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Chapter 3
Social Inclusion of Syrian Refugees and Reclaiming Their Arab Belongingness: The Cases of Jordan, Germany, and Sweden

Aoi MOCHIZUKI

In 2011, the so-called Syrian Civil War broke out. So far, at least 35,000 people have been killed because of this war. More than 10 million people have been displaced from their homes and more than 6.8 million have fled to other countries as asylum seekers and refugees.

The main host countries for Syrian refugees are in the area neighboring Syria. Turkey is the biggest host country with 3.7 million Syrian refugees. More than 800,000 people have fled into Lebanon. Jordan hosts the third largest number of refugees. These countries sometimes become the gateway to accessing Northern Europe.

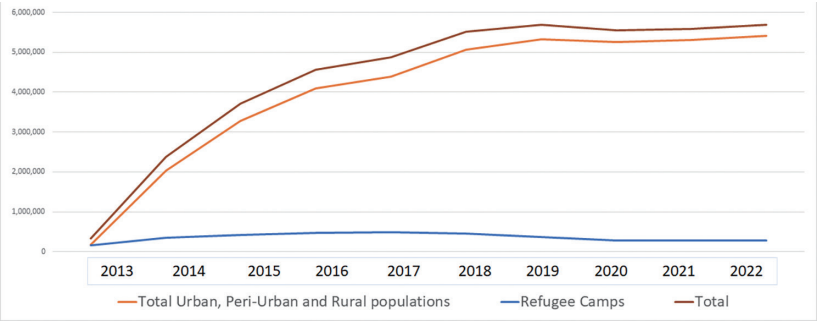

Figure1. Trend of registered Syrian refugees in Syria's neighboring countries.
Source: UNHCR (https://data2.unhcr.org)

Figure 1 shows how the number of Syrian Refugees has increased. The number of refugees accelerated around 2013 and gradually increased until 2019. At first, they went to countries neighboring Syria, but some people sought safer places and opportunities for employment. Therefore, in 2015 and 2016, many people took boats to Europe, and it took on the characteristics of a serious international issue.

Even to this day, the social inclusion of Syrian Refugees is the main issue in the host countries, but the refugees' situations vary greatly depending on the host societies. I will focus here on the refugees' cultural belongingness, such as their being Arabs, but we cannot overlook the fact that their religious belongingness also plays an important role in their displaced lives. It is necessary to conduct a comparative analysis to find solutions that help the refugee crisis. This chapter focuses on the three main host countries of Syrian refugees: Jordan in the Middle East and Germany and Sweden in Europe. In Jordan, most Syrian refugees can live without any cultural barriers because the majority of Syrians and Jordanians have similar backgrounds as Arabs and Muslims. However, in Europe, they might realize that they are the other in the host societies. How would these differences affect the refugees' lives?

The purpose of this study is to examine Syrian refugees' belongingness. I will attempt to make a regional comparison of how Syrian refugees have rebuilt their livelihoods in their host society, comparing the Arab Islamic areas and non-Arab Islamic areas. My research question is about how Arab belongingness functions in the lives of Syrian refugees.

Valentine et al. compared the identity formation of Somali refugees in the UK and Denmark. They reveal that the presence or absence and size of the immigrant community in the host society influence refugees' choices of identity (Valentine et al. 2009). Adachi, a Japanese

sociologist, also pointed out that cultural communities ensure one's identity (Adachi 2020).

1. Social Inclusion of Syrian Refugees in Jordan

Based on these discussions, I will move on to refugees' social inclusion and talk about the case of Jordan. Jordan is a small country neighboring Syria, but now more than 670,000 Syrian people live there. I conducted my fieldwork in Amman for three months in 2017 and 2018. I mainly interviewed Syrian refugees who lived in a district in east Amman. In Jordan, about 80% of Syrian refugees live in urban areas.

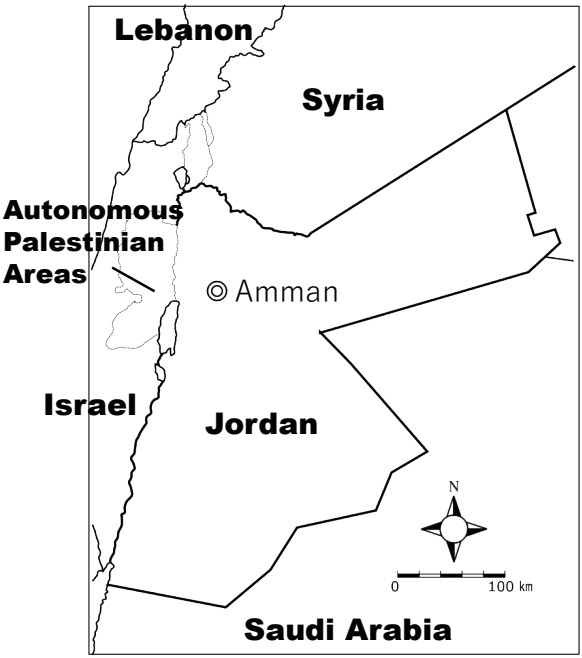

Figure 2. Refugee Host Country Jordan
Source: Author

Like other Arab countries, Jordan has not ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. At the beginning of the refugee problem, Syrian people were de facto refugees, while the Jordanian government only treated them as guests. However, after the Arab League suspended Syria's membership, the Jordanian government began to accept Syrians as refugees. The UNHCR, which is the UN organization that assists refugees, carried out refugee registration on behalf of the Jordanian government.

Figure 3: Research Area
Source: Taken by author (July 2018)

The major flow of refugees over the last 10 years has seriously affected Jordanian society. For example, its population is reaching the limits of its infrastructure and education system, and people have suffered from rent and price inflation. Sometimes there are inter-religious conflicts in the communities. Syria and Jordan once formed the same region called Greater Syria, and these two countries have similar languages, cultures, and religions. I was impressed that these similarities

often become the reason refugees choose Jordan as a destination. A family I met in Amman told me they had a chance to resettle in the United States due to the support of the UNHCR, but they refused this offer because the U.S. is not an Islamic country. This case shows that for some Syrian refugees, it is important that the host society be Islamic because living in an Islamic society makes them feel safe.

Cultural and religious solidarity serves as a safety net for Syrian refugees' lives. According to El-Abed (2014), there are three rationales for unconditional hospitality in Jordan. The first is Bedouin, the second is Arab, and the last is Islam. In this chapter, the latter two are the keys to the social inclusion of Syrian refugees. For example, *Karam* is one of the Islamic virtues. It means "generosity," and it becomes the basis for refugee support.

Religious belongingness with Islam is the basis of the local and informal support in a particular district. For example, a community center regularly distributes bread to poor people, including refugees in the area, and on Eid Day in 2017, local elders worked with a Japanese NGO to collect money and prepare eight sheep. They then distributed the meat to Syrian refugees. The lamb dish in Figure 4 was made from that meat.

Figure 4. Eid Meal Provided for the Poor
Source: Taken by author (January 2017)

The community elder, called a Shaikh in Arabic, engages in assisting refugees and poor people in the area. He knows more than 1,000 residents' names and faiths, and he talks with people about their daily lives. Not only that, but he also tells Islamic stories from the Quran and Hadith. He is an elder who has a rich knowledge of Islam, so he is highly regarded by refugees in this area.

In Jordan, the guarantee of legal refugee status is uncertain. However, the Quranic schools sometimes act as safety nets for children who cannot go to public or private schools for financial reasons. I met two girls who go to a Quranic school because their parents cannot pay their transportation costs to attend public schools. The lack of a normal education is still a big problem, but the Quranic schools are at least places where children are not isolated from society. Additionally, faith can stabilize refugees' spirits during unstable times in the host society. I asked some people, "What do you think of being a refugee?" They answered that they felt their tragedy was their own *qadar*. Qadar is the belief in Islam that one's destiny is predetermined by Allah. In these ways, Islam plays an important role in the context of refugee assistance in the case of Amman. This support is provided within the context of assistance to poor households in the region rather than the refugee support framework.

Likewise, the aspect of being an Arab helps the social inclusion of Syrian refugees. The important point is that there are no linguistic barriers between Syrians and Jordanians, who speak a very similar Arabic dialect. When I attended a Quran study group with Syrian women, there were participants from four Arab countries, and they communicated without any problems. The absence of linguistic barriers is a steppingstone to integration into Jordanian society in terms of employment, education and so on. In addition, sometimes relatives who live across the border help refugees. Refugees tend to gather and live

with relatives or friends from the same hometown and help each other.

2. Social Inclusion in Different Cultural Sphere: Germany and Sweden

(1) A Summary of the "European Refugee Crisis"

Next, I would like to talk about the situation in non-Arab Islamic countries such as Germany and Sweden, which have accepted Syrian refugees since the early stages of the Syrian civil war.

Around 2015, a large number of asylum seekers, including Syrian refugees, traveled to Europe by land and sea to seek refugee status in Northern European countries. This phenomenon has been named the European Refugee Crisis. For European countries, this refugee crisis raised the question of who they were willing to accept. As a result, the evacuation of Syrian refugees was deemed highly politicized, and they received refugee status at a high rate in 2015. Germany and Sweden especially demonstrated initiatives for accepting Syrian Refugees.

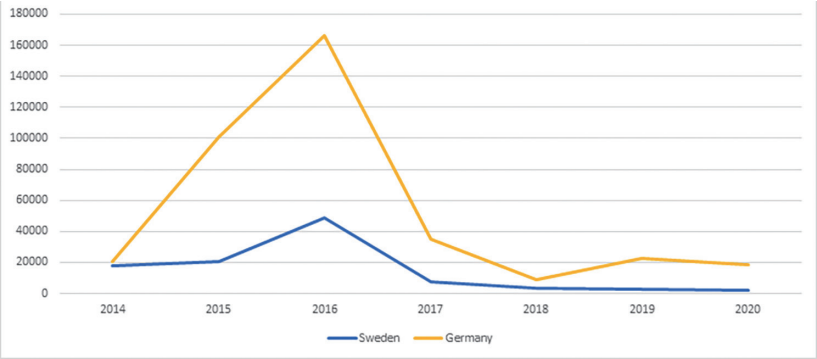

Figure 5. Number of certifications of Syrian refugees in Germany and Sweden
Source: Migrationsverket and BAMF

Figure 5 shows the number of certifications of Syrian refugees in both countries. In September 2011, the Swedish government declared it would accept all Syrian asylum applicants, which became a pull factor so that refugees aimed for Sweden as their final destination. In addition, in Germany, the acceptance program for Syrian refugees in Syrian-neighboring countries was started in March 2013, and 15 German states launched unique refugee support programs. However, such permissive acceptance reached its limit after large numbers of refugees and migrants flowed in during 2015. In Germany, refugees are considered workers and are required to attend job training and language schools. If they refuse these duties, then they receive fewer welfare benefits. Germany continues to accept refugees in a limited way but demands that Syrian refugees integrate into society as workers. On the other hand, Sweden reintroduced border inspections to reduce the movement of people. As in other European countries, in Germany and Sweden, opposition parties arose to reject immigrants such as the Swedish Democrats and the Alternative Party for Germany. In this way, the refugee crisis transformed both countries' tolerant refugee policies into more harsh ones.

From my fieldwork in Stockholm and Berlin for about one month in 2019, it became clear that refugees' cultural belongingness was used in various situations of social inclusion in Europe.

(2) Arab Belongingness in Europe

Figure 6 shows the so-called "Arabic Street" in Berlin. It was easy to find Arabic cafés, restaurants, and supermarkets on this street.

Figure 6. "Arab Street," Berlin
Source: Taken by author (October 2019)

Figure 7. "Arab Street," Stockholm
Source: Taken by author (October 2019)

Figure 7 was taken in a suburb of Stockholm. In Sweden, there is a strong tendency toward residential segregation, and unlike Berlin, immigrant strongholds are located in the suburbs.

1) Religion

As in the case of Jordan, religion functions as one of the doors to accepting refugees into the host society. The mosques play a big part in supporting refugees in Stockholm and Berlin.

Figure 8. Flier for Goda Grannar (Good neighbors)
Source: Taken by author (June 2020)

Figure 9. Stockholm Mosque
Source: Taken by author (October 2019)

The Stockholm Mosque has collaborated with Islamic Relief and the Katarina Church to implement a refugee support project called "Goda Granner," which means good neighbors in Swedish. They provided refugees with temporary beds and food and permitted Islamic worship in the church. Currently, they provide language training and consultation services for refugees and asylum seekers.

Figure 10. A Mosque in Berlin
Source: Taken by author (October 2019)

Figure 10 shows a mosque in the Neuköllen district in Berlin that exercised initiatives for social integration during the refugee crisis. This mosque has held various activities such as a refugee festival, inviting refugees to meals, and meetings at the mosque for dialogue among residents and newcomers. From my interview surveys, I found that in other mosques, imams or mosque officers occasionally provide a voluntary charity called *Sadaqa*, which includes food, daily supplies, and showers. Some of them helped refugees as interpreters or by giving information about refugee assistance. It can be said that Islamic solidarity in the host societies helps and promotes the social inclusion of

Syrian refugees.

2) Language

Next, I would like to describe social inclusion from a linguistic perspective. In public libraries in Stockholm and Berlin, services are available in multiple languages, including Arabic, Kurdish and Armenian. In particular, Stockholm posts notices in various languages including English and Arabic, and Swedish-speaking cafes provide information about refugee support and job assistance in Arabic and other languages too. Here, libraries function as places for information sharing in the local community including migrants and refugees.

Figure 11. Public Library in Stockholm
Source: Taken by author (2019)

Figure 11 shows a public library in Stockholm. There is a bookshelf

dedicated to Arabic works, and the information boards are also written in Arabic. As you can see, Arabic has a high presence in Stockholm.

In Berlin, Syrian refugees have started an interesting activity: an Arabic library called Baynatna run by Syrian refugees next to the Berlin City Library (Fig. 12). All books were donated, and the categories of books are diverse. This is an attempt to reconstruct their cultural base in the host society. Baynatna sometimes co-sponsors events with the Berlin City Library, and it is a bridge between Arabic and German speakers.

Figure 12. Baynatna Arabic Library, Berlin.
Source: Taken by author (2019)

3) Refugeeness

Finally, I will talk about the aspect of using refugeeness in the situation of social inclusion. For example, "Multaka" is a service to guide visitors to museums in Berlin by Syrian and Iraqi refugees and

is based on refugees' cultural belongingness. When I joined a tour of Islamic art, the male guide explained about the art on one floor in Arabic. In addition, the concept of refugee entrepreneurship has been attracting attention recently as a model of refugees' economic integration. It seems that the entrepreneurship of refugees promotes their independence. In the case of Berlin, refugees can receive support from the German government and the EU to start their new businesses.

3. Conclusion

I would like to conclude by returning to my first question concerning how Arab belongingness functions in the lives of Syrian refugees. Through my investigation of the process of the social inclusion of Syrian refugees, it became clear that the refugees' cultural belongingness plays a complementary role in supporting their livelihoods. In Jordan, where legal guarantees for refugees are lacking, cultural belongingness ensures the survival base of Syrian refugees. In Europe, some projects focusing on refugees' cultural belongingness have been attracting rising attention as an important consideration for refugees' social inclusion.

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