

Systems of Social Identity: Citizen Identities Shaping Female Jordanian and Syrian Refugee Students in Amman's Public Schools

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This study explores displacement, socialization, resistance, and citizenship by examining citizen identity formation of female schoolchildren and youths at three government (public), double-shift schools in Amman, whereby Jordanian girls attend school in the morning and Syrian refugee girls attend in the afternoon. Because Jordan (along with Lebanon) has the greatest influx of Syrian refugees in the world, school serves as a critical site for interrogating how systems of identity are upheld or altered for children and youths as a result of migration. Qualitative data from 12 focus groups with 90 students (36 Jordanians and 54 refugees) reveal a strong Arab Islamic identity. While Jordanian girls express support for king and country that exhibits pride in their Jordanian national identity, the majority of Syrian refugee girls feel a strong sense of alienation and displacement in Jordan. While proud of Jordan's role as a refugee host state to Arabs fleeing political persecution and societal destruction, some of the female participants acknowledge that Jordan may have reached its maximum capacity to assist despite its commitment to Arab unity.

Keywords: citizen identity, Jordan, Syrian refugees, schools, girls

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INTRODUCTION

Research on youths as a social group in the contemporary Middle East is of growing importance. Prior to 2005, few books had been written about youths in the Middle East (Simonsen, 2005), with the notable exceptions of Meijer (2000), who explored alienation and integration of Arab youths, and Mahdi (2003), who examined teen life in the Middle East. Since the Arab Spring that spread across the Middle East and North Africa beginning in late 2010, scholarly attention has focused on: the antecedents of social upheavals and venues of resistance for marginalized Arab youths desiring civil liberties, human rights, and participatory democracy (Khalaf & Khalaf, 2011); the use of the internet and social networks by Arab youths for protests to delegitimize national regimes (Al Disi & Albadri, 2013; Cole, 2014; Herrera, 2014); and rising Arab youths' distrust of social institutions (Sánchez-Montijano & García, 2019). In 2015, Momani asserted that passion for equality, entrepreneurship, and reform among youths across 15 Arab countries may suggest an emergent cosmopolitanism. Much less attention, however, has been given to social identities of female students in Jordan, specifically. Toward that end, Adely (2012) examined gendered paradoxes within the complex intersection of nation, faith, and modernity for females in Jordan, while Wagner (2017) studied how the notion of youth is constituted for Syrian refugees in protracted displacement in Mafrq, a northern border town in Jordan. Wagner found that Syrian refugees failed to develop practices of youthfulness despite being exposed to productions of youths by the aid sector, which constructs the citizen refugee in a depoliticized manner without sufficient attention to their limited access to the labor market and higher education. Importantly, neither displaced adolescents (Chatty, 2007) nor dominant-culture youths within Arab host refugee states have received sufficient scholarly attention.

This paper is concerned with social identities, or the collection of group memberships, that define Arab female schoolchildren and youths in public schools in Jordan. Social identity theory asserts that a person's sense of who they are is dependent on the groups to which they belong (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Different social contexts can cause an individual to think, feel, and act on the basis of one's personal or national level of self (Turner et al., 1987). Social identities are based upon a common culture, lineage, history, and geographical location, including shared experiences and conflicts. Jordan—the country (along with Lebanon) with the greatest influx of Syrian refugees in the world (Yahya et al., 2018)—serves as a critical site

for interrogating how systems of identity are upheld or altered for, and by, Arab female youths as a result of migration and schooling. In Jordan, “multiple definitions of national identity compete for predominance” (Ayooob, 2005, p. 191). These layers of collective identity cannot simply be arranged in concentric circles from local to global, but rather are overlapping, in constant flux and dependent on situational circumstances (Fathi, 1999). The Jordanian state lays claim to Jordanian nationalism, Arab nationalism, and Islamic identities in varying degrees and emphasizes one or more at different times. Thus, the “space” that the state occupies by means of society and its populace is immense (Fathi, 1999).

Jordan’s double-shift public schools—where Jordanian children and youths attend school in the morning and Syrian and other refugee children and youths in the afternoon—are spaces where nationalism is being socially constructed and where students negotiate, embrace, and resist the systems of identity fashioned there. These social constructions constitute modes of citizen identity shaping the ontological understandings of Arab children and youths in Jordan. In particular, an examination of citizen identity constructions among female students illuminates “both the silences nationalism rests upon and the new voices it creates” (Göçek, 2002, p. 1). This paper explores the social identities held by female Jordanian and Syrian refugee children and youths at three double-shift schools in Amman and the kind of political socialization occurring there.

MIGRATION, DISLOCATION, AND MULTIPLE NATIONALISMS IN JORDAN

Approximately 10.46 million people live in Jordan, of whom 97.2% are Muslim, predominately Sunni, and 92% live in Jordan’s urban sector (CIA, 2019). There are more than 660,000 registered Syrian refugees in Jordan, and one in three are children and youths aged 5–17 years (Human Rights Watch, 2016). In Jordan, 83% of Syrian refugees live outside of camps, with approximately 28% living in the capital, Amman (Jordan Ministry of Planning and Cooperation, 2015). Only 53% of school-age children living outside camps are enrolled in school in Jordan (UNHCR, 2016). Syrian refugees, unlike Iraqi refugees, have much fewer financial assets and need greater social assistance, placing extraordinary demands on educational structures and resources (UNICEF, 2015). Of Jordan’s total population, 20% are between 15–24 years of age, 40% are younger than 18 years old, and 63% are under 20 years of age (UNICEF, 2018). More than 14% of Jordan’s population live below the poverty line, and one-third

is considered transient poor (World Food Programme Jordan, 2018). The refugee crisis has led to overcrowded public schools and a double-shift system. Only Jordanians are allowed to serve as teachers in Jordan's public (government) schools.

There are multiple definitions of national identity in Jordan. The question of national identity, which refers to one's sense of belonging to a nation-state (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), is at the core of policy and discourse in Jordan—exacerbated by current events in the region and enmeshed in the enduring dialectic between state and Arab identity (Fathi, 1999). Jordan's political life revolves around migration and refugees, including mobility, dislocation, and uprootedness. Citizenship, however, is passed to children by descent only: one's father must be a citizen of Jordan. While the movement of people across and within borders is costly in human and material terms, Fathi (1999, p. 161) argues that:

nowhere does it touch so fundamentally upon the very existence and most basic issue of citizenship ... than it does in Jordan where the Palestinians constitute the other part of the composite population that makes for Jordan's particularly unstable concept of identity.

Nationhood is a particular kind of citizen identity and belonging (Kubow, 2010). Göçek (2002) contends that nationalism—a narrative of shared experience upon which social groups build solidarity—is constructed through a “process of social closure whereby a social group assumes the cloak of the ‘nation’ to contest, negotiate, and determine which groups, meanings, and practices ought to define the imagined community of the nation” (p. 4). Narratives of the nation contain meanings that are traversed, erased, and interpreted through cultural production (Bhabha, 1990). The social construction of nationalism builds on the work of Benedict Anderson (1983), who focused on the imagined and constructed nature of nationalism and its interaction with cultural developments to produce a new political community.

In Jordan, *turāth* (heritage) and *waṭan* (nation) in its varied meanings have been used by the government in support of a discourse of identity and development (Corbett, 2014). “The fact that Jordan was initially an artificial creation, in response to foreign domination, personal ambitions and regional developments is not disputed” (Fathi, 1999, p. 160). The Hashemite family's legitimacy to rule the nation-state has been based on patronage, being patriarchs of a large national tribe, having led the Arab Revolt, and having a genealogical narrative as descended from the Prophet

Muhammad (Corbett, 2014). The *waṭan* (nation) has been “both conceptually and physically elastic,” comprising “a diverse population within and beyond it” and “their identity in Jordan institutionalized in larger frameworks of Hashemite national discourse” (Corbett, 2014, p. 14).

Politically, youth are of importance because they can be socially molded to realize national development goals (Simonsen, 2005). Nationalism, a major instrument for developing national identity in Jordan, is seen to be crucial to Jordan’s security (Abdul-Hadi, 2016). For example, the aim of the “Jordan First” (*al-Urdun Awal*) policy launched in 2002 was to orient students away from regional affairs (e.g., concerns regarding Palestine) and toward building the modern nation-state (Adely, 2007; Kubow & Kreishan, 2014). King Abdullah II implemented a strong nationalist approach to foreign policy and as a way to counter foreign influences within domestic policy (Ryan, 2004). In 2005, King Abdullah II launched the National Youth Strategy in Jordan to stimulate and institutionalize youth participation in public opinion formation, public policy decision making, and civil society involvement within a context defined by tolerance and democratic political and social activity (Kanaan & Hanania, 2009). These activities included participation in clubs, sports associations, and community volunteerism in the non-formal sector as opposed to being made a part of formal public schooling. In an effort to counter extremism after suicide bombings targeted three hotels in Amman during November 2005, the representation by Emad Hajjaj of three hands (green, red, and white) grasping each other in the geographical shape of the country of Jordan on a black background has symbolized the slogan, “We are all Jordan” (Corbett, 2014).

While the colonial legacy bequeathed the Arab world with artificial borders (Ayoob, 2005), it has not prevented an Arab nationalism imbued with real meaning in Jordan (Fathi, 1999). As an ideological position, Arab nationalism asserts that Arabs are a nation and that the unity of the Arab people is the solution to the oppression and occupation experienced by Arabs in diverse locations. *Qawmiyyah* is the Arabic term that refers to nationalism in this wider sense, which does not represent a single political creed but advances the basic concepts of Arabism and unity (Fathi, 1999). Thus, Arab identity can be understood simultaneously as a single nationality and as separate independent states (Cefkin, 1985). Arab nationalism (*qawmiyyah*) and independent Arab state (*waṭan*) nationalism can exist as overlapping identities. Arab identity, therefore, is composed of several interconnected categories, including Arab nationalism, the Arab homeland, religious identity, national identity, political identity, and cultural

identity. Arab nationalism encompasses the notion of Arab civilization, the language and literature of Arab people, and the political union of the Arab world. Rather than static, Arab national identity is in a continuous process of change (Barakat, 1990).

Psychological studies of Arab society have focused on three areas: national character, socialization, and value orientations (Barakat, 1990). Jordan's national character, which derives from traditional Bedouin life, is characterized by the values of solidarity (*ʿaṣabiyyah*) as evidenced in respect for elders, pride in origin, loyalty to blood relations, and hospitality and generosity, such as giving freely, helping others, and offering protection (Barakat, 1990). Values derived from Islam also shape a distinctive religious identity, for example: absolutism as opposed to relativism (i.e., truth comes from God as opposed to from within individual members of society); an orientation to the past as opposed to the future; conformity more than creativity; fatalism rather than free will; and charity over justice (Barakat, 1990). While these binaries or opposites frame "ideal types," it is important to recognize that nationalism engages a wide range of enduring modes of identification that are neither cognitively dissonant nor linear (Corbett, 2014).

Importantly, I argue that the narrative of Arab unity plays a role in erasure—erasing signs of difference—within and between Arab children and youths. In the field of social sciences, the concept of erasure refers to the absence of something critically important or that which is overlooked, deliberately ignored, or removed. As the study's findings will show, the concept of Bilad Al-Sham is referred to by Jordanian and Syrian refugee girls physically and metaphorically to remind them that Jordan was, and is, part of Greater Syria. Multiple nationalisms keep students ever mindful of Jordan's strategic location in the Arab world, its inseparability from Palestine, its connection to Hijaz (the birthplace of Islam), and as gateway to the Arabian Peninsula (Corbett, 2014). A recent study (Kubow, 2018) in four double-shift public schools in Amman reveals a strong Arab Islamic identity among Syrian refugee boys who report that their double-shift schools emphasize Jordanian history and historical sites, giving little attention to the West and other Arab countries, including Syria and its ongoing war. But what modes of citizen identity are held by Jordanian and Syrian refugee girls in Jordan's double-shift public schools?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a critical approach to attend to the dialectical nature of identity, its convergences and contradictions (Barakat, 1990). Focus group

discussions are particularly useful in gathering data from children and youths because peer interactions lead to insights and opportunities for students to agree, expound, or counter the points they hear. Over a five-month period, I conducted 12 focus groups with 90 female students at three double-shift public schools in Amman (see Table 1). In terms of participant recruitment, the Ministry of Education notified school principals about my approved research study. The school administrators at each respective school then identified classes and interested students who assembled in a designated schoolroom for the focus groups. Student consent was obtained by reading aloud the study protocol and purposes in Arabic. Students were given the opportunity to ask questions about the study, and it was shared that they could answer or not answer any questions they saw fit during the focus group.

The overarching research question posed by my research is: How do Arab female children and youths in Jordan perceive their citizen identities? The specific focus group questions posed to the participants included the following: 1) What does it mean to be Jordanian or Syrian? 2) What kind of values, knowledge, and behaviors are important to you? 3) What does it mean to be Arab? and 4) What are you learning in school, through textbooks or teachers, about Jordan and/or Syria and about Jordanian and/or Syrian identity? For focus groups with the refugee students, the following questions were also included: 1) What kind of experience do you have in school and society being from another nationality in Jordan? 2) Do you feel that you belong to the Jordanian society? and 3) What makes you feel that you belong or don't belong?

Conducted in Arabic and simultaneously translated into English, the focus groups were digitally recorded and ranged in length from 30-60 minutes, which is the period of time allocated by the schools for the students' focus group involvement. Four focus groups were conducted with a total of 27 girls (14 Jordanians and 13 Syrian refugees) at School 1, a primary mixed-sex school, with girls only enrolled in Grades 5 and 6. Four focus groups were conducted with a total of 34 girls (14 Jordanians and 20 Syrian refugees) in Grades 5-8 at School 2, a primary girls school. Four focus groups were conducted at School 3, a primary girls school, with a total of 29 girls (eight Jordanians in Grade 5 and 21 Syrian and other refugees in Grades 8-11). The perspectives of 92 Arab female youths at three all-girl, double-shift secondary schools were examined in a separate article (Kubow, 2019).

Data were transcribed verbatim from Arabic into English by a Jordanian transcriber with exceptional experience and expertise. I held separate

debriefing meetings with each of the three female Jordanian interpreters who had accompanied me to the schools and the one female Jordanian transcriber, which provided the opportunity to uncover additional contextual and cultural meanings from the data. I applied Eisner’s (1997) four-stage analytical approach: *description* (capturing what was said by the study participants); *interpretation* (analyzing what was said by participants); *evaluation* (connecting the data to the literature); and *thematics* (explaining the concepts that emerge from the data). Drawing upon Rubin and Rubin (2012), I ascertained emic codes in the form of key concepts that emerged from students’ responses (e.g., the one hand—a metaphor describing Arab unity) as well as etic codes (e.g., Arab nationalism and Jordanian nationalism) determined from my review of the literature. Taken together, the qualitative data and analysis capture the modes of citizen identity and sociality expressed by female schoolchildren and youths at three public, double-shift schools in Amman.

Table 1. Focus groups conducted at three public, double-shift schools

School 1		
Grade	Focus group	Number of girls
5	Jordanians	7
6	Jordanians	7
5	Syrian refugees	7
6	Syrian refugees	6
		27 total
School 2		
Grade	Focus group	Number of girls
5	Jordanians	7
6	Jordanians	7
7	Syrian refugees	9
8	Syrian refugees	11
		34 total
School 3		
Grade	Focus group	Number of girls
5	Jordanians	8
8 & 9	Syrian refugees	5
10	Syrian refugees*	8
11	Syrian refugees*	8
		29 total

* Three students in Grades 10-11 at School 3 are non-Syrian refugees.

SOCIAL IDENTITIES OF ARAB FEMALE YOUTHS: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the social identities of female Syrian refugee students are discussed in relation to their migration and identity experience as belonging, alienation, and displacement in Jordan. This is followed by an examination of the multiple nationalisms (Arab, Islamic, and Jordanian) informing the social identities traversed by female Jordanian students committed to maintaining Jordan's security and stability.

'A Stranger in a Foreign Land': Belonging, Alienation, and Displacement in Jordan

Aside from one Iraqi, one Lebanese, and one Chechen, a total of 51 refugee girls (all Syrian) participated in the study. At School 1, seven Syrian girls in Grade 5 stated that they are proud of their nationality. They identified Syrian nationality and patriotism ("love of country and our people"), patience and perseverance, self-esteem, and faith in God as important aspects of their identity. However, according to the girls, they are not learning about Syria in school; rather, the curriculum focuses on Jordan's cities, governorates, kings, constitution, communities, and the desert. The Syrian fifth graders at School 1 spoke of the challenges they face in trying to fit into their school environment. Female 5 explained that "Jordanians and Palestinians don't speak nicely about Syria. They swear, rhyming bad words about Syrians being boogers [i.e., waste from the nose]." Prior to the double-shift system, Syrian girls attended school in the morning and had Jordanian friends with whom they interacted daily. Now, with Syrians and other refugees relegated to the afternoon shift, they don't see their Jordanian friends much anymore. The Syrian girls also reported facing a double standard at the school, in that the morning teachers don't ask the Jordanians girls to clean their messy and dirty classrooms, while teachers in the afternoon shift do not let the refugee students go home "without putting everything in order in the classroom" (female 5).

Likewise, the six Syrian refugee girls in the Grade 6 focus group at School 1 reported learning very little about Syria in the school curriculum, aside from the historical battles that occurred during the time of Prophet Muhammad. Rather, students learn the history, geography, kings, and famous sites (e.g., Petra and the Roman Amphitheater) of Jordan. When I asked if they learn about other countries besides Jordan in school, female 1 said that they are learning about Bilad Al-Sham (a region that historically included Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, and parts of Iraq), Yemen, and Palestine. While there are radio activities focused on Palestine, the

students reported not learning about “foreign countries” such as America and Europe.

Similar to School 1, the nine female Syrian participants in Grade 7 at School 2 said that the afternoon shift is not ideal for learning because they arrive home very late from school and do not have enough time to study. The Syrian girls do not feel a sense of belonging in Jordan, as female 2 explained: “Some people here are vocal about not being keen to welcome us in Jordan. They claim that Syrians’ demand on housing has resulted in a hike in rental rates. They blame us for that.” When I asked who says those things, female 2 replied: “The [Jordanian] girls and boys say that, and some of them use bad language ... we don’t like to be at the same school with Jordanians. They speak badly about us.”

Like their counterparts at School 1, the Syrian seventh graders at School 2 said that their school textbooks focus on Jordanian history and geography with some attention to the history of Bilad Al-Sham and Syria’s neighbors. For the most part, though, said female 5, “we learn patriotic culture and belonging to Jordan.” Despite the school’s attempt at socializing refugees, female 4 said she does not feel that she belongs in Jordan. The students believe that belonging in Jordan is “important so that we don’t feel like foreigners, like we are in isolation from home” (female 4); however, without this sense of belonging to Jordan, it “makes us feel displaced” (female 5). When asked what it feels like to be displaced, the Syrian refugee girls replied:

Female 7: We feel anger; we feel detached from home, living in a foreign country, a stranger in a foreign land.

Female 5: When we came to Jordan, we felt like we traveled to a different country, that we are not in our country.

Female 2: Not a good feeling.

Female 7: Felt like a visitor to Jordan.

For these students, a sense of alienation in Jordan has negatively affected their learning in school. A resolution by The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan’s Ministry of Education requires that school libraries, labs, and handicraft workshops be closed in the afternoon shift. One student also noted that there are no sports or physical education in the afternoon, either.

Similar to their seventh-grade peers, the 11 Syrian refugee girls in Grade 8 at School 2 reported that the curriculum focuses on Jordan’s history and ancient civilizations. They recognize that they are not receiving as much schooling as the Jordanians during the regular school week (Sunday through

Thursday), which necessitates attending classes on Saturdays to compensate. Although concerned about returning home late after school, they preferred being separated from Jordanians because it is easier to communicate in the Syrian dialect and because now classrooms are not overcrowded.

When asked what they are learning in the school curriculum about Arab identity, female 11 in Grade 8 at School 2 replied: "What we learn in Social Studies is that we are all one nation, and there shouldn't be racial differences or discrimination based on race." According to female 6 in the same focus group, "We learn that people are equal, and that there's no difference between one or the other based on race, color, or faith." For female 4, "We learn that there shouldn't be intolerance or prejudice, and that in wartime we should all stand together as one." Having lived in Jordan for nine years, the Syrian eighth-graders feel they belong in Jordan and reported that Jordanians welcomed them into the country. According to female 6, "Jordanians ... have been so good to us; they offer their condolences and they care a lot." But, the refugee students are sad about the ongoing war in Syria where they have "lost family members and relatives" and "some [people] are starving to death" (female 11).

The five Syrian girls from Grades 8 and 9 who participated in a focus group at School 3 have lived in Jordan for a long time, prior to the war in Syria, or were born in Jordan and feel that Jordan is home. They have not experienced differential treatment as Syrians in Jordan. In addition to learning about Jordan's Constitution, history, geographic location, ancient civilizations, and cultural heritage, the Syrian students reported learning values such as tolerance, respect for neighbors, fairness and justice, and forgiveness. Female 2 asserted that "we have Arab roots, and we are proud of that." Female 5 explained, however, that "nowadays some people don't hold the values and ethics of Arabs that prevailed in the past":

In the older days, when we arrived on this land, it was an Arab Islamic nation, but it was divided in small pieces of land [e.g., Jordan, Syria, etc.], each country has a share, with its own customs and traditions. This is why we cherish the homeland, as one entity. And, just as it gives to us, we should give back to our homeland.

The Syrian girls in Grades 8 and 9 at School 3 learn about the war in Syria through their families and the internet as opposed to school. "When we see footage and pictures of the devastated homes and the children who have become homeless [in Syria], we are heartbroken," said female 1. "We wish we could be able to help in any way possible, but we are helpless."

The seven Syrians and one Iraqi student in Grade 10 at School 3, who ranged in age from 16-18 years old, also spoke of Bilad Al-Sham. The Iraqi student (female 1) said that Syrians are proud of their country and homeland, “a land called the Levant ... known for its abundance and richness” of natural and national wealth. The students also stated that because Syria’s population is multicultural, there is no discrimination based on one’s race or faith. Due to the differences in the Arabic dialect and school curriculum between Syria and Jordan, the refugee girls “had difficulty blending in at the beginning” (female 4) in Jordan. As explained by a Syrian student (female 3):

They [Jordanians] felt that I’m different. We have certain differences in the lifestyle, way of life. The situation at the beginning was somehow delicate as to who is from Jordan and who’s Syrian due to some of the differences between the two. This is unlike Syria, where Syrians come from many sects and races and faiths, but without any discrimination against anybody. In Syria, everybody is equal to everybody.

The Grade 10 girls in the afternoon shift at School 3 spoke about the distance of their homes from the school. Female 5 reported that the buses are not safe because “the driver may not be a well-mannered, honorable man, or a passenger may not show good manners, or there may be certain questionable girls with a reputation on board, and the presence of those girls affect other girls.” Female 7 spoke about the restricted mobility and limited autonomy she feels in Jordan:

Sometimes when I want to go out and my father objects, I ask him why can’t I go out? His answer is, ‘You are not in your home country. In Syria, people know you and if anything happens to you, you will find someone to help you or defend you. But in this country [Jordan], nobody knows you [you have no acquaintances here], and you may not find anyone to defend you, plus you may not be able to be served your full rights because you are not a Jordanian citizen.’

Although the 10th-grade refugee girls at School 3 reported that such disrespect was uncommon, female 7, a Syrian student, spoke of a landlord who treated her family so badly that they had to move to another location in Amman. The Iraqi student, though, said she has never faced discrimination in Jordan because she has “met a lot of people who love Iraqis because they remember the good deeds of Saddam Hussein towards Jordan, so they have high appreciation of Iraq and its people.”

The eight girls (six Syrian, one Lebanese, and one Chechen) in the Grade 11 focus group at School 3 expressed that an Islamic identity—premised on the values of kindness, honesty, and love—characterizes the Arab world. However, female 1 (a Lebanese student) has been made to feel different from Jordanians by the disrespectful looks she has experienced. According to female 4 (a Syrian student), “In Jordan, we learn about Jordan. We don’t learn anything special about Syria. The focus is on colonization, occupation, history.” Their school textbook titled, *The History of Jordan*, describes the history of Arab civilization and the kings in Jordan. For those students born in Jordan, they learn about the war in Syria through the news and their family, while other students witnessed first-hand atrocities before leaving Syria. Interestingly, though, one Syrian girl said that she has never thought about the war in Syria, while her peer (female 4) commented that she feels sorry for Syria’s destruction, people who have died, and those who have lost everything.

One Hand: Arab Islamic Unity and the Erasure of Difference

A total of 36 Jordanian girls participated in focus groups across the three schools. When asked what they are learning in school and what curricular subjects they liked, the seven Jordanian girls in Grade 5 at School 1 spoke of Islamic Education, which entails learning about Islam, the surahs (verses of the Qur’an), Prophet Muhammad and his followers, and prayer. Female 1 stated that, “We learn the values and ethics of Islam; to be united, one hand.” When I asked what is meant by “one hand,” students replied: “It means that all Arab states must be united so as to work together to save Palestine” and “also to save Syria” (female 5) “and Iraq” (female 6). The girls explained that one hand means “to cooperate” among Arabs (female 3) and “to fight against our enemy” (female 1). As female 1 elaborated, “One hand means to make the occupiers leave the occupied countries, especially Palestine.” When I asked who is the enemy, students replied, “Sahayina” (the Zionists) and “Al-Yahoud” (the Jews). According to female 5,

We are like the walls of a room. If one wall is knocked off, then anybody can enter the room. Now Palestine is occupied by the enemy. So, if we are all united against the enemy, we can make that enemy leave.

The Jordanian fifth-grade girls at School 1 cited Arabic (language) and Islam (religion) as important identity markers, depicting Arabic as “the language of the Prophet and the Qur’an” (female 7). When I asked

if there was more to being Arab than speaking the Arabic language, the students replied, “our Islam” (female 5), namely that “God sent Prophet Muhammad to the Arab world, while He sent Moses to other countries, and Jesus to others” (female 1). Female 3 identified the traditional dress (*thawb*) and veil (*hijab*) as symbols of Arab Islamic identity. There was an implicit understanding among the students that to be Arab is to be Muslim, perhaps reflective of the shrinking religious diversity within Jordan. The students identified “high ethics and manners, helping others, and human dignity” (female 6) as values central to an Arab Islamic identity, as well as “truthfulness and honesty” (female 3) and “taking care of family members and relatives” (female 1). Jordanian sixth graders at School 1 also expressed support for the protection of Palestine and an awareness of the atrocities in Syria, such as starvation and concern that Daesh (ISIS) will target Saudi Arabia next. The girls cited Israel, Bashar Al-Assad in Syria, ISIS, and foreign superpowers (e.g., the U.S. and Russia) as reasons for the war in Syria.

When I asked eight Jordanian girls in Grade 5 at School 3 if they viewed themselves as having an Arab identity, female 4 replied:

I see myself not as Jordanian, but as an Arab, because we, as Arabs, are not different from one another by race or anything else. We share a lot, and we are similar. At the end of the day, we will all die, and the judgment will not be in light of who is Jordanian or otherwise, but we will be judged by our deeds.

Female 8 in the Grade 5 focus group at School 3 explained that “an Arab citizen has many values, such as tolerance, pride, [and] honesty.” The girls said the school helps to develop those values through their textbooks and teachers. For example, said female 7, “when we go to the Religion class, the lesson may involve ideas about morals and ethics, so the teacher tells us more, on the importance of being ethical, and on the need to help others.”

One Hand: Jordanian Nationalism and the Erasure of Difference

In addition to signifying an Arab Islamic identity and unity with Muslims outside of Jordan, the metaphor of the “one hand” was also used by Jordanian schoolchildren to assert the importance of unity among people within Jordan. The data reveal that Jordanian girls across the three schools hold a strong national identity and allegiance to Jordan. The emphasis on unity, though, may be at the expense of diversity and the erasure of signs of difference. When I asked what it means to be Jordanian, the seven Jordanian fifth-graders at School 1 replied: “To be proud of one’s country and to

have dignity. In Jordan, all people respect one another” (female 1). The reason the girls gave for the importance of respect is “because we are all equal” (female 6) and “we are all the same” (female 4). As female 1 explained, “If you are Iraqi or Syrian doesn’t mean we should treat you differently, or not interact with you.” The girls’ respect extends to King Abdullah II. To show the King respect, the students have learned that “we should not make our country or school dirty, we should not throw papers on the floor, we must have a policy. We have to adopt and safeguard Jordan’s culture and what it stands for” (female 1).

For the Jordanian girls in Grade 5 at School 1, Jordan plays an important role in helping those from other Arab nations. The students emphasized that “anybody who comes to Jordan from another country must feel welcomed. We should not push those people away and must respect them” (female 6) and not make others feel inferior. As Jordanians, the girls are “proud because we welcome and we respect everybody from Iraq, Syria, Egypt, or from any part of the world. We don’t kick them out” (female 1). The Jordanian students provided both a societal and school example to express their feelings about Syrian refugees in Jordan. Female 3 explained:

When the Syrians came to Jordan, it was hard for us to accept them. This is because they came in big numbers. [With the population increase,] the prices went up, including the price of bread. We have a water shortage. We accommodated the biggest number of Syrians [compared to other countries]. But now we are brothers and sisters.

Yet, although “we are like brothers and sisters,” female 3 continued, “we hope that they will be able to return to their country.” Female 5 spoke of the initial challenges of accommodating Syrian refugees in Jordan’s public schools before the double-shift system:

At first, prior to the double shift, we and the Syrians attended school together. We were irritated by some of their behavior: they would damage the desks and drawers, and take away some of the things in class. Then gradually we were more accommodating, we were more accepting.

It is interesting to note that “accommodating” Syrian students on the part of the Jordanian girls has come about through the double-shift system of separation of learners into morning and afternoon shifts.

For the seven Jordanian girls in Grade 6 at School 1, being Jordanian was characterized by pride and viewing Jordan as a safe haven from

enemies. They reported learning from their Social Studies textbooks about respect for others, about their king, about Jordanian customs and traditions, and how to be self-assured and proud. The girls also said they are learning about the importance of helping others through the role model of their king, who according to female 3, “pledges relief and assistance to others, such as building refugee camps, helping the poor, [and] building schools and hospitals.” The students are also learning in school about the preservation of public property, human rights, and protecting Jordan. To express her love and devotion toward her country, one Jordanian sixth grader delivers speeches and recites poems through radio broadcasting. In the focus group, she recited from memory a poem she learned in Grade 4 by Ahmad Shawqi, who pioneered the modern Egyptian literary movement and introduced the genre of poetic epics to the Arabic literary tradition. As an expression of love for Jordan, the seven Jordanian sixth graders sang in unison the words of Jordanian poet Haidar Mahmoud, who depicts Jordan as a beautiful, beloved lady.

The seven Jordanian girls in Grade 5 at School 2 report that they are learning “social language”—how to interact with people, how to “talk politely with others and not speak in a loud voice” (female 1), and “the art of dialogue” (female 3). The emphasis on becoming polite (*mu’addab*) is a value in Jordan. Students’ responses to what it means to be Jordanian emphasized the notion of the good citizen as one who protects the country and keeps it clean:

Jordan is our beloved country and nation. We should protect and guard it and keep it clean. If I find garbage on the ground, I should pick it up, whether in Amman or at school. So when I’m at school, going up the stairs to class, I pick up garbage if I see any on the floor. (female 3)

In their Social Studies and English classes, the students said they are learning the importance of sharing with people in good and bad times and being kind, gentle, and compassionate to others. Kindness was seen to be crucial so that there is not hatred between people that can lead to chaos. The girls said that they are learning an Islamic identity in school, as well as love for their nation and king.

The Jordanian fifth-graders at School 2 asserted that they are learning that “there’s no difference between people, irrespective of nationality, religion, language, or belief” (female 2). When I said that I have been learning

from schoolchildren in Amman about the “one hand,” I asked them to tell me more about the concept. Female 4 elaborated:

It means to be one hand in defending and protecting our beloved society and country. If we are not one hand, society will be divided and there would be hatred. There will cease to be understanding between people. If we are not one hand, society will be “damaged” and hatred would prevail.

Female 3, also a Jordanian in Grade 5 at School 2, viewed double-shift schooling as “a good system” to deal with overcrowded classrooms and to accommodate many nationalities, including Iraqis and Egyptians. “However,” said the student, “the Syrians are bigger in numbers, so this is why we have two shifts—to minimize the number of students in one class. We already have a total of 43 students, so there’s no place for more. This is why the Syrians attend school in the afternoon.” Female 7, though, expressed that she “was upset about the separation because I had Syrian friends in class. I, for one, I miss my Syrian friends.” She said that she now only sees her best friend on the way out of the school in the passing time between the morning and afternoon shift.

The seven Jordanian girls in Grade 6 at School 2 are also proud of their country, feeling that they belong to Jordan, and stating that they will “defend it [Jordan] with all our means” (female 6). Public schooling serves to instill a positive spirit about Jordan in schoolchildren, as female 3 explained: “We learn that we must love our country because it is the land of giving. We should not be resentful towards our country.” I asked the students how they felt about the double-shift system that separates Jordanians from Syrians to address overcrowded classrooms, to which female 6 replied:

It is not a nice feeling at all. In Jordan, we receive people and host them irrespective of where they come, whether Syrians or Iraqis or Palestinians. So, we are proud to welcome other peoples, be they fleeing war or not. We must be all together, one hand. So again, it is an ugly feeling toward this separation.

The tendency to gloss over differences for the sake of unity was also noted in the discussion with eight Jordanian fifth graders at School 3. Female 3 asserted that there is peace in Jordan because Jordanians do not discriminate between Arabs (e.g., Jordanian, Syrian, Iraqi, or Egyptian) but rather “we [Jordanians] must show them sympathy and compassion, and be nice to them.”

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This study explored the systems of citizen identity held by Jordanian and Syrian refugee children and youths in three public, double-shift schools in Amman. Multiple nationalisms inform the social identities of these youths. The public school engages in a kind of political socialization that acquaints Jordanian students, as well as Syrian refugee students, with a Jordanian nationalism—a national narrative that views Jordan as hospitable to people from diverse countries living within its borders—while also promoting a larger ideological construction of Arab identity as inclusive of Arab peoples and nations beyond its geographical boundary. In particular, the girls in this study spoke of “one hand” to symbolically represent unity within Jordan (among citizens and refugees) as well as outside of Jordan as unity against the enemy (i.e., Zionists and Jews) whom they view as responsible for the occupation and displacement of large numbers of Palestinians and Syrians.

Both Jordanian students and Syrian refugee students expressed an Arab Islamic identity shaped by their lived experiences and their learning of the values and ethics of Islam, which includes working together to save Palestine, Syria, and Iraq. This seems to confirm earlier reports that have suggested a tendency among Muslim youths to be increasingly devout to Islam (Fattah, 2006). Although students believe that schooling strives to develop democratic values (e.g., the art of dialogue, respect, tolerance, and preservation of public property) to maintain peace and security in Jordan, silences are also notable in that the students do not report that their schools engage them in discussions about the more sensitive political and economic aspects in the region. While the international community and aid organizations depict Arab youths, especially Syrian refugee youth, through a lens of crisis, public schools give scant curricular attention to the contemporary scene, despite the ongoing war in nearby Syria and the attendant challenges and hardships faced in Jordan.

The public schools’ emphasis on adopting Jordanian culture may also be silencing Syrian refugee girls who speak of the alienation and demeaning treatment they have endured in Jordan. Only a few Jordanian girls found the condition of refugees, especially Syrians, to not be on equal footing with Jordanians. It seems the multiple nationalisms promoted in public schools (i.e., Jordanian nationalism and Arab nationalism) are serving to erase differences between Arabs, as noted in students’ statements that “we are all the same” and that their respective nations do not discriminate based on religion, place of origin, or race. Imagining the nation-state of

Jordan as hospitable and as a safe haven from enemies, combined with an ideological orientation of Arab unity, the Jordanian students' social constructions foster a romantic view of Arab equality that overshadows Syrian refugee students' concerns about discrimination between Arabs in Jordan. Although the double-shift system aims to instill a positive attitude toward Jordan, the separation of Jordanians from Syrian and other refugee children and youths to address overcrowding may be undermining Arab unification goals.

While Jordanian girls exhibited more proactive, determined stances (e.g., liberation for struggling Arab populations), there was a sense of helplessness expressed on the part of Syrian girls and uncertainty about their own futures. Most of the Syrian female participants expressed a sense of displacement in Jordan, though views are mixed as to the degree to which the Syrian students feel their Jordanian peers and the society at large have helped their transition in Jordan. Moreover, there are differences of opinion as to the students' feelings about the double-shift system. Most of the Syrian refugees like learning with their Syrian peers but do not like the late start and late return to home posed by the afternoon shift.

The modes of citizen identity and sociality promoted by public schooling in Jordan and internalized and appropriated by female schoolchildren and youths in this study are religious (Islamic) and Arab. Jordanian nationalism may be having a more limited effect on Syrian and other refugee students. The results are a call for more research to explore the relationship between migration and Arab youths' identity formation to better understand how systems of identity are upheld or altered for the marginalized and the mainstream as a result of migration. The implications for policy that emerge from this study are at least twofold: one, the need to experiment with integrating refugees with Jordanian students as opposed to schooling children separately (i.e., trying a system of integrated double shifts); and, two, offering in-service teacher professional development to acquaint teachers with the value and technique of engaging students in democratic classroom dialogue. The goal is to better understand the issues impacting students' daily lives so as to facilitate learning, while also recognizing that youth identity formation is occurring in a period of ongoing social unrest and migration in the region.

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