Identity in Protracted Displacement: Exploring Identity of Palestinian and Syrian Refugees Living in Lebanon

Shelbi Macken

School of Applied Psychology, UCC

Abstract

Since the onset of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, over 5 million Syrians have been displaced globally, with no clear end in sight for the ongoing conflict (UNHCR 2017a). Syrian refugees are now worried they will be facing a situation similar to that of the Palestinians living in displacement in Lebanon for over 50 years as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict (United Nations 1951). Currently, almost 1.5 million Palestinian and Syrians are seeking refuge in Lebanon, representing over a quarter of the total Lebanese population. In a country that is recovering from its own civil conflict, the surge of displaced Syrians, in addition to the resident Palestinian refugee population, has led to increased tensions between the Lebanese host and refugee communities. Increased labour competition, housing prices and pressure on limited resources have, in particular, contributed to this polarisation. Feelings of uncertainty for the future and a loss of identity are pervasive within the displaced Syrian population in Lebanon as they attempt to navigate survival in a new environment. In Syria, individual identities are highly influenced by religious, ethnic and tribal identities. Through civil war, these salient identities have become challenged and fragmented, pressuring displaced Syrians to continuously shape and reshape their identities in response to factors such as the ongoing conflict at home and the local landscape of displacement, as well as the global narrative environment currently beleaguering Syrian refugees. In contrast, Palestinians displaced in Lebanon have undergone multiple identity transformations throughout their protracted displacement, which are echoed in a culmination of active local and global Palestinian identities. Through reviewing literature surrounding the Palestinian and Syrian displacement, this paper seeks to provide a framework for understanding the intersectionality and complexity of identity development and the means by which this transformation affects refugee communities living in protracted displacement.

Introduction

After the 2011 uprisings, millions of Syrians fled to neighbouring countries for safety. March 2017 marked the sixth year of the Syrian Conflict, still, at the time of writing, without a clear end in sight. Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan host the world's highest populations of Syrian refugees. Lebanon currently has the highest percentage of Syrian refugees per capita. With around one million Syrian refugees scattered throughout various regions of Lebanon, the Syrian refugee population comprises almost 25% of the inhabitants in Lebanon (UNHCR 2016; 2017b). Without official camps set up for Syrian refugees in Lebanon, many are

scattered throughout residential areas in the Bekka, North Lebanon and Beirut/Mount Lebanon regions of the country (UNHCR 2017b). Many refugees who fled Syria without documentation have sought refuge in the official Palestinian Camps in Lebanon to avoid deportation, as these camps are not patrolled by Lebanese authorities (Parkinson and Behrouzan 2015). Within Lebanon, Syrian refugees have been given minimal rights and have been discouraged from integrating into Lebanese society (Thorleifsson 2016). Both inside and outside of the camps, Syrian refugees face numerous barriers in access to paid labour, housing, safety, medical assistance and education (Norwegian Refugee Council 2014).

Limited access to education, risks to safety, isolation and early marriage are some of the challenges that are faced by Syrian refugees living in Lebanon. The ability for Syrian refugee youth to attend Lebanese schools, for example, is very limited due to many schools being tied to political party membership. Furthermore, while Syrian children are able to attend part-time education in Lebanese schools (Parkinson 2014), safety concerns while travelling to school act as a large barrier for many. This is especially true for females, who report experiences of real or perceived risks to safety when outside of the home (International Rescue Committee 2014; Hassan et al. 2015; Yasmine and Moughalian 2016). This has led to a large number of young girls not continuing education and being kept within the home. Early marriage of adolescent girls has increased compared to rates prior to displacement due both to an inability to attend educational institutions and an overwhelming lack of physical and/or financial security for unmarried women (Cherri et al. 2017; International Rescue Committee, 2014; Hassan et al. 2016). This is typically done in hopes that marriage will provide young females with physical and financial security. However, this comes with issues of isolation as studies report that girls who have been subjected to early marriage have an increased risk of becoming isolated within the home (Cherri et al. 2017).

In addition to the challenges outlined above, Syrian refugees face increasing competition with locals in their host country. In a country that has been recovering from its own past civil conflict, the surge of displaced inhabitants has also had a large effect on Lebanese society. Rights to work are limited for refugees within Lebanon and many jobs that are acquired by the refugees are grossly underpaid. Lebanese citizens have reported that their ability to financially support themselves is being affected by the low wages afforded to refugee workers by employers (Christophersen et al. 2013; Thorleifsson 2016). Issues such as this have led to increased tensions and polarisation between the two populations (Christophersen et al. 2013; Midgley and Eldebo 2013; Thorleifsson 2016). Common Lebanese discourses about Syrian refugees include labelling Syrian women as promiscuous and "husband stealers" (Thorleifsson 2016, p. 1079), blaming Syrian refugees for the lack of

paid work and housing (Thorleifsson 2016) and bullying of children by Lebanese classmates and school teachers (DeJong et al. 2017). This polarisation between Syrian refugees and the Lebanese populations, along with the lack of social rights afforded to Syrian refugees, can have important effects on certain aspects of psychosocial wellbeing such as identity.

Collective identities evolve over time due to pressures acting upon them from, for example, the ways in which the group is viewed by others, or from constraints such as social rules and governmental policies. At the same time, these collective identities have the ability to bring people together to shift social norms and influence local, national and global policies (Ertorer 2014; Hopkins 2008; Phinney et al. 2001). Within diaspora populations, retaining a collective ethnic identity while trying to simultaneously adjust to the host culture can be difficult (Tint et al. 2017). Identity, according to Human Needs Theory (Burton 1990; Danielsen 2005), is a universal human need and can aid in psychological wellbeing (Çelebi et al. 2017; Jetten et al. 2012; Luckyx and Robitschek 2014; Phinney et al. 2001). Having a strong sense of a collective identity, therefore, can be of particular importance for those who have experienced conflict. Idenitity theorists Stets and Burke (2014) also explain how verification of certain identity meanings allows for one to feel valuable to their group and contributes to an individual's self-worth and self-esteem. Further research shows that a strong sense of identity is beneficial for psychosocial wellbeing and that a collective identity can serve as a protective factor against psychological disorders, such as PTSD and depression, in times of rupture (Çelebi et al. 2017; Jetten et al. 2012; Phinney et al. 2001; Smeekes et al. 2017).

Recent studies have identified that Syrian refugees living in Jordan, Egypt, Turkey and Lebanon are experiencing feelings around a loss of identity and social cohesion due to displacement (Çelebi et al. 2017; Hassan et al. 2015; Kira et al. 2017; Yasmine and Moughalian 2016). While certain studies state that Syrian refugees are feeling a loss of identity, deeper exploration into the psychological processes of this phenomenon is currently under researched. However, there is a long history of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, whose shifting identity researchers have been able to record through their years of protracted displacement. Palestinians have been living in official refugee camps in Lebanon for over 60 years without being allowed to integrate into Lebanese society (Farah 2012; Fincham 2012; Haddad and Jamali 2003; Hanafi 2010; Thorleifsson 2016). Much like Syrian refugees, Palestinian refugees have been given minimal rights within Lebanon. However, over the years, there has been an evolution of a strong local and global Palestinian identity despite the long term yet systematically temporary nature of their displacement (Farah 2012; Fincham 2012; Holt 2010). This raises questions as to how Palestinian refugees have a strong

collective national identity that supports feelings of cohesiveness while Syrian refugees are reportedly feeling a loss of community and a lack of a cohesive collective identity (Çelebi et al. 2017; Kira et al. 2017; Yasmine and Moughalian 2016). By looking at how Palestinians living in a similar context have constructed and reconstructed their collective Palestinian identity over long term displacement through a sociocultural framework of transitions, it can be seen more clearly how identity in protracted displacement evolves. This will be done by first outlining a sociocultural framework of transitions, which will then be used to examine Palestinian refugees' utilisation of symbolic resources in identity construction, a mode of inquiry which can "[offer] new access for investigating processes of change in people's lives" (Zittoun 2007, p. 347). These processes will then be compared to what is known of the Syrian refugees within Lebanon. Political and gender intersectionalities, for both Palestinian and Syrian refugees, will also be explored through a sociocultural psychological perspective. Through this, questions are formulated for further study into Syrian identity that may help us understand the identity needs of those living in crisis and can serve as a basis for participatory social action.

Sociocultural Framework of Transitions

Both Syrians and Palestinians have experienced ruptures due to being forced to flee from their home countries. Sociocultural psychologists view ruptures as initiating a psychosocial transition process through which an individual comes to re-define their position within the world. In sociocultural literature, ruptures are defined as experiences "that substantially question a person's daily life or current routines," (Zittoun et al. 2013, p. 262) which "requires new ways of handling one's daily reality… and do[es] not allow a return to the initial state" (ibid.). In response to these ruptures, transitions are made in which one comes to a new state of being. According to Zittoun (2008), three interdependent processes make up all transitions: acquisition of new knowledge and skills, sense making and changes to identity. The focus of this paper will be mainly on the changes to identity; however, because these processes are interdependent, theories of sense-making and knowledge acquisition will be interwoven.

One of the most influential components in shifts to identity, as a part of the transition process, is the meaning-making process, during which one is able to define oneself within the present in relation to both past experiences and ideas of the future (Zittoun et al. 2013). These meaning-making processes are constantly taking place as individuals move through their lives and develop. Through the use of semiotic and symbolic resources, individuals are able to better understand their self and others within their social worlds. Semiotic resources are

grounded in culture (Zittoun 2009). They are objects that have a meaning which is available to anyone in a community, assuming that access to such resources is not restricted. The meanings of these resources are taught by both formal institutions, such as schools and religious centres, and informal institutions, such as family and peer groups (Zittoun and Gillespie 2015). Meanings given to and taken from these signs are not fixed and are constantly evolving as one develops and as their social world changes (Zittoun et al. 2013). Typically, semiotic resources occur in the form of signs, which are objects that act upon the mind of the individual and represent objects or ideas outside of their physical form (Gillespie and Zittoun 2010; Zittoun 2009). Signs are given meaning through development and discourse with those individuals in a given social environment.

A semiotic resource becomes symbolic when it moves outside of its socially shared meaning and is used by an individual as a reminder or initiator of a meaning that is personal and significant (Zittoun 2009). People who have experienced ruptures are more likely to utilise these shared semiotic resources as symbolic resources to aid the transition process (Zittoun 2007) by "turning the unfamiliar into manageable environments" (p. 344). Ruptures that come from relocation, as in the case of Palestinian and Syrian refugees, can result in a loss of certain parts of physical and social environments that once contained signs that provided stability to identity (Zittoun 2007; Zittoun and Cerchia 2013; Zittoun et al. 2013). These could include trinkets, food or music, but meaning-making can also be tied to larger things such as a house or land (Zittoun et al. 2013). Physical environments that once contained semiotic resources which helped to reinforce an ethnic or national identity may not be as readily available in situations where one has been forced to flee from their homeland into unfamiliar territory.

The camps in Lebanon can be viewed as an incubator for a Palestinian national identity. Many living within the camps have a very strong sense of what it means to be Palestinian (Farah 2012; Fincham 2012; Turan 2015). In the camp, there are signs which evoke an imagined space of Palestine that has lived on throughout decades of displacement. In various places in the camps, the Palestinian flag and other symbols are displayed, acting as a reminder for the camps' residents of their "Palestinianess" (Fincham 2012, p. 122). Graffiti that tells stories of a lost homeland and that conveys hope for a reclamation of what was lost similarly adorns the camps. These physical representations act as a confirmation that the collective Palestinian identity still exists (Turan 2010). However, the few Palestinians that were allowed to integrate into Lebanese society and live outside of the camps do not, reportedly, feel these same strong ties to Palestine (Farah 2012). Farah (2012) found evidence of a shift in identity to be a mixture of Lebanese and Palestinian for those living outside of

the camps and further found that this group does not evince a strong desire to return to a land that they have never known.

Social institutions, such as schools, religious institutions or communities, typically act as structuring frameworks for identity and meaning within the social context (Assman and Czaplicka 1995; Zittoun et al. 2013) and, in times of conflict and forced displacement, these influential social elements can be lost or weakened. During times of rupture, objects, social bonds or meanings tied to a certain identity (i.e. gender, race, profession) can create continuity for that particular identity. Zittoun et al. (2013) state that this would allow other identities or meanings tied to multiple identities to shift and evolve. Cultural signs become increasingly important here through allowing one to make meaning of a new situation while also creating stability for other identities during periods of transition. Through institutions within Palestinian camps, there is a binding of the past with the present in order to construct what it means to be Palestinian (Fincham 2012); this is mainly an identity that is tied to struggle and resistance. Fincham (2012) outlines how schools and other institutions within the camps are named after famous villages where massacres occurred, reinforcing the identity of a persecuted nation. These institutions act as "facilitating environments" (Turan 2010) for a collective identity, where meanings of identity are transmitted within and across generations. In addition, stories are passed down through families about the villages that they came from and what life was like in Palestine (Fincham 2012; Holt 2010; Turan 2010). Even though they have never been there, children three generations after initial displacement can describe in detail what the village looked like or how people lived their lives in Palestine (Holt 2010). The transmission of stories throughout generations ties their meaning of being Palestinian to these imagined spaces which are not constrained by time.

Considering how these camps have served as a space for the transmission of cultural signs for a Palestinian national identity, it leads one to wonder about the Syrian experience; because Syrian refugees are scattered throughout different areas in Lebanon, are there spaces available within their community in which cultural signs are displayed to reinforce feelings of 'Syrianness'? In addition, semiotic and symbolic resources serve as a way for individuals to distance themselves from their current experiences in order to create new meaning. This distancing happens through the ability to reflect on past experiences and how they relate to the present, while also considering how this will orient one in the future (Zittoun et al. 2013). Symbolic resources assist in this process by allowing an individual to engage reflectively, either consciously or subconsciously. The use of symbolic resources relies on certain abilities to call upon memories and images within the environment (Zittoun 2007). These memories must be connected with one's conscious and unconscious thoughts while also being in touch

with experiences in the real world. Researchers who use a Life Story Model to explain identity formation (McAdams 1988; McLean 2005; Pasupathi et al. 2007) also find that memory of past experiences helps to create meaning in what is being experienced in the present and helps to form imagined futures. When one has experienced traumatic events, as in the case of many Syrian refugees, the ability to call upon specific memories which would help to make meanings in the current situation may be hindered (Lacapra 2016; Cote and Levine 2014). Many Syrians in Lebanon have experienced traumatisation through both the war and subsequent forced fleeing of their home and may have experienced further trauma from either their living conditions in Lebanon or from hearing tragic news of loved ones that have remained in Syria (Kerbage and Marranconi 2017). These ongoing traumatic experiences restrict their ability to distance themselves from their current experiences (Lacapra 2016; Zittoun et al. 2013). Thus, there is a limited ability for them to enter into an imagined space and create meaning from their experiences in order to reconstruct a fractured identity (Cote and Levine 2014; Lacapra 2016; Zittoun et al. 2013).

This inability to enter into an imagined space is exacerbated by the yet unclear future of many Syrians living in Lebanon. These refugees are unsure whether they will be able to return to Syria, if they should attempt to integrate into a host community that is discriminatory towards them or if they should try to resettle in a different country (Jazairi 2015). Individuals act in their present world in expectation of certain potential futures to become manifested (Zittoun et al. 2013). These actions depend on the ability to imagine these futures as being real and enter into this imagined space, an ability that may be hindered by the experience of traumatic events and an inability to envisage the future due to ongoing legal and political uncertainty.

Intersectionality of Identities

Through social processes and the use of cultural resources such as signs, a person comes to define themselves as belonging to different groups. This is something that is learned through interactions with the environment and others (Adams and Marshall 1996; Hopkins and Reicher 2011; McLean 2005). Group identity is not singular. An individual can have various identities, but those which are most salient are dependent on the social and contextual factors that one experiences at given points in time. It is through processes of self-categorization and social comparison (Stets and Burke 2000; Tajfel 1982) that individuals are able to position themselves within different social groups as they develop. When one is born, he or she is ascribed certain social identities such as race, gender or ethnicity (Stets and Burke 2000; 2014). At first these social identities or categories may only have meaning through claiming

membership. However, through development, the meaning ascribed to a certain identity evolves through interacting with others enacting that same identity. This is what Stets and Burke (2014) have defined as a group identity. For example, at a young age, through sign usage in the form of customs, music and food, Palestinian youth are taught what it means to be Palestinian. Additionally, sociocultural psychologists discuss how, in development, one discovers what something is by concurrently discovering what it is not (Zittoun et al. 2013). Through this process, Palestinian youth are able to distinguish themselves and other things in the world as being Palestinian through not being something else. For example, 'this tradition is Palestinian because it is NOT Lebanese' or 'I AM Palestinian because I am NOT Israeli'. Through the understanding of what is and is not, one is able to position oneself within the world through the meanings given to these constructed definitions. These meanings then act upon a specific social identity which may reinforce or confirm membership of a specific group (Stryker 1968; 2000; Stryker and Burke 2010).

Zittoun and Gillespie (2015) describe how individuals move through social positions throughout development. While moving through these different positions, however, past experiences are not discarded but are layered within an individual's psychological world. They explain how people have both proximal and distal experiences. Proximal experiences are those that are lived in the present moment, while distal experiences are those that were once proximal experiences in the past but are still being utilised. Although one may be in a certain proximal experience, multiple distal experiences may also be active at the same time. These experiences can create conflict with each other in an individual's psychological world as one experience may be fundamentally different than another. Zittoun and Gillespie (2015) use the example of a parent who was once a child themself and currently needs to discipline their own child. Their past experience of being a child conflicts with their current need to be an authoritative figure. This concept of layered experiences can translate into the concept of the intersectionality of identities and the layering of the multiple identities which one may possess at any given point in time. As demonstrated by the example of the parent, at a given point in time one may be experiencing a specific aspect of his or her identity that is dominant, but there are also multiple other identities that are still active on the peripheries. These multiple 'distal' identities may conflict with the current dominant active identity. For example, while one may identify with a larger group identity such as nationality, he or she may also belong to other groups which may compete with each other, such as a religious or political affiliation, or a gender. Within the larger group identities of being Palestinian or Syrian, there are multiple political or religious identities which may have more salience than a collective national identity. The ways in which these different identity layers interact with

each other has consequences for which identity is more salient at any given point in time. How this intersectionality affects shifts in identity for Syrian refugees adjusting to a life in displacement is a question that should be explored further, as it could offer insights into processes of integration and facilitating social cohesion.

Identity theorists also discuss these multiple identities in terms of salience hierarchies (Stets and Burke 2000; Stryker 1968; 2000; Stryker and Burke, 2010). Identity theory explores salience as a function of commitment: the more people one knows who share the same identity, and the stronger his or her bonds are to the others in that group, the more salient the identity will be (Stets and Burke 2000). In addition, identities need to be confirmed by others within the group. This identity verification interacts with self-esteem and the process can be cyclical. The greater salience an identity has, the greater the need for verification. If an identity is verified by others, it will result in increased self-esteem and strengthen the salience of the identity (Stets and Burke 2000; Stryker and Burke 2010). If an identity is not confirmed in certain situations or conflicts with roles required by other identities, the salience of that specific identity or the conflicting identities may decrease.

There are two major political parties to which Palestinians living in refugee camps have loyalty towards (Fincham 2012; Schanzer 2008). The Fatah is a party that carries the belief that the future state of Palestine should be a secular state. Hamas believes that this future Palestine should be an official Islamic state. The parties' differing visions of what the Palestinian state should look like in the future creates tensions within the wider Palestinian community (Fincham 2012). Within the camps, this promotes differing views of what it means to be a true Palestinian. However, despite the internal differences between different groups of Palestinian political parties, they are still able to unify under a strong national identity with meanings of persecution and resistance (Turan 2015). This could be due to the fact that certain meanings of Palestinian identity and political identity are shared between the two identities. Therefore, performing behaviours to verify one identity will also verify the other and will not necessarily create conflicts between the meanings tied to each identity (Stryker and Burke 2010). However, identifying as Palestinian may not be as salient for minorities such as Palestinian Christians. A major site of transmission of Palestinian identity is also tied to religious social institutions such as Mosques and many, therefore, view being Palestinian as being part of an Islamic state (Fincham 2012). Those who do not identify as Muslim may rather be integrated into Lebanese society than be tied to a nation in which they are marginalised. This phenomenon can be explained by Identity Theory. Palestinian Christians' social ties may be greater with other Christians than with Palestinian Muslims, creating more commitment to a Christian identity than a Palestinian identity (Stryker 1968;

2000; Stryker and Burke 2010). As stated above, the greater commitment one has toward an identity, the greater the need for verification of the identity (Stryker 2000). Because the wider narrative of being Palestinian is tied to being Muslim, role behaviours associated with a Christian identity may not, therefore, be verified by others holding a Palestinian identity that is tied to being Muslim. This may, then, be an indication of the decreased salience of a Palestinian identity for those who would rather integrate into their host community than fight for a Palestinian state.

Findings from Palestinians in Lebanon are also relevant for Syrians living there. The situations are comparable in a number of ways. For example, Syria and Palestine are both religiously and ethnically diverse (Phillips 2015). Despite their diversity, Syria's constitution identifies Syria as being a member of the Union of Arab Republics (Jazairi 2015), creating tensions between Syria's many ethnic and political sects. Furthermore, the civil unrest in Syria has arisen as a result of fighting between these different groups. This has, since the Arab Spring Uprisings of 2011, resulted in deep mistrust between many of those groups who once lived together in the same communities (Hasan et al. 2015; Salm 2016). Many refugees have been displaced due to fear of persecution because of their real or perceived association with certain political or religious groups. Being persecuted for belonging to a certain group may act to verify a particular political or religious identity (Tajfel 1982), thereby making it more salient. This conflict between groups may be a contribution to reported feelings of lost identity and social cohesiveness between Syrian refugees while in displacement, as political and religious ties may be more salient at this point in time than the more encompassing identity of being Syrian (Hassan et al. 2015).

Gender

Studies completed with Palestinians living in Lebanese camps (Fincham 2012) have identified family structures as one of the main institutions for identity development. Women's roles are important to discuss in terms of identity development because in many different contexts women are viewed as the "carriers of culture" (Phinney et al. 2001, p. 504). In many Middle Eastern countries, women pass down culture and national identity through traditionally domestic roles such as through the preparation and serving of food, or through raising children. Among those in the camps, Palestinian women were once given the title of "mothers of the nation" (Fincham 2012, p. 128), relaying the expectation to bear as many children as possible in order to keep the Palestinian nation alive. This greatly restricted them to a space only within the home through the responsibilities of bearing and raising the future representatives of Palestine. However, Palestinian women have become important in creating

a strong Palestinian national identity through passing on cultural narratives through generations (Holt 2010). Through the experience of other ruptures within displacement, such as uprisings in the camps and a significant loss of male leadership during certain time periods, Palestinian women's identities shifted from more passive, homebound roles to active ones, giving these women greater influence throughout different social institutions and allowing them to have a strong voice in the shared Palestinian identity of suffering and resistance.

Currently, many displaced Syrian women are experiencing isolation and are constricted to the home (Boswall and Al Akash 2015; International Rescue Committee 2014; Wells et al. 2016). In addition, many young Syrians are limited in their access to Lebanese educational institutions (Parkinson 2014; Parkinson and Behrouzan 2015). Due to safety concerns and early marriage, females are more likely to be kept from attending schools (International Rescue Committee 2014). Zittoun et al. (2013) speak about limits to identity changes, one of which is access to knowledge. Through being able to learn new information or ways of thinking, one is able to shift certain aspects of particular identities as he or she absorbs what they have learned into the sense of self and understanding of who one is. If access to knowledge is limited, it restricts the ways in which one can come to understand the world and make meaning of what one currently knows or has experienced in the past. In times of transition, this knowledge is needed in order to make meaning in a new social context. Hindered from being able to acquire new knowledge or skills by being restricted from learning new trades or attending educational institutions, it is possible that Syrian refugees (more specifically women) are limited in their ability to make new meanings of who they are in their social world. Furthermore, before displacement, community was something that largely contributed to meanings of identity for Syrian women (Boswall and Akash 2015). In a new context, in which safety outside of the home is questioned and isolation is typically the answer, meanings for women around their own identity may be going through transition. This transitional process for women, as seen with Palestinian refugees, may also have implications on the wider Syrian national identity.

Conclusion

Palestinian and Syrian refugees living in Lebanon are facing a liminal situation in that they are unable to return to their homelands. While Palestinian refugees have been living in displacement for over sixty years, strong Palestinian identity continues to exist, tied to a land that once was Palestine. The Syrian crisis, however, is still relatively recent and the effects of an uncertain future on the identity of displaced Syrian refugees is under researched. Within a

sociocultural framework, it can be theorised how Palestinians have come to construct a strong national identity within the context of protracted displacement. This, in turn, suggests certain means by which researchers can try to understand why Syrian refugees living in a similar context have reported feelings of a lost identity. By situating the study of identity transitions within a sociocultural framework, questions are uncovered which point towards developing a greater understanding of the processes of identity reconstruction in the context of being forced from one's country with no clear indication of when, or if, one will be able to return.

Through the use of cultural resources, Palestinians have been able to reconstruct and project a national identity of struggle and resistance in the Lebanese camps. Syrian refugees living in Lebanon are scattered throughout different areas: both urban and rural neighbourhoods and in the camps that were established for Palestinians. Taking this into consideration, it cannot be assumed, in this paper, that there is a lack of collective spaces for Syrian refugees to display signs of 'Syrianness' that would reinforce a feeling of social cohesion and collective identity while in displacement; however, some studies have indicated this (Cherri et al. 2017; Hassan et al. 2015; Kira et al. 2017). Further research could explore the places and settings in which Syrian refugees feel like their collective Syrian identity is most salient, along with the meaning-making processes that create such spaces. Individually, people may have brought objects from Syria with them to remind them of home, but these cultural resources may not have crossed the boundary of private to public, semiotic use. It would be beneficial to understand what cultural artefacts are currently used by Syrians in displacement to symbolise their identity on an individual level. By knowing what meaning-making, symbolic resources the displaced Syrians currently have access to, researchers could better understand the relationship between their present space (i.e. displacement in Lebanon) and the ability to enter into an imagined future through the mediation of signs. Discovering these semiotic and symbolic resources that are important for Syrian refugees would be consequential in understanding their shifting identities while in displacement and how these support psychological wellbeing. For Palestinians, this occurs within the camps, but the transmission of national identity does not need to be constricted within an isolated space. While having a strong sense of national identity is protective for psychological disorders such as severe depression and PTSD (Çelebi et al. 2017; Jetten et al. 2012; Phinney et al. 2001; Smeekes et al. 2017), the creation of highly politicised identities resulting from segregation of host and minority communities could lead to further conflict (Saab et al. 2017; Simon and Klandermans 2001). Social institutions that promote identity and contain cultural resources that interact with identity transitions can be present throughout communities. Educational and religious institutions as well as family and peer groups are sources of meaning-making that

influence identity (Hopkins and Reicher 2011; Zittoun et al. 2013). The following question, then, needs to be answered: what social institutions, through which meanings of identity are strengthened, are most important to Syrians?

As stated above, identity is not singular and there may be many different layers of identities that compete with an overarching Syrian national identity. The mistrust of those with loyalties to particular political, ethnic or religious groups – a mistrust planted in Syria – may travel with the refugees to Lebanon. This battle for identity salience could act as a hindrance to social cohesion within the wider Syrian refugee population. Studies that reported Syrians feeling a lack of collective identity and social cohesion (Çelebi et al. 2017; Kira et al. 2017; Yasmine and Moughalian 2016) did not further explore what factors were contributing to these feelings. Consequently, an exploration of how salient political and religious identities are for Syrians living in displacement is the next step for understanding if these competing identities are factors that contribute to feelings of lost social cohesion between Syrian refugees.

Lastly, gender is an important aspect to take into consideration when understanding the intersectionalities of identity. As women in many contexts are viewed as being the "carriers of culture" (Phinney et al. 2001, p. 504), they play an important role in transmission of identity and the narratives surrounding identities in transition. The isolation of female Syrian refugees is something that cannot be ignored when trying to grasp the dynamics of a loss of social cohesion in a culture that is closely tied to community (Boswall and Al Akash 2015). Understanding how women's roles have shifted during displacement and how that affects their understanding of themselves within their new surroundings, has many implications as to the type and effectiveness of the assistance they receive from humanitarian programmes. Therefore, it is of consequence to explore how Syrian women who are now experiencing isolation are able to currently make sense of their situation in displacement and how it will shift meanings surrounding a collective Syrian identity.

Shelbi Macken is a psychological researcher who graduated from University College Cork with a Masters in Applied Psychology. In 2017, she received an Excellence Scholarship through the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences to complete her PhD in Applied Psychology at University College Cork. Specialising in creative methods and participatory action research, her research interests are in understanding developmental transitions and identity shifts as a result of transnational migration.

Works Cited

Adams, G.R. and Marshall, S.K., 1996. A developmental social psychology of identity: Understanding the person-in-context. *Journal of adolescence*, 19 (5), pp. 429–442.

Assmann, J. and Czaplicka, J., 1995. Collective memory and cultural identity. *New German Critique*, (65), pp. 125–133.

Boswall, K., and Al Akash, R., 2015. Personal perspectives of protracted displacement: an ethnographic insight into the isolation and coping mechanisms of Syrian women and girls living as urban refugees in northern Jordan. *Intervention: International Journal of Mental Health, Psychosocial Work & Counselling in Areas of Armed Conflict,* 13 (3), pp. 203–215.

Burton, J., 1990. *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*. London, UK: Springer.

Çelebi, E., Verkuyten, M., and Bagci, S. C., 2017. Ethnic identification, discrimination, and mental and physical health among syrian refugees: The moderating role of identity needs. *European Journal of Social Psychology*. [e-journal] 47 (7), pp. 832–843. doi:10.1002/ejsp.2299

Cherri, Z., Gil Cuesta, J., Rodriguez-Llanes, J. M., and Guha-Sapir, D., 2017. Early Marriage and Barriers to Contraception among Syrian Refugee Women in Lebanon: A Qualitative Study. *International Journal Of Environmental Research And Public Health,* [e-journal] 14 (8), pp. 836–851. doi:10.3390/ijerph14080836

Christophersen, Mona, Jing Liu, Cathrine Moe Thorleifsson, and Å. Tiltnes. "Lebanese attitudes towards Syrian refugees and the Syrian crisis" [Accessed 29 November 2016].

Cote, J.E. and Levine, C.G., 2014. *Identity, formation, agency, and culture: A social psychological synthesis*. New York: Psychology Press.

Danielsen, G., 2005. *Meeting human needs, preventing violence: applying human needs theory to the conflict in Sri Lanka.* MA. Universidad del Salvador, Buenes Aires.

DeJong, J., Sbeity, F., Schlecht, J., Harfouche, M., Yamout, R., Fouad, F.M., Manohar, S. and Robinson, C., 2017. Young lives disrupted: gender and well-being among adolescent Syrian refugees in Lebanon. *Conflict and health*, 11 (1), pp. 23–34.

Ertorer, S. E., 2014. Managing Identity in the Face of Resettlement. *Identity,* [e-journal] 14 (4), pp. 268–285. doi:10.1080/15283488.2014.944695

Farah, M., (2011). *Home versus shelter: Place, media, and identity among Lebanon's Palestinian refugees*. Ph.D. New York University.

Fincham, K., 2012. Learning the nation in exile: constructing youth identities, belonging and 'citizenship' in Palestinian refugee camps in south Lebanon. *Comparative Education,* 48 (1), pp. 119–133.

Gillespie, A., and Zittoun, T., 2010. Using resources: Conceptualizing the mediation and reflective use of tools and signs. *Culture & Psychology,* 16 (1), pp. 37–62.

Haddad, S., and Jamali, D., 2003. The Politics of Refugees' Non Integration: The Dilemma of

Palestinians in Lebanon. *Journal of International Migration & Integration,* 4 (1), pp. 1–22.

Hanafi, S., 2010. Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon: Laboratory of Indocile Identity Formation. In: M. A. Khalidi , ed. *Manifestations of Identity: The Lived Reality of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon*. Washington D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies. pp. 45–74.

Hassan, G., Kirmayer, L.J., Mekki-Berrada, A., Quosh, C., el Chammay, R., Deville-Stoetzel, J.B., Youssef, A., Jefee-Bahloul, H., Barkeel-Oteo, A., Coutts, A. and Song, S., 2015. Culture, context and the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of Syrians: a review for mental health and psychosocial support staff working with Syrians affected by armed conflict. Geneva: UNHCR.

Hassan, G., Ventevogel, P., Jefee-Bahloul, H., Barkil-Oteo, A., and Kirmayer, L. J., 2016. Mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of Syrians affected by armed conflict. *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences,* [e-journal] 25 (2), pp. 129–141. doi:10.1017/S2045796016000044

Holt, M., 2010. 'Moving from silence into speech': Palestinian refugee women in Lebanon speak about their lives. *Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture,* [e-journal] 1(1), pp. 69–86. doi:10.1386/cjmc.1.69_1

Hopkins, N., 2008. Idenity, Practice and Dialogue. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology,* 18 (4), pp. 363–368.

Hopkins, N., and Reicher, S., 2011. Identity, culture and contestation: Social identity as cross-cultural theory. *Psychological Studies,* 56 (1), pp. 36–43.

International Rescue Committee, 2014. Are we listening? Acting on our commitments to women and girls affected by Syrian conflict. IRC.

Jazairi, R. A., 2015. Transitional Justice in Syria: The Role and Contribution of Syrian Refugees and Displaced Persons. *Middle East Law & Governance,* [e-journal] 7 (3), pp. 336–359. doi:10.1163/18763375-00703002

Jetten, J., Haslam, C., and Haslam, A. S., 2012. *The social cure: Identity, health and wellbeing*. New York: Psychology Press.

Kerbage, H., and Marranconi, F., 2017. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services (MHPSS) for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: Towards a Public Health Approach Beyond Diagnostic Categories. *European Scientific Journal, ESJ,* 13 (10), pp. 208–219.

Kira, I. A., Shuwiekh, H., Rice, K., Al Ibraheem, B., and Aljakoub, J., 2017. A threatened identity: The mental health status of Syrian refugees in Egypt and its etiology. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research,* [e-journal] 17 (3), pp. 176–190. doi:10.1080/15283488.2017.1340163

Lacapra, D., 2016. Trauma, History, Memory, Identity: What Remains?. *History and Theory*, 55 (3), pp. 375–400.

Luyckx, K. and Robitschek, C., 2014. Personal growth initiative and identity formation in adolescence through young adulthood: Mediating processes on the pathway to wellbeing. *Journal of Adolescence*, 37 (7), pp. 973–981.

McAdams, D.P., 1988. *Power, intimacy, and the life story: Personological inquiries into identity*. New York: Guilford Press.

McLean, K.C., 2005. Late adolescent identity development: narrative meaning making and memory telling. *Developmental Psychology*, 41 (4), pp. 683–691.

Midgley, T. and Eldebo, J., 2013. Under Pressure: The impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on host communities in Lebanon. World Vision Advocacy Report.

Norwegian Refugee Council, 2014. The consequences of limited legal status for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. *NRC Lebanon field assessment part two: North, Bekaa and South: NRC*.

Parkinson, S. E., 2014. Educational aftershocks for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. *Washington (DC): Middle East Research and Information Project*. [online] Available at: http://www.merip.org/educational-aftershocks-syrian-refugees-lebanon [Accessed 24 October 2017].

Parkinson, S. E., and Behrouzan, O., 2015. Negotiating health and life: Syrian refugees and the politics of access in Lebanon. *Social Science & Medicine,* [e-journal] 146, pp. 324–331. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2015.10.008

Pasupathi, M., Mansour, E. and Brubaker, J.R., 2007. Developing a life story: Constructing relations between self and experience in autobiographical narratives. *Human Development*, 50, pp. 85–110.

Phillips, C., 2015. Sectarianism and conflict in Syria. *Third World Quarterly,* 36 (2), pp. 357–376.

Phinney, J. S., Horenczyk, G., Liebkind, K., and Vedder, P., 2001. Ethnic Identity, Immigration, and Well-Being: An Interactional Perspective. *Journal of Social Issues,* 57 (3), pp. 493–510.

Saab, R., Harb, C., and Moughalian, C., 2017. Intergroup contact as a predictor of violent and nonviolent collective action: Evidence from Syrian refugees and Lebanese nationals. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology,* [e-journal] 23 (3), pp. 297–306. doi:10.1037/pac0000234

Salm, R., 2016. The transformation of ethnic conflict and identity in Syria. Ph.D. George Mason University.

Schanzer, J., 2008. *Hamas vs. Fatah: the struggle for Palestine*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.

Simon, B., and Klandermans, B., 2001. Politicized Collective Identities: A Social Psychological Analysis. *American Psychologist,* 56 (4), pp. 319–331.

Smeekes, A., Verkuyten, M., Çelebi, E., Acartürk, C., and Onkun, S., 2017. Social identity continuity and mental health among Syrian refugees in Turkey. *Social Psychiatry And Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 52 (10), pp. 1317–1324. [e-journal] doi:10.1007/s00127-017-1424-7

Stets, J.E. and Burke, P.J., 2000. Identity theory and social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63 (3), pp. 224–237.

Stets, J.E. and Burke, P.J., 2014. Self-esteem and identities. *Sociological Perspectives*, 57 (4), pp. 409–433.

Stryker, S., 1968. Identity salience and role performance: The relevance of symbolic interaction theory for family research. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 30 (4), pp. 558–564.

Stryker, S., 2000. Identity Competition: Key to Differential Social Movement Involvement. In: S.Stryker, T. Owens, and R. White. eds, 2000. *Identity, Self and Social Movements*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. pp. 21–40.

Stryker, S. and Burke, P.J., 2000. The past, present, and future of an identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63 (4), pp. 284–297.

Tajfel, H., 1982. Social psychology of intergroup relations. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 33 (1), pp. 1–39.
Thorleifsson, C., 2016. The limits of hospitality: coping strategies among displaced Syrians in Lebanon. *Third World Quarterly,* [e-journal] 37 (6), pp. 1071–1082. doi:10.1080/01436597.2016.1138843

Tint, B., Sarkis, C., Haji, S. e. M., Chirimwami, V., and Lass, C. R., 2017. Diaspora Populations. In: B. Tint ed., 2017. *Diasporas in Dialogue: Community Reconscilliation in Worldwide Refugee Communitites*. West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. pp. 21–40.

Turan, Z., 2010. Material objects as facilitating environments: the Palestinian Diaspora. *Home Cultures*, 7 (1), pp. 43–56.

UNHCR, 2016. Global trends: Forced Displacement in 2016. [online] Available at: http://www.unhcr.org/en-ie/statistics/unhcrstats/5943e8a34/global-trends-forced-displacement-2016.html [Accessed 24 October 2017].

UNHCR, 2017a. Figures at a glance. [online] Available at: http://www.unhcr.org/en-ie/figures-at-a-glance.html [Accessed 24 October 2017].

UNHCR, 2017b. Syria Regional Refugee Response. [online] Available at: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122 [Accessed 24 October 2017].

United Nations, 1951. General progress report and supplementary report of the United Nation Cocilation Commission for Palestine covering the period from 11 December 1949 to 23 October 1950. [online] Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20110822123836/http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/b7923018076 50d6685256cef0073cb80/93037e3b939746de8525610200567883?OpenDocument. [Accessed 24 October 2017].

Wells, R., Steel, Z., Abo-Hilal, M., Hassan, A. H., and Lawsin, C., 2016. Psychosocial concerns reported by Syrian refugees living in Jordan: systematic review of unpublished needs assessments. *The British Journal Of Psychiatry: The Journal Of Mental Science*, [e-journal] 209 (2), pp. 99–106. doi:10.1192/bjp.bp.115.165084

Yasmine, R., and Moughalian, C., 2016. Systemic violence against Syrian refugee women and the myth of effective intrapersonal interventions. *Reproductive Health Matters,* [e-journal] 24 (47), pp. 27–35. doi:10.1016/j.rhm.2016.04.008

Zittoun, T., 2007. The role of symbolic resources in human lives. In: J. Valsiner and A. Rossa, eds., 2007. *The Cambridge handbook of sociocultural psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 343–361.

Zittoun, T., 2008. Learning through transitions: The role of institutions. *European Journal of Psychology of Education,* 23 (2), pp. 165–181.

Zittoun, T., 2009. How does an object become symbolic? Rooting semiotic artefacts in dynamic shared experiences. In B. Wagoner, ed., 2009. *Symbolic transformation. The mind in movement through culture and society*. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis. pp. 173–192.

Zittoun, T., and Cerchia, F., 2013. Imagination as expansion of experience. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science,* 47 (3), pp. 305–324.

Zittoun, T., and Gillespie, A., 2015. Internalization: How culture becomes mind. *Culture & Psychology,* 21 (4), pp. 477–491.

Zittoun, T., Valsiner, J., Gonçalves, M. M., Vedeler, D., Salgado, J., and Ferring, D., 2013. *Human development in the life course: Melodies of living*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.