly, I want to argue that this assumption must be challenged when bringing the topic of wellbeing into the context of political violence and displacement. As Gough, McGregor and Camfield (2007) state, people are not solely defined by their poverty or the suffering that it causes, and so their overall wellbeing should be addressed holistically rather than through a narrow focus on poverty. Discussions of wellbeing are not widespread in the context of developing countries, because “wellbeing” is here regarded as a luxury that may only serves as an index for

developed countries. Gough, McGregor and Camfield (2007) push against this tendency by arguing for a more universalised application of wellbeing to communities in widely varying contexts. Building on this, I argue that refugees should not solely be defined by the suffering they are subject to as a result of political violence and displacement. Just as McGregor and Camfield emphasise that life may be unbearable without wellbeing and therefore that it is relevant to the study and practice of international development, I argue that the same can be said for those experiencing political violence and displacement. It is within this frame of thinking that I am compelled to explore what wellbeing means for refugees from Syria in Jordan.

My own research project contributes to filling the gaps in research and joining other scholars who have endeavored to shift the focus from one of suffering and survival to the acknowledgment of agency and the pursuit of wellbeing. In addition, my research explores the multiple ways in which refugees affected by political and structural violence conceptualise and experience wellbeing. I will do this throughout the course of my dissertation by first presenting the available literature on wellbeing and framing my research within it; second, by explaining the methodological framework I adopted in implementing my fieldwork; third, by exploring and analysing the results of my fieldwork divided into four sections, each respectively dealing with a particular dimension of wellbeing from the perspective of the participants; and finally, by putting the results of my fieldwork in conversation with the existing literature on wellbeing, and outlining the contribution the dissertation has made to that literature.

I explore the concept of wellbeing within mental health and mental health provision for Syrian refugees in Jordan specifically. Yet to do so, I review and utilize literature and perspectives from various disciplines such as development, philosophy, psychology, and anthropology. This choice of interdisciplinary lens is influenced by my own academic background which is in itself interdisciplinary. I started my academic journey with a Bachelors degree in psychology and an interest in mental health service provision. Thereafter, I completed a Masters degree in political psychology - a field which investigates political phenomena and behaviours relying on social psychology and other disciplines, such as politics, history and anthropology. I then started working in the Institute of

Community and Public Health at Birzeit university where mental health was conceptualized and thought of within a public health framework. This interdisciplinary academic and professional background provided me with the perspective which I applied to my current research about the wellbeing of Syrian refugees in Jordan. It was particularly useful to utilize such a perspective while reviewing the literature about mental health, wellbeing, and displacement. Beyond the scope of the literature review, interdisciplinarity influenced how I conceptualized the theoretical contributions of my research, as well as practical contributions for practitioners and organizations working with displaced populations.

What follows is a more detailed outline of the structure of the dissertation. The following chapters will explore conceptions of wellbeing through various lenses.

In the literature review I provide detailed insight into some of the main scholarly work in the fields of psychology, development economics and anthropology with regards to the concept of wellbeing. I particularly highlight scholarly work that intersects with and influences conceptualisations of wellbeing in humanitarian aid settings, as well as in political conflict and displacement discourses. I conclude by situating my own research in relation to literature presented and explain how it builds on and extends it. This is followed by a chapter on methodology where I explain the methodological framework of my research project, providing theoretical justification for using ethnographic and participatory approaches. I then describe my field site and introduce my sample. In addition, I present my methods, specifically sampling, interviews, participant observation, photovoice and other participant led activities. Finally I present how I analysed and interpreted the data I gathered through these methods.

The results of my research will form the main body of this work. The chapters relate to the key themes that have emerged through the analysis of my interviews, field notes, photographs and participatory activities. The chapters discuss how my interlocutors continuously negotiated their wellbeing throughout their displacement from their departure from Syria. To do so I follow the experiences of those participated in my research temporally, and then through a

discussion of the varied ways wellbeing was represented and discussed in the last results chapter.

Chapter 4, “Becoming displaced: The difficult negotiations of a difficult decision”, focuses on the study participants’ departures from Syria and the reasons for displacement. I present the nuances of the experiences of my participants in relation to their forced journeys from their homes in Syria up to their arrival in Jordan. Throughout the chapter I present how they navigate making the difficult decision of leaving their home country, and the various challenges they faced as they made their way to Jordan.

In chapter 5, “Strangers in familiar lands: Navigating expectations and wellbeing”, I focus on my interlocutors’ arrival in Jordan – from feeling strange in the familiar to finding the familiar in the strange. I engage with their narrations of the first period of their lives in Jordan after their displacement. Within this chapter I show how my participants discuss the ways in which they dealt with the disruption of their expectations of hospitality in Jordan and feeling strange in the expected familiar. I present how they pursue finding their wellbeing within this period by finding their own Syrian familiar in the strained context.

This is followed by chapter 6, “Beyond living in the temporary: Seeking wellbeing in protracted displacement”, which explores notions of transformation and the ordinary. Specifically, I focus on how my participants have experienced transformations in their lives as they have acknowledged that they could be staying in Jordan for a protracted amount of time. As they sought a sense of stability within this protracted uncertainty they actively sought ways to practice their wellbeing through varied experiences.

Finally, in chapter 7, “Representations of wellbeing: Idioms, photographs and practices”, I investigate wellbeing through an experiential lens. I pay attention to the varied ways those who participated in my research conceptualised and represented their experiences of wellbeing and present idioms of wellbeing as the ways in which they expressed their wellbeing. I also present the photographs and accompanying narratives through which my photovoice participants represented and discussed their wellbeing in different media. Finally I focus on

how wellbeing is experiential, through highlighting several practices which my interlocutors carry out to experience wellbeing.

Throughout the chapters I examine the importance of exploring the various ways wellbeing is conceptualised and represented in the lived experience of my interlocutors. Their experience of wellbeing reveals how in the context of their displacement they practice their wellbeing while at times simultaneously experiencing distress and strain. Wellbeing is not defined through a set of categories, but rather it is continuously sought and practiced in relation to their present experience.

The dissertation concludes by discussing my findings in light of the literature, emphasising the importance of acknowledging both wellbeing and suffering in contexts of political conflict and displacement. I focus on some of the ethnographic, conceptual and methodological contributions my dissertation offers. I present an overview of some of the main ways my work creates a dialogue and pushes dominant approaches of wellbeing. I end with recommendations based on insights from my own work.

2. 'Wellbeing' explored from an interdisciplinary perspective

Today the concept of wellbeing is used so broadly that it could be taken to mean anything from yoga and meditation to a labelled section in a pharmacy (Sointu, 2005). Neither is there a consistent application of the concept in the scholarly literature as it spans across several disciplines which employ different theoretical frameworks. In the interest of avoiding any conflation of different definitions of the term, the following chapter will address various conceptualizations of wellbeing, while situating my dissertation within this literature and outlining which approaches are most relevant to my research. It is also important to understand some of the academic discourses that influence policy and interventions relating to wellbeing in various contexts, especially in those of political violence and displacement, which are most relevant for my own work. The following literature review will outline and compare scholarly work and perspectives on wellbeing from the disciplines of psychology, development economics, and anthropology.

Scholars from these different disciplines explore wellbeing in order to gain insight into what makes people “happy”, since happiness is considered to most strongly influence people’s experiences of wellbeing (Bevan, 2010). Until recently, such investigations excluded individuals and communities who were living through hardships, and people living in poverty and those emerging from catastrophic events, such as violence and war, in particular (Derluyn et al, 2019; Gough and McGregor, 2007; Yotebieng et al, 2018). Having said this, there is some work which investigates wellbeing in relation to refugee mental health. Yet these studies often focus on its flipside – on refugees’ “illbeing”, rather than its positive inversion.

My work is concerned with how refugees conceive of their own wellbeing in the context of their displacement. This approach responds to the most recent calls from academics and practitioners in the fields of mental health and psychosocial support in refugee and humanitarian settings. Weissbecker and colleagues (2019) argue, for instance that researchers ought to engage with notions of “resilience and social ecology,” specifically how “changes in the social environment can influence individual wellbeing” (158). In this sense, my work seeks not only to further understand wellbeing on the individual level, but to also

understand wellbeing *contextualised within the experiences of displacement of Syrians in Jordan*. This stands to make mental health and psychosocial interventions more socially and culturally meaningful. While my approach diverts from most of the currently available academic literature on wellbeing, I consider it nevertheless possible and, indeed useful, to engage with some of the existing literature on wellbeing to gain insights into how the concept has been conceptualised among refugees up until now.

Psychological perspectives on wellbeing

The concept of wellbeing in psychology is defined in various ways. Acknowledging this while aspiring to provide a definition that is simple, optimistic and perhaps even universal, Dodge and colleagues (2012) define the presence of wellbeing as: “When individuals have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological social and/or physical challenge” (230). In positive psychology, scholars explore the concept from different perspectives, the most common being hedonism and eudaimonism. The hedonic perspective considers the wellbeing of a person in relation to what it means to lead a good life, which includes feelings of happiness and pleasure (Kahneman, et al., 1999; Ryan and Deci, 2001; Vitterso, 2013). The eudaimonic perspective, on the other hand, criticises the focus on happiness, arguing that people’s perceptions of their “happiness” do not necessarily relate to their psychological wellbeing (Deci and Ryan, 2008). Instead, a eudaimonic view considers wellbeing to be the fulfilment of one’s potential, or optimal functioning, which includes achievements, activities, health and creativity (Waterman, 1993; Ryan and Deci, 2001; Vitterso, 2013). The differences between these two perspectives are not only conceptual, but also practical, as their proponents use different research tools to measure the notions of wellbeing. These divergent methods of measurement, depending on their results, inform policy in various ways. In order to gain greater insight into the ways in which psychologists conceptualise, measure and operationalise the concept of wellbeing, I will, in the following, examine some of the main scholarly work in the field.

Hedonic approaches

Hedonic psychology was first introduced in 1999 by Kahneman, Diener, and Schwartz in the field of psychology. These scholars characterise the field as “the study of what makes experiences and life pleasant or unpleasant” and explain that “it is concerned with feelings of pleasure and pain, of interest and boredom, of joy and sorrow and of satisfaction and dissatisfaction” (Kahneman et al., 2003, ix). The approach builds on earlier hedonic perspectives on wellbeing that focus on what has been termed subjective wellbeing (SWB) (Diener, 1984). SWB was initially pioneered by Diener (Diener, 1984; Vitterso, 2013), who defined it as the presence of: positive affects including happiness, joy, ecstasy and contentment; the absence of negative affect, such as sadness, distress, depression and feelings of guilt or shame; and satisfaction in various domains of life, including work, marriage, family, leisure, health, finances and self (Diener et al., 1999). This approach has led to an important body of literature based on empirical research that measures the SWB of individuals.

Empirical research in this field employs self-rate survey tools like the global self-report and the happiness scale (Diener et al., 1999). Other tools include experience-sampling measures of happiness, which sample moods and emotions of participants at various points of their everyday lives, as well as physiological measures of salivary cortisol levels (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1985). The use of such diverse tools reflects the perception of researchers who argue that SWB is an extremely complex entity that should be explored from various angles by measuring “physiological characteristics, behavioural reactions, and memories” (Diener et al., 1999, 278).

The research findings around SWB have been used for policy development (Kahneman et al., 2003), and while public policy related to wellbeing and quality of life focuses heavily on economic indicators –per capita Gross-Domestic-Product (GDP), for example – proponents of the hedonic approach argue against solely focusing on economic and material indicators for wellbeing. Rather, they aim to take the nuances in people’s lives into account – and these include non-material experiences. In other words, they propose that “a scientific understanding of hedonic experience will allow for the development of valid hedonic indicators that reflect the pleasantness of life in the everyday

experiences of people” (Kahneman et al., 2003, loc 427). Through this experience recording and monitoring, scholars aim to surpass the limitations of the economic indicators, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of whether or not people are “happy” (Kahneman et al., 2003, loc 438).

However, hedonic explorations of wellbeing rarely examine the experiences of refugees or of people living in contexts of political conflict. Nevertheless, a few studies do explore the concept among people living in precarious situations. For instance, Van Tran and Wright (1986) examined the SWB of Vietnamese refugees resettling in the United States. The main findings indicated that social support, interaction with Americans, high family income and being married, in addition to good English language skills, formal education and living in the United States, were all used as indicators of happiness amongst Vietnamese people. Based on their findings, the authors recommend that policies should maintain and support programs such as English language training, foster a sense of belonging and social support and develop programmes that support refugees’ understanding and adjustment to American society overall. With these recommendations, they targeted policy makers with the aim of improving integration, since “a high level of well-being among Vietnamese refugees is one good indicator of successful and effective refugee policies, programs, and services” (Van Tran and Wright, 1986, 457).

Other studies that examine experiences of wellbeing within the context of political violence include works by Ayyash-Abdo and Alamuddin (Ayyash-Abdo, 2010; Ayyash-Abdo and Alamuddin, 2010), investigating SWB among Lebanese college students. Their research is a rare example of scholarly work that investigates SWB within a politically volatile context and with a focus on the effects of external living conditions on wellbeing. In particular, the authors write about the relation between SWB and the personality constructs of self-esteem, optimism and positive affect by comparing the predictors for and experiences of wellbeing among around seven hundred Lebanese students during two periods – that is, times of relative political quiet in 2003, and episodes of heightened political tension and uncertainty in 2007. In accordance with other SWB literature, the research results indicated that socio-economic status correlated positively with SWB and that positive affect was more correlated with being male, whereas

higher negative affect was found to correlate with being female. Interestingly, the comparison of SWB among Lebanese college students in contrasting times of political quiet and political turmoil did not show any significant differences in results. The authors explain that it is likely that some students had assimilated experiences of adversity given that they had been brought up in an orientation that emphasises the importance of the collective. In addition, they note that high SWB does not always mean a lack of negative emotions while participants were undoubtedly going through a process of adaptation. Finally, they note that resilience is valorised in Lebanese culture and embedded within their environment, manifesting itself through family ties and collective social orientation. Consequently, the authors call for more studies on SWB in contexts of political violence and conflict, and the need for “collective awareness of the role of SWB in contributing to a healthy society” (Ayyash-Abdo, 2010, 358).

In an article by Diener and colleagues reflecting on three decades of progress within SWB research, they conclude that a “happy person is blessed with a positive temperament, tends to look on the bright side of things, and does not ruminate excessively about bad events, and is living in an economically advanced society, has social confidants, and possesses adequate resources for making progress towards valued goals” (Diener et al, 1999, 295). They conclude by noting that future research must further develop this conception of wellbeing, asserting that there is a need for a methodology more sophisticated than using cross-sectional surveys. They are concerned with better understanding the phenomenon of adaptation – how people maintain average levels of SWB even through hard times.

The SWB approach is currently the dominant approach and most often employed to measure wellbeing within psychology, influencing other disciplines such as economics (Rojas, 2007). Yet several authors outline some of the shortcomings of this framework. Ryff argues, for example that SWB does not address the need for an enriched theoretical guidance in charting the influences on wellbeing and identifying how these influences occur, and more importantly, that SWB tends to develop narrow conceptions of positive functioning. SWB tends to place emphasis on short-term affective wellbeing at the expense of more

enduring life challenges, such as having a sense of purpose and direction (Ryff, 1989). But SWB is not the only dominant approach in psychology, and other approaches aim to focus on other aspects of wellbeing that remain unaddressed by SWB, to which we will now turn.

Eudaimonic approaches

Proponents of a eudaimonic understanding of wellbeing criticise the hedonic approach for its focus on happiness and pleasure as goals that people supposedly seek in order to achieve a good life. For instance, Ryff and Keyes (1995), coming from psychology and sociology respectively, argue that studies of SWB have had “little theoretical rationale”, are “data driven rather than based on a clear conceptual framework” (Ryff and Keyes, 1995, 719) and neglect “important aspects of positive psychological functioning” (Ryff, 1989, 1069–1070). Instead, eudaimonic scholars argue that pleasure and positive feelings cannot encompass the whole of human wellbeing, and that research should examine the processes with which individuals strive to achieve their potentials in life (Ryan and Deci, 2006; Vitterso, 2013).

Emanating from this critique, Ryff and colleagues (Ryff, 1989; Ryff and Keyes, 1995; Keyes, Shmotkin and Ryff, 2002) have developed a theoretical framework of psychological wellbeing (PWB) that builds on various psychological development theories. Specifically, they integrate a theory-guided approach which takes various perspectives from several authors on positive psychological functioning – Maslow, Erikson, Allport, Neugarten, Rodgers, Jung, and Jahoda – and synthesise “core dimensions of the alternative formulation of psychological wellbeing” (Ryff, 1989, 1070; Keyes, Shmotkin and Ryff, 2002; Ryff and Keyes, 1995). Based on the framework derived from the above authors, Keyes, Shmotkin, and Ryff developed six indicators for a person’s PWB which are summarised and explained as follows: People attempt to feel good about themselves even while aware of their own limitations (self-acceptance). They also seek to develop and maintain warm and trusting interpersonal environment so as to meet personal needs and desires (environmental mastery). In sustaining individuality with a larger social context, people also seek a sense of self-

determination and personal authority (autonomy). A vital endeavour is to find meaning in one's efforts and challenges (purpose in life). Lastly making the most of one's talents and capacities (personal growth is central to PWB (Keyes, Shmotkin and Ryff, 2002, 1008). For each of these indicators it is understood that a person can be a high or a low achiever. Using this measure, PWB assesses "ways of living (e.g. I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important) and well-being outcomes (e.g. when I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out)" (Huta and Ryan, 2009, 737).

Another psychological model following a eudaimonic approach to wellbeing is called self-determination theory (SDT). Its proponents, Ryan and Deci (2001), explain that within SDT there are three basic psychological needs that are necessary to foster wellbeing within an individual: first, autonomy that is, "acting from interested and integrated values...[and] experiencing (...) behaviour as an expression of the self"; second, competence, namely, "feeling effective in one's ongoing interactions with the social environment and experiencing opportunities to exercise and express one's capacities"; and third, relatedness that is, "feeling connected to others, to caring for and being cared for by others, [and] having a sense of belongingness" (Ryan and Deci, 2002, 6–7). According to this approach, it is paramount that the needs listed above are satisfied across an individual's life span in order to experience an ongoing sense of integrity and wellbeing or "eudaimonia" (Ryan and Deci, 2000, 75).

Ryan and Deci (2001) argue that PWB and SDT share crucial similarities in that wellbeing is more than simply attaining desires, but also concerned with being fully functioning. Both approaches also regard wellbeing eudaimonically and not solely hedonically. The key distinction between PWB and SDT are that Ryff's approach seeks to define wellbeing through identification and assessment of the six indicators, while Ryan and Deci consider other factors as fostering wellbeing – namely, autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Moreover, SDT posits that satisfaction of the basic psychological needs typically fosters SWB as well as eudaimonic well-being" (Ryan and Deci, 2001,147).

Though the PWB approach focuses, in its early stages, solely on eudaimonia as encompassing wellbeing, a study by Keyes et al. (2002) considers the conceptual overlap between SWB and PWB. Despite the theoretical distinction between the approaches of SWB and PWB (presented above), the authors argued for integration of PWB with SWB, rather than displacing SWB entirely.

Keyes, Shmotkin and Ryff examined “the role of location in the life course (i.e. age), and position in the socioeconomic hierarchy (e.g. educational status) as well as personality traits in accounting for different profiles of wellbeing” (Keyes et al., 2002, 1007). Their study was conducted with a national sample of American adults between the ages of 25 and 74, and included 45-minute phone interviews as well as two self-administered questionnaires. The study revealed that SWB and PWB could be complementary to each other and provide a sense of self-congruence. SWB and PWB could also compensate for each other – for example, in the case of compromised health and vitality and the lack of opportunities that lead to lower possibilities of PWB, a higher SWB plays a role in preserving positive feelings.

The opposite is also true, where high achievement and PWB may exist, but where SWB is found to be low (Keyes et al., 2002). As for sociodemographic factors and wellbeing, this study showed that younger adults with lower education had low perceived quality of life (SWB) and low challenged thriving¹⁷ (PWB). On the other hand, midlife and older adults with higher levels of education enjoyed a higher perceived quality of life, and were more likely to be thriving. Therefore, the study concluded that optimal wellbeing is connected to both education and age.

Thus far I have outlined two primary directions in exploring wellbeing in the field of psychology – the hedonic and eudaimonic approaches. These approaches shaped different instruments for measuring the wellbeing of populations, but, as became apparent, there are instances where both approaches have been utilised together to understand wellbeing. Wellbeing consists of several facets, some of which are affective and others which focus mainly on thriving and self-progress. But both traditions are framed in terms of an

¹⁷ Challenged thriving refers to the obstacles faced by persons as they seek to function positively (Keyes et al., 2002).

individualist conceptualisation of wellbeing, due to the Euro-American cultural bias of these studies. Some scholarly approaches understand imaginations of wellbeing cross-culturally (Suh, 2000), but they still do not explore those examinations of wellbeing in the context of political violence, conflict, war, and forced displacement (Tov and Diener, 2009). My research seeks to fill this gap by bringing war-affected societies into the discussion of wellbeing. In order to better understand how positive psychological functioning of populations emerging from armed conflict and wars has been investigated I have examined the concept of resilience. Resilience is particularly pertinent to my research as it is often employed in lieu of wellbeing.

Resilience

Resilience is a complex concept and has been defined in a variety of ways as a trait and as a process. Bonanno (2007) defines resilience as “the ability of adults in otherwise normal circumstances who are exposed to an isolated and potentially highly disruptive event such as the death of a close relation or a violent or life-threatening situation to maintain relatively stable, healthy levels of psychological and physical functioning ... as well as the capacity for generative experiences and positive emotions” (671). Resilience here is defined as a reaction to what Bonanno calls a “potentially traumatic event (PTE),” which could include the death of a loved one, physical assault or accidents (Bonanno et al., 2007). Such reactions to a PTE may have been regarded as odd during the embryonic stages of research on resilience, but scholars have since come to realise that resilience is the most common reaction to traumatic events (Barber, 2013; Bonanno et al., 2007; Masten, 2001). It is also important to note that resilience is no longer considered a static trait, but rather as part of a process which factors into the manifestation of a person’s wellbeing.

With the increase of scholarly interest and research on the topic, understandings of resilience as a psychosocial phenomenon shifted from Bonanno’s earlier conception of resilience as an individual trait to understanding resilience as “processes of, capacity for, or patterns of positive adaptation during or following exposure to adverse experiences that have the potential to disrupt or

destroy the successful functioning or development of the person” (Masten and Obradovic, 2008, 2). Panter-Brick and Leckman agree with Masten and Obradovic (quoted above) that resilience is a process, but one that is also employed in “harnessing biological, psychological, structural, and cultural resources to sustain wellbeing” (Panter-Brick and Leckman, 2003, 335). The importance of this assertion should not be understated, since previous examinations of resilience have used the concept as an alternative to wellbeing, and not as a component of it. This is particularly pertinent to my research, because aside from discourses that focus on the adverse mental health condition of refugees, resilience is the topic that arises in many discussions of war-affected populations.

Charting the history of the development of resilience as a concept in psychological literature is instrumental for both understanding how it is related to wellbeing, and how it has been expressed in diverse contexts, including ones of political conflict and violence¹⁸. The term first appeared in psychological literature when Rutter explored protective factors which may exist in response to stressors that people experience (Rutter, 1985). While adaptive and positive functioning in the face of adversity was discussed within scholarly work in psychology since the 1970s (Luthar et al., 2000), it was not until the 1980s that the concept of resilience started to be used within psychology and mental health. The concept was often applied to cases in which people were able to rebound from adverse situations or events that did not break them. For instance, an early example studied children of mothers with mental illness and explored the protective factors the children needed in order to develop well psychosocially (Rutter, 2012; Garmezi et al., 1984).

At the beginning of resilience research, the focus was mostly on children, specifically children’s healthy development despite adversity and risk. These circumstances included socioeconomic disadvantage and its associated risks, parental mental illness, community violence and maltreatment. These studies attempted to make sense of how children adapted to these aforementioned

¹⁸ Before its introduction into the fields of psychology and mental health, resilience as a term referred to the resilience of materials – that materials can withstand pressure and then recoil or rebound to their natural or normal state (Norris et al, 2008; Ungar, 2012).

circumstances in such a way that did not impede on their development (Luthar et al. 2000; Masten, 2001; Ungar, 2012). It was only later that resilience among adults was studied (Bonanno, 2007; Werner, 1996). The trend in psychology to understand positive reactions, or positive adaptation in the face of difficult, traumatic events was in line with an approach within psychology that recognised that the focus on pathology led to dismissal of positive mental health (Masten, 2001). This study contributed to increased interest on the part of psychologists in adjustment and adaptation after experiences of adversity. This interest extended to include politically-induced traumatic events and the politically violent contexts of potentially traumatic events (PTEs), to which we will now turn.

The context of political violence, and research on resilience within it, is different from the general conception of resilience outlined above, since “political violence represents a somewhat unique stressor in that it threatens both individuals and their environments” (Sousa et al., 2013, 235). In other words, conditions of political violence are particularly apt for the study of resilience, or as Barber (2013) suggests, such ubiquitously present adverse circumstances offer an “ideal” research environment for the concept. The following provides a brief sketch of the literature on resilience in settings of political violence.

Sousa and colleagues (2013) review the literature on resilience within politically volatile contexts for both individuals and communities, presenting the results in a table organising their findings. They state that individual resilience among children is influenced by demographic factors such as age and gender, which play a role as protective factors. Gender specifically plays a different role for males and females, as males and females experience political violence differently. In some studies, girls seem to fare better in the face of political violence, perhaps as a result of being less directly exposed to violent events or being sent to safe areas (Giacaman et al. 2007; Sousa et al., 2013). Nguyen-Gillham et al. (2008) also suggest that girls and boys may express resilience differently; Palestinian girls tended to express resilience through their commitment to their education as an act of defiance against the Israeli occupation while Palestinian boys expressed it by going to protests.

As for the individual resilience of adults, Sousa et al. (2013) assert that there is little evidence for the role of demographic characteristics on protective

factors playing a part of resilience. Instead, it was found that religious conviction, self-esteem, hope, optimism and engaging in processes of meaning-making are important traits that play a role in building resilience. The review by Sousa et al. (2013) also identifies the resources that play a part in bolstering resilience, including family unity and stability. They also discuss how opportunities to hold perpetrators of violence accountable play a role in the process of becoming resilient. This would take place when people were given the opportunity to face their perpetrators and give their testimony at a tribunal, allowing them to feel they were standing up for social justice, giving them a sense of power and helping them maintain their own positive self-image. This, of course, would assume an end to the conflict or political violence, and does not apply to protracted situations. The opportunity to hold people accountable for their actions, through tribunals and truth commissions, for example, as well as the ability to maintain culture through traditions and ceremonies seem to be protective factors.

Resilience at the community level

Resilience does not only function as an individual coping mechanism, but also extends to collective practices at the level of the community. Sousa et al. (2013) refer to the importance of studying this kind of resilience. The concept of community resilience is defined by Ungar (2011b) as follows: “A community's resilience is its social capital, physical infrastructure, and culturally embedded patterns of interdependence that give it the potential to recover from dramatic change, sustain its adaptability, and support new growth that integrates the lessons learned during a time of crisis” (1742). This socio-ecological definition of resilience accounts for the complex contextual and cultural factors related to positive development under stress. Norris et al. (2008) also recognise community resilience as an important concept to explore, specifically in the context of disasters (whether natural or man-made), although it must be noted that, in reference to man-made disasters, they do not include political conflicts. In their understanding and exploration of community resilience, Norris and colleagues propose that community resilience is a set of linked and interactive adaptive capacities, including information and communication, community competence, social capital, and economic development – all of which may contribute to

community resilience. Their work points to the context of political, economic, and natural forces that influence community-level capacities, which Norris and colleagues argue should be studied (Norris et al., 2008).

Thus far I have examined the factors which contribute to resilient behavior, but I have not described in great detail how it manifests. Sousa et al. (2013) state it somewhat generally when arguing that a general affective orientation manifests itself in both community and individual resilience as a sense of hope, agency, trust, and interdependence. In the Palestinian context, Giacaman (2005) shows how such collective emotional orientations are related to resilience in life under protracted conflict, focusing on her experiences and those of her colleagues. She argues that coping with protracted conflict takes place through collective hope. It is expressed through the exercise of agency, which the author describes as being exercised collectively by her and her colleagues, her family members, and the community in which she lived.

Other scholars study what they describe as contexts of strong community cohesion that have been forged through collective experiences of adversity. In these contexts, such experiences make the community hardier in the face of recurring political violence, allowing them to be more resilient. Nuwayhid et al. (2011) argue this, providing the example of the 2006 Lebanon War, in which the Lebanese people were able to draw on past experiences of political violence. The authors show that these shared experiences helped craft a sense of collective identity, which was, in turn, instrumental in allowing them to cope with the war (Nuwayhid et al., 2011). Other factors also included the availability of resources such as education and health care, while having a trusted leadership contributed as a protective factor.

Though Sousa et al. (2013) present community and individual resilience separately throughout their review, they note in their conclusion that they are in agreement with Masten and Obradovic (2013) that, especially in contexts of political violence, it is unrealistic to separate them as the relationship between both is reciprocal and dynamic (Ungar, 2011b). In line with Sousa, Masten and others, Ungar proposes an approach to resilience which accounts for contextual and cultural factors. This is consistent with the argument that resilience is experienced at both the individual and communal levels. In this social ecological

model, resilience is defined and operationalised through four principles: “decentrality, complexity, atypicality and cultural relativity” (Ungar, 2011, 2). These four principles were offered as a way to “broaden...conceptualisation of positive development under stress” (Ungar, 2011a, 13). Ungar argues that this social interpretation of resilience pushes for cultural sensitivity by placing less emphasis on the individual, such that the individual is less responsible for not flourishing when they have no access to resources that would allow them to flourish (Ungar, 2013).

The literature on resilience is also shaped by scholars who not only agree with the previous conceptualisations of resilience as a process – that it is both individual and community-based, and deeply connected to political, societal, economic and environmental factors – but also argue that it may occur alongside suffering. In a panel discussion between various authors that have tackled issues of resilience from interdisciplinary perspectives, Rachel Yehuda argued that, in her research experience, even the most resilient people may have severe PTSD symptoms and continuously struggle with those symptoms (Southwick et al., 2014). In other words, resilience does not mean the absence of PTSD, but rather the ability to survive and function despite it.

Also in agreement with Yehuda’s argument of the co-occurrence of resilience and PTSD, Eggerman and Panter-Brick (2010) confirm that people experience both positive and negative responses to adversity at the same time. In their study of children and their adult caregivers in Afghanistan, they examine how distress and hope are manifested, describing how culture shapes these experiences and thereby produces both a sense of coherence as well as entrapment (Eggerman and Panter-Brick, 2010). They found that people established a sense of coherence through cultural values such as faith, family unity, service, effort, morals and honor, which elevate the sense of hope against adversity. However, these sentiments coexisted with the experience of entrapment, due to economic hardship and the inability to meet social obligations, and having individual aspirations, all of which potentially conflicted with their cultural values.

Nguyen et al. (2008) similarly engage with this idea of coexisting emotions in their research with Palestinian youth. The authors utilise this approach to

capture the complex nuances within resilience in the context of protracted conflict. In their approach to resilience they note how resilience coexisted with feelings of emotional distress and boredom. They write: “For Palestinian adolescents, being steadfast neither precludes nor excludes feelings of emotional distress or sheer boredom. Palestinian girls, in particular, talk about political commitment and complain about nervousness and a loss of appetite in the same breath” (296). These scholarly discussions of resilience, which show the concept’s coexistence with other experiences of distress, highlight the complex reality of this concept and the importance of recognising this complexity, and avoid a decontextualized, and perhaps superficial, account of this concept. This is also important in order to have instruments and tools that not only measure but also capture the meaning of resilience as experienced by populations that experience political violence and its sequelae.

All of the above studies of resilience have been consolidated by some researchers who seek to distil them into an instrument for measuring resilience in conflict settings. Panter-Brick et al. (2017) do this in their development of the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-12) to assess resilience in Jordan of both the host community and the Syrian refugee community. They conducted a study to develop and validate Arabic-language resilience measures in response to the need for instruments that assess resilience, particularly for humanitarian agencies that require such instruments in order to set quantifiable targets and evaluate their own programmes in relation to improved youth resilience. The study confirms that the CYRM-12 is a “reliable and valid Arabic-language measure of child and adolescent resilience to effectively measure whether their programs promote the acquisition of resources relevant to improved youth well-being” (13). Nevertheless, Panter-Brick and her team acknowledge that resilience itself is a difficult concept to operationalise. They add that resilience, which usually occurs within the context of risk, is not a mirror of the risk itself. They also clarify that there are nuances to how resilience is thought of and expressed in different contexts in the Arab world. For example, in the context of their study with Syrians and Jordanians in Jordan, resilience is referred to as *muruna*, meaning flexibility and adaptability. In contrast, in the Palestinian context resilience is expressed as *sumud*, which relates more to the political dimensions, coupled with

determination, steadfastness and being rooted in the land (Nguyen-Gillham, Giacaman, Naser and Boyce, 2008; Panter-Brick et al., 2017; Panter-Brick, 2015). These insights further emphasise that “contextually relevant, validated resilience measures are necessary” (1816) and that there is still a need for further focus on processes related to resilience and not just the construct (Panter-Brick et al., 2017).

Through this brief overview of research on resilience, it is clear that there is a shift in the resilience literature from a static trait perspective on resilience to a more process-oriented approach, which considers various dimensions of the social, the political and other environmental factors. Although not always explicitly explored, the link between resilience and wellbeing is often present. Vindevogel et al. (2015) understood this point from their work with Ugandan youth, noting that utilising contextually-grounded indicators for resilience emphasise “the multidimensional character of well-being and suggest[ed] that resilience is situated at the intersection of various areas of functioning.” However, experiences of wellbeing in the context of conflict and displacement are still rare to find, despite calls for “intersectoral and holistic approach that assesses multiple domains of functioning and aspects of well-being” (Vindevogel et al., 2015, 409). My research will aim to pursue this kind of holistic approach. The following section offers an overview of a separate set of literature approaching wellbeing from the perspective of development.

Development perspectives on wellbeing

It is important to explore wellbeing as it is investigated and conceptualised within the field of development as the field has been influential in not only adopting the concept, but also in influencing policy in different parts of the world. At the level of political governance, both international governments and the UN consider wellbeing an important marker of progress for development. This conceptualisation of wellbeing and its consideration as a marker of progress are important to my own research on wellbeing, particularly as the policies which are shaped by this conceptualization influence interventions in contexts of political conflict and displacement by governments and non-governmental actors. In the preface to their book on wellbeing in developing countries, Gough and McGregor

state that “wellbeing is now commonly used by governments and politicians in developed countries, as the policy documents and legislation of the UK, Europe, and North America indicate” (Gough and McGregor, 2007, xxi). In addition, the United Nations’ International Day of Happiness uses the Gross National Happiness Index to highlight the view that sustainable development should take a holistic approach towards progress and give equal importance to non-economic aspects of wellbeing (UN, 2013). Wellbeing in the field of development is not a new subject of investigation. While economists have been thinking of wellbeing for a long time, their conceptions of it differ from how it has been articulated in the field of psychology¹⁹.

The questions guiding scholars researching wellbeing and the quality of life of people and nations have been: “How do we measure the prosperity of a nation?”; “What makes a good life?” and “How do we assess prosperity as well as good life?” While many scholars would agree that such guiding questions have little relevance for measuring wellbeing in contexts of poverty, Gough, McGregor and Camfield (2007) argue against the idea that wellbeing is a luxury that poor and developing countries could do without. Instead, they relate these concerns to developing countries perceiving “development as organised pursuit of human wellbeing...broadening the notion of development from a narrow economic conception, to encompass human development and wider ideals such as participation and freedom” (Gough et al., 2010, 4). To gain an understanding of the current perspectives of wellbeing within economics and development I will present literature that has influenced thinking about conceptualisations and ways of assessing wellbeing in economics, policy and development. The following will discuss the influence of psychology and philosophy on development theory and,

¹⁹ Until recently, the wellbeing and quality of life of people and entire nations have been explored and understood through the measure of gross domestic product (GDP), where people’s consumer choices and preferences were used as a reflection of their wellbeing (Gasper, 2004; Gough and McGregor, 2007). Nevertheless, it has been recognised that GDP is limited as a measure of development of human welfare, because “it takes no account of the composition of output between need satisfiers and luxuries (nor between those elements of consumption which are ‘good’ or ‘bad’); nor of the distribution of welfare between groups and within families; nor of the side-effects of production on the environment and the biosphere and hence of the sustainability of future production and welfare” (Gough, McGregor and Camfield, 2007, 9). Due to these limitations in utilising GDP as a measure of determining development, there has been a recent shift towards utilising wellbeing as an indicator that nations are thriving.

thereupon, present scholarly work on wellbeing from the discipline of development.

Influences of psychology on development approaches to wellbeing

Approaches to wellbeing in economics have been heavily influenced by the approaches in psychology. In fact, scholars of economics draw on psychological measures (including SWB measures) and indicators in order to assess wellbeing. SWB measures are specifically utilised as proxies for utility instead of inferring utility for goods and commodities an individual prefers (Dolan, 2008; Gasper, 2004). The utilisation of SWB as a concept and as measures for wellbeing within economics was further highlighted when the Stiglitz Report identified it as one of the ways to measure quality of life. The Sarkozy Commission, established by the French President Sarkozy in 2008 and chaired by Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen and Jean-Paul Fitoussi, aimed to explore and recommend social and economic indicators that go beyond GDP to measure social progress (Stiglitz et al., 2009; White et al., 2012). One of the main messages of the report was that there is a need to “shift ... emphasis from economic production to measuring people’s well-being” (12). The Commission’s report uses Diener’s definition of SWB, which focuses on life satisfaction, the presence of positive feelings and the absence of negative feelings (Diener, 1984). Stiglitz et al. recognize, for instance, that wellbeing is a holistic concept that incorporates feelings of satisfaction related to intersecting fields that shape people’s daily lives, including health, education, work, political voice and governance, social relationships and economic and physical insecurity. (Dolan and Metcalfe, 2011; Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi, 2009). This approach to wellbeing in economics is closely related to the utilitarian tradition; yet Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi (2009) state that it is only recently that the measurement of people’s subjective states became of interest for economists, because there are now ways to systematically quantify these states.

Social determination theory (SDT) is another psychological approach to wellbeing that economists draw on in order to measure wellbeing across cultures (Ryan and Sapp, 2010). The theory differs from the SWB approach in that it

focuses on psychological needs rather than affect and satisfaction. Moreover, it is considered to be universalistic rather than dependent on subjective individual concerns (Ryan and Sapp, 2010), highlighting characteristics that are universal and innate, such as autonomy, relatedness and competence as basic psychological needs. Another characteristic of SDT is that it connects psychological needs to the stability of cultures and nations. Ryan and Sapp (2010) explain: “The more a culture ... engenders integrated internalisations and needs fulfilment, the more satisfied and harmonious its members will be and thus the more stable will be the culture itself” (91–92). The authors argue that the SDT approach lends itself for cross-cultural comparisons of development and wellness, and that it is in a “prescriptive and proscriptive position to argue for specific supports in contexts where health and wellness are being promoted” (2010, 71). Yet assumption of universality and the need for stability within a nation make SDT’s theoretical framework seemingly ill-suited to contexts of political conflict and forced displacement. Using SDT as a tool for cross-cultural comparisons of wellness is also challenged when comparing nations and cultures experiencing war and displacement with those experiencing relative stability, further straining the authors’ claim of universality.

This approach calls for promoting opportunities to provide access and care for the basic needs they proposed. They argue that to ensure the thriving of developing nations we must not only work on “providing food shelter and medicine...but also by paying attention to opportunities to fulfil the basic psychological needs that are the foundation of health behavioural functioning” (Ryan and Sapp, 2010). Despite the challenges of relating this approach to contexts of war and forced displacement, the point Ryan and Sapp make about promoting the provision of psychological services beyond food and shelter is relevant for populations living in contexts of conflict and forced displacement, as this may indeed be relevant to their experience of wellbeing.

To further understand the range of approaches that have shaped wellbeing discourses in development it is also necessary to explore philosophical contributions to the literature. These accounts inform policy recommendations regarding wellbeing on the national level and the international level.

Influences of philosophy on development approaches

One of the most common accounts on wellbeing within development is the “desire” or “utility account” which concerns itself with the “satisfaction of desires (or equivalently, the satisfaction of preferences)” (Griffin, 1988; Qizilbash, 1998, 58). For instance, Griffin differentiates between the “actual desire” that is, our choices and preferences, and “informed desire,” where utility is defined as “the fulfilment of desires that persons would have if they appreciated the true nature of their objects” (Griffin, 1988, 11). The reason for this distinction is that actual desires can be inaccurate as they may result from our own interests in something, but may in fact prove harmful due to a lack of information. Griffin exemplifies this by referring to an ill person who opts for receiving an operation in a situation where a pill could have solved her problem. Her actual desire is considered “faulty” in this case as it is based on a lack of information of alternative and possibly less harmful treatments.

However, the “desire” approach to wellbeing has been criticised for reducing wellbeing to mere choices and preferences (Gasper, 2004). Griffin affirms this, adding: “it does not seem that it is fulfilled desire that is the basis of wellbeing, but certain of its objects” (Griffin, 1988, 17). Instead, he suggests a list of what a good life is by outlining particular prudential values. Prudential values are those where people recognise mutual intelligibility and the shared values that they consider relevant for a good life. Qizilbash provides the following summary list of these prudential values: “1) The components of a characteristically human existence, that is, the components of agency (autonomy, liberty and minimum material provision; 2) deep personal relations; 3) understanding; 3) enjoyment; and 5) accomplishment” (Qizilbash, 1998, 65). According to him, prudential values must make any human life improve, whatever class or culture. The list has been extended to include the following: “a) minimum levels of nutrition, health, sanitation, shelter, rest and security; b) certain basic intellectual and physical capacities and literacy; c) certain levels of self-respect and aspiration; d) enjoyment; 3) autonomy or self-determination; f) liberty; g) understanding; h)

significant relations with others and some participation in social life; i) accomplishment” (67).

Another approach to wellbeing that found the utilitarian approach to be lacking – due, in part, to its focus on the satisfaction of desires and the obtaining of primary goods – is the capabilities approach. The capabilities approach to wellbeing has been chiefly developed by Amartya Sen who argued against primary goods as the metric to measure a good life (Sen, 2001). His argument against it stemmed from a concern for the inequality the approach could cause. In a publication co-authored with Martha Nussbaum, the authors explain that “what people get out of goods depends on a variety of factors, and judging personal advantage in just by the size of personal ownership of goods and services can be very misleading” (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993, 16). To further explain how a utilitarian focus on primary goods leads to inequality, Nussbaum and Sen provide an example, arguing that giving equal goods to someone who is able-bodied and someone who is paraplegic is morally blind and creates inequality because a paraplegic person will need greater resources to enable her to achieve mobility (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993). Instead, Sen proposes an approach to capabilities rooted in Aristotelian philosophy. Capability, according to him, refers to “alternative combinations of functionings that are feasible for her to achieve. Capability is thus a kind of freedom: Substantive freedom to achieve alternative functioning combinations” (Sen, 2001, 75). The functionings relate to not only what a person is able to do, but also what the person values doing. Functionings can be elementary such as having shelter and food and being in good health. Yet, they can also be complex and may include having self-respect, dignity, and respect in one’s own community. Each person may have a different capability-set of valued functionings (Sen, 2001). Although Sen refers to functionings, he refrains from specifying exactly which functionings lead to wellbeing. This is a conscious choice as he believes that there are no universal functionings as people in different parts of the world may value different capabilities at different points in time. This perspective is referred to as pluralistic approach in development economy (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993; Qizilbash, 1998; Sen, 2001; Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi, 2009).

Nussbaum builds upon Sen's work, but criticises its lack of specificity. In order to ameliorate this, she developed the following, often cited "objective list of functional capabilities":

1) Life: being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; 2) bodily health: being able to have good health; 3) bodily integrity: being able to move freely from place to place; 4) senses, imagination and thought: being able to use senses to imagine, think and reason; 5) emotions: being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; 6) practical reason: being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life; 7) affiliation: a. being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, b. having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; 8) other species: being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals plants and the world of nature; 9) play: being able to laugh to play and to enjoy recreational activities; 10) control over one's environment: a. political- being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life, b. material- being able to hold property and having property rights on an equal basis with others. (Nussbaum, 2001, 70-71)

According to Nussbaum, this list is universal and, therefore, cross-culturally applicable and necessary in order to achieve a life that is "worthy of the dignity of the human being" (Gough et al., 2010, 13). Given that many countries in the world and populations living within them lead lives which are shaped by political instability, the pluralistic approach suggested by Sen may be closer to such lived realities – for example, in the case of refugees whose lives are governed by political, economic and social factors which are continuously in-flux, the functionings which they potentially value would also be changing.

While Nussbaum and Sen may disagree on the issue of pluralism versus universality, their approaches do share central features. Both provide a conceptualisation of and an approach to wellbeing, and focus on the ethics and principles that ought to constitute a good society. The capabilities approach was also one of the recommended approaches for the assessment and understanding of quality of life and wellbeing by the Stiglitz Commission report. Led by Stiglitz,

Sen and Fitoussi, the Commission recognises the need for both SWB and quality of life that “depends on people’s objective conditions and capabilities” (Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi, 2009, 15). This direction in research on wellbeing is not only undergirded by an effort to move beyond GDP and the availability of commodities as markers of wellbeing, but also concerns itself with ethical and political values that have served as driving forces for research in development economics and wellbeing. It is to this research that I now turn. This understanding of the major influences on how wellbeing is conceptualised in development is important for my research because it helps us understand how wellbeing is understood at the governmental level, both internationally and locally. These conceptualisations of wellbeing on the international level are usually developed in high-income countries (such as the above mentioned Stiglitz Commission report), which are not in the midst of political turmoil – nevertheless the policies that were developed as a result of these conceptualisations in high-income countries often trickle down and shape interventions implemented in various other contexts, among them countries and populations experiencing political violence and displacement.

Examples from development and related disciplines

In their introduction to “Wellbeing in Developing Countries: From Theory to Research” Gough, McGregor and Camfield (2007) observe that there is a move towards conceiving of “development as the organized pursuit of human wellbeing” (4). They further specify that this development has involved “broadening the notion of development from a narrow conception to encompass human development and wider ideas such as participation and freedom” (4). This trend toward greater complexity and process has, in recent years, also influenced wellbeing research and public policy development on an international scale. Rather than measuring a nation’s wellbeing based on GDP, new projects such as the 2007 European Commission’s Beyond GDP project pay greater attention to environmental and social aspects of progress (European Commission, 2012). The project builds on previous developments including the United Nation’s Development Index (1994) and the UK Cabinet Office Strategy Unit’s (2002) report, “Life Satisfaction: The State of Knowledge and Implication for Government”. Since then, President Sarkozy commissioned the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, or simply the

project known as the Stiglitz Report (see above). Similar to the Beyond GDP project, the Commission's report aimed to identify the limits of GDP as an indicator of economic performance and social progress in order to "influence future statistical policies in both developed and developing countries, as well as the work of international organizations that play a key role in the development of statistical standards worldwide" (Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi, 2009, 9).

In the UK, a high-income country context, this vision has already taken root in that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) now also records measures like SWB to be able to establish the quality of life and wellbeing of its population (Bunn and Venkatapuram, 2012). Specifically, in 2010 the ONS began including national wellbeing measures as part of a national annual population household survey which consisted of the following aspects to indicate wellbeing: relationships, health, what we do, where we live, personal finance, education and skills as well as other wider influences like governance, the economy and the natural environment (Bunn and Venkatapuram, 2012). The survey further includes four subjective wellbeing questions which are: "1) How satisfied are you with your life nowadays? 2) To what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile? 3) How happy did you feel yesterday? 4) How anxious did you feel yesterday?" (3). The first results of the survey revealed that three quarters of participants rated their life satisfaction as seven or more out of ten, while 80% gave a seven or more in answer to the question of whether they felt their lives worthwhile (Bunn and Venkatapuram, 2012, 3). This information is argued to be useful for informing policy in the future in that such "policies could be designed to take into account the way choices are made, so that people are more likely to make decisions that improve their own personal wellbeing as well as that of others" (Bunn and Venkatapuram, 2012, 4).

The inclusion of wellbeing, at the international level by the United Nations and European commission, as well as on the local level in countries such as the UK as a measure of flourishing and progress within societies highlights the importance of discussing this concept and how it may influence policy globally. Yet it is important to also consider low- and middle-income countries, and how the concept may be utilised or understood differently. Not only in high-income countries, but also in low- and middle-income countries, these new measures

have been introduced to determine a nation's wellbeing. An example from the field of sociology is post-apartheid South Africa, where Møller (2007) carried out the Quality of Life Trends project. This project had initially begun in 1970 and continued over a period of 25 years, with the aim of defining what constitutes a good life in South Africa. The project further developed and refined its research methods over time. The survey itself was applied several times over those 25 years and included questions concerned with the quality of life and happiness of South Africans. Based on the results, the following four features of South African quality of life were highlighted and problematised: (1) There were significant discrepancies between levels of satisfaction between black and white populations as well as between the rich and the poor; (2) The objective and subjective indicators closely matched; (3) Satisfaction increases with levels of living; and (4) Optimism is negatively correlated with current satisfaction. Although the results were important findings for policy development, Møller acknowledged that one of the main limitations of the project is that it was mainly informed by American social indicators, leading to a narrow focus on the individual, which she considered to be "an anomaly in a society that leans toward a collectivist worldview" (Møller, 2007, 258). Hence, Møller called for research that would make use of local indicators of wellbeing to better assess the lived experience of a population.

In a different study, but with a similar aim of understanding and assessing wellbeing in a developing country context, McGregor (2008) explored wellbeing in Thailand. The author explored wellbeing by arguing that "it provides us with new and innovative ways to understand the processes of societal changes that are stimulated by development" (McGregor et al., 2008, 2). Through this project, they came to the conclusion that wellbeing is a social concept, based on the insights of the various scholars mentioned above and elsewhere in the literature. This includes the work of capabilities by Sen, SWB from psychology, as well as contributions of social and cultural constructions of society from sociologists and anthropologists (McGregor, 2008). McGregor's empirical research (completed between 2003 and 2006) was conducted in both urban and rural areas and found that perceptions of wellbeing varied depending on where the persons resided. From these varying perceptions of wellbeing, the authors followed not only that development itself is an uneven process, but also that conceptions of wellbeing

differed as particular locations offer context-dependent opportunities for its pursuit (McGregor et al., 2008, 14). It is concluded that this and similar research projects can raise important questions about “what type of economic growth and social change we want in our societies” (2008, 20) and that these wishes may not only vary between but also within countries.

Despite these complexities, the researchers propose a definition of wellbeing for the context in Thailand defining it as “a positive state of being with others in society, where needs are met, where one act effectively and meaningfully to pursue ones’ goals and where one is able to experience happiness and feel satisfied with one’s life” (McGregor, 2008, 3). McGregor concludes that the “distinction between wellbeing as a profoundly social phenomenon or as a vehicle for individualism must be regarded as a major fault line in contemporary national and global political discourses” (McGregor, 2008, 19). Thus, there cannot be a one-size-fits all approach to work toward increasing a nation’s wellbeing as individuals and groups understand wellbeing in very different ways partly depending on whether they have more collectivist or individualistic understandings of the concept. Indeed, this point is one that I adopt throughout my research.

Through a focus on a specific conceptualisation of wellbeing from the perspective of a population, interventions and policies to improve wellbeing of a population can be better suited to the specific needs and perspectives of the population in question. In the case of my own research, the conceptualisation of wellbeing from the perspective of Syrian refugees in Jordan would be better suited to influence and inform policies which aim to improve their overall wellbeing. To engage with such in-depth understandings of wellbeing I turn to anthropological approaches and methods of inquiry.

Anthropological perspectives on wellbeing

In the final section of this literature review, I explore various anthropological engagements with the concept of wellbeing, ranging from discussions on the reasons underlying some anthropologists’ silence on the issue

of wellbeing, to alternative cultural conceptions of wellbeing grounded in ethnographic participatory research among different communities in the world.

While these approaches are of great interest to me as my own work is mainly rooted in anthropology, it has to be recognised that the discipline has not contributed vastly to the literature of wellbeing. Thin (2007) discusses the lack of recent contributions of anthropologists and sociologists to wellbeing and happiness literature in the introduction of his chapter, "Culture and wellbeing," stating: "Regardless of beliefs about the place of happiness in the characterization of human nature, or in the evaluation of society and policy, we must surely all agree that well-being is a universal human concern and that subjective well-being or happiness, is a core part of that concern" (134). In other words, Thin regards wellbeing and happiness as central human concerns and as such must be explored in anthropology and other social sciences. Similarly, Mathews and Izquierdo (2010) in their edited book, "Well-being in Anthropological Perspective", highlight the concern that wellbeing itself has "exploded in its usage over the past two decades, becoming an important term for social sciences such as economics, public health, and psychology, *although not anthropology*" (3, emphasis added), again emphasising the importance of investigating how wellbeing is conceived of in different social and cultural contexts. Moreover, anthropology would provide an in-depth understanding of how wellbeing is conceptualised beyond the use of survey tools which try to compare wellbeing between cultures. This is because these surveys are limited by a cultural bias which anthropology as a discipline attempts to avoid. Thin argues that there are several reasons behind the lack of anthropological engagement with wellbeing and happiness (terms he uses interchangeably). One reason behind this lack of engagement with the concept, he argues, can be attributed to a tendency among anthropologists to adopt an anti-hedonist and utilitarian position. As a result inquiry into things that are pleasurable (Thin, 2005, 18) have been considered to be fraught with the danger of adopting "socially unjust means to achieve the ends of 'maximum happiness'" (19–20). A second reason is what Thin calls a cognitivist bias – a move away from the discussion of the emotional in anthropology, mainly until the 1980s. He argues that when anthropology has dealt with emotional dimensions of social life it has focused only on the pathological and the negative;

“depression, anxiety, hate and anger far more than the positive emotions” (Thin, 2005, 17). Finally, Thin cites the tendency of social sciences to adopt a “non-evaluative” refrain in analysing patterns of human behavior “without coming to explicit judgments about the good or bad quality of human experience” (9). This is due to a moral relativist position which has impeded “cross-cultural comparative moral judgment” (9) in anthropology. In assessing Thin’s critique, it is worth noting that the field of anthropology is constantly changing, and there have since been several new additions to discussions of wellbeing within the field. Reflecting on Thin’s work, editors Mathews and Izquierdo (2010) note that Thin’s approach to wellbeing represents a “distinct type of anthropological investigation of wellbeing, based in the explicit moral or quantitative comparison of societies as to wellbeing” (249).

Recently, scholars have been paying greater attention to new conceptualisations of wellbeing and happiness. One example is Johnston’s invitation to several prominent anthropologists to present their own insights on happiness reflexively and provocatively in the Vital Topics Forum in the *Journal of American Anthropology* (Johnston et al., 2012, 6). The author encourages anthropologists to pose questions about human rights processes and resistance, and explore the complexities of both euphoria and unhappiness even in the unlikely spaces of political struggles (Johnston et al., 2012). She situates her call in a context and time where the world is witnessing various crises such as wars, natural disasters, and financial recessions. She sought to encourage fellow anthropologists to examine the role of happiness in current research discussions, joining her voice to others who call for shifting the conceptual lens from an analysis of trouble to one about happiness. The responses of scholars to her call ranged from research related to psytrance party culture (St John), to distribution of social power in small nations (Bodley), to the Arab spring (Slyomovics) and human rights leading to the transformative change related to happiness (Johnston) (all authors mentioned in Johnston et al., 2012).

One such example is Alaka Wali’s engagement with Johnston. She discusses the way anthropologists investigate happiness compared with economists and politicians. Wali argues that anthropologists assess happiness

and wellbeing by contributing an understanding “beyond materiality to the inestimable number of qualities that people rely on to counteract the toll of social life. We account for cultural difference” (Johnston et al., 2012, 12). She then presents two examples of alternative contributions to conceptualising happiness: the first was the practices of balancing between humans and other creatures and the creation of moral systems to regulate intergenerational social relations, as in the case of the forest people of Amazonia; and the second was the freedom from work regimens and control over time for people in urban Chicago (Johnston et al., 2012). In a different context, yet with a similar challenge to traditional indicators of wellbeing, Slyomovics discusses how happiness is possible and present in spaces of political imprisonment. As such she focuses on the stories of happiness and hope of political prisoners of autocratic regimes in the Middle East and North Africa, who feel free within the prison walls, and those who rise against their governments such as in the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia since 2011.

In an effort to shift the focus towards wellbeing and reduce the conflation between happiness and wellbeing, Heil explores the wellbeing of Aboriginal people in Murrin Bridge, Australia and offers “critique of taken-for-granted western conceptions of well-being” (Heil, 2010, 105) and presents more local conceptions of wellbeing. Her study began with a question related to Aboriginal understandings of diabetes and later shifted to what it means to be well and to examinations of language and practices to further understand their approaches to wellbeing. Heil adopted an ethnographic method of participant observation for her study while living with 3 families and staying in Murrin Bridge for 18 months. Through participant observation, she engaged with the community and became familiar with communal life, and learned about various social groupings to understand community politics and frictions over time (Heil, 2010). Based on her exploration of Australian Aboriginal understandings of wellbeing, she criticises the conceptualisation that health and wellbeing are synonymous with each other when they are clearly distinct for Aboriginal people themselves. That is, Aboriginal understandings of wellbeing are “not restricted to the individual...but to the whole community”, and emphasise the importance of the social life. In other words, “being well is inseparable from being at home and situated with the social...being

well is a process of self-making through social identification [and] rooted in cultural norms and values that permeate and define the individual” (Heil, 2010, 104). This understanding of wellbeing is important, as it is a way of making sense of the continuous negotiations related to being intercultural (belonging both to Aboriginal and Australian cultures simultaneously), marginalised and discriminated against, and the politics of interacting with the often discriminatory concept of being “other” (Heil, 2010). Moreover, it allows a thinking about wellbeing which is more interrelational than individualistic.

Another example of indigenous understandings of wellbeing is Naomi Adelson’s (2010) examination of the “ways in which a particular Aboriginal conceptualization of well-being is at once both grounded in specific land-based beliefs and activities and yet is changing with changing times” (109). Adelson acknowledges the works of other scholars who have explored the wellbeing of Indigenous Canadian populations, yet she points out that there has been little focus on the social and political contexts which change and shift people’s concepts of a balanced well-being (110). In her 16-month-long ethnographic study of Cree meanings of health in the Whapmagoostui community, Adelson presents how political changes also change Cree understandings of their identity and their wellbeing. She begins by introducing the term *miyupimaatsiun* as one which reflects and encompasses Cree wellbeing. The term translates more accurately to “being alive well” and refers to “one’s proper sense of place in a broadly defined social and physical Cree landscape” (113). Yet, the past 20 years have brought with them several changes to the community: the population has doubled, reliance on the income security programme has gone up and migration from the village to more urban areas has increased, as well as community experiences such as hunting and camp life decreasing. As a result of these changes, Adelson concludes that “well-being for the youth is not defined so much as by what they are doing, as by how well they can tack between the varying worlds in which they live”. That is, for many Cree youth *miyupimaatsiun* is a distant ideal that they may not be able to attain, and some may not even want. This is obviously a central insight for our purposes, as it outlines how wellbeing is an ever-changing concept that must be contextually grounded. As Adelson states, the crux of the matter is that wellbeing, its definitions and its calculations

are neither unitary nor fixed. The challenge that she presents is one that may relate not only to the changing culture and life of Cree people, but also other cultures and contexts, and it is not to delimit the concept of wellbeing, but rather “to engage meaningfully with the all of the nuances and complexities of that world as it transforms, such that both concepts are understood as necessarily always unfinished” (121).

The foregoing examples highlight that anthropologists are increasingly recognising the need to explore wellbeing and happiness in various contexts, such as in indigenous communities in both Australia and Canada, different communities in the MENA region, urban communities in North America, and so on. Others such as Slyomovics have challenged scholars to investigate wellbeing and happiness even in the difficult conditions of political instability and violence. These varied understandings of wellbeing challenge notions of wellbeing that have gained prominence in the fields of psychology and development, which regard wellbeing as a trait which can be measured and compared cross-culturally. Rather, these ethnographically grounded approaches challenge scholars to allow nuanced conceptions of wellbeing to shape research and policy. Literature which explores the wellbeing of those who have experienced displacement and political violence is available yet scarce.

Wellbeing research in the context of war and forced displacement may appear at first glance to be an unexpected direction to take. Yotebieng et al voice this sense of perplexity with the title of their article: “Is wellbeing possible when you are out of place?” (2018). Yet as we consider the lived experiences of forcibly displaced populations around the world, it is imperative that we consider the full spectrum of experiences, ranging from suffering to wellbeing. Excluding forcibly displaced populations from this conversation would contribute further to what Malkki (1995) calls the essentialisation of the experience of refugees, and the imposition of narrow perceptions of what their experiences must conform to. Most importantly, one cannot see how the need for a better understanding of wellbeing among refugees can be avoided when the majority of psychosocial interventions claim that the psychosocial wellbeing of refugees is one of their main objectives. These interventions range from local non-governmental organisations, to

international aid agencies such as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and to international government programs – yet most of these bodies do not provide any clear conceptualisation of wellbeing.

For example, anthropologists McMichael and Manderson (2004) explore wellbeing specifically as it relates to social capital within the experiences and lives of Somali women refugees resettled in Australia. The researchers conducted 42 in-depth interviews with Somali women in Australia between 2000 and 2001 about war, displacement, resettlement and emotional health. The Somali women maintained that a sense of wellbeing could be found in social events and religious gatherings that promote shared time, as well as fostering continuance of Somali culture and community life. Yet the researchers concluded that “despite instances of solidarity and support, including both formal and informal community activities and structures, women have an overriding sense that social networks have been fragile and fractured” (McMichael and Manderson, 2004, 96). Both social elements such as family separation and the eroded social networks, as well as the displacement itself and current conditions of resettlement, contribute to Somali women reflecting that in the short term community cohesion is undermined (McMichael and Manderson, 2004). This example both widens the scope of wellbeing research and reveals its various complex dimensions. In this instance, McMichael and Manderson’s research emphasised how social networks and social activities contribute to Somali refugee women’s experience of wellbeing.

While McMichael and Manderson explored the role of social capital in contributing to wellbeing, other literature highlights the role of cultural values in constituting resilience and its contribution of overall wellbeing. For instance, Panter-Brick and Eggerman argue that wellbeing is maintained through resilience in contexts of political violence, and investigate its connection to cultural values and hope. They explore these concepts in a study they conducted in Afghanistan, where they carried out semi-structured questionnaires and organized drawing sessions with 1,011 16-year-old students, as well as 1,011 caregivers (Eggerman and Panter-Brick, 2010, 73). Their study aimed to assess the psychosocial

wellbeing and life adversity of respondents. The authors identified three dimensions of daily life in Afghanistan which reflect aspects of everyday adversity and cross-generational suffering. These dimensions are hope, suffering and entrapment. Hope is the basis upon which resilience rests, and is related to cultural values such as religious faith and individual effort. Social suffering, in turn, is strongly related to economic insecurities, which lead to psychological distress as it also causes family tensions and community conflict, thus also hindering social ambitions. The last dimension the authors discuss is entrapment, defined as the tension experienced by people due to “the desire to maintain personal or collective values and the bald economic demands of survival” (Eggerman and Panter-Brick, 2010, 81). Eggerman and Panter-Brick highlight the complexity present in a thorough engagement with wellbeing, resilience and hope in the context of political conflict, as it is not solely the politics that produce stress and anxiety, but it is also daily stressors as well as the cultural values which influence them (i.e. religious faith and individual effort).

In a different context, but with a similar focus, Sampson and Gifford (2009) offer insight related to meanings of wellbeing from the perspective of young people of varied refugee backgrounds resettled in Australia. Their four-year study aimed to describe which social determinants promoted psychosocial wellbeing among recently arrived refugee youth in the early settlement period, as well as *where* they felt a sense of wellbeing (118). The authors explored participants’ connections to place through visual methods such as photo-novellas (also known as photovoice), as well as neighbourhood diagrams, in addition to ethnographic methods and informal conversations with 11–19-year-olds in their first year of resettlement. They identify four types of places that contribute to the process of restoration and wellbeing of resettled youth in their efforts to “become at home” in the new host country. Participants highlighted everyday and mundane spaces such as the home, schools, parks and libraries as falling within these four categories, which are: places of opportunity, which “promote meaning and purpose in life” (128); places of restoration, which “reduce fear and anxiety and promote dignity and value” (128); places of sociality promoting “attachment and connection to others” (128); and places of safety, which “promotes a sense of security” (128). These spaces build a framework for therapeutic landscapes

which the authors suggest can contribute to recovery goals set by UNHCR. Sampson and Gifford's research highlights how spaces, and meanings attributed to those spaces, can be an influential part of wellbeing in populations of resettled refugees. Yet in the same line as some of the previous examples of anthropological approaches to wellbeing, this example reasserts the importance of highlighting specific meanings. These meanings contribute to the promotion of wellbeing throughout experiences of displacement from the perspectives of those who have experienced it.

Other authors have also explored the role of developing a relationship to space as a component of wellbeing. For instance, Cattell et al. (2008) examined the relationship people built with public spaces. In Newham, east London, an area which has the highest proportion of black and minority ethnic groups (as well as recent refugee and migrant residents) in the UK, they explored links between public spaces and diverse conceptualisations of wellbeing (458). Cattell and colleagues examined these links through asking residents in the neighbourhood whether the people they see and meet make them feel good or not, as well as asking about the places they go to and whether they make them feel good or not. They posed these questions and explored narratives related to the neighbourhood through interviews, observation and discussion groups. Cattell and colleagues (2008) identify several themes related to how people derive benefit from the places they visit. Among these themes is the value of everyday spaces such as the market or one's own front drive, as places that are special or unique for reasons not perceptible to outsiders, since these places may relate to their comfort, and the shared social elements they represent. Memories also play a role in the value and meaning people associate with places, such as reminding them of their home country or place of birth. Another aspect that makes certain spaces highly valued are those that provide escape from the pressures of life and offer opportunities to be alone, such as cemeteries. At the same time, places were also appreciated and valued for the benefit they provide through being spaces for building and maintaining social relationships and interactions, and for providing a sense of escape from the stresses of life. Nevertheless, the authors recognise that these spaces of social interaction may also be detrimental to wellbeing, as they are the same spaces where residents experience

harassment or racism, leading them to withdraw into their private homes and to be isolated. Cattell et al. (2008) argue that such mundane spaces are beneficial to wellbeing, not only because of the social interactions that take place, but because “spaces can contribute to meeting needs for security, identity and sense of place” (556).

The anthropological perspectives presented above show how understandings of wellbeing are enriched through ethnographic and participatory methodologies which seek to capture the complexity and nuances within the lived experiences of many cultures and populations. The studies presented turn our attention to the multiple ways wellbeing can be expressed through highlighting local ways of expressing wellbeing rooted in indigenous languages and lives. Space was explored as an aspect of wellbeing, which is important to consider in examining how mundane spaces can be part of the experience of wellbeing. Social relations were shown to simultaneously contribute to improving wellbeing, but risk obstructing seeking wellbeing at the same time. A major theme that I learned which presented itself throughout the research is the coexistence of multiple and sometimes varying emotions situated within the experience of wellbeing, especially in the context of displacement where wellbeing did not imply the absence of distress.

Conclusion

This literature review presented varied perspectives on wellbeing as well as related concepts such as resilience, hope, and happiness, drawing on scholarly work from the fields of psychology, development economics and anthropology. The overview has showcased the diversity of views on the issue of wellbeing, as well as the need for further focus on what specifically is meant by wellbeing in the context in which it is being used. More importantly, it highlights the need for further exploration of the meanings and experiences related to wellbeing in the context of political violence and displacement.

Wellbeing has been a topic of increased research interest in all of the aforementioned fields. Yet it is also clear that there are gaps in trying to understand wellbeing from the perspectives of refugees and those who have

experienced political violence. In the field of psychology, both hedonic and eudaimonic approaches to wellbeing attempt to measure and assess wellbeing, yet very little consideration is given to how experiencing adverse situations such as political violence may influence or disrupt these theories and, consequently, the instruments which rely on them (SWD, PWD, SDT). Beyond wellbeing research, psychology researchers have explored resilience as a positive response to adverse circumstances born of political violence. Increased interest in resilience research becomes pertinent to explorations of wellbeing when it is considered a dimension or component of overall wellbeing. Some of the research on resilience contributes to my approach to wellbeing from the perspective of Syrian refugees in Jordan – as an experience and a process, not as a trait.

Wellbeing in the field of development, shaped by fields such as psychology, philosophy and economics, draws its significance from the fact that it shapes and affects international policy and local governmental policies, which in turn influence interventions. But this research rarely, if ever, considers the role of displacement in contributing to how wellbeing should be approached in development endeavors. My own research does not directly engage with developmental approaches beyond this chapter, but my framework places emphasis on the experiences of displaced populations in such a way that would benefit developmental research – particularly in incorporating the voices of the displaced within developmental research agendas. More enlightened intervention policies may, as a result, come out of these reformulated research agendas.

Anthropological perspectives allow researchers to focus on the lived experiences and in-depth accounts of the lives of researched communities. Nevertheless, the topic of wellbeing among forcibly displaced populations has not received much attention until very recently. Some of this recent research on the wellbeing of refugees within anthropology has been useful in presenting the complexity of experiencing wellbeing throughout displacement. It also highlights the need to provide nuanced accounts of wellbeing in the specific circumstances of displacement. This dissertation builds on this kind of anthropological research, where I provide ethnographic and participatory engagement with wellbeing as experienced by Syrians in Jordan.

Within my own research I draw on the intersection of the disciplines I have explored above while situating my exploration of wellbeing within anthropology. Through considering the contributions and limitations of psychology, development and philosophy I am able to consider how wellbeing is currently conceptualised to inform my own work. Through the exploration of wellbeing within the field of psychology it is apparent that both hedonic and eudaimonic approaches include important dimensions of wellbeing. The consideration of both affective aspects of wellbeing as well as aspects related to personal fulfilment is important. Despite the scarcity of the exploration of wellbeing in contexts of political conflict, the studies presented highlight the need to pay attention to contextual and cultural specificity. Moreover, the heavy reliance on survey tools to assess wellbeing highlights the need for in-depth exploration of meanings of wellbeing which are relevant to varying contexts, including those affected by political violence.

As for development, the shift towards adopting wellbeing as a marker of progress within nations was highlighted, but the heavy reliance on conceptualisations of wellbeing from high-income countries ignores and marginalises conceptions of wellbeing in low- and middle-income countries, while at the same time informing policies which affect humanitarian interventions globally. As for the philosophical contribution to wellbeing explorations, despite being abstract and not wholly explored in relation to contexts of political conflict, the proposition by Sen to consider functionings which are most valued according to the population in question is helpful in focusing what people value, and how that may change according to changes within their lives. This is especially important to consider when examining how wellbeing is conceptualised and experienced while living within the continuously changing context of displacement. My approach contributes to the current discourses of wellbeing in anthropology by following several parts of the experience of displacement, and focusing on how wellbeing is variously experienced as the lives of Syrians change from one period to the next.

3. Methodology

In approaching the concept of wellbeing, I encountered a multitude of scholarly work which utilised varied methods to explore and investigate the concept. Most of the research methods were quantitative and sought to measure and assess the wellbeing of societies and nations, while others sought theoretical, non-empirical approaches to investigate the concept. Upon developing my own research questions, I decided to engage with the concept of wellbeing from the perspective and understanding of people who have lived experience of displacement and, thereby, build on and expand the existing wellbeing literature as this perspective had not been fully explored. Specifically, I chose to follow ethnographic and participatory methods in order to draw out the experiences, perceptions and meanings related to feeling well from the perspectives of my interlocutors.

Firstly, ethnographic methods including participant observation and interviews, allowed me to gain a close encounter and understanding of certain dimensions of the lives of Syrians I met with. I sought to derive at a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of wellbeing as a practice by not solely describing related behaviours, but also the ways in which it manifests in various contexts, different time frames, and among differently positioned individuals and groups. Secondly, participatory methodologies allowed me to explore the historical and social agency of the people in question, in this case through “inclusivity and ... recognizing the value of engaging in the research process (rather than including only as subjects of the research) those who are intended to be the beneficiaries, users, and stakeholders of the research” (Cargo and Mercer, 2008, 326). By combining methodologies I was able to draw upon both research approaches to enrich my own research. This in turn allowed me to observe and reflect on the details of lived experiences of my participants. It also provided me with detailed descriptions from my interviews and allowed my participants to influence and shape parts of my overall research and interpretations. In the following, I will provide an overview of participatory methodologies while focusing on the particular methods that I used in my research.

Ethnographic methods

Given the well-established history of ethnographic methods, I will only briefly outline the usefulness of the approach for my own research. Ingold (2014) put it succinctly when he declared that ethnography is simply “writing about the people” (385). But, of course, the actual process of writing about them entails a whole host of complications and dilemmas for the researcher, many of which derive from the different disciplinary origins of this particular research method. Ethnography, initially utilised by anthropology, and later incorporated by sociology and other disciplines like public health, has developed a number of practical methods, including participant observation and structured and semi-structured interviews. Typically, this has meant that researchers must step out of their own milieus and base themselves among a community in which they are foreign (Lenette and Boddy, 2013). But methods evolve and ethnography has gone through a series of transformations. More and more, ethnographers do not need to pick foreign or isolated research sites, but rather engage in more familiar cultural and social landscapes, albeit to varying degrees (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Lenette and Boddy, 2013). What has remained constant is the need for researchers to live with the communities they study for extended periods of time (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Van Maanen 2011).

So what is ethnography? It’s complicated evolution and travel across disciplines means that there really is no simple answer. But the ethnographic method may be summed up as consisting “of going to a place, interacting with the subjects in their ‘natural’ environment, recording the observations, and then interpreting this data” (Sanchez-Jankowski, 2018,150). Certainly, such definitions run the risk of reductionism, but a version of this general formula has made its way into most incarnations of ethnography, even those definitions intersecting with critical ethnographic schools of thought. Hemment’s work advances such critical ethnographic interpretations, asserting that both critical ethnography and participatory research could be made compatible with one another. According to her, including participatory research in ethnographic encounters “offers a means of reconceptualizing the ethnographic encounter to allow for some of the collaborations critical anthropologists advocate” (Hemment, 2017, 302). At the

same time the inclusion of one-on-one interviews allows for more private interactions and conversations between researchers and interlocutors. This is in line with the argument of Lenette and Boddy (2013), whose ethnographic stance regards cultures not as isolated and atomised entities, but as multiple intersecting sites which offer up more space for participant engagement and collaboration. This kind of engagement allows us to position ourselves within fieldwork, thereby unmasking relations of power that may not be apparent on the surface.

These dynamics manifest as tensions between the ethnographer and the community in which she is embedded. But this tension can be addressed by pushing for the perspectives of “the subjects” to be reported and highlighted and, moreover, for those perspectives to be analysed by the participants themselves (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Lassiter, 2005). Most importantly, this means that researchers must try to avoid imposing a set of preconceived ideas originating from their own positionality on the social world they are trying to understand. Rather, they must utilise this mode of observation to develop a collaborative understanding of the detailed lived experiences of the communities under study (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, 230–1).

Participatory methods

The participatory research paradigm is characterised by multiple approaches varying in terms of terminologies and names as well as goals, practices and methods of implementation (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). Such approaches are variously known as participatory action research (PAR), participatory rural appraisal (PRA), practitioner research and popular research. Additionally, there exist discipline-specific terms that have emerged in education, development, and psychology (Chambers, 1992; Frisby, McGuire and Reid, 2009; Wallerstein and Duran, 2006; Adelman, 1993)²⁰. Under the umbrella of

²⁰ Development: rapid assessment procedures, rapid rural appraisal, and participatory rural appraisal;. Education: classroom action research, critical action research, and practitioner research. Organizational psychology: action learning, action science, action inquiry, and industrial action research. Social action literature: including collaborative action research, participatory research, emancipatory or liberatory research, and dialectical inquiry. (Wallerstein and Duran, 2006)

participatory approaches are a host of methods, such as community art and media, photography and film, storytelling, dialogue, interviewing, diagramming, mapping, shared analysis and writing and presentations (Kindon et al., 2007). Despite these differences, the methods are linked by a crucial commonality – namely, the central role that community and individual research participants play in conceptualising and carrying out research, data analysis and dissemination of research findings (Reason and Bradbury 2008; Wallerstein and Duran 2008). One early and widely cited definition of participatory research is “a practice that attempt[s] to put the less powerful at the center of the knowledge creation process to move people and their daily lived experiences of struggle and survival from the margins of epistemology to the center” (Hall, 1992, 15).

The main goal of participatory research is to shift power to the affected individuals by enabling them to define research agendas that are relevant to them and their communities. Therefore, it is argued, that emerging research is conceived of as meaningful, and has the potential to impact or even transform the lives of marginalised and disempowered individuals and groups (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1996; Kindon et al., 2007). In other words, it is paramount to learn from “those who have been *most* systematically excluded, oppressed or denied carry specifically revealing wisdom about the history, structure, consequences and the fracture points in unjust social arrangements” (Fine, in Kindon et al., 2007). Unlike more traditional research, participatory approaches steer away from expert knowledge production in that they encourage researchers and participants to rid themselves of the formal roles of researcher/expert/institution and participant/subject. Rather, participatory methodologies challenge these traditional hierarchies of researcher and researched, and acknowledge the knowledge of the local people and communities with whom academics seek to work and learn from (Kindon et al., 2007).²¹

²¹ see also: Beresford, P. (2002) User involvement in research and evaluation: liberation or regulation. *Social Policy and Society*, 1 (2), 95-105.

Barnes, C., Mercer, G. (2003) Research review on user involvement in promoting change and enhancing the quality of social ‘care’ services for disabled people. University of Leeds, Centre for Disability Studies. [www.leeds.ac.uk/disability-studies/archiveuk/Barnes/SCIE user involvement 2.pdf](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/disability-studies/archiveuk/Barnes/SCIE%20user%20involvement%202.pdf)

Beresford, P. (2007) User involvement, research and health inequalities: developing new directions. *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 15 (4), 306-312.

Participatory research methods have been built on the work and the discussions of various academics and activist scholars, as well as community organisers who sought to challenge the dominant view of knowledge production. One of the early scholars who contributed to this field is Kurt Lewin (Kindon et al., 2007). Lewin, a social psychologist, worked with his PhD students to develop and implement research methods that focused on action (Lewin, 1946; Wallerstein and Duran, 2008), thereby creating “the means of systematic enquiry for all participants in the quest for greater effectiveness through democratic participation” (Adelman, 1993, 7). Their research, carried out between 1932 and 1940, employed action-research and democratic active participation in the form of group discussions and a review of problems and their solutions by workers in the factory to have better production and efficiency. Lewin argued that theories based on his research which encouraged active participation could inform social planning and action in more effective and meaningful ways (Adelman, 1993; Lewin, 1946).

Yet much of Lewin’s theorisation about action research and active participation in research was not implemented until the 1960s. Wallerstein and Duran (2008) recognise that it was also in the 60s and 70s that the world witnessed a number of political struggles, which led to tensions and challenges in relationships between academic institutions and societies. These tensions, in turn, encouraged many researchers and scholars to investigate and develop new methods of research and social theories. It was then that the world “saw the proliferation of participatory and participatory action research approaches ...[and] presented a new epistemology of practice grounded in people’s struggles and local knowledges” (Kindon et al., 2007, 10; Lykes and Mallona, 2008).

During this period other strands of research also called for and developed methods of participatory research that aimed to “[transform] the concept that knowledge emanated from the academy and created openness to knowledge

Boote, J., Telford, R., Cooper, C. (2002) Consumer involvement in health research: a review and research agenda. *Health Policy*, 61, 213-236.

Carrick, R., Mitchell, A., Lloyd, K. (2001) User involvement in research: power and compromise. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 11, 217-225.

Telford, R., and Faulkner, A. (2004) Learning about service user involvement in mental health research. *Journal of Mental Health*, 13 (6), 549-559.

learned from people's experience" (Wallerstein and Duran, 2008, 28). The move to develop participatory approaches for research was particularly strong in Latin America (Rahman, 2008). While Lewin's conception was characterised by limited political engagement and largely refrained from challenging power structures, the traditions originating in Latin America and other countries that were experiencing political strife included scholars and community organizers who were quite explicitly politically motivated. They viewed research as committed to "critical consciousness, emancipation ... [and] challenged their own roles in communities with the political ideology that self-conscious people, those who are poor and oppressed, will progressively transform their environment by their own praxis" (Wallerstein and Duran, 2008, 28). Among the renowned names within this movement was the Brazilian philosopher Paolo Freire, whose view that there is no objective truth asserts a connection between objectivity and subjectivity. Freire highlights this point, stating that "one cannot conceive of objectivity without subjectivity. Neither can exist without the other, nor can they be dichotomized...but rather subjectivity and objectivity [are] in constant dialectical relationship" (Freire, 1970, 24; Wallerstein and Duran, 2008, 28).

Not only did these novel approaches to research achieve new methods of data collection, interpretation and dissemination, but they also critically contributed to an epistemological shift within the social sciences – a shift from a positivist epistemology towards a social constructionist view of the world (Frisby et al., 2009; Hall, 1992; Kindon et al., 2007, 13; Swantz, 2008). Emerging constructivist perspectives argued that participatory modes of research follow the epistemological assumption that knowledge is socially constructed, hence adopting research approaches which allow for "social group or collective analysis of life experience of power and knowledge" (Hall, 1992, 20). Particularly, PAR methodologies follow an orientation of praxis informed by Freirian thought, where "only human beings are praxis – the praxis which, as the reflection and action which truly transform reality, is the source of knowledge and creation...through their continuing praxis, men and women simultaneously create history and become historical-social beings" (Freire, 1979, 74). This orientation within research means that both researchers *and* participants work towards transformation and change within the communities they work, and live through

cycles of reflection and action. This Freirian approach, when applied to research, implies a change in the relationships between researcher and participants analogous to the change he suggests between teachers and students where “they become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow” (Freire, 1970, 53).

Critical thinking and reflexivity within participatory research approaches

Regardless of the naming of the participatory approaches, the issue of ‘participation’ itself and what precisely it means are a topic for debate (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995). Wallerstein and Duran (2008) present several critical questions related to participation in order to think of where power lies in participatory research methods. They ask: “who is participating, for whom are we participating? In what sphere are we participating, to what ends are we participating, and perhaps most important of all, who or what is limiting participation in shaping our lives?” (29) These questions are not only helpful in theoretically examining the various participatory methods that exist, but they can also be used as tools of reflection on one’s own research.

In the same vein, Fine and Torre (2004) challenge social scientists to interrogate their methods when they are committed to their studies. In the context of their research in schools and prisons they ask, “How do these global and local shifts in power affect how we design and engage our work?” (16). Gaventa and Cornwall (2008) raise similar questions on where power lies within research strategies. The authors present PAR as a methodological strategy to reveal power and socio-political exclusion, and they do so by allowing for a democratic research process that recognises new categories of knowledge. This is implemented by challenging power within dominant knowledge production systems by introducing different forms of knowledge that firstly highlight the participation of those affected by the research problem in the research process; secondly, recognising that knowledge is socially constructed; and thirdly, recognising that there are different ways of knowing and forms of knowledge (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008, 179). Fine and Torre push in the same direction,

stressing the importance of recognising power. Within a participatory methodology framework, therefore, we must interrogate our positionality and sources of power within the context in which we are situated ourselves, as well as within our own research.

In my own research with two groups of Syrian refugees in Jordan, I employed the participatory method of photovoice, in which participants take photos of their lived experience in relation to the research topic, with discussion of the themes that emerge from the photos. This allowed me and the participants to engage in discussions and dialogues about the experiences and conceptualisations of wellbeing for a Syrian in Jordan after displacement. As already highlighted in the introduction to this dissertation, Syrians in Jordan currently experience exclusion from employment, unless given hard-to-acquire work permits, and exclusion from social spheres, due to tensions between them and some Jordanian communities they live among, as well as feelings of marginalisation as they depend on aid and services largely from non-governmental organisations (Mercy Corps, 2013). By participating in photovoice, the Syrian refugees were provided with an inclusive space in which to co-produce knowledge about their own wellbeing while living in Jordan. They did this by photographing aspects of their lives relating to their own wellbeing, discussing and reflecting on themes that emerge from these photographs.

This approach helped me as I attempted to reduce the power differential between me as an outsider to the Syrian community in Jordan, in the role of researcher, and the participants leading their lives now in various urban areas in Jordan. Yet, I am aware that my attempts to implement participatory aspects into my research methods were limited, as I had arrived at the field with a ready-made agenda and plan for a research project about which I had consulted very few from the Syrian community. With the knowledge that I am a PhD student with time constraints and formal academic requirements, there were many factors that influenced how I envisioned the work long before I was on the ground. To mitigate some of my influence over the research agenda, I consciously tried to pick up on ideas and encourage suggestions for activities the groups themselves wanted to lead. This resulted in participant-led activities, such as cooking a Syrian meal,

going on a trip with the families of the participants to a natural reserve, sharing in a nostalgic evening of traditional Syrian foods and snacks and, finally, an exhibition of photographs that resulted from the photovoice project. Each of these activities were suggested and led by the participants themselves, who discussed what types of activities they would like to carry out in relation to exploring and experiencing wellbeing. I could support these activities as a participant by bringing some food or materials needed to realise them. These activities were different from the overall photovoice project in that the participants felt these were normal undertakings that could take place outside the framework of research and academia, but related directly to what they do to feel well and contributed to their overall wellbeing with friends and family. These activities definitely fostered a high sense of ownership and agency for all the participants involved, leading to reflective discussions in later group meetings.

Nevertheless, I am conscious and always reminded of my position as a PhD candidate; for one thing, I could easily return to the safety of my office at any point, and time constraints limited my ability to give more time for further discussions and work with the groups. I also realised after finishing my fieldwork – through WhatsApp texts and Facebook messages with participants – that they did not have the opportunity for respite from their daily routines and struggles, as the researcher does. The participatory project would have needed more time and engagement to develop an action component and lead to noticeable social and communal change with regards to their experiences of wellbeing.

Research location and sample

Study location

My research took place in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, a small country located on the East Bank of the Jordan River. The population size is estimated to be 9,814,995 (Department of Statistics, 2017) with most of the population living in the west and north-west of the country as well as areas surrounding Amman and in the south-west near Aqaba. Neighbouring war-affected countries such as Syria and Palestine, Jordan has continuously hosted

large numbers of displaced persons. This makes Jordan a host to the 2nd highest number of refugees per 1000 inhabitants in the world (see Jordan fact sheet, February 2017, UNHCR, 2017).

Among the 655,732 Syrian refugees, only about 17% reside in the three formal refugee camps of Zaatari, Azraq, and the Emirati Jordanian Camp. The remaining 83% of Syrian refugees live in urban areas including Amman as well as cities located in the northern governorates such as Irbid, Ramtha, and Zarqa. According to UNHCR's Vulnerability Assessment Framework Baseline Survey approximately 86% of Syrians currently living in urban areas in Jordan live below the Jordanian poverty line (UNHCR, 2015). These Syrian refugees technically have the right to access public services like healthcare and education; yet to be eligible they are faced with various procedural obstacles such as being required to have a UNHCR Asylum Seekers Certificate and a Ministry of Interior (MoI) service card, both of which involve a bureaucratic and cumbersome process to obtain (Amnesty International, 2016).

The most recent influx of refugees did not only have an impact on the population density of certain areas, but also increased demand on public services such as health, education, sanitation and electricity. In addition, rent in most areas rose significantly and there was higher competition for lower paying jobs between refugees and the local population. This resulted in a negative perception of the refugee population among Jordanians and, consequently, tensions between the host community and refugees became noticeable (Socio-economic Inequality in Jordan, UNDP, 2015).

I conducted ethnographic fieldwork primarily in Amman, the country's capital city, and the town of Rusayfe located in the Zarqa governorate. In addition, I conducted some visits to the northern cities of Irbid and Ramtha – areas in which many Syrians who fled from the current war sought refuge. Amman has a population of approximately 4,119,500 and is a host to about 180,450 Syrians (UNHCR, 2017). To ease some of the pressure, a myriad of NGOs currently try to provide aid to the refugee populations. Many of them primarily distribute aid to refugees living within the refugee camps, but some also support refugees who live in urban areas outside the camps. Unlike Amman, Rusayfe is a small town

estimated to have 500,000 residents, resulting in high population density (10851.4 per km squared) (Russifah.gov.jo, 2019; Ministry of Interior, 2019). The location is sought after by Jordanians as well as refugee populations mainly due to the cheap price of land and proximity to Amman. Due to the large number of refugees in the area, several NGOs have begun working there including Action Aid International, Premiere Urgence Internationale and around ten other active community charity organisations. Their work focuses mostly on youth through community projects and supporting refugee communities through providing financial aid as well as legal and health advice (from fieldwork conversations, 2016).

Sample

I interviewed 24 refugees from Syria (17 women and 7 men) who were between 18 and 36 years of age. The photovoice project, on the other hand, included ten participants in Rusayfe (eight women and two men) and six participants in Amman (one woman and five men). Their ages ranged between 18 to 38 years with one 60-year old woman. The 11 NGO workers I interviewed had professional backgrounds in psychosocial counselling (6), psychological nursing (1), and administrative work (4). They worked for 11 organisations focusing mainly on providing psychosocial activities and psychological support, as well as general health and legal advice and support.

Research methods and data collection

Sampling

To invite participants to partake in interviews and the photovoice project, I adopted two methods of recruitment. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I used my visits and initial contacts with NGOs to introduce me to the people they support, especially those they expected would be willing to participate in research. This method of recruitment was helpful as NGOs acted as access points and gatekeepers who facilitated an initial relationship with potential participants. Once I met with a participant I also used the snowball sampling method – a method of

recruitment which relies on “referral made among people who are or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest” (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981, 141) – and asked whether they could connect me with other Syrians they knew and thought would be willing to participate in the study. Thereby, I made use of my existing personal networks and the social networks that I was developing over time.

In order to recruit NGO workers, I conducted an internet search to map the organisations that provided mental health and psychosocial services to refugees in and around Amman. I then sent an email to each of the 11 organisations I found, introducing myself and my affiliation to King’s College London as a PhD candidate, and provided a summary about my research interests, with a formal letter confirming my affiliation attached. The internet research also led me to a document that listed all the organisations working in the field of mental health and psychosocial services provision entitled “Who is Doing What, Where and When (4Ws) in Mental Health Psychosocial Support in Jordan”. I used this document to help me identify which organizations were relevant to the focus of my research.

Through these methods of finding the organizations and visiting them, I also intended to recruit participants for the ethnographic and participatory parts of my research. Overall, I had intended that the sample consist of young men and women within the age of (18-35), who had experienced displacement from Syria after 2011 to participate. I had hoped that I would be able to speak with, interview and allow for the participation of both young men and women equally. However, while doing my fieldwork I met more women than men. This was mainly the result of recruiting and meeting people through NGOs, where mostly women met to seek services and support. These visits and connections with the organizations allowed me to interview persons from various walks of life, some were students, others were stay-at-home mothers, many were unemployed and searching for employment, some were employed as dry-cleaners, builders, or volunteered at NGOS.

In the participatory component of the research, the demographic characteristics of the groups I established in Rusayfe and Amman were different due to the setting where the meetings took place as well as the recruitment

process. Rusayfe is a densely populated town, which had welcomed many refugee populations, and had a lower socio-economic standard of living than the capital, with scarce opportunities for activities other than those provided by community centres and NGOs. Amman on the other hand is the capital of Jordan, a city which is marked by great economic disparities – including areas densely populated and others areas of great affluence. Amman also was host to many refugee communities, yet had opportunities for education, activities, volunteering and work which exceeded those found in Rusayfe. The different living conditions, stark economic differences, as well as the differences in opportunities available in each of these settings meant that the groups established in each of these places would reflect some of these differences. In both settings, I was keen on committing to the participants who were willing join since I faced challenges in establishing the groups. Especially in Rusayfe where I tried several times to establish a group, yet after the second or third meeting the participants would not be able to continue with their commitment. The Rusayfe group which met at a community which provides services to refugees in that town, was composed mainly of women with two men who were husband of two of the women. The context was familial, as others in the group were also related either by being siblings, or in-laws, or neighbours.

As for the Amman group which was recruited mainly through snowballing, and met at an NGO which hosted cultural events, the context consisted of young men, and one woman (who eventually could not continue with the meetings due to other commitments). The group members were mostly in university or interested in pursuing a university education. Only one person within that group was married. These participants who were generous with their time and shared their experiences with me shaped the course of the research as well as my understandings and interpretations of their experiences.

Semi-structured interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with both displaced Syrians living in Jordan and NGO workers. Semi-structured interviews are a method of

interviewing where the researcher uses a predetermined set of questions, which can change slightly according to the information provided by the interviewee. The interviewee is usually encouraged to express themselves freely and provide information which they deem important (Kienzler and Pedersen, 2007). Semi-structured interviews allow for eliciting qualitative information about a specific topic (Kienzler and Pedersen, 2007), and in the case of my own research enabled me to have in-depth and open conversations with interviewees. The format allowed the participants to express their opinions and ideas in their own words (see Esterberg, 2002). Interview guides that I used in conversations with displaced Syrians included questions related to their journey from Syria to Jordan, about their lives before the crisis in Syria, the lives they lead now in Jordan and what aspects of their experiences relate to wellbeing. In interviews conducted with NGO workers I inquired about their job description, when they started working with Syrians in Jordan, what kinds of services or interventions their organisations provided and how they thought their work related to Syrians and their wellbeing. I also asked them about their own conception of wellbeing, as well as their organisations' conceptions of wellbeing in the context of forced displacement. Interviews with both participant groups lasted between one and two hours and were conducted in places chosen by the participants themselves. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. In five cases, participants were not comfortable with being recorded and, therefore, I took detailed notes during our conversations which I typed up immediately afterwards.

Participant observation

My research included participant observation at NGO offices and community centres in each of my different research sites. Participant observation is a method by which a researcher lives with and observes the lives of the community and the individuals she is interested in and exploring the lives of. The method allows us to understand cultural and social dimensions and details within the lived experience of people which are difficult to understand or observe

through other methods. It requires patience and building trust with the community a researcher wants to explore. In these offices and centres I was able to have conversations with both people working there and those visiting and seeking support. At times I was able to participate in the routines of the centres, such as a morning coffee with the workers at a Rusayfe community center. At other times I was allowed to join activities targeting the beneficiaries, such as doing crochet at an Amman community centre. Throughout all of these experiences of participant observation, I was able to understand more about the lives of Syrian refugees in Jordan. I had the opportunity to engage in informal conversations with them, as well as the opportunity to interview some of the people I met in those visits. As a result, I was able to observe and understand their social lives beyond their access to services in these centres.

Photovoice project

As outlined above, photovoice is a community-based participatory research method during which persons are provided with cameras with the aim of: (1) recording and reflecting their community's assets and concerns, (2) discussing issues of importance to the community in large and small groups to promote critical dialogue and produce shared knowledge, and (3) reaching policy makers (Wang and Redwood-Jones, 2001, 561). Working with a marginalised or vulnerable community such as Syrian refugees, I found that using photography as a method encouraged and enabled participants to share their knowledge the way they would like, on their own terms. This community-based participatory research method also allowed me to go beyond the focus on social relationships and phenomena as I aimed to equalise power differences between the participants and myself. This, in turn, enabled me to build trusting relationships and create a sense of ownership within the limitations that come with carrying out a PhD project (as explained above).

For the photovoice project, I recruited young Syrian men and women to form two groups in the areas of Amman and Rusayfe. Together we explored meanings and experiences related to wellbeing when displaced and living in

Jordan. The photovoice groups were carried out over a period of twelve weeks and each session lasted between two and two-and-a-half hours. This is in line with the approach suggested by Wang and Burris (1997) which I used as a template for my own work. With each group, the first three sessions were used for introductions and to explain the goals of the research project, to introduce the method and to establish group norms. In the fourth session a photographer joined us to give a basic photography training for the participants where technical use of the cameras and basic rules of photography were presented. We also discussed the ethics of photography such as the importance of privacy, consent, and power. Moreover, the participants practiced what they had learned by using their camera phones upon which they received feedback and discussed what they learned with the trainer. At the end of the photography training session, the participants were given disposable cameras to use and were encouraged to take pictures from their day-to-day lives relating to the topics of the research project (wellbeing and experiences, places and people that remind them of wellbeing) that had been discussed in the previous sessions. Once the participants had finished taking photos (one week for one group and two weeks for another group), the cameras were collected and the films developed in order to be handed back to the group. When the participants received the photographs, a photo sharing session took place (the fifth session), during which participants selected photos (approximately four for each participant) that they felt expressed stories and meanings related to wellbeing, which they wanted to share with the rest of the group. The emerging stories were written down or shared orally according to the preference of the participant. A following session (the sixth session) was allocated to discuss and reflect on the content of the photographs and the stories that had been shared. This allowed participants to reflect on their fellow participants' stories and the ways in which they echoed their own. At the end of this particular session, I encouraged participants to discuss what they would like to do with the photographs. One group decided that they would like to share their stories and photographs in a public exhibition (Rusayfe), whereas the other group (Amman) wanted to keep the photographs and share them personally with organisations and persons whom they felt were close and important to them. Finally, the last session (the seventh session) was focused on themes that emerged throughout the previous meetings and their relation and wellbeing, the experience of

participating in the project, as well as the experienced of living in Jordan as a Syrian.

Through the photovoice project and from the various activities and discussions throughout the duration of my research, the participants and I were able to discuss the highs and the lows of being displaced in Jordan, sharing memories from their lives in Syria before and during the crisis, the co-existence of good and bad moments in their lives and emotions that accompanied them, their lives within families and the changes that have taken place as they moved to Jordan and their relationships with community and non-governmental organisations, as well as many other ideas that relate to the above.

Participant-led activities

The participants who were part of the photovoice project also suggested and led certain activities that allowed for different conversations that would otherwise not have taken place. One main event that was suggested by the participants of the Rusayfe group was the exhibition of their photos and stories in Amman. In exhibiting their photographs in Amman, they hoped to encourage a more public discourse about their lives as Syrians as seen through their own eyes. They titled it '*Basmat w Bassmat Souriyeh*', meaning 'Syrian smiles and imprints'.

In addition, participants suggested cooking and sharing a meal that consisted of Syrian dishes where each participant suggested and cooked a part of the meal. On another occasion, we planned a trip to a natural reserve and had a picnic with the families of the participants. The group in Amman suggested and led a Syrian evening where we ate Syrian snacks, drank tea and smoked *argilah* (water pipe) as the participants told stories from their time in Syria about friends and family and the way they passed time with them. Both the cooking and the Syrian evening were activities that related to normal and ordinary activities that would have been part of everyday life before the participants' displacement.

All these activities led to types of conversations that were intimate, needed little or no facilitation by me, and were natural to the participants who suggested them. The stories that were told and the social interactions between the participants resembled those of families and friends rather than participants in a research project.

Data analysis

As a result of the various methods used to conduct this research, I accumulated several types of data. Voice recordings and written notes from interviews, field notes from the participant observations and the discussions of the participatory methods, as well as photographs and the stories accompanying them from the photovoice project. I regard all of these types of data as text. I utilised reading and re-reading of notes and transcripts as well as re-listening of voice notes to re-acquaint myself with some of my data in preparation for analysis. *Atlas.ti* software was used to explore, annotate, code, and organize the data collected during group discussions and individual semistructured interviews (Lewis and Silver, 2007). Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory informed the analysis of the photographs, interview transcripts and field notes systematically. More specifically, the analysis was done through open coding, a process through which passages of text and aspects of images were identified, named, grouped and conceptually labelled.

Once the concepts were categorised, they were linked and organised by relationship in a process called axial coding. Through a process of comparative analysis, links were established between the categories and define their properties such as phenomena, causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, action strategies and consequences. Through an interpretative process and selective coding, core categories and themes were identified from which the theoretical conclusions were derived.

Ethical considerations

Participation in this research was entirely voluntary. Recruitment was done in a non-intrusive manner. Before they became involved, I met with participants to discuss the research objectives, expected outcomes, potential risks and benefits, as well as the possibility to refuse participation or withdraw from participation during the research. An information sheet, which explained the research and its objectives, was given to all potential participants and a period of time was provided to allow them to decide whether to participate or not (24 hours for the semi-structured interviews, and 3 days for photovoice project). Following this time period, a consent form was provided to participants, read together, and explained. Those who wanted to participate were given the choice of giving written or oral consent. If the participants chose to provide oral consent, all the statements in the consent form were read by the researcher and the participant responded orally with a “yes” or “no” to indicate agreement or disagreement. If the participant did not agree with any of the statements the researcher made note of it, and the name of the participant was not written on any sheet to provide full protection and to respect their wishes in choosing oral consent. The option of giving oral consent was important, as written consent may not be appropriate specifically because of the heightened sense of security that refugees develop due to being displaced and their experience of various forms of violence. All participants were able to withdraw from the study until the end of data collection period (31st March 2017). All information sheets, consent forms and discussions were in Arabic.

It was important for me to ensure participants’ anonymity. I followed the UK Data Protection Act 1998 in safeguarding the data obtained through the various methods of investigation. Only I had and continue to have access to participants’ personal data and none of the names used in this dissertation are their original names. Instead, I anonymised them using pseudonyms. During the research process, I further ensured my participants’ privacy and anonymity by allowing them to choose where they felt comfortable to be interviewed. Places of data collection varied. Interviews were conducted in people’s homes, offices of organisations where they sought support, or public places such as cafes. For the

photovoice project, each group decided together where to meet. We were able to use two spaces (a community centre and an NGO office) as hosts for the group sessions. Both locations were easily accessible for the participants and were places where they felt comfortable. The meeting time was also organised such that it would be convenient for the group participants – for the Rusayfe group the morning was easier and fit the schedules of the majority best, whereas for the Amman group, since many were university students, evening meetings suited them best.

As part of the photovoice research, disposable cameras were distributed for the participants' use as the main tool of the method. Once the cameras were given to the participants, they owned them and were responsible for their safety and proper usage. Although this is not an intended incentive, it may have acted as one. The cameras are an essential part of the methodology; the introduction of the cameras and the use of the cameras were within a process of teaching the participants basic techniques of photography, as well as the ethics of photography. In addition, it was clear that the cost of transportation to the meeting place could have been prohibitive for the Rusayfe group. After careful consideration and conversations with a worker in the community centre that hosted our meetings, I was advised that it would be respectful and helpful to cover the transportation cost. This meant that the meetings would not be a financial burden for the participants and would ensure that they had the ability to attend the meetings.

To mitigate potential psychological distress, I consulted the staff of community centres which also provided mental health services for refugees about their referral procedures, which were common and acceptable in Jordan. This meant that in the event that any of my interlocutors felt that our conversations caused any psychological distress I would have been able to follow these procedures. In one instance, as I was in middle of a participant observation, I saw an older woman expressing distress. I connected her to the psychosocial worker at that specific organization, who took care of her and scheduled a future appointment with her. In no other instances was this type of referral required.

Having presented in detail the steps I took in order to complete my research with the least harm possible, as well as paying attention to ethical scenarios that I may face and taking measures to mitigate them, there were some situations which were ethically ambiguous to deal with. By ethically ambiguous I mean that these were situations that I did not anticipate before reaching Jordan—forcing me to deal with them on the ground as they came along. Although these situations were rare, they are important to present here as they reflect some ethical dilemmas, we as researchers may face, and how I personally chose to go forth within such situations.

In the following I will present two situations in which I took decisions that were not considered in the ethical application, and in which I had to commit to a decision I felt best suited the context. The first situation pertained to the question of inclusion criteria and presence of children, and the second situation is related to the discussion of privacy and confidentiality.

While working to recruit participants for the participatory part of the research, I had to consider the parameters of my inclusion and exclusion criteria. I had intended that the age inclusion criteria would be adults between the age of 18-35. In the course of meeting persons who were interested and were able to commit to several meetings, many expressed concerns that they would rather come with family members, such as a sister-in-law, a husband, or a daughter-in-law. For example, a participant asked if she could bring along her sister-in-law, which I agreed to since I understood that it would make coming to the meetings easier and more comfortable for her. Her sister-in-law was in her early sixties and became one of the committed participants in the photo-voice group and participant led activities. Although her age was outside my earlier set inclusion criteria, her presence did not alter the dynamics of the group in any negative way. Both women, the first participant and her sister-in-law, were also comfortable with each other's company and contributed greatly to the discussions we had throughout the duration of our meetings. This flexibility in allowing certain deviations from the original inclusion-exclusion criteria allowed me to create deep connections with my participants and allowed them to feel welcome and comfortable with the setting of the group.

In the same sense of allowing participants to feel comfortable and facilitate their participation in the group, some of the participants who had children would

be burdened or unable to join if they were not able to bring their children along. In these cases I decided that it would be best to allow the children to be present and have them play together around their parents, while their parents were participating in the group meeting. In many of our meetings the children of several of the participants would be present – these included infants who still relied on their mothers for breast feeding, as well children as old as 6 years old. The children were not part of the discussions, and would usually spend the meeting together playing, or in their parent's lap.

While preparing for one of the participant-led activities the Rusayfe photovoice group and I had a discussion reflecting on privacy and confidentiality. The activity -sharing the group's photos and stories in an exhibition- required that we prepare the photos and decide how to label and introduce the participants on the event's Facebook page as well as on the plaques next to the photos. Rather than immediately deciding on not including any names as a way of adhering to the ethical guideline of protecting privacy, the decision of what type of introduction the participants had next to their photos was discussed together, and the participants chose various ways to introduce themselves. Some chose to use nicknames, others chose commonly used ways of referring to themselves such as father of X and mother of Y (Abu Ahmad, or Um Mohammad). This was a cause for another discussion about privacy at the place of exhibition itself.

Both dilemmas presented above show scenarios which I did not expect at the time of preparing for my fieldwork, and where I had to make decisions quickly in order to continue with my research with minimal burden or harm for my participants. I also had to consider the course of the research and whether these decisions would alter or be obstacles in completing the research itself. The situations were lessons on the ground about how to be responsive to context, while prioritizing the wellbeing of my participants. These were also instances where I reflected on how the ethics of research are not linear nor straightforward and need to be continuously attended to and negotiated throughout the research process. One can deviate from rigid ethical guidelines if it is for the benefit of those participating in the research.

Ethics approval was received from King's College London's ethics board on the 9th December 2015, reference number: HR15/162196.

Methodological limitations

For future engagement in participatory research, I would prefer to have additional time, flexibility and human resources to be able to follow some of Mercer and Cargo's (2008) guidance to strengthen participatory research practice. This would involve more equitable participation and involvement between academic and non-academic partners within all phases of research, beginning with the shaping of the scope of research, extending into the implementation phase and finally arriving at interpreting and analysing results and writing research outcomes (Mercer and Cargo, 2008). In the first part of my research design (in 2014), I consulted with colleagues who had worked on research related to wellbeing and forced displacement and persons who were displaced from Syria after 2011 to inform the direction of my research, and reflected on the development of my research questions. This step was important in the spirit of collaboration and participation, yet I realise more consultation about the research questions throughout the research period could have enriched the partnerships between myself as a researcher and my participants. Although I aimed to use participatory methods to reduce the power differential between my participants and myself, as well as stepping towards the co-production of knowledge with them, I acknowledge and realise this is still only an "intermediary step towards democratization and dissemination of knowledge production itself" (Coombes, 2012, 290). I also realise that there is currently a trend towards the use of "participation", which as a term has been co-opted and emptied of its meaning as a result of disconnecting the methodologies from their political and historical roots (Hemment, 2007).

Beyond methodological limitations, and through my many conversations with workers in the non-governmental organisations I visited (workers within community centres I visited and conducted participant observation at), I became acutely aware that there is an important element that I was not able to fully explore in the scope of this research project. This element is the conceptualisation and reflection of what wellbeing is from the perspective of workers in institutions which

serve refugee populations. An exploration of this facet of understanding wellbeing as it is understood by service providers working with refugees, could illuminate how these understandings influence and shape how they seek to improve the wellbeing of their refugee beneficiaries, and perhaps how they influence the wellbeing experience of refugees themselves. Yet another limitation that I recognise in this dissertation is a lack of socio-economic analysis. The Syrian refugee population in Jordan varies socio-economically, and in my current analysis and exploration of wellbeing as it is experienced, I do not delve into how those differences may or may not imply differences and variations.

4. Becoming displaced: The difficult negotiations of a difficult decision

“We no longer had a safe haven. For the longest time, we tried to stay in Syria, to rent an apartment, to stay at my in-laws’ house. But it was no longer possible now. We no longer had safe haven.” Raneem, now 30 years old and living with her husband and four children in Zarqa, recounted to me the story of her decision to flee Syria after having spent her entire life in Damascus before the outbreak of the revolution. Her words reveal the difficult choice that many Syrians like her were forced to make several years into the Syrian civil war.

When I started my fieldwork in 2016, very few of my interviewees and those who met with me perceived their arrival in Jordan as the beginning of their actual displacement experience. Invariably, most of them started their narratives with the time in which they first experienced the escalation of violence in their cities and neighbourhoods. The violence was shocking to most of them considering that they had never experienced anything like it before, whether it be shootings, shelling, kidnappings, checkpoints or the lack of basic needs. In a dissertation which aims to understand the wellbeing of Syrian Refugees in Jordan on their own terms, it seems only fitting to start my narrative with their own

periodisation²². This has allowed me to sequentially trace the changes in their lives as they expressed them and, consequently, how their sense of wellbeing changed alongside the shift in circumstances. Moreover, these experiences shed light on a part of the experience of displacement that is often overlooked – since, usually, the focus is on experiences in the country of displacement, not the home country prior to flight. Yet focusing on my participants' lives during the last months in their home countries, and how they navigated their lives and decisions to flee allows for understanding the frame of perception through which subsequent parts of their displacement is seen, as well as how wellbeing was experienced in the context of their displacement in Jordan.

Specifically, this chapter explores how Syrians who were forcibly displaced to Jordan, explained what led them to leave their country, how this decision was taken and what the journey to Jordan entailed. These three phases also form the structure of their displacement narratives, which reveals the complexity of the process of ultimately deciding to leave Syria as one of the main features of this period of displacement. The choice, or lack thereof, to leave Syria amid these circumstances is important in understanding how refugees related to their wellbeing after displacement. The degree of agency in making the decision to leave and their own orientations and expectations of what would come next all factored into how they acted in the circumstances in which they found themselves. This period is also crucial because it was the first step in shaping how those who participated in my research perceived their own upcoming displacement and the events that subsequently unfolded. In the first part of the chapter, I will illustrate the three stages of displacement through a case study in order to highlight how the seemingly separate stages actually come together in someone's life. In the remainder of the chapter, I will explore how some of the people I met explain what led them to leave Syria, how they made the decision to leave, and the forced journey to Jordan and what it entailed. I will conclude by reflecting on how these experiences have influenced how they think of the first stage of their displacement experience. While wellbeing does not feature in these

²² By periodisation I mean following the timeline and grouping of events chronologically as was described by my interlocutors

accounts, the experiences of struggle and suffering during flight are pertinent to our discussions of wellbeing in subsequent stages of displacement – that is, after people's arrival in Jordan.

I met Nadiya at a non-governmental organisation in Jordan where she volunteered. She was a 23-year-old Circassian-Syrian woman who was tasked with surveying Syrian households in order to assess their needs and to explore if these matched the organisation's services.²³ At the time of our meeting, Nadiya was living in a suburb of Amman with her brother and sister-in-law, while the rest of her family had sought refuge in Germany. Before coming to Jordan, Nadiya had almost completed her bachelor's degree in Languages, with a focus on Spanish. Her own family had witnessed a great deal of discrimination since the beginning of the conflict. For example, her father was stopped on his way to work and interrogated several times by the Syrian intelligence. Each time with the recurring assumption and accusation that he is affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood. This discrimination became even more pronounced as the revolution spread across Syria. Moreover, as a part of the Circassian minority community in Syria, her family was experiencing further discrimination from both the regime as well as the opposition. Nadiya explained that her family felt under attack by pro-Assad groups who would say 'you have your rights here in Syria so why are you upset?' as well as anti-Assad groups who told them to 'go back to Russia' to which Nadia would respond that her only homeland is Syria, – both sides suggesting that they should not be involved in the revolution. When the revolution broke out, Nadiya participated in demonstrations, as well as in the coordination committees engaged in organisational and communication roles. She believed in and had hopes for the change the revolution promised to bring to Syria. Her place was in Syria — in being a part of the process to realise this change. In her words she said "I went out to the demonstrations, I saw what happened in the demonstrations, saw how people got arrested, and I saw everything you could imagine seeing, I saw the killing in front of me, but I did not want to leave [Syria], I felt like I want to be here, I want to give something to the people of my country...even when I could not go out to the demonstrations I still

²³ Circassians are a minority in Syria, and some of the surrounding countries. They are originally from Circassia, a region near Russia

wanted to do something- I volunteered, and contributed to the coordination committees, we used to find and provide medicine, and blankets, and basic necessities for those who were displaced from Daraa, and Homs and Hama”.

As Damascus, and her neighbourhood in particular, became subject to bombings, continuous raids, and arrests, Nadiya’s family began to fear for her safety. She explained to me: “Like any family who fears for their daughter’s safety...my aunts [in Jordan] continued to urge my parents, saying, ‘send the girls here, it’s safer, don’t wait till it is too dangerous.’” This they eventually did. In fact, during the period between March 2011 and July 2012, Nadiya travelled back and forth between Jordan and Syria. She remembered: “Each time I was the one who insisted on returning. I was the one who didn’t want to leave Syria because I was with the revolution”. In July of 2012, Nadiya and her family went to Jordan for a relative’s wedding, but she had what she called “a bad feeling” – she was worried that she and her family might not return to Syria. She said, “I was so doubtful that I went to the human resources office [where her mother worked] and asked them to show me how many days my mother’s vacation was...I had the feeling that they [my parents] were going to make us leave and not return”.

On their way to Jordan, they faced many obstacles and suffered immensely at the Syrian border; they were travelling to her father’s birthplace, Daraa, the governorate where many of the protests had started and where the most violent repression of political dissent began. When they finally arrived at their relative’s home, her parents announced that the family must stay in Jordan, which led to a lot of conflict within the family. Yet Nadiya insisted on returning in order to join her friends fighting for the revolution, to protect documents she was worried about and to continue her education. But at this point there was no going back; it had become too dangerous. Nadiya ended this part of her displacement narrative by saying: “The first six months I was here [in Jordan], I [was] almost completely closed off, isolated”.

This vignette presents one story among many that my participants shared with me about their journeys, and it presents several aspects I wish to address within this chapter. In Nadiya’s narrative the contextualisation of her family’s life is similar to those of others who outlined the complexities involved in navigating

the political crisis and their own involvement. Her story highlights the violence and discrimination that Syrians experienced, as well as the family dynamics in situations of displacement. The deteriorating situation forced her family to make the decision to move from their neighbourhood and eventually depart to Jordan, as well as the hardships people undertake during their forced journey. As Nadiya's narrative illustrates, the decision to leave is affected by individual, communal, and structural factors, all of which interact in complex ways. In addition, news of the kinds of immigration procedures that were being practiced at the Jordanian border influenced the numbers of refugees by discouraging them from travelling to Jordan. At the very beginning of the crisis, Syrians were able to enter Jordan on a regular basis using their recognised Syrian passports, without many protocols or complications. However, this changed the moment the Jordanian government and UNHCR realised that the numbers of Syrian refugees entering the country was increasing drastically. This led to specific protocols for refugees at the borders between Syria and Jordan being implemented, including the recording of passport and identification information and registration of each individual and family who enter Jordan. Each were then given an official UNHCR document which confirmed their status as a refugee. This in turn, made entry into Jordan increasingly difficult over the eight years of the crisis, including several statements from the Jordanian government denying entry to more refugees, as well as leaving thousands of Syrian refugees stranded at what is called the Berm Jordanian border area in 2016 – a desert region between the Syrian and Jordanian borders, though closer to the Jordanian border. It is known as the no-man's-land, as it does not fall under the jurisdiction of either country – as reported by Amnesty International (Amnesty International, 2016). The factors which influenced the decision to leave or to stay in Syria rested in part on the positionality of the person in question – for example, if they were caretakers of children tasked with keeping their children safe, activists with a stake in political participation in the revolution or young men seeking to avoid a military draft. The geographic location of where they lived was also an important determining factor, as the level of violence also influenced when they would leave. In addition to these factors, the pre-existence of ties with Jordan – through relatives, friends, or geographical proximity – led a higher proportion of people to go there rather than to other countries.

Amidst this crisis, much ink has been spilled on the humanitarian consequences of the displacement resulting from the Syrian crisis, but far less attention has been given to the nuanced details of displacement as a process with various stages, from the decision to leave to arrival in the host country. In what follows, I will focus on these experiences, from internal displacement and experiencing the violent crisis in Syria to people's arrival in Jordan. Through this, I shed light on the experiences which are part of the displacement of Syrians and show how the range of experiences affects how they perceive their own displacement, and illustrate the everyday lived experience which influences and shapes the experience of wellbeing.

Between a rock and a hard place: The decision to seek refuge

At the very beginning of the Syrian crisis in 2011, few expected that the revolution would transform into what is now a multi-lateral violent civil war between the Syrian regime and various opposing forces. In fact, all the people whom I spoke with were optimistic and had expected that the situation would improve, hoping for a shift towards a more democratic government and reforms which would lead to a better economic future – a positive change from the historical and continuous austerity measures imposed by the Assad governments (Hinnebusch, 2012; Perthes, 2001). Yet these feelings of hope were not the same everywhere in Syria. For example, in Daraa – a city in the south of the country, bordering the Jordanian city of Ramtha – citizens were forced to witness brutal violence in the form of bombing, shelling and shooting from the very beginning of the crisis. It was clear to them that they had to leave their homes quickly in order to seek safety elsewhere. The same urgency was not felt in other regions. Haroon, a young man from Aleppo, explained that it was comparatively quiet in the city during this time. However, due to the news and rumours reaching him and his family from different parts of the country, he lost hope that the crisis would be resolved any time soon. He said: “We knew that the situation [the crisis] was going to continue. We knew this because other areas had this [violence and destruction] happen to them and still it's the same, and so many of the areas in Syria are still as they are, we knew it was going to stay like this”. He turned out

to be right: the Syrian civil war took a bloodier turn, gaining greater prominence in all global media outlets and humanitarian aid efforts increased (Satchit et al., 2015; United Nations News, 2013). Thereby, basic information about the situation and how it unfolded in different parts of Syria became more easily accessible within the country and abroad. Despite the increase in information from humanitarian agencies and news networks, my interlocutors felt the need to further educate me about the situation in their home country. In almost all of our conversations, they were careful to expand on and justify why they had left their homes, and explained in great detail how they made the decision to leave. Their narratives bring to the fore the difficult negotiations that took place within families as they made the decision to leave their homes to seek refuge in Jordan.

Many of my participants elaborated on how they fled from their homes after experiencing not only the bombing and shelling of their homes, but also curfew, incursions, and raids, as well as attacks against themselves and their families. Many of them also experienced reduced or complete lack of access to basic needs. Aabed, a Syrian refugee who told me he and his family were among the first people to leave as Deraa deteriorated, said: "There was no water or electricity or communications in our neighbourhoods. We stayed for 10 days. No water, no electricity, no communications". He told me that he and his family had no longer felt safe to leave their homes to access basic necessities such as food or water, and had been afraid of being sniped, attacked or kidnapped by one of the warring factions. "Even bread was impossible to go and get," Aabed concluded.

Unlike Aabed, other people did feel safe enough to leave their homes during the conflict. Yet, they were at risk of being stopped by one or more of the many checkpoints that emerged as part of the territory-marking practices of the numerous warring factions. These checkpoints were set up within cities as well as between them and in the surrounding areas. Sameera, who lived in Yarmouk Camp, the Palestinian refugee camp in the suburb of Damascus, mentioned in her story about leaving: "To leave Syria, I counted 36 checkpoints that we passed to get from an area near Yarmouk camp to the Jordanian border". As similar experiences accumulated in contexts of increasing insecurity and increasing brutality, many like Sameera decided to leave their country.

While the reasons for leaving appear straightforward at first, my interlocutors' lived experiences reveal that they were often torn when making these decisions. They often began their displacement narratives by saying: "Why we left Aleppo? First of all..." implying that they had a host of reasons to intimate. Others began their stories by first listing numerous dangers and sources of risk in order to highlight the fear they were experiencing. One told me, "Our area became empty, clashes always happening at our doorstep, tanks and tanks passing by". Similarly, Allam, a man from Homs who was studying in Damascus when the civil war broke out, said that he stayed in Damascus even after his parents had left the country. He stated that, although it became "normal to have a car bombed near me on my way to university," it was not reason enough to leave. Instead, he only made his decision to join his parents in Jordan when he feared that he would be drafted into the military. Between the bombings on the way to university, fear of his home being raided at any moment and the potential for being sniped while walking in the street, it seemed that there was never just one reason that forced people like Allam into refuge. In addition, it became clear just how long people actually endured such a precarious and often life-threatening situation, until finally reaching breaking point. Indeed, many emphasised that they would not have left Syria, had life in the context of war not become just too difficult and too dangerous to endure.

What it meant to endure, but nevertheless to reach one's breaking point eventually, became apparent in my conversations with a married couple, Maya and Saleem. Maya, a Syrian woman, was in her late twenties, and Saleem, a Palestinian refugee in Syria, was in his early thirties. The couple used to live in the Yarmouk camp near Damascus, which was home to 160,000 Palestinian refugees (UNRWA, 2019). During one of our conversations, they told me that their life before the Syrian crisis was stable; Saleem had a good job and they had owned a house together. When the war broke out, Maya reflected on the uncertainty that plagued them as Palestinian Syrians: "We kept waiting. [But] people increasingly felt life become unbearable, that there was no mercy". Indeed, the Yarmouk camp was often heavily hit and besieged by the Syrian regime and various warring factions. Saleem, along with many living in that area, had only Palestinian refugee papers and a Jordanian passport, making him a

target for the regime as many Palestinians in Yarmouk were known to be on the side of the revolution, and had held out in Yarmouk for some time. Saleem and Maya stayed in Yarmouk camp until 2013 even though the situation was getting worse around them and Saleem's shop had been closed down. Maya insisted that "even if it was difficult and stressful psychologically, we were in our own home, we had some food, and we had a full pantry, and so we thought we could stay". But when the violence escalated in 2013, the couple began to worry about the checkpoints that sprang up around them. Saleem explained: "At the [regime] checkpoints you worried that you would get one of two choices, either a permanent disability or death". The couple lived in a continuous state of fear and anxiety as they anticipated the worst, including kidnapping, torture, and even killing. Eventually, they felt that they were left with no other choice but to leave.

All those who shared their narratives with me divided them in two segments: before and after the crisis. This observation is important as it is an experiential and life-forming divide. I am inspired here by Carina Perelli's (1992) concept of *memorias de sangre* (blood memories). According to her, *memoria de sangre* includes the "notion of before and after, this idea of a life order disrupted by the situation and reconstructed after it" (416). This disruption she found was salient in the narratives of her participants as they remembered and narrated the violent conflict they experienced in their country, Argentina. Perelli explains that how people use the narrative of "before" and "after" has a specific function in that it serves as a way of conceptualising the point at which their lives were fundamentally disrupted. Henry (2006) made a similar observation among his interlocutors, survivors of the Sierra Leone – Guinea war, who "trac[ed] a rent fabric back to the crucial moment that some 'tear' occurred, realizing a history that, although not necessarily explaining an event, mapped it in time and space as if to say, 'THIS is where things began to go wrong.'" (Henry, 2006, 382, emphasis in original). As stated above, my interlocutors also divided their lives into "before the war" and "after the war" in order to highlight a historical tear. When reminiscing about "before the war", they emphasised the stability and financial security they had enjoyed and contrasted this with the disruption, insecurity, danger and loss that they experienced as the political crisis began. Ruqaya, a woman originally from Homs, recalled her once-stable and safe family life during

one of our conversations. Her husband had a good job as a salesman, with a decent salary that had allowed them to buy their own house. However, as the situation deteriorated in Homs, being a salesman and often on the road was becoming increasingly precarious. She recalled that one day her husband was sniped while driving his car and his leg was severely wounded. Consequently, he could no longer work, which, in turn, led to additional economic hardship for the family. Ruqaya went on to tell me that around the same period, their house was burned to the ground requiring them to rent houses in safer areas of the city. She added, "We started fearing for my husband being taken at any point". Although she did not explain what she meant by "taken", the implication was that there was a fear for his life due to kidnappings. These fears eventually led her family to leave Homs in search of safety. Ruqaya's example is one of many where participants not only gave a justification for leaving Syria, but elaborated on their experiences by recounting layers of justification that informed their displacement experience.

In another example, Hameed, who had loved being a truck driver and who used to spend hours on the roads travelling from Daraa to surrounding towns delivering gasoline, experienced first-hand the disruption in their life and how unsafe it had become. While participating in the photovoice group in Rusayfe, he shared with us one of his experiences when he was stopped on the road: "They stopped me and they were asking for money, a bribe, it had been a group of them all carrying guns, and I told their leader that I had given his superior the bribe, why should I give him? When I said that, he got angry and proceeded to shoot all the tires of my truck, and he threatened me, saying 'the next one will be to your head'." That was the moment that pushed Hameed to resign and decide to leave with his family. While telling this story, Hameed recognised and highlighted that this moment was the 'tear' which made him aware that life now is not as life before, and that he and his family would no longer be safe living Syria.

Each layer of experience created an ever stronger justification for people's decision to leave Syria. This is particularly apparent in the recollections of Sama, who was not yet eighteen when she left Syria with her family. She began her story by recalling that a bomb hit their home, which led her family to move from one

house to another seeking safe shelter from violent areas. “Even when we moved to another place, the house would be attacked and raided constantly.” She continued saying, “we sometimes had to stay and sleep in the gardens.” She went on to explain that her family felt safer in the open air, particularly after raids had taken place. At the same time, they began to realise that “it was no way to live, we had nowhere to go back to. We had already moved several times, we had to leave, and there was nowhere else to go.” Yet, before explaining how she and her family left, she added one more layer of justification, stating that it was actually her uncle from Jordan who requested them to join him, telling them “life here [in Jordan] is good”.

Sama’s story illustrates that feeling the urgency to leave one’s home did not always mean that it would be a straightforward decision. Similarly, many others tried their hardest *not* to leave, to prolong their stay until they felt that they were left with no other choice but to flee. The process of reaching the decision and indeed moving to Jordan was complex and varied from family to family. The conversations usually began with explaining and justifying why they were forced to leave Syria. The lives they led before the Syrian crisis were perceived to be relatively stable, and were later turned upside down. But leaving was never easy – in fact, it was the last resort. This became evident from the time they took to painstakingly explain the dangers and risks they endured, as well as the complexity of the experiences. As argued above, the fact that this was no easy choice is particularly important in our assessment of the wellbeing of refugees. The agency people exercised in making the choice to leave, and in attempting to find alternative havens within Syria before that, all influence how they came to terms with their displacement – displacement that was the direct result of the hard choices they made.

The layered justifications of leaving Syria

Beyond the justifications provided to explain their decisions to leave Syria, my interlocutors also recalled their own reactions to the decision itself. These reactions were shaped by the negotiations that took place among family members

and relatives and were often complex due to the social factors which shaped them. The people I spoke with remembered their reaction to the decision of leaving their homes and country in different ways. Some recalled that they had reacted with surprise and others with rejection, even protest. People's commitment to their country and to their families and relatives, as well as to their homes and even at times to their education, complicated the decision to leave. Reacting to the decision with protest was especially true when it was not themselves, but family members, such as parents or older relatives, who made the decision to leave *for* them. In other cases, the person had made up their own mind to leave and had, at least to some extent, taken the time to plan and arrange for the journey. The level of participation in decision-making – or lack of it – eventually had an impact on how leaving Syria was perceived and experienced.

The decision-making negotiations were related to age and gender; these power differentials within the family unit and their influence on the decision to leave were exemplified in the testimony of Sama. For Sama and her family, introduced above, life had become increasingly difficult due to the multiple internal displacements. Despite these experiences, she told me: "It [the flight] happened suddenly really...we were sleeping and suddenly my mother decided! She woke us up and told us we are moving." This example shows clearly the sudden nature of some of the decisions to leave, as one or both parents made them without giving the family any indications about what was about to happen. This was also reflected in Fitzgerald and Arar's (2018) work discussing the decision-making process in the context of conflict and how it is shaped by economic and other social factors. The authors note: "The household can be considered a unit of analysis, but there may also be bargaining around migration decisions within the household that is affected by power differentials along the axes of age and gender" (395). They exemplify this based on the research conducted by Arar among Syrian refugee families. Specifically, Arar's work reflects on the experience of certain families, including one case where there was a risk of sexual assault against two women in the family, which made the father stay in Syria to protect them, and another where the age and gender of the 18-year-old son were factors that encouraged the family to have him accompany and support his mother and teenage sisters until they reached a refugee camp

(Fitzgerald and Arar, 2018). Thus, it is concluded that “household decisions are shaped by culturally elaborated expectations of the different vulnerabilities faced by family members depending on their age and gender” (396).

Factors such as gender and age also shaped the decision to leave made in Yasmeen’s family. Yasmeen recalled how surprised she felt when the decision to leave Syria was finally made. “It was a surprising decision, a decision from my father,” she told me. “We [she and her siblings] didn’t agree, we were forced to do it.” She highlighted that it was her father who made the decision and she was upset about this. With irony in her voice, she exclaimed “He is the one who knows best.” In these two examples, the young women seemed not to have been part of the decision-making process, which led to tensions within the families. Similarly, Nadiya’s experience (presented as a case study at the beginning of the chapter) reflected these family tensions as she resisted her family’s decision to make her and her sister stay in Jordan, eventually rendering them unable to return to Syria. In all the previous examples being daughters, female and young people were excluded from the process of decision-making. Such experiences of sudden decisions to leave made by a parent exemplify how the hierarchies within the family shaped the decision. It is also important to note this colours the experiences of those lower in the family hierarchy, as well as their exclusion from the decision-making process.

I was made further aware of how family hierarchies created tensions when Allam told me that his father, contrary to the examples before, insisted they stay in Homs despite the fact that the city was already experiencing a mass exodus. Allam said, “You could see people leaving with what they had in the streets in large masses.” In the end, Allam’s father seemed to “wake up”, realising the gravity of the situation, and suddenly decided that they must leave, at which point Allam reacted sarcastically, thinking, “good morning father, thank you for catching up with us.” While he and the rest of the family had been aware of the danger of staying in Homs, he believed that his father had been in denial. As this and the previous examples show, family, generational as well as gender norms and dynamics have to be taken into consideration when trying to understand how decisions to leave in times of extreme crisis are made. Yet, it is important to note

that not all people I talked to were taken by surprise when the decision was made to leave. For instance, I spoke to participants whose decision to leave Syria, while difficult, was not unexpected, and did not cause family tensions. The reason for this difference is the context in which these decisions were made.

Whether people left individually or with their families, many experienced factors which made their decision to leave Syria less of an issue of negotiation and more of a matter-of-fact situation. This was particularly true for those who were trying to evade being conscripted or re-conscripted into the army – making them convinced of the need and almost prepared to leave Syria, despite it being an unsavoury decision. In certain cases, the preparations for leaving Syria only began after the decision was made, prolonging the process even further. For example, some needed to obtain passports and had to wait until the passport was ready for collection before they could actually leave. In other cases, the decision to leave in a group or with other relatives also meant that it took time to coordinate between the families.

The time at which participants actually left Syria was also shaped by factors other than waiting for paperwork or relatives. Families encouraged some of the young men to leave Syria, with education and evading being redrafted for the regime's army among the most prominent of these reasons. Some, on the other hand, left Syria around the time of the civil war for education, and had their travel planned ahead of time.

Homsy was in his final year of high school when the crisis began. By the time he had finally graduated it was clear for both him and his family that the prospect of his enrolment in a university in Syria were low. In fact, most universities had already ceased to offer regular classes as it was considered much too risky for students to attend due to regular bombings, sniping and raids. Homsi had relatives in Jordan, and his family encouraged him to go study and live with them. While the circumstances of increasing violence and lack of access to education played a role in the decision-making process, it was Homsi and his family who jointly decided when and where to go; to seek safety while also building a career.

While Homs left to attain a higher education, other young men left Syria to escape being conscripted into the regime's army or of being re-drafted as part of the reserve. Radi had started the two-year mandatory army draft in Syria before the crisis. At first, his draft was reduced to one year and a half as a result of the war, but it was then extended for five more months as the army needed young men to fight against the various opposition groups. On 1st January 2012, Radi was finally released from military service and returned home. From then on, his family was in constant worry that the army might re-draft him at any point. His mother was especially anxious; he remembered that each time he left the house, she kept calling him, causing him stress. "I started to leave my phone at home when I went out" he told me to highlight how he tried to escape both the threat of re-drafting and the constant nagging and anxiety of his mother. Finally, Radi decided to flee to Jordan and join his two older siblings, who had been living there for several years.

Fleeing to Jordan was rarely as *ad hoc* as it initially sounded in some of the narratives. Indeed, when probed, my interlocutors outlined that leaving was often a social experience and a collective effort, which required preparation and organisation within families and between relatives and friends. Usually when a family decided to leave, it was rare for them to leave as a nuclear family; instead their group consisted of other relatives and often neighbours. Waiting for this larger group to get prepared and organised tended to cause delays. For example, Ruqaya's family took a whole month to leave because they were tied to the families of three other relatives. This example of leaving within a family structure illustrates that fleeing war is rarely an individual process. For instance, Sameera, who had initially been separated from her family due to road closures and the siege on Yarmouk camp stated, "I left with my mother, father, and sister, together with yet another twenty people". She had decided to endure the wait for her family to be able to escape the siege, and the uncertainty within the waiting period as it was important for her to be with her family as they all left to Jordan. People tried to move together with their families and relatives whenever it was possible, rather than leaving individually. The collective rather than the individualistic dimension of the decision-making process conveys the importance of familial and

community ties that are maintained even at a time of chaos, unpredictability and eminent displacement.

The experiences presented above highlight the varied and complex dimensions of the decision-making process, and the reactions to the difficult decision of leaving one's country – both of which are part of the overall experience of displacement. These experiences further bring to the fore that families' and individuals' narratives did not solely focus on the act of displacement itself, but related to their justifications for fleeing. These experiences are various, and were intrinsically shaped by family dynamics, generational and gender relations, as well as personal motivations, aspirations and insecurities. Despite these tensions, the narratives shared convey that people were acutely aware of the deterioration and danger of staying in Syria. The nuanced narratives highlighted the positionality of the person telling it within their family and wider society. These differences framed how they experienced negotiations of the decision to leave and ultimately leaving. It was not only the social dimensions affecting the experiences of my interlocutors revealed through their narratives. The political reality of the war was also emphasised, revealing how it affected people whose decisions were highly related to their fear of being drafted or re-drafted into the Syrian military. People were afraid and anxious for their own and their loved ones' safety. Many were surprised and even angry at the prospect of leaving. Tensions arose within families when they disagreed, sometimes vehemently, about the timing of leaving or even leaving as such. Unlike one might expect, families did not immediately flee as soon as violence struck their neighbourhood. Instead, they withstood long periods of waiting in unstable conditions as they prepared to leave, while sorting out documentation, the route and a place to stay in Jordan, for example. These contradictory emotions show that these families went through experiences and feelings of displacement even before leaving their homes and prior to arriving to a country of refuge. They reflected on these aspects later, including in my interviews with them, as they recalled how they reached Jordan. It is important to acknowledge these varied experiences, since they form a part of how many frame their displacement narrative and their experiences of wellbeing within it – a narrative which continues to change in tandem with changes in their lives.

An unforgettable day: The rupture of leaving and its consequences

Even though the decision-making process differed from person to person, they all led to the central event, namely that of leaving homes, neighbourhoods and the country. These memories of events reflect the concept of *memorias de sangre* where life is divided into “before” and “after” certain disruptive experiences (Perelli, 1992). It is only after their leaving that the memory of the event itself is described as a watershed moment.

Almost everyone I spoke with realised that their lives had drastically changed from that point onward. They all recalled vividly the day and the date they left. For example, Faqih recalled: “I came here in 2012. Do you want me to specify the date? I came on 27th of July in 2012”. The same occurred in my interview with Radi, who told me, “I was released [from the military draft] on 1st of January and I came here on the 18th of January” – he repeated these two key dates several times throughout our conversation, thereby further confirming how important they were to his story and current situation. Similarly, Rima, who I interviewed along with her niece, told me: “We came on the 17th of October 2012” – the date when she and her family had hastily left Syria. This memory of the date was etched into the minds of everyone I spoke to. This relates once more to the power of narrative as a tool to conceptualise and understand how their lives have been disrupted, and the drastic changes that happened as a result of these violent experiences. Up until the date that they left, there was still hope that the situation in Syria would improve so that they would be able to stay. Yet, this hope was crushed at the very moment when the decision was made to leave. While recalling this watershed moment, my interlocutors described the events and experiences they faced between leaving their homes till arriving in Jordan.

Just like the decision to leave, the process of travelling itself was not straightforward either. On their way to the Jordanian border, they faced many obstacles: they were forced to manoeuvre checkpoints in their villages and cities, had to avoid dangers such as snipers, and needed to communicate with others en route to Jordan to avoid potentially dangerous areas, as well as having to pass through the Syrian border control. They feared being blocked from exiting Syria, as well as not being allowed in at the Jordanian border control. The recollections

of this forced journey, just like other part of their displacement, were varied not only due to differences in violent experiences, but also due to personal, social and structural factors.

At the start of the Syrian crisis, the regime violently repressed dissent, beginning with killing protesters in Daraa city, in the south of the country. As the situation in Daraa escalated, violence began to spread to other areas of the country. Several of my participants from Daraa and its governorate told me of the experiences they had upon leaving, emphasising the violence they and their fellow citizens had been exposed to. However, some recalled that as this was at an early stage of the conflict, they could travel unhindered from the country towards Jordan. The journey itself was perceived as relatively uneventful, reminding them of past travels before the Syrian crisis began. In a description of Daraa itself after the crisis had begun, Faqih, who had grown up there, told me that it was “full of checkpoints. If you would go out for something and you were stopped at a checkpoint, you wouldn’t know if you would continue on your way, or if that’s it – if you continue your life, or you’re finished.” Faqih’s recollection of his forced journey from his city to Jordan during the crisis is contrasted with previous times he had travelled to Jordan. His description of the city conveys the sense of insecurity and risk which he and his family experienced in their hometown. This was contrasted with how he described his journey to Jordan upon leaving the city. When I asked about the road to Jordan, he responded: “Yes it was easy, because the situation was still at its beginning, there were no problems.” Similarly, Aabed, who was also from Daraa and had left even earlier than Faqih with his family, confirms the same worries about checkpoints within the city. It was not the Jordanian side, or even travelling within Syria, but rather the Syrian border itself that troubled them. Aabed was 4 months shy of 18 years of age, the official age of military conscription, and the border police had decided not to let him leave Syria so that he could be conscripted. He recalled what they told him at the time: “Your mother can pass but you have to go back”. The guards at the border explained that he and his siblings needed a male legal guardian to let them leave. Aabed immediately called his father explaining the situation. The father made haste to get them out, he “exited Jordan, entered Syria, got us out and we came here, this was all in the same day. We kept waiting at the border till

he came...we had left at sundown, when we entered the borders [of Jordan] it was midnight or one in the morning”.

These recollections of flight are very different from the stories of others who fled later in the conflict. They were forced to experience even greater obstacles as they made their way to Jordan from their respective villages and cities. One such case was Haroon’s story of his family leaving Aleppo. He told me that: “[In 2012, at the] beginning of shelling of nearby neighbourhoods, our whole neighbourhood left, but a few families and us we stayed, like a couple of houses or so”. Already by July of that year, Aleppo had been experiencing shootings and bombings and clashes between the various opposition factions and the Syrian regime (Reuters, 2017, The Aleppo Project, 2016). At the time of their leaving, Haroon’s family was the only one of their relatives to head to Jordan, the rest of his relatives had left for Turkey, a country that was closer in reach geographically. However, Haroon’s nuclear family headed to Jordan because his mother had Jordanian papers and had several relatives in Jordan, which would have facilitated their entry into the country and potentially helped them establish themselves in Jordan. The route to reach Jordan took his family two whole days on a bus. He recalls several reasons for this, saying:

There were great numbers of checkpoints, of all colours Jabhat al-Nusra, the Regime’s, the Free Syrian Army, all of it. So, each bus was stopped. We would stay at each checkpoint about quarter of an hour. Even when we got to the borders they held us. There were people that they didn’t let in. They didn’t allow anyone to come in, but because my mother is Palestinian and has all her papers they let us in.

This situation differs in two major ways from the previous two examples. First, in 2012, the route between Syria and Jordan had become very precarious due to the excessive number of checkpoints of the various political factions (Todman, 2016). As people sought safety, they feared what would be required to pass through these checkpoints and what the consequences of being stopped might be, including long delays, being captured or even death. Second, Jordan had significantly increased its security at its border, making it more difficult for those who sought refuge to enter the country (Achilli, 2015). These changes also

become apparent in the following example of a family who expressed how anxious and worried they were when leaving their home. The couple Ali and Lamis, together with their daughter, used to live in Yarmouk camp. When they left in 2013, Yarmouk camp had already been under siege for a whole year, with people experiencing arbitrary arrests and a lack of basic life necessities (Amnesty International, 2014). Despite this, they were anxious and afraid of moving out of their home in the camp, of the many scattered checkpoints within the camp and the unknown that was awaiting them on the route to Jordan. Lamis and Ali took turns describing the events and their feelings to me:

A: when we left, the way was very difficult

L: if you only knew how we got here [Jordan]

A: before things had changed you would be able to get from Damascus to Jordan in about 45 minutes, but when we came here we stayed on the roads for seven hours

L: seven hours! We left at seven in the morning and we got here around five thirty or six in the evening

A: and of course, under immense pressure and checkpoints

After a short pause, they continued saying:

L: When we first got here [Jordan] it was so cold

A: when we got to the border it was actually fine, there was a lot of *ajqa* (craziness) but we... [Lamis interrupts]

L: [the Jordanian border guards] let us in because my father in law was an old man, had open heart surgery, and he was exhausted by the way, so my father went to the officers and told him this, so they opened for us and let us in

A: it was difficult ... you could see at the border there about 300 cars!

As they spoke their voices were full of intensity as they described the ways in which they had experienced their journey. Their words were laden with the urgency of escaping, taking one obstacle at a time: first the checkpoints, then the way itself and, finally, the controls at the Jordanian border. They were fortunate enough to be able to enter Jordan relatively smoothly due to the fact that Ali held a Jordanian passport.

Many other of my participants were not as fortunate. While they were able to leave their homes and endured the journey to the Jordanian border, they were usually held by Jordanian border guards in a no-man's land, an area called the Berm/AlSater. Many were barred from entering the country for an extended period of time. In the literature, the Berm area has been described as "an inhospitable desert in the no man's land of the Jordanian–Syrian–Iraqi border triangle, far away from larger settlements or infrastructure and basic services" (Bank, 2016, 4–5). This area contains what Bank refers to as "wild camps": the unofficial camps set up by refugees, that were neither governed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees nor the Jordanian government, and have existed there since 2014. Syrians who fled Aleppo when the violence greatly escalated in 2015 sought temporary shelter there, along with Syrians who fled areas which were attacked by groups affiliated with ISIS (also known as the Islamic state) (Bank, 2016). The area, which borders Jordan, has since been militarily closed off, and thus people who reached the area ended up being stuck there for months and years at a time with very little access to services and basic needs.

Several of the people I met and their families were among the many who got stuck at the Berm area. As they participated in the photovoice component of my research, they recalled the time they had spent in the Berm area as one of the worst parts of their displacement experience. In one of the first group meetings, as the participants were getting introduced to each other, two women discovered they had indeed met before at Berm area. Om-Mohammad and Daad told us about their time on the Berm between tears and laughter:

D: We had stayed in the desert [at the Berm] for five days, no water no food nothing, we both arrived there on the 13th of June [2013] – the same day!

O: I recognised her from her grandfather who was with them – he would always sit on a chair and prayed on his chair. He was upset because he was not allowed to enter [Jordan]... and I just recognised her again just now

They had not seen or heard from each other since the time they had left the Berm area and entered into Jordan. Om Mohammad remembered the details: “I asked her did you come and ask sugar from me? Were you at the Berm with an old man? And I said to myself I remember this face.”

Da’ad told us that the experiences they had trying to reach Jordan and being held at the border meant that they had “tasted the difficult times” and made them realise “how life changes”. The experience of enormous difficulty and change was also experienced by Hameed, another participant in the photovoice group. He described how awful their experience at the Berm was, and how it forced him to do things he would not normally do. He told us how hungry they had been as they waited for the Jordanian border guards to allow them to enter, and how he watched his young daughter getting thinner and thinner. One day he saw a man falling from fatigue and hunger and he rushed to help him as an ambulance came for help as well. When the doors opened Hameed saw there were boxed meals inside: “I quickly let go of the man I was helping, and I snatched two of the boxed meals and ran to my wife and daughter. I yelled at my wife ‘don’t eat until she [daughter] eats’”. Hameed was aware that he was stealing, but told us that he did not care, since all that was on his mind was feeding and saving his daughter. Luigi Achilli (2018) discusses the ambiguities of such ethical considerations as he discusses how vulnerability and uncertainty within protracted displacement leads some refugees to work in smuggling. He explains: “The situation of many refugees from Syria, whose need to support their families back in Syria considerably increased their vulnerability and the likelihood of working in dangerous and exploitative conditions, or getting in smuggling networks to enhance their own mobility” (Achilli, 2018, 79). It is both the need to support one’s

family, and knowing just how precarious their lives are which pushes people to engage in practices that they would often not do - whether it be stealing to feed one's starving child, or smuggling to support one's family living in a context of protracted conflict.

The conversations and the reflections in my group discussions about the same situation both show how desperate and scared people had been while at this stage of their flight. They were so close to entering Jordan, but the heightened restrictions that had been imposed by Jordan between the end of 2012 and beginning of 2013 also made entry more difficult – at times, impossible. Yet people persevered with whatever little they had, tried to help each other when they could, but at other times had to make difficult choices to survive and help their loved ones to survive. People were affected and burdened by the memories they shared about their experiences as they were forced from their homes in Syria to Jordan. They carried the details of these experiences even after several years have passed.

Conclusion

The Syrian crisis had completely disrupted and overturned the lives of my interlocutors. Their experience of displacement is told through a narrative which starts with the experiences of the violent consequences of the revolution-turned-civil-war, and the navigation of the changed lived experience. These narratives often followed their experiences from the time they experience the political violence in their hometowns and how they and their families navigate the decision to leave. The narration often focuses on experiences they recognise as scarring disruptions. They reflect *memorias de sangre* (Perelli, 1992), dividing their lives into how they perceived life in Syria before the crisis and their lives and events after the crisis. These experiences included internal displacement, difficult and emotionally tumultuous decision-making and the treacherous and risky route to leave their country, making them displaced and labelled as refugees as they arrived at Jordan.

The importance of discussing the details of the different periods of these experiences – from the experience of violence, to negotiations of decision-making and the process of departing within families, to individuals who were displaced from Syria and the differences in their journeys at different times of the Syrian crisis – is that these experiences are part of the frame of perception through which the experiences which followed are seen. These experiences also implicate and help to shape how my participants negotiated and experienced life in later stages of their displacement in Jordan, and thus also how they sought and experienced their wellbeing there. Although my interlocutors barely discuss their wellbeing within this stage of their displacement experience, it was crucial to have a full understanding of the complexities of their journey. This chapter discusses how the decision making process and leaving Syria included varied experiences, all of which are part of the displacement narrative. The negotiations of decision making, family dynamics, and reactions to leaving continue to shape dimensions of the lived experiences of my interlocutors and how they navigate seeking their wellbeing in different periods of their displacement. At the same time these experiences are different from the experiences which start at the time of arrival to Jordan, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

5. Strangers in familiar lands: Navigating expectations and wellbeing

The experiences of displacement among my interlocutors were marked by the historical relationship between Jordan and Syria and the perceived geographical, cultural, and historical closeness of the two countries. Since the early 2000s, the Syrian state had implemented a policy of “softening” the borders between Syria and surrounding countries, which allowed for the movement of people and of trade of goods between the countries of the region (Vignal, 2017). Moreover, Syria and Jordan share the same language as well as similar cultural customs and values revolving around hospitality, social solidarity, and the importance of family ties (El-Abed, 2014; Chatty, 2017; Lokot, 2018; Vignal, 2017). In addition, many Syrians have relatives and friends in Jordan whom they visit regularly (Chatty, 2017).

I found that these existing relationships affected the ways in which people from Syria perceived their displacement in Jordan. Specifically, I came to understand that the flight itself was only one stage of a much longer and ever-changing experience of displacement. As presented in the previous chapter, people’s displacement started with seeking safety from the dangers of the civil war in Syria, but then continued once they arrived in Jordan and as they tried to establish their lives there. Much of the literature on forced displacement and refugee resettlement revolves around how refugee communities settle into the new and very unfamiliar culture of the host society (Baird, 2012; Brough et al, 2012; Lenette and Boddy, 2013; Vignal, 2017). But in the case of Syrians fleeing to Jordan, the abovementioned geographic, cultural, and historic relations form an integral part of the displacement experience, where they had little expectation of needing to adapt to an unfamiliar setting.

In this chapter, I focus on the first period of my participants’ lives in Jordan. It becomes apparent that many of them were quite shocked to find that, far from being welcomed, they were treated as strangers and pushed to the margins of society. I explore how these tensions and disappointments were navigated by the Syrian refugees as they were, as I found, “feeling strange within the familiar.” Feeling strange in the familiar refers to situations where those who expected a

certain level of familiarity in Jordan due to their country's geographic, cultural, and historic proximity, instead, were faced with feelings of estrangement among the host community. I then go on to discuss how they responded to being strange in the familiar and how this impacted on their sense of wellbeing.

Good fences make bad neighbours²⁴

Syrians seeking refuge in Jordan had a specific set of expectations when arriving in their neighboring country, located only 30 minutes away from their homeland. They spoke of an expectation that heading to Jordan would mean arriving in a place which would be familiar to them. The expected familiarity was related to a shared imagination of Arab culture. As one of the young women I spoke with put it: "I imagined that when I would arrive here [Jordan], I would feel exactly as I would in my own country." Moreover, she expected that she would be welcomed and showered with hospitality, as is perceived to be customary in Arab culture. This expectation of hospitality is linked to a long history of Arab customs and values. Historians have traced it back to the nomadic and tribal structure of Arab societies, originating in the Arabian Peninsula and extending towards the Levant and the modern Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region through centuries of Muslim expansion (Hitti, 2002). For instance, Phillip Hitti's classic "History of the Arabs" describes Arab hospitality in simple, albeit somewhat archaic terms: "The keen competition for water and pasturage, on which the chief causes of conflict centre, splits the desert populace into warring tribes; but the common consciousness of helplessness in the face of a stubborn and malignant nature develops a feeling for the necessity of one sacred duty: that of hospitality" (Hitti, 2002, 25). While this text may be reminiscent of an anachronistic essentialism – the first edition first appeared in 1937 – it nevertheless reflects the common conception among my interlocutors of an imagined notion of Arab hospitality, especially at times of scarcity and need, however idealised that notion may be.

The notion of hospitality in the MENA region has since been described by more contemporary scholarship, especially in terms of its relation and difference

²⁴ Inspired by Robert Frost's poem *Mending Wall* (1915).

to Western conventions. Feghali (1997) provides a more nuanced perspective on the transactional aspects of hospitality, arguing that “Arabs expect hospitality from others, and one’s status and reputation may be affected by the absence of such behaviour” (353). This injury to one’s reputation and the consequences of breaking with this convention, may lead to non-reciprocity in the future. In his research on key values in the Arab region, Harb (2015) also identifies hospitality as a deeply entrenched cultural tenet. To be inhospitable brings shame upon the erstwhile host, possibly leading to social ostracisation. Moreover, Harb’s (2003) earlier research on value type preferences in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon found that “morality and hospitality...rank highest in both Syrian and Jordanian samples” (11). Although this account of the importance of hospitality as part of the Syrian and Jordanian cultures may seem essentialising and, at times, orientalising, I could find similar values expressed within the narratives shared with me.

Interestingly, hospitality has not only been discussed as an historical concept, but also in the context of displacement and the humanitarian response to it (El Abed, 2014). I found this particularly interesting as some of this work resonated well with my own findings. For instance, the scholar Kaya (2016) writes: “Syrian refugees have been considered as ‘guests’ by the Turkish, Lebanese and Jordanian states. From the very beginning of the refugee plight, Syrians have been presented as if they are ‘welcome’ by the host states and societies on the basis of some deep-rooted values such as ‘Turkish hospitality’, ‘Muslim fraternity’, ‘Arab hospitality’ and ‘guesthood’ traditions” (17). Despite this rhetoric of “hospitality”, the author highlights that the relationship between hosts and their refugee guests was strained as it turned out to be difficult to accommodate the refugees’ urgent needs and to appease the increasing resentment among the local or host population. In the following, I unpack these tensions further in relation to my own research.

Hopes for hospitality dashed: Syrian refugees’ reactions to disappointment

My participants tended to have a common imagination of Arab hospitality, which involved a shared set of traditions not dissimilar to some of the ideals outlined above. However, these ideals are not to be confused with the actual

practice of hospitality. More importantly, hospitality was conceived of as manifesting in different ways in different societal spheres and was practiced variously at the level of the nation, the community and the family. This tripartite division of the different facets of hospitality are important for my examination of the levels at which this hospitality was, or was not, extended to my interlocutors fleeing from Syria.

National hospitality

Among the people I talked to, there was an overall expectation of hospitality that went beyond the individual and family levels, to an expectation of unconditional hospitality from Jordan as a country. This expectation of hospitality on the national level included the provision of shelter, access to basic services with ease, acceptance in the community and care and kindness, as well as financial support. Yet, this was often disappointed. When I asked one of my interviewees, Maha, what she had expected when she had arrived in Jordan, she said: “Life was going to be the same – same people, same way of life.” This similarity Maha expected would have allowed for a smoother transition from Syria to Jordan. However, not encountering this similarity meant that she had to adapt to her displacement, a process which was not anticipated and extremely challenging.

Interestingly, expectations like Maha’s are fuelled by the way Jordan utilises hospitality in its political discourse as a means of consolidating its national identity – one that emerged from Arab Bedouin tribes that held hospitality as a marker of national pride. El-Abed (2014) argues as much, suggesting that Jordan’s response to refugees has reflected the public discourse that Jordanian hospitality is rooted in the values of its combined identities – Bedouin, Arab, and Islamic – all of which encourage unconditional hospitality to refugees and those seeking asylum. However, this does not mean that the state is not motivated by other, conflicting, priorities, including security, national identity, and political considerations, factors that impose conditions on hospitality. Interestingly, many Syrians arriving to Jordan failed almost completely to consider the conditional

dimensions in their expectations of hospitality which may have contributed to why they felt so utterly disappointed upon their arrival.

In an interaction that emphasised this unconditional expectation of hospitality on a national level, I recall the time I sat in the family home of a married couple. Hameed was attentively looking at his phone, seemingly expecting a call. When he received the call, he spoke briefly and, upon hanging up, looked disappointed. He looked at me and said, “I am sorry that I have to answer all the calls I receive. I am always waiting for a call from an organisation or a center to support me and my family financially, we have registered our name in many organisations but they rarely call us back”. Similarly, others I talked to constantly had their expectations for support from the country that was hosting them and the various bodies that could provide such support disappointed. They had anticipated generosity, respect, and help, but faced exclusion and resentment instead.

Community hospitality

As I focused more closely on the stories and experiences of my participants as they tried to embed themselves in the Jordanian communities, I noticed that many of them experienced discrimination in their new neighbourhoods and exploitation when seeking work. Many explained that neighbours hurled discriminatory and humiliating slurs at them, such as calling them *nooriyeh* (a derogatory term for Jordanian and Syrian Gypsies) or even just calling them *soorriyeh* (Syrians) disparagingly. For instance, Mariam, a woman in her mid-thirties, told me how surprised and hurt she was to find out that people in the street would call her *sooriyyeh nooriyyeh* – “Syrian Gypsy” – turning her identity and nationality into a derogatory label. This made her acutely aware of the way Jordanians looked down on her as a Syrian. Accordingly, she tried to escape the discrimination by hiding any indicators that revealed that she was a Syrian. Others, also like Miriam, talked about the fact that their children were humiliated in the schoolyard or in the streets. This usually led to the exclusion of Syrian children from playing with other children, whether it be in schools or the neighbourhoods. In one of the interviews a mother shared how she had heard

her child being called *soory* (Syrian) while he was playing near their house. When she noticed that he was going out to play less and less due to these insults, she decided to have a word with him. She said to me: “I took him aside and told him, ‘you have to keep going out and playing; being Syrian is nothing to be ashamed of, this is who we are’”. From conversations like this one, it became clear to me that mothers attempted to support their children and buffer the possibly negative effects of discrimination by highlighting that national identity is nothing to be ashamed but to be proud of.

It was not only children who were harassed in the streets. Many adults were disappointed by the discrimination and harassment they experienced due to the fact that they were Syrian. Mariam explained how upsetting it was for her to always feel like she was being seen as a stranger and to be the object of continuous gossip in the street: “I had not expected that at all, I thought it would be exactly the same as in Syria, like my own country.” When I inquired how Jordanians recognised that she was Syrian, she said: “I don’t know, I even changed my clothing to be more similar to Jordanians to fit in more, but I don’t know they still recognise that I am Syrian and make me feel as if I am less.” She felt that everywhere she went she was being sneered at. For example, when she would go to the shops and use coupons (a form of financial support for refugees in Jordan), she would hear people comment: “Look at how much money these Syrians get – look how lucky they are, they’ve ruined our lives.” She told me in frustration that she had to listen to such pronouncements too many times to handle.

The discrimination experienced by Syrians in Jordan further reinforced the disruption of the familiarity that many of them had expected. In fact, the discrimination was explained as yet another layer added to the dashed hopes for a hospitable reception – further emphasising their exclusion from the community. A further example of disbelief resulting from estrangement at the community level is the discrimination Syrians faced when they sought employment with the international NGOs working in Jordan. While volunteering with a local NGO, Hammam, a young man in his early twenties, decided to respond to a call for projects by UNICEF by developing an outline for an initiative to work with young people from Syria and Jordan. He felt great disappointment when he found out

that he was forbidden from registering because he was Syrian. Being forbidden from doing something was upsetting in its own right, but the fact that the rejection was based on his nationality only furthered his growing sense of marginalisation. This was particularly so as his proposed initiative aimed at fostering cohesion between host and refugee communities.

The examples make apparent that expectations of hospitality on the community level were crushed variously through discrimination, marginalization and exclusion. It was especially disheartening for my interlocutors to realise that hospitality and related practices were not only disappointed on national and community levels but also within their own families.

Family hospitality

Several of those who fled Syria sought refuge with their relatives in Jordan. They expected to be welcomed as guests considering that they had often received the very same families as guests in their own homes in Syria before the war. In the words of Lama, who was staying with the relatives of her husband in Jordan: “If they [her relatives] came to Syria we would give them our whole house.” She implied that this almost boundless hospitality should be the proper way of welcoming and treating guests. Compared to this ideal, her experience in Jordan was very different. Instead of reciprocating their generous hospitality and treating them like guests, her husband’s relatives treated them like strangers and tenants in their house. To illustrate this, Lama outlined how she and her family were treated when they had first arrived. Feeling cold and exhausted from the journey, they had hoped for a warm welcome from their relatives. Yet this was not the case. She said:

When we first arrived, you know it was really cold on the way and my baby had needed proper changing and feeding... but even before that the wife of the relative said first thing we need to agree on the rent! She didn’t even have the patience of giving me time to change the baby first.

This example highlights how the familiar scenario of expecting to be a guest suddenly transformed into one of estrangement whereby families such as

Lama's, were made to feel as if they were a burden or, rather, renters and customers.

Others, like Lama, highlighted how they were frequently reminded of the "footprints" they left in their hosts' homes. One participant who had come to Jordan from Swaida, a city located near Damascus, told me that their hosts – also relatives – made her and her family feel as if they had to calculate "every single thing" they used. She explained that the relatives berated them for using too much water and other basic amenities: "This created *ta'ab nafsi* (psychological fatigue) for me," she told me. At the same time, her father-in-law's health began to deteriorate, culminating in a stroke. She explained that she believed that the deterioration of her father-in-law's health was directly linked to the lack of hospitable treatment, but she also perceived the psychological fatigue as exacerbating her father-in-law's illness. By describing to me the inhospitable treatment she and her family experienced in their relative's home, she highlighted how this situation was not only disappointing, but an active source of *ta'ab nafsi* for the entire family.

Inhospitable behaviour was not only encountered when hosted by extended family, but also when living with very close relations such as siblings. The experience of maltreatment and jealousy from close family members was the opposite of the welcome expected and caused tensions between family members. Sanaa', a woman in her thirties lived in a flat neighbouring her brother's and sister's houses. According to her, this led to being under constant scrutiny and surveillance by them, something that she experienced as distressing. The surveillance, she explained, was due to envy as her siblings' families had unrealistic perception about the aid she received thinking that UNHCR and other NGOs showered her with financial and material resources. Indeed, her family and neighbours constantly asked her for money that they assumed she was receiving. "They think we are rich even though we barely can make ends meet." This, in turn, led not only to competition for resources within their family, but also the need to protect herself from them and their demands. She illustrated with the proverb: "If you are not a wolf, wolves will eat you" and by saying: "People eat each other, even families do."

The disappointed expectations in both of the above examples within family spheres highlight how families and relatives contributed to refugees feeling unwelcome in the first few months of arriving in Jordan. Similarly, Michelle Lokot's (2018) highlights in her work about Syrian refugees the importance of understanding nuances of dynamics and feelings of alienation within family. She writes: "Displacement may perhaps be more isolating an experience for Syrians who may not be used to making connections with unknown 'others' – for those who hold to blood ties rather than the weaker ties of water" (17). Her assessment indicates that when family relations are disrupted it may go so far as to lead to feelings of isolation, rather than the expected connectedness. This is an apt observation, and one which I made in my conversations and interviews as well.

Reactions to estrangement: Different ways of seeking the familiar

Arriving in Jordan and encountering the conditional reality of hospitality on the ground fully disrupted the expectation of the unconditional hospitality. In addition, the discrimination by the host community, as well as unreciprocated family hospitality and tensions within families compelled my interlocutors to feel estranged in Jordan. The reactions to this new reality of estrangement took on different forms including a desire to return to Syria and self-imposed isolation and finding people and places within Jordan which reminded them of home. Albeit different, these approaches all shared the notion of seeking the familiar and, thereby, achieve greater wellbeing.

Longing to return

The disbelief felt by many of my participants upon realising that they were not welcome in the country, the communities, and even within their own families led them to contemplate returning to Syria despite the ongoing war and violence. As Faqih told me:

When we first got here, at the beginning the situation was very bad. Our psychological state was very bad. You know, one has come to a place, it's the first time I've have ever been to it, completely not used to it. I would say to myself and to my family 'No *khalas* (enough). No! Let's go back,

let's return [to Syria]...at that time I was serious, if anyone had told me to go back I would have gone back in a heartbeat.

He could not fathom staying, unwelcome as he felt. The accumulation of negative experiences over time – such as leaving their country, family fragmentation, discrimination and financial distress – reinforced the desire of many to return to the familiar, despite the dangers of which they were well aware.

These negative experiences made them feel that it would not be possible to realise their wellbeing within their new host country. Indeed, the fact that some expressed the desire to return to their war-torn homeland highlights their perception that their wellbeing would be better maintained outside of Jordan entirely. For example, Haroon, who was studying at a university in Jordan at the time of our interview, said that he and his siblings did not feel like they could make Jordan their home due to the constant discrimination and harassment they were subjected to. He said: “The only solution is to complete my education and leave. Hundreds [of Syrians] think like this, to me there is no final *istiqrar* (stability) here, there will come a day that I will leave this country”. Similarly others did not perceive Jordan as a country of resettlement and a place to find stability, but rather a place of transition.

Self-imposed isolation

Another reaction to estrangement and exclusion was a self-imposed isolation. Several participants, such as in the examples below, explained that they stopped leaving their house or interacting with people except for close family members for many months on end. As Allam, a young man from Homs shared with me: “The first six months I stayed at home, didn’t go in and out, I stayed in my room, I had not accepted at all”. This story is similar to Nadia’s behaviour after arriving in Jordan with her sister. For the first six months after her arrival, she rarely had any conversations with anyone, feeling demoralised. She repeated a story almost identical to Allam’s, saying: “I rarely left the house, I spoke to very few people...and I spoke to family only because I was forced to speak to relatives since I lived with them”. The feeling of not belonging and of being forced to be in Jordan exacerbated her self-imposed isolation, which served as a way of

escaping the feeling of estrangement. This act of self-isolation was simultaneously an escape from the harsh reality and an important form of self-preservation. In some way, one can regard this kind of reaction as a way of nursing a bare minimum of wellbeing. In this sense, it is similar to the previous strategy of longing to return. In both cases, one can see that conditions in the host country are so alienating that Syrians would either prefer isolation via seclusion or risking, or at least entertaining the notion of, return to a dangerous place.

The two reactions – self-isolation and the wish to return back to Syria – limited many of the interactions between my Syrian participants with the host country and its people. At the same time, these reactions were protective mechanisms through which they sought to evade confrontation and seek shelter from negative experiences. In the following, I will highlight yet another strategy through which many sought to protect themselves from discrimination and harassment namely, by actively seeking familiarity within their Syrian community rather than by engaging with the host community.

Seeking familiarity among fellow Syrians

Seeking familiarity among fellow Syrians was a way of making up for the disappointed expectations of hospitality from the host community. In fact, they created a “bubble” of sorts that insulated them from their hostile surroundings, whether collectively or individually by strengthening family ties as well as forging new connections during their visits at community centres run by NGOs.

Close family lightens the qhorbeh (estrangement)

My interlocutors pointed to their family and, in some cases, specifically to their spouses, as the people who helped to make the felt estrangement in Jordan more bearable and to find familiarity. To illustrate this, I want to turn to Maya who found that the person who helped her navigate her sense of estrangement was her husband, Saleem. She told me: “He makes things easier, lightens things, lightens my *qhorbeh* (feelings of estrangement).” Saleem, in turn, said the same of Maya: “She is very kind to me and *hanuna* (tender)”. The comfort they found

in their relationship allowed them to work through the challenges and disbelief at the estrangement from their relatives in Jordan.

The act of socialising was not straightforward as it was often fraught with social and financial struggles. Those who did not live in Amman or places with many refugees found it difficult to establish connections with fellow Syrians, let alone with their Jordanian neighbours. Narmeen, a young woman I met in a community center in Rusayfe, outlined this challenge for me by establishing the following contrast: “In Syria if I went to the roof of my house to hang some laundry, I will inevitably find some neighbour and they would invite me for some coffee. Here (in Jordan) a week might pass with not even a knock on our door from anyone of the neighbours”. The drastic difference between how easy it was to establish social relations in Syria and how difficult it was to socialise in Jordan entrenched the sense of estrangement and distance between her and the community she was living in.

For those like Narmeen who lived in remote or marginalised areas it was also difficult to establish ties with fellow Syrians considering that the costs of transportation were difficult to justify. Consequently, many chose their place of residence carefully based on proximity to family and Syrian community. Mariam, a young woman in her thirties, emphasised that although she and her family did not share a flat with her close family, she made sure to visit them regularly. She said: “Although we each live in independent flats, we don’t leave each other. I don’t leave my sister, I can’t live without her, this thing helps me in my *ghorbeh* (estrangement), it makes my psychological state better knowing that my family is around me. If it wasn’t this way, I don’t know what would have happened to me”. Her emphasis on the importance of being close to her sister and her family reflects the awareness that without this proximity her life would have been even more difficult.

Elaborating further on how these family relations contributed to improving one’s wellbeing, Maya explained how she mitigated her sense of estrangement by connecting with her family. She told me: “Visiting my maternal family and trying to find old neighbours from Syria helps a lot, it offers a sort of a *mutanaffas* (breather)”. It was existing family relations that created spaces of familiarity which

allowed people to “breathe” and, thereby, release pent-up tension that came from the stressful engagement with the Jordanian community.

Indirect use of NGO spaces

In other efforts to mitigate the estrangement they experienced my interlocutors shared an indirect way of seeking the Syrian familiar through visiting NGOs. Instead of being isolated at home, they shared that they would go to community organisations and NGOs not only for services but also to socialise with other Syrians. While sitting at a community centre in Zarqa, waiting to see if I would be able to conduct interviews with any of the beneficiaries who participate in the activities there, I had a few conversations with some of the women sitting around me. One older woman heard me speak about my research and said: “I’ll give you my daughter’s phone number, I always tell her about activities and programmes, this makes her get out of the house more. Otherwise she mostly just sits in the house.” Going to the community centres allowed many to go out of the house without the anxiety of the transportation costs as usually this would be reimbursed. It was a place where they could find other refugees like themselves, who were trying to do some activities and socialise with others despite the strains of living in Jordan.

This became apparent to me while waiting to interview people at a community centre in Amman. I was invited to join a group of Syrian women who were attending a cooking class. The activity was meant to teach the women how to cook Jordanian dishes and formed part of a psychosocial program. What I noticed was that most, if not all, of the women were not actually listening or paying attention to those teaching them. They told me that they were not really interested in learning how to cook Jordanian meals as they considered their Syrian cuisine superior. Thus, instead of participating, they began to share their own recipes among each other, each woman chiming in with her own region’s tradition of cooking certain meals. Responding to a woman’s outline of her recipe, another woman stated, “This food is similar to how we in Daraa cook,” while another woman exclaimed: “We do it differently in Homs!” Including me in the recipe exchange, I was told by a mother and her daughter about their unique recipe for

making *waraq 'inab*, stuffed grape leaves. These examples highlight how seeking the familiar is part of how people dealt and coped with the estranging environment that disappointed their expectations. These examples reflected how many found spaces that challenged individual isolation in the face of a non-existent hospitality. In other words, such actions helped Syrians to improve their wellbeing by connecting with other Syrians with similar experiences of strained social lives.

While socializing, Syrian refugees helped each other by trading tips and experiences and by sharing information about organisations that offer support – financially, legally and in terms of health. The importance of such exchanges and mutual support was made clear to me during one of my interviews with Ruqaya. She said that it was fellow Syrians rather than NGOs who provided useful tips. Organisations, she said tend to ask detailed questions like “what you eat, what you spend money on, about electricity and water in the house”. Yet, beyond this, they rarely provide much aid. She continued: “There are organisations that I have registered with but it’s *alfadi* (for nothing) ... of the ten organisations that I register with maybe one would call”. Thus, only few organisations actually followed up with her and failed to provide useful information or services. When I asked her based on what criteria she chose organisations to register with, she explained that it was based on other people’s opinions and advice.

A visit to the centres is usually through an invitation to an activity such as knitting, crocheting, or cooking, or professional courses such as hair and make-up or computer literacy courses. The organisations offering these activities to refugees would often reimburse their transportation costs in order to make the visits affordable. This was an important factor in whether or not their beneficiaries would be able to attend and participate. This was made clear to me when I was preparing to recruit participants for my own research from the local NGO in Rusayfe. During one of my conversations with the psychosocial worker and health counsellor, they asked me whether I would reimburse my participants for transportation costs. When I said that I would not, they explained that when they or other organisations set up activities, it is almost expected that they will cover the transportation costs for the participants. Accordingly, I also started to offer reimbursement for transportation for my photovoice participants so as to not burden or exclude them from the project.

The experiences of refugees utilising the spaces of NGOs and centres to their own advantage may have not been part of the direct goals of the aid-providing organisations. Yet, the spaces allowed for building connections with fellow Syrians, exchange tips and advice, receive financial reimbursements, and the occasional *mutanaffas*, or breather, from social strain and isolation.

Tensions between seeking familiarity and efforts to integrate

In one of my visits to an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) that worked with local Jordanian community centres offering services to Syrian refugees, I was invited to join a field visit to one of their partner community centres in the north of Jordan. The INGO focused on partnerships with centres that could offer courses to prepare participants to establish small businesses and generate independent sources of income. In some of the centres, the courses were offered to both Syrians and Jordanians in an effort to foster the integration of refugees in the host community and reduce potential tensions between two groups. As I was accompanying INGO workers on a field visit to a centre in AlMafraq (North of Jordan), one of them outlined his interpretation of the tensions for me. According to him, impoverished Jordanian communities perceived Syrian refugees as receiving more attention and financial support compared to them and consequently felt jealous. This interpretation can certainly find public corroboration, since the Jordanian government consistently enforces the image of Syrian refugees as an economic burden (El-Abed, 2014).

When we arrived at the centre, I was introduced to a group of 22 women – most of them were Syrian, while only few were Jordanian. The activity in which they were to engage was an educational one, aimed at improving literacy. During a conversation with the group, which had been meeting regularly for a couple of months, I was able to observe that social interaction between the Syrians and Jordanians was mostly formal. The seating arrangement was a U shape whereby each of the participant groups clustered together homogenously. The division in the seating and the formal interactions between the participants reflected how, despite two months of regular meetings, the Syrians preferred being with fellow Syrians, finding more comfort and ease with each other than with the Jordanian

participants. This point was further emphasised in a conversation with one of the Syrian volunteers working in the community center. She highlighted that it was in fact important for staff to be Syrian in order to be able to attract Syrians to the centre and to, thereby, offer them a space of comfort. In her opinion, the comfort stemmed from the assumption that there would be a common understanding and shared experiences between fellow Syrians. This seems to show that although there were ardent efforts to promote integration, these efforts were met with challenges due to the preference of Syrians to find comfort with their fellow nationals.

Integration efforts through community-based interventions have been similarly discussed in the literature. For example, Strang and Ager (2008) developed what they consider to be a “successful integration” framework based on literature review and fieldwork among refugees in London and Glasgow. Their framework consists of ten domains including:

Achievement and access across the sectors of employment, housing, education and health; assumptions and practice regarding citizenship and rights; processes of social connection within and between groups in the community; and barriers to such connection, particularly stemming from lack of linguistic and cultural competences and from fear and instability (Strang and Ager, 2008, 185).

While describing this framework as potentially successful, the authors also note its limitations acknowledging that it would be difficult to accommodate the diversity of values and assumptions in different contexts. Interestingly, the notion of integration was debated among photovoice group members as well people I met in NGO visits. Several of the NGO workers considered it important to integrate refugees into the wider Jordanian community. During a visit to a local NGO in Irbid, a female employee explained to me: "To adapt anywhere, you need guidance, someone almost like a tourist guide... people [refugees] who are connected to organisations which offer refugee guidance assist them in integrating into the [host] community." She then added: "Those who did not get support from organisations, you'll find they are facing more hardships and are not adapting so well...they don't reach a point where they are well." Her statement supports the argument that there should be efforts on behalf of NGOs and

governments to assist refugees to integrate into host communities and that it is this integration which allows for the improvement of wellbeing. In contrast, others were sceptical about its success considering that such efforts often failed to actually improve the beneficiaries' wellbeing markedly.

They found that in the face of challenged integration efforts, Syrians preferred to turn inward for support, rejecting many of the programmes with overt integration agendas. In a discussion among one of the photovoice groups, a young man from Yarmouk camp, Rami, explained: "I like to create something that brings together only Syrians – I don't mean anything by that, but most of the work that is being done is aimed at integration. I'm not against dealing with Jordanians, but if you would like to participate you have to participate as a Syrian." Rami's comment stems from his feeling of comfort and familiarity with fellow Syrians, coupled with his dissatisfaction with the integration efforts of the NGOs. While such efforts intend to reduce tensions between the host community and the refugees, they do not necessarily contribute to improving the latter's wellbeing.

I believe that these integration efforts also partly failed as they directly and indirectly emphasised differences between people, spaces and places instead of pointing to commonalities between them. Moreover, they neglected already existing strategies to build social connections, exchange information, and achieve greater wellbeing developed by the refugees themselves. This becomes apparent in the following examples. One of the activities we did as part of the photovoice group was to go on a trip (a *seiran*, or a picnic or outing) to the Dibeena area in Jordan. Upon our return, participants reflected on the joy they had felt upon seeing the similarity between the Dibeena area and the many areas in Syria they were familiar with. In another photovoice meeting, one of the participants pointed to his photo depicting trees and a green landscape somewhere in Jordan. He told us: "When I go to a place full of green and water I feel [as though] I am back in my environment, the same one I grew up in. It reminds of good times from before, like outings we would take with friends and with my family, when we went on *seiran*." As becomes apparent from these examples, my interlocutors did not attempt to assimilate, but rather sought familiarity with people and places that reminded them of Syria in the midst of Jordan. While this brought comfort, it did not resolve their feeling of strangeness in the host country.

Letting go of expectations to move forward

Seeking familiarity in the strange to enhance one's wellbeing was an important aspect of the lived experience of my interlocutors especially when focusing on the first period of arriving to Jordan. Yet many also revealed that it was not the only strategy they adopted to seek wellbeing. For instance, they told me that it was important to let go of certain expectations and rather move on, try to persevere in spite of hardship, and rely on oneself rather than the host community or even family. The importance of letting go of expectations revealed itself during one of our discussions that we had in the Amman photovoice group. Several of the participants agreed that they had adopted an attitude of not expecting, considering that their initial expectations had been shattered, and preferred to rely on themselves. One person stated in our discussion:

From so many experiences you no longer wait for anything from anyone, even from the closest people. *Khalas* (enough), I don't wait for anything. Whether they like you or not, whether they care for you or not – *la 'ijri* (I give them my foot). Life has taught me not to expect anything from anyone. If they do something nice, good. If they don't, it's normal since you don't have any expectation. You're on your own, and you have to take responsibility for yourself.

Letting go of expectations contributed to an increased level of responsibility for one's own actions as well as a future outlook which allowed for planning and seeking opportunities for oneself as well as one's family and even friends. A Syrian man working in an NGO shared his reflections on this with me saying, "I had to think, 'Should I stay where I am? Or will I start anew?' I must look to the future." At the time, this had reminded him of stories he had heard about Palestinian refugees explaining, "those who shook the dust off of themselves - their children have become men and live in Abdoun [a fancy and well-to-do area in Amman]. I think about this and I think my daughter has the right to live." His reflections make apparent how important it was for him to let go of expectations and disappointments ("shaking off the dust") in order to be able to look into a brighter future with new possibilities and opportunities not only for himself, but his family, especially his daughter.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have outlined how my participants moved from feeling strange in the familiar to seeking the familiar in the strange in order to enhance their wellbeing. Upon initial feelings of disbelief and even shock about the treatment they received not only from Jordanians, but also their own families, they sought to improve their lives variously. Some strategies were more insular such as self-isolation or individualistic by trying to become more self-reliant and independent. Other strategies were collective in nature as they emphasised intra-Syrian community cohesion. Although one may regard some of the more insular practices as passive, this would paper over the fact that it was through such activities that my interlocutors actively sought self-preservation in a hostile environment while also trying to come to terms with their disrupted expectations.

The wellbeing experienced by my interlocutors constantly fluctuated. It shifted as their lived experiences changed. I found that their stories of their displacement did not contain explicit referrals to wellbeing. However, this changed as my interlocutors shared with me how they tried to navigate the strained and estranging context in Jordan by seeking greater wellbeing through forging social ties with family members and establishing new relationships during visits to NGOs and other community centres. As they navigated the difficult context, they also started to develop a future outlook whereby they stopped entertaining the wish to return to war-affected Syria (at least in the immediate sense) and began to accept their stay as protracted requiring proactive engagement with the new environment. The following chapter will build on this by highlighting how accepting the protractedness of their stay in Jordan was productive in that it harboured new possibilities which were experienced as hugely transformative.

6. Beyond living in the temporary: Seeking wellbeing in protracted displacement

A refugee is similar to a prisoner at times. He tries to control his life amidst the new conditions. And what do I mean by controlling life? It means to have a base, a point of stability. A point of stability is necessary to plan for life, to control time in such a way that it allows the transformation from the state of the displaced refugee to the state of the stable refugee who is able to recommence life or give himself a new beginning (Haj Saleh, 2018).

The quote above by prominent Syrian author and refugee Yassin Haj Saleh reflects on the needs of displaced persons to control their new lives while experiencing displacement. He refers to a key “transformation” throughout the period of displacement that takes the refugee from a state of mere survival to a state of stability. He argues that this transformation is only possible when steps are actively taken to secure this stable state. While Al-Haj Saleh’s reflection seems to suggest a sort of linearity or stage-ism in the transformation from distress to stability, it bears noting that his description is written as an abstracted reflection on an aspect of the lived experience of Syrian refugees. This is not to say that this “progression” takes place literally; the reality is far more complex and dynamic. Nevertheless, it describes a general tendency or format which also my interlocutors appeared to reproduce namely, the striving to transition from a state of survival to one of stability. Naturally, this transformation was not in every case total, and was in many cases partial and incomplete due to the continued salience of the strains in their lives. These strains, such as immigration policies, discrimination and socioeconomic exclusion, hurled obstacles in the path of people’s attempts to achieve a sense of stability. But despite these obstacles, they consciously took proactive measures to qualitatively change their lives – this included pursuing their education, marrying, finding employment, social engagement through volunteering, securing housing and so on.

The stability these measures aimed to secure were part and parcel of the experience of seeking and improving their wellbeing. In other words, the transformation towards seeking stability, insofar as people I met were concerned,

was their way of enhancing their personal and interpersonal experiences of wellbeing. In this chapter, I unpack the concept of transformation as it relates to two sets of literature, namely literature exploring experiences of displacement (Brun, 2016; Shaarawi, 2015) and literature engaging the concept of liminality (the feeling of marginality and “in-between-ness” that is felt during periods of transition or extreme change) (Simich, 2009; Turner, 1967). Specifically, I pay particular attention to moments of transformation in the later stages of my participants’ time in Jordan, moments they described as “*nuqtat tahawwul*” (a transformation point). This transformation was usually experienced from six months to a year after they arrived in Jordan, when they described a significant change from experiences of isolation and depression, to a new period that allowed them to change how they dealt with and perceived their lives in exile. Many referred to this as moving towards a direction of *istiqrar* (stability). Specifically, transformation was not so much a state as it was a set of practices, and included varied life experiences such as volunteering, seeking employment, education and social celebrations, as well as seeking stability in residence and housing. These practices were part of the adaptation to the new lives in Jordan. Here, I focus specifically on these experiences and reflect on concrete ethnographic examples in order to illuminate yet another aspect of the various lived experiences of wellbeing. Specifically, I explore how my interlocutors negotiated their practices of wellbeing, as well as the tensions and struggles experienced as these transformations took shape.

Changes in perspectives over time

The experiences of transformation were described as first emerging when many of my participants ceased to expect a short-term stay in Jordan and a swift return to Syria and, instead, started to accept that they would be staying in exile for the foreseeable future. This moment of recognition meant that my they started to have different needs, such as access to employment, health services and adequate housing, and it was the pursuit of these needs that characterised how they then perceived their wellbeing. This change in perception was not a sudden one, but rather a lengthy process. Time plays a crucial role in regard to changes

in perception and has been explored as the notion of “time-perspective” by Catherine Brun (2016) in her work on protracted displacement among internally displaced Georgians from Abkhazia. In her work, Brun introduces the concept of “agency-in-waiting,” referring to “an understanding of how people are able to move on during a situation of protracted uncertainty...[which] also shows that there is a limit to the ability of IDPs [internally displaced persons] to challenge their status and control their future” (33). Placing displacement experiences within this temporal framework allows us to understand with added nuance “the process by which people structure the experience of protracted uncertainty, that is how they cope with this particular experience of uncertainty” (33). In the following, I bring to the fore the time framework within which my interlocutors lived and how it affected their shift in perspective towards their lived experiences in the present.

Initially the expectation held was that the time in Jordan would be temporary. Many were hopeful that after a relatively short wait in exile, they would be able to return to Syria quickly. But as time passed, the realisation that their stay in Jordan would be longer-term and that new arrangements needed to be found to make life liveable in under these circumstances set in. The director of an international organisations working with Syrian refugees in the field of education made a similar observation telling me: “When Syrians first arrive, they don’t have clarity and stability. In a sense they think, ‘well, we’re not staying here for long, a couple of weeks and maybe we’ll go back, or a couple of months and we’ll go back’.” He then went on to describe how the refugees’ narratives about the urge to return to their home country changed over time, saying: “Yet, later this tone [of desire to return] decreased greatly, and they started having different needs, reflecting that they now live here [in Jordan] with a certain degree of stability.” According to him, Syrian refugees experienced a shift in perspective once they realised that their presence in Jordan was not as temporary as they had initially expected. It is also a nod to changes in their behaviour that were connected to their shift in perspective (or, as the NGO director said, “they started having different needs”). This shift in perspective did not happen suddenly, but gradually. Similarly, many of my participants shared with me that “with time” they started thinking of stability and changed the ways in which they interacted among each other and the Jordanian society.

While behavioural change appeared over a certain period of time, most people I talked to remembered very clearly when they first actually realized that their perspectives and related actions changed. In fact, they used the notion of time as a framing mechanism to structure their narratives and experiences of transformation. They would say: “Within the first six months...” and “after this period what happened was...” as a way of framing their narratives. First, they would describe the period before the transformation, where many felt isolated and *ikta’abit* (depressed), and avoided socialisation. Allam, a young man in his early twenties from Homs told me that “at first I didn’t leave the house, I barely left my room, I became *ikta’abit*. For six months, I didn’t leave the house, until one day I felt I should get out of the house.” Others echoed Allam’s experience of distress, highlighting the length of time during which their feelings of distress persisted. During a photovoice meeting, Hammam, a young man from Damascus told me that during the “first six months [I] still wanted to be in Syria. [I] was pulled towards Syria,” indicating his lack of comfort in Jordan and rejection of being there. Other members of the photovoice group appeared to understand precisely what he was referring to, as most of them initially rejected the idea of living in Jordan for an extended period of time and, consequently, isolated themselves from their host society during the first six to twelve months of displacement. Most notably, whenever they would reference their “moment of transformation”, they preceded their narratives with an account of the first few difficult months upon arrival.

In a way, the passing of time itself helped to change the perspective of Syrians I met, since the news of the ever-worsening conditions in Syria made it clear that Jordan would not be a temporary haven. This serves to further highlight the stark differences between the initial period and the one that followed – that is, pre- and post-transformation. This realisation meant a shift in their practices, from those which related to a temporary stay, to one which acknowledged the protracted nature of their stay in Jordan, and thus the need to attend to the necessities of everyday life, such as finding accommodation that was not temporary, establishing one’s family and recommencing certain behaviours such as enrolling children into schools and finding employment. “The situation in Syria seems to be going backwards, not forwards,” Roqaya told me, a woman in her late twenties and mother of three. In the same conversation, she linked this

realisation to the fact that she began to seek stability in her life and, thereby, to properly arrive in Jordan. When I asked if she felt more stable now, she responded: “Yes. I used to say tomorrow maybe I’ll go back [to Syria], but now we are here [in Jordan]. It seems like we are staying.” Her contentment at being settled in Jordan, belated though it was, is indicative of the willingness to “recommence life” as described by Haj Saleh above. Through Roqaya’s reflection, we can surmise that this realisation and acceptance of being in Jordan for a protracted period of time shaped how others also perceived their lives, which was also linked to changes in how they lived their lives on a daily basis. In the following, I present several ways my interlocutors engaged in practices that contributed to their experiences of transformation. I argue that these practices are part and parcel of their wellbeing, a practice which moved them along the trajectory from depressed isolation to strained stability.

Recommencing social celebrations

In the conversations I had with my participants about the initial part of their arrival to Jordan, many shared a description of lives as being “put on hold.” Nadia El-Shaarawi (2015) observed a similar phenomenon among Iraqi refugees in Egypt. They faced both spatial and temporal uncertainty. Spatial uncertainty meant that the Iraqis in Egypt were in transition, hoping to go to another country for resettlement and not knowing where they would go. Temporal uncertainty, on the other hand, meant that they were unsure when their transition might take place. This meant that Iraqis felt “stuck between places and in between past and possible future lives, with the sense that a resolution was out of their hands” (39). The practice of life and all its attendant activities and rituals was temporarily suspended, as was certainly the case with many young men and women as well as families I met. Their moments of transformation helped change that. They were able to recommence, as far as they were able to, their daily lives.

Social celebrations served as crucial nodes for this process of transformation, from having their lives “put on hold” (Shaarawi, 2015) to acting towards improving their wellbeing through certain practices, including social

celebrations. Many referred to having delayed or suspended the decision to get married or start a family due to the lack of stability and the temporary nature of their lives during the initial period of arrival. With the realisation that they were here to stay, they picked up the threads of their lives from where they had left off. They resumed these plans and moved on with the necessary rites, some feeling anxious that they have waited for a long time, but were at last feeling relieved to be able to make this decision and act towards resuming certain aspects of their lives. For instance, it was not until Radi had realised that he was not returning to Syria anytime soon – “not in the next few days, or the next couple of weeks” – that he let his mother and sister help him find a suitable wife. “Had I been in Syria I would have been married even earlier,” he explained. “I would have married younger, maybe at 21 or 22. But because I kept waiting, I am now marrying relatively late [25 years old].” The state of uncertainty and temporariness in which he had lived compelled him to delay his decision to get married.

Displacement in its initial stages fostered the perception that Syrians were only temporarily residing in Jordan, which meant that they did not associate their place of refuge with the requisite rites of passage that are normally associated with a permanent place of residence – which, in their minds, remained Syria for some time. Within this period, my interlocutors’ experiences of uncertainty — not knowing when they would return to Syria, putting rites of passage on hold — echoes the social liminality discussed by Laura Simich and colleagues (2009). They examined how immigrants in Canada adapted and navigated their lives from the margins of society to achieve their mental wellbeing. In order to explain these social processes, the authors refer to Victor Turner’s (1967) early conception of liminality, a notion of the “neither here nor there” experienced during *rites de passages* among the Ndembo Zambian boys as they transitioned from boyhood to manhood. In their work, Simich et al. highlight that the transformation from mental distress to mental wellbeing can be considered a vital part of immigrants’ adaptation process. This process is conceptualised as social liminality, meaning “marginalization from mainstream culture and society and the inability to exercise power and control” (258). The authors state that their participants identified integrating into the Canadian culture as one of the most significant challenges—feeling powerless and marginal within it, feeling socially liminal (Simich et al.,

2009). However, their work goes beyond social liminality as they discuss how their participants engaged in a process of adaptation, or “cultural negotiation,” which included “an active, empowering process of personal reflection and recovery from mental distress in a given social context” (260). This cultural negotiation included a reconstruction of their perspectives to allow both their culture and that of their hosts’ to inform their lived experiences. This included compromises which they felt were beneficial, even if they weren’t entirely satisfactory. For example, one participant recognised that his shock at people not cleaning after themselves at the mall was resolved when he realised that this practice created the need for a cleaning job, which he himself was employed to do. In another example, to illustrate the transformative process of cultural negotiation, the authors present the example of a participant who felt isolated due to being separated from his family. He started to explain the changes he went through as he realised that in the country of his resettlement he was able to find a new ‘family’ consisting of new strong relationships, and realising that there were similarities between how Canadians and his own Latin American culture value family.

These kinds of negotiations were different in the case of my participants, due to the proximity of Jordanian and Syrian cultures. Instead, they took the form of shifts in perspective about various aspects of life, including their expectations regarding social celebrations, housing, employment, and education. Their negotiations reflected the change from perceiving their life in Jordan as temporary and transient, to accepting that they would be staying longer and needed to attempt to establish stability amidst a strained context. The negotiations they undertook were mainly negotiations of their expectations, which was most clear in their recognition of the struggles and constraints they faced as they strived for practices that would bring stability and wellbeing to their lives in Jordan. For example, Radi’s negotiations as a means of mitigating his liminal experience can be seen in the evolution of his attitude towards marriage: “I had not intended on getting married here. I thought I would go back to Syria first, and marry there.” When Radi decided to get married, it was an acknowledgment of a shift in perspective about his life in Jordan. Gone was his view of the temporariness when he started to resume the life plans he had originally laid for himself in once-stable

Syria. Jordan, although hardly receiving Syrian refugees with open arms, still offered a modicum of that stability, but only after – as Radi realized- they came to terms with the fact that they would be staying, that they would not be there temporarily.

Yet displacement itself sometimes complicated the process of marriage. Radi recounted the travails of his twin brother's attempt to marry in Jordan as he encountered legal problems related to the different registration statuses of himself and his wife. "Up to today, they [the UNHCR Jordan] have refused to register his wife with him on the same *mufwadiyya*." ²⁵ He went on to explain: "this is because she had been registered in Zaatari²⁶ [refugee camp, while he was registered elsewhere] ... this is despite having a marriage contract at the court ... they have tried to fix this, but I don't know, they have not found a way!" Such legal difficulties complicated life matters. The uncertainty caused Radi to fear for his brother's family, since his brother's wife could be taken back to Zaatari at any moment, given that she was still registered with her father's family.²⁷ For Radi, the shift in perspective regarding his marriage and that of his brother was situated within a strained context, not knowing the legal frameworks that influenced their registration, which created a sense of uncertainty and family discomfort.

What Radi's case makes apparent is that resuming social life was expressed through certain social milestones, such as marriage or moving into a new family home. Yet none of these steps was a cure-all for their problems. Indeed, the resumption of social life was often fraught with dissatisfaction due to various structurally induced strains. Narmeen's experience illustrates this: even though she was able to marry her husband in Jordan, which was itself a sign of carrying on with an aspect of her life as she would have done in Syria, she was

²⁵ *Mufwadiyya*: the UNHCR asylum seeker certificate paper given to each family to confirm their legal status as Syrian refugees in Jordan. This paper includes all members of the family, and their passport information (from fieldwork observations).

²⁶ Zaatari refugee camp: refugee camp in Mafraq, in the North of Jordan. The camp was established in 2012, and as of February 2018 has hosted 788,994 Syrian refugees (UNHCR, Zaatari camp fact sheet, February/2018).

²⁷ "Previously, Syrians stopped by the police who could not prove that they left the camps lawfully were liable to arrest, involuntary transfer to refugee camps, or to be summarily deported to Syria. Police also often arrest people working without authorization" (Human rights watch, 2018; retrieved 2018.oct.22).

not free from constraints and was still far from attaining what she considered a normal progression of social life. Although she got married and moved in with her husband's family, when I asked about the beginning of her life with them and her wedding, she responded: "The wedding? What wedding?" The sarcasm in Narmeen's tone was hard to miss as she highlighted the dissatisfaction of having what she considered to be a lacklustre wedding that fell short of her expectations. "There was nobody we could invite," she told me. "All of this happened at the very beginning of my in-laws' arrival here, so they also weren't prepared to host a wedding [so soon after arrival]. They came to our house, they took me." Everything was done in such haste that it felt as if they were all trying to "cover up a crime", she told me laughing. Then she added: "but of course there were difficulties." In Narmeen's experience of marriage, none of the expected traditions were followed. She did not have a proper wedding, which would have entailed *jhaz* (bridal preparation), buying bridal jewellery, celebrating with a *zaffe* (a procession celebrating the bride and groom), a wedding party with guests and moving into an independent home. None of these customary rites could be carried out, as everything was rushed due to the financial constraints and limited resources of her husband's family, who could not bear the expenses that these rituals would have entailed. And after marrying her husband, Narmeen told me, "we didn't even have a bed, we slept on a mattress on the ground!" Narmeen further explained that, at the beginning of her marriage, she was hopeful that life circumstances would improve enough to fulfil some of the above-mentioned traditions in a belated manner, such as having a delayed wedding party. However, continued financial difficulties and the lack of a strong social network did not allow for such a celebration. When I asked her if she would host a wedding now, after having gained some financial stability, she responded jokingly: "No, I am an old woman now, I've been married for four years." Her response was part of her disappointment of not having had a proper celebration of her marriage, which reflects part of the social exclusion she had felt in her experience in Jordan. As she explains, life in Jordan was also difficult for her husband, especially when it came to finding employment. Yet even as she reflected on these difficulties, she said: "It is difficult for him [my husband], but you accept reality. It is better ... it makes it easier that we are together." As she negotiates these changes in life in Jordan, she recognises that a certain level of acceptance is needed, and that

accepting reality is partly made easier by being with her husband. This acceptance and recognising that she is sharing this experience with her husband made her feel content with what they have and was part of her own practice of wellbeing. Narmeen's experience tells us that even though she attempted to "recommence" her social life, seeking stability through practicing social conventions, the realisation of that stability would not allow her to escape the strained context that comes with being a refugee – most importantly, financial strain. How Narmeen dealt with this disappointment is in itself instructive of how I view her wellbeing. As her initial expectation of enjoying a wedding with all the expected social conventions proved untenable, she was forced to face reality, accepting the situation for what it was; by feeling contentment she was able to feel well rather than continuing to feel disappointment.

The stories shared thus far about weddings as social celebrations indicate the acceptance of life in Jordan, propelled by the need to adapt and find stability. Yet as it was conveyed, experiences of transformation did not immediately lead to a sense of stability, but rather a period filled with tension and strain due to insecurity, weakened social ties and lack of material resources. Moreover, these celebrations are not only marked with a sense of joy, but also laced with sadness at the absence of faraway loved ones and the lack of some traditions – leading to disappointed expectations. The experiences mentioned show that navigating the strains of life, yet being able to recommence certain aspects which were paused, allowed my interlocutors to feel relief and joy in certain instances, and contentment in spite of disappointment, which allowed them to move forward with their lives.

Seeking *istiqrar* (stability) through housing

The *tahawwol* (transformation) which was experienced as the shift in perception of their stay in Jordan from temporary to protracted led my interlocutors to seek *istiqrar* (stability) within various aspects of their lives. The recognition of protracted stay and practices of seeking of stability were in themselves part of their experience of wellbeing within this period. One of the

dimensions included in this process was related to housing. Narmeen's example above illustrates the tribulations that came with less-than-ideal living situations, which in turn motivated people to introduce changes. They began to reject living in temporary, crowded and otherwise inadequate housing conditions. The search for stability was often turbulent and involved moving from one house to another, but, at the same time, also highlighted people's desire to improve their living conditions and through this their sense of wellbeing.

Most of my participants and their families moved houses several times. Each move was shaped by the desire to find a home that would provide the family with greater stability. Yet this was a difficult goal to attain in contexts where finding affordable and adequate apartments was no easy task, especially with soaring rent prices due to tensions with the host community. As documented by the UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), 41% of Syrian refugees live in rented accommodation, which has "two or more substandard features, such as insufficient ventilation, dampness, leaking walls, poor hygiene conditions, and privacy concerns." Moreover, lease agreements are becoming scarcer for shorter renting periods (assessment of the Jordanian marketplace, UNHCR and NRC, 2018). I was able to observe the housing conditions of some of the Syrian families while visiting several houses as part of the interviews I conducted and when I was accompanying volunteers working with NGOs during home visits. I was able to note the differences between people's homes and living conditions. Although I did not conduct a survey to understand the varied socio-economic status of the households, it became apparent that several Syrian families were living in difficult conditions characterised by a lower socioeconomic status compared to others. They lived in simple small apartments, shared by several families or one large family. Many of the houses I visited consisted of only one room with minimal furniture, often just a few mattresses, while in other cases, apartments did not have doors between the rooms and sheets and blankets were used instead. The bathrooms had often only basic plumbing and were sometimes shared with several other families which has implications for privacy and hygiene.

Conversations with my participants brought to the fore that the seeking of stability through finding adequate housing was both a struggle and a way to

actively seek an improvement for their lives and, related to this, their wellbeing. This might be further evidenced by research that found that although both Syrian refugees and Jordanians struggled with finding adequate and affordable housing, Syrian refugees had a more positive outlook about the future improvements in the housing conditions (REACH, 2014). This further emphasises the argument I present about my interlocutors continuously seeking better housing as part of improving their wellbeing. This process was made more complex by the obstacles many Syrians experienced and continue to experience, both financially and socially, while trying to find housing, leading them often to jump from one house to another, yet in the direction of seeking a type of *istiqrar* (stability).

Beyond the housing itself, my participants mentioned that the neighbourhood's atmosphere – its friendliness, how safe it made them feel and the proximity to people they knew – also influenced their sense of wellbeing. Being able to live among neighbours one could trust, who were able to help each other out, and who created a sense of safety was in itself important. Arriving in a neighbourhood where they could feel well often required several moves, from one neighbourhood to another. Each move brought them closer to attaining less crowded living conditions, greater independence from host families, and improved social relations with relatives. Several commented on the social aspects of moving houses and how it influenced their experience of wellbeing throughout the process. As Ruqaya recounted her own moves between homes, she commented on the social dynamics related to the moves, telling me:

When we first came here, we stayed at my husband's brother's house. We stayed for almost one month there. We were there with my husband's sister's family as well, all in the same house. Two families, we stayed in the Nazzal neighbourhood. The women alone [in one room] and the men in their own [room]. We stayed for six months like that in that house. Then we moved to a slightly bigger house. Another six months alone, then I moved alone to a smaller house.

When I asked her whether or not she was happy during this time, she responded: "Yes *hamdulla* (thank God). We are close to my husband's brother's house and other relatives of my in-laws. We are close to them, which is a good

thing.” And yet Ruqaya’s moves from one house to another were not only for financial or logistical reasons, but were also motivated by the need for independence and a comfortable, less overcrowded space. At the same time, Ruqaya was emphatic in highlighting the importance of maintaining a close connection with relatives, whom she frequently visited and has nurtured positive social relationships. Ruqaya’s experience of transformation occurred when she and her family accepted that she was not residing in Jordan short-term, and this motivated her to find new housing that would accommodate her need for independence and continued family relations. These actions represent how she practiced her wellbeing, seeking comfort that would satisfy her need for both individual autonomy and community cohesion.

But of course, such aims were not easy to achieve, and had to be pursued by navigating the harsh conditions in which people were situated in order to improve their wellbeing. The major changes caused by the first or second move also meant a difference in the dynamics of families and how they were living in Jordan. Sama and her mother shared with me, for example, that when they were not living independently in their first four months, “the atmosphere of the whole house was *kaabeh* (depressing), the whole household would stay up at night, and sleep through the days, without going out or seeing people ... in those months we hated Jordan.” The way that Sama described this experience of moving houses and how it was part of their family’s transformation also highlighted how this experience was not an individual one, but rather experienced collectively as a family. This sentiment changed for the better when they found their own independent house, which also motivated the mother and the elder son to find employment.

These two examples highlight that the transformation could be shaped by several aspects of their lives, and how families work together to improve their lives and may also experience the transformation in their emotional states together. The navigation of struggles such as finding adequate housing, and emotional changes that accompany this struggle reflect what Yotebieng et al. (2018) found in their own study with urban refugees. In their exploration of wellbeing perspectives among urban refugees and professionals in Cameroon,

the authors present how their interlocutors identified finding adequate housing is a continuous struggle, and where poor housing conditions impact their health negatively. For refugees in Cameroon, housing was one of the main which were highlighted, and humanitarian agencies were urged to consider it as one of the top needs to be addressed (Yotebieng, 2018).

The aspects I have discussed thus far, such as the recommencing of social celebrations and seeking stable housing conditions, may also coincide with seeking of employment and volunteering opportunities. This leads me to the next practice of seeking stability, to which I will now turn.

Seeking wellbeing through employment

Seeking employment was essential for many of my interlocutors as they needed to be able to support themselves and their families financially. Finding employment was referred to recurrently as part of the transformation experience and contributing to wellbeing. Seeking employment was interwoven with recommencing social celebrations and finding suitable housing as dimensions of the overall transformation experienced. Scholars investigating the role of employment and market participation note that it is one of the elements in refugees lives that influences “promoting economic independence, planning for the future, meeting members of the host society, providing opportunity to develop language skills, restoring self-esteem and encouraging self-reliance” (Strang and Ager, 2008, 170). Strang and Ager’s statement shows that finding employment contributes to the significant changes in the lived experiences of refugees. This was certainly the case for my interlocutors as well. Seeking employment or volunteering opportunities was the result of accepting the permanence of their stay in Jordan and broke their isolation. On some level, it should not be considered surprising that employment has this effect: by becoming employed and participating in volunteering initiatives, my interlocutors found vital sources of financial support. “Volunteering,” it should be noted, was a way for employers in Jordan to hire Syrians for pay while circumventing the red tape of obtaining work permits. The lack of financial support put them in conditions of strain to begin

with – tight living quarters, substandard housing conditions and so on. While the flow of new income helped furnish the resources necessary to facilitate the move to better housing. In other words, employment was a vital tool that enabled the aforementioned practices of seeking stability, and simply made the attainment of that stability easier.

In the experience of Faqih, one of my interviewees, finding employment preceded the importance of education. He stated: “I didn’t start studying right away, I found a job. I helped my father and family”. This would help provide a small income for his family. At the time Faqih felt that his father and his family needed the financial means to establish a beginning in Jordan, and that he needed to help his family in that process before starting to think of his own education. The financial reasoning behind finding employment is important, yet employment and volunteering were also ways in which they broke their isolation. Getting out of the house and becoming more active in the way that is required from work had a positive effect on their wellbeing, making them feel like they are able to contribute financially to their homes, as well as feeling good about contributing to the community. The period before employment was, in a sense, one of isolation because as many of my interlocutors explained, they did not interact socially with others in the community. Starting work reflected both an indication that they felt ready to engage with the community, and an opportunity to do so through employment.

For Allam, the point of *tahawwol* (transformation) from a time of isolation to being an active contributor in the community began when he realised the protracted nature of his stay in Jordan. This realisation led him to get out of the house and search for employment and volunteering opportunities. He broke his own isolation – which manifested as staying at home and not leaving the house – by finding a part-time job at a dry cleaner near his home, while also volunteering at a nearby community centre. “This was a *nuqtat tahawwol* (transformation point),” he told me. “I participated in a 12-day training in Madaba, where I met many people. Through the training, we launched initiatives, one of which I am still a part of. It’s called The Pens Initiative to tackle illiteracy of children in schools.” His volunteering experience meant that he was more socially engaged than

before. Being able to open up to the world was what instigated his *nuqtat tahawwol* (transformation point), as he put it. Much of this engagement was motivated by his desire to shed the stereotypes attached to being a refugee – that is, as he put it, of being a social leech who does not contribute to society. As previously described, the Jordanian host community perceived Syrian refugees negatively, as a result of misconceptions about the adverse effects of the Syrian community on the Jordanian economy and job market. Luigi Achilli (2016) discusses how Jordan reacted to the influx of Syrian refugees, stating: “That Syrian refugees are blamed for a variety of issues that have always plagued Jordan’s dysfunctional infrastructure and stagnant economic market” (8). As a result Allam instead wanted to show that “a refugee doesn’t wait for aid; on the contrary, he creates initiatives.”

The positive effects of breaking this stereotype and its effects on wellbeing should not be understated, as it served to change the host community’s perception of him as a refugee, but more importantly changed his own perception of himself. Through his volunteering, and therefore engagement with the community, Allam was proving to himself and the host community that he was a contributor. This is the transformative effect this engagement had on him, no longer seeing himself as a draining recipient of aid, and becoming a provider of support to the community.

This perception of marginalisation was by no means exclusive to Allam, rather, it served as a motivating factor for many Syrians in their efforts to prove that they can contribute to society. By breaking stereotypes about themselves as refugees, they improved their perception of their own role in the community greatly. They saw that they were able to engage in developing initiatives in the community despite the discrimination and marginalization they experienced, creating a cycle that moved them further away from the isolation and *ihbat* (depressive feelings) that they felt in the first period of their displacement and in turn improved their experience of wellbeing.

When my interlocutors were able to do so, it contributed positively to their perceptions of self-worth and, by extension, to their wellbeing. Hammam, for instance, participated as a volunteer at a Jordanian organisation which provided

scholarships to university students while at the same time engaging them in community engagement programmes. Working at this organisation was a point of *tahawwol* for him, asserting that participating in the organisation “was important in *tahawwol* (transforming) my development and my experience in Jordan and my reality there.” He continued to explain that the organisation fostered the sense of “feeling as equals. Reciprocity within [the organisation] is very positive, [making us] feel like we are family.” The importance of being perceived as equals lies in disrupting the experience of discrimination – most notably felt when his fellow classmates would exclude him and look down upon him throughout his education, directed at him because he is Syrian. By feeling equal and “like family,” Hammam felt accepted rather than excluded, contributing to a shift in his life experience – from exclusion and isolation, to active participation.

Nadia’s experience also reiterated elements of the *tahawwol* (transformation) previously explored – initial isolation, acceptance of permanence, followed by a transformation and subsequent social engagement based on this transformation. At the time of her arrival in Jordan she was feeling hurt as a result of leaving Syria – she states that as a result: “So for the first six months [in Jordan] I rarely went anywhere or even left the house, I spoke to very few people. I was completely in a state of self-inflicted *inghilaq* (closure).” When Nadia left Syria, she was in the middle of her exam period, rudely disrupting her education, her community engagement and her participation in the revolution. These disruptions led her to reject her new life in Jordan for the first six months. When I asked her what happened after those initial six months, she replied: “there was a change, I’ll tell you how: my family started to make me work, or tried to help me work. I had been working since my second year in university, so I started looking for work – or rather, they started looking for jobs for me in order to pull me out of my bad mood.” Her experience echoes that of Hammam and Allam, in that she pursued employment and volunteering to break her isolation. In the case of Nadia, the role of family was also highlighted. Her family’s support and encouragement was essential in motivating her transformation from isolation to engaging in the community. She gradually started to socialise, initially with just one colleague in a school she taught at. Working meant a return to pattern of a life she knew, since she always worked alongside her education. This routine was

familiar, and that sense of familiarity, fostered by seeking experiences that would bring her into contact with other Syrians, was essential for Nadia's experience of wellbeing. She changed jobs several times and seemed to feel settled only when she felt that she was giving back to her own Syrian community through volunteer work with an INGO that worked with Syrian refugees. In her words: "I was so happy to do this job, I didn't care for anything, I didn't even pay too much attention at the salary or even the work hours, the most important part was that I was helping people of my country [Syria], this is what I wanted". Her determination and focus in her position working with her Syrian community, contributed greatly to the sense of comfort that she had when working, and feeling like she was doing something good for her own community. The sense of familiarity in this type of work was even greater, in addition to the feeling that she can do it well. The role of familiarity both in relation to going back to a familiar work routine, as well as seeking the Syrian familiar by working with the Syrian community, reminds of 'seeking the familiar as part of the experience of wellbeing' as discussed in the previous chapter. This was the transformation point – because she felt like she was an active participant in the community, the way she used to be in Syria. Her experience of wellbeing presents a situation where both seeking the familiar as well as experiencing transformation overlapped. This shows how different processes of seeking wellbeing may indeed overlap and interact within the experiences of Syrians and are not tied directly to linear and discrete stages.

The shared experiences I have presented reflect that participation in employment and volunteering and through engaging in both the Jordanian and the Syrian communities was how my interlocutors were enacting changes in their lives which they perceived as transformative. These examples also show that my interlocutors broke their isolation by engaging socially and professionally through in the community. This afforded them a considerable sense of personal and collective agency, agency which contributed positively to their wellbeing. Moreover, once they became what they perceived as productive members of the community, they started to feel as equals and experienced less discrimination, receiving greater recognition for their efforts and initiatives. This in turn played an important role reinforcing their break from isolation and their heightened sense of wellbeing.

Experiencing wellbeing through education

Education was in itself a goal for many Syrians, but the ravages of war made this goal unrealisable for many of them. A return to education, whether at the high school or university level, represented a return to normality. Many of my interlocutors highlighted this as an issue of great importance. In one stark description of the meaning of education, Narmeen who had not continued her education past ninth grade, shared the value she saw in education through her sister's experience of studying in an institute for hospital management: "She is happy. After two years [of living in Jordan], she got a scholarship – it was like she was in prison, and was suddenly set free." Clearly, Narmeen was describing the opportunity she didn't have herself, but she recognised the significance of it all the same. The proof, she maintains, is in the marked improvement in her sister's life.

The fact that her sister was not able to secure a scholarship until after two years of residing in Jordan is a stark reminder that undergoing a "transformation" for some of my interlocutors was a difficult process that took a long time in many cases. Allam, whose transformation experience is described at the beginning of the chapter, emphasised that education was a path for change for him. When he was in Syria, he was in university studying mathematics, as this was the subject his grades allowed him to study. Two years into his displacement, he decided to go back to university, this time studying civil engineering, a subject he cared about more. In the group discussions he participated in, he shared with us that from a certain perspective one could appreciate the unexpected opportunities that may arise due to being in a different context. Though the displacement itself was not a choice and was forced upon him, he strived to make his own decisions about what he is doing with his life in Jordan. Allam saw that instead of a future as a bored mathematics teacher, he would be able to become an engineer, a profession he was more passionate about.

The experience of returning to education was incredibly important as a way of returning back to a type of normality after displacement. After experiencing the disruption caused by the crisis in Syria and arriving in Jordan, recognising that their stay in Jordan would be protracted, education was one of the pathways

of seeking wellbeing. Education was experienced similarly to employment as a way to break the isolation and eventually allow them to improve their sense of wellbeing through being able to socialise and recommence normal experiences such. Sama was adamant to explain this – when she arrived in Jordan with her family, her father did not enrol her back into school. She said: “When we first got here my father didn’t allow me to go to school, I was in tenth grade when we left Syria, and he was too worried about and would say ‘I fear for you, it is a Jordanian school,’” implying that being Syrian in a Jordanian school might lead to discrimination which could have the potential to adversely affect her. She continued to explain that in that period she “didn’t know anyone, we didn’t have a phone, I felt I became psychologically ill staying in the house the whole time, and I lost so much weight.” According to her, feeling isolated and feeling trapped in the house while not engaging in any activity affected her psychological health and even caused physical changes such as weight loss. This was when her mother intervened. She said: “It wasn’t till my mother insisted and convinced my father to enrol me in school again and studied that I started getting better.” In this specific case, Sama did not excel in school, and actually did not even graduate as her marks were too low, and she was not going to enrol in university because her family could not financially afford it. Yet attending school, and getting out of the house helped Sama feel better, and feel like she was no longer “psychologically ill” as she had mentioned. Returning to school allowed her to restore some normality to her life and be able to socialise and improve her wellbeing.

Educational institutions such as schools formed part of the changes people experienced in their lives in Jordan. Many children whose education was interrupted by the crisis and displacement returned to school when they were able. This allowed them to return to a routine, as well as start to establish relationships in the community. The return to school did not only affect one individual, but rather affected the family as a whole: the educational dimension was not the reason for the importance of school, as the role of schools also facilitated a type of stability for families. Both the children who attended the schools, and also the parents, benefitted. This was made clear to me through the example given by one of the young women I interviewed. She started by saying

that going to school was very difficult at the beginning: “I would go to school every day and come back crying, and say I don’t want to go back there [school]”. Nevertheless, she started socialising which changed her outlook on school: “I started getting to know people, made friends, and built trust with people”. She further noted that her school acquaintances and newly won friendships also affected her parents’ social lives: “My mother now knows the parents of my friends... my dad became the friend of my friend’s father, because they were a good family, and they supported us.” This highlights how the experience of education is part of the experience of the transformation in indirect ways. The social lives of my interlocutors were greatly affected by their education, as it was a facilitating venue for them to get to know the community they lived in. This was true not only for the individual in education, but their family as well.

Conclusion

The transformations described and experienced by my interlocutors included practices that were related to improving their lives in Jordan. The transformation experiences were part of the continuously negotiated experience of wellbeing. After living in Jordan for several months, and for up to a year, my interlocutors recognised that they had different needs from when they first arrived. They sought stability within this new context, countering their isolation and exclusion by participating in various aspects of life. Rites of passage that may have been put on hold in the initial period of displacement were now resumed and subsequently contributed to these transformation experiences. At the same time these experiences of transformation were navigated within a context of strain and struggle. This included the struggle of everyday life for Syrians, ranging from discrimination in public spaces, to lack of employment opportunities, to exclusion from social and public spaces. Yet, these experiences highlight the efforts my Syrian interlocutors exerted to create social relations, foster families, and strive to seek the familiar as part of the overall practice of wellbeing. Syrian experiences of seeking wellbeing were similar to what Yotebieng and colleagues (2018) observed in their research with urban refugees in Cameroon. While exploring wellbeing and resilience among various refugee groups in Cameroon Yotebieng

et al. (2018) found that it was important to pay attention to not only the shock of fleeing and its effect on resilience and wellbeing, but to focus on events which happen before and after fleeing and their interaction with refugees' wellbeing. They observed that "the most pervasive issues that came up during our research revolved around legal precarity and issues related to Refugee Status Determination, access to health care and the ability to ensure continued care of long-term illnesses, and issues related to housing and security in the neighbourhoods where refugees were living" (16). My interlocutors' experiences of seeking wellbeing as they experience transformation and seek stability though not identical are in agreement in regard to the importance of housing and neighbourhoods to live in. In addition, my interlocutors seeking of employment and volunteering to improve their financial situation and their wellbeing also contributed to breaking stereotypes regarding their image as dependent on aid. This mirrored Yotebieng et al. (2018) finding that as refugees living in protracted situations "they are 'capable'... [and that] they would rather [have] solutions towards being self-sufficient than the typical, short-term, humanitarian support that does not match the nature of the protracted situations that the majority of the world's refugees live in" (16).

These practices of wellbeing presented in this chapter, and the transformation they effected, contributed to a specific experience of wellbeing. For it was not only a turn towards being proactive, but was a constant struggle against marginalisation and discrimination. These obstacles invariably limited the extent of their participation and engagement, and so their achievement of wellbeing was necessarily partial – but they sought it nevertheless, even in an abbreviated or stunted form.

The changes in their lives show that the experience of transformation is situated in varied aspects of life. Not all families or individuals will experience these changes in all aspects of life, but rather in piecemeal fashion, and in some sectors, according to the area of life most relevant to each individual. While transformations were presented in this chapter as part of a shift in perspective regarding the stay in Jordan from temporary to protracted after the passing of

several months or more, it was also shown in this chapter that processes of seeking familiarity continue to contribute to seeking wellbeing.

The experiences through which my interlocutors navigated their wellbeing echo some of the domains that are quantitatively investigated and measured as part of the components approach to wellbeing, such as the subjective wellbeing (SWB) measures. What is intriguing here is that it is not my interlocutors' degree of satisfaction and positive affect that determines their wellbeing, but rather it is the pursuit of these experiences amidst conditions of strain that contribute to an overall experience of wellbeing. In this sense, my interlocutors' transformations and attempts to mitigate their liminality — by getting married, establishing families, pursuing an education — are noteworthy domains for study precisely because they are the *way in which* the improvement of wellbeing within displacement is actively pursued. This perspective offers an alternative approach in perceiving the importance of the domains investigated in quantitative measures of the SWB approach.

7. Representations of wellbeing: Idioms, photographs, and practices

Wellbeing is a practice, a continuous process. It is not a discrete state of being, but on a spectrum that coexists simultaneously with others states; people can experience wellbeing and “illbeing” simultaneously – they can be distressed while being well. Often, I encountered my interlocutors’ sadness at the absence of a loved one, and noted that it also existed alongside gratitude for having friends who could console and support them. This complex and seemingly paradoxical nature of wellbeing was laced through the experiences and narratives of my interlocutors. Moreover, wellbeing was not merely an experience, but also a situational practice. That is, wellbeing took place through social relations and events, and through experiences such as employment and community engagement. In this sense, wellbeing was not a state of being that could be measured as either present or absent, but was rather an experience situated within a particular social context, and framed by the displacement experience and its consequences. I argue that these aspects of wellbeing illustrate how it is not a static state, but rather a fluid process, shaped by and continuously responding to displacement.

To explore these complexities further, in the following I bring to the fore how my interlocutors explicitly expressed their wellbeing, how they defined it and how they understood it impacting on their lives. Specifically, I investigate how they engaged with the concept and practice of wellbeing through their use of idioms, photos and participatory exercises. In doing so, I am engaging with my interlocutors *on their own terms*. This is perhaps the most crucial component of participatory research as it is thereby that it is possible to give actual methodological weight to subjective experiences of people and communities, and to avoid foisting upon it pre-set templates and incongruent psycho-social models (Hemment, 2007; Lenette and Boddy, 2013). In this sense, I aim to make concrete the concept of wellbeing through my interlocutors’ own conceptualisations, visualisations and practices.

The importance of engaging with my interlocutors on their own terms became apparent already at the beginning of my fieldwork, when I noticed that the predetermined psycho-social terminology of wellbeing employed mostly by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and health organisations failed to truly account for the experiences of my study participants. In the mental and psychosocial health sector of the NGO world, wellbeing is often translated into Arabic as *rafah nafs 'ijtima'i* meaning psychosocial wellbeing, or welfare. Upon using this terminology in my own interviews, I noticed that it had no traction. In fact, it meant very little, if nothing, to my interlocutors as a concept or practice. In order to be able to talk to them about 'wellbeing', I quickly realised that I would have to find other terms – terms which my interlocutors used themselves in order to discuss with them their experiences and practices of being well. Consequently, I was very attentive to the phrases and expressions used by participants in their conversations with me and with others.

In the following, I first present how wellbeing is discussed and spoken about through specific idioms. Building on this, I explore representations of wellbeing through photographs shared by participants in the photovoice project and, finally, I discuss how wellbeing was practiced and reflected upon through participatory exercises conducted during my fieldwork. This chapter differs from the previous ones in that it does not follow a chronological approach. Instead, it helps to tie notions of wellbeing explored throughout the previous chapters together by focusing most of all on how people talk about, visualise and experience their wellbeing both in the abstract as well as in concrete social situations.

Idioms of wellbeing

In the following, I develop the concept of “idioms of wellbeing,” which I posit as a counterpart to what many scholars have called “idioms of distress” (Abramowitz, 2010; Hinton et al., 2010; Guarnaccia et al., 2003; Hagengimana and Hinton, 2009; Nichter, 1981; Nichter, 2010; Pedersen et al., 2010; Kidron and Kirmayer, 2018). This latter concept has been defined by anthropologist Mark

Nichter (2010) as “socially and culturally resonant means of experiencing and expressing distress in local worlds,” where such idioms “communicate experiential states that lie on a trajectory from the mildly stressful to depths of suffering that render individuals and groups incapable of functioning as productive members of society” (405). In their work investigating local idioms of distress among the communities of the Peruvian Andes, Pedersen et al. (2010) note that the shift towards the adoption of “idioms of distress” beyond the anthropological literature in the clinical realm largely arose from the recognition that scholars and practitioners must “make better sense of cultural variations of complaints, symptoms, and syndromes” (281) by learning and using local meanings of culturally specific illnesses in order to provide adequate support and healthcare. Within the same vein, I argue that we must extend this attentiveness to cultural specificity to wellbeing. In other words, I argue for a view that acknowledges the need for socially and culturally specific expressions of wellbeing and a focus on how such conceptions shape people’s practices including their coping with violence and hardship.

In order to explore local expression of wellbeing, I initially began by asking participants about the concept *rafah nafsi ijtimai’i* (psychosocial wellbeing), generally used by NGOs working in the mental health and psychosocial support field. As noted above, this term was far from accessible to my interlocutors, especially when speaking in colloquial Arabic. When asking about it, the response was one of perplexion. The term was clearly disconnected from their own lived realities. As a result, I was challenged to experiment with different terms until, through participant observation, informal conversations, and interviews, terms emerged that people employed when referring to their experiences of wellbeing. I began this “expression finding” by using a term suggested to me by former colleagues at Birzeit University in Palestine. One of the proposed terms was that of *’afiyeh* which refers to psychological wellbeing (World Health Organization, 2013). When asking my interlocutors about its meaning, they explained that they could not relate to it as they considered the term too abstract. I then experimented with various colloquial Arabic words such as *mneeh* (being good) and *t’hiss mneeh* (to feel good). Yet it was not until we tackled the question “how we speak about our own wellbeing?” as part of the photovoice project that I realized that

my interlocutors employed a range of expressions to refer to their wellbeing. Before I define and describe them further, I outline my approach to finding culturally appropriate expressions of wellbeing with the aim of learning about idioms that are used by the community and might differ from the ones available in the academic literature.

Wellbeing as a rhetorical trope vs. wellbeing as a lived experience

It was during one of our conversations as part of the photovoice group in Amman that I began to understand that terms for wellbeing used by NGOs and academic institutions (i.e. *rafah nafsi ijtimai* and *'afiyeh*) were understood differently by my interlocutors. Moreover, I learned that expressions were not only context dependent, but they also reflected a dynamic and fluctuating experience. This dynamic could be observed in how my interlocutors interpreted the coexistence of joy and distress in the same instance. For instance, a wedding might simultaneously elicit expressions of joy at the establishment of a new union, but also expressions of sadness at the absence of a loved one who could not attend the celebration due to displacement or even death. Such simultaneity of seemingly contradictory emotions is not particular to wellbeing, it is also a key characteristic of “idioms of distress”. Intriguingly, Nichter’s first exploration of the concept idioms of distress was critiqued by Kirmayer and Young for being too one-dimensional. Instead, they highlighted the “often fragmentary, tentative, and even contradictory” nature of idioms (in Nichter, 2010, 408). In response to their observation, Nichter later wrote that he “could not agree more, and would argue that a transactional approach attentive to the semantics, pragmatics and micropolitics of communicating distress leads us to an understanding of idioms based far more on presentation and negotiation than on static representations” (408). These idioms were, thus, to be understood as fluid terms expressing a particular facet of distress at a certain point in time. I found that very similar dynamics can be found and applied to idioms of wellbeing considering that they are equally related to non-static representations of human experiences.

I first became aware of the context-dependent and dynamic nature of expressions of wellbeing while sitting together with some of the photovoice group members drinking tea and eating *bizir* (toasted watermelon seeds and other assorted nuts). One of the young men, Rami, started the conversation about the term *'afiyeh*. He said pointing at me, "The first time I thought of the term *'afiyeh* outside of my neighbourhood was with you". He continued, "In my neighborhood, we use [words like] *ya'teek al-'afiyeh* very often, yet I never connected its meaning with health, or even thought about what it really meant." Literally translated, *ya'teek al-'afiyeh* means "may you have good health/wellbeing." Culturally, this term is used to recognise hard work done by someone, partly to convey appreciation. To further illustrate the contextual nature of the term, another young man in the group added: "Yes, sometimes our usage of the word doesn't relate to the literal meaning, it relates to the specific interaction and usage of the word that we are used to for that specific interaction." It became clear that while *'afiyeh* was used by mental health professionals and academics to refer to wellbeing, it resonated little with these young men, who used the same term very differently in order to highlight their appreciation of someone else's hard work. This conversation inspired me to further explore what expressions my interlocutors used to refer to *their* wellbeing. Consequently, I designated two group sessions with the photovoice group participants, specifically to explore terms and idioms which refer to or relate to wellbeing.

First, we discussed the term *mneeh*, meaning being good. It is usually used following greetings when being asked how one is doing. Rather than reflecting one's real state of being, it is a set phrase or rather response. The Amman photovoice group reflected that the term is meant to ostensibly express one's wellbeing, but does not reflect one's actual feelings. That is, it was considered more of a greeting ritual which required the question "How are you?" followed by the equally required and ritualistic answer *mneeh*, "well." Accordingly, *mneeh* can be seen to reflect a pre-packaged answer holding little meaning with regards to actual wellbeing. This comes as a result of perceiving the question "how are you?" itself as one that comes as a result of social obligation, rather than a genuine desire to hear how another person is feeling. In other words, one must differentiate between notions of "being well" that are expressed as part of a

greeting ritual and actual expressions of wellbeing. Nevertheless, the participants suggested that when close friends or relatives ask each other how they are, the question might beget a more genuine answer from the enquirer since the question is understood to reflect an actual desire to know about one's feelings and experiences. This specific example shows how even the simple enquiry and response – “How are you?”... ‘Well’ – is situational.

When discussing idioms that my interlocutor used to refer to their actually lived experienced of wellbeing, I found that these terms varied. Below is a table of the various idioms addressing wellbeing as listed by the two photovoice groups in Amman and Rusayfe.

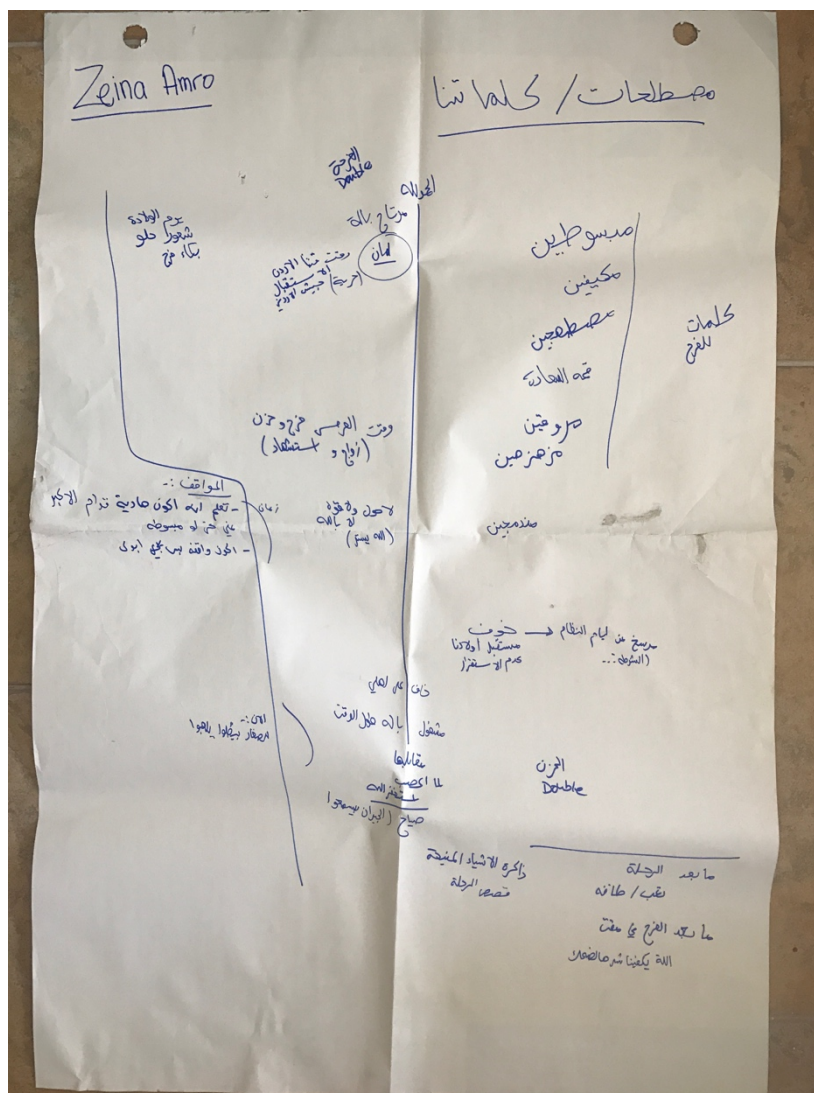


Figure 1

قمة السعادة	Kimmat al Sa'ada		
مروقين	Mrawqeen		
مزهزين	Mzahzihin		
مندمجين	Mondamijeen	Immersed	Engrossed or involved
الحمد لله	Alhamdullilah	Gratitude to god	
مرتاح البال	Mirtah Albal	Mind at ease	Serenity, without too much thoughts on one's mind
أمان	Aman	Security	A feeling of safety away from dangers
لا حول ولا قوة الا بالله	La Hawla Wala Kowatta Illa Billah	There is no might nor power except in Allah	Implies putting one's trust in god fully
خوف	Khawf	Fear	
السعادة	Alsa'ada	Happiness	
الراحة	Alraha	Rest	A feeling of relaxation and stillness
الرضا	Alrida	Contentment	
الامتنان	Alimtinan	Gratitude	
تمام	Tamam	Alright	

Figure 1 shows a map of terms that was produced during the aforementioned discussion of “how we speak about our own wellbeing” in the Rusayfe photovoice group. As participants discussed the question, I noted down terms and phrases that were being used and reflected upon. Participants then decided that they might be best sorted along a spectrum. It became apparent that for them each of the terms reflected different states of wellbeing – that is, whether one has more or less of it. The spectrum also challenged the notion of having discrete categories of wellbeing as the stages were not sharply demarcated from one another, but could overlap and even coexist at certain times. On one end of the spectrum were words which related to positive experiences of comfort and happiness while on the other end were words which related to negative experiences of fear, anxiety and anger. While having the discussion, the terms were always referred to in conjunction with a specific situation or context which the participants felt illustrated the terms.

One of the key terms used was *mirtah il-bal*, which translates into “mind at ease” or “comforted mind.” Alongside it were the words *alhamdulillah* (thanks be to God) and *aman* (security). The group members specifically linked these terms with their arrival in Jordan and with having escaped the dangers of war. And yet these words were not exclusive to these kinds of situations as they were also used in other social contexts. For instance, in another conversation with the group in Amman, the participants used the term of *al-raha* (comfort), a variation on *mirtah il-bal* (mind at ease) in slightly different ways. One young woman, Rima, explained the word *raha* in relation to the experience of adaptation. She said that adaptation and *raha* go hand-in-hand. It meant: “that I feel normal, that I feel safe, that I feel mentally at ease – that is what adapting means.” This highlights the situational nature of how my participants use and think of the different idioms expressing wellbeing.

The expression of *Alhamdulillah*, in turn, referred to gratitude for what one has and what one experiences. The concept was utilised in more than one way by interviewees and photovoice participants alike. For instance, among the participants in the Rusayfe group, gratitude and being thankful were mentioned

in their discussions of expressions of wellbeing along the spectrum (see Figure 2). On the one end of the spectrum were expressions of thanking god (*Alhamdulillah*) or gratitude for particularly important issues. In the Amman group, on the other hand, being thankful was discussed as *al-imtinan* (gratitude), and was elaborated upon by noting how becoming ill and overcoming illness makes people grateful. The group agreed that gratitude is most clear in situations where people recognise their wellbeing after having overcome adversity, such as an illness. For example, it was explained to me that during the war, water or electricity cuts happened in almost all areas of Syria. Experiencing the cuts during the war was a distressing experience. Yet, when the water or electricity returned, a certain form of happiness and *imtinan* – gratitude – was felt by people. In this specific situation the experience of happiness and gratitude was temporary, and very specific to the experience of insecurity and the lack of access to basic needs. Yet it was described as a strong form of gratitude that would not have been felt had the experience of lack had not existed prior. Here, the participants were discussing how certain terms and aspects of wellbeing were not only temporary, but also born out of and defined by the specific context itself.

What this does not mean is that *imtinan* or *Alhamdulillah* are everyday words to express one's happiness. Happiness, or *al-sa'ada*, participants regarded as a fleeting phenomenon. Several other colloquially available synonyms, including *mabsuteen*, *mistihjeen*, and *mzahziheen* were used interchangeably with *al-sa'ada*. "This is how we felt when we were all together at the seiran [trip]," one of the Rusayfe male participants said, referring to a trip that the group and I had undertaken together earlier that month. Thus, *sa'ada* reflected a discrete instance, not a general state. In order to refer to the latter, interlocutors used *rahat il-bal* (mind at ease). Photovoice participants in Amman told me that *al-sa'ada* "is momentary and fleeting, rather than comfort which may be experienced over time and through accumulated experiences." Similarly in one of the interviews, a young man said, "you can't connect happiness to something, to one specific reason." Instead, it was explained to me that it depends in large measure on what is happening and how it is experienced.

Mind at ease or *rahat il-bal* was considered to be cumulative that is, related to experiences that allow for a life of normality. To explain, my interlocutors would start feeling greater ease of mind as they found increasing stability through income and employment, finding adequate housing, and experiencing life not defined by the state of being a refugee. In one interview, a young woman refers to this return to normality and its connection to *rahat il-bal* as she explained her decision not to seek asylum outside of Jordan: “Now you adapt and you become more comfortable psychologically [*mirtaha nafsiyyan*], and things become normal” through staying in one place, rather than “starting from zero” all over again in a new country. This also shows that there are aspects of the experience of adapting to a place that are cumulative, but are not always described or stated – such as developing comfort in a new place. These aspects are only acknowledged when there is a potential for losing what one had been able to accumulate in terms of stability, *raha* and comfort.

When opposites attract: Conflicting emotions within idioms of wellbeing

At times, my interlocutors connected idioms of wellbeing to their opposites. This became apparent during various conversations about expressions of wellbeing and the situations that instigated them. I learned that when persons spoke of being *mirtah al-bal* (mind at ease), the very mention of the word reminded them that it is not easy to attain this state of mind due to the more commonly experienced state of having *mashgh’oul il-bal* (troubled mind), a term conveying feeling anxious and worried. *Mashgh’oul il-bal* tended to be experienced when there was worrying news, or no news at all about relatives left behind in Syria. In one situation, when the Rusayfe group was going on a trip organised as part of the photovoice project, one of the participants was unable to join. The reason for his absence, it was explained to me, was because *baloh mashgh’oul* (his mind is busy) due to being anxious. On that day, his village in Syria had been bombarded and he had not heard from his family who still lived there. In this specific instance, the experience of worry and lack of security for one’s family resulted in not being able to socialise and participate in joyful activities. Discussing idioms which may reflect opposite feelings highlighted

another issue. Opposite feelings were not only experienced in separate situations; many also mentioned that there were situations which caused the coinciding of two disparate emotions. Such as one's wedding or the wedding of a family member where people experience "*farah wa huzn fi nafs al-waqt* (happiness and sadness at the same time)." Happiness and elation for the wedding occasion is situated within the tension and sadness of knowing that siblings and close relatives who should be there celebrating were absent, due to distance or, at times, death. In the same spirit of acknowledging the presence of both positive feelings and sad feelings, the group discussed other situations and proverbs which reflect this experience. Shadiya, one of the women in the Rusayfe group with a great sense of humour, often making the whole group laugh, presented the proverb *Allah yikafeena shar hal dohhok* ("may god protect us from the evil of this laughter"). She explained that often when a group is feeling well, happy and full of laughter, the proverb is said in order to acknowledge that though the moment is filled with joy one is aware of other stressors and is also anxious that the joy might end at any time. Shadiya used the saying after remembering when we had all went on a trip together the previous week and had a good time laughing a lot. When I asked, "does the proverb mean that once people enjoy themselves they will have a bad time?" another woman, Rajiya, explained: "No, it doesn't mean that we forget the joy, we have the joy as a memory, but for example, I went home from the trip and found that the electricity bill was 42 Jordanian Dinars, and the water bill in the 20s, that's a lot for the small house made of one room and a hallway." Here Rajiya acknowledged that she enjoyed having been on the trip and feeling well, but that difficulties and distress were never far. This highlights the complexity of describing wellbeing as a state, rather than as an interactive process that is influenced and shaped by experiences in the everyday lives of my interlocutors. The experiences may include positive and negative experiences on a spectrum, and this ultimately shapes the overall wellbeing experience. Moreover, the interviews with my interlocutors show that notions of wellbeing and sadness co-exist. The co-existence, in turn, is expressed by pitting seemingly contradictory terms against each other.

The foregoing exploration of idioms must be complemented by representations of wellbeing beyond the verbal scope. Throughout the

discussions, it became clear that verbal expressions about the experience of wellbeing, through the usage of words and idioms, may not always be the only way the experience is encompassed. Rather, non-verbal expressions, such as practices and representations, may more accurately reflect the experience of wellbeing in ways that verbalising it cannot. While discussing terms and expressions of wellbeing in the Amman photovoice group, this point about non-verbal expressions of wellbeing was highlighted in the reflection that wellbeing is not limited to verbal expressions acknowledging their experiences. Rather, the participants discussed how wellbeing is at times present in other forms, for example through close social relationships where family members or friends recognise one's emotional and mental wellbeing. In the following, I explore these complexities through the visual representation of the notion of wellbeing.

Photographic representations of wellbeing

In our photovoice groups, photographs served as a way to visually represent experiences of wellbeing outside of the constraints of solely verbal communication. Using visual methods allowed further nuance and depth to be added to the exploration of wellbeing. It also allowed for both similar and different reflections of wellbeing to be represented visually, as well as through the stories and discussions which were prompted by the photographs the participants had captured. Interestingly, a similar observation was made by Lenette and Boddy (2013) who utilised visual methods to explore nuanced aspects of the lived experiences of single refugee women in Australia. They state that these visual methods allowed researchers to “yield greater reflexivity and nuanced meanings to the women's concepts of resilience” (p. 80). In addition, visual methods created space for some of the participants to share stories and parts of their lived experience, which they did not share within interviews or discussions. This was certainly clear in my research, when one of the quietest participants who had barely participated in the discussion sessions utilised the opportunity provided by photovoice to visually represent her relationship with the neighbourhood she currently lives in, her new family after getting engaged, and dealing with memories of the past. The photographs, the stories, and the discussions that

were all part of the photovoice project, yielded several themes, all of which were part of the participants' own representations and reflections of their own wellbeing.

Moreover, photographs can encompass more than the visual representations and the narratives within them. Indeed, they can help the participants and researchers to pay attention to the event which photographs invoke. Sarah Pink (2011) adds yet another dimension to the advantages of visual methods, arguing that "both producing and viewing images are corporeal practices. Rather than being simply the conveyors of visual discourses, they are embedded in, and engage and evoke, movement and all the senses, and as such, situate photographs as part of the multisensory event of place rather than within a visual event" (11). Within the following section, I incorporate both the visual element (the photograph), the story it evoked, as well as some of the reflections of the other participants in the group vis-à-vis the respective photo. This approach will be useful for engaging not only with how wellbeing is visually represented, but also with how the overall "event," as Pink describes it above, relates to the experience of wellbeing. In order to pursue this approach of engaging with concepts and experiences, I utilised photovoice with my participants in order to engage with visual event of wellbeing.

In my own project, participants took photos within a period of one to two weeks. In addition, some participants shared photographs they had taken before being involved in the research project (captured with their smartphones), which they deemed important and connected to the research project. The photos were printed, and we had a session to share the photographs within the group setting, where each participant chose three or four photos which they felt represented stories related to their own wellbeing. The photographs also encouraged reflections and discussions within the groups which enriched our understanding of the wellbeing concept. Overall, the photographs varied in content. Participants in the photovoice groups represented their wellbeing through capturing moments (such as family gatherings, children's play); or people (friends, colleagues, family, or themselves); places (nature, university, place of work, place of eating, old homes, current homes, neighbourhoods); and experiences (trips, lunch,

volunteering), which they felt were important to their wellbeing experience in their lives in Jordan. In the following, I focus on these representations by presenting them according to several general themes. Moreover, I explore and analyse how wellbeing was present in photographs which captured them. Each of these general themes contains layers of meanings related to people's own wellbeing folded within the visual representations and the accompanying stories.

Social relations: Family and friends

Social relations with families and friends were among the most represented in the photographs. In the previous chapter, I explored how establishing new families was one aspect of the transformation experience which contributed to the wellbeing of my interlocutors. Many participants took photos of their families to represent important aspects of their everyday lives, and shared reflections which expanded the meaning of the photographs beyond the visual representations. As far as these representations went, they revolved around the role of families and friends in improving wellbeing. The stories and reflections accompanying the photos made this clear. Participants discussed how establishing new families mitigated the sense of estrangement they felt, how their children reminded them of absent family members and helped alleviate the longing they felt for them, and how friends provided a sense of familiarity in a strange context that encouraged community engagement. These photographs not only represented wellbeing, but also situated it within the complexity of the accompanying narrative.



Figure 3

The photo above (Figure 3) was shared by Rana. It depicts her two children, Dana and Abood. In the photograph, the two children sit snugly in a cardboard box. When Rana and her husband first arrived in Jordan, they came with only one child, Dana. They wanted to have another child after their arrival, and Rana shared the story of how she became pregnant with her baby boy, Abood. She said: “I had to undergo four years of treatment to be able to get him,” and explained that the reason for the need for treatment was “of course the constant raiding and bombing in Syria.” What she implied here was that her difficulty in conceiving was connected to the violence she witnessed and related stress. She continued her story by highlighting her gratitude stating, “*alhamdulillah* [thanks be to God], after expensive treatment and laboring long and with expensive medical treatment, I went to get tested and I was finally pregnant.” Her story further reflected the coexistence of happiness and suffering when she said, “I cried tears of joy and suffered nine months after that from exhaustion, but I was happy with my baby. Although it was painful, I tolerated it, and we were so excited as we waited for him to come.” The picture and related story encapsulate both the intimacy of siblings and how Rama perceived them as

well as the emotional journey she went through to arrive at this moment – to have both a daughter and a son, a nuclear family that has endured the travails of war and displacement. As with the theme of the previous chapter, Rama’s narrative reiterates the importance of stability through establishing a family for improving one’s own wellbeing, within and against experiences of strain.



Figure 4

Children, according to the participants, provided stability. But they also were living reminders of long-lost relatives. This became apparent when Monther shared a photograph of his two children (Figure 4), where his eldest daughter is holding her baby brother. He told us, “When I look at this picture I remember pictures of my sister and I when we were their age. Many of the pictures that I take of them, together with their aunt Lamis [also a child], show them in the same position as me and my sister.” This picture, along with the story, showed us how keen Monther was on establishing an intimate relationship with his children, one which reminded him of his relationship with his own sister. Monther told us that his sister did not live in Jordan, and that he missed her tremendously. Through

his own children, he tried to recreate moments which remind him of her, thus finding a way to cope with the sadness of her absence.



Figure 5

Many families also shared the experience of ways of coping with the absence of family members, and being far from them after the fragmentation resulting from the Syrian crisis. They did so by forming new relations and strengthening their social bonds. This was how they engaged in the practice of wellbeing, which, given its complex character, existed simultaneously with continued sadness at the absence of loved ones from Syria. Shadiya, the woman holding the little girl in Figure 5, shared a photograph she captured on a trip with the whole group. The photograph is of some of the group members, as well as myself, surrounded by trees, standing around Shadiya and her little daughter. Shadiya shared with us her own interpretation of the photo saying: “In this picture I feel the togetherness of family and the love of motherhood and sisterhood, with the backdrop of nature’s beauty that brought us all together. I felt surrounded by memories of my mother’s tenderness.” Although the women in the photo were

not her own family, she told us that the relations she cultivated with these women reminded her of it. The women in the pictures represented her sisters, and the older woman represented her mother. She currently lives with her husband and children, but all the family members represented in the photograph were residing outside of Jordan; unable to visit, she missed them dearly. The new friends and social relations she has cultivated where she now lives has offered her some solace, as well as the activities she attends, including the photovoice group sessions. These are all ways of coping with the longing she feels for her sisters and her mother, contributing to her wellbeing. But given the paradoxical nature of wellbeing, the longing for her family remains, existing alongside the joy she has found in her new connections.



Figure 6



Figure 7

This process of making new families to cope with the loss and fragmentation of the old is further illustrated in the case of Samiya, a newly married participant. Showing us two photographs (figure 6, figure 7), Samiya, who was a shy quiet young woman, wrote how her husband helped her cope with her difficulties; the first one displayed densely packed houses, and in describing it she wrote: "Houses that are connected, with people inside whose hearts are very disconnected, harsh and merciless. There is no love or familiarity between them. Every day we become rivals and we put our heads on our pillows, our hearts filled with anger and resentment towards one another." Samiya describes the neighbourhood she lived in as hard and unwelcoming, a place that made her feel isolated and disconnected. In contrast, she showed us her second photograph, of an alleyway and a small house. "I lived in that small home," she wrote. "It brought me, my father, my grandmother, and my grandfather all together. I had been starved of my mother's love, but after I got married to a young man who showed me the richness of life and everything that it has to offer, I got a substitute

for the love of my mother.” In the first photo, she is isolated and estranged; in the second, with her new family, loved and embraced. The transformation, embodied in the contrast she paints between the two photographs, is hard to miss.

These photographs each show an aspect of family life – establishing a new family, expanding an existing one, raising children and fostering strong friendships. The three stories emphasise how these connections play an essential role in dealing with longing and sadness due to the absence of family members. Each photograph and related story reflect a coexistence of two feelings or thoughts; one which focuses on the difficult experience, such as the absence of a sister, or the difficulty of conceiving a child; and one which focuses on what helps people to cope with these experiences, such as children and friends. The coexistence of these thoughts within these photographs — the duality of joy and suffering, for instance — mirrors the coexistence of opposite emotions presented when discussing the idioms of wellbeing.



Figure 8

While discussing more photographs from group participants, the theme of friends and newly established social relations emerged as a crucial component of coping and wellbeing. A selfie of two friends (figure 8), one from Aleppo and

the other from Homs, was taken by Saleem (pictured wearing glasses) before he was given the prompt from the research. Saleem nevertheless chose to share the photo because it represented the importance of their friendship. Saleem told us that his friendship with Wael was strengthened by how they encourage each other to be part of community engagements and initiatives, through volunteering together at a local Jordanian organisation that focuses on community services in areas suffering from disenfranchisement and weak educational systems. The organisation provides educational scholarships to young men and women to facilitate their education at universities in Jordan, and fosters their leadership skills. At the same time, the young scholars volunteer with the organisation in facilitating and working with them on their community activities and programmes.

Finding Syrian friends also contributed to their wellbeing by countering the sense of estrangement they felt. These friendships fostered social familiarity, echoing the discussion within the second results chapter about navigating feeling “strange in the familiar.” Instead of being solely distressed by feeling estranged, these young men sought the familiarity they found amongst each other. Friendships such as this one were also important in how integral they were in fostering wellbeing, providing social solidarity and encouraging volunteering and community engagement in overcoming discrimination.

Places and their influence on wellbeing

The photos made apparent that wellbeing is rooted in a sense of place. In part, it was through association that certain places reminded my participants of home, helping them cope with the loss of access to those places. But such places were elusive amidst the landscape of daily life in Jordan. To find places that reminded them of home, they had to make a concerted effort. My interlocutors took photos of these locations, as varied and extensive as the fabric of their past lives: they were of houses, homes, and neighbourhoods, restaurants, organisations and streets. Each represented a different aspect of the wellbeing experience.



Figure 9



Figure 10

For instance, Rami shared with us a photo about how he found places of enjoyment in his practice of wellbeing. The picture is of his work trip to Aqaba, where he decided to make time for himself and take part in activities that he also used to enjoy in Syria (figure 9). It shows the front of a Syrian restaurant called al-Shami (in reference to *al-Sham*, or Greater Syria) (figure 10), reminding him that wherever he goes he will find a Syrian person cooking the exact same way food is cooked in Syria, and that he has a way of accessing it even in Jordan. Such and similar photos engendered discussions about life in Syria before coming to Jordan, and how going on trips and enjoying various parts of Syria was something all people used to do on a regular basis. In Jordan, many Syrians did not have the financial means to go on trips or, if they did, they did not know Jordan well enough or feel confident enough to go on the types of trips they regularly enjoyed in Syria. Yet this photo, and some of the conversations it instigated, as well as other conversations with the photovoice group in Rusayfe, reflected that people are interested in going on such trips when possible. The photograph of the al-Shami Syrian restaurant from Rami's trip is another reiteration of this continuous quest for the familiar.

Since these places invariably reminded my interlocutors of home, the wellbeing they experienced going to them was also tinged with sadness at that home's loss. Two women in the group shared pictures of their homes in Syria, before they were forced to leave. Both shared the sense of loss and sadness of leaving. Sharing these photos, they conveyed their pride at having worked hard to be able to own these homes and how this made them feel.



Figure 11

In the first picture (figure 11), Um Muhammad spoke with intensity about being sad at the loss in addition to anger after having learned that her home was occupied by Syrian regime forces. She told the group: “This is my home in Homs, I worked very hard [to build it], just so the day would come that they [Syrian regime] would hang pictures of their sons [their dead fighters] on it?” The group empathized with Um Muhammad, who was relieved to have the support of the group.



Figure 12

Um Mariam shared a similar picture (figure 12), one of the home she and her family built, displaying the kitchen of which she was particularly proud. Yet she contrasted her sadness at losing her home with another picture of the view from her current rented house in Jordan. Although she conveyed the sadness of her loss, she recognised that her current house offered a safety that was no longer attainable in Syria. This made her current house easier to appreciate, even though it did not compare to the beauty of her old home. The contrast which um Mariam offers is one that also reflects on how she and Um Muhammad appreciated their newfound security despite loss. Though it was not stated explicitly, these conversations, though laden with sadness and loss, show how focusing on the safety they found in Jordan was also a way in which they accepted their situation, and the places they resided in, even if they were not completely satisfied with them.

Memories and notions of being well

Participants in the photovoice groups not only captured representations of social relations and places, but also used photos as a tool for recreating and narrating memories that were important to them. In one of her photographs, Samiya from the Rusayfe group photographed a stack of photos, in her description of the photograph she wrote a reflection about how pictures capture memory: “We remember our past lives only in the images that bind us with the past and our future. Every time I look at these pictures I remember that incident that I captured, and talking about it turns into discussions that make me feel as if we were still living in those times”. The instrumentality of the photos was the fact that it conjured up memories that made them feel good.



Figure 13

In another instance, Rana shared a photograph of her daughter next to a bush of red flowers, which reminded her of the time her daughter and her father had planted those flowers in their house in Zarqa, Jordan (figure 13). When Rana's father had to return to Syria, despite the ongoing crisis, due to the financial constraints of living in Jordan, he told his granddaughter: "I have to go [back to Syria], but you have to keep taking care of the flowers. Every time you miss me, go visit the flowers." Rana then told us that "this is the home where my parents used to live. That day, Nada and my father worked hard to plant these flowers, and suddenly he just left them and went back, but they [the flowers] stayed and they remind us of him and they still smell like him." By visiting the flowers with her daughter, Rana was able to mitigate the longing she felt at the absence of her father.



Figure 14

Photos at times represented how memory is utilised for hope. The photographs shared evoked memories, both happy and sad, which instilled and sparked hope for participants whenever they remembered these events. Some of the photos revived memories of celebrations with family members long past. Nisreen from the Rusayfe group for example shared a photo of her husband's nephew, who is shown excited for Christmas and the lighting and decoration of the New Year's tree (figure 14). An unexpected photo – Nisreen's family is a conservative Muslim family – yet they heeded the child's desire for tree decorations and lights. In the accompanying story, Nisreen tells us that her husband's nephew "told us to decorate him like the tree, so we put all the decorations on him, and his eyes shone with happiness." His happiness was especially appreciated and contagious, as his own father had passed away in Syria the year before, the family made sure that the child would have celebrations and joy. She emphasised how much laughter and happiness the whole family had shared because of the child's desire to be decorated and lit up like the tree. The photograph itself represents the instrumentality of memory in fostering wellbeing — ostensibly showing one happy child, it represents how an entire family lifted each other up through difficult times of loss and the absence of loved ones.



Figure 15



Figure 16

Some of the photos my interlocutors shared were grim, harkening back to the destruction of the Syrian civil war. But unexpectedly, these images were also a source of hope. Shadiya, for instance, chose two pictures she held dear to her heart of her cousin during two different stages of the Syrian crisis (Figures 15 and 16). “This is a young man who sacrificed himself and his soul for his home country through his work as a photographer,” she said. “He was looking for something to photograph through a window in his home, out to a homeland that was lost and destroyed. I felt he had such a big love for his home. The look in his eyes gives you hope to return, for our homeland to return to what it once was.” The photo (figure 16) brought to Shadiya’s mind the destruction wrought by the war, and yet as the young man smiles up at us in the photo, it also gave her hope that things could get better. The pictures, which were not taken at the time of the group sessions, were also a reminder that hope can be hidden in the images of people

who have passed, but whose memory is crucial in fostering a kind of joy amidst a difficult context.

It became clear to me that the way in which memories are explored through photographs is not as straightforward as one might initially think. One need not have photos of exclusively joyous occasions (although those certainly existed), and apparently grim depictions may serve to actually enhance wellbeing. But when one connects this to the complex nature of wellbeing, it no longer seems so strange. What remains constant throughout is the orientation towards seeking familiarity as a way of mitigating estrangement. While these photos are visual representations of important aspects of the wellbeing experience, some photographs also served to highlight certain practices that were part and parcel of seeking wellbeing. The trip, a suggestion of the Rusayfe group members, was one such example – many in the group took advantage of the trip and took pictures which they then shared amongst their fellow participants. Others utilised them to represent other aspects of their lives (such as Shadiya's family picture). It was important to discuss the actual practices that form a part of the wellbeing experience, which cannot be easily captured verbally or through idioms. Rather, they are intended actions taken by individuals, groups, or families, to be well. I explore them in the following section.

Practices of wellbeing

In the following, I show how wellbeing is expressed through practices, not only through their idiomatic descriptions of my interlocutors' mental health or photographs. Practices and experiences are integral to understanding the most crucial component of wellbeing, which, as we have argued, is a practice in and of itself. Wagenaar and Cook (2011) highlight that we learn about context and people's understanding of certain things by investigating practices rather than knowledges. According to them, "experience animates the relationships among practice, knowledge and context" (p. 194). This is particularly pertinent to my discussion of practices of wellbeing, in that "the concept of 'experience' reminds us that practice always takes place with respect to a specific need to act, against

the backdrop of a particular multifaceted history, always under present conditions that develop and transform in emergent time” (p. 194). For my interlocutors, this backdrop is the context of displacement, against which they have had to act to improve their wellbeing amidst financial, social and political strain. They did so by reshaping their social relations and building new forms of community. In what follows, I aim to further our understanding of wellbeing-as-practice as it is embodied through the everyday actions of my interlocutors.

When people talk about their wellbeing, it does not always capture the entire gamut of their wellbeing experience. But as they carry out their daily lives, their actions reveal new aspects of it. My interlocutors’ sense of wellbeing became palpable whenever they carried out practices that made them feel good. In the same sense, it became more apparent to me that my interlocutors would also refer to aspects of their lives that were not part of any organised or planned activity that was intentionally geared towards improving wellbeing. This is where participatory and ethnographic approaches are most apt to capture the quotidian manifestations of wellbeing. It allows the researcher to both observe and engage in the practice of the everyday lives of participants, revealing facets of wellbeing that the more contrived setting of the interview or the group activity might not readily yield. This aspect of data collection had not been a part of my research plan when I first began developing my methodology. The participatory element emerged when my interlocutors and the participants of the photovoice groups suggested certain activities that they felt were a part of improving their wellbeing. Actually carrying these activities out then allowed me to engage with my interlocutors at a level I had not initially anticipated, observing the phenomenon of wellbeing-as-practice first hand, instead of merely hearing about it through interviews.

Practices of wellbeing have of course been referenced in previous chapters, all containing dimensions of the strategy of breaking isolation and seeking stability in a strained context. This section continues in the same vein, as I joined my interlocutors in the activities they suggested which I had only heard of up until then. We engaged in activities such as cooking together and having a late evening with friends and family, or going on trips and barbecuing with family

and friends. The atmosphere and the conversations these activities allowed for were less structured and more natural. The social atmosphere was also palpably different, resembling that of a family gathering, rather than an intentional group setting for research purposes.

In the Rusayfe group, the decision to cook and eat a meal together came as a result of the constant references to food and the central role it occupied in many side conversations. The topic of food, recipes and family meals was all too common during my observation of community centre activities providing services for refugees. The choice of food and recipe was decided upon within the group – a spiced rice dish called Kabsa, in addition to a number of side dishes and desserts. The day began with several of the women in the kitchen preparing the dishes, while the two men of the group, along with the teenagers, took care of the children. Throughout the activity, most of the conversations revolved around making the food, what the children were doing, setting the table. Conversations that were mundane and uneventful, but far from trivial. It is precisely that these conversations were similar to normal everyday interactions that made the activity a space of comfort, an intentional practice of wellbeing.

Some practices of wellbeing were not so easily achievable in Jordan. For instance, a simple trip, or *seiran* as Syrians would call it, is an integral aspect of social and cultural life for Syrians, one that they consider an indispensable regular recreational activity. But due to financial strain and lack of familiarity with Jordan and the best areas to visit, this aspect of their lives was hardest to realize in the new context. In some of our discussions, the topic of going on trips with family and neighbours and friends would arise as an activity which people did to relax and shed some of the stressors of the week. The availability of time of the Rusafye group allowed us to organize such trip, at the participants' suggestion. Given that it was the group's initiative, it ended up most closely resembling the *seiran* trips that their families would regularly take in Syria.

The atmosphere of the trip was unlike anything we had experienced in previous group sessions. The trip started by gathering near the community centre, where we usually met. Each of the group members had brought some food or prepared something to be barbecued. We had also rented a bus which

accommodated about twenty people, which included not only the group members, but some of their family as well. The bus ride itself from Rusayfe to our trip's destination, the Dibeen forest, was akin to a party bus, or a wedding bus, where the group members kept sharing and singing and dancing to tunes of popular music throughout the entire ride, right up to reaching the camp. There, we barbecued, shared food, played cards, danced and walked in nature. The children of the group members played together, found a turtle, climbed trees (figure 17, figure 18, figure 19).



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19

While certainly enjoyable and entertaining for the families, there was also an overarching feeling of being well in an organic, unimposed way. In a sense, it was not built as a programme or structured activity, which was a part of why the participants collectively experienced wellbeing in that setting — it was the group's intentional choice because it was a part of the fabric of their lives before displacement, something they used to do to relieve normal everyday stress. Social relationships and the interactions between participants also figured prominently in how they experienced wellbeing on that day, as group members had a chance to be together as friends and family, to be introduced to each other's families and to share the day with them.

Practices were not only activities which I observed first hand with the groups, they were also mentioned in the narratives that emerged during group discussions. These were things that they did to make themselves feel better. In one instance, Radi, a young man in his late twenties, shared that it was his love for playing football every week that made him feel good. His favourite pastime was playing in a football team in Jordan named after his town in Syria. He had first started as a player in a team near Amman, but after some time he noticed that other fellow Syrians expressed interest in making a team in Zarqa, where he lived. He established a team consisting of Syrians players, and they now play in tournaments. When I enquired about whether there are other teams, he told me that there are many teams in Jordan, all of which compete within a Syrian football league, called the Syrian Community Football Club. On his Facebook wall which he showed me, most of the posts are of his team and teammates and their games. The time and effort Radi puts into his football team, and the pride he holds in sharing photographs and stories about it, show that it is not solely the mere act of playing football that is important, but also the community created around it, that contributes to his experience of wellbeing.

In another example, a woman in one of the interviews shared her love for gardening and planting. Practicing planting and gardening was one aspect of life she regularly engaged in while living in Syria that she re-integrated into her life in Jordan. In Syria, she said with pride, "we used to plant wheat, barley, tomato, aubergine." In Jordan, she tried to recreate something similar: "I have a little

balcony. I filled it all with flowers. I feel like they keep me company, and I enjoy it. I could sit outside like that.” Although her small balcony may not fit many plants or yield the same type of harvest, it was the actual practice of planting and gardening that was important to her. It reminded her of her family in Syria, and allowed her to practice something that she did with them collectively. This practice allowed her to be comforted.

These practices show how, although they might not be explicitly linked to wellbeing, they contribute to feeling good, finding stability, establishing something of your own, and shedding the label of a “refugee” (“for Syrians by Syrians,” such as in Radi’s football club). Recognizing that these practices are an essential dimension of wellbeing allows for a wider inclusion of the lived experiences of my interlocutors and their wellbeing.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the wellbeing experience through the different ways in which it was present within the lives of my interlocutors. Rather than following how wellbeing was experienced and how it changed in the lives of my interlocutors from one period to another, this chapter focused on wellbeing as it is verbally communicated through idioms and their attendant experiences, through visual representations accompanied by stories and discussions, and through the observation of the practices which contribute to the experience of wellbeing.

I developed the concept of “idioms of wellbeing,” building upon the literature on “idioms of distress.” Discussions of these idioms revealed the contextual and dynamic employment of these idioms to describe wellbeing, sometimes coupled with their opposites, and sometimes carrying different meanings according to use. These idioms are not separate from the overall experience of wellbeing; they are present in the narratives accompanying the photographs which the photovoice participants produced. The visual representations through the photovoice project allowed the participants to utilise a different medium to capture complex narratives and representations of their

wellbeing. The photographs were of family and friends, places, memories. Yet through the photographic representations the participants captured how wellbeing was negotiated despite longing for absent loved ones, the loss of home and estrangement. They achieved this by finding joy in establishing families, in bringing up their children, in finding spaces familiar to their home country, and in utilising their memories to overcome sadness and find hope for the future. Finally, I focused on how the practices of my interlocutors are an integral dimension of their wellbeing. These practices included highlighting Syrian pride and familiarity and recreating experiences which they did in their lives in Syria, as well as finding ways to enrich their social lives.

Although I focus on the verbal and visual expressions of wellbeing and the practices that embodied them, they are not separate experiences of wellbeing. Rather they are all experiences and representations of it. The ethnographic and participatory approach I followed to explore wellbeing experiences are essential in avoiding the pitfalls of applying ready-made psycho-social templates and terms to a context that does not quite fit with them. It is important in understanding communities on their own terms, in understanding how they actually experience wellbeing, rather than placing how they feel on a predetermined scale for measuring wellbeing. My fieldwork made this particularly explicit, since the readily available terms passed down from NGOs and health organisations had little purchase among my interlocutors' conception of wellbeing. This is why throughout this chapter I have highlighted the importance of examining the multiplicities of ways in which wellbeing could be presented by participants to have a fuller and closer understanding of wellbeing that is drawn from their lived experiences.

8. Conclusion

The director of an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) that worked with refugees gave me a puzzled look when I described the topic of my research to her. “There is not much positivity in the life of a refugee,” she told me flatly, clearly finding it absurd that my research would focus on wellbeing. According to her, refugees were people whose lives were chiefly characterised by suffering. It was beyond her imagination to conceive how one would talk about, let alone observe, experiences of wellbeing in the midst of adversity. This would be neither the first nor the last time that my research was met with such bemusement. Even Jordanians, many of whom regarded their own lives as marred by struggles and hardships, found my proposition odd: “If we don’t have wellbeing, how on earth would Syrians have it?” they would often ask me. For them, the life of a refugee was one of unmitigated suffering, lack and uncertainty.

These kinds of responses appear to be motivated by two primary assumptions: the first, that if you are a refugee, you cannot experience wellbeing, and the second, that wellbeing is a *rafah* (luxury) reserved for those more fortunate. In this way, wellbeing is considered the affect of particular privileged societal strata – of those who are not displaced or impoverished or experience material hardship. But these assumptions also presume another underlying preconception, namely that of dichotomy: one either has wellbeing or lacks it. Wellbeing here becomes a state, an ideal type that can either elude people or be attained by them. Similar assumptions have been made in the literature. For example, Cummins (2009) argues that subjective wellbeing is homeostatically protected. This means that individuals tend to have a set-point of positive affect which, if impacted on negatively, ceases to exist and, instead, leads to homeostatic failure which may lead to mental illness such as depression. On the other hand, researchers like White (2010) and Atkinson (2013) criticise these dichotomous assumptions about wellbeing. Contrarily, they advocate conceptualising wellbeing as a dynamic process and encourage scholars to step away from viewing wellbeing as an endpoint in people’s experience.

My work engages with these debates by adding an additional dimension highlighting how wellbeing is not only a dynamic process, but, can be experienced

both alongside hardship and distress as well as in spite of it. Hereby, I am inspired by Behrouzan's (2016) argument in "Prozac Diaries" which posits that the complexities of experiences in contexts of war and hardship defy "rigid binaries of health and illness" or conventional analyses of phenomena like conflicts and displacement. Behrouzan invites us to "write about the health impact of a war...without depicting a dark image of a people's [lives], without overlooking the everyday fragments of joy or solidarity, and without undermining the powerful agency and faith with which people remember, endure and overcome" (14). My research has taken this injunction to heart, challenging the conventional dark image of the lives of Syrian refugees by paying equal attention to their experiences of comfort, joy and hope.

In the following, I highlight how my research has contributed to the ethnographic, conceptual and methodological literature in three primary areas: first, how it has added empirically to our understanding of the wellbeing of Syrian refugees; secondly, how it has deepened and complicated our conceptual understanding of wellbeing more generally; and thirdly, how the use of participatory methods, in conjunction with ethnography, allow us to generate new kinds of data on wellbeing in the context of displacement.

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times: Conceptualizing wellbeing amidst displacement

To disregard wellbeing as irrelevant in the lives of refugees is to discount the fact that wellbeing is an actual part of their daily practices, their memories of the past, and their aspirations for the future. Researchers who dismiss the concept's application in contexts of suffering often conceptualise wellbeing as an ideal type. In contrast, I propose to complicate our understanding of wellbeing by viewing it as a fluid and even contradictory phenomenon that can exist alongside and in the midst of distress. In this respect, I follow the experiences of my interlocutors throughout their displacement journey and chart the changes in their wellbeing from one period to the next. This is not to say that the evolution of every one of my interlocutors' wellbeing can be neatly parcelled out into temporal

stages – indeed, the various transformations and evolutions took place across the different “stages” highlighted in previous chapters. However, I nevertheless decided to use a temporal division in my interlocutors’ displacement experience as a tool to apprehend and describe in depth its varied aspects. Hence, in my first three results chapters I addressed the ways in which refugees from Syria navigated the travails of displacement, highlighting how changes in their circumstances led to changes in their experience of wellbeing.

Specifically, in chapter 4, “Becoming displaced: The difficult negotiations of a difficult decision”, I showed that during the initial stages of the war in Syria, wellbeing did in fact not figure prominently in people’s narratives. In a context of political violence and extreme insecurity, my interlocutors did not seem to even entertain the notion of how they saw, experienced, or even attained their wellbeing. Perhaps expectedly, the main focus of their narratives was on how they experienced the violence of the crisis and on the myriad difficulties involved in making the decision to actually leave Syria. While of them the emphasis was certainly not on wellbeing, I found it crucial to explore these experiences as they formed the starting point of their displacement journeys. The journeys themselves were complex and not necessarily straightforward. It became apparent that many had been initially internally displaced before finally leaving their homeland, meaning that displacement was already something they had weathered even by the time they arrived in Jordan. But even these experiences of distress were not uniform. They were shaped by different factors such as resources, age, gender and personality. This became particularly apparent in my interlocutors’ explanations of how they and their families arrived at the decision to leave Syria. Most of them gave a number of justifications layering them on top of one another in order to highlight both the urgency of having to leave and how difficult it was to actually make the decision. The ability for decision-making was crucially influenced and shaped by each individual’s particular role within the family – it was mainly parents or family elders who announced the family’s decision to flee and seek refuge in Jordan. These dynamics, in turn, shaped the character of the decision as abrupt or pre-planned, and subsequently, how other family members reacted to it. In cases where decisions to leave were taken suddenly, or perhaps unilaterally by a single family member, my interlocutors described their flight as

one characterised by high levels of shock and distress. In contrast to this, decisions to leave were experienced as less shocking when they were collaboratively planned or motivated by particular goals such as continuing with one's education or evading military re-conscription. In other situations, family members emphasized such goals and related opportunities (education) or protective mechanisms (avoidance of military re-conscription) in order to persuade a reluctant family member to join the flight. Overall, their narratives made apparent that leaving the homeland was a process that took place only after all other options had been exhausted.

The act of leaving driven by extreme violence caused a significant rupture in people's lives. Similar to Perelli's (1992) concept of *memorias de sangria* (blood memories) which divided her study participants' life worlds into before and after, my interlocutors felt that the act of leaving created a cleavage as it separated their lives into before disruption (that is, before leaving) and after disruption (or leaving). This framing allows one to think not only of the life disrupted by the displacement, but also the "after," where people seek to re-establish and reconstruct their lives after this tear. It is within the "after" that my interlocutors also worked to navigate their new setting – the host country – in which they were seeking to achieve their wellbeing.

In chapter 5, "Strangers in familiar lands: Navigating expectations and wellbeing", I show that while my interlocutors escaped the immediate physical dangers of war, the experience of being a refugee nonetheless impressed itself upon their daily lives. This was accompanied by a particular affect which I have called "feeling strange within the familiar." My interlocutors, fleeing to an ostensibly kindred Arab country with historic, geographic, and cultural ties to Syria, expected to be welcomed with hospitality. In other words, they expected that a fellow Arab country would be culturally familiar and would offer a source of comfort – a home away from home. But their hopes were summarily dashed upon arrival. Instead, they felt strange in the familiar which meant living with a simmering feeling of resentment and estrangement in a country that provided a paltry welcome. They recounted facing discrimination and deprivation, whether in terms of health services, housing, or employment.

Feeling strange in the familiar led to several reactions: longing to return to Syria despite danger, seclusion and self-imposed isolation, and, most importantly, seeking solace and comfort amongst themselves, searching for sources of familiarity amongst fellow Syrians. Seeking the Syrian familiar served to counter the sense of estrangement experienced in Jordan. This was found not just among close family members, but also by establishing new relationships with fellow Syrians with whom my interlocutors came into contact during visits to the NGOs and community centres that they used as a space for socialising. This allowed my interlocutors to experience a sense of wellbeing in a strained context as they stuck together as Syrians in order to face the discrimination and exclusion from the host community together. This form of solidarity, however, countered many integration efforts which NGOs tried to impose upon them, with the motivation to establish links between Syrian refugees and the host community and, thereby, to reduce social tensions. Yet, Syrian refugees refused such approaches by choosing to further their wellbeing not through integration, but through familiarity. Familiarity is what offered them resources for lightening the sense of estrangement and for sharing similar stories and experiences in order to bear the stressors of living in Jordan. In addition, familiarity of other fellow Syrians contributed to the practical dimensions of helping each other out through trading tips and advice on how to survive and find support in the new environment. With increasing social networks and familiarity, my interlocutors began to shed their high expectations of hospitality along with other expectations that they had initially projected on their host country. This, in turn, allowed them to adopt a future-oriented outlook and work towards improving their lives and, related to this, experiences of wellbeing.

Building on these insights, chapter 6, “Beyond living in the temporary: Seeking wellbeing in protracted displacement”, explores how people continued seeking their wellbeing at a time when they experienced what they themselves called “transformation.” These transformations were motivated by the need to resume a “normal life.” For instance, people felt that they achieved a notion of normality by accepting that they would remain in Jordan indefinitely, and that they must go about building a life in their new place of refuge. The point of “transformation” marked a shift from a period of isolation and inertia to one of

acceptance and action. This was not an abrupt break, but rather highlighted the emergence of a resolve to seek a semblance of *istiqrar* (stability) amidst protracted displacement and uncertainty.

Stability was sought by my interlocutors through recommencing certain aspects of their lives which had been put on hold during the time of flight and arrival in Jordan. Recommencing their social lives helped them in breaking away from their feelings of isolation and despondency, which in turn were a product of social liminality (Simich, 2013) due to social exclusion and discrimination. In practice, this meant finding employment, establishing a family, and/or continuing their education – all this aided in gaining stability despite the co-existence of obstacles and complications considering that they were, after all, still refugees living in an often hostile environment. Such practices, in turn, allowed people to navigate and negotiate the strained experiences and uncertainties and, in this very process, enhance their feeling of wellbeing as they started to be able to contribute to their community, whether through employment or volunteering. Many felt a sense of comfort in the familiarity they experienced when establishing their families and resuming social celebrations, and greater stability when they found adequate housing. This underscores and further illustrates the complex nature of wellbeing – that even once people have undergone a “transformation” from isolation to relative stability, they continue having to adapt to daily stressors and social upheavals.

In chapter 7, “Representations of wellbeing: Idioms, photographs, and practices”, I added a layer of complexity to our understanding of wellbeing by further highlighting its contradictory characteristics – namely that it can be experienced alongside distress, not necessarily instead of it. Moreover, I highlighted that wellbeing is not a discrete state, but rather a practice that coexists with a host of other mental health states. I also paid attention to how my interlocutors articulated, represented, and how they experienced their wellbeing. Based on these findings, I developed the concept of “idioms of wellbeing” to highlight the experience’s multiplicity of contextual nature. In addition, I emphasized the importance of exploring other arenas for observing wellbeing – not only in the verbal and written mediums of interviews, but in the visual and

experiential domains as well. The idioms, images, and practices of wellbeing drew our attention to the importance of how my interlocutors conceptualised their own wellbeing on their own terms which were strikingly different from pre-existing psychosocial terminology and models.

Wellbeing displaced: Navigating conceptual notions of wellbeing

In addition to contributing to a better understanding of how Syrian refugees experience wellbeing in the midst of distress, my research aims to also engage in academic debates about the concept. In what follows, I place my findings in conversation with the academic literature in order to allow for conceptual rethinking of the wellbeing concept. First, I will critically engage with what has been referred to as “components approaches” to wellbeing and then reflect on the capabilities approach by highlighting some of its strengths and limitations. Finally, I will engage with anthropological research by inserting the “idioms of wellbeing” approach to its repertoire.

Components approaches

My approach to wellbeing focuses explicitly on the experiences of my interlocutors and, thereby, diverges from other dominant ways of approaching wellbeing. The contrast is particularly stark between my work and approaches that have been labelled as “component approaches” to wellbeing (Atkinson, 2013). These include subjective wellbeing (SWB) (Diener et al., 1999) and self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan and Deci, 2001), both of which aim to measure wellbeing through a set of components or domains. The SWB approach focuses on the affective dimension of experiences – the presence of positive affect and the absence of negative affect. It also assesses the satisfaction of individuals within various domains of life such as work, marriage, and family (Diener et al., 1999). This focus on the importance of affect has been highlighted as an important contribution of hedonic approaches to the exploration of wellbeing. Through my work, I was also able to see that feeling happy and having positive

affect was recognised as an important part of my interlocutors' experience of wellbeing. Happiness and joy were referred to in relation to particular events such as the birth of a child or going on a trip with family and friends. At the same time, affects like happiness and joy were not considered long-lasting, but rather evaluations of specific time-limited experiences.

Other scholars adhering to components approaches, such as Ryan and Deci (2002), have conceptualised wellbeing through a more eudaimonic lens. Their SDT focuses on other dimensions of the experience such as the satisfaction of psychological needs including autonomy, relatedness, and competence. These dimensions highlight the importance of social relations and having opportunities within one's environment. Similarly, my interlocutors reflected on particular dimensions such as establishing families, socialising within NGOs, and finding employment opportunities while they were navigating an environment which tried to exclude them. Thereby, they gained greater stability, improved their social networks, and found comfort and solidarity among those with similar experiences. This, they explained, had a profoundly positive impact on their sense of wellbeing.

Both approaches to wellbeing outlined above (SWB and SDT) rely mainly on quantitative instruments in order to measure the wellbeing of others in a standardised fashion. My research, on the other hand, highlights the limitations of using such standardised measures. While some of my interlocutors may have recognised several of the domains also highlighted by SWB and SDT scholars as part of their wellbeing experience, standardising them runs the risk of losing their inherently situated and complex meanings. I want to make two arguments against overt standardization: First, instruments which evaluate various dimensions of wellbeing quantitatively are limited in that they do not allow for eliciting people's lived experience and meaning making endeavours. Second, such approaches claim to measure subjective experiences while, in fact, providing objective measures such as scales which is ontologically contradictory. This inherent contradiction has also been pointed out by White (2010) who explains: "There is an irony that the stress on perceptions and their numerical coding can divorce 'the subjective' from the subject" (165).

I would like to illustrate this by contrasting the SWB and STD approaches to the positive impact of family relations on wellbeing with my own empirical findings. The domain of family, when assessed within SWB or STD, reflects the level of satisfaction on a numerical scale. On the other hand, my interlocutors' assessments of the importance of their families was assessed based on their potential to provide familiarity and comfort while, at the same time, acknowledging that family can be a source of strain and stress. This became especially apparent when relatives in Jordan acted as hosts and were, in their role, expected to provide shelter but, instead, behaved unwelcoming toward their refugee 'guests'. Within a quantitative inquiry, such dynamics would be challenging to observe as they defy clear-cut positive or negative interpretations. Another example that makes this complexity apparent is how families derived at decisions to leave Syria and seek refuge in Jordan. Many of my younger interlocutors felt that they had to "endure" the decisions of their elders while not being able to contribute to them due to their respective position within the family related to age and/or gender. Others again were involved in the decision-making process and felt that this strengthened their bond and alleviated the distress they experienced in a situation of violence and uncertainty. While family was mainly described to me as a source of strength and support, narratives of jealousy and envy came also to the fore as well as interpersonal conflicts fuelled by the limited resources and financial strains. Such nuances within domains are impossible to elicit through quantitative measures and, consequently, a shallow or one-dimensional sense of wellbeing is created which fails to reflect the plurality, multiple layers and inherent contradictions which are, as my research clearly shows, part and parcel of the concept.

Capabilities approach

The other dominant approach to understanding wellbeing is the capabilities approach, to which I will now turn. The capabilities approach lays out a set of functionings that, taken together, make up the wellbeing of a person and what they value to be or do (Sen, 2001). However, this approach does not clearly discuss how functionings are in fact attained. While I agree that it is important to

pay attention to what people value in their lives, it is also crucial to understand the practices which lead people to actually do the things they value and thereby to enhance their sense of wellbeing. When we take the example of social relations, it is not enough to state that refugees from Syria sought the familiar in the strange by forging ties among family and friends, but to outline how such ties were intentionally established, maintained, changed and, in some instances, severed or broken. Thus, while my work pays attention to how people derive at what they value in order to enhance their wellbeing, the capabilities approach focuses mainly on the tail end of this process that is, the value of social functionings.

However, it is important to note that functionings have been variously described by proponents of the capabilities approach. While Nussbaum provides a universally applicable and relatively stable list of functional capabilities (see literature review of my dissertation), Sen's approach is more open. Functional capabilities, according to him, are dynamic and context dependent. Nevertheless, it has been criticised as not flexible enough by scholars. For example, Zimmerman (2006) criticised Sen's marginalisation of the temporal perspective. He highlights the importance of time in relation to experience, arguing that time is essential in relation to the opportunity to have certain functionings writing:

Time is crucial for both individual and collective agency. It raises intertwined issues which concern persons as well as collective action and institutions. Just like interactions, however, processes in the sense of temporal dynamics are absent from Sen's approach. Yet, opportunities and possibilities bear an undeniable temporal dimension (480).

To focus on the temporal component of the wellbeing is to recognise its dynamism, which is constantly in motion and contingent upon the shifting of circumstances. This flux and dynamism is described in Brun and Fabos (2015), who highlight the importance of acknowledging this aspect with the lives of displaced populations, they state "we suggest that the people in the protracted situations under study are experiencing extraordinary flux even in their immobilized states, and the metaphor of navigating the "moving environment" here is apropos of these dynamic conditions" (11). While I sympathise with the

authors' emphasis on the importance of the temporal dimension, I also recognize Sen's approach as dynamic and attentive to context. Specifically, I found that my interlocutors' perceptions of things they valued and the practices they employed to achieve wellbeing changed over time and depending on their respective situation. Based on my findings, and unlike the capabilities approach, I understand wellbeing less through categorization and functionings (no matter how flexible or dynamic they may be), but as a dynamic practice that is, something that people "do" rather than have.

Anthropological approaches and "idioms of wellbeing"

While components approaches and the capabilities approach dominate the scholarly debate around wellbeing, anthropologists have provided alternative perspectives to understand the concept (Johnston et al., 2012; Heil, 2010; Adelson, 2010; McMichael and Manderson, 2004). Their approaches are closely aligned with my own considering their emphasis on practice, context and flux. In fact, ethnographic and participatory approach to wellbeing allowed me to arrive at themes similar to those explored within other anthropological explorations of wellbeing among marginalised communities, such as indigenous peoples. I was especially inspired by Adelson's work with the eastern Cree of Quebec in Canada where she explores the cultural meanings of wellbeing. Specifically, she presents the local concept of *miyupimaatisiun* (being alive well) as a specific Cree idiom capturing wellbeing. Within her work she observed that the notion of Cree wellbeing is tightly connected to the land and to being part of the wider Cree community: *miyupimaatisiun* means "the assertion of one's proper sense of place in a broadly defined social and physical Cree landscape...and the ability to sustain oneself as a member of a Cree community" (114). While the context is completely different, I also found that wellbeing among Syrian refugees is less an isolated or individualistic experience but rather an interrelational one where community plays a decisive role. In fact, community was seen as a shared resource for practicing wellbeing as it offered familiarity and the possibility to gain some stability in a unstable and uncertain world.

Another similarity between Adelson's and my work is that she does not understand being Cree and being well as static. She elaborates that the Cree community in itself has been changing within the past two decades, affecting the Cree's way of life, from health-seeking, to education, to business, to how connected they now are to the wider world through the internet. With these changes, she noted how "notions of wellbeing for the Cree must shift with ... shifting concepts of what it means, fundamentally to be Cree" (115). Connected to these changes, notions of wellbeing have also fundamentally changed over time and across generations. What I take away from this is the importance of understanding the concept of wellbeing in its own temporal, social, and historical context in order to retain the concept's richness related to lived experience and meaning.

I build on Adelson's work by introducing the concept of "idioms of wellbeing" in order to develop a terminology that better captures multi-layered experience of the wellbeing among my interlocutors. The "idioms of wellbeing" approach does not simply provide an alternative list of words compared to those used by SWB and SDT scholars referred to above. Instead, the epistemological structure of these idioms differs from those used in SWB and SDT in that the idioms cannot be measured or neatly situated within a linear progression. Instead, they are fluid and contextually contingent. Similar to the anthropological concept of "idioms of distress", I perceive "idioms of wellbeing" as polysemic and idiosyncratic and governed by complex and seemingly contradictory rules in their respective situational expression (see Davis and Joakimsen, 1997, 371; Pedersen et al., 2010 for idioms of distress). While idioms of distress cannot be utilised in the same way as diagnostic categories listed in diagnostic manuals like the DSM, idioms of wellbeing defy standardisation and measures as this would result in separating the idiom from its situated experience which produced it in the first place. Moreover, the concept of idioms of wellbeing harbours contradictory sentiments allowing wellbeing and distress to exist simultaneously. During photovoice group meetings, my interlocutors discussed the simultaneity of distress and wellbeing explicitly, invoking, for example, proverbs which capture these contradictions. "May God protect us from the evil of this laughter" was one of them that recognised the coexistence of joy and fear of impending distress in

the same instance. The breadth of idioms of wellbeing which are connected and situated in the experiential dimension of wellbeing provide a deeper understanding of how this concept was engaged with by my interlocutors – reflecting the complexity of wellbeing and allowing for co-existence of opposing affective responses to the same experience to be recognised.

Methodological contribution: The participatory lens

Beyond contributing to the conceptual development of wellbeing, my dissertation also pushes methodological approaches to studying the concept as lived experience and practice further. Specifically, I have combined ethnographic with participatory approaches to achieve in-depth understanding of what it means to “do” wellbeing in various social contexts.

The reason I chose to use participatory approaches in my work was for their potential to engage the community in research projects and, thereby, even out the balance of power between researchers (often perceived as experts) and the researched (often perceived as informants) (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008). Indeed, Julie Hemment (2007) argues that participatory research is compatible and, thus, a welcome addition to ethnographic work as it allows for collaboration and potential for social change. Although my own research did not have an action component, I believe that it can serve as an inspiration for humanitarian organisations to foster their clients’ wellbeing in a more collaborative and participatory fashion.

In my work, ethnographic and participatory approaches came together in the photovoice component and participant-led activities alongside the more standard ethnographic methods such as interviews and participant observation. My knowledge and understanding of wellbeing would have been inadequate had I not been able to recognise that the activities and practices led by the participants were actually also their way of sharing how they practiced their wellbeing. By allowing me to be a part of this experience, they offered me a window into their lived experience that conventional interviews and participant observation would have failed to do. In hindsight I recognise that my research approach is similar to

what Sharlene Swartz (2011) identifies as research which engages in an ethics of “parallax of perspectives”. By parallax of perspective she refers to research which recognises and includes different angles into the topic under study which “ensure[s] research participants (and the topic under scrutiny) are not misrepresented through shallow, monocled gazes, but instead take every opportunity to consider participants’ perspectives in ways that allow a reader to change position as the subject is viewed from changing perspectives” (49). In her own work, the author explored moral understandings of “right and wrong” among a group of adolescents in an impoverished South African township through a combination of ethnographic and participatory methods including photovoice, discussions, and mind-maps. Similarly to Swartz, I combined various methodological approaches with the intention to provide as much space and opportunity for the perspectives of my interlocutors to be foregrounded in relation to their experiences of wellbeing.

To achieve a “parallax of perspectives” in my own work, I found that certain tools were in and of themselves better equipped to reflect wellbeing in unconventional ways. The photovoice method, for example, not only included participants’ visual representations of wellbeing, but also accompanying discussions about the photos’ meanings in relation to lived experiences of the photographers. That is, the photos enabled participants to reflect on images and their lives at the same time – whether contemplating their own photos or those of others. This process facilitated a sense of collectivity through which participants could come to a common understanding of what wellbeing could mean or meant. The development of “idioms of wellbeing” is another example of this collective process, whereby the group experimented with various expressions, terms, and examples in different settings to derive at a lexicon of collectively shared meanings. Such a lexicon could not have emerged through individual interviews or observations alone.

This combined methodological approach also led me to understand that wellbeing is not solely a mental state but a practice that is, something that people do. Doing wellbeing became particularly apparent during participant-led activities where they actively practiced their wellbeing through cooking and heating

together or going on a trip and reminiscing about the happier life they once had back home in Syria. Such experiential dimensions of wellbeing were also represented and highlighted through the visual representations of wellbeing. My utilisation of photovoice as a participatory method allowed me to be part of the conversations and reflections on wellbeing that emerged as the groups and I looked at the photos and listened to the stories that were within them. To summarise, the multiple methods utilised in this project led to the exploration of varied experiences which allowed wellbeing to emerge as multi-dimensional concept articulated through memories, feelings, and practices and varies over time and according to context.

Concluding remarks

Throughout my research, I have demonstrated that wellbeing is a situated concept, experience, and practice. Moreover, I have argued that wellbeing should be examined through a variety of mediums to better understand its multifaceted manifestations. I have illustrated this by combining participatory with ethnographic methods, capturing how my interlocutors represented their wellbeing visually through photographs, experientially through practices, and conceptually through idioms of wellbeing.

To understand how this approach to wellbeing fits within scholarly discourses on the topic, I have engaged with some of the dominant approaches to assessing and understanding wellbeing – namely, components approaches and the capabilities approach. I have shown that both approaches are met with a number of challenges and limitations in understanding wellbeing, whether it be the static definition of the concept in quantitative components-based measures, or through the limited applicability of the capabilities approach to displacement and conflict settings due to its sidelining of the temporal and its overly abstracted understanding of wellbeing.

The wellbeing of refugees is of interest for various academic disciplines, including health, psychology, and psychiatry, as well as for different actors in humanitarian and development settings. In order to gain a richer understanding

of the concept of wellbeing, I have explored it from various disciplinary angles, including psychology, development, and philosophy, pointing to the ways in which these fields have understood and dealt with the concept. I discovered that these disciplines have variously influenced the development of current psychosocial models of wellbeing as they are applied in refugee settings (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2017; Tol et al., 2011). The World Health Organization's definition and measure of mental health and the centrality of wellbeing within it is exemplary of this (WHO, 2014). However, I argue that instruments, such as World Health Organization's (WHO) quantitative measure called WHO Wellbeing Index (also known as WHO-5), are insufficient in attaining an in-depth understanding of wellbeing experiences, especially in complex contexts such as displacement. Importantly, such instruments fail to inquire into the political and social contexts within which both suffering and wellbeing are experienced. This omission has been highlighted in Harsha and colleagues' (2016) limitations section of their study of wellbeing within the context of protracted conflict experienced by the Palestinian population. The authors noted that the usage of WHO-5 did not allow them to consider the effects of political violence on subjective wellbeing. My approach to exploring wellbeing offers an alternative route, which can be contextually adapted to incorporate the perspectives of the population in question through their own participation. This, in turn, has the capability to bring to the fore a wide range of experiences which affect wellbeing, including political, economic, social, and cultural factors.

Having said this, my work does not offer a set of definitions or strategies which can be easily operationalised by practitioners seeking to assess, measure, and evaluate the wellbeing of refugees in different parts of the world. Instead, I offer an insight into the lived experience of wellbeing among Syrian refugees in Jordan. This insight has been shaped by the perspectives, practices, and experiences of my interlocutors, which I elicited through various methodological approaches, including more traditional interviewing and observation techniques as well as creative methods like photovoice and participant-led activities. It was only by combining these methods that I was able to comprehend that people's experiences of wellbeing were not straightforward, and that their

conceptualisations of wellbeing included affects that went beyond happiness and joy, such as longing, sadness, and disappointment.

I strongly believe that wellbeing and its representations can only be studied by combining various methods in order to understand its complexity and dynamic character. Hereby, participatory approaches are especially important as they allow refugees and other marginalised groups to formulate wellbeing in their own terms. Such a practice could be immensely useful for humanitarian aid providers. Instead of devising interventions *for* refugees they could develop interventions in collaboration *with* the potential beneficiaries. By allowing beneficiaries to be part of the process of designing interventions which target them, these interventions could be developed in ways which respond to their mental health needs and be more relevant to their own lived experiences. For instance, instead of enforcing integration into a host society, it would be important to understand what social ties are valued and already utilised by refugees to improve their wellbeing. I was able to show that my interlocutors actually refused to participate in interventions that primarily served to diffuse refugee-host tensions and, instead, engaged in fostering ties that allowed for feelings of familiarity to emerge and helped to mitigate feelings of estrangement in an often hostile social environment.

While it is important to engage refugees in the development of programs affecting them, it is vitally important that such efforts do not come at the expense of overburdening an already struggling community. Instead, it would be important to create equitable spaces within which refugees can work in collaboration with practitioners and researchers without being forced to do the latter's work. I believe that it is important to allow beneficiaries to contribute with their expertise based on their lived experience to inform program design, help shape interventions by highlighting existing practices that improve their wellbeing, and ensure that practices remain flexible depending on changing or shifting contexts within which they lead their daily lives. In sum, participation should allow for equitable relations and practices that acknowledge the expertise and agency of those affected.

In order to achieve this, I follow the advice of Biehl and Locke (2010) who have argued that "it is time to attribute to the people we study the kinds of complexities we acknowledge in ourselves, and to bring these complexities into

the forms of knowledge we produce and circulate” (317). This dissertation has taken this injunction to heart. Rather than focusing our gaze solely on the suffering of displaced populations, I have shifted my gaze towards achieving a more holistic understanding of people’s experiences. That is, I do not focus merely on the negative consequences of war and violence, but explore multiple realities within this context including notions of wellbeing, hope, and strength. Moreover, I want to encourage practitioners and fellow academics to refrain from essentialising displaced populations by confining their lived experience to suffering and victimhood (Malkki, 1995); instead, researchers ought to examine the complexities and nuances of wellbeing as experienced and practiced by displaced communities. This, I argue, could lead to a more sophisticated understanding of the varied ways in which people navigate wellbeing and distress in their complex and often uncertain lives within displacement.

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Miss Zeina Amro

44 Goodhall street
London
London
NW10 6TU

9 December 2015

Dear Zeina

Reference Number: HR-15/16-2196

Study Title: The wellbeing of Palestinian refugees from Syria in Jordan - resubmission

Review Outcome: Approval with Provisos

Thank you for submitting your application for the above project. I am pleased to inform you that your application has now been approved with the provisos indicated at the end of this letter. All changes must be made before data collection commences. The Committee does not need to see evidence of these changes, however supervisors are responsible for ensuring that students implement any requested changes before data collection commences.

Please ensure that you follow all relevant guidance as laid out in the King's College London Guidelines on Good Practice in Academic Research (<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/college/policyzone/index.php?id=247>).

For your information, ethical approval is granted until **09/12/2017**. If you need approval beyond this point, you will need to apply for an extension at least two weeks before this. You will be required to explain the reasons for the extension. However, you will not need to submit a full re-application unless the protocol has changed. If you have been granted approval for only 12 months, you will not be sent a reminder when it is due to lapse.

Ethical approval is required to cover the data-collection phase of the study. This will be until the date specified in this letter. However, you do not need ethical approval to cover subsequent data analysis or publication of the results.

For secondary data-analysis, ethical approval is applicable to the data that is sensitive or identifies participants. Approval is applicable to period in which such data is accessed or evaluated.

Please note you are required to adhere to all research data/records management and storage procedures agreed to as part of your application. This will be expected even after the completion of the study.

If you do not start the project within three months of this letter please contact the Research Ethics Office.

Please note that you will be required to obtain approval to modify the study. This also encompasses extensions to periods of approval. Please refer to the URL below for further guidance about the process:

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/research/support/ethics/applications/modifications.aspx>

Please would you also note that we may, for the purposes of audit, contact you from time to time to ascertain the status of your research.

If you have any query about any aspect of this ethical approval, please contact your panel/committee administrator in the first instance (<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/research/support/ethics/contact.aspx>)

We wish you every success with this work.

Yours sincerely,

Annah Whyton - Senior Research Ethics Officer

For and on behalf of

Dr Michael Kandiah - Chair

Social Science & Public Policy, Law, Arts & Humanities and KLI Research Ethics Subcommittee

Major Issues (will require substantial consideration by the applicant before approval can be granted)

The Committee still have concerns regarding the PhotoVoice aspect of the project, particularly regarding taking photographs of individuals in private settings. At this point, approval for this study is granted on the condition that you seek legal advice from the KCL legal compliance team regarding what your obligations are concerning identifying secondary participants in both the final report and the exhibition. The Committee are unsure whether you have a legal obligation to obscure the identities of the secondary participants when reporting your findings, or whether you have different obligations depending on the use of the photos in research and in the exhibition context.

Once you have received an answer from legal compliance, please contact sshl@kcl.ac.uk to report this. **Data collection should not commence until you have done so, and received an acknowledgement of this from the SSHL RESC.**

Minor Issues related to application (the reviewer should identify the relevant section number before each comment)

2. Question B9 - Please ensure that any secondary participants are fully informed of your intended dissemination plans for the research when they are consenting to taking part in the research. This should be emphasised to primary participants during the role-plays. This should be emphasised to the primary participants on the Information Sheet and Consent Form.
3. C2a: Please take in to consideration that there may be new anti-terror laws that you need to be aware of in the event that illegal information is shared by this groups fresh off Syria.
4. C9: Please clarify to participants if will be able to withdraw their contribution from the PhotoVoice aspect of their participation. This should be clearly outlined on the Information Sheet.
5. D4: Please ensure that participants are made aware that anonymity cannot be fully guaranteed because during the group discussions.
6. E3: It is the view of the Committee that the photographs taken by participants for the PhotoVoice project should be stored separately from the other data collected to ensure confidentiality is maintained if a data breach was to occur.
7. E7: Data should be stored for 8 years at KCL in accordance with College data storage guidelines.
8. H1: If necessary, please update your departmental risk assessment to reflect new risks that have arisen since you completed the original assessment.

Minor Issues related to recruitment documents

9. Information Sheet

- Please ensure that the invitation paragraph makes it clear to participants that you are conducting your PhD at King's College London
 - ◊ 1st consent form – data withdrawal date / time period missing.
 - ◊ The information sheet (young refugees) - the section 'what does my participation entail' could have clearer divisions in relation to the various stages of participation (maybe in bullet point form).

Advice and Comments (do not have to be adhered to, but may help to improve the research)