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From Roses to Red Raincoats: Documenting Syrian Women's Resistance Narratives

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Spelman College

From Roses to Red Raincoats:
Documenting Syrian Women’s Resistance Narratives

A Senior Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Graduation Requirements for the B.A. Degree in Sociology

Sociology 432 Sociology Thesis
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Submitted by
Banah Ghadbian
Abstract

This thesis proposal outlines a research study that centers on collecting displaced Syrian women’s refugee-activist narratives about their goals and challenges in activist organizing. It focuses on a group of displaced Syrian women affiliated with the Syrian Women’s Association in Amman, Jordan. These chapters describe my research goals, provide a literature review of existing scholarship on the subject matter, explore theoretical frameworks for conceptualizing the research study, outline the proposed methodologies for collecting data, discuss its findings and their implications for policy research as well as social theory.
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CHAPTER ONE: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

INTRODUCTION

In 2010, a young Tunisian fruit cart seller named Muhammad Bouazizi set himself on fire and sparked a series earth-shaking uprisings collectively referred to as the “Arab Spring” (Lynch 2013, Gelvin 2015, Lesch 2012). Shortly thereafter, a group of children in a small rural town in Syria called Deraa scrawled Tunisian and Egyptian revolution slogans for freedom and justice against Assad regime violence on the walls of their elementary school. Their subsequent imprisonment and torture set into motion the people’s uprising in Syria, begun by mothers and grandmothers who took to the streets to demand the release of their children from regime prisons (Kahf 2013).

Since the uprisings in Syria began in 2011, women have played an active role in developing resistance strategies (Khoury 2012). Women coordinated neighborhood and regional protests through forming a network of revolutionary councils across the rural areas in Syria. Single mother Suheir Atassi and human rights lawyers Razan Zeitouneh lead factions of the movement and played important roles in the political development of the opposition (Ghazzawi 2014). In response to their activist participation and leadership, Syrian women have paid a high price of detention, torture, and sexual abuse (Human Rights Watch 2014). At the same time, the revolution gave women an unprecedented sense of empowerment as powerful social and political actors capable of transforming Syrian society (Khoury 2012).

The current sociohistorical context: understanding the Syrian Revolution

When the nonviolent revolution began in March 2011 as a “popular and democratic protest movement demanding democratic reforms,” the Assad regime responded by crushing the protests with violent repression. According to Chomsky (2013) “the usual outcome of such a
course of action is either a successful crushing of the protests, or otherwise, to see them evolve and militarize, and this is what took place in Syria. When a protest movement enters this phase we see a dynamics at play: usually, the rise of the most extremist and brutal elements to the front ranks.” Chomsky’s (2013) analysis articulates what happened in the Syrian Revolution after members of the government forces defected and joined disenfranchised revolutionary youth in September 2011 to form the Free Syrian Army (Kahf 2013). After the revolutionary militarized, regime response to the Syrian uprisings escalated into a situation characterized by a large-scale genocide, crimes against humanity, and systematic sieges on Syrian cities that decimate(d) everything from life to homes to cultural memory to historic sites (Violations Documentation Centre of Syria 2015, Syria Justice and Accountability Centre 2015, Rifai and Haddad 2015).

What's left of Syria?

In the past four years, the Syrian war has increased in intensity causing severe damage and destruction to most of the country. Millions have lost their homes while hundreds of thousands have been killed. What was once a country steeped in history and diverse culture is now a war-torn country brought to rubble. Here is what's left of Syria:

Pick a category below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEOPLE</th>
<th>HEALTHCARE</th>
<th>HOMES</th>
<th>SCHOOLS</th>
<th>PLACES OF WORSHIP</th>
<th>HERITAGE SITES</th>
<th>CITIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50% of the Syrian population has been displaced</td>
<td>36% of hospitals have been destroyed</td>
<td>At least 1,200,000 homes have been destroyed</td>
<td>Almost 4,000 schools have been destroyed</td>
<td>1,549 places of worship have been destroyed</td>
<td>290 heritage sites have been damaged or destroyed</td>
<td>Almost 50% of Syria’s major cities have been destroyed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10.9 million displaced
3.9 million refugees
7.1 million internally displaced

At least 210,000 killed
1.5 million civilians seriously wounded
At least 200,000 detained
At least 2,400 reportedly missing

Figure 1: “What’s left of Syria?” info-graphic. Source: Al Jazeera 2015.
After four years of global inaction, disengagement, and widespread apathy toward Syrian suffering, the situation has reached a desperate point (Yassin-Kassab 2014). It has now evolved into a multi-pronged cluster of conflicting forces. Nonviolent, civil disobedience activists continue to protest for values of liberation and justice while the Free Syrian Army’s initial support in the form of militarized resistance has translated into human rights abuses of ethnic and religious minorities and the authoritarian regime’s violence relentlessly persists as militant Islamist extremists transform Syria into a post-Cold War battleground between Russia, China, Iran, Syrian regime and U.S. and Israeli imperialist influences.

Ultimately this turmoil has lead to the displacement of 10.9 million Syrians, with women paying the highest price for the conflict (Rifai and Haddad 2015, Kahf 2014, UNHCR 2014). Many families fled due to the regime’s use of systematic starvation siege. A woman describing life in the Damascus suburbs of Daraya and Moadamiyeh in 2012 said, "The living conditions here are terrible; we've been under siege, no water, no bread, no electricity. No one can leave and no one can enter: complete siege" (George 2013). By August 2011, over 5,000 Syrians lost their lives and today the number of causalities has climbed to an estimated 200,000 deaths (Violations Documentation Centre of Syria 2015).

The majority of Syrian women found themselves the sole breadwinners of their families overnight (Sherwood 2014). The rising radicalism and militarization of the struggle meant increased limitations on women’s educational opportunities and other freedoms (HRW 2014). The role of displaced Syrian women in their refugee communities is became more and more vital to the survival of their families.
PURPOSE

In this thesis I investigate the creative, political, and economic strategies displaced Syrian women build to support their communities in sustainable, transformative ways. I examine existing discourse on gendered activism and situate these resistance strategies in a global context and history of diasporic and displaced “Third World Women’s” social movements (Sandoval 2000, Abu-Lughod 1993). My aim in this research project is to capture the experiences, visions, and strategies of Syrian women in a pivotal moment, when society is on the verge of transformation. It is to shed light on the invaluable contributions of Syrian women in the revolution and in the diaspora, and to ensure that their activism garners the attention it deserves.

Through investigating Syrian refugee women’s resistance and empowerment strategies, I argue that women are crucial to creating new terrains of civic engagement and economic self sustainability in future Syrian society. Ideally my research will contribute to larger discourse on the nature of representation of women in the Global South, particularly those targeted by war and state sanctioned violence. Most importantly, it will give voice to the narratives that have been silenced in the distorted political and global discourse on Syria.

PERSONAL INVESTMENT

When the Syrian Revolution began in 2011, I was a senior in high school. I am the daughter of Syrian political dissidents, born into a legacy of political exile, exodus, and forced displacement. In order to situate the necessity of documenting other displaced Syrian women’s narratives, I will document my own. I grew up hearing about the human rights abuses of the Assad regime and witnessed how it shaped my family, the silences between us, and the traumas that remained unsaid. When the Arab Uprisings began in 2011, my uncle was visiting my family
home in Arkansas. I remember watching my father, mother, and uncle watch protestors demand an end to dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt with tears in their eyes.

**Historical Context**

To understand why the uprisings were this momentous, it is important to situate them within the context of Arab*, Middle Eastern (West Asian), and North African political histories. In the 1950’s and 1960’s, momentous struggles against colonial occupations thrust the Arab world into “post-colonial” revolutionary governments, from Egypt to Sudan to Libya to Tunisia to Syria, and the military heroes from these resistance struggles were elected presidents— for life—from Sadat to Bashir to Ghadafi to Bourguiba to Assad (Lynch 2013). Although some of the leaders came to power with the genuine spirit of their revolutionary agendas intact, they replicated systems of colonial abuse and violence through enacting neoliberal, neocolonial economic, political, and constitutional policies that policed the movement, speech, and resistance of Middle Eastern and North African people (Kahf 2013).

**The chronology of repression in Syria**

Syria’s modern borders were carved from the Ottoman Empire in an agreement between the British and French in 1916 (Kahf 2001). Subsequently, Syria was under French colonial rule under the post World War I League of Nations mandate from 1923 to 1945, an era characterized by censorship, harassment, and discrimination against the Alawite minority and Sunni majority.

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1 Here I acknowledge that my usage of “Arab Uprisings” is limited in describing who participated in the string of popular protest movements beginning in 2011 that occurred and continue in the geographic region Middle East Studies theorists call the “Arab World,” a name embraced in favor of the colonial invention “Middle East,” but also critiqued for its misleading assumption that only Arab people populate the West Asian peninsula and North African regions. This name categorizes West Asian/North African people on the basis of shared linguistic and cultural ties to the Arabic language and countries’ membership in the Arab League. In decolonial and ethnic studies, the term “Southwest Asia and North Africa,” (SWANA) is presented as an alternative to the limitations of the term “Middle East,” and “Arab World.” In using the term “Arab Uprisings” I also acknowledge the diversity the term invisibilizes, including but not limited to Imazigh, Kurds, Druze, Circassians, Alawites, Aramaic Assyrians, Armenians, Copts, Maronites, Romani, Turks, Turkmen, Somalis, Yazidis, Mandeans, and members of other ethnic minority groups who played important roles in the uprisings. Part of creating new epistemologies and vocabularies to document the narratives of SWANA people outside of the Orientalist framework produced by Western hegemonic discourse is acknowledging the limitations of these terms.
When Syrians declared their independence from the French in 1945, the country saw a brief shift to democratic rule, which created space for free intellectual and political development to flourish in civil society. This brief and fragile period was shattered when Husni al-Zai’m, a military official motivated by the Arab defeat in the Arab-Israeli war, staged a coup in 1949. His coup was followed by a series of other military coups characterized by “tightened state control of cultural instructions” (Kahf 2001: 227). After al-Za’i’m’s assassination in 1949, Kurdish military leader Adib Shishakli rose to power and banned political opposition from the Muslim Brotherhood, the People’s Party of Aleppo, the Community Party, and the Ba’athist Party (Paul 1990:123). After Shishakli’s regime was overthrown in 1954, various socialist and Syrian nationalist political parties fought for control. From 1958 to 1961, Syria joined in a political union with Egypt called the United Arab Republic, which increased the Syrian state’s censorship powers (Kahf 2001).

The brief periods of democratic rule in Syria “are important because they establish that Syrians do indeed understand and have a collective memory of the political freedoms they lack today” (Kahf 2001: 228). In 1963, a police state headed by the secular, socialist (in rhetoric) Ba’athist Party came into power. Hafez al-Assad, one of the founding members of the Ba’athist party and a military hero from the Alawite minority named himself president in 1970. Under the Ba’athist regime, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom to protest, and freedom to assemble were outlawed under the Emergency Martial Laws of 1963 which lasted until the Syrian uprisings began in 2011.

“The State of Emergency [gave] sweeping powers to the Martial Law Governor and his Deputy (Minister of the Interior) to restrict freedom of assembly and movement; to censor mail, other communications, broadcasts and publications; to confiscate,
and close organs of the media; and to requisition or confiscate property. The State of Emergency also includes a long list of offenses “Against State Security” and those which “Constitute a General Danger.” (Paul 1990: 26)

The Emergency Martial law also suspended habeas corpus and expanded the definition of what characterizes a political crime, as any “offense against the security of the state…actions considered incompatible with the implementation of the socialist order, whether they are deeds, utterances, or writing, or are done by any means of communication or publication… or [any act that] opposes the unification of the Arab states or hinders their achievement” (Paul 1990: 27).

Essentially, given the vague definitions and arbitrary discretion of the military officials who determined what constituted political crimes, any disagreement with or act of resistance against the Ba’athist government was deemed illegal. Anyone violating the Emergency Law was brought before a military regime court without the protection of the rights of the accused.

Any opposition to the self-elected Ba’athist government was punishable by imprisonment, torture, or death. The Ba’athist party established a mob-like totalitarian authoritarian regime structure, led by Hafez al-Assad and members of the Assad family. His brother was in charge of the military, his cousins in charge of the economy, and a judicial branch was established as a mere formality. In order to establish dominance the regime created what Syria scholar Lisa Wedeen (1999) describes as a “cult of personality,” a complex system of mass propaganda, media, and control over education—in order to reshape historical narratives into a mythologized account of the president-as-hero to keep Syrians living in fear and ignorance. The regime began fortifying itself through human rights abuses.
Silences in Syrian cultural memory

I felt the impact of those human rights abuses in my family and extended family’s communities, where accounts of torture in political prisons and rape by regime agents (who are called “Shebiha,” an Arabic word that literally translates into phantom or ghosts) haunted and wounded people around me. My father and grandfathers had narrowly escaped a fate of torture and imprisonment themselves. My extended family belonged to a group of religiously conservative but (at the time) politically moderate, anti-imperialist, Islamists—a term that refers to individuals who practice political applications of Islam, as a part of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria is ideologically and politically rooted in the Salafiyya movement that emerged in Ottoman-era Syria as a way “to reform Islam from within in order to give the Arab world the resources deemed necessary to confront the challenges of European domination” (Lefevre 2013: 3). Although the Muslim Brotherhood has evolved into different strands across the Arab World, varying in political nature, the branch in Syria was formally established in 1945 as a “particularly moderate politico-religious trend instinctively favouring political pluralism and religious tolerance” that relied heavily on populist discourse (Lefevre 2013: 4). According to the Emergency Law of July 8, 1980, membership in the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria was punishable by death (Paul 1990). My great uncle Taha had been murdered by regime agents for his political activity in the Brotherhood. As a result, affiliated members and his family were on the list of radical anti-government dissidents. My grandfather was targeted next, and regime agents ransacked his home to detain and arrest him in political prison without trial. I heard accounts of the story of how he escaped through fragments growing up, but it was not until the Syrian Revolution began in 2011 that family silences were broken and stories were told in full for the first time.
My grandmother had spent her entire life in the fields of Syria growing wheat and bulgar and started a sewing business to sustain her family, exhibited extraordinary bravery when the regime agents stormed her home. The regime agents demanded she hand over my grandfather. With her children still sleeping in the back room, she quickly went to my grandfather and instructed him to hide behind a wall panel where mattresses were stored. She looked the regime agents in the eye and told them that she did not know where her husband was, and that they would have to search at another time. The regime agents ransacked the house, which my father and grandfather had just finished building after eight years. They then targeted my father, who had been carrying on the spirit of activist resistance in his own personal life. As a high school student in Syria in the late 1970’s and in 1980 he coordinated group meetings with his friends to read literature on democracy and political theory.

The context of regime repression and censorship of free speech in the 1980’s Syria cannot be discussed without mentioning the Hama Massacre. In 1982, a group of armed revolutionaries affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood staged an uprising against regime officials in Hama, a city on the Orontes River in western Syria (Lefevre 2013: 122). In response to the uprising, the Syrian Arab army under commands from Hafez al-Assad barricaded the city and massacred everyone in the city limits, from women to children to the men who had staged the uprising. According to a 1991 Human Rights Watch account, “virtually every façade [in Hama] [was] pockmocked with shell holes” (Kahf 2001: 228). Between 17,000 and 40,000 people died. Exact estimates do not exist because of the systematic erasure of the Hama massacre from Syrian history and collective Syrian memory. As soon as the bodies were piled into mass hidden graves, the government insisted that the uprising in Hama never happened.
When governments are responsible for committing genocides against their own people, denial is a common strategy to elude international human rights law, as in the case of the Armenian genocide in Turkey, and the ongoing genocide against Black and Native people in the U.S. The Hama uprising was wiped from Syrian history and any mentions of it were punishable by death, imprisonment, and torture. Hama also came during a chain of events in the 1980’s that repressed political opposition movements, including the massacre of political prisoners in Tadmur in 1980, the executions at Sheikh Miskin Prison in June 1985, executions at Jisr al-Shughur, Ma’arra, Idlib, the Palmyra political prison, and the killing of two hundred unarmed Syrian political opponents in Tripoli, Lebanon in 1986 (Kahf 2001, Paul 1990). During my political organizing in 2011 with other Syrians in the diaspora, I met a Syrian engineer who was imprisoned at the age of 13 for asking where Hama was at a train station shortly after the massacre. “It does not exist,” police officers told him. “What do you mean, it does not exist?” he asked. “I know it exists. I am looking to buy a train ticket there.” They abducted him and kept him in political prison for the next ten years of his life, where he communicated revolutionary messages with other prisoners with a tiny scrap of paper and pencil. He learned while in prison what had happened to Hama and it fueled his desire to fight the systematic erasure of resistance in Syria.

Around the same time, my father was forced to burn his childhood photographs, change his name, and flee Syria for his life. His friends were detained for their affiliation to him and his reading groups--some were tortured, others escaped too; one was so traumatized by his experiences in political prisons that he still thought he was nineteen years old, frozen in time, twenty years later. The concept of preserving the cultural memories of resistance in the face of a
regime intent on systematically erasing its own people and their histories motivated me to
document the narratives of resistance of other displaced Syrian people.

In “The Silences of Contemporary Syrian Literature,” Kahf (2001) discusses the politics
of Syrian silence, particularly as it relates to the Hama massacre. The silences in Syrian history,
literature, and political discourse on contemporary Syria enable the cult of personality narrative
to legitimize Assad’s abuse of power, “as a constituent element in the fabric of political life in
Syria; the cult evolves, waxes and wanes, changes direction, and returns to prior points of
emphasis in response to identifiable political crises that challenges the regime’s idealized
representations of events, conditions, and people” (Wedeen 1999: 34).

I was motivated to trace the contours of these silences in the resistance narratives of
Syrians in the diaspora. My mother’s family was also displaced for participating in the Muslim
Brotherhood. Her father was an outspoken activist and card-carrying member of the Brotherhood
and witnessed his comrades disappear in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. Many of their family
friends in the Muslim Brotherhood were forced into exile, but even then some could not escape
the iron fist of regime control. Even after her family fled and immigrated to the U.S. in 1971, my
mother heard stories about regime agents following activists into the diaspora and targeting their
families. In the early 1980’s, the wife of a Muslim Brotherhood political activist and close family
friend named Banan al-Tantawi was murdered in her own home in exile in Germany in front of
her four children. Her murder was a regime strategy to punish her husband, the former director of
the Muslim Brotherhood’s nonviolent branch, for his political organizing—a transgression that
followed him even in exile. It catapulted my mother’s family into a fear that concretized itself
into silence and secrets about their own stories and whereabouts. They were forced to live under
fake names and fake addresses for much of her early years in the U.S for fear that regime agents
would track them down and massacre her siblings or mother to target my grandfather’s political work.

**Shattering the silences: Syrian women documenting their experiences**

With the knowledge of my family’s political history given to me in hushed pieces, I was curious to know more. I wanted to fill in the gaps and record the narratives that were forced into hiding. When I was a high school student, watching Egyptian and Tunisian protesters tear down the systems that had imprisoned and abused them for so long, I felt a sense of empowerment mixed with profound sadness for my people. The prospect of resistance in Syria was slim. Political activists in exile had attempted to organize a “Day of Anger” in Syria on February 5th, 2011, but no one physically came out into the streets for fear of death, torture, and the massacre of their loved ones (Abdulhamid 2011). Academics and experts on the region predicted that a revolution in Syria was impossible, especially because a large-scale political mobilization had not occurred since the 1982 Hama massacre, which had set a grim example for the future of political mobilization in Syria. Political opposition since Hama was mostly limited to exiles who organized the Damascus Spring in the early 2000’s and who signed the Damascus Declaration calling for improved human rights in Syria. A few Kurdish revolutionary groups organized protests in 2004 calling for better treatment as ethnic minorities but were squelched shortly thereafter (Kahf 2011).

That February 2011, with a poster of Bouazizi’s Tunisia behind me, I decided to make a Youtube video from living room in Arkansas to share my family’s story and to call for freedom and justice in Syria.

Within a few weeks, my Youtube video had gone viral and Syrian activists in and outside of Syria took note. I used Facebook to reach out to Syrian woman activist and single mother,
Suheir Atassi, who was instrumental in organizing early mobilizations before the revolution began in Syria. She described to me how she organized solidarity vigils with Tunisia and Egypt outside of their embassies and how regime agents (Shebiha) responded by beating her and her fellow activists. I remember her telling me, “They treated us like insects. They stomped on us and beat us like we didn’t matter.”

It was our connection via Facebook that brought Suheir and I into conversation, and internet access to footage of revolutions in North Africa that inspired Dera’an children to resist. When the courageous children of Dera’a, a quiet rural village in Syria inscribed anti-regime slogans—We want the fall of the regime! and Freedom! Freedom! Freedom! onto the walls of their elementary school walls and were subsequently tortured, the first ones to take to the streets in response were women—mothers and grandmothers to the children, along with disenfranchised youth. They released a series of demands and flooded the streets of Dera’a on March 15, 2011. Other rural cities in Syria joined in solidarity, and by the next week, protesters were in the streets of Banyas holding red roses and olive branches to the sky, demanding retribution for the collective abuse Syrians have suffered. This creative symbolic nonviolent resistant was in large part crafted by women activists in the Local Coordinating Committees that emerged as the Revolution took shape. Soon the Syrian Revolution became known as “The Youtube Revolution,” because of the day-to-day live streams of footage that citizen activists uploaded to social media platforms to document the abuses of the regime. The Revolutionary Youth Council of Dera’a posted their demands for freedom and justice as a document in their neighborhood Facebook group. Meanwhile, my own activist mother was fundraising money to distribute to the newest wave of refugees displaced by regime violence. In the summer of 2011, I traveled to the Turkish-Syrian border to help distribute aid to the first wave of Syrian refugees, the majority of
whom were women and children. While there, some recognized me as the “Syria Youtube Girl” and shared with me unspeakable stories of violence. I began to notice how social media as a medium allowed Syrians access to sharing their experiences, on their own terms. This documentation and sharing was a radical act, particularly in a culture where regime repression enacted a sense of collective fear of speaking truth to power.

Figure 2: An example of the online documentation grassroots civil society organizations in Syria and the political opposition (the Syrian National Council) have created with Youtube videos of protestor’s deaths included. Source: The Syrian Revolution Martyr Database.

After that momentous summer in Turkey in 2011, I spent the rest of my summers in college volunteering at a Syrian refugee social services center run by members of my extended family in Amman, Jordan. Each year, more of my relatives poured out of Syria fleeing horrifying trauma, telling me their stories.
One day I opened the *Huffington Post* online and saw that a white woman professor had written a riveting story about Syrian political refugees who fell in love during the Revolution. I recognized mentions of an activist niece who had uploaded videos for Syria on YouTube. With a start, I realized that she was describing my uncle and his wife who had just left Homs in the middle of shelling to be his lover in Jordan. I knew the realities of my communities and the complexity of their stories. When I read the article, I noticed that the author framed my aunt as a victim and my uncle as her savior.

Reading my own family narratives that had been distorted into Orientalist sensationalism further motivated me to authentically research and narrate the stories of my family and our community. Each summer in Jordan I listened to the stories of many Syrian refugee women who were struggling in a society that did not allow their husbands to obtain work visas, driver’s licenses, or citizenship. As many of the women struggled to feed their families and raise their children under stable circumstances, they began developing strategies for economic sustainability. I watched displaced Syrian women create their own hair salon businesses, sell homemade meat patties, and sew clothing to sell to provide for their families in the face of socioeconomic and xenophobic discrimination in Jordan. Women were actively carving out underground and alternative economies to take advantage of the limited resources they had and to use them in innovative ways.

**CONCLUSION**

In Syria, realities have been warped, revised, and misrepresented to justify state repression. I write this thesis in hopes of illuminating a truth that has been neglected by the regime’s cult of personality narratives that mythologize its power into an all-knowing and righteous force. The common headlines on Syria, from “Rebel-on-Rebel Violence Seizes Syria”
to “U.S. Fears Al Qaeda Group in Syria Is Plotting Terror,” overemphasize the militarization of the Syrian conflict and frame it as apolitically volatile, and prey on an Islamophobic fear of extremism. They do not humanize the voices of the resilient and brilliant people who resist structures of oppression in Syria. Additionally, there is a global industry around packaging images of Third World, oppressed Muslim women that used to justify colonial occupation. Syrian women do face multiple oppressions, but their narratives must be framed in a way that respects the complications and specificities of their sociopolitical contexts.

Since the Syrian refugee crisis is the largest of its kind in the 21st century, the entire world benefits from knowing more about Syrian women and their narratives of resistance. I want to know: how do Syrian women resist? Do they consider their community labor to be resistance? Do others in their community consider the work they do activist labor? What do their narratives reveal about larger structural oppressions displaced Syrian women face? What are their hopes for the future?

I decided to record Syrian women’s narratives using qualitative feminist methodologies. I wanted to interview women in a way that could allow space for understanding these women as activists, mothers, community leaders. I understood that Um Tariq cooking kebab or Aunt Marwa sewing children’s schoolclothes was an act of self-sufficiency and resistance, just as important as Brother Jamal carrying a microphone and yelling about revolution in the street. I sought to situate these personal narratives in a sociological context and feminist theory using concepts such as gendered resistance (Kuumba 2001) in order to characterize the methods displaced Syrian women use to empower themselves and their communities.
Chapter TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

In my literature review I examine existing research that focuses on displaced Syrian women and their stories of displacement. There is a body of humanitarian reports published by the U.N., Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the International Rescue Committee collected in efforts to lobby support for Syrian refugee women in international sectors. While this objective is incredibly necessary in the realm of humanitarian awareness, my research takes an academic approach on situating Syrian women’s narratives within larger discourses on Muslim women and refugee women in the Global South. I am also critical of the ways in which these reports emphasize certain details about the women’s narratives that shaped by Western, colonial bias trying to prove the victimization of these women in order to raise humanitarian awareness. Additionally, while most of the existing literature focuses on the challenges displaced Syrian face, I look at the ways in which Syrian women create strategies to survive in creative ways. In this literature review I connect the humanitarian reports to first hand accounts of Syrian women inside and outside of Syria. It is necessary to highlight the roles women played in the Syrian revolution to understand the types of activities they continue to organize after being displaced. I divide their activist work into political activism, civil society organizing, social media activism, humanitarian activism, and creative resistance.

When I first began collecting information for my literature review in 2011, the only sources of Syrian women’s narratives were primary accounts through the Facebook profiles of various activists and pages for revolutionary organizations. Once organizations and activists began to publish their narratives in more public and professional means and translated them into English, it became more feasible to document the specific instances Syrian women engaged in
resistance. It is important to show that the roots of the revolution were in nonviolent, women-led civil disobedience in order to contextualize the activism of displaced Syrian women in surrounding countries.

Interestingly enough, I came across quotes from my aunt, Hanna Ghadbans in UN and International Rescue Committee reports, summarized in an article whose headline was—“Young girl who dreams of an education ended when her parents sold her into marriage” (Aly 2012). I knew exactly what context she was referring to and noticed how decontextualized her words became. This affirmed the necessity for my research and my culturally sensitive and firsthand understanding of the importance of hearing displaced Syrian women’s stories. Ratta (2014) explains the importance of narrating Syrian stories as they should be told. In the digital era where activists in Syria documented day by day human rights abuses on social media platforms such as Youtube and Facebook, vast amounts of information on the Syrian struggle flood the internet with little context. Syrian citizen-journalists often lack the training to effectively situate their narratives within political, geographic, and social contexts, which makes their materials ripe for cooptation from larger and more dominant global media outlets. As a result, a group of Syrian activists launched Syria Untold, a platform to amplify authentic storytelling of the Syrian revolution and refugee crises, created with an intention to highlight marginalized narratives that are typically erased in dominant narratives on the crisis such as civil disobedience work, nonviolent activism, and women’s voices (Ratta 2014). As a result, many of my first-hand sources come from the Syria Untold platform, which was a crucial vessel for recording the narratives of Syrian activist-refugee women, in their own words.
I. Humanitarian Reports on Gender Violence among Syrian Refugee Women

Several research studies sponsored by international NGOs have worked to document displaced Syrian women’s narratives. Recently, UNHCR (2014), Human Rights Watch (2014), and the International Rescue Committee (2014) have all published reports on Syrian women that document displaced women’s stories to provide recommendations to host governments and the international community on how to aid Syrian women. All reports provide detailed narratives of the challenges refugee women face in the conflict. At the same time, since these reports are published by international non-governmental organizations to serve particular agendas. I also review a report on Syrian women from a grassroots social justice organization, MADRE (2014) that includes different perspectives on their plight. The reports from international NGOs rely heavily on in-depth interviews, focus groups, survey research and analyses of secondary sources. A major ideological consideration that emerges is whether Syrian women actually possess and enact agency in their situations, or if they are rendered victims by the intense amount of oppression and violence that characterizes their daily lives.

The Human Rights Watch (2014) is an international non-government organization that collects data related to human rights advocacy. Their report “We are Still Here: Women on the Front Lines of Syria’s Conflict” begins by recognizing “[displaced Syrian] women’s multiple and significant roles in the conflict,” and emphasizes that women can be both activists and victims at the same time (2014: 1). This mirrors the complexity Ghazzawi (2014) offers in her firsthand account of Syrian women that I will discuss later in this chapter. The Human Rights Watch report (2014) represents a wide array of voices—veiled and unveiled women, middle class to lower income, women who lived in rural to urban areas. They stress the importance of seeing displaced Syrian women as political activists, caregivers, humanitarians and providers.
They point out that many of the women interviewed have long histories of activism and faced physical harassment as a result. HRW (2014) describes how women participated in peaceful protests, provided humanitarian assistance to internally displaced refugees, and were targets of government abuse from the beginning of their activist journeys. This connects to Kahf’s (2013) account of Syrian women in the early stages of the peaceful protest movement in Syria and how women led the first local coordinating committees in Syria and two of the first three coalitions inside Syria at the beginning of the revolution prior to their displacement. The HRW report (2014) paid attention to the impact of extremist militarist groups on the increased rates of gender-based violence, including forced dress codes and restricted movement in public.

On the other hand, the UNHCR report (2014) profiles Syrian refugee women in a way that seems to cater to a Western gaze intent on constructing them as oppressed third world women. The report is a result of extensive fieldwork conducted based on interviews with 135 Syrian female heads of households in Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt during the 2014 year. It asserts that the sample is not “comprehensive or statistically representative” (2014). The interviews were not structured and were combined with mixed methods of quantitative survey research. UNHCR (2014) focused on displaced Syrian women who are heads of households as their unit of analysis, operationalized as someone who is in temporarily charge of finances and decision making in families. The report is incredibly useful for its qualitative data statistically capturing the struggles displaced Syrian women face. Common themes that emerge include maintaining home and well being, dealing with hostile host communities, finding a safe place to live, staying healthy, coping with sexual violence, and living with disabilities in diaspora. The UNHCR (2014) report does not specify where the interviewed women come from or much about their lives prior to displacement. The UN Reports detailed how informal marriages (‘urfi’) of
young Syrian women to Jordanians enable them to gain citizenship status in Jordan. Divorce sacrifices their access to citizenship, so the potential for intimate partner abuse is high. It documents how early marriage presents health risks for girls, including early pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and physical abuse (Aly 2012). At the same time the UN reports do not account for the possibilities of researcher’s bias when documenting narratives, particularly if the researchers were not sensitive to the sociocultural contexts of the women and could possibly have encountered errors in translation, whether from cultural cues or language barriers.

Additional UN literature from UNICEF, UNHCR, and the UNFPA document rape as a common experience among Syrian refugee women. The UN documentation of Syrian refugee women is important for policy implications and arguing the need for increased structural support.

As a result of UN reports, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) called for $18 million in funding to help Syrian refugee women and girls have access to health resources and protection from gender violence. UNFPA also worked to distribute half a million “dignity kits” to Syrian women lacking soap, sanitary pads, and basic hygienial necessities. They also released figures showing that over 38,000 people had appealed to the UN for help after facing gender violence and rape as a war weapon in Syria in 2013. U.N agencies are also conducting awareness sessions for the prevention of gender-violence in thirty one “safe spaces” in various refugee camps in surrounding countries.

A recent Amnesty International report (2015) “Hardship, hope and resettlement: refugees from Syria tell their stories” highlights the narratives of extremely vulnerable Syrian refugee populations, including rape survivors. It was published as a part of Amnesty International’s #OpentoSyria campaign, which was launched to “put pressure on wealthy countries…to accept a greater number of vulnerable refugees from Syria.” It describes how Syrian refugees endure a
“merciless and hopeless reality...[and] have been abandoned by the international community” (Evin 2015). In Turkey, Syrian women are often seen begging at apartment and metro entrances with their children. The vast majority of the over 1.6 million Syrian refugees registered in Turkey live in extreme poverty. Many are turned away and told to return to Syria once they reach the border. There is a massive smuggling economy that puts Syrian women refugees at high risk for gender violence. The reliance on smugglers as the only viable way to leave Syria has contributed to a human trafficking economy. Once refugees reach the border they are subject to harassment. Amnesty International has documented several incidents where border patrol has killed groups of refugees attempting to leave Syria (Evin 2015).

The International Rescue Committee’s (2014) report on Syria gathered data from women’s protection and empowerment programs in 64 communities in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, and Jordan. In depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with displaced women, adolescent girls, and men living in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, and Syria from May 18 to July 1, 2014. There were 56 in depth interviews and 17 focus groups, with an overall total of 198 individuals participating. The primary focus of the research was to understand the main challenges facing displaced women and girls in the region, unlike the UNHCR (2014) report that only focused on Syrian women heads of households. They also reviewed secondary data which highlighted gender based violence such as domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, restricted mobility, working for better wages or wages at all, limited access to resources as they relate to sexual and reproductive health, and forced and early marriage as key challenges facing displaced Syrian women and girls.

Women and girls in Syria told the International Rescue Committee that they are attacked in public and inside their homes in Syria by armed men, sometimes in front of their family
members (George 2013). Increased rates of rape are forcing women to leave Syria (George 2013). Notably, the International Rescue Committee report did not mention if the perpetrators were from the rebel or regime side, which depoliticizes the conflict and characterizes again in terms of violence, where the structural forces that perpetuate them are absolved from responsibility. Horrific descriptions like these were shared, without identification of what was the causing violence, of who “they” were.

“A 28-year-old woman from the southern town of Dara’a, now a refugee in Jordan, told the IRC that her children used to see dead bodies thrown in the garbage pile across the street from her home:

"I told them not to look out the window anymore. It didn't help," she says. "When they raided the house next door, we could hear the rape of my neighbor, my friend. And then they arrested my brother and tortured him for days" (IRC 2014).”

MADRE’s (2014) report “Seeking Accountability and Effective Responses for Gender Based Violence Against Syrian Women: Women’s Inclusion in the Peace Process” was the only report that situated the violence Syrian women face in a political context. The report discusses how Syrian women played an active role in grassroots mobilization early on in the Syrian resistance movements and how women became marginalized when the struggle against the Assad regime became militarized. It includes references to important U.N. briefings on Syria that show the sexual and prison violence women faced directly as a result of their activism in the Syrian resistance movement. For example, despite the fact that the U.N. report was written and produced by UNHCR (2014) it includes no mention of any U.N. briefings that proved “in all instances [of sexual violence], the women were accused of supporting the anti-Government
armed groups, being involved in protests or being related to those involved with the armed
groups or in protests. The commission found that such acts were perpetrated as part of a
widespread attack directed against a civilian population, pursuant to or in furtherance of an
organizational policy.”

This direct correlation between a woman’s level of activism and the violence she faces as
a result is an important factor that the UNHCR, HRW, Amnesty, and IRC reports overlook.
Additionally, the MADRE (2014) report points out that rape has been used as a weapon of war in
Homs and Al-Haffe throughout 2012, as part of a systematic regime attack against the civilian
population, which could be prosecuted as crimes against humanity. In the Human Rights Watch,
U.N. and International Rescue reports the violence Syrian women face was described in detail
but attributed to vague mentions of “war” and “conflict” without specifically mentioning how
regime violence is gendered and targets activist women. The fact that MADRE (2014) is an
international women’s rights organization focused on social justice rather than on diplomatic
aims and rallying support meant that their report gives a needed perspective on displaced Syrian
women, one that is rooted in understandings of patriarchy and how it interacts with structures of
violence. Similarly to the other reports, the MADRE (2014) briefing focuses on gender-based
violence Syrian refugee women face such as early marriage, lack of access to healthcare and
stigma in reporting gender-based violence. Unlike the other reports, however, it compares the
state of displaced Syrian women’s experiences of gender-based violence to gender-based
violence before the conflict, which roots the current phenomena in longer histories of patriarchal
control that Syrian women struggled against prior to the revolution.
II. Accounts of Syrian women in their own words

Syrian women have been instrumental in organizing during the revolution. One woman’s powerful insight that “I do not make a distinction between the Syrian revolution and women’s revolution, to me they are the same” shows how the Syrian uprising opened the possibilities for questioning the norms of a patriarchal society (Syria Untold 2014). There is an association of the regime with old structures of oppression such as patriarchy that were at liberty to being torn down (Syria Untold 2014). When the revolution evolved from a popular uprising into a militarized conflict, new enemies such as ISIS threatened women’s movement and self-expression (Syria Untold 2014). Many Syrian women who are activists have made intentional choices to stay in Syria despite extreme regime repression such as barrel bombing, imprisonment, and torture, in addition to violence from extremist forces such as Jabhat an-Nusra and ISIS. Raqqa teacher Souad Nofal and Razan Zeitouneh of the Syria’s Violations Documentation Center are two women who have stayed in Syria despite having paid heavy prices for their activist work. Says Nofal, “We did not take to the streets against Assad to be scared of these ones now!” (Syria Untold 2014).

It is important to note that Syrian women activists do not come in any particular demographic—old, young, widowed, liberal, conservative, Sunni, Alawite—Syrian women activists represent a wide array of complex experiences. These categories are not mutually exclusive—creative resistance and nonviolent resistance often overlap, for example. I consider political activism as a woman’s participation in larger political processes, from prisons to councils to internationally recognized oppositional political bodies such as the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (formally known as the SNC—Syrian National Coalition.) Nonviolent resistance is the use of symbolic protests to peacefully resist. Civil society
organizing includes grassroots organizational work, creative resistance uses creative forms of protest to rebel, and humanitarianism includes providing refugee relief.

1. Political Activism

Syrian refugee women are lifelong activists and political exiles themselves. Seventy-year-old Fadwa Mahmoud has survived political prisons and is a mother and wife to current political prisoners. Mahmoud is a veteran member of the outlawed Communist Action Party in Syria (Mataz 2014). She was displaced from Syria a year ago and has sought refugee in Beirut, Lebanon from regime repression. She is known as a mother figure to other Syrian activists and political dissidents in exile. She is also the mother of two leftist opposition activists who were forcibly disappeared in 2012 near Damascus.

Her husband is Abdulaziz al Khayer, head of the Communist Action Party and a leading figure in the National Coordination Body for Democratic Change opposition group, and her son Maher Tahan is a civil society activist who fought for a establishing a democratic Syria. Her son was abducted by the Air Force intelligence on his way from the airport September 20, 2012, on his way to the Syrian Salvation opposition conference in Damascus.

Figure 3: Mahmoud and her husband in Damascus. Source: Mataz 2014.

Mahmoud herself was imprisoned from 1992 to 1994 for her involvement in the Communist Action Party (CAP). Her two sons were 9 and 6 at the time. Shockingly, her brother was the head of the prison she was kept in. She experienced horrific treatment and her brother’s
loyalty to the regime meant that he treated her particularly badly. When she left prison she said, “people were saying I was a bad mother for getting them into politics, leaving them alone.” Her experience shows the layered difficulties women political refugees face juggling the expectations of gender roles, regime violence, and the trauma of imprisonment. Mahmoud never stopped her political organizing even after imprisonment, despite many of her comrades abandoning the cause. Her activist journey is characterized by the “maternal frame” Kuumba discusses (2001) that women’s activism is tied “cultural themes of mothering,” in the context of violent state repression. Mahmoud’s position as an activist and mothering figure is reflected in her exile, as she is lovingly referred to as Khalto (auntie) by Syrian political exiles and refugees in Beirut who look to her for guidance and support in their political organizing.

Women like Rima Fleihan in the Syrian National Coalition have also been in the front lines of political negotiating. Kabawat (2014) notes that women who have been detained in the regime’s prisons have become icons of the revolution and have participated in the Geneva talks. Noura Al Ameer from the Syrian National Coalition is a former political prisoner who is on the front lines of international political negotiations. Syrian women political activists even produced a video calling for the inclusion of their voices in the Geneva II talks (Leimbach 2013, Rees 2014).

At the same time, firsthand Syrian women’s accounts reveal that despite women’s active roles in political participation, their representation in the political sphere is still grossly limited (Syria Untold 2014). Syrian poet and activist Khawla Dunia commented on the tokenization of Syrian women...“women are like spices for men in the political opposition. They use us to add some flavor, but we do not affect the main ingredients. I refuse to take part in this cooking, as long as I am not considered an active participant.” Activist Razan Ghazzawi asked, “How many
women are there in the Syrian National Coalition at the moment? And how many men?”

Ghazzawi pointed out that this lack of representation perpetuates what the regime has been doing for decades—enforcing “a simple quota for women in the parliament or local councils, without any regard to how active or important their role is. The decision-making process is placed firmly in the hands of men.” (Syria Untold 2014). This critique articulates what Kuumba (2001) identifies as gender differentiated political opportunities, that points to how institutionalized gender norms determine the access women have to participating in oppositional political activities.

My own firsthand experience attending Syrian National Coalition conference attests to Ghazzawi’s analysis. I remember attending one of the very first political opposition conferences in July 2011 where a Kurdish minority staged a walk-out to highlight the Sunni majority’s privileged centering of themselves. Young people also formed a coalitionary network—the Syrian Youth Activist Network (SYAN) to counter the rampant ageism of the coalitionary government that only included older Sunni male activists 65 and up. I noticed that the most silenced group at the conference had not spoken at all—women. When I brought up this critique, an older woman journalist told me I was being overanalytical and that gender was an issue they would deal with “after the Revolution.” This dynamic emerges historically in revolutionary structures from the Civil Rights Movement to other liberation struggles in South Africa and Algeria to the Blacklivesmatter movement in the U.S. today. Women often end up experiencing gendered state sanctioned violence and perform double the labor as activists, but are not allowed the same voice or visibility and valuing of their activist labor as men (Kuumba 2001). Khawla Dunia brings in another perspective of being both a woman and an ethnic minority (an Alawite) in Syria. “Many times, I am invited will after all the details have been agreed on. I receive the invitation not for
the discussion, but for the photo-ops.” Dunia’s comments show the surface-level tokenization of women in the political sphere as useful for images of diversity rather than true representations of diversity. Yara Nuseir, another woman activist in the Syrian revolution also agrees that women have been relegated to marginal roles in both the political and revolutionary spheres. Razan Ghazzawi sees this lack of inclusion as means for a call to action: “Syria needs a renewed feminist movement that can bring accountability to those violating women’s rights and restricting their freedoms, both during and after the revolution” (Syria Untold 2014).

2. Nonviolent movement

*Syria Nonviolence Movement*

The Syria Nonviolence Movement was an organization founded in 2011 that coordinated the Dignity Strike, which closed shops, universities, transportations, and public sectors, Freedom Days, a series of nonviolent civil disobedience initiatives, and the Nonviolence map that documented civil disobedience initiatives in the Syrian revolution, from supporting detainees, to awareness raising campaigns, to visual art, demonstrations, creating revolutionary proxy servers to facilitate social media activism, providing psychological support to traumatized refugees, engaging theatre of the oppressed, starting newspapers, and conducting sit-ins.

“Placing radio speakers in Damascus' central squares and playing revolutionary songs; painting the city's fountain water red to remind the martyrs' blood; blocking traffic in the middle of roads; distributing anti-regime leaflets that looked like Syrian currency notes - "everybody would stop to collect 1,000 Syrian Pounds on the floor!"-are some of the nuanced acts taken in defiance of regime” (Ratta 2012).
Nonviolence strategies are important because they include activists who would typically be excluded from protests, usually women who face extreme threats of sexual violence if they visibly protest in the streets.

Figure 4: An Interactive display mapping Syrian nonviolent resistance. Source: Benedict 2013.

Maimouna al-Ammar is a cofounder of Syria Nonviolence who was arrested while pregnant early in the revolution (Kahf 2013). She suffered shelling in her town and her two younger brothers were abducted into regime prisons since November 2012. Her powerful use of nonviolence tactics saved the life of her baby. When regime agents stormed her home and threatened her family, she held her baby in her arms and asked the soldiers, “Do you not have a mother?” and the soldiers let her go (Kahf 2013). While appealing to the conscience of one’s oppressors is not always a popular strategy, in this case, Ammar, who was trained in nonviolent political strategies saved the life of her and her baby.
Usama Nassar was imprisoned for organizing a silent march against Iraq and Syrian regime’s role in endorsing the imperialist and colonialist U.S. occupation. She helped to found the Syrian Nonviolent Movement inside April 2011 and was subsequently imprisoned. Her continued activism shows that the work of nonviolent resistance continues in Syria today despite any global or media attention to it.

Another example of a coalitionary nonviolent movement is the Public Commission for Civilian Defense in Dera’a, who collect water and trash in the liberated territory of Dera’a. They maintain civilian work even in the face of daily regime military assaults and Islamist extremist attacks. Their work safeguards life for ordinary Syrians, no matter which side they are on and is vital to creating an alternative economy not reliant on regime structures (Kahf 2013). They are innovating what it means to be nonviolent.

Yaman al-Qadri is a young woman activist who was imprisoned and tortured when she was 18 for peaceful protesting in 2011. Qadri commented on her underlying political belief that “it doesn’t matter if the regime wins or not, we are here for liberation.” Her insight is profoundly important because it shows that her activism is deeply rooted in the notion that systems of oppression must be dismantled in order for liberation to occur.

Um Nizar is a 57-year-old Syrian widow from Kafranbel who narrated her story of surviving regime brutality and losses of her loved ones to disease and violence (al Mahmud 2015). After the loss of her husband to blood cancer she single handedly raised her seven children by picking olives and making tomato paste. When the Syrian revolution began in 2011, she saw the possibility of a better life and says the revolution “changed all our lives.” She accepts the fate God has given her and prides in her activism in the revolution. She recalled an incident where she saved a young man from the grips of a regime soldier when everyone else
was too scared to intervene (al Mahmud 2015). Her oldest son was abducted at a military checkpoint and has not been seen since. Her story reveals the complexity and hardships experienced by elderly Syrian women, the coping strategies they develop to endure--often through their faith, and the avenues the revolution provided to reimagine the status quo.

Another young activist named Laila came from an upper middle class pro-regime family who prided themselves on liberal values (Deeb 2015). She joined the protests in al-Ramel district of Latakia in 2011 and helped plan peaceful demonstrations and days long sit-ins, until a horrific massacre deterred protesters from continuing (Deeb 2015). She soon became a veteran organizer in the neighborhood revolutionary councils, and was recognized by regime agents for her visible documentation of the protests on her cell phone. She was forced into exile and disowned by her family (Deeb 2015).

*Razan Ghazzawi*

Razan Ghazzawi’s (2014) piece “Seeing the women in revolutionary Syria,” offers a perspective that none of the other NGO sponsored reports can shed light on—a personal autobiographic account of Syrian women’s activism. Much like Samar Yazbek’s (2012) published diaries of the Syrian revolution, *A Woman in Crossfire*, Ghazzawi (2014) traces the challenges and visions she has as a displaced Syrian woman activist. Ghazzawi (2014) mostly summarizes the most notable women activist figures in the struggle as she herself is a witness to its history. She mentions figures such as Razan Zeitouneh, Doha Hassan, Nura al Ghaman, Rima Flehan, and Mai Skaf as noteworthy women activists in the revolution who represent a wide array of cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Ghazzawi’s (2014) report is incredibly helpful in providing a perspective of Syrian women’s roles from a Syrian woman, which curbs
the effects of Western cultural bias through her own candid first-hand observations as the primary source of her findings.

She outlines the main abuses and challenges Syrian women face in activist organizing, such as government institutions that monitor their activities and punish them.

The systematic violence women face from the regime is often gendered, such as sexual harassment and assault from regime officials. “I often get interrogated at checkpoints about what I am wearing, where is my family and whether I am married or not, questions that men never get asked,” Ghazzawi said. “As if I could not work freely for my own country, the country I own a passport for.” Ghazzawi calls for activists to speak out more about the gendered treatment of women in systematic oppression from the regime and from the hypermilitarized, liberated areas.

One schoolteacher in Syria who travels from Idlib to Damascus for her work crosses through three Syrian government checkpoints (G haila 2015). In her first hand account the woman describes harassment from a government official who points a rifle at her “as a joke” and asks her if she is from ISIS or Jabhat al-Nusra. (G haila 2015). Yara Nasseir, another Syrian woman activist disagrees. She has not experienced sexual harassment in the liberated areas but claims she has “not heard one of my comrades make distinctions against women. She blames her fellow activists, both from the armed and peaceful struggle, for not speaking out against the treatment female activists receive in some of the liberated areas. “I have not heard one of my comrades publicly denounce such restrictions against women,” she complained (Syria Untold 2014).

The Women of Raqqa: Against ISIS and Al-Nusra

Raqqa is a Syrian city famous for protesting and commemorating their martyrs in the face of Jabhat al-Nusra, the radicalized faction of the Free Syrian army. After the “Battle of Raqqa” in
March 2013, rebel forces faced the Syrian regime army and declared the Raqqa area liberated. Shortly thereafter, ISIS militants who are a part of the Al-Nusra front gained strength in the area. Mothers, wives, and daughters of ISIS detainees demanded their immediate release by raising the slogan, “There is nothing holier than freedom, and no worse sin that stealing it.” The women of Raqqa protested ISIS’ use of religion to justify extreme repression. They stood outside of the Al-Nusra headquarters against the black flag that has replaced the rebel’s revolution flag. “Safeguard the state’s capabilities,” “Respect freedom,” “Respect civilians,” and “Do not humiliate,” were some of the slogans, once used against the Assad government, now used as a warning against those trying to co-opt the revolution. After the protest, the city was met with severe force from extremist factions. The population and the Women of Raqqa continue to boldly confront ISIS and An-Nusra, carrying on the spirit of nonviolent resistance that has guided the Syrian Revolution from its inception (Syria Untold 2013). One schoolteacher in Raqqa, Suad Nofal, staged a one-woman protest against ISIS.

Suad Nofal was one of the first demonstrators in Raqqa in 2011 when the Syrian revolution first began and was one of the first demonstrators against ISIS. She staged a one-woman protest by raising homemade banners in front of the ISIS headquarters and through the streets and markets of Raqqa with the message, “Our revolution was sparked by honorable people, and it is being stolen by thieves,” “Release all detainees,” and “Where were you when the crimes of Ghouta happened? Sleeping in your palaces,” referring to the city outside of Damascus that suffered chemical attacks in 2013. Other messages included, “Muslims who spill the blood of Muslims are sinners,” “Our enemy is the criminal regime, not the people,” “Don’t just talk about religion. Show us your religion through your decency, your compassion, and your good deeds.” Nofal described how she faced resistance from within her own family because they
disapproved of her activism due the risk that it put them in. She says, “my family has told me to stop and they say that they will not forgive me if something happens to them. Of course I am worried about this, but Syria needs us all now. How can we abandon our country when it needs us the most?” Nofal was shot at when she protested and survived through the help of her sister. “No matter what happens, I want to stay. I want to stay in my city. I don’t want others to take over it. Online activism is good, but there is work that has to be done on the ground, and some of us have to stay to do it.”

Nofal’s message shows a double critique—a critique of the regime, and a critique of the hijacking of the revolution by Islamist extremists. She has an anti-imperialist, anti-colonial praxis that I would argue is feminist in nature. She resists displacement actively because she realizes she is one of the few activists who is courageous enough to keep working, even in the face of extremist oppression doubled with regime violence. Her demonstration against ISIS prompted solidarity from all over the country. Activist Mayan Atassi commented, “Today I really needed this feminine source of strength and courage. I wish you the best, Suad Nofal!” She holds on to her banners, full of messages, colors, and cartoons, to remind herself of the Syrian struggle. In contrast to the black symbolism of ISIS, she fills the Syrian landscape with vibrant colors of hope. Her creativity, which is traditionally devalued in activist work, and feminine aesthetics resist oppression. Nofal says “these banners have kept me company, they have given me strength. They remind me why it is important to keep doing what we are doing. Until we are free.”
3. Civil society organizing/grassroots

Men and women before the official March 15, 2011 start of the Syrian Uprisings were protesting in front of the Libyan, Tunisian, and Egyptian revolutions to show solidarity. Since the start of the Syrian revolution, women have worked side-by-side to men to organize protests and civil disobedience initiatives. One of the first people to be arrested in public for protesting was a woman named Marwa Ghamain March 15, 2011 during a demonstration in Damascus’s Hamidiah Market. (Syria Untold 2014).

Participating in civil society organizing in the revolution gave Syrian women an unprecedented sense of hope. “With the beginning of the uprising, I felt there was a space for personal and public freedom that I had never experienced in my life,” Khawla Dunia said to Syria Untold. “I could raise my voice, speak up, demand my rights, in the streets of Damascus and elsewhere” (Syria Untold 2014).
Razan Ghazzawi said that women who were engaged in civil society organizing and activism in the Syrian revolution were from different intellectual, social, and class backgrounds (Syria Untold 2014).

“As militarization gained ground, the role of women decreased significantly, and became mostly reduced to humanitarian aid and relief,” Yara Nassir said (Syria Untold 2014).

Syrian women face the oppression of the regime, while simultaneously facing violence from patriarchy. According to Nassir, women in liberated areas are systematically excluded from decision-making and public spaces. Women continued to search for a place in civil society that could hold the space they needed to express themselves freely. Part of the problem was that the revolution did not incorporate women’s rights as its core (Syria Untold 2014). Priorities on the activist agenda—revolutionary praxis lacked an intersectional approach. “A change is needed, Dunia agreed, and “that is what drove Syrians to the streets in the first place, but current circumstances have not allowed this change to come about” (Syria Untold 2014). Despite this, various women-led civil society initiatives promote the revolution’s initial calls for total liberation.

The Mazaya Center

Women founded the Mazaya Center in Kafranbel in June 2013 to train women in workshops in literacy, first aid, sewing, languages, and computer skills. (Syria Untold 2013). Their trainings aim to empower women and help them achieve financial independence despite increasing threats of extremist violence. (Syria Untold 2013). The presence of fundamentalist forces in Kafranbel attempted to suffocate their peaceful movement and alienate women in the town (Syria Untold 2013). In response the women of Mazaya wove a giant Syrian revolution flag, saying “We are sending a message to ISIS as well as our fellow revolutionary men, to
remind them of how much women have sacrificed in the struggle for a civil state where men and women have equal rights.” It is important to note that the women are mostly religiously conservative but politically progressive; their practice of Islam does not diminish the radicalness of their politics and praxis. The giant revolution flag was also a reassertion of the revolutionary symbol in the midst of black flags representing extremist groups. “[This] is a symbol of what we demanded in 2011, what we still demand today.” On November 10, 2014, the Mazaya Center was burnt down by extremist groups. The women of Mazaya’s activist work was seen as a threat to their dominance. In a matter of hours, the women of Mazaya began to clear the damage, rebuild the center, and coordinate a protest against the attack. Nour, the head director of Mazaya, says, “Despite being capable of committing such horrid crimes, you [the extremists] are weak. Your language is murder, theft, and arson, a language we do not understand.” (Syria Untold 2013). The center was attacked yet again January 14, 2015. Islamist militants in Jabhat al-Nusra raided the center because of a newspaper they released called Souriana with included a message of solidarity with journalists murdered in the attack on Charlie Hebdo in France.

The women of Mazaya once again protested in retaliation and asserted that the incident would not inhibit their activist work. They recycled banners they had created to protest regime violence that read “I am no longer a liability, I am an asset. We are here to stay.”

The Free Women of Darayya

Darayya, the hometown of celebrated nonviolence activist Ghaith Matar and Yahja Sherbaji, is a symbol of the Syrian civil society organizing movement (Ratta 2012, Syria Untold 2013). The Free Women of Darayya is a grassroots organization founded in 2011 that built the groundwork for the Syrian Civil Movement (Syria Untold 2013). “We didn’t know each other before the uprising”, one of Darayya’s Free Women said. “The demonstrations that took so many
to the streets to demand freedom and justice united us.” (Syria Untold 2013). As early as 2003, Darraya activists worked on citizen street cleaning campaigns and organized protests against the U.S. invasion of Iraq, which shows how Syrian women activists use an anti-imperialist political consciousness to inform their work. In the Syrian Revolution, the Free Women of Darayya’s first initiative was to organize a sit-in demanding the release of political prisoners.

Figure 6: Christmas tree decorated with the names of Syrian detainees Source: Syria Untold 2013.

By that time the regime had already detained, tortured, and arrested hundreds of activists. Darraya’s Free Women were also the target of this repression themselves. This is a common thread between the women’s activism—it was repressed and targeted in specific ways by the regime in order to dismantle the movement from the grassroots using threats of gendered violence. The organization hosted meetings to plan revolutionary strategies, and began teaching workshops to women wanting to engage in the civil protest movement. This was important because the women who would be in danger from protesting could attend these meetings and workshops and participate in the revolution in alternative ways. Their activism was also more accessible for women who were also wives, mothers, and daughters caring for their families under government repression, shelling, and systematic resource deprivation (sieges).

The group began to structure their work like a nonprofit organization into communication, public relation, photography, humanitarian, and psychological support sectors, while archiving and documenting their activism on the group’s website and Facebook page. They spearheaded creative protests such as decorating trees with the names of Syrian detainees during
Christmas, and gathering letters from detainees’ mothers and children to publically display on a banner in the streets.

The Free Women of Darayya helped launched a grassroots newspaper, “The Local Grapes,” which documented human rights abuses of the regime and the abuses of the Free Syrian Army. The newspaper enforces a civil disobedience principle of documenting war crimes, detainees, martyrs, and missing people. In the post-revolutionary process, archival projects like the Local Grapes are vital to holding war criminals accountable for the violence they commit and lays the groundwork for conflict resolution stages. The women also organized in solidarity with Syrian women in other towns such as Sednaya to join in resisting the regime’s divide-and-conquer sectarianist and regionalist strategies to fragment the revolution. When the regime sieged Darayya in November 2012, most of the activists in Free Women were displaced. Many returned later, to find their town completely devastated and their relatives massacred. They returned to their work, now focusing on delivering humanitarian assistance to those who were still living in the city. As of 2013, many of the Free Women founders were either imprisoned or displaced, but many continue the fight even in exile and prison.

Figure 7: Syrian women and children protesting the detainment of child prisoners. Source: Syria Untold 2013.
The civil disobedience strategies of Free Women of Darayya are immensely powerful. Dominant narratives in literature on the Syrian revolution tend to erase the backgrounds of civil society activists and assume that their revolutionary activism came out of a vacuum. Scholars who try to assert that the Revolution is a US and Israeli backed CIA informed project fail to see that Syrian revolutionary women who were anti-imperialist organizers joined the anti-regime struggle in rural cities like Darayya, and that these were primarily women who showed out and contributed to organizing.
4. Creative resistance

Khawla Dunia is a Syrian woman poet whose work is featured in *Writing Revolution: Voices from Tunis to Damascus*. She “feels that the situation of Syrian women today is in a constant state of degradation, “not only in terms of rights…but more importantly, in terms of the lack of balance between the sacrifices we make and our achievements.” (Syria Untold 2014).

Mai Skaf is a Syrian actress who supported the revolution since the early stages and was arrested by the regime and forced to leave the country. Lisa Wedeen (1999) and Miriam Cooke (2007) theorize on the ways in which Syrian actors have subtly used drama to create satirical critiques of the regime that have been misread by dominant power structures. This subversion is crucial to understanding how Syrians creatively produce an aesthetics of resistance that ruminates on their multiple historic selves converging in the revolutionary moment.

*The Revolutionary Women of Al-Tall: Weaving Green Ribbons of Freedom*

A group of eight young women started a group called, “The Revolutionary Women of the Tall of Freedom” (Syria Untold 2013) in Al, Tall (my family’s hometown!) The women had a protest where they walked with tied hands, muzzled mouths, and green ribbons flying from their arms. Creativity and feminization of their protest challenge machoist images of protest. The women also organized sit-ins and leaflet distributions in the main streets of the town (Syria Untold 2013). Their signature was the green ribbon around the wrist and the leaflets, which represented a rejection of sectarianism. The pamphlets included reflections of slogans about freedoms, anti-militarization and critiques of violence. The ladies kept their identities secret but were known as the “girls with the green ribbons.” They found creative ways of encouraging the local population to protest in daily ways. For example, during olive season the women used
“wedding invitations, similar to the ones used by local families, as invitations to protests, coupled with an olive branch” (Syria Untold 2013).

The women divided their work into three categories: planning protests, producing and distributing leaflets, and doing graffiti. The group also participated in national coordinated region-wide revolutionary activities such as Days of Freedom, Freedom Money, We Are the Moral Alternative, The Friday of Revolutionary Syrian Women, and We Were Born to Live.

Figure 9: A child holds a banner in Al-Hasakah, that reads “Revolutionary women in the Syrian Uprisings are real, not mythical.” during the “Friday of the Revolutionary Syrian Women.” Source: Local Coordinating Committees.

The Revolutionary Women of al-Tall painted the major cities red to signify the blood of the people running in the streets and distributed pamphlets in solidarity with other towns and
detainees. By mid-2012, male activists began to join the group so the founders renamed the organization, “Our Streets.” The activities continued. Young women, accompanied by two men, hung banners with the names of detainees on the post office building to emphasize the importance of ongoing nonviolent resistance. After al-Tall was declared liberated, the regime began a bombardment campaign. The severity of the shelling made several members of the organization take refuge elsewhere. They came back after two months and returned with a new name for the group, “The Grains of Wheat.” According to one of the activists, “the name came as tribute to the town which is famous for its wheat production, and as a tribute to the feminine noun “grain.” The group’s first comeback action was to distribute pamphlets that boycotted celebrating Eid Holiday until martyrs were honored. “In reverence to our martyrs, we have no Eid.” Although Al-Tall was not taken over extremists immediately after liberation, women still protested early signs of radicalization in the region. They carried orange and blue banners that denounced sectarianism and promoted peace (Syria Untold 2013).

Their “Grain of Wheat group” protested against the chemical massacre where they raised banners criticizing the lack of global action in Syria with the words, “When you talk about humanity remember that humanity buried our children dead.” They also participated in the Birds of Peace, a youth movement and civil society campaign that declared “we are an ethical alternative” by distributing origami birds with revolutionary messages to the city in Damascus.

The Revolutionary Women of Tall write their signs in French, Spanish, Italian, begging for anyone in the world to join in moments of solidarity.

This is what is missing from discussions on Syria in the global imagination—who often characterize the Syrian conflict through cold and calculative geopolitical analyses of whether ISIS has proved enough of a threat to the Western order to be exterminated yet. This is why my
research is necessary; it humanizes the narratives that have not even been considered in the mainstream, and especially the mainstream American discourse on the Middle East and even academia as a whole. The narratives of women, young women especially, reveal the intersecting natures of state sanctioned systems of violence with patriarchal violence and why the rest of the world should intervene. Documenting these narratives also highlights the vibrantly creative ways Syrian women have organized in protest to articulate their demands expressively and freely, with bright colors, artistic flourish, and even crafts. These strategies should be considered feminist and transgressive ideas of social mobilization and social change because of they create alternate routes of resistance that are more difficult to quell than armed resistance or chanting with megaphones in the street.

**Rima Dali and the Revolution of Red Raincoats**

On April 24 2012, Rima Dali, a 34 year old Alawite lawyer, walked to a street corner in downtown Damascus wearing a bright red raincoat and holding a bright red sign that read, “Stop the killing, we want to build a Syria for all Syrians.” The regime police, not used to this form of protesting and her a feminized approach, did not know what to do or how to respond. Her “Stop the Killing Campaign” street theatre strategy soon sparked a series of flash mobs in solidarity across the country, and soon--all around the world. Dali began organizing with other young Syrians to coordinate vibrant and expressive protests all across Syria. Six months later, Six months later, Dali, together with three other women, Kinda, Lubna and Roa’a, marched in the streets of a downtown souq or market in Damascus, wearing bridal gowns and holding bright red signs. The group became known as the Brides of Peace. The women were detained in a regime prison shortly thereafter, one that is notorious for the torture of Palestinian women prisoners and were later released in January 2013 as a part of a prisoner exchange (Kahf 2012).
5. Social Media Activism

Estayqazat is an online Syrian feminist movement focusing on the sexuality of Syrian women. The name means “She has awoken” and works primarily through online videos and testimonies (Gebeily 2015). Estayqazat was founded in 2014. They say, “Patriarchy, apart from keeping women marginalized by default, also keeps women in a permanent state of anxiety and guilt” (Gebeily 2015). The group consists of 30 volunteers who live throughout the Middle East and Europe. The group operates through a collectivist-decision making model and anonymously. Much like larger Syrian society and Syrian activist circles, Estayqazat believes that focusing solely on individual activists would be a distraction from the group’s overall goal. There are also safety reasons for not divulging the names of the participants. They interview Syrian women then turn their narratives into creative messages, usually in the form of animated videos (Gebeily 2015). Two videos: “What do you call it?” which humorously touches on the taboo around
speaking openly about vaginas and “When I heard my voice for the first time,” which is about feeling empowered by participating in anti-regime demonstrations (Gebeily 2015). One social media activist in Estayqazat says, “We are starting by putting names on things, so that they, and other things related to them, can be addressed and talked about…One could look at what we are doing and how we chose to communicate as a sign of the environments Syrians face in Syria and in their host communities. We cannot pretend that we are living in open societies when we are not.”

Another organization that dialogues about Middle Eastern women’s rights is a Facebook page called the Uprising of Women in the Arab World, a space intentionally open to women of all religions and backgrounds: Arabs, Imazigh, Circassian, Nubians, Kurds, Assyrians, Arameans, Syriacs, Armenians, Turks, Turkmens. Syrian women joined and posted in the Facebook group with the motto “To overthrow the repressive regime on the one hand, the oppressive religious and social power structures on the other” (Syria Untold 2014). This visible social media activism shows the double critique that Syrian women carry the use of social media as a living witness to the complexity of their realities.

**6. Humanitarianism**

Stories are common of women who cook for the injured and who help teach, feed, and care for refugees who have fled Syria (Kabawat 2014). Syrian women are active in organizing humanitarian aid and join across the diaspora to provide support for the refugees in Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon such as the MILAD volunteering group (Kabawat 2014).

One Syrian-Palestinian woman works as a humanitarian assistant to provide food and shelter for displaced people in Yarmouk camp, a Palestinian refugee camp in Syria. She described an account of surviving regime violence and staying behind as one of the only aid
workers in Yarmouk camp. The woman was helping a client when she heard explosions in the camp and saw that it was Russian made fighter jets targeting the school and mosque that had served as shelters for people. She saw bodies covered in blood in the mosque. Her family was shaken by the bombardment and considered leaving to survive. She returned back to Yarmouk to find that the director of her relief agency had fled and bravely decided to stay to help the families in need. (Yafa 2015)

_Sister Activists of Damascus: The Crossroads of Political, Civil disobedience, Social media, creative resistance, and humanitarianism_

Activists Maisa and Samar are sister-activists in Damascus known for their creation of peaceful protests and civil disobedience initiatives. On April 23, 2013, Maisa was arrested by regime forces in the Saruja market, in Damascus (Syria Untold 2013). A few months later, on August 8, 2013 her sister Samar was detained by ISIS in Tahuna, Aleppo for demanding a civil state and equality for all citizens. It was a moment of crisis that other Syrian women activists joined together to protest. “Freedom to Maysa and Samar, and shame on all the kings of oppression and darkness,” wrote activist Mays Qat on Facebook (Syria Untold 2013.) Members of the Syrian National Coalition such as Rima Fleihan also condemned the sisters’ arrests (Syria Untold.) They both worked tirelessly in humanitarian relief and in promoting women’s rights in the revolution.

**CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I explored multiple reports that have been produced on the status of various groups of displaced Syrian women. I look at what international NGO’s have researched and contrast their constructions of displaced women and the narratives they present to firsthand accounts of displaced Syrian women’s strategies of resistance. I also examine the gaps in the
research and critique the methodologies used in the NGO reports. Since most of these reports are relatively recent, I argue that there are no major research studies on the status of refugee-activist women in the community I am looking at in Amman, Jordan which increases the need for my study to fill in those gaps in the existing discourse.
CHAPTER THREE: THEORY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I outline how I situate my research within a sociological postmodernist paradigm specifically within transnational feminist and intersectional perspectives on the complex ways in which women resist and create their own survival strategies. I then look at specific concept I use in my research, “gendered resistance,” and Kuumba (2001) and Molyneux’s frameworks for analyzing women’s movements.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

I frame my research with postmodernist theory (Said 1978, Anzaldua 1987) and specifically transnational feminist theory paradigms. Within this strand I work from Foucault’s (1990) notion of discourse analysis that understands discourse is built on systems of thought where “nothing is taken for granted. Nothing is accepted at face value. Nothing is real. All is imagined and therefore disputable” (Perez 1999: 4). Discourse analysis understands that while narratives are imagined and abstract, they become continually reproduced and become embedded in social and political institutions that result in lived, material consequences (Foucault 1990). This is important for understanding how women, and the marginalized subjectivities, produce narratives that are worth studying and reflective of larger sociopolitical processes. I work in the vein of other postmodernist theorists such as Anzaldua and Said (1987) who articulate the importance of interrogating how spatial relationships between the center and the margin carry important epistemological implications. It is this theoretical foundation I center the narratives of marginalized, displaced Syrian women as an intentional and political choice that has epistemological implications in the way it shifts how knowledge is produced and accounted for.
I also work from the perspective of transnational feminist theory which Mohanty (1993, 2003) defines as a culturally sensitive feminism that subverts Western, hegemonic understandings of the oppression women in the Global South face. As intersectional feminist theory at large examines the multiple interlocking nature of systems of dominance (Hill Collins 2001, Crenshaw 1991) it can account for a complex analysis of the multifaceted nature of oppression women within resistance movements face. Transnational feminist theory builds solidarity between women of the Global South and North by recognizing the differences created by border spaces and multiple, interlocking global processes. It inherently critiques hegemonic Western feminism by centering the voices of oppressed and marginalized women in discursive production and critical engagement (Kaplan, Alarcon, Moallem 2007). It also takes into account the significance of women’s activism in the context of militarism, totalitarian regimes, and the legacy of colonial order and present day Western military occupations in the Middle East (Waller and Rycenga 2001).

Gayatri Spivak (2010) famously asked, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” and in my work I reframe how women of the Global South speak for themselves and on behalf of their communities. My insider-outsider positionality as a researcher was important in representing communities in culturally sensitive and context-specific ways (Abu-Lughod 1993).

The particular oppressions Syrian women face must be contextualized not only to only oppression to the patriarchy of Arab men, but within how Western colonialism informs the condition of the oppression they face. Like women’s resistance in the Palestinian struggle, the South African apartheid, and the African-American Civil Rights Movement, women build and fortify the foundations of movements without receiving due credit within larger narratives of resistance struggles and within the movements themselves. Kuumba (2001) and Molyneux
(1998) provide frameworks within transnational feminist theory and conflict theory paradigms that specifically theorize on how gender is formative to understanding and documenting narratives in the context of social resistance movements. Since the displaced Syrian women I interview are a part of a larger revolutionary community of anti-Assad regime activists, I consider their narratives as crucial to understanding the dynamics of the Syrian revolution as a social movement overall.

**Gendered Resistance**

*Gender and Social Movements* by Kuumba (2001) analyzes women’s activism in social movements on the micro (individual), meso (organizational), and macro (institutional) levels. By defining concepts and developing frameworks for a gendered social movement analysis, Kuumba (2001) exposes the influence of gender hierarchies in social movement processes. She situates women’s activism within larger dynamics of power and refers to women’s strategies of subversion as gendered resistance (2001: 22). Kuumba (2001) theorizes that because women experience oppression differently, they resist differently. Kuumba also distinguishes different types of gendered resistance, or traditionally feminized activities such as cooking that are not considered revolutionary or activist activities in dominant understandings of social movement work. Kuumba (1998) cites the example of Argentinian women in the 1970s, the “Mothers of the Plaza del Maya,” who revolted after members of the Argentine government abducted their sons by sewing the names of their missing children on pillowcases. Although sewing is traditionally not conceptualized as a form of resistance because it is often relegated to the sphere of women’s work, Kuumba (1998) argues that gender-specific contributions must be revalued to be equally important as other acts of resistance. Kuumba (2001) asserts that gendered resistance creates oppositional cultures (Ogbu 1991) that challenge patriarchal notions of leadership and activism.
Analyzing women’s movements

Molyneux (1998) supplements Kuumba’s (2001) theory on gendered resistance by characterizing the nature of women’s involvement in social movements. Some women engage in resistance through *autonomous action*—where women have “final control over the agenda…in pursuit of universalist goals.” Others loosely reflect the goals of the social movement through *associational linkage*—where women form direct alliances of interest within movements but do not create autonomous spheres of resistance (Molyneux 1998: 147). They can also engage in *directed mobilizations*—where authority comes from higher political organizations or governments with “little room for negotiation” (1998: 148). Molyneux (1998) stresses the importance of macro or structural/political processes in women’s interests in social resistance movements and how these movements are structured. She names and categorizes the general forms of gendered resistance Kuumba (2001) identifies. In the context of my research topic, using Kuumba’s (2001) framework allows me to understand the activities displaced Syrian women participate in as integral to the larger social movement. I can use Molyneux’s categories of gendered resistance to better understand the specificities and significance of women’s social movement activities in the context of women’s roles in the Syrian revolution as reflective of their contributions to the movement both inside Syria and in the diaspora.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

My first research question (R1) asks how Syrian women’s narratives reflect complex social, political, and economic realities. I hypothesize that (H1) due to the complexities of their social locations as displaced women in a new society, the struggles they endure against both state sanctioned oppression and patriarchal forces within their communities, and the nature of displacement due to the Assad regime’s violent repression against their communities, Syrian
women engage in struggle in intersectional ways. The way Syrian women engage in resistance is related to Kuumba’s (2001) theory of gendered resistance because it posits that Syrian women are oppressed by multiple forces so they resist in specific response to those oppressions.

My second research question (R2) asks what structural forces seek to diminish the relevance of Syrian women’s resistance narratives? What structures are they resisting against? Possibilities might include the Assad regime, hegemonic western military complexes, indigenous military resistance factions such as the Free Syrian Army, ISIS, or discriminatory Jordanian policies against Syrian refugees seek to erase Syrian women in particular ways. This is not to suggest that each might affect Syrian women equally or that all Syrian women resist against structures equally. This project seeks to investigate the complexity and multiplicity of the struggles Syrian women face.

My third research question (R3) asks about the visions this sample of Syrian women have for the future. It is an exploratory question that might be prompted through asking whether the women would stay in their host communities even if the Assad regime falls in the future. It is important to gauge what Syrian women’s goals are for the future because it could show how Kuumba (2001) describes that women have differing goals from men in social resistance movements. It could also relate to Molyneux’ (1998) framework of analyzing women’s movements because it could reveal the role of macro processes in women’s future strategizing in social movements.
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY, SCOPE, AND LIMITATIONS

INTRODUCTION

I will first outline the purpose and methodology implicated in feminist qualitative methods. Then I will describe the process of using semi structured interviews with a convenience sample of displaced Syrian women affiliated with the Syrian Women’s Association in Amman, Jordan. I will show how feminist qualitative methods allowed me to identify challenges Syrian women face and the approaches they develop to address them. This feminist qualitative research design will allow me to gauge the ways in which displaced Syrian women create strategies of resistance and survival in their communities.

METHOD

I used feminist qualitative methods and conducting semi-structured interviews with a convenience sample of displaced Syrian women, asking questions about their strategies of survival in their communities. I created a research design rooted in feminist qualitative methods using in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews that corresponded with my primary research questions. My research questions measure concepts of gendered strategies, resistance, and activism (previously defined operationally in Chapter 1 of this paper.)

RESEARCH DESIGN

My “unit of analysis” was displaced Syrian women affiliated with the Syrian Women’s Association whose headquarters are located in Amman, Jordan. In July 2013 I traveled to Amman, Jordan where I conducted interviews with a convenience sample nine different Syrian women activists who worked with the Syrian Women’s Association, a refugee processing center for women and children. I do not distinguish between women displaced post-2011 Syrian
Revolution and prior to the Syrian Revolution. By affiliated I mean any woman who works in, helps coordinate, volunteers, organizes educational and community projects, supports social media campaigns or runs a business through the Syrian Women’s Association. Many of the women affiliated with the Syrian Women’s Association are mothers of martyrs, soldiers, and wives to prisoners of war or have been prisoners of war themselves. When interviewing the women I hoped to remain as sensitive as possible to their experiences and not probe into the intimate details of their displacement, but instead shed light on their daily modes of resistance and survival.

My access to the network of Syrian women activists, as well as my native Arabic speaking skills enabled me to pose the questions my research is asking to women who struggle with these questions in their day to day realities. I initially wrote the questions in Fus’ha—Modern standard Arabic, which is the formal written form of Arabic not commonly spoken in informal situations outside of media and print contexts. However, I clarified my questions by asking them in informal Syrian-colloquial dialect, and commented in Syrian colloquial dialect. I first asked the women to introduce themselves and then asked the following questions:

- What type of activities do you organize/assist with in the center?

- Do you consider yourself an activist?

- How do you balance your family life with your activist/work life?

- What is a typical day like at the center?

- What type of challenges do you face?

- What benefits do you find in working in an all-women’s community?
· Do you ever have trouble working with men in your circle? What kind of challenges?

· If the regime falls, will you continue your activism?

**SCOPE**

My sample of women was limited in scope. Ideally, given more resources and time I would have conducted the interviews with a much larger sample of women. I also wanted to conduct follow-up interviews the next year (2014) that I worked at the center, but many of the women I had interviewed transitioned out of the center. There were also time limitations to the length of the interviews due to the chaotic nature of Ramadan at the center, when many of the women are engaged in strenuous, all-day work shifts while fasting, from 10 am until sunset. The interviews themselves took place at the Syrian Women’s Association Center in the Hay Nazzal neighborhood in Amman, but two took place in my grandfather’s patio, which was a more convenient, central meeting point for two of the participants.

**Why feminist qualitative methods?**

Feminist qualitative methods as a field operates from the assumption that knowledge production has historically revolved around men’s perspectives. It purports that recording women’s narratives is vital to epistemological projects of reconstructing dominant accounts of reality (Personal Narratives Group 1989). Feminist qualitative methods are dedicated to documenting women’s personal narratives in order to challenge hegemonic views of the world that seeks to erase and exclude them (1989: 3). It treats women’s personal narratives as “essential primary documents for feminist research” (1989: 4). Recording women’s narratives reveals how gender identity influences one’s relationship between herself and society and how power relations can intimately shape the way women navigate the world. It is useful for revealing the
larger structural forces at work such as patriarchy. Women’s narratives can also be read as “counter-narratives” to dominant discourse because they provide alternative understandings of racial, ethnic, sexuality, and class dynamics. At the same time, feminist qualitative methods understand that not all women’s narratives are inherently subversive because they are women’s narratives, just as not all women’s work is automatically feminist. Many narratives can uphold and replicate dominant discourse, but documenting women’s narratives as a whole is still important to understanding critiques of systems of oppression and recording the gendered ways in which women navigate their everyday realities.

The use of narrative itself is a cross-disciplinary form that is often shaped by historical contexts and available cultural models of narrative forms, such as autobiographies, life histories, archival evidence, ethnographies, and interviews (Scott 1999).

Feminist qualitative methods scholars approach the methodology with an awareness of how their own positionalities and subjectivities may influence the way in which they interpret women’s narratives. They do not accept that social researchers can maintain objectivity in interpreting data. Feminist qualitative methods stress that the relationship between the researcher and the participant is not a subject-object relationship, but rather that it is a subject-subject relationship where the participant holds equal weight in the relationship. This engages the researchers politics of location, the partial perspectives she holds on the bases of her social locations and the situated knowledges that emerge from it (Lal 1999: 103). In interrogating one’s politics of location it is imperative to ask, “What is the nature of reality that is presumed in constructions of [my] identity that has stable boundaries? Who is the assumed historical subject in such a construction? How have such constructions undergirded critical political practices of representation of Third World subjects? What happens when the traditional boundaries between
the Knower and the Known begin to break down, are reversed, or crosscut with mixed and hybrid identities?” (Lal 1999: 105)

This approach also allows for a restructuring of traditional anthropological methods that often reify power dynamics between researcher and participant (Personal Narratives Group 1999). In this sense feminist qualitative methods are also useful for addressing ethical concerns between the researcher and the participants because they dismantle the idea of a Western “expert” and allow for participants to express themselves without an element of coercion implicit in traditional researcher-subject power dynamics. (Minh-ha 2010). This framework interrogates the power dynamics inherent in sociological methods of conducting interviews and distributing surveys/questionnaires and transforms those methods into collaborative interviewing (Ellis and Berger 2003). It argues that the researcher plays an important role in the interview process, and that collaborative interviewing can involve reflexive dyadic interviews—wherein the researcher shares personal experiences to reciprocate the interviewee’s storytelling, interactive interviews, where interviewees play a role as the researchers asking their own questions during the process, and unmediated and mediated co-constructed narratives, in which multiple perspectives in a relationship are recorded and interact with one another (Ellis and Berger 2003).

Additionally, feminist reinterpretations of traditional sociological and anthropological discourse undo the notion of “fieldwork” (Lal: 1999 101.) They “challenge the construction of Third world women as an essentialized Other” (Lal 100). In my interviews, the “field,” was the Syrian Women’s Association center itself—a building on the corner of a busy street intersection, constantly buzzing with families who had just arrived from Syria, social service workers, and children everywhere. The center served as a meeting point where the interviews took place, but was not separate from my own daily life. For the past three years that I’ve spent with my
extended family, I’ve continued to visit the center and volunteer there regularly, a relationship I expand upon later in the chapter.

In my case, I informally participated in conversations with the women in the center and realized that my research would be informed by their observations off-the-record—by the conversations we had together while washing dishes, walking together on group picnics, and cooking meals together outside of the center. The insights I gained outside of the semi-structured interview format were critical to contextualizing the responses women had in the interviews themselves. I recall a moment after interviewing one of the participants where a group of her friends gathered in the kitchen while making meat patties and described the racist attacks their husbands were experiencing in Jordan. One woman’s husband had a knife pulled on him in the street because someone heard his Syrian accent and assumed he was a beggar and a thief, when he was just trying to buy cookies for his child and make his way home safely. Other women described the sense of emasculation their husbands felt because of the fact that they were employed in the center and their husbands were systematically denied jobs. I connected their experiences to other gender dynamics in social movements and how women learn to create alternative survival strategies using their gendered skill sets. Other women saw me as the “stable American” girl—in the sense that I was not emerging from a traumatic war-stricken context—and opened up to me about horrific violence she had experienced crossing the border. I found that important political theorizing occurred when women were making shishbara (meat patties) in the kitchens and sewing school clothes for children…valuable insights that are only proven “legitimate” when validated by a Western-trained academic or political analyst, but that emerge from the complex lived realities displaced Syrian women navigate today.
Feminist qualitative methods theorize that “people’s stories at not in final form, shape, and content, waiting patiently for a glorified mechanic (ie an anthropologist) to open their “verbal tap,” allowing the performed story to escape” (Personal Narratives Group 1989: 232). Instead an interview is more like a recorded conversation between two equal counterparts engaged in a discursive project to illuminate the narratives that are typically silenced in dominant accounts. It challenges the notion that “the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce,” and the simultaneous rejection of colonized people’s own claims to authentic experiences and legitimate knowledge (Smith 2012: 3). In my interviews, I understood the women’s reflections to be only a small window into the expansive range of experiences that displaced Syrian women have.

Feminist qualitative methods acknowledge that in a “postmodern era of intensified globalization, the international movements of capital, labor, and commodities shape not just the objects of our academic inquiry—factories and finance capital, workers, and products…. critically determine the forms that such inquiry and the discourse surrounding it takes” (Lal 1999:101). It takes into account the “global ethnoscape” that shapes identities, politics, writing, lived experiences, and what is prioritized as an object of study on the academic agenda. Interviewing is not about pulling a narrative out from a participant (Lal 1999). Feminist qualitative methods critique positivist approaches to knowledge collection and construction because it challenges the notion that knowledge operates within binary, essentialist formations of “researcher,” vs “participant,” “Occident,” vs “Orient,” “Us” vs the “Other,” “Academia” vs “the field” (Spivak 2010). By treating the interview as a collaborative process, it undoes positivist assumptions that knowledge can be attained through fixed scientific methods. It challenges fixated, Western ideas of identity politics and dissolves those assumptions of what is “female” or
“Western” into constantly evolving, intertwined, multiple selves that emerge from the social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism (Harraway 2010: 528). It points out the “ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism…[a] powerful remembered history for many of the world’s colonized peoples” (Smith 2012: 2) and seeks to reconstruct marginalized histories that are not represented through the eyes of the West, but through the eyes of colonized people.

Feminist qualitative methods allow researchers to make moments and narratives visible that are otherwise silenced by dominant discourses (Scott 1999). Interviews provide new evidence previously ignored about others, which reveal what silences have been crystallized in dominant discourse and why (Foucault 1976). It redistributes and challenges the authority of experience, a critical term that emerged among historians to describe a particular type of consciousness not derived from “reason” and “knowledge,” but instead from the self-evident lived realities of a historical subject (Scott 1999: 83).

Postmodern feminist qualitative methods ask epistemological and ontological questions concerning how Western academia studies and creates objects of knowledge in the “Third World.” These concerns have emerged from a poststructuralist understanding of how representations of the Other are created through the authority of the West as the expert and the ethnographer (Said 1978). The field moves away from exotifying non-Western locations and instead strives for a self-consciousness that counter the ongoing colonizing of Third World Women as distant objects of knowledge. It reciprocally treats the academy as “field” in which power dynamics are present and in which the work of decolonizing dominant discourse is ongoing. Trinh T. Minh-ha in, “Infinite Layers/Third World?” (2010: 531) outlines the continuous dialectical pull between what exactly constitutes “Third World,” and the “Otherness”
inherent to its construction when she says, “a critical difference from myself means that I am not i, am within and without i. I/i can be I or i, you and me both involved. We (with capital W) sometimes include(s) and other time exclude(s) me. You and I are close; we intertwine; you may stand on the other side of the hill once in a while, but you may also be me, while remaining what you are and what i am not.” She captures the difficult complexities I faced in my positionality as a Western-displaced Third World “Other” engaged in a project of dismantling the power relations between the Occident as active subject and the Orient as passive, gendered other. She asserts that subjects are multilayered and intertwined in ways that reflect how my subjectivity as a displaced Syrian with American privilege relates to displaced Syrians living as political refugees with no citizenship at all. It reveals how I, as the “researcher,” can claim a “Third World” positionality while engaged in research with “Third World Women.” In this case the term does not referring to our statuses in the world hierarchy, but rather “Third World” here refers to a reclaimed tool of subjectivity that encompasses a wide range of complexities that we the “I” and “i” form into multiple “Third World” subjectivities, resulting in our collective range of “infinite layers” (Minh-ha 2010:531).

**PROCESS**

The first step I took in preparing for my semi-structured interviews was examining my own positionality and the process through which I selected participants.

The summer after my first-year in college in 2012 I spent a month volunteering at an organization that members of my extended family were involved with called the Syrian Women’s Organization. The organization had been founded in March 2006 to resource Syrian women’s projects related to faith, education, and psychological support for children. Its goal was to help displaced and exiled Syrians become economically and spiritually empowered (SWA
website). When the uprisings in Syria began in March 2011, the organization mobilized to create structures of support for newly displaced Syrian refugees. My aunt, Hanna Ghadban, was among one of the most active founders of the organization. She worked in coalition with women to develop the organization into a full-fledged refugee social services center, where newly displaced Syrian refugees were to report to when they entered the country for the first time from Syria. At the center, Syrian women and their families officially register with UNHCR as refugees in order to qualify for the amenities assigned to each family, which usually are a tank of gas for cooking, a supply of water, blankets, mattresses, clothing, medical care for any wounded refugees, enrollment in psychosocial support faith-based programs for children, and a series of programs for women to engage in to create alternative economies to support their families, from hair salons, to sewing circuits, to kitchen work, to teaching in the children’s programs. It coordinates programs to support Syrian women who lost sons fighting for the Free Syrian Army and whose family members were forcibly disappeared and detained in the Assad regime’s notorious prisons. The organization moved into a physical center in the Hay Nazzal neighborhood, and hired a woman-only staff of administrative assistants, volunteers, and lead coordinators. The organizational structure mirrors a typical hierarchy of a non-profit, with divisions ranging from humanitarian aid to administrative documentation/registering refugee information, to the children’s programs and psychological programs. My aunt first served as a co-chair in one of the departments and eventually became the president of SWA.

The organization creates a way to use the resources and skill sets that incoming Syrians already have in order to create sustainable and alternative economies, communities, and support systems due to the inadequate structural support of the Jordanian government and the ongoing xenophobic discrimination Syrian refugees and extreme racism Syrian refugees continue to face.
in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. In summer 2012, I had volunteered as an assistant in the children’s psychosocial support program, called Sanabel al-Awda, Seeds of Return—in reference to an exile anthem where children sing about the promises of returning to the homeland, like seeds in the wind who will turn into grain. I would go to the center to help with children’s trips to local malls where voucher programs were in place for Syrian refugee orphans to receive new Eid holiday clothing. I also assisted on financial aid distribution trips with an organization of Jordanian and Syrian university students who drove out to the outskirts of Amman to give the refugee families their monthly stipends. I witnessed heartbreaking circumstances, Syrian women stuck in destitute one-bedroom shelters with no running water or electricity, children who would hold on to me and cry when we left.

I also attended the surgeries of wounded Syrian refugees. There was a period of time in Ramadan when I would sneak out of my grandparent’s house with my same-age girl cousin Meimouna and we would go to a hospital, Musteshfah Al-Aqlah in Amman, where a floor was dedicated to Syrian refugees who were deliberately injured during protests in Syria by the regime and could not seek treatment there because of the insufferable abuse they would face in regime hospitals. The hospital requested psychological support for their patients, who would sit alone in their rooms all day in between surgeries. It is interesting to note that the reason I was granted access into so many activities related to the center was because of the perceived need for psychological support. At first, many of these activities were relegated to men only but women in the center insisted on becoming involved because they could provide the emotional and psychological support men could not—I kept hearing that women were vital to keeping traumatized refugees company because of our “good-natured” sensitivity that men were incompetent in providing. The doctors, in typical Arab hospitality, invited us in to watch their
surgeries and take pictures on our phones and iPads. I mention this because my cousin, who like me, is a Syrian daughter of immigrants but was raised in Germany, were given special access to the behind-the-scenes work of the doctors because of the automatic expertise we were presumed to have as Western-educated students. Despite the fact that we were both barely 18 at the time—we had knowledge of European and American languages but mastery of Arabic and Arab social norms, which made us the epitome of expertise in their eyes.

That summer (2012) I served as a bridge between the refugees and Western outsiders. I became the guide for two Japanese women who were sent by their government on an aid mission to assist Syrian refugees and were wandering aimlessly around the refugee hospital. Because I was the only person at the Syrian Women’s Association with full command of English, I could show the outsiders around and translate when we went on distribution trips. I also served as the liason for an Arab-American woman researching Syrian refugee narratives on a Fulbright scholarship. In one sense I continually struggled proving to my peers and co-volunteers that I was actually competent due to my slippery and grammatically inconsistent Arabic. At the same time, I was valued in the organization because of my ability to serve as a liason between them and outsiders, because I was in between—an insider-outsider. People were either amazed that I was able to “blend in” as a refugee and as a volunteer or completely dumfounded by my incompetence in certain situations (ie my awkward inability to reciprocate religious phrases and praises. In Arabic, there is an extensive social script of religious phrases that are exchanged in particular situations, such as when a patient is sick, or in welcoming a guest, or in thanking someone who has helped you. I knew almost none of them.) I remember on one aid distribution trip, the leader assumed that I was dumb, mute, and mentally incompetent because I had not spoken a word of Arabic and when I did, it sounded bizarrely incorrect. My presumed
incompetence allowed me to peer at the world differently because I was treated as a silent piece of the scenery, almost a reversal of the space a traditional Western researcher occupies in ethnographic study.

The next summer (2013), I had established enough relationships with people in the organization that I was embraced as a familiar face, albeit one that had been gone for almost a year. My aunt is a beloved member of the community because of her open easy-goingness and famous humor. I entered the space again, as her niece, and as automatically a part of the family. Also, in the eyes of many incoming refugees, I was the daughter of an esteemed revolutionary activist (my father). Since my father is one of the only Syrians in the entire diaspora to have outwardly criticized the Assad regime on national television (Al-Jazeera) since the early 90’s, some were honored to meet me, his American-raised daughter. At the same time, people remembered my strange “Western” quirks and awkwardness that could only be explained by my distant position in the diaspora, culturally removed from my roots and socialized in a world far away from the graffiti’d and bustling Hay-Nazal refugee neighborhood where my family lives in Amman. I should note that my dress and clothing was an important element of my “blending in” the organization. The organization is faith-based and leans toward Islamist praxis, a conservative but socially benevolent branch of applied political Islam, and were loosely connected to the Muslim Brotherhood. Many of the women who founded the organization such as my aunt were directly connected to the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood as members and wives of leaders in the Jordanian branch of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. All of the women wore hijab, abayas, and some, like my aunt (up until recently) wore niqab. When I visit my family members in Jordan my sister and I wear hijab in order to respect the differences of their political and cultural context. My hijab and modest dress, despite the tiny details that one could find in order to see
that I normally don’t wear it, allowed me to “pass,” not only as a Syrian woman in the organization, but even as a Syrian refugee. That is, until I spoke and my clunky mistranslated Arabic-Americanisms revealed the lack of my authenticity. It was interesting because it removed the uncomfortable power dynamics at play when other outsiders came into the organization to conduct “research” or to “volunteer.” It was well-known among both the refugee women and the Syrian women running the organization that these outside volunteers, whether from the U.K., Kuwait, or the Jordanian bourgeoisies were insultingly patronizing to the situation of Syrian refugees. I experienced the paternalism firsthand, at a refugee dinner that I was volunteering at that was coordinated by a Saudi sheikh. The non-Syrians (Kuwaiti and Gulf Arab) women distributing food mistook me and my sister for Syrian refugees, patted us on the back condescendingly, and told if we just prayed we would see better times. The moments when my “Westernness” became visible and invisible became an entry point for me into the research process itself, because I was charged with the responsibility to carry the message of Syrian women’s struggles into the Western world. One woman, upon hearing I was raised in the U.S., grabbed my arm and told me to tell NATO or Congress to intervene because we Syrians had seen enough horror. Others had similar missions for me—make sure Americans know about our suffering, know what we have been through.

Initially I was slightly embarrassed to ask my aunt for help in selecting participants because I did not want to add extra stress to her workload during the most stressful part of her summer, as Ramadan was ending and Eid preparations for refugees was in full swing. I asked my dad to help me approach her for help with my project. When she found out that I needed to conduct interviews for a senior thesis that would help me graduate she exclaimed, “Of course! Why didn’t you tell me earlier?” and we immediately got to work. I went with her to the center
the next morning and she announced that I needed participant volunteers for a study in order to graduate. Many of her busy coworkers volunteered their time right away and were immediately willing to offer their voices to the project. Women in other parts of the center who were asked were slightly uneasy at first. I wasn’t sure if this was because my aunt occupied a higher-level position in the organization and they potentially saw answering the request as a work-related assignment. I noticed that younger women were more willing to share with me their stories, and that older women would agree but only because I was a trusted and familiar face. Many of the women agreed to do my study because I told them it was for my senior thesis and they wanted to support the prospect of helping a displaced Syrian women complete her education in America. Almost all of the women wished me good luck on my studies.

I recall one moment when one of the women who I interviewed was puzzled when I showed up. She heard that a student was doing research on displaced Syrian women’s narratives and had not expected a teenage-looking girl with tan skin and hijab to show up with a piece of paper and an iPhone recorder. She looked at me and said, “Are you the one doing the research?” I wasn’t sure if she was asking if I was affiliated with a larger institution that had sent me, or if she was communicating her surprise and relief that it was me conducting the researcher, or if she had a concern with how the research would be used in the future. When interviewing the women I intended to remain culturally sensitive and not probe into the intimate details of their displacement and to shed light on their daily modes of resistance and survival. This particular method has been utilized in studying other communities when looking at modes of resistance South African and Palestinian women have developed in their political and social contexts (Beckwith 2005, Cockburn 1998, Mrsevic, 2001, Zaru 2008, Kuumba 2001). In “Can the Subaltern Speak,” Spivak (2010: 538) asserts that part of the epistemological and
discursive “unlearning” project that Third World women scholars are engaged in requires “measuring silences…” and transforming the silences “into the object of investigation.” Part of my methodology in the interview process involved pausing to understand the gaps in what was being said and to acknowledge what was not being said. I take into account Foucault’s (1978) notion of paying close attention to what is unspoken in dominant discourse to understand what is being spoken from the margins. In my interviews I noticed that some women would pause or answer questions with Arabic expressions such as “Alhamdullilah 3ala Kul 7al,” which roughly translates “Thank God, despite everything,” which, when interpreted by a native Arabic speakers is not an indicator of thanking God at all, but a well-known expression of dissatisfaction and weariness, masked with the almost sardonic praise of God. Its critical but goodhearted undertones matches the connotation of the English parallel, “God bless her/ Bless her heart,” a Southern colloquial expression of politely expressing discontent or dissatisfaction about someone without outwardly dwelling on the specifics of the negative details. A researcher without a culturally sensitive lens or who did not pay particular attention to “reading in between the lines” so to speak could not have caught the subtle nuance in such an expression and may have interpreted it literally.

LIMITATIONS

Only in retrospect did I realize the limitations of conducting interviews. Some women were more than willing to participant, until they saw me pull out a consent form and ask for their consent in writing. I think up until I pulled out a translated Arabic consent form they saw me still as an “insider-outsider,” but when things became “official,” I could sense some of the women became nervous. One woman in particular, who is my distant cousin, became visibly uncomfortable once I brought out the form. I asked for consent to record and I also asked if the
women were comfortable using their real names or if I should change them to pseudonyms because I know the context of fear and paranoia coming from a system of totalitarian authoritarian police state where recorded evidence is often used to justify torture, rape, and state sanctioned killing of loved ones.

Would I be just another Western researcher misrepresenting their stories to the mainstream media and the world? As I mentioned earlier, there was a general attitude of uneasiness and distrust toward “outsiders” who would come into the organization and conduct research or interviews because they often traumatized the participants and never returned the community for follow-up. I witnessed these incidents firsthand. In one, a Jordanian TV reporter came to the center to interview Syrian rape survivors. She sensationalized the most brutal parts of their stories and showed footage of nameless, sobbing Syrian women to accompany the soundbites. My aunt was frustrated that no fruitful support came from sharing their stories. It was precisely the type of extraction that feminist qualitative methodology purports to work against. I remember washing dishes with my aunt as she would describe the frustration with Western researchers who would come into the organization, conduct research studies for their own benefit and their own institutions, then leave. “Their research never helps us directly!” she said. For example, one German woman researcher came in to gather statistics on the refugees in order to receive funding for a research fellowship, but never returned to offer the data to the organization itself. My aunt had expressed her frustrations to me about her wish for the organization to develop its own team of researchers to gather statistics and data on the women that other researchers could pull from instead of collecting data for their own benefit, an indicator that she wanted to be in charge of the knowledge production emerging from the center, and not just a
passive receptacle that outsiders could use to produce their own narratives about the women affiliated with it.

At the same time, there was an excitement and pride that I was documenting the work of women in the organization. Many women suggested I take pictures of the center—the places where they sewed, cooked, and did administrative work. The next summer I worked less with the center but got a tour of their upgraded location, with its new amenities and my aunt suggested I take pictures for my study to show how far the center had expanded.

The other limitations of conducting interviews was that I realized many of the key stories I was looking to document came out informally, during conversations I would have with women in the organizations on distribution trips, picnics, and while doing work in the center. It was a strange ethical dilemma I was caught in—due to bureaucratic limitations of the Institutional Review Board, I needed to structure the way I was asking for consent and documenting their narratives, which potentially constricted how freely women could speak about their realities. Additionally, because I was using a snowball, convenience sample via referrals from my aunt, I sensed that some women who participated did not fully express themselves for fear of painting the organization in a negative light or potentially jeopardizing their position in the organization. So many of the informal conversations I had with women throughout my time in the center revealed more about the contours of their social and political realities but I hesitate to disclose full details as to not breach of confidentiality or cause a violation of trust between us. I recorded the conversations in a personal journal with my own thoughts and reflections separately.

Existing research conducted on Syrian women focused on pretty irrelevant concerns— their attitudes toward smoking for example and forced marriage (HRW 2014, UNHCR 2014, International Rescue Committee 2014). In the past year, the UN, Human Rights Watch, the
International Rescue Committee and several other international non-governmental organizations have conducted extensive research on the challenges Syrian women have faced. Most of the reports these agencies publish are shared with the purpose of raising funds for displaced Syrian women and lobbying for them in international sectors. While this objective is incredibly necessary in the realm of humanitarian awareness and organizing, my research takes an academic and personal approach on situating Syrian women’s narratives within larger discourses on Muslim women and refugee women in the Global South. I am also critical of the ways in which these reports emphasize certain details about the women’s narratives that might be shaped by a particular bias trying to prove the victimization of these women in order to raise humanitarian awareness. Additionally, while most of the existing literature focuses on the challenges displaced Syrian face, I wanted to focus on the ways in which Syrian women create strategies to survive in creative ways.

My limitations in comprehending and facilitating the interviews in Arabic are important to note. Although I have a native fluency, my Arabic skills are sometimes erratic and I can be easily misunderstood due to my inconsistent grammar. It is my hope that my language limitations and the cultural limitations of being an insider-outsider did not exceedingly limit the meanings I extract from the interviews.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

In order to verify the validity of my analyses and translations, I sought assistance from another native Arabic speaker and we translated the interviews into English together, sometimes with significantly different interpretations that I will discuss in Chapter 5. Because I am using a convenience sample, I lack a significant claim to external validity. I cannot generalize my research findings to a larger body of displaced Syrian women, particularly because of the
absolute number of Syrian women displaced and the fact that the relative number of the sample is still not representative. I believe that I ensured internal validity of my interview method by maintaining consistent in the questions that I ask the women and because I avoided probing for particular answers. There is also the question of whether women are responding truthfully to questions or whether they answer in particular ways because they want to represent their organization in a good light. This concern is subjective and could have easily influenced how the women responded in the ways they did, but through a deep, critical analysis of the interviews, I believe that I read between the lines enough to catch the nuances in how women responded. Since I am using semi-structured interview, I lack claims to reliability because there were slight variations in the follow up questions I would ask. However, I tried to remain as consistent as possible and only provided clarification if the respondent did not understand the question. I was consistent in recording the women’s responses.

**HUMAN SUBJECTS CONSIDERATION**

My participants will be briefed on their participation prior to engaging in the study (ASAnet.org 2008). I printed consent forms and translated them into clear and concise Arabic in order to have participants consent in writing to the interviews. I also asked participants whether they would like the option to remain anonymous and made notes of it. The participants’ identities were kept confidential and their names are changed in my presentation of the findings. They were fully informed of the study and the potential benefits (none) to them. I assured them they had a right to withdraw at anytime and omit any questions that may have made them uncomfortable.
HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

I received retroactive IRB approval after conducting my interviews. I assured the IRB that I conducted the interviews with the IRB requirements in mind. I ensured to my full capacity that the study was done with the voluntary consent of participants who are informed about the risks and benefits of the study although I mentioned the ethical concerns of power dynamics in the organization influencing their consent earlier. I went to great lengths to ensure that the participants’ rights to privacy and dignity were protected.

POSSIBLE RISKS AND BENEFITS

The benefits of this study are that it highlights the voice of marginalized women, which is an epistemological achievement and contribution to a larger discursive project of centering Third World Women’s narratives. There are no immediate benefits for the respondents. However, I can use my findings to benefit the Syrian Women’s Association community in Amman in order to document their struggles and strategies in academic terms. This work could be useful for the organization when applying for grants to support their activist work.

There are no physical or psychological risks associated with the study. Respondents had the option to have their identity remain confidential during the study. They also had the option to skip any questions at any time. Additionally, the interviews were recorded with the permission of the respondent on record. After my research the recordings will be destroyed within three weeks to preserve the respondent’s confidentiality (ASAnet.org 2008).
CHAPTER FIVE: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I discuss the themes that emerged from the qualitative interviews. I identify the unit of analysis and discuss the variables that impacted them. Then I analyze and interpret the data by categorzing the data into common themes and connecting different responses.

HYPOTHESIS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My specific research questions looked at the roles the women play in the organization, their daily lives in the organization, whether they consider themselves activists, how they balance an activist/work life with family life, the challenges they face in their work, their perspectives on gender dynamics and differences and how it impacts the work they do, and what their hopes are for the future if the regime were to fall. From these research questions emerged reflections on nationalism, diaspora, cultural pride, loss, psychological trauma, empathy, resilience, and faith.

UNIT OF ANALYSIS

I was studying the narratives of displaced Syrian women in the Syrian Women’s Association in Amman, Jordan. For sociological purposes, the women’s lives and experiences are the “units of analysis,” or what I am investigating in the study. It is important to note that many of the women were affiliated with religiously conservative and right wing political organizing in the Muslim Brotherhood and adhered to conservative religious views. All wore hijab or niqab. Some were married with children and others were not. Their ages ranged from old
to young. Their educational levels varied. Despite the relative homogeneity of the demographic sample, their responses revealed a diversity in thought and experiences.

**DISCUSSION OF VARIABLES**

Variables that influenced respondent’s answers can be broken down into several themes. Nationalist, revolutionary pride for Syrian counter culture across the diaspora, faith-based motivation, the structural challenges of the physical and psychological violence refugees experience, and the psychological toll of the work these women engaged in were common themes that emerged from the interview. The questions I asked effectively revealed a wide arrange of prompts for questions of motivation, including an introduction to the participants where I introduced myself and asked about demographic information such as their name, age, hometown, and when they left Syria.

The first few questions collected mostly demographic information and inquired about the type of work and daily lives of women at the refugee center. Although small, the sample of women I interviewed represented a diverse cross-section of a wide range of roles and work activities. Inquiring about the daily routines of the women sometimes revealed the attitudes toward the work they were doing and the connections they had to their activist labors. Someone went at great length to describe each step in their day in great detail, and highly praised the work they did, while others were curt in their responses or responded in dissatisfied tones.

Janna distributed clothes, assisted with providing psychological support to the refugees, such as visiting their families, providing transportation to the families and coordinating their visits to the city for resources. Her daily life consists of opening the center in the morning and constantly organizing goods and services in the center. “I organize the goods for the children and babies. If someone is looking for clothing, baby clothes, baby food, I help them. I tell them
where to go, I answer the phones. I call the refugees and coordinate meals and clothing
distribution...I feel very proud of myself when I help these people.” She seemed to play a direct
role in the process of mobilizing and distributing life sustaining supplies and resources to the
refugee population. She communicated a sense of pride for participating in a collective effort to
support the revolution.

Sabila held a leadership position as a coordinator of the refugee aid distribution sector,
“collecting data and information about the refugees. We distribute the goods according to the
region they belong in. We distribute them before each visit [to the sites.] Each team goes out to
visit them and we receive feedback for each situation. We divide the refugees into categories of
need. The married ones have special needs, the wounded have needs, the widowed, the students,
the newly married, and other areas. We see who is missing what and who needs aid. We try to
help whoever needs it.” Each day she worked on managing bank accounts, assessing their
financial situation in order to allocate and measure the resources available for distribution. She
also answered questions for refugees and in Ramadan, during the time of the interviews, she
organized clothing distribution days for the refugee children to have new clothes for the
upcoming Eid holiday.

Marwa dealt the more administrative and quantitative side of refugee aid, as the director
of registration services. “If someone wants to register with us, I record their information and put
it into the system using excel.” She worked on the computer everyday to organize the database of
registered refugees and organized their corresponding information.

Ghadeer works in the charity sector, distributing clothes to Syrian refugee children. Her
daily work was concerned with “checking the activities we have to do. Everything needs to be
organized.”
Laila has been working for about a year with the organization’s social services for refugees. “I visit the families, especially the newly arrived families. We try to lessen the psychological trauma they’ve endured. We assess the situation and try to figure out how to help, morally, financially, materially.” Daily, she arrives to the center, receives a list of the newest refugees with their names, addresses, and phone numbers. It is her job to visit the families and record their needs so that the center can allocate the appropriate resources to them. She also helps coordinate treatment for wounded and sick refugees through the center.

Jamila, who is 26 and from Al Tall, Syria worked as a schoolteacher in the children’s summer camp. “I used to try to help the kids learn songs, memorize Quran, and learn the alphabet. They have a lot of energy for the revolution. Like they feel it more than we do. The work was amazing, I would love to do it again.”

Rafif helps organization in the kitchen. She makes iftar for the refugee kids during Ramadan. Back in Syria, the year before being displaced she would participate in protests and photographing them covertly. During the interview her kids ran in and out of the patio where we were sitting and grabbed their mother’s hand. “My daily work is that I cook,” she said with a laugh. “That’s it.”

Hind has been in Jordan for 10 months. She works in sewing and in the beauty salon in addition to doing secretarial work at the center involving finances. Before Ramadan she would work every day from 10 am to 5pm. Ramadan she worked from 10 am until sunset. She sounded generally dissatisfied with her work. Later on in the chapter I discuss how her alienation from her work stems from a frustration she has with her skill sets and academic expertise not being able to be utilized in the best ways as a newly arrived refugee in Jordan.
Arwa is from Homs and left Syria only a month prior to the interview. When speaking with her I sensed a lot of weariness and fatigue. Laughter at difficult things. “Praise gods,” (‘Alhamdullilah’) instead of complaints, but mixed undertones between sighs and resentment. She works as a seamstress in the center. She used to work from 8am to 7pm before the month of Ramadan but cut down on her work hours from 10am to 5/6pm during the month of fasting. She works all day and makes sure she cooks for her daughter before she leaves her house in the morning. She credits her daughter with being able to get her through her days because she commented on her fatigue and exhaustion after a day’s work.

The “do you consider yourself an activist?” question brought about an important array of underlying responses that reflected women’s motivations for doing activist work, revealed their attitudes toward their work, and showed the degree of political efficacy they felt regarding their role in relation to the larger struggle. Several variables affected women’s responses to this question, including the distinction on pre displaced and post displaced Syrian women, socioeconomic status and financial stability affecting the importance women placed on activism. The authority figures also felt more responsible for what they were doing and were more likely to consider themselves activists. The women sewing and cooking felt more alienated from the work they were doing and saw their work as temporary. Perhaps the sense of alienation combined with a dissatisfaction with the structural forces made the “lower-level” laborers more apathetic toward their perceptions of themselves as activities. There was a distinction between being certain and proud about their activist statuses and an uncertainty about whether they could call themselves activists that I think related to the sense of ownership they felt over the work they were doing. Sometimes a dissatisfaction, structural force combined with the desperation of their immediate problems as refugees made women reluctant to call themselves activists.
Janna considered herself an activist since the start of the uprisings in 2011, because “these we were the same things we were doing and participating in the 80’s. The same thing people are doing now [in the Syrian revolution] they were doing then.” She brought up an important point about the connections Syrian women who were displaced in the 1980’s during the Muslim Brotherhood backlash made to the current political struggle.

Sabila claimed ownership of her position as an activist. “Yes I consider myself an activist and proudly so. Because you are asking something of your family. We as Muslims--who is going to help Muslims if we don’t? I support my religion, my community through this work.” Her proximity to activism was influenced mostly by her allegiance to her community, faith-based and culturally. She saw herself directly connected to the larger struggle and this sense of investment into her community translated into the high value she places on her role in the struggle. Moral and religious obligations undergird her commitment to uplifting her community. Perhaps an understanding of oneself as connected to the divine and connected to larger revolutionary movements are more likely to raise one’s own sense of self-worth and pride in the role one plays as an activist.

Ghadeer’s response aligned to Sabila’s. “Of course I consider myself an activist. I am content with and proud of the work I’m doing.” Her definitive answer affirmed Sabila’s connection to the larger country and community’s struggle. She explained she feels proud, “because I am supporting my country. We are all from the same country.” Sharing a common homeland with the beneficiaries of her activist work motivated her to see herself as a part of the whole. She may have identified her work as activist in nature because she understood her impact and obligation to her community in fighting for structural change.
Marwa, on the other hand, said she considers herself a half-activist. She felt like she hadn’t reached the degree of involvement of a real activist like those in the charity sector of the organization. But she mentioned that she still assists with the work that they do. Perhaps since she worked with the administrative, registration side of the organization’s work she may have felt a less immediate interpretation of the work as directly contributing to social betterment. Rafif echoed Marwa’s attitude toward her activism as limited in nature in comparison to others. She laughed and said, “Not a lot. Because activists do more than me.”

Laila did not consider herself an activist, despite the rigorous nature and extensive commitment she has to her work. “An activist has a goal. He helps. These people are trying to find houses, food, something to sleep on. There’s nothing more than that. There’s only so much I can do.” Perhaps Laila felt that her distribution efforts were limited because they only helped in a small way in the context of a devastating situation. Her comments could also reflect an understanding that enabling access to human rights such as access to shelter and food should not be activist work but a given for survival. Because of the extensive destitution in the refugee communities, Laila was reflecting on the need to shift discourse that sees human survival as exceptional and instead normalize the fact that all people should have their basic human needs filled. Perhaps her comment is recognizing that the conditions that make underserved populations marginalized require a shaping of their access to basic human resources as luxuries instead of taken for granted. She also realistically or perhaps pessimistically acknowledged the limited scope of her impact when she said, “there’s only so much I can do.” If Laila is motivated to continue due her moral and ethical belief in the betterment of the human world she saw herself in relation to larger forces as a fundamentally small resistance but still necessary.
Hind’s answer matched Laila’s sentiment. “An Activist? Hmm..I don’t know. Maybe. I guess what I do has a relationship to the revolution. But everything we do is for the Syrian refugees. For example, right now we are sewing children’s school uniforms which goes to the refugees when the school year begins or to Zaatari camp.” She saw her work as a necessity, and less of directly contributing to the dismantling of the regime which is the revolution’s primary goal. The revolution and helping the displaced refugees were related, but not directly correlated in Hind’s eyes, since one was a movement for social change and the other was a struggle for basic human survival.

Jamila said that she considers herself an activist. She used to teach in the daycare/children’s camp and help the children memorize Quran and songs about the revolution. She said “they have energy. The kids feel the revolution more than us. I would love to return to teaching, hopefully in Syria.” Her answer was energized by the spirit of the children who seemed to keep her going.

Arwa’s answer revealed a difficult truth. “I say every Syrian is an activist. It’s impossible to say we’re not activists. Everything we’ve seen. The sights, the situations we came out of. Hearing the things children say...the children, the children. The things they are saying are unbelievable. Completely abnormal and horrific.” When she was in Syria she did not have a chance to participate in the revolution because people could barely leave their houses in Homs without narrowly escaping extreme violence. The experiences she has endured shape her understanding of her own resiliency the value of her resistance and survival in systems that threaten to eliminate her and other Syrian refugees.

The question, “how do you balance your work life with your family/home life?” also elicited a wide array of responses that were completely different across the board. This was
important because the responses complicate assumptions about the oppressive forces trapping Muslim women into their home lives. Many of the concerns about balancing family and work life were logistical, psychological, and related to structural processes such as classism and xenophobic discrimination. For example, in addition to her daily routine at the center, Janna also had a job at beauty and hair salons in the neighborhood. After her activist work at the center and working at her job at the hair salons, she would return home and still manage everything. “I clean the house, make food for my family. No one helps me at home. I am married. I manage it all.” Although Janna had a demanding work, home, and activist life, she maintained confidence in her ability to manage her time and the various labors she performs for herself, her family, and her community. This self-assurance was evident and counters ideas about Muslim women’s “agency” and the lack of their competence or capacity to work. At the same time, it shows the varied types of labor that women are socialized and forced to perform with little compensation for their emotional, physical, and moral support they provide their communities (Kuumba 2001).

Hind also attested that she did not find any conflict between her work life and her family life.

On the other hand, Sabila said she manages her schedule with great difficulty. “Everyone gets frustrated with you. In Ramadan there is a lot of stress. I finish with great difficulty but soon we’ll be back to our regular day-to-day life. You are always short with some people, someone is always upset.”

Arwa’s comment reflects Sabila’s experience but in a different context. “I find a lot of difficulty in managing between my work, my husband, and my children. I used to never have to work this much. We used to live like kings in our old home. I was not working because there was no need to. We’re not used to it. May God bring an earthquake on the one who caused us this pain and made us leave our home.” The difficulty of managing work and home life arose from
the shift in having a work life to balance. Because Arwa never had to work prior to her displacement from Syria probably due to her middle class or upper middle class status, the time and labor she expended at the center weighed on her ability to labor at home for her family. The subtext of her response also reveals the shift in women’s move from performing domestic labor at home and the necessity of having to be the sole providers for their children and families. Since Syrian men are systematically discriminated against and not hirable without extensive work permits, Syrian women have been thrust into the role of economic provider. For some, like Arwa, who implies she came from a middle-class or upper-middle class background, the shift to refugeehood was from riches to rags, from being relegated to social and domestic work to having to work difficult jobs to stay afloat. Her class descension seemed related to the difficulty in managing both work and home lives. She was not used to working, whereas people like Rafif and Jamila were used to working for their families in Syria, working the land in rural areas and as schoolteachers, perhaps because of their differing class experiences.

Marwa did not have a problem managing work and family time but did struggle with balancing her workload with her university studies. She said that she can manage her work at the center a lot better once she is on summer break or is finished with exams. Her family is very supportive of the work she does with the Syrian Women’s Association. “I don’t have problems with my parents in terms of me working. They think it’s really great that I’m working and helping my community,” she added.

Ghadeer noted “I try to manage my work and time with my family. Sometimes I find difficulty but most of the times it’s fine.” Rafif agreed, “I work in the morning and I balance with my family. It doesn’t really affect my family or my work. I do find it difficult sometimes.”
Laila has a difficult time with processing the emotional trauma she encounters on a day-to-day basis and figuring out how to have it impact her family in the least negative way. “My work takes a toll on my emotions,” she said. “I get really affected because I’m so sensitive. This one is devastated, or left widowed because her husband was murdered by the regime, another has a husband in prison, you often people without enough money to feed their children.” She connected the difficult situations she witnesses to the privileges of her home life. “I return to my house and I have food, I live a great life, amazing, beautiful. I have one young girl...who is 18 years old. She asks me to buy chocolate, chips, juice, and I’m thinking of these people who do not even have bread or milk.” Laila touched on the impact her activist work has on her mental health. “This work is tiring. Sometimes I come back home and I don’t want to talk to anyone; I’m psychologically tired.” She uses her faith to keep her grounded. “I pray two rakats and read some Quran until my well-being is restored.” But even then, she describes how surreal the situations are that she witnesses. “We used to watch the situation on TV..you would see a woman is crying and children are too traumatized to speak, too scarred from the shelling…and here I don’t see a single child who smiles; it is heartbreaking. The children are the saddest. Especially when the smiles have left their faces.”

**CHALLENGES**

This mostly had to do with interpersonal tensions between the workers at the centers and the refugee families. The answers also reflected tensions with general work politics and dynamics that some of the women alluded to in different ways.

Janna commented that on the struggles of working with traumatized refugees. “Sometimes people are frustrated with us and we try to resolve the problem as nicely as possible.” Sabila said that these tensions between the workers and the refugees were primarily
“cultural differences. This refugee comes to you, very frustrated. You have to deal with it...because he is psychologically stressed and traumatized. That is a lot of negativity. You have to be very understanding.” This sense of empathy resonated with many of the women.

Marwa echoed this sentiment of having to remain empathetic when interacting with a traumatized population. “Sometimes people are annoyed or frustrated with you and you have to maintain calm. You witness a lot of difficult situations, and it’s a stressful job. You want someone who can care for you while you are providing care to others. I try to be empathetic and helpful. You have to be very empathetic.” Providing emotional labor can be very emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually taxing on the women. But many women used the word “ri3ayeh,” or care--the necessity of caring for others, despite hardships and tensions across cultural differences and contexts. Ghadeer identified this tension as stemming from larger structural issues related to the refugees’ frustration with their lack of access to basic resources. “The biggest problem is we can’t provide enough support to the families that need it.” As a result, the refugees unleash their frustration with the larger system onto the women at the center who are coordinating and distributing that aid. Laila also empathized with the new refugees’ frustrations and pointed out the logistical difficulties that impact communication between the coordinators and the families in need. “These people are coming to a new country. They don’t know where they’re living. They don’t know what’s here. I often have trouble trying to locate them--like where are you? Near a pharmacy, grocery store, what? They don’t know even the general location they live in, because this area is so huge compared to Syria... I have trouble reaching them. I feel like I am embarking on a long journey just to reach them. Driving from the association to the area they are living in the heat - it’s disorienting. This country is so far from [what we know]. It’s disorienting, overwhelming” she said.
Laila’s switch from calling the refugees “they” to empathizing with feelings of disorientation and displacement as a community, “this country is so far from us” reflects the common theme of diasporic connections between the women and the new refugees across diaspora and geographic boundaries. At the same time, Laila is also echoing Ghadeer’s analysis that many of these difficulties and miscommunications are the result of structural obstacles. Since many of the refugees are not structurally, culturally, and geographically familiar with Jordanian society, reorienting the refugee families to their surroundings is an exhausting and difficult process, particularly with such limited resources. Arwa captured the heartbreaking sense of disorientation that Laila describes from a more immediate and firsthand perspective. She also touched on the structural analysis inherent to Ghadeer and Laila’s comments. “I haven’t been here for very long. And my husband can’t find work here. You know, we have to pay rent, bills, and we still haven’t gotten used to the fact that we’ve left our country. We are having trouble settling here. We can’t sleep. We are like lost people. I don’t know how to behave. Did this really happen to us? I still don’t believe it. I still don’t understand.” Her sense of shock and disbelief was conveyed through the sorrow in her voice when she responded. When I followed up and asked how she liked working at the refugee center herself she responded “Alhamdullah 3ala kul 7al,” an Arabic expression that thanks God. In context, it is best understood as concealing a critique in the form of invoking God to make the best of a bad situation.

Jamila identified working with traumatized and psychologically distressed children as a disturbing challenge she encountered. “We used to have problems with the kids who were psychologically affected and tired because of the Revolution. When we would do songs and activities like drawing, the sense of tragedy would lessen.” Jamila’s statement reveals how
women in the center worked to engage children in helping them discover creative outlets for processing their traumas from experiences with regime and war violence.

Rafif asked for clarification of the questions. “Problems? Like work problems? Problems anyone has. A lot of stress. Especially if there are deadlines.” Marwa echoed a similar sentiment in her interview—that interpersonal work-related tension also added to the stress of other challenges the women were navigating.

Hind’s challenges had to do with her frustration in the lack of available employment in her specialized field, perhaps communicating a larger dissatisfaction among Syrian youth who must grapple with the ways displacement stunts their access to opportunities and to pursuing their aspirations. “I am working in something that isn’t my specialty.” Because I’m a new graduate. I studied Economics but I couldn’t find work in that specialty here.”

**GENDER RELATIONS**

There were fairly split analyses of the differences between working with men versus women in the organization. About half of the respondents leaned toward a neutral opinion on gender differences (that it had no impact on power dynamics or interpersonal relations), while the other half came to a general consensus that working with women was easier despite certain complications. Janna said that she works with both women and men and implied that this relationship was normal and not challenging. Similarly, Laila remained fairly neutral about gender-related challenges. “The difference between dealing with men versus women isn’t that important. What’s more important is if they are easy to work with. If a man is frustrated he’s difficult to work with. If a woman is frustrated, it’s difficult to work with her.” In Laila’s opinion, a person’s demeanor was more important than their gender in facilitating communicative and smooth interactions. Rafif echoed a neutral opinion about gender
differences’ impact on interpersonal interactions in her work. “I’ve never really worked with men. I just work with women. But it’s in between. Not super hard and not easy.” Hind’s opinion was similar. “I don’t interact with women. Most of my work is done with women. It’s good, and working with men is fine too.”

Women were often assumed to have qualities such as patience and empathy. Sabila commented, “it’s easier to work with women. Refugee men consider asking for help injurious to their pride. It’s always better if he brings his wife. It’s easier on his dignity if you just deal with his wife instead.” Her analysis could be interpreted in numerous ways. First, it reflects a common trend in which marginalized men often feel “emasculated” by seeing women in authority figures in charge of managing aspects of their lives. At the same time, the sensitivity to men’s “dignity,” reveals that women may interact with each other to spare men of the injury to their ego and sense of self-worth in capitalist, patriarchal systems where men are valued by their ability to provide for their families in an ownership model as a caretaker and safeguard their families. Marwa said that “it’s easier to work with women because you can relax more. You can understand each other better, you can speak more comfortably.” She brought up an important point. In a cultural context where gender segregation is emphasized, the possibilities for increased solidarity and communication between women open. Because of the formality and discomfort associated with interacting with the other sex, perhaps having women’s-only environments such as the Syrian Women’s Association empowers women to work in solidarity together, which could arguably be a feminist mobilization, despite the lack of language to identify it as such. At the same time, Ghadeer’s reason for the ease in working with women revealed gendered assumptions about the assumed qualities of each gender. “It’s easier to deal with women,” she said, “But women are sometimes bad with management. Men are often more resolute and consistent. But I don’t really
care about what they [men] think about what I’m doing.” Her answer reveals an interesting analysis of gender dynamics. In one sense, she may have internalized ideas about women’s feminized and perceived incompetence in favor of the “rationality” of men. But at the same time she divorces herself from the idea that she is working within the male gaze and instead emphasized that women are easier to deal with.

Jamila echoed similar understandings of certain qualities attributed to gender difference. “I think working with women is easier because we understand each other, Subhanallah. They [men] don’t have patience.” In my own experience volunteering with various activities with the center, I recall hearing similar assumptions about the inherent empathetic and patient nature of women, which puts them at an advantage when it comes to interpersonal relations and in dealing with the emotionally taxing realities of traumatized refugee populations. On one aid distribution trip I went on with a Jordanian university student organization, women were asked to come because they could provide the psychological and emotional support that men could not. Men were instructed to physically distribute the aid while women were brought on the trip to visit with the families in need and engage with them in open and empathetic ways. Similarly, I was given opportunities to support wounded patients in the affiliated refugee hospital because of my perceived empathetic and patient nature as a woman, qualities and services that men could not provide. While these ideas rely on gender essentialist ideas of the inherent qualities each gender has, I could interpret these ideas from a sociological understanding of how women are socialized in to performing wide arrays of emotional labors that men do not often learn due to restrictive hegemonic constructs of masculinity. At the same time, the fact that women perform this emotional labor for not only themselves but also their families and communities shows the tiring and exhausting nature of the work.
HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

I asked each of the women if they would continue doing the same activist work if the Assad regime fell. Their answers revealed a beautiful and complex array of interpretations of the current situation in Syria, mixed with poetic ruminations on their hopes for the future. This question also ended up revealing the motivation for why women engage in the work they do, despite the struggles, exhaustion, and endless nature of it. The answers ranged from absolute certainty, to hesitant realism, to complete uncertainty. Their responses often related to the recency of the women’s displacement, the level of allegiance they felt to the revolution, the extent to which they believed in their self-efficacy and the degree to which felt the impact of their work. It seemed to directly relate to the question “do you consider yourself an activist?” because it revealed the connection they felt to themselves as activists in the larger struggle.

Janna connected the dedication and empathy she had for doing volunteer work with her position as a displaced woman from the previous generation of refugees. The connections were clear to her and directly implicated her personal life as an ex-political prisoner.

“I hope to continue my work. Even if the regime falls. I hope to join nursing school to help in Syria. I want to continue. Why do I love this work? In the 80’s, I had brothers and my dad, eight people who were close to me, who disappeared during Hafez’ regime. Here at the organization if they call me at 10pm, I come bring them what they need. Whenever, wherever. I have a heart of gold. [In Arabic: I have a heart like honey] I open my heart to everyone. This is because I understand how they feel. I do this because I suffered [under the regime]. I was in prison for seven months in the 1980’s. And that’s why I support the way that I do. You know what I mean?
Sabila reflected similar sentiments about returning to the work force when the regime falls. “I would continue the work. I might return to my career as a schoolteacher,” she said, but to use her career to help out in a more systematic way. She followed her statement with an “Inshallah,” (God willing) and a laugh.

Marwa was assured that she would “definitely continue [her] work. Because even if the regime falls, the situation could become much worse. I predict the situation will be worse. People will still need help. The situation will be dire.” Since she gave this prediction in 2012, the number of refugees has nearly doubled. Her perspective offered a realistic insight into the nature of refugee crises--they do not go away overnight. Instead, they expand and the need for structured, systematic humanitarian relief and grassroots organizing grows. She recognized this and expressed a commitment to continuing the work due to the increasing direness of the situation.

Ghadeer expressed similarly determined and resolute sentiments. “I will continue this work,” she said definitively, “We are building a foundation to continue this work.” She, like Marwa, understands the need for building sustainable activist structures to ensure the future of Syrian society and of Syrian refugees, despite the uncertainty of their violent upheaval. This reveals that the women potentially believed that their work was important in building a better future, and in fortifying grassroots, humanitarian, faith-based civil society initiatives in and out of Syria.

Laila on the other hand, cited moral and religious reasons for her prediction of the future. “I don’t ask anything but the rida--satisfaction--of God. I pray my intention is solely for God. As long as he blesses me with good health, I will help. I am helping my brothers and sisters in Islam and I pray that God gives them the ease they need. And I hope he
makes the situation better. This situation is in the hands of God. The issue is not about terrorism or about the revolution or about the country but about our belief in God and the life we live in this Dunya (material world). I hope this work can one day finish...I hope this suffering will be over. Our purpose is to build a society with an intention of worshipping God.”

At the end of her response she made a dua’a (prayer) asking God to ease the suffering and pain of her people. She repeats, “La ilaha illallah,”—there is no God but God. She discusses a Quranic verse about death and the blessings of life in the material world. Her spiritual interpretation of the traumatic experiences of refugeehood reveal her profound and fundamental trust in larger forces. The constructions of borders and creations of violent structures diminish in comparison to the trials and tribulations of the material world. Her metaphysical understanding of the situation could also reflect a profound coping mechanism she has developed to articulate the spiritual and psychological impact of violence on the well-being and souls of marginalized peoples. She expresses a type of liberation theology that transcends overtly political goals and instead concerns itself with bettering humanity and striving for ethical and moral goodness.

Women who were displaced more recently such as Hind, Rafif, Jamila, and Arwa express a more immediate and urgent desire to return to Syria as soon as possible. The recency of their displacement made the prospect of return more possible, whereas women who were displaced prior to the 2011 uprisings had a broader understanding that conditions of displacement do not often reverse or diminish but expand over time. It may also relate to the process of grieving that refugees and diasporic people endure in understanding their positions in relation to their homelands. There may be a slight hope in returning after one year or two years after displacement. But one year often stretches into thirty or fifty or two hundred...to the point where
refugees and displaced people must grapple with the notion that they are alienated from their origin permanently, with little hope of returning to the sites of their cultural memories. Hind said, “In Syria we’ll find a lot of work in our specialties because there will be a lot of need for work in those fields.” Rafif commented, “I will immediately return to Syria. Of course.” Jamila commented, “Inshallah I would like to return to Syria and get involved with work with children. I was working for seven years in education.” Arwa sang her response, “I would go back, to Syriaaa! To Syria. Our country has killed us slowly. But if someone is going to rebuild Syria, we will help them. I will help right away. I don’t mind. I will help in any way possible. May we return to our country, God willing. I hope we can return to our homeland. The worst thing we’ve been left with is psychological damage which is far worse than the physical impact of devastation.”
CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND POLICY

Existing humanitarian reports from Amnesty, the UN, Human Rights Watch, and the International Rescue Committee come to false conclusions about the nature of solving the Syrian refugee crisis. Many are only documenting Syrian refugee women’s narratives as evidence to ask “wealthy countries,” to intervene, in the words of the Amnesty Report (2015). These reports use the decontextualized and disembodied stories of brown Syrian refugees as means to enact a global sense of pity and understanding—a noble enough cause. But I was wary of the urgent tones and selective framing of the refugee narratives as a perfect background onto which Western NGO’s and “wealthy countries” can shape new structures “for the better.”

In “Against Imperialism’s “Development,” Pimental (2015) argues that “too many aid agencies treat development and developing country research as one and the same. Blanket approaches are thought to remedy pressing and persist issues despite any nearsighted assumptions that the strategies and theories at work in “highly industrialized” countries ought to naturally and effectively work in states of altogether histories. There must be a shift from the pro-imperialism approach that is now in place, which relegate the Global South, its wisdom, and its responses to North Western prescriptions for development.” This seemingly well-meaning Western sympathy embedded in the discourse of humanitarianism is neoliberalism in disguise. Because neoliberalism sees developing and Third-World countries as potential sights for economic opportunities, the false conclusion that is inherent in these reports is that “a liberalized [capitalist] global economy maximizes human freedoms globally” (Pimental 2015). This seemingly harmless rational contributes to exploitation of people in the Third World who are seen as potential labor pools, void of culturally specific ways of carving their own strategies for economic self-sufficiency. Additionally, it is proven that Human Rights Watch and Amnesty
International have endorsed border controls in the EU that have led to the death of hundreds of Syrian migrants drowning in the Mediterranean (Nevins 2015). This contradiction touches on the heart of the politics of human rights discourse, or what theorist Hannah Arendt called the “right to have rights,” a notion that interrogates how constructions of human rights are tied to the politics of citizenship and nation states inherently created in relation to “Others,” or non-citizen, non-humans. This ties to what Balibar calls the “politics of civility,” or “a politics of the second degree, which aims at creating, recreating, and conserving the set of conditions within which politics as a collective participation in public affairs is possible” (Bot 2014). Harsha Walia’s (2013) Undoing Border Imperialism also critiques the “universalization and proliferation of the Western state as the defining political institution” that determines notions of citizenship and human rights, notions which would not have been created to begin with if it were not for European imperial divisions of borders to serve capitalist and colonial interests.

Essentially, these reports are not really about “humanizing” Syrian refugees, but about arguing for the creation of conditions that replicate Western ideas of who a human being is and what humanity looks like, inherently tied to white supremacist, colonial, imperialist, masculinist, and heteronormative notions of citizen and legitimate personhood. The language of “empowerment,” represents a very different set of goals in this case. I could use U.S. third world women theorists such as Sandoval’s (2000) to argue that Syrian women’s resistance strategies are reinventing the notion of empowerment and creating new imaginaries on their own terms.

My project highlights the cracks in this imperialism-veiled-as-humanitarianism discourse because it shows that Syrian women are creating self-sufficient alternative economies on their own terms, with their own resources, although limited. It shows the violence inherent in approaching the Syrian refugee crisis in essentialist and Orientalist tones. These reports all
focused on individual plights instead of collective experiences that bind refugees together, with pictures of Syrian refugee women and their first name, then offer often sensational stories. I often wondered how the reports generated such specific accounts of gender violence when it is known among Syrians that experiences with gender violence are often spoken about in coded ways.

Figure 11. Source: Amnesty International (2015).

Images like this one from the Amnesty Report (2014) are common. Note that the woman is nameless and her quote is about her husband, as she is holding her child—she is defined in relation to men—an imposition that is easily created by the framing of her narrative rather than the narrative itself.

As I have mentioned earlier, the creation of these images of oppressed, Third World Muslim women is nothing new. The creation of gendered, Orientalist images of Muslim women has historically been a way for the West to assert its hegemony over the “Orient” (Abu-Lughod
This dominant representation justified imperial feminist campaigns to rescue Afghani and Iraqi women from oppressive Muslim forces through U.S. invasion and occupation (Husein 2014). The West is framed as humane, developed, and a safe haven for victims of violence, while the Orient is barbaric, inferior, and ravaged with violence and mystery. This construction is incredibly dangerous. In the context of neoliberal human rights discourse,

“The production of authentic victims, or victim authenticity, is an inherently voyeuristic or pornographic practice that, no matter how carefully or sensitively it is done, transforms the position of the ‘victim’ in his or her society and produces a language of victimization for him or her to speak on the international stage… The remove between the human rights professional and the people they purport to represent can reinforce a global divide of wealth, mobility, information and access to audience. Human rights professionals consequently struggle, ultimately in vain, against a tide of bad faith, orientalism and self-serving sentimentalism.” (Madlingozi 2010)

Additionally, my focus on documenting women’s nonviolent strategies of resistance in my literature review reveals the close ties between militarization and masculinity, as “the process of militarization both draws on and exaggerates the bipolarization of gender identities in extremis.” (Mama 2013). The masculinization of militarized resistance also contributes to the patronizing way that alternative forms of resistance are treated in larger discourse, particularly if those alternative strategies of resistance are traditionally feminized activities such as sewing, cooking, or providing logistical support. It also results in the construction of sexist ethnonationalist logics that drive the agenda and priorities of the revolutionary structure and replicate oppressive systems through rape and other violent, gendered expressions of dominance. This discourse also reifies women’s positions as victims in war situations, instead of capable of also resisting the state in transgressive ways. My work reframes these narratives in a way that radically alters the possibilities for their liberation.
Then again, critiques about the imperial nature of Western humanitarianism ignore the very tangible resources and support that on-the-ground organizations provide. At the same time, there are alternative ways to endorse supporting Syrian women refugees on a policy level. Many of the women’s comments on the psychological stress of working with refugee families bring up an important policy and social need. Culturally-specific mental health and trauma therapy for survivors of state violence must be taken seriously. Particular attention must be paid to the intimate, spiritual, psychological, and physical impacts of violence on women and children. In order for refugees to receive proper psychological care, their aid workers must also receive psychological support, particularly if they are refugees themselves.

The women bring up important questions about the nature of displacement and diaspora. Considering the Syrian refugee population is the largest refugee population in the 21st century, important ideological, academic, and political theorizing must occur on the status of Syrian refugees in the contemporary world order, particularly when they have experienced and continue to experience the multiple and interlocking systems of violence that the women articulated.

In relation to other challenges, gender differences as they relate to patriarchy were not highly significant. This is important because obsessions with Muslim women’s oppressions in relation to Muslim men is a favorite topic in the West. This obsession often correlates to Islamophobic fascinations with constructions of the barbaric, repressive “Other,” and the morally sound, capitalist, woman-liberating forces of the West (Abu-Lughod 2013).

Additionally, many of the human rights reports devote large sections to describing horrific and sensationalist experiences with gender violence. While gender violence does exist, the particular way in which it is framed may not accurately represent the complex understandings Syrian women have of their own realities. It also erases Syrian women’s voices in articulating
their own resistance to and experiences with patriarchal forces in their communities. Like my aunt’s response to the Jordanian TV station that sensationalized Syrian rape victims’ stories, I am critical of the ethical concerns implicated in the framing of sexual violence, which should always be on the victims’ own terms.

Because Syrian civil society inside and in the diaspora is undergoing several radical shifts, the possibility for gender liberation from patriarchy is also potentially growing. Since most Syrian men are disenfranchised in Syrian communities, women are becoming the primary caregivers and providers for their communities, which subverts traditional patriarchal power relations and could restructure Syrian society. This phenomenon could be further encouraged if alternate grassroots structures provide adequate resources to compensate women for the emotional, physical and psychological labors displaced Syrian women do in their communities.

It is important to listen to these narratives with the understanding that Syrian women are keenly aware of the sociopolitical processes that shape their everyday realities and the possibilities of their work in the future. For example, Suad Nofal was acutely aware of the forces of U.S. imperialism, regime violence, and extremist violence when she critiqued the militarized, ethnonationalist rhetoric of both the regime and ISIS. Yaman al-Qadri was articulating important political theory that echo the work of Angela Davis and Audre Lorde when she said the revolution’s goal moved beyond the dismantling of the current regime and was more concerned with total liberation. Therefore, before concluding any policy changes it is imperative to realize that Syrian women are the only experts on their own realities who can dictate liberation on their terms.
Chapter 7: Conclusion and Summary

“I am from there, I am from here,
but I am neither there nor here.
I have two names that meet and part
And I have two languages, I forget
which one I dream in.

“All I [was] really nervous about the idea of leaving. I convinced myself it was only going to be temporary, a period of time that would pass and then I would come home…. Leaving Syria means death and nothing else. It means shedding my skin, casting away my heart and everything I ever wanted to do.”

--Samar Yazbek, A Woman in the Crossfire: Diaries of the Syrian Revolution

Embarking on this research process held personal and emotional investment for me. The summers I spent working with Syrian Women’s Association taught me a lot about the resilience of women in diasporic populations in navigating the layered challenges that systems of oppression bring. Women shared with me stories of narrowly escaping shelling and sniper bullets. One made the decision to leave her two young sons, 12 and 17, behind--so they could join the Free Syrian Army and continue the revolution’s liberation struggle. I had heard stories in my own family of women who had experienced violence in the regime’s prison systems, lost brothers to torture in regime prisons, and women who gave birth under brutal conditions in war zones. My literature review allowed me to map out the political and social context of women’s role in the Syrian revolution and refugee communities. It was empowering to piece together common themes from overlooked firsthand accounts of women’s creative, spiritual, literary, and
cultural resistance strategies in the Revolution. I also began interrogating the silences in the dominant narratives about Syrian refugee women’s day to day challenges.

Documenting a group of women’s narratives who directly worked for a refugee social services center provides a snapshot into the lives of such resilient women—capturing the mundane, the routine, and the extraordinary in their narratives. I also creatively processed many of the traumatic stories I had heard through writing poetry that brought those experiences to light. My own experience distributing aid made me sympathize with Jamila when she described how deeply disturbing it was to witness the levels of violence people had experienced. I remember when I brought the two Japanese aid workers with me the women burst into tears halfway through the trip. “How can these people have experienced so much loss and so much violence?” they wondered. I connected to the sorrow that painted some of the women’s voices and the silences that emerged as they articulated the grieving process of losing our homeland to state-sanctioned violence.

Engaging in this research project taught me about the importance of cultural dexterity in navigating multiple worlds as a researcher and as a listener in a shared cultural community. I was charged with the task of making sure sites of Western academic knowledge could recognize and allow space for the documentation of these narratives of resistance and weariness. I learned about the complexities of accurately representing the dimensions of a community caught in the crosshairs of multiple oppressions simultaneously. I became charged with an ontological mission to recreate and reshape knowledges of Syrian refugee women’s experiences that hold policy and structural implications. It also meant maintaining an acute cultural sensitivity and awareness of difference and of my own positionality as a researcher.
Most profoundly, it allowed me to articulate and connect my own feelings of displacement and resistance to the experiences of women whose lives at intersections of multiple oppressions reveal the creative power and poetry that emerges through resistance. I discovered that women’s resistance and storytelling contain a playful subversion that blurs colonial borders and builds imaginaries for future worlds. The pain of navigating displacement and the dual consciousness and split subjectivities it creates is translated into a fluidity that is hard to capture in academic text alone. Women of color theorists in the U.S. have created their own languages to articulate these imaginaries—Patricia Hill Collins (2004) calls this being an outsider-within, Gloria Anzaldúa (1989) names it being a “border woman,” Audre Lorde (1984) calls it sister-outsiderness. I see the creation and articulation of these survival strategies as the result of a dance between worlds, combined with yearnings for the past and visions for the future, blended with experiences of marginality, balanced on the border between refuge and escape. These strategies enable empowerment not in a capitalist sense, but as an alternate hybridized set of tools that allow for an articulation of the complexities embodied in silence and in storytelling—it is a creation of a new language of survival.
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Appendices

CONSENT FORM

This interview will be conducted by Banah Ghadbian of Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia in fulfillment of her undergraduate degree in Sociology.

The purpose of this interview is to document Syrian women’s narratives. If you agree to do this study, you will be asked to do a short interview. You may opt to have your answers be anonymous. If the interview is tape recorded, the recording will be for transcription purposes only and will be destroyed shortly after the interview. Taking part is voluntary. Participants must be 18 or older. You may skip any questions and you are free to withdraw at any time.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature ___________________________ Date ____________________

Your Name (printed) __________

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.

Your Signature ___________________________ Date ____________________

Signature of person obtaining consent _____________ Date ________________

Printed name of person obtaining consent _____________ Date ________________

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study and was approved by the IRB on [date].
نموذج الموافقة

بانانة الغضبان, طالبة علم الاجتماع ودراسات نسائية, بجامعة سلمان, أتلانتا, جورجيا

الهدف من هذه المقابلة هو توثيق روايات النساء التونسيات
إذا كنت موافقة على هذا البحث
سيطلب منك عمل مقابلة قصيرة ولك حق الاختيار في الإجابة على الأسئلة
وقد تختارين أن تكون إجاباتك مجهولة المصدر
إذا كانت المقابلة مسجلة سيكون هدف التسجيل هو النسخ وسوف يتم تدميره بعد وقت قصير من المقابلة
 المشاركة اختيارية وتستطيع تخطي أي أسئلة وليك الحرية في الانسحاب في أي وقت

بيان الموافقة

لقد قرأت المعلومات المكتوبة أعلاه وتفقت إجابات عن كل الأسئلة التي سألت عنها، وأوافق
على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة

____________________________________________________________
التاريخ

__________________________________
الاسم المطبوع

بالإضافة إلى الموافقة على المشاركة والموافقة على تسجيل المقابلة

____________________________________________________________
التاريخ

توقيع الشخص الحاصل على الموافقة

اسم المطبوع الشخص الحاصل على الموافقة

ستبقى هذه الإستمارة مع الباحث لمدة لا تقل عن ثلاث سنوات وقد تمت الموافقة على هذا
البحث من قبل مجلس المراجعة (IRB)