The Syrian Refugee Crisis
&
the Contiguous States

Erbil Refugee Camp
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Workshop Report

The Syrian Refugee Crisis and the Contiguous States

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Conference Report Editor: Louise Klann
Associate Editor: Martha Lagace
Rapporteurs: Louise Klann, Sarah Bidinger
Shree Chudasama, Lesley Harkins, Yoana Kuzmova, Ryan Yunis

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Conference Objectives

This report captures the second Syrian refugee workshop sponsored by the Boston University Institute for Iraqi Studies (IIS), with the co-sponsorship of the Boston Consortium for Arab Region Studies and Boston University’s Institute for the Study of Muslim Societies and Civilizations. The first workshop examined the comparative lessons from the earlier Iraqi refugee crisis, as well as the pressing questions that might be addressed with respect to the gargantuan Syrian refugee tragedy. The report from the May 2013 meeting may be found [here](http://example.com).

A practical question was what substantive issue might be productively addressed in the second workshop? In other words, what added value might the workshop offer? It was decided to primarily focus the January 31 workshop on the impact of the Syrian refugee catastrophe upon contiguous states, namely Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The workshop tackled three regional themes: legal solutions, the special case of Palestinian refugees, and sexual predation and violence afflicting many refugee girls and women. A variety of qualified scholars and serving professionals address each of these four countries, as well as the plight of the millions of Syrians who have had to flee their homes.

For further information on IIS, the following links may be useful: Background information from the [first refugee workshop](http://example.com), which was held last Spring. Follow IIS [@IISBU](http://twitter.com/IISBU), Find IIS on [Google+](http://plus.google.com), and Like IIS on [Facebook](http://facebook.com).

Speakers

**Susan Akram**
Clinical Professor, Boston University
Director, International Human Rights Clinic, Boston University

**Dr. Muhamed Almaliky**
Fellow, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University
Physician, University of Pennsylvania

**Cigdem Benam**
Visiting Scholar, Institute for the Study of Muslim Societies and Civilizations, Boston University

**Madeline Campbell**  
Assistant Professor, Urban Studies Department, Worcester State University

**Rochelle Davis**  
Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Georgetown University

**Adrienne Fricke**  
Syria Human Rights Consultant

**Vicky Kelberer**  
Master’s candidate, Department of International Relations, Boston University

**Rami Khouri**  
Director, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut

**Diane E. King**  
Visiting Scholar, Center for Historical Research, Ohio State University  
Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Kentucky

**Shamiran Mako**  
BCARS Visiting Scholar, Northeastern University, Boston, MA  
Ph.D. candidate, Politics and International Relations, University of Edinburgh

**Lenore Martin**  
Professor, Department of Political Science, Emmanuel College  
Associate, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University

**Martha Myers**  
United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), Director of Relief and Social Services

**Augustus Richard Norton**  
Professor, Departments of International Relations and Anthropology, Boston University

**Denis Sullivan**  
Professor, Political Science, International Affairs, and Middle East Studies, Northeastern University  
Director, BCARS
Kelberer opened the conference with an update on the humanitarian and geopolitical consequences of the refugee crisis in host countries. She argued that the toll of human suffering and regional instability will become insurmountable if the international community does not step in to fund the United Nations’ refugee agency, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and other agencies’ relief efforts. UNHCR requested $4.2 billion in additional funding as it works with more than 100 other agencies to deliver life-saving aid, but international donors have pledged less than half of that amount. Since donors delivered only 60% of pledged funds last year, aid agencies will struggle to even minimally address the crisis, to the long-term detriment of the region and the international community as a whole.

Without the aid of the international community, contiguous borders may close and violence may spread to host communities. The greater Middle East already hosted the largest refugee population worldwide prior to the Syrian conflict. Weak economies and infrastructure have steadily eroded the generosity and hospitality of host governments. Host countries all experience strains between local communities and the refugee populations.

Already the largest refugee diaspora and humanitarian disaster of the decade, the Syrian crisis has grown exponentially over the past year. UNHCR reports more than 2.3 million registered refugees. There are probably an additional 700,000 unregistered refugees. In 2013, the number of registered refugees jumped 3.4 times over 2012. More than 4 million refugees are expected to flee Syria by 2015. Of this 4 million, it is estimated that 84% will live outside of camps, presenting further obstacles to aid delivery and potentially exacerbating strains with host communities.

The UN’s sixth Regional Response Plan (RRP) focuses on two key areas of aid delivery: essential needs and services, and protection. Protection aid is concerned with sexual and gender-
based violence (SGBV), the protection of children, providing documentation to prevent statelessness, and seeking durable solutions for refugees in temporary accommodations.

The humanitarian situation is dire. Over the next year, more than 4 million people in the region will require water assistance. Polio, measles, and other diseases could return with a vengeance. Syria itself has lost an estimated 35 years of human development, and if the refugees are left uncared for, the impact on post-conflict Syria may be grave. Basic access to shelter has been an issue in every host country, and 420,000 refugees in the region live in “tented, non-permanent accommodations,” said Kelberer, while 105,000 live in “substandard informal settlements.”

Beyond physical health concerns, the majority of these people have experienced trauma of some kind, and psychosocial health care must be provided if they are to recover. Furthermore, a great many refugee children from Syria have witnessed horrific acts, and the war has disrupted their schooling. As many as 3,000 schools in Syria have been destroyed or are unusable. By some estimates, as little as ten percent of refugee children attend school. These children may become a lost generation.

The contiguous states of Iraq, Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan have absorbed the brunt of the Syrian refugee crisis, but other regional states have absorbed large numbers of refugees as well. For instance, Egypt now hosts over 130,000 refugees.
Martha Myers’ presentation conveyed insights from the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) in the Syrian refugee crisis. While Palestinians comprise a tiny sliver of those displaced in the Syrian conflict, Myers argued that for many reasons they play a significant role. The ongoing civil war has displaced approximately half of nearly 500,000 UNRWA-registered Palestinian refugees in Syria. When the conflict finally ends, Palestinians who have left Syria risk finding themselves converted from stateless to “statusless” persons. UNRWA estimates that currently about 300,000 registered Palestinians (“PRS”) remain in Syria although many are internally displaced. Throughout the region, Palestinians’ tenuous status places them in a gray area of exploitation, refoulement, and abuse. Often uprooted for the second or third time in their lives, the predicament of these Palestinians lends a tragic and unique perspective into the conflict’s impact on civilian populations as a whole.

Myers noted that, like UNHCR, her agency is tasked with protecting and assisting refugees, but her agency also provides direct services to Palestinian refugees. Unlike other UN agencies, UNRWA does not rely on local implementing partners. Since its creation in response to the 1948 Arab-Israeli Conflict, the UN General Assembly has limited UNRWA’s operations to five regions: the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria.\(^1\) However, without

\(^1\) Myers began with a brief disclaimer meant to dispel any confusion bound to result in the audience regarding the number of persons of concern in the region: UN agencies and governmental sources often report wildly divergent statistics because a coordinated count of displaced
many major international backers, UNRWA has been marginalized, underfunded, and understaffed. While limited by these structural factors, UNRWA continues to advocate for and assist Palestinian refugees in Syria and the contiguous states.

UNRWA’s humanitarian footprint is largest in Syria, she said. The agency has developed a network of schools, health facilities, and other services. Most of the country’s half million Palestinians arrived in the 1940s. A smaller number arrived in 1970 fleeing the Jordanian civil war. Myers emphasized that, historically speaking, good will has prevailed between Syria and the hosted PRS: Syria integrated PRS by granting them free movement, access to universities, and induction into the Syrian army. The civil war has curtailed some integration, but most PRS manage to remain neutral parties in the conflict. However, this neutrality may not endure as the fight becomes increasingly sectarian.

In the short term, the situation on the humanitarian front is bleak. Registered Palestinians remaining in Syria live in three unofficial camps in addition to official UNRWA camps. Refugees move in and out of camps. Of the 11,000 PRS registered in Jordan, for example, approximately 5,100 have traveled back from Jordan into Syria since their initial displacement. Whether they will remain in Syria is unclear. It is estimated that 6,000 PRS left Syria to find refuge in Egypt, while about a thousand fled to the Gaza Strip. Six of the original 12 Palestinian camps in Syria have literally turned into battlegrounds between the opposition and the regime. The starkest example of this transformation is Yarmouk in Damascus.

Palestinians comprise 83 percent of the 80,000 people trapped and besieged in the Yarmouk district of Damascus – an opposition stronghold. Civilians risk their lives daily as the government fights to re-take Yarmouk. Since the siege began, more than 1,000 babies have been born (as of January 2014) in substandard conditions. Most of their parents cannot access vaccines and thus the infants suffer from nutritional problems. In anticipation of the January 2014 Geneva II talks, the Syrian government allowed UNRWA and other organizations to drop off food parcels in a government-controlled area, but the black market and closed economic system within Yarmouk have grossly inflated prices for everyday commodities.

**Lebanon**

Long-standing hospitality between local communities and refugees and a grudging tolerance by the Lebanese state have begun to fade. In October 2013, Lebanon announced that its border would no longer be open to PRS. In retrospect, it seems that this measure was merely domestic political window-dressing because formal closures have been enforced selectively at best.

UNRWA in Lebanon struggles to meet assistance needs with cash transfers and to ensure that PRS can access schools and health clinics. Lebanon’s reluctance to set up more Palestinian refugee camps has complicated humanitarian delivery. For decades, refugees from Palestine and present-day Israel, as well as Jordan have lived in camps, some of which have become hotbeds for instability. Approximately 270,000 PRS live in informal settlements and rental housing throughout Lebanon. To deliver aid, UNRWA must seek out and locate these recipients.

Lebanon is under UNRWA’s jurisdiction, so Palestinians in Lebanon cannot regularize their status through a UNHCR card. However, Palestinians registered with UNRWA may pay for

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people and refugees is impracticable. Myers noted that she was using the most recent data collected by UNRWA, according to which there are between 260,000 and 270,000 Palestinians in Lebanon, for example.
a new visa to lawfully remain in the country after residing there for 12 months. Unfortunately, for most Palestinians fleeing Syria the cost for the visa is prohibitive.

**Jordan**

While Jordan still accepts Syrian refugees, the Hashemite Kingdom has made clear that Palestinians are not welcome there. Jordan’s hostility toward Palestinians derives in part from the regime’s reliance on East Bank tribes, the regime’s power base. In addition, Jordan justifiably wants to avoid the economic and infrastructure strain that the influx of Palestinians has caused in Lebanon. The Jordanian government coordinates with the Free Syrian Army to keep Palestinians from crossing the border, and Jordanian policies discriminate against Palestinians. Despite this, the Cyber City refugee camp has registered 11,000 PRS with UNRWA. In contrast, Palestinians in Zaatari camp risk refoulement if their identity is discovered.

Palestinians’ shaky legal status restricts their access to state and aid agency infrastructures, and this insecurity will likely prolong regional instability. To statusless Palestinians, every checkpoint or visit to a hospital presents a tangible risk to livelihood. Jordan provides refugee cards to other refugees and such cards give the people rights and allow them to move around the country; without such cards, Palestinians have no place to go and cannot cross borders.

Forced returns to Syria have become widespread for Palestinians who manage to cross into Jordan. Jordan is not a signatory to the Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, and thus Jordan is under no legal obligation to abstain from imposing forced returns. Forced returns, however, contravene international legal custom whereby even non-signatories should not deviate from the principle of non-refoulement.

Myers concluded by emphasizing reasons why the international community should continue to invest in stabilizing the Palestinian population in the Syrian crisis. First, Palestinians’ multiple displacements have made each subsequent regional refugee crisis worse. Their lack of official status prevents Palestinians from meaningfully improving their lives and livelihoods, which exacerbates the crisis. Finally, Palestinians matter in their own right, she said. The many elderly Palestinian women forcibly displaced for the second or third time deserve active, persistent effort from all relevant global actors in restoring peace.

**Discussion:**

Prompted to comment on UNRWA’s funding, Myers observed that UNRWA has long argued that the best way to assist PRS in Syria is not by helping them flee the country but by instead improving their resilience inside Syria. Such a proposition, however, requires cash transfers that UNRWA is unable to provide under its current funding scheme. While a lot of money is pledged, very little comes through. This is especially true in Jordan where UNRWA’s operation is severely underfunded; furthermore, the Jordanian government blocks UNRWA efforts to participate in regional planning. Myers also pointed to the debilitating impact of inter-agency rivalries on humanitarian coordination. Turf wars between established actors such as UNHCR and newer capacity builders like OCHA prevent the emergence of an overarching response framework.
Akram reported on a project mapping refugee laws and policies in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA region) to evaluate their effect on Syrians and Palestinians. Interviewing policymakers in Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon, Akram and her team looked at responsibility-sharing from a legal rather than donor perspective to see where there is already legal precedent for solutions and where temporary assistance could become permanent legal remedies. Akram hopes this project will elicit an overarching framework to assist refugees among host states and will include temporary protection status and resettlement.

In particular, Akram and her team evaluated the difference between de jure and de facto legal frameworks. She found that refugee laws are often a moving target. In Egypt and Jordan especially there has recently been a major change in policy to prevent Palestinian refugee flows. Egyptian officials often admitted that while they had a legal understanding of how the law should be applied, the reality often completely depends on the whims of the Ministry of Interior. UNWRA and UNHCR are prevented from operating in Egypt, and the Egyptian government has chosen to consider refugees as foreigners. Left extremely vulnerable, Palestinians flee Egypt for Greece in rickety boats, which often capsize or are apprehended by border guards. When Egyptians capture fleeing Palestinians, they are put into detention until they can buy a ticket out of the country.
Akram’s project also intends to promote the sharing of responsibility outside the region, primarily in the United States and Europe. She argued that the “West” pours money into host states as an excuse to avoid responsibility sharing and to keep refugees from coming out of the region to burden other states. Akram hopes that increased transparency will shame and encourage states outside the region to take in more refugees.

On the international level, she said, a UNHCR representative committee mediates refugee resettlement and reabsorption. Countries engage in what amounts to horse-trading each year in Geneva. Some countries put money on table while others accept certain numbers of refugees. Akram argues that this is the wrong tradeoff. Western states should not use money to avoid taking in refugees because doing so relieves international pressure to give refugees legal status.

Akram pointed out that the United States does not necessarily need new laws. It has a yearly quota for refugee resettlement but never resettles nearly as many refugees. Augustus Richard Norton commented that the autonomy of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) exacerbates the problem of assisting refugees: During the recent Iraq war, for example, only miniscule numbers of Iraqis (who were in serious danger for having aided U.S. services) were resettled in the United States. Norton argued that refugee resettlement requires much more focused Senate oversight. Currently there is little transparency as to why the DHS rejects claims; furthermore, the DHS can freely establish filters to prevent particular groups from resettlement. At the risk of being perceived as endangering the United States, the dominant conservative ethos of the DHS minimizes visa opportunities for legally qualified applicants.

**Discussion:**

Rami Khouri commented that formal law and sovereignty of the state are often meaningless in Middle East when laws only become real because someone’s cousin contacts the “right” people. A key question is where, in this context, there are the entry points for helping refugees? He asked how to strengthen the capacity of the rule of law to alleviate the vulnerabilities and pressures on individuals?

Akram then argued that international law can be effective. If a country tries to shirk its responsibility other countries will pressure it. This works best when all relevant representatives are at the table; everyone has a stake in the outcome and must work together. Moreover, the process must be effective at both the domestic and international levels. An international commitment will not occur absent thorough knowledge of domestic laws as well as shared obligations between countries.

Akram added that there are many different mechanisms for responsibility-sharing. She then drew upon on a recent case in Sweden, the June 28 Host Country Agreement, which gives Palestinian Representation in Sweden a position equivalent to that of an embassy. The Agreement gives the Palestinian authority all the privileges, immunities, and protections as embassies and their representatives. Major legal decisions have also reinterpreted the directive toward Palestinian refugees. Recent cases in the European Court of Justice reinterpreted Article 1D of the 1951 Refugee Convention in the case of three Palestinian refugees (Abed El Kareem El Kott, A Radi and Kamel Ismail) seeking asylum in Turkey. The judgment mandates that if refugees can prove that their personal safety is seriously at risk and UNRWA was unable to protect them, European states must grant them protection. Sweden now has 100,000 cases under review and these could have a great ripple effect across Europe. Sweden is the first country to
offer automatic resettlement. Akram noted that another model of responsibility-sharing would be the provision of humanitarian visas.
Turkey’s large population, territory, and resource reserve contribute to making it one of the most responsive host countries. More than 570,000 refugees now reside in Turkey. 36 percent live in camps and 64 percent in urban areas, and it is predicted that Turkey will host up to one million refugees by the end of 2014. Relief projects have shifted focus from camps to urban settings where many of the newer refugees are settling. Syrians are being given cash grants to start small businesses as well as cash assistance via bank cards. Within camps, schools enroll 60 percent of refugee children while outside it is just 14 percent, primarily due to language barriers and refugee families’ need for child labor for daily sustenance.

Physical security is an overriding concern in border areas where militant group operations encroach on the Turkish frontier. A newly implemented “temporary protection” regime removes limits on refugee stays and forbids forced returns. Turkey has already spent $2 billion to support the refugees. It is unclear how long borders will remain open and refugees can easily obtain residency.

Lenore Martin: Turkish Domestic & Geopolitical Strategy

Martin addressed three major political concerns in Turkey: (1) tension between Alevi and Sunni religious communities; (2) Turkey losing control of the Kurdish nationalist movement; and (3) containing negative public opinion. Cigdem Benam then described how Turkey’s “open door” policy has created instability in the border region.
Alevi and Alawite Concerns

The influx of Syrian refugees into Turkey has reignited tensions between Turkish Alevis, Syrian Alawites, and Sunni Muslims. Alevis comprise about 15 percent of the majority Sunni Turkish population and have been targets for increasing discrimination and violence. Refugee flows tilt the uneasy religious balance in favor of Sunni Muslims. Due in part to Alevi and Alawite religious practices that valorize Ali and house rather than mosque worship, Turkish Alevis have long endured persecution, including four major massacres.

Martin illustrated this tension by describing the May 11, 2013 car bombing in Reyhanlı. Most of the 51 people killed in the bombing were Sunni; many Turks, including Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, insinuated that Alevis were behind the bombing. Many Turks further implied that Alevis supported the regime of Syrian president Bashar Assad, a perspective which - according some groups - invited Sunni religious retaliation against Alevis. The influx of Sunni refugees makes the political establishment’s scapegoating of Alevis especially troubling. Syrian Alawites also fear for their safety in Sunni-majority refugee camps. Alawites have sought shelter outside of the camps and depend upon organizations that provide aid directly to Alawites.

New Approaches to Kurdish Concerns

Martin indicated that the threat of a two-front conflict has prompted Turkey to adopt a conciliatory policy toward Kurds. Turkey initiated a peace process in 2012 with Kurdish movements. However, the continued conflict has made Kurdish aspirations for independence difficult to contain. Large refugee flows have taken foreign policy precedence in Turkey and created opportunities for Kurds - disillusioned with the political process - to take advantage of the disarray to attempt to carve out territory.

Kurdish sovereignty became possible after Syrian president Bashar Assad withdrew troops from northern Syria, allowing the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), an affiliate of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), to seize control of the region. They declared a Kurdish autonomous region in December 2013. Martin argued that Assad withdrew troops as retaliation for Turkey’s open border policy, which has allowed radicals and opposition fighters to enter Syria. After the PYD declared an autonomous region, the Turkish opposition slammed the government: The Turkish opposition said while the prime minister and government acted like representatives of the Syrian Opposition the Kurds set up a government on Turkey’s doorstep.

Martin indicated that Turkey remains worried that the growing strength of the PYD will lead to a possible sovereign or semi-sovereign Kurdish region close to the Turkish border. She outlined three steps the Turkish government has taken to limit the appeal of the PYD.

(1) Turkey began unprecedented negotiations with the Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party including Abdullah Öcalan, the jailed PKK leader;
(2) Prime Minister Erdogan met with Massoud Barzani, president of Iraq’s Kurdistan Regional Government in Diyarbakir, a predominantly Kurdish city. Erdogan used his close relations with Barzani to weaken support for the Kurdish political party in Turkey. 
(3) Turkey has constructed a wall in Nusaybin, a heavily populated Kurdish area in Syria, to prevent Kurds from crossing the border freely between Syria and Turkey.

Negative Public Opinion & Turkey’s Syria Policy

Martin argued that Turkey is more vulnerable to its neighbors than it has been at any time in memory. She cited growing dissatisfaction among the Turkish public about the perceived
increase in vulnerability to radical Islamic groups active in the Syrian war. Perhaps the most significant area of concern is the perceived relationship between the Turkish majority Justice and Development Party (AKP) with hardline opposition groups. The AKP denies ties to al-Qaeda affiliated al-Nusra or the more extreme Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) group. However, these groups are allowed to operate freely along the border. Al-Nusra even conducts fundraising on street corners in Turkey.

**Cigdem Benam: Refugee Populations & Turkey’s Open-Door Policy**

Benam proposed that Turkey’s open-door policy – envisioned for a short conflict ending within several months – has led to great instability in Turkey. Turkey has the longest border with Syria and has an ever-increasing number of crowded refugee camps. Benam argued that Turkey needs to pursue permanent remedies including refugee integration in addition to temporary measures. Turkey’s open-door policy quickly turned into an open-border policy that has weakened physical border security. The border population’s increased military experience and cross-border access to military material and explosives may result in rising extremist militancy in the area.

Benam said that the unchecked flow of refugees has created a shadow economy with friction between locals and refugees. Many Syrians, due to their predicament, work outside the legal framework and for lower wages, effectively competing with locals for jobs. Urban refugees have also altered the housing market. Rising rental prices are hurting Turkey’s lower and middle classes who tend to rent rather than own property outright.

Turkey initially did not seek international refugee aid because registering international non-governmental organizations with the Ministry of the Interior’s Department of Associations would take time. Turkey soon exhausted its resources, forcing a change in policy. The country has since established additional camps on the Syrian border through its “Zero Point Operation,” which uses NGOs as an extension of the Turkish government to deliver aid without violating sovereignty. While UNHCR reports that approximately 600,000 Syrian refugees are present in Turkey, the country has not yet implemented a uniform registration mechanism. Benam believes Turkey hosts closer to one million refugees. Approximately 200,000 predominantly Sunni Syrians live in camps administered by the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency of Turkey.

Many refugees have fled religious violence in majority Sunni camps and are instead choosing to live in urban parks. Without the aid infrastructure available in camps, urban refugees struggle to access healthcare and education. Family networks generally support these refugees who are comprised primarily of Kurds, Alawites, and former members of the Assad regime.

A new asylum law will go into effect in 2014: the Law on Foreigners and International Protection. The law should alleviate some of the confusion around refugee status, since refugees currently have temporary protection but no legal status. Until now, refugees theoretically can access schooling and healthcare, but the ill-defined 1994 legislation has muddled implementation. Even so, Benam observed that Turkey’s new asylum law is security-oriented and largely misses the humanitarian dimensions of the crisis.
Jordan has reached the limit of its capacity to serve refugees and vulnerable host communities. Refugees comprise 10 percent of Jordan’s population: There are 592,000 refugees in the country. The largest of five refugee camps, Zaatari, is now the fourth largest city in Jordan. Even so, 80 percent of refugees do not live in camps. UNHCR anticipates the refugee population will rise to 800,000 by 2015. Unlike many states, Jordan keeps close tabs on registering refugees, which allows for more accurate aid estimates to provide services to both the refugees and the host communities.

Syrian refugee children generally have achieved only basic education by the time they arrive in camps in part because most of the children come from rural areas with limited educational facilities. Jordan has managed to place 55 percent of these children in school. The country’s “Back to School” program, considered a success, allows for “double-shifting” so Syrian children can attend courses in the afternoons.

Jordan struggles with sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), unemployment, and inconsistent access to food and water. Ubiquitous SGBV is correlated with 40 percent of women and girls staying indoors most or all of the time out of fear for their safety. Without the buffer of steady employment, negative coping mechanisms have emerged, such as early and forced marriage, prostitution, and survival sex.

Unemployment is soaring among working-age refugees. Jordan has the highest unemployment rate, 90 percent, in the region. Within the camps informal economies are the rule.
Zaatari’s main thoroughfare, where refugees can buy everything from bridal gowns to kebabs, has been dubbed “Avenue des Champs Élysées” after the famous Parisian shopping boulevard.

The war and the influx of refugees have exacerbated difficulties with food and water resources. Much of Jordan’s fresh produce traditionally was imported from Syria, and Jordan’s desert terrain cannot sustain large population increases. Because the Jordanian government extended access to public water to all refugees, the water infrastructure is under severe strain.

**Rochelle Davis: a Cultural Anthropological Perspective**

Rochelle Davis, Madeline Campbell and Denis Sullivan all discussed conducting research in Jordanian refugee camps, particularly the largest camp, Zaatari, which is operated by the Jordanian government and UNHCR.

Davis placed the current flow of Syrian refugees into the context of Jordan’s long experience hosting refugees. When Iraqi refugees immigrated in 2003 due to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, for example, Jordanians generally treated them as guests. Over the years, however, Jordanians have felt that Jordan has disproportionately shouldered a burden of helping refugees and the effort is straining their infrastructure. At first Iraqi refugees tended to be skilled urban professionals who assimilated well into Jordanian society. After 2006, however, poorer Iraqis sought refuge in Jordan and the country struggled to absorb them.

The majority of Syrian refugees come from Homs. Almost all are in northern Jordan, and come from mercantile, service, or manual labor sectors. These refugees’ abilities and needs are different from those of Iraqi refugees. For various reasons, including similar lifestyle, many Syrians have integrated into Jordan better than Iraqis.

Davis argued that the crumbling Syrian state apparatus poses a major bureaucratic threat to the Syrian diaspora. Even Syrians who left Syria legally cannot renew their passports. Their passports are now expiring and those Syrians who left legally cannot leave Jordan or obtain legal refugee status within Jordan.

UNHCR performed well in Jordan and quickly adapted to changing conditions. At first the agency distributed huge amounts of rice and flour that went unused or were sold on the black market because Syrians needed more than staples to survive. UNHCR later switched to money distribution. The World Food Program’s operations, meanwhile, were less effective since the WFP distributed food vouchers that could only be used in accredited stores. Because these stores were not widespread, refugees ended up wasting time and money travelling to particular stores and transporting food home.

Many Jordanians are afraid of Syrian refugees. Every Jordanian whom Davis encountered felt that Jordanians are losing jobs to Syrians. So far, however, Egyptian construction workers in Jordan experience the main threat of employment loss. Syrians have a reputation for doing very good work and they may replace Egyptians. Cultural fears developed very early on. Jordanian newspapers implied that Syrian women were “loose” and posed a temptation to Jordanian men. This stereotype has persisted. Jordanian men target Syrian women as sexual objects, and even Jordanian women experience increased sexual harassment on the streets.

Davis challenged the audience to examine their assumptions about refugees. If policymakers want to end the crisis in Syria, for example, they must begin seeing young men as
vulnerable instead of dangerous. Young men are the fodder for the Syrian conflict. There should be targeted programming to offer these men another path rather than isolating them in camps.

Davis also argued that the word ‘sectarian’ should be replaced with ‘political’ because the fight is over political power and authority, not religious ideals or sectarian rivalries. Continually describing the crisis as sectarian paints the conflicting groups as inherently bad. Davis also noted the tendency among academics and agencies to only perceive refugees as mouths to be fed or bodies to be clothed rather than respecting people’s strength and resilience in extraordinary circumstances.

**Madeline Campbell: an Urban Studies Perspective**

Campbell analyzed the Zaatari Vision Project, which aims to create a privatized model city based on the existing organic composition of Zaatari camp. Campbell laid out the intended and unintended gender dimensions of the camp construction.

Zaatari has become the second largest refugee camp in the world after Dadaab camp in Kenya. Zaatari is now one of Jordan’s largest cities. Approximately 80,000 Syrians live there, and refugees move freely between the camp and Syria. Unlike many other camps, however, Syrians themselves created the city, situating their tents wherever they wanted. UNHCR stepped in to administer the camp about six months after the camp began to grow, and attempted to co-opt control from Syrian leaders. The Zaatari Vision Project aims to harness the creativity of Syrian refugees while forging a functioning temporary city within the limits Jordanian laws impose on building permanent structures.

As the camp evolved, self-appointed street leaders handled day-to-day governance, managing security and advocating for basic needs such as food and oil distribution to their area. UNHCR officials are now trying to work with street leaders to govern the city while simultaneously curbing some of the leaders’ self-appointed powers. Closely partnering with street leaders, UNHCR is trying to respond to ever-expanding needs of inhabitants by, for instance, setting up an electrical grid for Zaatari’s main shopping street, the “Champs Élysées,” and installing sanitary house toilets across the camp. (Easily accessible toilets as opposed to communal toilets also reduce the vulnerability of women to predatory sexual attacks, which are reported to often occur as women make their way to communal toilets in the darkness of night.) All these projects require infrastructure as well as effective political representation.

Campbell also urged the audience to give closer attention and more research to gender dynamics. Her study shows that UNHCR efforts may institutionalize distinct gender dynamics that effectively put men in charge and leave women as hired help. This gendered governance has heightened resource and representative disparities. Unlike in other Jordanian camps, all street leaders in Zaatari are men. Men are the interlocutors for aid while women have no channels for self-representation. Although women head many households, they do not have access to the system and are effectively invisible.

Perhaps surprisingly, the Cash for Work program – in which the UN employs refugees in camp maintenance – is correlated with an increase in domestic conflict. Since most cash-for-work jobs involve cleaning, nursing, or teaching, the jobs seem “feminine” and men will not do them. It is apparent that employed women’s insecurity increases because earning an income is perceived by many men as undermining patriarchal family structures.
**Denis Sullivan: a Security Perspective**

Sullivan described five layers of security in Zaatari camp. Two systems exist side by side: one to help keep workers secure and another to police refugees. At the top, the Jordanian Interior Ministry’s police force and special units maintain camp security. Next UNHCR’s Field Safety Officers coordinate and protect all international staff. The Noor Al-Hussein Foundation hosts UNHCR as Jordan’s main governmental NGO. A private British security firm, G4S, both protects UN workers in Zaatari and ensures that no one leaves who is not allowed to do so. Finally, street leaders provide a street-to-street security system. Sullivan noted that while UNHCR needs Syrians themselves to secure the camp, self-appointed street leaders have evolved into a kind of mafia whose activities include “selling” land to establish caravans or kiosks.

Brits and Americans train local police to use a district-by-district community policing model that divides Zaatari into 12 districts. While this model has arguably been successful in Belfast, Northern Ireland, Sullivan questioned its efficacy in a refugee camp.

**Discussion:**

Myers responded to Davis’s concerns about using iris scans for identification purposes in distributing cash vouchers. Myers said that the program, rather than being an invasion of privacy, aims to resolve issues using ATM cards in insecure environments: problems that include the diversion of goods to the black market, stolen cards, and lost access to vouchers in abusive home situations.

Responding to a question about the role of religion in camps, Sullivan said that while Zaatari only had three schools, there are 18 mosques because Syrians built the mosques themselves even as UNICEF has not been able to staff the schools. Campbell commented that while some people in the camp have contacts in the Free Syrian Army, there does not appear to be jihadi recruitment in the mosques.
Both Lebanon and Jordan have experienced acute strain on their infrastructure and capacity to provide aid. Refugees comprise a large proportion of their population. Lebanon already hosted approximately 450,000 registered Palestinian refugees in a population of over 4.4 million, and now also hosts nearly one million registered Syrian refugees. Predictions for 2015 refugee flows in Lebanon assume 1.5 million Syrian refugees including 100,000 Syrian Palestinian refugees. In addition, UNHCR estimates that 50,000 Lebanese returnees will reenter the country in 2014. Overall, it is estimated that refugees now comprise between a quarter and a third of the population of Lebanon.

Lebanon’s tightly interconnected economy took a hit as a result of the Syrian conflict. The World Bank estimates that GDP growth rates have decreased by 2.9% every year of the conflict at a cost to the economy of $7.5 billion by 2015. The sum of $1.4 billion to $1.6 billion is needed to restore public services to pre-conflict levels. Such services were already under strain to meet the needs of the Lebanese population. As a result, UN programs have focused on aiding areas with high numbers of both refugees and poor Lebanese in order to try to double the effectiveness of programs. Aid agencies attempt to “buy Lebanese” products and services in order to bolster local economies and offset some of the costs of the conflict.
More so than in other states, Syrians in Lebanon struggle to find shelter and integrate peacefully. Lebanon has not built official refugee camps for Syrians due to its complex history of hosting Palestinian refugees. The lack of centralized camps makes delivering aid a problem. Aid agencies struggle to reach approximately 1,400 makeshift settlements. Cash transfer programs have been the most effective in delivering aid directly to refugees. Housing shortages are rampant as is inflation in housing prices. 67% of refugees live in rental accommodations and 30% live in substandard, informal housing. To attempt to alleviate the housing problem, UNHCR plans to build pre-fabricated housing designed by Ikea. Lebanon has just officially recognized a tented settlement outside the town of Arsal.

Syrian refugees struggle to get sufficient water and food. 27% of refugees do not have access to potable water, and 80% cannot provide food for themselves. Rising prices for food, water, and housing negatively affect local populations as well. Overcrowding and poor sanitation heightens the World Health Organization’s concerns about potential outbreaks of waterborne diseases, measles, and tuberculosis.

Resource competition has led to violence. Tensions have exacerbated Lebanon’s sectarian political arrangement, complicated further by high-profile assassinations. Lebanese attitudes from every religious sect and region have begun to turn against refugees. Approximately 170,000 Lebanese may be pushed into poverty in 2014 due to the downturn in the economy. There have been near-universal calls for closing the borders. Palestinian refugees from Syria are already barred from entering the country, although most checkpoints are porous in the sense that people can usually bribe their way into the country.

*Rami Khouri: Structural Roots of Refugee Flows—Sykes-Picot in Flux*

Khouri encouraged the audience to look beyond the immediate needs of displaced people and examine the roots of struggles that create refugees in the first place. Khouri argued that neighboring conflicts have led to a continuous flow of refugees in the region as well as increasing violence involving, first, Palestinians, then Lebanese, Iraqis, Syrians, and Somalis. “The refugee problem” should be seen as a symptom of the wider challenge of establishing stable and legitimate statehood.

Khouri contended that the state system in the Levant is fragile. Governments do not control all their territories; Syria, Yemen, and Somalia have no effective control over their populations. Borders mean little. Because people can move unhindered across borders, it is often difficult for states to maintain security. Weak states with growing political tensions and overburdened infrastructure find that effective responses to refugee issues are extremely complicated. Khouri decried the miniscule levels of coordination among the myriad states and humanitarian organizations that are trying to alleviate this situation.

Khouri asserted that the Syrian conflict exacerbates Lebanon’s 30-year-long internal struggle between pro-Hezbollah and anti-Hezbollah forces, a struggle that has entered the Syrian battlefield. Northern Hezbollah and Salafist groups now fight in both Syria and Lebanon. He argued that combatants freely cross borders and thus Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq could become a single battlefield for Salafist Takfiri militant groups. This could enable organizations such as Al-Nusra to operate as a single geopolitical movement. Khouri emphasized that this is a major problem in the world that can no longer be addressed by any one country.
Turning to the issues of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Khouri said that Lebanon has absorbed a “total displacement” of Syrian society comprising a wide range of socioeconomic classes of refugees – from millionaires to the poorest people. Lebanon’s initially welcoming stance was altered by concerns about security and the economic impact of helping refugees over the long term. To its credit, the Lebanese government has not closed borders, he said. Syrian refugees go wherever they can find shelter, food, medical aid, and income. Khouri encouraged researchers to delve deeper into refugee decision-making by learning how refugees make assessments of their own conditions. Khouri suggested a series of questions that as yet have not been adequately addressed: When do people move? Where do they decide to go? To what extent do they go where aid is available or where relatives are present? When do they decide to work illegally or legally? When do they decide to return to Syria? Understanding the answers to these questions would help in coordinating responses to all refugee crises.

Khouri reminded the audience that the varied responses of refugees to their depleted life conditions represent normal human reactions. What makes the situation unique is that it has lasted for so long: While, the Assad regime’s criminal behavior and incompetence initiated the Syrian uprising, he said, the underlying conditions were created by historic, illegal, international conduct. He included Arab colonization, the American-British invasion of Iraq, and what he termed Israeli criminal action. The consequences of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq unleashed sectarianism and created areas of mass disruption in which militants could operate freely.

Discussion:

Davis wondered if Lebanon, like Jordan, has weak municipalities that cannot be adequately empowered to respond to the needs of communities and refugees. Khouri replied that Lebanese municipalities’ “anemic tribal representation” do not have money or serious authority with which to operate. Public institutions generally lack efficacy, credibility, and legitimacy unless an individual leader makes it happen. Citizens cannot hold the Lebanese government accountable, and the government lacks the technical capability to deliver services.
Fricke, a human rights consultant specializing in refugee-related issues in the Middle East and Africa, described the challenges facing those who try to document sexual violence in the midst of the Syrian crisis. Fricke began by defining gender-based violence as “any harmful act perpetrated against a person’s will, especially violence based on socially ascribed gender differences between males and females.” Sexual violence includes exploitation, abuse, and forced prostitution. Women are generally seen as most vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), yet men are also at risk, especially during detention in Syria. Due to the sensitive nature of the issue and the dangerous environment surrounding it, Fricke said collecting authoritative data on sexual violence is very difficult and reliable information is scarce.

Fricke described several challenges to documenting gender-based violence and emphasized they are not unique to the Syrian crisis. Often victims are exposed to sexual diseases and trauma because they do not have access to or the ability to seek immediate medical care. The lack of patient confidentiality in small communities like refugee camps can make it dangerous for survivors to seek medical care because any information gathered by healthcare providers may be quickly leaked to the general community; even the fear of this happening is enough to chill access among survivors. Some initiatives focus on educating doctors about SGBV in order to encourage the doctors to maintain confidentiality for such patients and to improve their treatment...
methods. At the same time, Fricke observed that in some cases the widespread nature of sexual violence may reduce the negative stigma.

Fricke said ethical concerns about collecting data that documents sexual violence have made it difficult to shape both policy and justice initiatives. The absence of methodologically sound data, particularly in the Syria context, is frustrating because researchers know anecdotally it is occurring but it is very hard to determine prevalence. Humanitarian service providers in the Middle East region might have access to important data about sexual violence, but because their access to at-risk populations is dependent on the government in power, publicizing or even sharing this data could jeopardize their ability to continue providing services. Operational humanitarian actors are not legally obliged to disclose this data to other organizations. Moreover, where such data is accrued informally, it’s legal strength and credibility are weakened. Fricke added that when performed without adequate attention to protection measures, the collection of data can endanger survivors as well as humanitarian workers serving those populations by alerting perpetrators to their work.

Fricke outlined the two main approaches to addressing sexual violence. First, she described the “livelihoods-based” approach, focusing on a survivor’s overall economic, psychosocial and health needs rather than the pursuit of justice for perpetrators. Providing economic aid and humanitarian assistance best helps survivors over the long term. “Neutral spaces” such as women’s centers and similar environments are vital for attending to the medical and psychosocial needs of survivors. Where reporting is a goal, effective neutral spaces should have a preexisting use that is valid so that a person has a reason to be there other than to report gender-based violence.

A second approach focuses on justice, including prosecuting the perpetrators of sexual violence. Fricke noted that many humanitarians find this approach detracts from individuals’ actual physical needs in wartime and, where adequate supports are lacking, may do more harm than good. The critique of the justice approach is that refugees and displaced people have suffered, and that corrupt courts and overburdened institutions are untrustworthy vehicles for punishing perpetrators. Expending energy on justice does not address survivors’ immediate requirements - such as meaningful work, food, and shelter. Significantly, however, for those individuals interested in pursuing justice for human rights violations such as sexual and gender based violence, documentation of their stories can be empowering and significant acts of resilience, and that while successful prosecutions may be rare, each court decision strengthens the fight against impunity for sexual and gender based violations. Fricke noted that the humanitarian stance does not consider access to legal counsel a service that is necessary for survivors of sexual and gender based violence in emergencies. This posture, seen by some as paternalistic, effectively tells survivors what is good for them instead of letting them decide on their own how to proceed. Critics of the classic humanitarian position would say that by preserving the choice to pursue justice for the perpetrators, survivors’ best interests are served.

Fricke concluded with suggestions of potential strategies for overcoming the challenges to documentation. First, documenters of sexual violence must seek more creative ways to acquire data without endangering humanitarian service providers or the women they serve. Second, she suggested an increased use of female interpreters and focus on communication strategies that use culturally relevant terminology. Third, she emphasized common sense measures like the use of neutral meeting spaces when speaking with victims of sexual violence, and the importance of
remaining cognizant of the kinds of information collected, and for what purpose. Protection of documenters and survivors is the most important goal.

Discussion:
Myers disagreed with Fricke’s emphasis on data collection for eliciting policy action. Myers emphasized that preventive measures should always be in place rather than rely on data to first prove the existence of sexual violence. UNRWA runs several gender-based violence projects that focus on adolescents because the organization assumes that gender violence is prevalent and must be addressed. Myers argued that humanitarian workers need to preserve the community’s social fabric and sustain traditional structures, however defined, that best protect vulnerable people.
Already dealing with its own political turmoil and violent upheaval, Iraq has absorbed approximately 217,000 refugees since borders opened in mid-2012. 95% of the refugees have settled in Iraqi Kurdistan. While the Kurdish Regional Government “generously” accommodates most Syrian refugees, Iraq often denies border access. After months-long closures, Syrians flood across in the tens of thousands. Syrians continue to cross into Iraq to collect supplies and then return home.

Syrian refugees compete for space and resources with Iraqis fleeing the fighting in Anbar Province. Iraqi instability has led to approximately 20,000 refugees returning to Kurdish areas of Syria last year.

Only 5-10% of children are able to attend school due to language barriers, a lack of space, and the need for children to help support their families’ sustenance. UNHCR-planned interventions in 2014 aim to provide classrooms closer to refugee settlements, remedial classes for students, and instruction in Arabic.

Muhamed Almaliky: Perpetual War & the Refugee Problem

Almaliky laid out four characteristics of refugee presence in Iraq. First, it is a relatively new phenomenon. Wars in Iraq have tended to generate rather than receive refugees. Second, refugees are primarily a Kurdish concern rather than an Iraqi one. Kurds comprise 97 percent of
refugees. The Kurdistan Regional Government has issued residence cards to the refugees in order to guarantee rights to employment, healthcare, and education. Third, Syrian refugees in Iraq have not received enough international media coverage even though UNHCR predicts there will be 350,000 Syrian refugees in Iraq by the end of 2014. Although Iraq has accepted 10 percent of Syria’s refugees over the past 18 months, it has only received 6 percent of the international funds, he said.

Finally and most critically, the influx of Syrian refugees has disrupted fragile social and institutional redevelopment after years of war in Iraq. Their arrival has exacerbated Iraq’s strained infrastructure, unstable political environment, and sectarian strife. Overcrowded refugee camps and urban migrants have further depleted Iraq’s limited resources. During the most recent Iraq war, Sunni jihadi fighters entered Iraq through Syria. Now Baghdad worries that Sunni opponents to Iraq and Syria will form a common cause.

Almaliky commented on Iraq’s triple burden: Iraq must accommodate Syrian refugees primarily in the northern Kurdish region; 1.3 million Iraqi refugees are returning after having fled the Iraq war to Syria; and there are an estimated one million internally displaced persons. Refugees have overwhelmed camps and urban settings. 60 percent of refugees live in urban makeshift shelters, schools, libraries, warehouses, and mosques. Refugees compete with local communities for housing, jobs, and services. He said that men, primarily low-skilled and uneducated laborers without assets, search for work while women and children beg at street corners. Their economic struggles combined with Iraq’s institutional deficiencies have meant that more than 70 percent of children are not enrolled in school.

**Diane King: Finding Flexibility in Migration & Resettlement: the Kurdish Refuge System**

King, a cultural anthropologist, asserted that historically in the Middle East mass migration was a regular part of life. Social structures allowed for people’s absorption into new orders. However, more recent conceptions of migrations and resettlement have calcified identity categories that slowly merged with official state identities. King encouraged the audience to recognize that for the foreseeable future a centralized Syrian state has fractured into multiple contested sovereignties. The international community needs a more flexible model that does not tie refugees as strongly to a state identity, allowing refugees to pursue more satisfactory options for resettlement.

For thousands of years, she said, Kurdish areas in the mountains have been zones of flight and refuge. When conquering powers overtook territory, populations would flee to the
mountains. People we now call refugees often sought a powerful yet merciful patron to protect them and to provide either a means to return home or resettlement. When Kurdish chiefs granted refuge, people could be incorporated into society within four generations by drawing on a patrilineal lineage. If someone had a son who married a local girl, their children would generally be considered liminal in the sense of being at an intermediate stage of local belonging. The following generation might face some questions of origin, but by the fourth generation the family would be considered as Kurdish as anyone else.

The modern state system is much less fluid. The population is now ten times larger than it was a hundred years ago, and for the last three generations identity categories have been tied to the state model. Now refugees subsist without identification cards; they struggle to travel and resettle – as if in permanent liminality. Local leaders cannot incorporate people into their communities as they used to do.

In addition, the Syrian conflict has redrawn the Sykes-Picot Agreement. The emerging state order includes an uncontested Kurdish area while Syria’s fragmented control will probably generate several “statelets.” If the international community holds onto the Sykes-Picot model and does not recognize these statelets then the populations will remain refugees. Without a more flexible model their lives will not improve for a long time.

**Shamiran Mako: the Iraqi Governance & Refugee Flows**

Mako, the third speaker on the Iraq panel, asked how a state that emerged in 2003 can accommodate mass displacements that have occurred as a result of the war. Her discussion focused on how Iraqi state institutions have handled the repatriation of refugees and internally displaced persons within the country. She described some of the legislation and legal framework in Iraq that relates to repatriation, such as property reconciliation and right of return, asserting that many of the Iraqi structures are at an impasse partly because they are disconnected from one another.

Mako described two main phenomena that hinder repatriation efforts by officials at the national, regional, and local levels: the presence of a power vacuum in the security sector and an intensification of communal conflict. Iraq’s security sector was damaged by the U.S. invasion of the country and ethnic targeting has run rampant. Returning Iraqis, fearing for their own security, tend to move back to friendly communal areas rather than the homes they left. Mako observed that the presence of a half million unemployed, armed men contributed to the dramatic rise in civilian casualties in 2013: 140,000 Iraqis have been displaced and 9,000 killed since July 2013.

Mako concluded with recommendations to help ameliorate the displacement crisis in Iraq. Violent groups should be restricted from politics, and sectarian influences should be removed from government posts including posts in the security sector. To help prevent election fraud, she also argued that refugees and internally displaced people should be allowed to vote wherever they find themselves on the day of election.
About the Authors

Louise Klann, Editor

Louise Klann is an M.A. candidate at Boston University in International Relations & Religion, specializing in transnational Islamic politics in Egypt and the Levant. She is also a Graduate Research Assistant in International Relations. Her research examines the changing shape of politics after the Arab Uprisings—as people, ideas and proxy militant groups more easily cross borders. She completed her B.A. in International Relations at Tufts University. Her longstanding interest in the region began during summers that she and her family spent in Beirut. She was also the editor of the report on the November 15, 2013, international conference on "The Arab Uprisings: Accomplishments, Failures and Prospects", which was also convened at Boston University.

Martha Lagace, Assistant Editor

Martha Lagace is a 4th year PhD student in social anthropology at Boston University. She is interested in the anthropology of war and peacemaking, especially issues of personhood and justice in east-central Africa. She was a journalist in Prague for eight years.