

‘Refugees Hosting Other Refugees’ in Ouzaii (Lebanon): Endurance and Maintenance of Care¹

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Abstract

This paper examines the socio-spatial mechanisms that emerge when refugees host other refugees. It argues that there is an underlying social infrastructure of care that impacts the refugees’ choice of destinations and modes of survival. When refugees host other refugees from close networks of relatives and neighbors, they create their own spatial clusters. In the process, the social infrastructure of care offers one mode of security to vulnerable refugees. Care as a concept and an approach is related to ideas of endurance and maintenance. It facilitates multiple dimensions, from space, to affection, and to the everyday. It is able to reconfigure a life possible, life enduring, and a life meaningful in an urban setting.

We focus on Ouzaii in Beirut, Lebanon. Ouzaii has been a destination for multiple displaced groups over different periods of time. Ouzaii currently hosts an approximate 10,000 Syrian refugees. They chose Ouzaii as their destination after they were helped by existing refugees who offered shelter and access to jobs. The resultant socio-spatial practices, flourishing businesses, and leisurely facilities are evidence of successful social networks that form an infrastructure of care. They also play a role in the reconstitution of Ouzaii itself.

We conclude with reflections on how urban informality may offer refugees an alternative right to the city while allowing them to escape the gaze of the humanitarian aid apparatus that can signify their vulnerability by reducing them to only being aid recipients. Instead, they form protective socio-spatial networks that has proved to be powerful in sustaining their livelihoods, guarding them from possible social discrimination or political threats.

Keywords: Syrian refugees, protracted displacement, informality, infrastructure of care, Lebanon, Ouzaii

Introduction

Since 2011, Lebanon became a destination for mass and rapid migration of Syrians. According to the 2014 statistics by the United Nations, an approximate 1.2 million Syrian refugees were registered in Lebanon with a high percentage of them settling in major cities and suburban and peri-urban areas namely as ‘urban refugees’ (Fabos and Kibreab, 2007). The total number of registered Syrian refugees in the governorate of Mount Lebanon, where the location of the case study of this research falls, was 235,859 with a high percentage settling in informal areas. (UNHCR, 2018) Most of these refugees have tried to secure shelter, employment, and livelihoods in these areas (Fabos and Kibreab, 2007; Campbell, 2006; Jacobsen, 2006). It is important to note that Syrians who fled to Lebanon after the Syrian crisis were left without a defined and consistent policy, legal or, administrative framework due to Lebanon’s precarious political positioning towards the conflict in Syria. Since 2014, the Lebanese government began to introduce aggressive policies such as; closing the borders, requiring strict conditions for Syrians to secure employment, and requesting that UNHCR stop registering refugees in 2015. Thus, the rights of Syrians to access mobility, education, employment, and healthcare were left to the discretion of political parties and local municipal councils (Geha and Talhouk, 2018). Hence, Syrian refugees had to largely rely on their own resources and social networks to overcome and cope with these challenges. They preferred independence from humanitarian agencies and opportunities offered in these areas by building on previous networks of migration and employment (Fawaz, 2016; Grabska, 2006). Due to their massive influx, apartments in informal areas have been re-subdivided between multiple families, with temporary rooms added to existing buildings and abandoned shops or unfinished structures adapted into dwelling units. (Fawaz, 2016)

Hence, studying the conditions of the displaced in these areas highlights the widespread phenomenon of ‘overlapping displacements’ where space is constituted through overlapping, simultaneous, and incremental encounters between different displaced populations and the social networks they develop. In the process, the newly displaced encounter and share the spaces of ‘established’ or ‘former’ displaced communities of similar or different nationalities and ethnicities (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015; 2016a; 2016b).

This paper builds on Fiddian-Qasmiyeh’s (2016a) discussion on actively exploring the ‘potential to support the development, and maintenance, of welcoming communities, whether [...] composed of citizens, new refugees, or established refugees’ (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016a, p. 27). It investigates an underlying social infrastructure of care formed through informal institutions and the accumulation of social capital. The infrastructure of care thus impacts the choice of destinations by the refugees and their modes of survival. It argues that when refugees host other refugees, they actively provide them with support rather than merely being aid recipients themselves. As a result, they form their own spatial clusters and create new opportunities for shelter and work. By identifying, dissecting, and spatializing such infrastructure of care, this paper engages with the agency of refugees and their diverse hosts. The hosts provide support as active partners in the processes of ‘unfinished endurance’ to mitigate marginalization and precariousness of their dwellings (Boano, 2018).

With the idea of unfinished endurance, this paper aims to foreground the malleable, mutable, imperfect, and contingent human interactions, suggesting ways in which social forms, multiple systems, and networks with a variable degree of agency produce urban spaces. It builds on the manifold concept of ‘care’ to explore ways of creating, holding together, and sustaining the diversity of life (Bellacasa, 2017). Care includes ‘everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair ‘our world’ [...] which we seek to interweave in a complex, life sustaining web’ (Tronto, 1993: 103). Building on this definition, this paper ties what Tronto (1993) terms as ‘life sustaining webs’ to Simone’s (2004) notion of ‘people as infrastructure.’ Simone foregrounds the social dimensions of the term ‘infrastructure’ and asserts that it is ‘capable of facilitating the intersection of socialities so that expanded

spaces of economic and cultural operation become available to residents of limited means' (Simone, 2004, p. 407). He suggests that life emerges in places that are capable of holding an intensity and heterogeneity of lives and the many ways of doing things just enough to enable mutual support (Simone, 2004). This takes place through a network of relations and actors that utilize a repertoire of 'practices' and 'tactics' to sustain a terrain of relations and resist marginalization (Bayat, 2010; Cresswell, 1992). These networks form what is termed in this paper as 'infrastructure of care' through which the displaced host and support one another to sustain a meaningful life in an urban setting where the socio-political tensions are one challenge and the lack of governmental refugee policies is another. It focuses on Ouzaii as one of the major informal settlements in the southern suburbs of Beirut that has been subjected to various waves of displacement throughout the past 60 years (Burckhardt and Heyck, 2009), including the Syrian forced displacement since 2011. Ouzaii currently hosts almost 10,000 Syrian refugees (Arch Consulting Surveying Department Supervisor, 2018) and is a rich model known for its strong political affiliation with Hezbollah and the tribal social ties of *ashae'r* (عشائر).

The research primarily covers the period from 2011 to 2018, hence, incidents after 2018 were not considered. However, the research acknowledges the nature of displacement as evolving and dynamic. The research leading to this paper identified networks of social interactions and ties that operate this infrastructure of care by conducting a thorough analytical interpretation of raw surveyed data by Arch Consulting from 2017 and 2018.² The research mapped the distribution of the Syrian refugees according to their governorate of origin and years of settlement in Ouzaii to conceive of a cartography of overlapping displacements. It also tracked family relations from the available data³. Using ArcGIS, the data was georeferenced to identify social clusters. This data was substantiated by four semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with displaced Syrian refugees identified either from the previously generated maps or through a snowballing technique. The challenges of the interviews included access to individuals and their willingness to share their experiences. The selection was however keen on showcasing representative roles played within social networks. The names of the interviewees were replaced by their initials to avoid identity disclosure. The interviews were conducted in Arabic and the questions revolved around the operations, the practices, and the tactics of different social agents who facilitated the arrival of the refugees and their settlement in Ouzaii in order to formulate an overview of how this infrastructure of care operates⁴.

Ouzaii Socio-Spatial Composition

Many factors encouraged displaced Syrian refugees to settle in Ouzaii: its strategic geographic location, commercial value, and informal composition. Firstly, Ouzaii is located on the southern coastline of the suburbs of Beirut between the Rafic Hariri International Airport and south of Beirut (fig. 1). It falls within three municipal administrative boundaries: Ghobeiry, Bourj Al Barajneh, and Tahwitat Al Ghadir. Ouzaii, along with the adjacent districts of Jnah, Hay Al Zahra, and Maramel, create a dense belt of informal settlements around the green golf course club. Secondly, the Beirut-Saida highway operates as the main street of Ouzaii. It constitutes a prominent spine of commercial and artisanal activities with substantial economic value and is particularly known for its furniture and mechanics shops (Halabi, 1988; Fawaz and Peillen, 2003; Burckhardt and Heyck, 2009). This commercial route served for years as the sole connector between municipal Beirut and the airport before the construction of the Hafez Al-Assad highway. The area is also well-known for its fishermen activities in the Ouzaii Al-Hadi port (Burckhardt and Heyck, 2009). Thirdly, the informal character of Ouzaii eases access for the displaced to housing and job opportunities away from the gaze of the government. Syrian refugees devise tactics to escape municipal checks around work and business permits as well as informal

encroachments on the public domain that range from critically picking operational times, to carefully hiding their goods, and to building alliance with local figures with social or political power.

Initially, the Ouzaii plain used to be covered with sand dunes and forest vegetation. The first traces of settlements emerged in 1924 when the elites of Beirut built private villas and create leisure spaces on the coastline. In the 1930s the first beach resorts were planned and put into construction. The squatting and informal settlements in Ouzaii started in the 1950s. (Halabi, 1988; Clerc-Huybrechts, 2008; Burckhardt and Heyck, 2009) Several factors contributed to their development from conflicts over the establishment of land registries during the French mandate, rising land prices, to different political rivalries (Fawaz and Peillen, 2003; Clerc-Huybrechts, 2008). Ouzaii grew into multiple neighborhoods according to family and village patterns, squatting and other forms of appropriation such as purchasing shares in large lots, or directly renting land from the municipalities. After land property rights disputes between the municipalities of Bourj Al Barajneh and Chiyah over the Modawara area, lying in the south of Ouzaii, the Municipality of Bourj Al Barajneh encouraged squatting and informal settlements around the core of the Ouzaii village, in the time when the upper-middle class leisure establishments were covering the coastline of Jnah. (As-Safir, 1983; Halabi, 1988; Fawaz and Peillen, 2003; Burckhardt and Heyck, 2009) Foreign workers (Syrian) and rural-urban immigrants (Lebanese) started settling in the area. The civil war intensified the progression of squatting in the area. The first documented wave of displacement was in 1975-76 when Kurds, Syrians, and Palestinians escaped massacres in the Quarantina, Tell-el Zaatar, and Nabaa camps during the start of the Lebanese civil war (1975-90). This wave of displacement also included Lebanese Shiites from downtown Beirut and its north-eastern suburbs (Halabi, 1988; Burckhardt and Heyck, 2009). The second wave was in 1982 after the Israeli invasion of Southern Lebanon, causing the displacement of almost a million Lebanese from the South and the Beqaa valley (Halabi, 1988; Burckhardt and Heyck, 2009). The third wave was after the Syrian crisis in 2011 when over one million forcibly displaced Syrians reached Lebanese territories many of which settled in Ouzaii.

Currently, the total population of Ouzaii is estimated at 43,000 people from more than five nationalities. The majority are Lebanese Shiites from the Beqaa valley and the south, comprising 70 per cent of the total population. Syrians constitute the second greater population count in Ouzaii, estimated at around 21 per cent (9,798 people). 41 per cent of the Syrians are from Aleppo. Other common nationalities are Palestinian, Ethiopian, and Bengali, each comprising 1 per cent of the total population. (Arch Consulting, 2017)

Changes in the Syrian demographic in Ouzaii (fig. 2) were influenced by successive incidents in Lebanon: Syrians arrived in Ouzaii as early as the 1990s. The number of Syrians in Ouzaii was however small and was estimated at less than 200 until the year 2000. Most of these Syrians at the time were construction workers involved in the reconstruction of downtown Beirut after the Lebanese civil war (CLDH, 2013). The number increased in the following decade (2000-10) to reach a total of 1,100. After the liberation of the south of Lebanon in 2000 from the Israeli occupation, rising economic opportunities attracted many Syrians to migrate to Lebanon in search for work opportunities. In 2005 after the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, some of the Syrians living in low to middle income neighborhoods in Beirut that are in political opposition with the Syrian regime had to relocate to the Southern Suburbs of Beirut, considered politically aligned with the Syrian regime. After the 2006 war with Israel, the number of Syrians in Ouzaii increased again. According to Arch Consulting (2018), many Syrian workers in the Suburbs of Beirut took part in the reconstruction projects of heavily bombarded areas.

After the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in 2011, the number of Syrians in Ouzaii further increased drastically. In 2012, 2,500 Syrian refugees were recorded. The number reached 5,600 in 2014. 2,000 Syrian refugees out of the

5,600 came to Ouzaii in 2014 which marked the maximum increase in incoming Syrian refugees per year. Between 2015 and 2018, the Syrian population increased by 4,200 to reach a total of 9,800.

The population counts from the last three years (2016-18) show that the number of displaced Syrians in Ouzaii is still increasing (fig. 3) (Arch Consulting Surveying Department Supervisor, 2018). However, the number of individuals per household has decreased. As the Arch Consulting officer explains, paterfamilias are still coming to Ouzaii without their families in search for work opportunities given the unstable conditions in Syria even after the war is coming to an end. This indicates the emergence of an infrastructure of care that is easing and paving the way for the new comers to settle in Ouzaii. The distribution map of the Syrian refugees in Ouzaii (fig. 4) shows that there are *life sustaining webs* that support the meaningful emergence of life in the urban setting. Such webs are clustering either at the level of the building or the neighborhood.

Syrians were able to secure jobs and open their own shops in an exclusive market of Lebanese businesses in Ouzaii until 2011 to sustain their livelihoods. 141 businesses in Ouzaii are managed by displaced Syrians and are recorded in this research out of 1550 in total⁵. The shops include furniture workshops, car garages and mechanics, groceries, mini markets, and bird stores⁶ among others. Syrian businesses were hardly identified and wouldn't have been possible without the help of 'قبضاي الحي'⁷ - neighborhood thug- who knows everything about the area and the reliance on the ARCH Consulting survey. However, the Syrian nationality can be identified from the names of these shops that refer to Syrian cities or food types; for example, Cham Furniture and Amir Halab Restaurant. The majority of the shops opened in Ouzaii after the Syrian crisis with a maximum of 25 new businesses in 2014 (fig. 5). Grocery shops are particularly appealing in Ouzaii. The way the shopfront displays are meticulously organized is influenced by what the Syrians call Grocery Salon (صالون خضار), in a manner that appeals to both the local and Syrian costumers. Furniture shops are many as well. Some are easily identified by the traditional Syrian furniture they display. These emerging businesses contributed to the activation of the main street of Ouzaii as a public space which was in decline before 2011.

This concentration of 141 businesses has created a solid base for a network that offers opportunities for Syrian refugees to self-sustain the livelihoods. Based on preliminary interviews with Syrian shop managers, these businesses have generated numerous work opportunities for Syrian refugees who they consider as a priority for employment. The following numbers by Arch Consulting from 2018 validate the above findings: the low unemployment rate of Syrians in Ouzaii at 4.1 per cent is an indicator that Syrians are able to secure jobs with more than 40 per cent employed within the boundaries of Ouzaii. These percentages are an indicator of a well-organized web of social support for working Syrians based on family and neighborly relations within Ouzaii.⁹

Refugees Hosting other Refugees

Clustering according to places of origin and family ties

In order to foreground the malleable interactions between Syrians in Ouzaii within the infrastructure of care, Syrians were mapped according to their governorate in Syria (fig. 6). These maps show that the Syrian refugees create geographic clusters based on their origin. They indicate the process of spatial settlement of refugees from the same origin. In addition, some Syrians displaced from coastal cities preferred to live adjacent to the northern seaside of Ouzaii where they formed large clusters. The large clusters are named 'the place of gypsies' 'الغجر' 'النور' after the Syrians from Banyas who settled there (fig. 7).

Syrians coming from Aleppo constitute the highest percentage of refugee population in Ouzaii recorded at 41 per cent in 2018. Thus, this research sought to analyze in depth the spatial settlements of the Syrians coming

from Aleppo to Ouzaii. Conceptualized in this paper as ‘social agents’ (Bourdieu, 1986), Syrians from Aleppo who came to live in Ouzaii before 2011 (fig. 8) are identified and georeferenced. It is assumed that these agents have catalyzed or eased the way for further clustering after the crisis. Each cluster is formed around one or more of these social agents. The same mechanism applies to Syrians in Ouzaii from other governorates. This geo-analysis explains that the growing of the clusters indicates the accumulated knowledge and familiarity of these agents with Ouzaii and the extent to which they can intervene or help others. Most probably, these agents have constituted the first entry point for many of the refugees and tended to recommend the area for its assets and what it offers in terms of housing and work opportunities. As discussed further in this paper, these agents mostly fall within the categories of friends and relatives.

Tracing and analyzing the family names of the surveyed Syrian refugees shows concentrations of nuclear and extended family ties. Around 40 cases are identified and highlighted in this research (fig. 9). The identified families either cluster in one building or within the same neighborhood to form an infrastructure of care where multiple practices are studied and mapped.

The analysis of recorded narratives by the interviewees showed that the emergent infrastructure of care operates at multiple scales from Syrian families to larger Syrian refugee communities and meets different needs for housing, work, and leisure.

This paper reflects on four of the narratives to illustrate the notion of refugees hosting other refugees through the infrastructure of care to secure housing and work opportunities.

Refugees Hosting other Refugees: Strategies to Secure Shelter

The modalities of housing refugees was studied by many scholars. Refugees, as other low-income groups in the city, rely on existing informal pathways for housing provision, mainly social networks which proved to be effective. (Fawaz, 2009a; Smith, 2003) As a priority for the newly displaced, the process of finding shelter for Syrian refugees in Ouzaii happens at successive stages with different hosts. The story of R.G., a woman in her mid-forties from eastern Ghouta, illustrates this process (fig. 10, 11). R.G. was internally displaced in Syria more than four times before arriving to Ouzaii in 2016¹⁰. This narrative tells her journey and identifies the different sequential hosts involved in her settlement in Ouzaii. Her journey is exemplary of a Syrian refugee who was hosted several times by a chain of refugees before becoming a host for newcomers herself. Her position comes through, in an interview, when she states with profound compassion that ‘Here we all help each other, we embrace each other to survive. I was helped to settle here and I am now open to helping others.’ The following episodes represent the successive stages of R.G. journey.

The first host: the ‘social agent’ as facilitator

In 2011, the husband of R.G.’s niece (dubbed Niece A) contacted a friend who owns a furniture workshop in Ouzaii. The friend operates as the social agent in this case as he lived in Ouzaii long before 2011. He temporarily hosted the husband of Niece A and shared with him his connections until he secured a job at one of the local furniture workshops, which in turn enabled him to rent a two-room apartment with a newly added kitchenette and bathroom and receive his family. Niece A and her children joined him at a later stage.

The second host: from previously hosted to a host

In 2012, Niece A shifted from being hosted to hosting her sister (Niece B) with three kids and later her mother (R.G.’s sister) and three brothers when the war had intensified in Ghouta. Her two-room apartment became a

site of refuge and accommodated the three families for more than three months until the infrastructure of care enabled them to secure shelter elsewhere in Ouzaii.

The story illustrates how Syrian refugees who live close to each other and share socio-spatial practices create a unified structure for support. R.G.'s sister had to relocate in 2012 after the apartment was no longer of adequate size to accommodate three families. She moved to a room that her other daughter (dubbed Niece C) found next to hers. As a result, the status of R.G.'s sister also changed from a hosted refugee to a refugee ready to host others within this chain of support.

The third host: further support

When the network of hosts and hosted refugees expanded, more opportunities for support beyond access to shelter became available to include work opportunities. In 2016, R.G. found the conditions in Ghouta intolerable and reached out to her sister in Ouzaii for help. R.G.'s sister hosted her for 20 days before she moved to an adjacent apartment. R.G. then moved again to the apartment of Niece C, which offered her better and much improved living conditions. The apartment of Niece C was renovated by Recycle Beirut.¹²

At the time, Niece C was one of the first people to work at Recycle Beirut and helped many other refugees secure work, including her aunt R.G. R.G.'s husband, on the other hand, found a job at a furniture workshop managed by an acquaintance of R.G.'s sister in Ouzaii.

The forth host: from suffering to empathy

It was clear from this representative journey that recurrent displacement creates empathy among refugees, as evident in R.G.'s quote at the beginning of this section: 'we care about each other.' R.G. is in close contact with her friends and relatives in Ghouta. She is always ready to offer help whenever anyone seeks refuge in Ouzaii. This is how the intricate web of connections sustains existing refugees and newcomers. As R.G. mentioned: 'we cannot survive and sustain our livelihoods without this network.'

Maintenance and Endurance of Care at Work

Maintaining the livelihoods of the displaced is not limited to finding shelter, but includes securing work opportunities. While some scholars argue that refugees face various hardships in accessing labor or establishing a business (Wauters and Lambrecht, 2006) due to their limited access to 'ethnic resources' (Waldinger, Aldrich, and Ward, 1990) and 'social networks' (Gold, 1992), few shed light on successful examples of refugees increasing their opportunities to find work or open their own businesses based on their social networks and strong group ties (Harb, Kassem, and Najdi, 2018). In Ouzaii, the infrastructure of care helps secure, facilitate, and support displaced Syrians. This section builds on three stories that demonstrate the operative role of this infrastructure in locating work opportunities through acquired trust in host communities, innovative tactics to work around municipal checks, and knowledge-building and technical skills.

Inherited trust in host communities

Securing and sustaining work in a politically-controlled area like Ouzaii is not easy. It requires building trust in the displaced as business owners. A.N. is a Syrian refugee from Dara'a who came to Ouzaii in 2012 to work for his cousin B.N. who arrived in Lebanon in 1995 and opened his own convenience shop in 2011¹⁴. A.N. was internally displaced in Syria more than five times¹⁵ and faced many hardships in sustaining work.

B.N. reflects on his experience in building a long-term professional network with people in Ouzaii. A.N. elaborates further: 'we have been here for 24 years, so we are almost Lebanese.' The 'we' reference in this quote extends beyond A.N.'s limited experience in Ouzaii to encompass 24 years of accumulated trust between B.N. and people in Ouzaii. This trust was transferred to A.N., creating a more flexible and healthy relationship with

the shop costumers and facilitating the process of establishing for himself a stable life in Ouzaii. A.N. states: 'here, we are financially stable. We are almost a part of this neighborhood. It is hard to predict if we want to return. We are not sure about this.'

Devising innovative tactics to work around municipal checks

As mentioned earlier, Syrian refugee workers are among the most vulnerable groups in Ouzaii to adopt innovative tactics to escape the gaze of the government and its municipal control. For example, N.J. is a Syrian refugee from Edleb who was displaced to Ouzaii in 2011 and has been since working as an informal street vendor. N.J. describes his work as a challenging and notes that it is not easy to work as a street vendor in Ouzaii in absence of a strong support from political parties or local tribes (العشائر). He had to devise ways to protect himself and his Syrian refugee friends who work as informal street vendors as well from frequent checks by the municipal police. In 2018, he started renting a small coffee shop on the main commercial street in Ouzaii, Running his coffee shop helped him increase his income and shadow his work as a street vendor. He mentioned: 'my friends gather with me in this coffee shop, hide the goods in one of the cupboards, and wait until noon to start work as street vendors. This way we escape the morning checks by the municipal police.' In addition, N.J. has secured a space in front of the coffee shop to park his cart and occasionally sell goods. But most importantly, N.J. secured an alliance that offers him protection. The Lebanese owner of the coffee shop is a member of the influential tribe (عشائر) who acts as a strong support for him in case he is stopped by the municipal police or teased by people. According to N.J., this support extends to other street vendors who use his coffee shop as a waiting station.

Acquiring knowledge and technical skills

Many of the Syrian refugees left their original professions after they settled in Ouzaii, which does not always offer work opportunities that match their existing skills. After 2011, they were able to gain access to work opportunities at Al-Hadi port¹⁶ in the coastal district of Ouzaii.

According to Mr. Jamal Alameh, Head of the Cooperative of Ouzaii Fishermen, there were only two Syrian fishermen before 2011 working under the supervision of Lebanese managers. They came from Aleppo and have been at Al-Hadi port for 20 years. They offered Syrian refugees extensive training to become fishermen as well. One of the refugees stated in an interview that: 'I have been here since 2011. My brothers eased my way into the port, trained me, and secured work for me with one of the Lebanese fishermen. I acquired fishing skills almost in a week.' He used the term 'brother' to reference his extended family as a sign of relationships of 'care' that emerge between the Syrians in the port. This refugee currently manages a boat that is owned by a Lebanese man who was originally not a fisherman.

Al-Hadi port currently hosts around 50 Syrian fishermen who are mostly from Aleppo. They constitute 41 per cent of the total number of fishermen. This percentage validates the huge influx of Syrians to Ouzaii and the largely growing capacity of the port that increased from 75 to 336 boats.

Infrastructure of Care: A Means of Maintaining Existence

The settlement of Syrian refugees in Ouzaii was possible through the accumulation of multiple efforts whereby local social agents share their different capacities and resources (Fawaz, 2008). These practices are manifested in an underlying infrastructural model whereby the concept of 'care' operates at different aspects of life to sustain livelihoods in Ouzaii. As Simone (2004) argues:

‘unless we reconceptualize the notion of belonging in terms other than those of a logic of group or territorial representation. These infrastructures display people’s needs to generate concrete acts and contexts of social collaboration [...] by making the most of the city’s limited means.’ (Simone, 2004, p. 419)

As such, the infrastructure of care in Ouzaii provides the base for a space of solidarity for Syrian refugees.

The infrastructure of care operates at three levels, each with its own social agents: nuclear family, extended family, and friends. They usually recommend settling in Ouzaii for what it has to offer in terms of housing and work opportunities, as well as its strategic location between Beirut, the airport, and south of Lebanon. Usually the social agent temporarily hosts newcomers until they are able to secure work and shelter. In the process, newcomers acquire the capacity to host their family members and other refugees. This constitutes the core of the social network whereby the settlement of one family facilitates the process for others and whereby the practice of refugees hosting other refugees is manifested. The infrastructure of care expands to include extended family members and friends who are either the first hosts to the newly displaced or are temporarily hosted by others. The social networks that emerge within the infrastructure of care represent points of reference for tracking and disseminating information on vacant apartments and work opportunities to newly displaced Syrian refugees. As a result, refugees are engaged in the production of a flexible housing stock between owners and former Syrian refugees and the refugees themselves.

We can conclude that the infrastructure of care operates as one critical mode of how Syrian refugees build trust with other communities in Ouzaii and connect to a network of support that exposes them to training opportunities in order to acquire technical skills. It further explains why Syrian refugees cluster in certain places according to their social ties. It is sustained by concentrations of Syrian businesses that create multiple work opportunities for the newly displaced. Its scope extends beyond the practice of ‘refugees hosting other refugees’ to utilize the concept of ‘care’ at multiple scales. Firstly, nuclear and extended family units display ‘care’ by hosting each other. This was illustrated in the story of R.G. who changed from being hosted several times by her family members to a current host for newly displaced refugees. Secondly, the Syrian refugee community in Ouzaii displays ‘care’ as a bond that connects between several social networks and establishes internal solidarity. This was illustrated by the stories of the fishermen from Aleppo who were trained at Al-Hadi port by other Syrians and N.J. who allows other Syrian street vendors to use his coffee shop as a hideaway from municipal checks. Thirdly, Lebanese hosts display ‘care’ by offering Syrian refugees work opportunities and apartments for rent and supporting Syrian businesses to flourish. This was illustrated in the stories of A.N. and B.N. who capitalized on their social and professional networks with people in Ouzaii throughout the past 20 years.

It is evident that urban informality in Ouzaii offered Syrian refugees an alternative mode of access to the city, allowing them to escape the gaze of the humanitarian aid apparatus that reduces them to a statistic and further signifies their vulnerability. The resultant infrastructure of care guards the refugees from possible social discrimination or political threats and allows them to maneuver quietly around the city. It serves as one mode for vulnerable groups, as the Syrian refugees in Lebanon, to work around the lack of public policies that protects them and contributes to sustaining their lives in the hosting countries.

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Interviews

A.N. (2019, January 31). (B. Yassine, Interviewer)

ALAMEH, J. (2019, February 9). AL-Hadi Port. (B. Yassine, Interviewer)

ARCH CONSULTING SURVEYING DEPARTMENT SUPERVISOR. (2018, August). (B. Yassine, Interviewer)

J.N. (2019, February 11). (B. Yassine, Interviewer)

R.G. (2019, January 7). From being hosted to a host. (B. Yassine, Interviewer) Beirut

Endnotes

¹ This paper builds on a presentation delivered by the authors in the Symposium of Infrastructures of Care: Spaces of Refuge and Displacement held at UCL on 01 February 2019.

² The data was collected by ARCH Consulting on behalf of the Municipality of Ghobeiry and Borj Al Barajneh and was initially intended to serve for taxation purposes. It was however filtered and adapted by the authors for the purposes of this research.

³ We sorted out the names of Syrian refugees and were able to identify relatives and family members by looking into the second and third names of each of the refugees as well as identifying their geographical location.

⁴ It should be noted that some of the meanings behind key terminologies used by the interviewees may have been slightly altered in translation to fit standard English academic writing.

⁵ We relied on data extracted from survey conducted by Arch Consulting in 2017, complemented by field mapping conducted by Batoul Yassine in 2018.

⁶ Bird shops are common in Ouzaii and are managed by the Syrians; 5 shops are counted on the main street. The bird shops reflect the old practice commonly known in the Syrian culture as *الحميماتي* "alhememati" or the 'breeder of birds.'

⁷ *قبضاي الحي* is a designation of a guy who is usually one of the *asha'er* members and in some cases affiliated with Hezbollah.

⁹ There are other models of commercial interactions between refugees and host communities in Lebanon in informal settlements that indicate adaptation of the Syrian refugees to diverse settings in which they are hosted. An example of this is well illustrated in Carpi, E. (2017). Learning and Earning in Constrained Labour Markets: The Politics of Livelihoods in Lebanon's Halba.

¹⁰ R.G. fled from eastern Ghouta to western Ghouta after the outbreak of the war in Syria. She stayed with her four kids and husband who is besieged in western Ghouta for four years. In 2015, she got in contact with her niece in Shmestar, Lebanon, who helped her settle and work in Shmestar through her connections with a Syrian family from Hasaka that works in harvesting green tobacco. She could not tolerate the work environment with her girls and, as a result, returned to Ghouta after five months. In 2016, R.G. traveled to Lebanon after her sister and her nieces who paved the way for her settlement and work in Ouzaii.

¹² Beirut Recycle is a private initiative that is supported by UNHCR. The initiative works in waste classification in Ouzaii and offers job opportunities to Syrian women.

¹⁴ People from Dara'a are known for working in mini markets and convenience shops.

¹⁵ On the onset of the Syrian crisis, A.N., along with his family and parents, escaped the harsh strikes on his hometown Dara'a to Jdaideh on the borders between Lebanon and Syria. They were unable to reach Ouzaii because A.N.'s parents suffered from physical disabilities, so they opted for refuge to Jdaideh (Syria) where some of their relatives hosted them for a couple of months. They had to move for more than five times between Jdaideh and a small town called Rawdah depending on the level of peace and stability. At that time, A.N. was working informally in the free market on the borders between Syria and Lebanon. He claims that his financial state was detrimental.

¹⁶ Al-Hadi port was established in 2002 and renovated in 2006 after the severe destructions caused by the Israeli strikes on Ouzaii during the 33-day war with Hezbollah. The port was designed for a capacity of 75 boats and many of the current existing facilities were added during the renovation process.