CONSTRUCTING REFUGEE IDENTITY:

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF HUMANITARIAN NARRATIVES ON SYRIAN REFUGEES IN AL-ZAATARI CAMP (2012-2022)

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In International and Regional Studies

(Middle Eastern and North African Studies)

At the

University of Michigan

April 2026

Acknowledgements

This thesis was written across different places, different seasons, and different versions of myself. It took shape slowly between questions I inherited and questions I learned how to ask. If it arrives here now as something finished, it is only because so many people walked parts of that path with me.

I want to begin by acknowledging the faith that sustained me through this process. I carried this work forward with the steadiness I find in Jesus, whose presence reminded me, especially in moments of uncertainty, doubt, and grief, that continuing is itself a form of hope. Thank you, Lord.

I am grateful to my family, who taught me what it means to carry more than one place at once. This work grows out of the worlds they carried with them and passed on to me, often without needing to explain that they were doing so. Their love and support made it possible for me to carry those worlds forward into this work. Everything in these pages begins there. I especially want to thank my older sister, Loureen Marji, who was part of this process in the most constant way. Throughout this program, she was the person I called almost every day with updates - the good, the bad, and the ugly. This thesis holds more of those conversations than it shows.

This year, I also carry the memory of my cousin Daoud Marji, whose life was taken suddenly and unjustly. Today marks one year since his passing. His absence is felt in ways that words cannot fully hold, but he remains part of the family and the world that shaped me, and therefore part of this work as well. I dedicate this to you.

To my friends and cohort who stayed close to me while this work was taking shape: thank you for the coffee chats, the long conversations, the laughter, and the space to complain when things felt overwhelming. It was a wild ride, but we made it out together, and this work carries traces of that shared time with me. I am especially grateful to Warsan Salah and Batool Makki, whose presence and support carried me through this work and this program in ways that are difficult to even put into words.

As a New Yorker and a Syrian-Jordanian immigrant, and as a student trying to understand how displacement reshapes identity and belonging, this work is deeply personal to me. It reflects not only an academic question, but a lifelong engagement with questions of identity, responsibility, and what it means to remain connected across distance. This thesis moves in the direction of Syrians whose lives continue across borders that were never meant to hold them. These chapters were written with an awareness that identity does not live inside categories. It lives in the quiet work of staying connected to places that history has tried to make distant. I wrote this work with them in mind, and with the hope that their stories continue to be told in ways that remain their own.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the communities whose struggles for dignity and justice continue to shape how I understand this research, this field, and my place within it.

And with that, I say: **Go Blue and Free Palestine.**

Abstract

This thesis examines how Syrian refugee identity in Jordan between 2012 and 2022 has been constructed through humanitarian institutional discourse and refugee-authored narratives. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis, the study analyzes how international humanitarian organizations, particularly the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), represent refugees through shifting categories such as vulnerability, resilience, productivity, and self-reliance across different phases of displacement. These institutional representations are placed in dialogue with refugee-authored testimonies, ethnographic research, and narrative-based scholarship that foreground lived experiences of waiting, family responsibility, conditional belonging, and temporal uncertainty in exile.

Using a longitudinal analytical framework structured around five phases of humanitarian response, the thesis demonstrates that refugee identity is not a fixed legal status, but an evolving discursive construction shaped by changing governance priorities and everyday social realities. While institutional discourse renders refugees legible through administrative categories necessary for coordinating protection and assistance, refugee narratives articulate identity through relational obligation, memory, and negotiation with uncertain futures. The comparison reveals tensions between humanitarian timelines structured around intervention and durable solutions and refugee experiences of prolonged waiting under conditions of temporary protection.

By bringing institutional and refugee-centered narratives into dialogue, the thesis contributes to scholarship on humanitarian governance and critical refugee studies by demonstrating how refugee identity is produced across overlapping discursive arenas rather than through institutional classification alone. The findings highlight the limits of vulnerability-, resilience-, and productivity-based frameworks for representing displacement and emphasize the importance of incorporating refugee self-representation into analyses of protracted exile. More broadly, the study illustrates how humanitarian discourse functions as a form of governance that shapes not only policy responses, but also the terms through which displacement itself is understood.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

The outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011, following widespread protests and subsequent state repression, led to unprecedented levels of displacement within Syria and across the region.[1] As violence intensified, millions of Syrians fled to neighboring countries, including Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, seeking safety and protection.[2] Jordan, which has historically hosted multiple refugee populations, became a key destination for Syrians fleeing the conflict.[3] In response to the rapid influx of refugees and concerns related to border management, security, and humanitarian coordination, the Jordanian government, in collaboration with international humanitarian organizations, established refugee camps as a central mechanism for managing displacement.[4] Al-Zaatari Camp, opened in 2012 near the Syrian border, quickly grew into one of the largest refugee camps in the world and emerged as a primary site of humanitarian intervention and governance.[5]

Over time, what began as an emergency response to mass displacement transformed into a complex system of long-term refugee governance involving international organizations, state institutions, and non-governmental actors.[6] As the Syrian displacement crisis became increasingly protracted, humanitarian responses in Jordan shifted from short-term relief toward longer-term frameworks emphasizing resilience, self-reliance, and sustainability.[7] Within this context,

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[1] Dawn Chatty, *Syria: The Making and Unmaking of a Refuge State* (London: Hurst, 2017), 210-215.
[2] UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2013* (Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2014), 14-18.
[3] Dawn Chatty, *Syria: The Making and Unmaking of a Refuge State* (London: Hurst, 2017), 192-198.
[4] Lewis Turner, "Who Is a Refugee in Jordan? Hierarchies and Exclusions in the Refugee Recognition Regime," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 36, no. 4 (December 2023): 877–896.
[5] UNHCR, *Global Appeal 2013 Update: Jordan* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2013).
[6] Suzan Ilcan and Kim Rygiel, "Resiliency Humanitarianism: Responsibilizing Refugees through Humanitarian Emergency Governance in the Camp," *International Political Sociology* 9, no. 4 (2015): 333–351.
[7] Suzan Ilcan and Kim Rygiel, "Resiliency Humanitarianism: Responsibilizing Refugees through Humanitarian Emergency Governance in the Camp," *International Political Sociology* 9, no. 4 (2015): 339–343.

humanitarian organizations, particularly the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), came to play a central role not only in coordinating humanitarian assistance but also in producing authoritative knowledge about refugees, their needs, and their identities.[8] Through reports, policy documents, and public communications, UNHCR has shaped dominant understandings of Syrian displacement in Jordan.[9] These shifts in institutional priorities were accompanied by changes in how refugees were discursively framed, categorized, and represented over time.

1.2 Problem Statement

Humanitarian discourse is often treated as a neutral or technical means of documenting crisis and coordinating aid.[10] However, critical scholarship has increasingly demonstrated that humanitarian language is deeply political.[11] Rather than simply describing refugee experience, humanitarian discourse actively constructs refugee identity by producing categories such as vulnerability, resilience, dependency, and responsibility.[12] These categories shape how refugees are perceived by policymakers, donors, host states, and the public, and they influence which forms of assistance and governance are considered legitimate.[13]

A central problem addressed in this thesis is the tendency of humanitarian discourse to privilege institutional priorities while marginalizing refugee voice, lived complexity, and political

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[8] Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 7–10.
[9] Roger Zetter, "Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 4, no. 1 (1991): 39–62.
[10] Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 1–6.
[11] Miriam Ticktin, *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 3–9.
[12] Roger Zetter, "Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 4, no. 1 (1991): 39–62.
[13] Liisa H. Malkki, "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization," *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 3 (1996): 377–404.

context. In institutional reports and policy documents, refugee experience is frequently abstracted into generalized narratives that obscure cultural, social, and personal dimensions of identity.[14] By contrast, refugee-authored and refugee-centered narratives often articulate experiences of displacement in ways that challenge, complicate, or exceed institutional representations. The gap between these institutional narratives and refugee-authored accounts raises critical questions about power, representation, and voice within humanitarian governance, particularly in contexts of prolonged displacement such as Al-Zaatari Camp.[15]

1.3 Research Questions

This thesis is guided by three interrelated research questions. First, how do humanitarian organizations, particularly UNHCR, construct Syrian refugee identity and experience through institutional discourse, reports, and policy language between 2012 and 2022? Second, how do refugee-authored and refugee-centered narratives construct Syrian refugee identity and experience in contexts of protracted displacement in Jordan? Third, how do refugee-authored and refugee-centered narratives challenge, complicate, or reframe institutional representations of Syrian refugee identity?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to scholarly debates in refugee studies and humanitarian governance by foregrounding discourse as a central mechanism through which refugee identity is produced and governed.[16] By focusing on language, representation, and narrative rather than policy outcomes alone, the thesis highlights how humanitarian discourse functions as a form of power

[14] Prem Kumar Rajaram, "Humanitarianism and Representations of the Refugee," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 15, no. 3 (2002): 247–264.
[15] Miriam Ticktin, "Thinking Beyond Humanitarian Borders," *Social Research* 83, no. 2 (2016): 255–271.
[16] Roger Zetter, "Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 4, no. 1 (1991): 39–62.

that shapes subjectivities, legitimizes particular interventions, and normalizes specific governance frameworks in protracted displacement settings.[17]

The project is also significant for its temporal approach. By tracing changes in humanitarian discourse over a decade of displacement, this thesis demonstrates how institutional narratives adapt to shifting political, institutional, and global conditions, including the normalization of long-term displacement and the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.[18] Finally, by placing institutional discourse in dialogue with refugee-authored and refugee-centered narratives, the study underscores the importance of refugee voices in contesting dominant representations and reasserting agency within systems that often speak on their behalf.[19] These insights have broader implications for understanding power, voice, and representation in humanitarian policy and practice.

1.5 Thesis Structure

This thesis is organized into seven chapters. Chapter Two reviews relevant literature on refugee governance and state policy in Jordan, humanitarian organizations and discourse, and refugee identity and representation, highlighting key debates and identifying gaps this study addresses. Chapter Three outlines the methodological framework, detailing the use of critical discourse analysis, the selection of the textual corpus, and the temporal structure of the study. Chapters Four through Six present the core analysis. Chapter Four examines how humanitarian organizations, particularly UNHCR, construct Syrian refugee identity across different phases of displacement, tracing dominant frames, metaphors, and discursive shifts over time. Chapter Five

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[17] Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 36–40.
[18] UNHCR, *Global Report 2021* (Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022).
[19] Prem Kumar Rajaram, "Humanitarianism and Representations of the Refugee," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 15, no. 3 (2002): 247–264.

examines how refugee-authored and refugee-centered narratives construct Syrian refugee identity and experience, with particular attention to themes of belonging, temporality, gender roles, agency, and everyday life in conditions of protracted displacement. Chapter Six places institutional discourse in dialogue with refugee-authored narratives in order to identify points of convergence, omission, and tension between humanitarian representations and refugee self-representation. Chapter Seven concludes by synthesizing the findings and reflecting on their implications for humanitarian governance, representation, and future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Refugee Governance and State Policy in Jordan

Jordan occupies a central position in the contemporary global refugee regime despite not being a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention.[20] Rather than relying on domestic asylum legislation, refugee governance in Jordan operates through a hybrid institutional framework shaped by cooperation between the Jordanian state and international humanitarian actors, particularly the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).[21] This arrangement produces a system in which legal status, protection access, and everyday refugee experience are structured less by formal rights than by administrative coordination and political priorities.

One of the defining features of Jordan's refugee governance structure is the absence of a comprehensive domestic asylum framework. Although the Jordanian constitution includes limited protections for political refugees, national legislation does not clearly define the legal status of asylum seekers or refugees. Instead, refugee protection is primarily administered through the 1998 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Government of Jordan and UNHCR,[22] which establishes the agency's authority to conduct refugee status determination (RSD) in the country while affirming the temporary nature of refugee presence. This arrangement positions Jordan as a transit state rather than a country of permanent settlement[23], emphasizing voluntary return and third-country resettlement as the primary durable solutions available to displaced populations.

Within this governance structure, access to protection is shaped less by formal recognition as a refugee than by access to registration with UNHCR. In practice, the majority of Syrians

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[20] Maja Janmyr, "UNHCR and the Syrian Refugee Response: Negotiating Status and Registration in a Non-Signatory State," *International Journal of Refugee Law* 33, no. 3 (2021): 409–432.
[21] Françoise de Bel-Air, *Migration Profile: Jordan* (Florence: European University Institute, Migration Policy Centre, 2016).
[22] Maja Janmyr, "UNHCR and the Syrian Refugee Response: Negotiating Status and Registration in a Non-Signatory State," *International Journal of Refugee Law* 33, no. 3 (2021): 409–432.
[23] Lewis Turner, "Who Is a Refugee in Jordan? Hierarchies and Exclusions in the Refugee Recognition Regime," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 36, no. 4 (2023): 877–896.

registered with UNHCR in Jordan hold asylum seeker status rather than formal refugee recognition, which is typically granted only to individuals being considered for resettlement. As Lewis Turner argues, refugee recognition in Jordan is "a heavily politicized process shaped by intersecting racial and national hierarchies," and registration itself functions as the primary mechanism through which protection is delivered.[24] This distinction highlights the extent to which humanitarian governance in Jordan operates through administrative categorization rather than legal entitlement.

The governance of Syrian refugees in Jordan has also been shaped by spatial management strategies that reflect broader regional containment policies.[25] Following the initial influx of Syrians after 2011, the Jordanian government supported the establishment of Zaatari refugee camp near the Syrian border as a mechanism for managing population movement and concentrating humanitarian assistance. As Dawn Chatty notes, this approach reflects a broader humanitarian template based on encampment and vulnerability that has historically structured international responses to displacement crises.[26] Although the majority of Syrians in Jordan now live in urban areas rather than camps, encampment continues to function as an important symbolic and administrative component of refugee governance.

At the same time, Jordan's refugee policy has evolved from an initial discourse of hospitality toward a more securitized framework of migration management. Early responses to Syrian displacement were often framed in terms of kinship ties and regional solidarity, particularly among communities in northern Jordan with longstanding social connections to southern Syria.

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[24] Lewis Turner, "Who Is a Refugee in Jordan? Hierarchies and Exclusions in the Refugee Recognition Regime," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 36, no. 4 (2023): 877.
[25] Zaid Alawamleh, *The Spatial Governance of the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Jordan: Refugees between Urban Settlements and Encampment Policies* (Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2023).
[26] Dawn Chatty, *Syria: The Making and Unmaking of a Refuge State* (London: Hurst & Company, 2017).

However, as displacement became protracted and refugee populations increased, policy discourse shifted toward concerns about national security, economic pressure, and demographic change. This transition reflects the broader tension between humanitarian protection and state sovereignty that characterizes refugee governance across the Middle East.

Refugee governance in Jordan is also shaped by differentiated treatment across nationalities, which further illustrates the political nature of protection access.[27] While Syrians have generally benefited from relatively broad access to registration and humanitarian services, asylum seekers from countries such as Iraq, Sudan, and Yemen face more restrictive regulatory conditions. In 2019, the Government of Jordan requested that UNHCR suspend registration for most non-Syrian arrivals entering the country on work, tourism, or medical visas, significantly limiting access to international protection for these groups. Such policies demonstrate how refugee recognition operates through selective administrative inclusion rather than universal legal criteria.

Finally, Jordan's refugee governance system increasingly reflects the influence of international development frameworks that link humanitarian assistance to labor market participation and economic self-reliance. Initiatives such as the Jordan Compact reoriented refugee policy toward integrating Syrians into formal employment sectors while simultaneously attracting foreign investment and development funding.[28] This shift illustrates how refugee governance has moved beyond emergency response toward longer-term strategies of managed integration that align humanitarian objectives with national economic priorities.

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[27] Lewis Turner, "Who Is a Refugee in Jordan? Hierarchies and Exclusions in the Refugee Recognition Regime," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 36, no. 4 (2023): 884–888.

[28] Katharina Lenner, "Biting Our Tongues: Policy Legacies and Memories in the Making of the Jordan Compact," *Middle East Critique* 29, no. 4 (2020): 347–363.

Taken together, these dynamics demonstrate that refugee governance in Jordan operates through a hybrid regime combining international humanitarian authority, domestic administrative regulation, and geopolitical considerations. Rather than functioning as a purely legal process, refugee recognition in Jordan is embedded within broader political negotiations over sovereignty, development, and international responsibility-sharing. Understanding this governance structure is essential for analyzing how institutional policies shape not only access to protection but also the social and political conditions through which displaced populations construct identity in contexts of prolonged displacement.

2.2 Humanitarian Organizations and Discourse

Humanitarian organizations play a central role not only in delivering aid to displaced populations, but also in shaping how refugee experiences are categorized, interpreted, and governed. Rather than functioning solely as neutral providers of assistance, international humanitarian institutions participate in the production of knowledge about refugees and in the construction of categories, such as vulnerability, resilience, and need, that structure access to protection and services. Scholars across anthropology, political sociology, and migration studies have demonstrated that these classificatory practices are central to contemporary systems of humanitarian governance and have lasting implications for how displaced populations understand themselves and are understood by others.[29]

A key contribution to this literature is the concept of humanitarian governance, which describes the ways international organizations regulate populations through techniques of care, assessment, and intervention.[30] As Michael Barnett argues, modern humanitarianism operates not only as a moral project but as a system of institutional authority that organizes responses to

[29] Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
[30] Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

suffering through standardized frameworks of intervention and expertise. Within this system, humanitarian actors define who qualifies as a legitimate subject of protection and what forms of assistance are considered appropriate, thereby shaping the structure of refugee response regimes. Rather than existing outside politics, humanitarianism functions as a mechanism through which global inequalities are managed and reproduced.

Central to humanitarian governance is the classification of refugees through bureaucratic categories that determine eligibility for aid. Roger Zetter's foundational work on refugee labeling demonstrates that administrative categories are not neutral descriptors but tools that shape institutional responses and refugee identities alike.[31] Labels such as "vulnerable," "self-reliant," or "at risk" function as mechanisms through which humanitarian actors prioritize assistance, allocate resources, and distinguish between deserving and undeserving populations. These classificatory systems therefore play a decisive role in structuring the everyday experiences of displaced communities.

Subsequent scholarship has expanded on Zetter's argument by examining how humanitarian discourse constructs refugees as depoliticized subjects. Liisa Malkki's influential analysis of humanitarian representations shows that refugees are frequently portrayed as universal victims rather than as historically situated political actors.[32] This framing removes displacement from its geopolitical causes and repositions refugees as objects of care rather than agents with political claims. In doing so, humanitarian narratives reinforce a moral framework that privileges suffering as the primary basis for recognition within international protection regimes.

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[31] Roger Zetter, "Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 4, no. 1 (1991): 39–62.
[32] Liisa H. Malkki, "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization," *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 3 (1996): 377–404.

Building on this insight, Prem Kumar Rajaram argues that humanitarian institutions frequently construct refugees as voiceless populations whose experiences must be interpreted by international experts.[33] This process of representation positions humanitarian organizations as intermediaries between displaced communities and global audiences, thereby reinforcing institutional authority over refugee narratives. Rather than amplifying refugee perspectives, humanitarian discourse often reshapes them into standardized accounts of vulnerability that align with donor expectations and policy priorities.

Didier Fassin's concept of humanitarian reason further clarifies how these representational frameworks operate.[34] Fassin argues that contemporary humanitarian interventions increasingly rely on moral claims grounded in biological survival rather than political justice. Within this framework, the legitimacy of assistance depends less on legal rights than on the recognition of suffering bodies in need of care. As a result, humanitarian governance shifts attention away from structural causes of displacement and toward individualized assessments of vulnerability, reinforcing a system in which access to aid is mediated through evaluations of deservingness rather than entitlement.

Miriam Ticktin extends this critique by demonstrating how humanitarian regimes produce hierarchies of innocence that determine who qualifies for protection.[35] In her analysis of migration governance in Europe, she shows that humanitarian assistance often prioritizes individuals whose experiences can be framed in terms of exceptional suffering, such as illness or gender-based violence. This emphasis on vulnerability as a prerequisite for recognition produces exclusionary

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[33] Prem Kumar Rajaram, "Humanitarianism and Representations of the Refugee," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 15, no. 3 (2002): 247–264.
[34] Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
[35] Miriam Ticktin, *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

outcomes, as those who cannot perform acceptable forms of victimhood are less likely to receive assistance. Humanitarian categories therefore function not only as mechanisms of care, but also as tools of differentiation within refugee populations.

These dynamics are further reinforced through institutional practices that emphasize resilience and self-reliance as central goals of refugee assistance. Suzan Ilcan and Kim Rygiel describe this shift as the emergence of resilience humanitarianism, a framework that encourages displaced populations to adapt to conditions of protracted displacement rather than to seek durable political solutions.[36] Within this model, refugees are expected to develop coping strategies that reduce dependence on aid, effectively transferring responsibility for managing displacement onto displaced communities themselves. This transformation reflects a broader shift in humanitarian governance from emergency response toward long-term population management.

Other scholars have examined how humanitarian organizations construct legitimacy through project-based interventions that translate complex social conditions into measurable indicators of need. Monika Krause argues that humanitarian actors rely on standardized assessment tools and reporting frameworks to demonstrate effectiveness to donors, often producing simplified representations of refugee experiences in the process.[37] These practices shape not only funding priorities, but also the categories through which displaced populations are understood within institutional contexts.

Gender has also emerged as a key dimension of humanitarian classification systems. Elisabeth Olivius shows that gender equality initiatives within refugee governance frequently frame women as vulnerable beneficiaries rather than as political actors, reinforcing paternalistic

[36] Suzan Ilcan and Kim Rygiel, "Resiliency Humanitarianism: Responsibilizing Refugees through Humanitarian Emergency Governance in the Camp," *International Political Sociology* 9, no. 4 (2015): 333–351.
[37] Monika Krause, *The Good Project: Humanitarian Relief NGOs and the Fragmentation of Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

assumptions about protection and empowerment.[38] Similarly, Ingrid Palmary's analysis of UNHCR documentation demonstrates how institutional narratives construct vulnerability through culturally specific assumptions about family structure, social roles, and risk.[39] These representations shape the design of assistance programs while simultaneously influencing how refugees are expected to perform vulnerability in order to access support.

Recent research has also highlighted the role of humanitarian expertise in producing knowledge about refugee populations. Bic Ngo and Sarah Hansen argue that NGO reporting practices frequently construct deficit-oriented portrayals of displaced communities that emphasize need, dependency, and risk while minimizing agency and resilience.[40] These representations are not incidental, but are embedded within institutional processes that translate lived experience into policy-relevant data. As a result, humanitarian organizations function as producers of authoritative knowledge about displacement rather than simply as providers of assistance.

Within the context of Jordan, Lewis Turner's analysis of vulnerability assessments illustrates how these global dynamics operate at the national level.[41] Turner shows that vulnerability has become a central organizing category within humanitarian programming, shaping decisions about resource allocation, service provision, and eligibility for resettlement. At the same time, the meaning of vulnerability remains highly contested, reflecting tensions between international frameworks and local institutional practices. Turner further demonstrates that the translation of vulnerability into Arabic introduces additional layers of ambiguity, as humanitarian terminology does not always correspond to locally meaningful categories of need. These linguistic

[38] Elisabeth Olivius, "Displacing equality? Women's participation and humanitarian aid effectiveness in refugee camps," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (2014): 93–117.
[39] Ingrid Palmary, "Gender, race and culture: Unpacking discourses of tradition and culture in UNHCR refugee policy," 2008.
[40] Bic Ngo and Sarah Hansen, "Humanitarian Knowledge Production and the Representation of Refugee Communities," 2020.
[41] Lewis Turner, "Defining, Operationalising, and Translating 'Vulnerability' in Jordan's Refugee Response," 2025.

and conceptual discrepancies reveal how humanitarian governance is structured through hierarchies of knowledge production that privilege international expertise over local perspectives.

Taken together, this body of scholarship demonstrates that humanitarian organizations do more than respond to displacement: they actively shape the categories through which refugee experiences are interpreted and managed. Through practices of labeling, assessment, and representation, humanitarian institutions construct hierarchies of vulnerability that determine access to protection while simultaneously reinforcing depoliticized understandings of displacement. These processes are particularly significant in protracted refugee contexts such as Jordan, where international organizations play a sustained role in structuring everyday life within refugee communities.

Understanding how humanitarian discourse produces and operationalizes vulnerability is therefore essential for analyzing the relationship between institutional narratives and refugee self-representation. While humanitarian organizations present vulnerability as a neutral indicator of need, existing scholarship demonstrates that it functions as a socially constructed category shaped by political priorities, institutional constraints, and global power relations. This insight provides the foundation for examining how such representations intersect with refugee perspectives and identity formation in the sections that follow.

2.3 Refugee Identity, Voice, and Representation

While humanitarian institutions play a central role in defining refugee categories and administering protection regimes, displaced people are not passive recipients of these classifications. A growing body of scholarship demonstrates that refugee identity is actively negotiated through narrative, memory, gendered roles, temporal uncertainty, and everyday strategies of adaptation in exile.[42] Rather than treating "the refugee" as a fixed legal or

[42] Wendy Pearlman, *Becoming a Refugee: Syrians in Exile* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

humanitarian category, this literature emphasizes identity formation as a dynamic social and political process shaped both by institutional discourse and by refugees' own self-representations.

Research on Syrian displacement in particular highlights how refugee identity emerges gradually rather than instantaneously upon crossing borders. Wendy Pearlman argues that becoming a refugee is a process shaped by shifting expectations of return, changing relationships to home and host societies, and evolving interpretations of displacement over time.[43] Refugee status is therefore not simply imposed externally through legal classification, but internalized and reinterpreted through lived experience. This insight complicates humanitarian narratives that treat refugee identity as stable and universally legible.

Other scholars emphasize how displacement restructures gender roles and family responsibilities, especially among women in exile. Dina Sidhva and colleagues show that middle-aged Syrian refugee women in Jordan often assume expanded economic and social roles within their households, challenging humanitarian portrayals that frame refugee women primarily through vulnerability.[44] Similarly, Sarah Tobin's ethnographic work demonstrates how Syrian refugee women engage in processes of "moral self-making" in exile, reconstructing dignity and belonging within environments shaped by legal restriction and humanitarian governance.[45] These findings suggest that refugee identity is not reducible to institutional categories such as vulnerability or dependency but is continuously reshaped through everyday practices of adaptation and survival.

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[43] Wendy Pearlman, *Becoming a Refugee: Syrians in Exile* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019). 12-28.
[44] Dina Sidhva et al., "In Exile, the Woman Became Everything': Middle-Aged Syrian Women's Contributions to Family Livelihoods during Protracted Displacement in Jordan," *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* (2021). 4-15.
[45] Sarah A. Tobin, *Everyday Piety: Islam and Economy in Jordan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016); see also Sarah Tobin, "Self-Making in Exile," 2020.

Temporal uncertainty also plays a critical role in shaping refugee subjectivity. An Van Raemdonck introduces the concept of "double waithood" to describe how displacement delays key life transitions, such as employment, marriage, and household formation, among Syrian refugee men in Jordan.[46] This condition produces identities structured not only by loss and displacement but by prolonged suspension between imagined futures and constrained present realities. Such analyses highlight how refugee identity is shaped by structural conditions of protracted displacement rather than by emergency alone.

In addition to gendered and temporal dimensions of identity formation, scholars have also examined how refugees articulate their own priorities and experiences in ways that diverge from institutional representations. Studies comparing refugee perspectives with service-provider assumptions demonstrate that displaced populations frequently prioritize issues such as mobility, employment access, and long-term stability over the categories of vulnerability that dominate humanitarian programming frameworks.[47] These discrepancies reveal important tensions between institutional narratives of need and refugees' own understandings of their circumstances.

Narrative and testimony further serve as important sites of refugee self-representation. Personal accounts of displacement challenge dominant humanitarian portrayals by foregrounding agency, resilience, and moral interpretation alongside experiences of hardship.[48] Rather than rejecting humanitarian categories altogether, refugee narratives often reinterpret them, demonstrating how individuals negotiate externally imposed labels while maintaining alternative understandings of belonging and identity. Such accounts provide critical insight into how displaced

[46] An Van Raemdonck, "Syrian refugee men in 'double waithood': ethnographic perspectives on labour and marriage in Jordan's border towns." 2023.
[47] Mitra Nasel et al., "Syrian Refugees' Perspectives and Service Providers' Viewpoints on Major Needs and Future Plans in Jordan." *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 5, no. 14 (2020).
[48] Rawan Al Akash and Jørgen Carling, "Listening to the Voices of Syrian Women Refugees in Jordan," 2016.

populations engage with, resist, and reshape the discursive frameworks through which they are governed.

Taken together, this body of scholarship demonstrates that refugee identity cannot be understood solely through institutional classifications such as vulnerability, resilience, or self-reliance. Instead, identity emerges through the interaction between humanitarian discourse, state policy environments, and refugees' own narrative practices. By placing institutional representations alongside refugee-authored perspectives, this thesis contributes to existing scholarship by examining how humanitarian discourse participates in shaping refugee subjectivity over time while also identifying points of divergence between organizational narratives and lived experience.

2.4 Gaps in the Literature

Despite extensive scholarship on humanitarian governance, refugee policy in Jordan, and refugee identity formation, important gaps remain in the literature concerning the relationship between institutional discourse and the production of refugee subjectivity over time.[49] In particular, existing research has rarely examined how humanitarian language evolves across different phases of displacement or how these shifts influence the ways refugees are represented within international policy frameworks.

First, while scholars have explored the political and administrative dimensions of refugee governance in Jordan, relatively few studies analyze the discursive mechanisms through which humanitarian organizations construct refugee populations as particular kinds of subjects over time. Research on UNHCR operations and humanitarian coordination structures has demonstrated how

[49] Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); Maja Janmyr, "UNHCR and the Syrian Refugee Response: Negotiating Status and Registration in a Non-Signatory State," *International Journal of Refugee Law* 33, no. 3 (2021): 409–432; Wendy Pearlman, *Becoming a Refugee: Syrians in Exile* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

international actors shape protection regimes and service delivery systems, yet less attention has been given to the role of language itself as a tool of governance.[50] As a result, the relationship between humanitarian discourse and identity formation remains underexamined.

Second, although critical scholarship has highlighted how categories such as vulnerability, resilience, and self-reliance function within humanitarian practice, these concepts are rarely studied longitudinally[51]. Much of the existing literature analyzes humanitarian discourse at a single moment in time rather than tracing how institutional representations shift across phases of crisis response, stabilization, and protracted displacement. This limits our understanding of how refugee subjectivity is reconstructed as emergencies transition into long-term governance contexts.

Third, while ethnographic and narrative-based studies have documented refugee experiences in Jordan and elsewhere, fewer works systematically compare institutional representations of refugees with refugee-authored accounts. As a result, the relationship between humanitarian narratives and refugees' own self-understandings remains insufficiently explored. Integrating these perspectives allows for a more comprehensive analysis of how identity is negotiated across institutional and lived domains.

Finally, although Al-Zaatari refugee camp has been widely studied as one of the largest Syrian refugee settlements in the region, it is often treated primarily as a site of service provision, security management, or humanitarian coordination rather than as a discursive space in which refugee subjectivity is produced and reshaped. Examining Al-Zaatari as a long-term governance

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[50] Françoise de Bel-Air, *Migration Profile: Jordan* (Florence: European University Institute, Migration Policy Centre, 2016); Lewis Turner, "Who Is a Refugee in Jordan? Hierarchies and Exclusions in the Refugee Recognition Regime," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 36, no. 4 (2023): 877–896.

[51] Roger Zetter, "Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 4, no. 1 (1991): 39–62; Suzan Ilcan and Kim Rygiel, "Resiliency Humanitarianism: Responsibilizing Refugees through Humanitarian Emergency Governance in the Camp," *International Political Sociology* 9, no. 4 (2015): 333–351.

environment rather than a temporary emergency settlement makes it possible to analyze how humanitarian institutions adapt their representations of displacement over time.

This thesis addresses these gaps by conducting a longitudinal critical discourse analysis of UNHCR policy and reporting documents related to Syrian refugees in Jordan between 2012 and 2022. By tracing shifts in institutional language across different phases of displacement and comparing these representations with refugee-authored narratives, the study contributes to ongoing debates about humanitarian governance, identity formation, and the politics of representation in protracted refugee contexts.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Theoretical Framework: Critical Discourse Analysis

This thesis employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its primary methodological and theoretical framework. CDA is particularly well suited to the study of humanitarian narratives because it approaches language not as a neutral or descriptive tool, but as a form of social practice through which meaning, power, and subject positions are produced and maintained.[52] In humanitarian contexts, institutional discourse plays a central role in shaping how crises are understood, how refugee populations are categorized, and how governance frameworks are legitimized. By using CDA, this study examines how humanitarian organizations, particularly UNHCR, construct Syrian refugee identity through institutional language and how these constructions evolve over time.

Central to CDA is the assumption that discourse both reflects and reproduces power relations.[53] Humanitarian texts such as policy documents, reports, and public communications do more than convey information; they actively frame refugees through specific categories, including vulnerability, resilience, dependency, and self-reliance. These categories are not merely descriptive but normative, shaping expectations about refugee behavior, responsibility, and deservingness.[54] This study therefore treats humanitarian discourse as a site of governance, where particular understandings of refugee identity are normalized and made legible to policymakers, donors, host states, and the public.

CDA also enables attention to what is excluded or silenced within institutional narratives.[55] In addition to identifying dominant frames and recurring metaphors, this approach considers the

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[52] Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).
[53] Teun A. van Dijk, *Discourse and Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
[54] Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).
[55] Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (London: Routledge, 2003).

absence or marginalization of political context, historical responsibility, and refugee agency beyond institutional definitions. Such silences are analytically significant, as they reveal the limits of humanitarian representation and the boundaries of what can be articulated within institutional discourse. Examining both what is said and what remains unsaid allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how refugee identity is discursively produced.

Finally, CDA provides a framework for placing institutional narratives in dialogue with refugee-authored texts and refugee-centered narratives. While humanitarian discourse often emphasizes abstraction and generalization, refugee narratives frequently foreground personal experience, memory, and social relations that exceed institutional categories. Rather than privileging one form of narrative over the other, this study uses CDA to analyze the tensions between these discursive registers and to examine how refugee-authored narratives challenge, complicate, or reframe dominant humanitarian representations. In doing so, the methodological approach aligns with the broader aim of the thesis: to interrogate the power of humanitarian discourse in shaping refugee identity and to illuminate the discrepancies between institutional narratives and refugee self-representation.

3.2 Data and Corpus Selection

The data corpus for this study consists of institutional humanitarian documents produced between 2012 and 2022 alongside refugee-authored and refugee-centered narratives that provide alternative representations of displacement in Jordan. The corpus was designed to support a longitudinal critical discourse analysis of how Syrian refugee identity has been constructed across different phases of humanitarian response, with particular attention to UNHCR's role as a central institutional actor in shaping policy language and public understandings of displacement.

The institutional component of the corpus is composed primarily of UNHCR Global Appeals, Global Reports, Annual Results Reports, and Jordan-specific operational updates

produced during the period under study.[56] These documents were selected because they represent authoritative policy-facing texts through which humanitarian priorities, protection strategies, and population categories are articulated for donors, host governments, and international partners. In addition to UNHCR publications, the corpus includes selected Jordan Response Plans and NGO policy briefs that reflect the broader coordination environment within which refugee governance in Jordan operates. Together, these materials provide insight into how institutional narratives evolve as displacement transitions from emergency response to long-term governance.

To enable systematic comparison across time, institutional documents were selected from five analytical phases corresponding to major shifts in the humanitarian response: the initial emergency response period (2012–2013), the expansion and coordination phase (2014–2015), the policy inflection associated with resilience and self-reliance frameworks following the Jordan Compact (2016–2017), the normalization of protracted displacement governance (2018–2019), and the pandemic-related recalibration of humanitarian programming (2020–2022).[57] This phased structure allows the study to trace changes in institutional representations of refugee identity across a decade of evolving humanitarian strategy.

The corpus also includes refugee-authored narratives, testimonies, ethnographic accounts, and refugee-centered narratives that foreground refugee perspectives on displacement and everyday life in exile. These sources include memoir-based writing, interview-based narrative research, documentary material, and qualitative scholarship centered on Syrian refugees in Jordan. While these texts differ in genre and methodological approach, they collectively provide insight

[56] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Appeal* (2012–2022); UNHCR, *Global Report* (2012–2022); UNHCR, *Jordan Operational Updates* (2012–2022).
[57] Government of Jordan and the International Community, *The Jordan Compact: A New Holistic Approach between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the International Community to Deal with the Syrian Refugee Crisis* (London Conference Supporting Syria and the Region, 2016).

into how displaced individuals articulate identity, belonging, agency, and uncertainty in ways that both intersect with and diverge from institutional representations. Rather than treating institutional and refugee-authored texts as equivalent forms of evidence, the study places them in analytical dialogue in order to identify points of convergence, omission, and tension between humanitarian narratives and lived experience. This comparative design supports the broader objective of examining how refugee identity is constructed within policy discourse while also attending to alternative forms of self-representation that challenge or complicate institutional categories.

Source selection was guided by three criteria: relevance to Syrian displacement in Jordan, temporal alignment with the 2012–2022 study period, and analytical significance for tracing discursive constructions of vulnerability, resilience, productivity, and long-term adaptation. The corpus was not intended to be statistically representative of all humanitarian reporting on Syrian displacement but was instead curated to enable close qualitative analysis of dominant frames, recurring metaphors, and discursive silences across a structured set of policy and narrative texts. This approach allows the study to identify both continuity and transformation in humanitarian representations of refugee identity over time.

3.3 Temporal Scope and Phased Analytical Design (2012–2022)

This study examines humanitarian discourse over a ten-year period, from 2012 to 2022, in order to capture how institutional narratives surrounding Syrian refugees have evolved over time. Rather than treating humanitarian discourse as static, the analysis adopts a longitudinal approach that recognizes displacement as a dynamic and shifting condition shaped by political, institutional, and global developments.[58] The selected timeframe begins with the establishment of Al-Zaatari Camp in 2012 and extends through a decade marked by the normalization of protracted displacement and the disruptions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

[58] Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

To facilitate systematic comparison across time, the analysis is organized into five analytical phases that reflect major shifts in the humanitarian response to Syrian displacement in Jordan. These phases include the initial emergency response (2012–2013), the scale-up and coordination phase (2014–2015), the policy inflection associated with resilience and self-reliance frameworks following the Jordan Compact (2016–2017), the consolidation of protracted displacement governance (2018–2019), and the period of pandemic-related recalibration (2020–2022).[59] This phased structure allows the study to trace changes in humanitarian priorities, rhetoric, and modes of representation as displacement moved from an emergency framework toward long-term governance.

For each phase, the analysis focuses on a set of key institutional texts alongside selected refugee-authored narratives and refugee-centered narratives. This approach enables comparison not only across time but also across discursive registers, highlighting how institutional narratives and refugee self-representations respond differently to shifting conditions. By examining how categories such as vulnerability, resilience, and self-reliance are articulated and rearticulated across phases, the study identifies patterns of continuity and transformation in the construction of refugee identity.

This temporal and phased analytical design strengthens the study's capacity to identify discursive change while maintaining analytical depth. Rather than surveying a large volume of texts superficially, the study prioritizes close qualitative analysis of selected documents that are representative of broader institutional and narrative trends within each phase. In doing so, the

[59] Government of Jordan and the International Community, *The Jordan Compact: A New Holistic Approach between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the International Community to Deal with the Syrian Refugee Crisis* (London Conference Supporting Syria and the Region, 2016).

approach balances historical scope with methodological rigor and supports a nuanced examination of how humanitarian discourse adapts to prolonged displacement over time.

3.4 Analytical Process

The analysis in this study follows a qualitative, iterative process grounded in the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis.[60] Texts within the corpus were examined through close reading with attention to language use, framing, and narrative structure, rather than treated as neutral sources of information. The analytical process was designed to identify how refugee identity is discursively constructed within humanitarian narratives and how these constructions shift across time and differ between institutional and refugee-authored texts.

Analysis began with an initial round of open coding across both institutional and refugee-authored sources to identify recurring themes, categories, and patterns of representation.[61] Particular attention was paid to the use of labels and descriptors associated with refugee identity, including but not limited to vulnerability, resilience, dependency, self-reliance, productivity, and responsibility. These initial codes were refined through subsequent readings as patterns became more apparent across texts and phases. Coding remained flexible and interpretive, allowing themes to evolve rather than imposing a fixed analytical schema at the outset. These coding categories were selected because they correspond directly to the study's research questions concerning how humanitarian organizations construct refugee identity, how cultural and social dimensions of displacement are represented or omitted, and how institutional narratives differ from refugee-authored accounts.

In addition to thematic coding, the analysis focused on identifying dominant discursive frames and metaphors through which refugee experience was narrated. This included examining

[60] Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (London: Routledge, 2003).
[61] Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 3rd ed. (London: Sage, 2016).

how refugees were positioned in relation to humanitarian institutions, host states, and imagined futures, as well as how responsibility and agency were distributed within narratives. Attention was also given to shifts in tone and emphasis across the five analytical phases, enabling comparison between early emergency-oriented rhetoric and later narratives emphasizing resilience, sustainability, and long-term governance.

A key component of the analytical process involved examining discursive silences, that is, aspects of refugee experience that were minimized, omitted, or rendered invisible within institutional texts.[62] These silences were identified through comparison with refugee-authored narratives and refugee-centered narratives, which often foreground personal histories, political context, and social relations absent from humanitarian discourse. By placing institutional and refugee-authored texts in dialogue, the analysis highlights points of convergence as well as moments of tension, rupture, and reframing.

Throughout the analytical process, analytic memos were used to document emerging insights, track connections across texts and phases, and support the organization of findings into the analysis chapters. This memo-writing process ensured transparency in how interpretive claims were developed. Together, these analytical steps enable a systematic and rigorous examination of humanitarian discourse while remaining attentive to the power relations and subject formations embedded in language.

3.5 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

This study relies exclusively on publicly available texts, including institutional documents, refugee-authored narratives, and refugee-centered narratives, and does not involve direct interaction with refugee participants or the collection of primary interview data. As a result, the project does not pose risks typically associated with human subjects research. Nevertheless, ethical

[62] Teun A. van Dijk, *Discourse and Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

considerations remain central to the analysis, particularly given the use of refugee-authored narratives and personal testimonies. Care was taken to engage refugee-authored texts respectfully and responsibly, recognizing that such narratives reflect lived experiences of displacement and loss. The analysis avoids extractive or decontextualized use of personal testimony and does not claim to speak on behalf of refugees. Instead, refugee-authored narratives are treated as situated forms of self-representation that offer perspectives distinct from institutional discourse. Where possible, attention is given to the context in which these narratives were produced and circulated.

Several limitations of the study should be acknowledged. First, the corpus is necessarily selective and cannot capture the full diversity of humanitarian discourse or refugee experience related to Syrian displacement in Jordan. While the phased analytical design enables longitudinal comparison, the focus on a number of texts within each phase prioritizes depth over breadth. Second, as with all discourse analysis, the interpretation of texts involves analytic judgment and is shaped by the researcher's positionality.[63] To address this, the study employs transparent coding practices, systematic comparison across sources, and analytic writing to support reflexivity. In addition, because this study examines institutional documents as discursive constructions rather than neutral policy records, the analysis does not seek to evaluate the effectiveness of humanitarian programming but instead focuses on how language shapes representations of refugee identity. This interpretive approach is consistent with the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis and ensures that findings are grounded in textual framing rather than institutional intent.

Finally, the absence of in-person interviews means that the study does not capture real-time or interactive dimensions of refugee experience. However, given the project's focus on representation, narrative, and discourse, the use of textual sources is both appropriate and

[63] Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2010).

methodologically aligned with the research questions. These limitations do not undermine the study's contributions but instead delineate the scope within which its findings should be understood.

Chapter 4: Humanitarian Discourse and the Construction of Refugee Identity

4.1 Introduction: Humanitarian Discourse as Identity Construction

This chapter examines how humanitarian organizations, particularly the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), construct Syrian refugee identity through institutional discourse across different phases of displacement in Jordan. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis, the chapter analyzes how policy documents, reports, and public communications frame refugee experience through recurring categories, narratives, and metaphors. Rather than treating humanitarian texts as neutral descriptions of displacement, the analysis approaches them as discursive sites in which particular understandings of refugee identity are produced, stabilized, and revised over time.[64]

Humanitarian discourse plays a central role in shaping how displacement is understood and governed.[65] Through institutional language, humanitarian actors define who refugees are, what they need, and how they are expected to behave within systems of assistance and regulation. Categories such as vulnerability, resilience, and self-reliance do not merely describe refugee experience; they function as organizing principles that structure humanitarian intervention and legitimize specific governance frameworks.[66] Examining these discursive constructions is therefore essential to understanding how refugee identity is produced within humanitarian systems, particularly in contexts of prolonged displacement.

The analysis in this chapter is organized chronologically to reflect shifts in humanitarian priorities and institutional responses between 2012 and 2022. The chapter traces discursive changes across five analytical phases, beginning with the initial emergency response to Syrian

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[64] Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).
[65] Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).
[66] Roger Zetter, "Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 4, no. 1 (1991): 39–62.

displacement and extending through the normalization of protracted displacement and the period of pandemic-related recalibration. This phased approach allows for systematic comparison between early crisis-oriented rhetoric and later narratives emphasizing management, resilience, productivity, and long-term governance. By examining how humanitarian discourse evolves across these phases, the chapter highlights both continuity and change in the construction of refugee identity. While the language of humanitarianism adapts to shifting political, institutional, and global conditions, certain underlying assumptions about refugees, as governable subjects, recipients of aid, and increasingly responsible actors, remain persistent.[67] The chapter thus establishes the dominant institutional framing of Syrian refugee identity that subsequent chapters will complicate and challenge through analysis of representation, omission, and refugee-authored counter-narratives.

4.2 Phase I: Emergency and Vulnerability (2012–2013)

The initial phase of humanitarian response to Syrian displacement in Jordan between 2012 and 2013 was characterized by an emergency-oriented discourse that framed refugees primarily as vulnerable populations in need of immediate protection and assistance.[68] During this period, institutional narratives produced by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) emphasized the scale and urgency of displacement, the rapid influx of arrivals across the Syrian border, and the necessity of expanding humanitarian infrastructure to accommodate growing refugee populations. Within these early documents, refugee identity was constructed largely through categories of dependency, exposure to risk, and need for shelter and registration rather than through longer-term frameworks of integration or self-reliance.[69]

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[67] Suzan Ilcan and Kim Rygiel, "Resiliency Humanitarianism: Responsibilizing Refugees through Humanitarian Emergency Governance in the Camp," *International Political Sociology* 9, no. 4 (2015): 333–351.
[68] UNHCR, *Global Appeal 2013 Update: Jordan* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2013).
[69] UNHCR, *Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis 2013* (Amman: Government of Jordan and UNHCR, 2013).

UNHCR reports from this period repeatedly described Syrian displacement in terms of crisis escalation and operational expansion. Institutional texts emphasized the rapid increase in refugee numbers and the pressure this influx placed on national infrastructure and humanitarian systems. As one early report noted, the organization "strengthened its operational response to the evolving situation with more staff and reinforced its field presence outside of Amman," highlighting the urgency of scaling protection mechanisms in response to mass arrivals.[70] Such language positioned refugees primarily as recipients of emergency intervention rather than as participants in longer-term governance processes.[71]

Central to this emergency framing was the prioritization of registration, documentation, and camp-based service delivery as primary tools of protection. Registration procedures were presented as essential mechanisms for identifying vulnerable individuals and ensuring access to humanitarian assistance. In this context, refugee identity became closely tied to administrative visibility within institutional systems.[72] Access to protection was therefore structured not through legal recognition alone but through participation in humanitarian registration frameworks that rendered refugee populations legible to international actors.

Encampment also played an important role in shaping early humanitarian representations of displacement. The establishment of Al-Zaatari camp in 2012 was described in institutional reports as a necessary response to the logistical challenges posed by large-scale arrivals near the Syrian border.[73] Within this framework, camps were constructed as spaces of safety, coordination, and service delivery rather than as sites of restriction or containment. Refugees were therefore

[70] UNHCR, *Global Report 2012: Jordan* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2013).
[71] UNHCR, *Global Appeal 2013 Update: Jordan* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2013).
[72] UNHCR, *Global Appeal 2013 Update: Jordan* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2013).
[73] Dawn Chatty, *The Syrian Humanitarian Disaster: Understanding Perceptions and Aspirations in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

represented primarily as temporary residents of emergency settlements whose needs could be addressed through centralized humanitarian intervention. At the same time, institutional discourse during this period framed refugees as populations requiring protection from both immediate physical danger and longer-term socioeconomic vulnerability. Reports emphasized access to shelter, food distribution, health services, and education as central priorities of humanitarian response. These interventions were described as essential for maintaining what UNHCR termed a "protection space" for displaced populations in Jordan.[74] Such language reinforced the perception of refugees as dependent on humanitarian institutions for survival while simultaneously positioning those institutions as primary guarantors of security and stability.

Early humanitarian narratives also placed strong emphasis on the exceptional scale of Syrian displacement as a defining feature of the crisis. The rapid growth of refugee populations was frequently described as placing unprecedented strain on national resources and host communities, reinforcing the urgency of international coordination and donor support. Within this framing, refugees appeared primarily as members of a collective population requiring management rather than as individuals with differentiated experiences of displacement.

Taken together, these representations illustrate how early humanitarian discourse constructed Syrian refugees primarily through the language of emergency response and vulnerability. Institutional texts emphasized protection, shelter, and registration as central priorities while minimizing discussion of long-term futures, economic participation, or social integration. Refugees were positioned as temporary recipients of humanitarian care whose presence was understood within the framework of crisis management rather than protracted displacement governance. This emergency-oriented framing established the discursive foundation

[74] UNHCR, *Global Appeal 2013 Update: Jordan* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2013).

upon which later narratives of resilience, self-reliance, and productivity would be built as the Syrian displacement crisis in Jordan entered subsequent phases.

4.3 Phase II: Scale-Up and Management (2014–2015)

Between 2014 and 2015, humanitarian discourse surrounding Syrian refugees in Jordan began to shift from the language of emergency response toward a framework centered on coordination, infrastructure development, and institutional management.[75] While vulnerability remained an important organizing category, institutional narratives increasingly emphasized system building, interagency cooperation, and the stabilization of humanitarian operations. In this phase, refugees were no longer represented solely as newly displaced populations requiring urgent protection, but as administratively governable subjects embedded within expanding humanitarian coordination structures.[76]

UNHCR policy documents and Global Appeal reports from this period reflect a transition from reactive crisis intervention to structured operational planning. Institutional language increasingly foregrounded partnerships between humanitarian organizations and the Jordanian state, particularly through references to memoranda of understanding, national resilience planning frameworks, and inter-agency response coordination.[77] Rather than emphasizing immediate survival needs alone, reports highlighted the consolidation of service delivery systems capable of managing displacement over longer periods of time. This shift marked an important transformation in how refugee presence was framed: displacement was no longer treated as a short-term emergency, but as a condition requiring sustained administrative oversight.

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[75] UNHCR, *Global Appeal 2015 Update: Jordan* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2015).
[76] Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), *2015–2016 Regional Strategic Overview: Jordan* (UNHCR, UNDP, and partners, 2015).
[77] Government of Jordan, *National Resilience Plan 2014–2016* (Amman: Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, 2014).

Encampment continued to function as a central component of humanitarian governance during this phase, but institutional descriptions of camps increasingly emphasized their role as organized service environments rather than temporary emergency shelters. Reports described the expansion of infrastructure in both Zaatari and Azraq camps, including housing units, registration systems, education facilities, and health services.[78] Through this language, camps were represented not simply as spaces of protection but as structured environments through which humanitarian actors could coordinate assistance efficiently and monitor refugee populations. Refugee identity within these narratives became closely tied to participation in managed service systems rather than solely to vulnerability resulting from displacement.

At the same time, humanitarian discourse began to incorporate greater attention to host-community impacts and national institutional capacity. UNHCR documents from this period frequently emphasized the strain placed on Jordan's infrastructure and public services by the continued presence of Syrian refugees.[79] References to water systems, education access, employment pressures, and municipal service provision positioned displacement as a shared governance challenge rather than a purely humanitarian crisis. This framing contributed to a discursive shift in which refugees were increasingly represented as part of a broader population management landscape involving both humanitarian actors and host-state institutions.

The growing prominence of coordination frameworks also reflected an expansion of technocratic language within humanitarian reporting. Institutional texts placed greater emphasis on operational indicators, funding requirements, sectoral planning mechanisms, and measurable program outcomes. Refugees appeared within these documents primarily as beneficiaries of coordinated service delivery systems rather than as individualized subjects of displacement.

[78] UNHCR, *Global Report 2014: Jordan* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2015).
[79] UNHCR, *Global Appeal 2015 Update: Jordan* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2015).

Through this process, humanitarian discourse translated complex lived experiences into categories legible to donors, policymakers, and international partners, reinforcing the role of institutional expertise in shaping representations of refugee need.

Importantly, this phase also marked the early emergence of resilience-oriented language within humanitarian narratives, although such terminology had not yet become dominant. References to host-community support, infrastructure strengthening, and sustainability planning signaled an emerging recognition that displacement in Jordan was becoming protracted rather than temporary. As a result, humanitarian discourse began to prepare the conceptual groundwork for later shifts toward self-reliance and economic participation frameworks that would become more prominent after 2016.

Taken together, the discursive patterns evident in humanitarian reporting between 2014 and 2015 illustrate a transition from emergency response toward structured population management. Refugees continued to be represented as vulnerable recipients of assistance, but they were increasingly positioned within coordinated governance systems designed to stabilize displacement over time. This shift marked an important intermediate stage in the evolution of humanitarian narratives, laying the institutional and conceptual foundations for the subsequent emergence of policy frameworks emphasizing resilience, labor participation, and long-term integration within national systems.

4.4 Phase III: Policy Inflection and Self-Reliance (2016–2017)

The period between 2016 and 2017 represents a significant turning point in humanitarian discourse surrounding Syrian refugees in Jordan. During this phase, institutional narratives shifted from frameworks centered primarily on coordination and service delivery toward language emphasizing resilience, economic participation, and responsibility-sharing between humanitarian actors and host states. This transition was closely linked to the introduction of the Jordan Compact

in 2016, announced at the London Conference on Supporting Syria and the Region, which linked international financial assistance to expanded labor market access for Syrian refugees and marked a broader reorientation of the refugee response from emergency assistance toward development-based approaches to displacement governance.[80] Within this emerging framework, refugees were increasingly represented not only as recipients of aid, but as potential economic actors capable of contributing to national systems.

UNHCR reports and related policy documents from this period reflect the growing prominence of resilience as a central organizing concept within humanitarian response strategies.[81] Rather than describing refugees primarily through vulnerability-based categories, institutional texts began to emphasize their capacity for adaptation, participation, and productivity under conditions of prolonged displacement. This shift did not eliminate earlier humanitarian categories, but instead layered new expectations onto existing representations of refugee need. Refugees were thus simultaneously framed as vulnerable populations requiring protection and as responsible subjects expected to participate in strategies of economic stabilization.

The introduction of work permit initiatives for Syrian refugees played a particularly important role in reshaping humanitarian discourse during this phase.[82] Institutional narratives increasingly highlighted access to formal employment as a pathway toward reducing aid dependency and strengthening host-community resilience. Within these texts, labor market participation was framed not only as a mechanism for improving refugee livelihoods, but also as a strategy for supporting national economic growth and attracting international development

[80] Government of Jordan and the International Community, *The Jordan Compact: A New Holistic Approach between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the International Community to Deal with the Syrian Refugee Crisis* (London Conference Supporting Syria and the Region, 2016).
[81] UNHCR, *Global Appeal 2017 Update: Jordan* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2017).
[82] International Labour Organization (ILO), *Work Permits and Employment of Syrian Refugees in Jordan: Towards Formalising the Work of Syrian Refugees* (2017).

funding.[83] Through this framing, refugee identity became linked to productivity and contribution rather than solely to protection and assistance. At the same time, humanitarian reporting began to emphasize partnerships between international donors, development agencies, and the Jordanian government as central components of refugee response planning.[84] References to investment frameworks, infrastructure development, and sectoral coordination expanded the scope of humanitarian discourse beyond traditional relief mechanisms. Refugees appeared within these narratives as participants in a broader political economy of displacement management rather than as isolated beneficiaries of humanitarian intervention. This repositioning reflected a growing institutional recognition that displacement in Jordan had become a structural condition requiring long-term policy solutions rather than temporary emergency responses.

Despite this shift toward self-reliance frameworks, the language of vulnerability remained embedded within institutional narratives throughout this period. Reports continued to identify women, children, and economically disadvantaged households as priority populations for assistance, reinforcing earlier hierarchies of need within humanitarian programming. As a result, the emerging discourse of resilience did not replace vulnerability as a central category of representation, but instead operated alongside it, producing a hybrid framework in which refugees were simultaneously constructed as dependent and responsible subjects. This dual positioning illustrates the complexity of humanitarian governance during moments of policy transition.

The growing prominence of resilience-oriented discourse also reflected broader transformations within international humanitarian policy during the mid-2010s. As displacement crises increasingly became protracted across multiple regions, humanitarian actors began to adopt

[83] World Bank, *The Jordan Economic Opportunities for Syrians Program-for-Results* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2016).
[84] UNHCR, *Global Report 2016: Jordan* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2017).

development-oriented approaches designed to reduce long-term reliance on aid systems. Within this context, Syrian refugees in Jordan were frequently presented as a model population for experimenting with new governance strategies linking humanitarian assistance to labor market participation and economic integration.[85] Institutional narratives therefore positioned the Jordanian case as an example of innovative refugee response planning within global policy debates on responsibility-sharing and sustainable displacement management.

Taken together, the discursive shifts evident between 2016 and 2017 illustrate a clear transition from coordination-centered humanitarian response toward frameworks emphasizing productivity, resilience, and economic participation. Refugees were no longer represented solely as vulnerable recipients of protection, but increasingly as actors expected to contribute to national development strategies under conditions of protracted displacement. This transformation marked a critical inflection point in the construction of Syrian refugee identity within humanitarian discourse and laid the groundwork for subsequent narratives framing displacement as a normalized and governable long-term condition rather than an exceptional crisis.

4.5 Phase IV: Protracted Displacement and Normalization (2018–2019)

By 2018 and 2019, humanitarian discourse surrounding Syrian refugees in Jordan had shifted further away from the language of crisis response and toward frameworks that reflected the normalization of protracted displacement.[86] Institutional narratives increasingly treated refugee presence not as an exceptional emergency requiring temporary intervention, but as an enduring governance condition embedded within national planning structures. During this phase, categories such as resilience, sustainability, and service system integration became central organizing

[85] Lewis Turner, "Explaining the (Non-)Encampment of Syrian Refugees: Security, Class and the Labour Market in Lebanon and Jordan," *Mediterranean Politics* 20, no. 3 (2015): 386–404.
[86] UNHCR, *Global Appeal 2019 Update: Jordan* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2019).

principles within humanitarian reporting, reflecting a broader transformation in how displacement itself was conceptualized within policy discourse.

UNHCR reports from this period placed growing emphasis on long-term coordination between humanitarian actors and Jordanian state institutions, particularly in relation to education, employment access, and municipal infrastructure. Rather than describing refugee assistance primarily through short-term relief mechanisms, institutional documents increasingly framed support as part of broader efforts to strengthen national service delivery systems capable of accommodating both refugee and host-community populations.[87] Within this framework, displacement appeared less as a temporary disruption and more as a structural feature of the national policy environment requiring sustained administrative management.

This normalization of displacement was accompanied by a shift in how refugees were positioned within institutional narratives. Earlier representations had emphasized vulnerability and emergency protection needs, while mid-decade discourse highlighted productivity and economic participation. By contrast, humanitarian texts during 2018 and 2019 increasingly described refugees as participants in stabilized systems of long-term service provision. Access to education, vocational training programs, and regulated labor opportunities was framed as part of an ongoing strategy for maintaining social and economic stability rather than as transitional support preceding return or resettlement. In this context, refugee identity became closely associated with managed adaptation to extended conditions of displacement.

Institutional reporting during this phase also reflected increased attention to the sustainability of humanitarian programming.[88] References to donor coordination, cost efficiency, and institutional capacity building became more prominent, indicating a shift toward governance

[87] Government of Jordan, *Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis 2018–2020* (Amman, 2018).
[88] Government of Jordan, *Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis 2018–2020* (Amman, 2018).

models designed to maintain assistance over extended time horizons. Rather than presenting humanitarian intervention as a temporary response to crisis conditions, documents increasingly emphasized the importance of integrating refugee response planning into national development strategies. This shift reinforced the perception of displacement as a durable policy reality, rather than an exceptional humanitarian event.

At the same time, humanitarian narratives continued to emphasize the importance of resilience as both a programmatic objective and a defining feature of refugee identity. However, resilience during this phase was no longer framed primarily as an individual coping strategy but as a collective condition linked to institutional stability and service continuity. Refugees were represented as populations expected to navigate long-term uncertainty through participation in structured assistance programs and regulated economic opportunities. This representation reflected a broader transformation in humanitarian governance in which adaptation to protracted displacement became an implicit expectation rather than an explicit policy goal.

Despite this normalization of displacement, institutional discourse maintained the language of temporariness as a formal principle guiding refugee response strategies. References to voluntary return, regional responsibility-sharing, and eventual durable solutions continued to appear in policy documents even as humanitarian programming increasingly assumed the persistence of refugee presence in Jordan.[89] This coexistence of long-term planning frameworks and temporary protection narratives illustrates a central tension within humanitarian governance: refugees were simultaneously constructed as permanent participants in national systems and as populations whose presence remained officially provisional.

[89] UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2020).

Taken together, the discursive patterns evident in humanitarian reporting between 2018 and 2019 demonstrate the consolidation of protracted displacement as a normalized condition within institutional frameworks. Refugees were increasingly represented as administratively integrated populations whose presence required sustained coordination between humanitarian actors and host-state institutions. While earlier phases of response emphasized emergency protection and later phases highlighted economic participation, this period marked the stabilization of displacement as an ongoing governance environment. This normalization established the conditions under which subsequent humanitarian discourse would respond to new global disruptions, including the COVID-19 pandemic, while maintaining existing assumptions about refugee presence as a long-term but temporary feature of national policy landscapes.

4.6 Phase V: Pandemic and Recalibration (2020–2022)

Between 2020 and 2022, humanitarian discourse surrounding Syrian refugees in Jordan underwent a further recalibration in response to the global disruptions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.[90] While earlier phases of response emphasized emergency protection, coordination frameworks, and economic participation, institutional narratives during this period increasingly framed displacement through the language of public health risk, service continuity, and adaptive governance under conditions of uncertainty. Rather than introducing entirely new representational frameworks, pandemic-era humanitarian discourse reconfigured existing categories of vulnerability, resilience, and self-reliance to address emerging constraints on mobility, employment, and access to services.

UNHCR reports and related institutional documents from this period placed significant emphasis on maintaining access to essential services despite widespread disruptions to education

[90] UNHCR, *Global Report 2020: Jordan* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2021).

systems, health infrastructure, and labor markets.[91] Refugees were frequently represented as populations facing heightened exposure to socioeconomic instability due to their concentration in informal employment sectors and limited access to social protection mechanisms. Within this framework, humanitarian assistance was framed not only as a response to displacement itself, but also as a mechanism for mitigating the secondary effects of global crisis conditions on already vulnerable populations.

Pandemic-related restrictions on movement and employment further reshaped institutional representations of refugee self-reliance. Earlier policy frameworks had emphasized labor market participation as a pathway toward reducing aid dependency and strengthening host-community resilience. However, the contraction of economic opportunities during the pandemic temporarily disrupted these expectations, leading humanitarian organizations to reintroduce forms of emergency-oriented assistance within otherwise development-oriented response strategies.[92] As a result, refugee identity during this phase was once again partially rearticulated through the language of vulnerability, although now within the context of global crisis management rather than initial displacement.

At the same time, humanitarian discourse continued to emphasize the importance of maintaining long-term governance frameworks established in earlier phases of response. Institutional reports highlighted efforts to adapt service delivery mechanisms through digital registration systems, remote education initiatives, and targeted cash assistance programs designed to ensure continuity of support under pandemic conditions.[93] These interventions were presented as examples of institutional flexibility and innovation, reinforcing the perception of humanitarian

[91] UNHCR, *Jordan Operational Update: COVID-19 Response* (2020).
[92] World Bank, *The Economic and Social Impact of COVID-19 on Vulnerable Groups in Jordan* (2021).
[93] UNHCR, *Global Appeal 2021 Update: Jordan* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2021).

governance as an evolving system capable of responding to shifting global conditions while sustaining established protection infrastructures.

Pandemic-era reporting also reflected increased attention to inequalities between refugee and host-community populations in access to health services, employment opportunities, and vaccination programs.[94] Institutional narratives frequently framed refugees as populations requiring targeted inclusion within national public health strategies, positioning humanitarian actors as intermediaries facilitating coordination between displaced communities and state institutions. This framing reinforced earlier representations of refugees as administratively integrated but structurally vulnerable participants within national systems of service provision.

Pandemic-era humanitarian discourse also expanded the language of digital adaptation, targeted cash assistance, and continuity planning as central components of refugee response strategies. Institutional reports emphasized remote education initiatives, digital communication systems, and flexible service delivery mechanisms designed to maintain access under conditions of restricted mobility. These strategies reinforced the representation of refugees as administratively governable populations whose needs could be managed through technical innovation even during periods of global disruption. At the same time, renewed reliance on emergency cash assistance revealed the fragility of earlier self-reliance frameworks, as economic contraction and employment instability temporarily reintroduced vulnerability as a dominant organizing category within humanitarian reporting.

Despite these renewed references to vulnerability, institutional discourse during this period did not return fully to the emergency-oriented frameworks that characterized the earliest years of displacement. Instead, humanitarian texts continued to situate pandemic-related assistance within

[94] WHO and UNHCR, *Inclusion of Refugees in National COVID-19 Vaccination Campaigns: Jordan Case Study* (2021).

broader resilience-based programming structures developed during the previous decade. Refugees were therefore represented simultaneously as populations affected by global crisis conditions and as participants in long-term governance systems designed to manage protracted displacement. This dual framing illustrates how humanitarian discourse adapted to new forms of uncertainty without abandoning earlier assumptions about the permanence of displacement as a policy environment.

Taken together, the discursive patterns evident between 2020 and 2022 demonstrate how humanitarian narratives responded to the pandemic by recalibrating existing categories of vulnerability and resilience rather than replacing them. Refugee identity during this phase was constructed through the intersection of public health risk management, economic disruption, and institutional continuity, reflecting the growing complexity of humanitarian governance in contexts of prolonged displacement. These developments marked the final stage in the decade-long transformation of humanitarian discourse examined in this chapter and provide the foundation for understanding how Syrian refugees in Jordan came to be represented as long-term participants in adaptable but highly structured systems of international protection.

4.7 Interim Conclusion: The Humanitarian Refugee Subject

The discursive shifts traced across the five phases between 2012 and 2022 demonstrate that humanitarian representations of Syrian refugees in Jordan evolved significantly over time, moving from emergency-oriented framings of vulnerability toward more complex constructions emphasizing resilience, productivity, and long-term administrative integration. Rather than reflecting a linear transition from dependence to autonomy, however, these shifts produced a layered and internally contradictory representation of refugee identity shaped by changing institutional priorities and governance strategies.

In the earliest phase of response, refugees were primarily constructed as vulnerable populations requiring immediate protection, shelter, and registration within rapidly expanding

humanitarian infrastructures. Institutional narratives emphasized urgency, scale, and exposure to risk, positioning refugees as recipients of emergency assistance within temporary protection environments. As humanitarian operations expanded during the subsequent coordination phase, representations increasingly framed refugees as administratively legible populations embedded within structured service delivery systems, reinforcing the role of institutional expertise in managing displacement over time. The introduction of resilience-oriented policy frameworks after 2016 marked a significant inflection point in the construction of refugee identity. During this period, refugees were increasingly represented as potential economic actors capable of contributing to host-state development strategies through regulated participation in labor markets and education systems. However, these expectations of productivity did not replace earlier vulnerability-based categories; instead, they were layered onto existing representations of dependency, producing a hybrid subject simultaneously in need of assistance and responsible for achieving self-reliance within constrained policy environments.

By the late 2010s, humanitarian discourse reflected the normalization of protracted displacement as a stable governance condition rather than an exceptional crisis. Refugees appeared within institutional narratives as long-term participants in national service systems whose presence required sustained coordination between humanitarian organizations and state institutions. While references to temporariness and eventual durable solutions remained formally embedded within policy frameworks, programming structures increasingly assumed the persistence of displacement as a defining feature of the response environment. The disruptions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic further illustrated the adaptability of humanitarian discourse without fundamentally altering its underlying assumptions. Institutional narratives reintroduced elements of emergency-oriented vulnerability while maintaining the broader resilience-based frameworks established in

earlier phases. Refugees were therefore represented as populations navigating overlapping forms of risk within established systems of long-term governance, rather than as subjects of a newly defined crisis response.

Across these phases, humanitarian discourse consistently constructed refugee identity through categories that rendered displaced populations legible to institutional actors, donors, and host-state authorities. Vulnerability, resilience, productivity, and adaptability functioned not simply as descriptive labels, but as organizing principles that structured expectations about refugee behavior, eligibility for assistance, and participation in governance frameworks.[95] Through these categories, humanitarian institutions produced a refugee subject who was simultaneously vulnerable enough to justify intervention, resilient enough to sustain long-term displacement, and responsible enough to participate in strategies of economic and social stabilization. This evolving construction of refugee identity illustrates how humanitarian discourse operates not only as a mechanism for coordinating assistance but also as a form of governance shaping the terms through which displacement is understood and managed over time. The representations analyzed in this chapter provide the foundation for the next stage of analysis, which turns to refugee-authored and refugee-centered narratives in order to examine how displaced Syrians construct identity and experience outside institutional frameworks of humanitarian representation.

[95] Roger Zetter, "Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 4, no. 1 (1991): 39–62.

Chapter 5: Refugee Narratives and the Construction of Identity

5.1 Introduction: Refugee Narratives as Sites of Identity Construction

While humanitarian organizations construct refugee identity through administrative categories such as vulnerability, resilience, and self-reliance, refugee-authored and refugee-centered narratives offer alternative accounts of displacement grounded in lived experience, social relationships, and temporal uncertainty. Rather than presenting refugee identity as a fixed condition defined by institutional classification, these narratives describe displacement as an ongoing process shaped by changing expectations of return, shifting family responsibilities, and everyday strategies of adaptation in exile.[96] Examining refugee-authored narratives therefore makes it possible to analyze how displaced Syrians construct identity outside the frameworks through which humanitarian organizations represent them.

Scholarship on refugee experience has increasingly emphasized that displacement does not simply produce a uniform "refugee identity," but instead generates multiple and evolving forms of self-understanding shaped by social context, gender roles, legal status, and future uncertainty.[97] Refugee narratives frequently foreground concerns that are less visible in humanitarian policy discourse, including questions of dignity, belonging, family obligation, and the meaning of waiting under conditions of prolonged displacement.[98] These accounts reveal how individuals interpret their own experiences of exile in ways that both intersect with and diverge from institutional representations of vulnerability and resilience. As a result, refugee-authored narratives provide critical insight into how identity is negotiated within, alongside, and sometimes in tension with humanitarian systems of governance.

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[96] Wendy Pearlman, *Becoming a Refugee: Syrians in Exile* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).
[97] Sarah A. Tobin, *Everyday Piety: Islam and Economy in Jordan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016); Sarah A. Tobin, "Self-Making in Exile," 2020.
[98] An Van Raemdonck, "Syrian refugee men in 'double waithood': ethnographic perspectives on labour and marriage in Jordan's border towns." 2023.

Importantly, refugee-centered narratives do not simply reject humanitarian categories. Instead, they reinterpret and reshape them through reference to everyday life in displacement contexts. Experiences of work, education, caregiving, and uncertainty about return frequently appear in these narratives as central components of identity formation, even when they are only partially reflected in institutional reporting frameworks.[99] By foregrounding these dimensions of lived experience, refugee narratives complicate simplified portrayals of displacement as either temporary crisis or successful adaptation. Identity emerges instead as a dynamic process shaped by structural constraints as well as individual agency.

This chapter examines how refugee-authored and refugee-centered narratives construct Syrian refugee identity in the context of protracted displacement in Jordan. Drawing on memoir-based writing, ethnographic accounts, interview-based research, and testimony-centered scholarship, the analysis explores how displaced Syrians describe their experiences of waiting, responsibility, adaptation, and belonging across different stages of exile. Rather than treating these narratives as supplementary to institutional discourse, the chapter approaches them as independent sites of knowledge production that reveal alternative understandings of displacement and identity formation.[100] In doing so, it establishes a foundation for the comparative analysis that follows in the next chapter, which examines how refugee self-representations challenge, complicate, and reframe dominant humanitarian narratives. These narratives are not treated as representative of all Syrian refugee experiences in Jordan, but as discursive sites through which alternative constructions of identity become visible alongside institutional representations.

5.2 Identity as Process: Becoming a Refugee Over Time

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[99] Dina Sidhva et al., "In Exile, the Woman Became Everything': Middle-Aged Syrian Women's Contributions to Family Livelihoods during Protracted Displacement in Jordan," *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* (2021). 4-15.
[100] Mitra Naseh et al., "Syrian Refugees' Perspectives and Service Providers' Viewpoints on Major Needs and Future Plans in Jordan," *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 5, no. 14 (2020).

Refugee-authored and refugee-centered narratives consistently challenge the assumption that refugee identity emerges as a fixed condition at the moment of border crossing. Rather than describing displacement as a single transformative event, these accounts present becoming a refugee as a gradual and uneven process shaped by uncertainty, adaptation, and shifting expectations about return. Identity is not experienced as an immediate legal status or administrative classification, but as something negotiated over time through changing relationships to home, host society, and imagined futures.

Narrative-based research on Syrian displacement illustrates how individuals often resist identifying themselves as refugees during the early stages of exile, instead framing their movement as temporary relocation undertaken with the expectation of imminent return. As Wendy Pearlman demonstrates in her collection of Syrian testimonies, many displaced Syrians initially described their experiences in terms of waiting rather than resettlement, emphasizing continuity with their lives in Syria rather than rupture from them.[101] Within these narratives, the label "refugee" frequently appears only after extended periods of uncertainty made return increasingly unlikely. Refugee identity therefore emerges not as a stable category imposed at the border, but as a condition gradually internalized through prolonged displacement.

This temporal dimension of identity formation is further shaped by the evolving social realities of exile in Jordan. Over time, displaced Syrians encounter new legal restrictions, employment barriers, and institutional frameworks that reshape their everyday lives and expectations for the future.[102] Refugee-centered narratives frequently describe this transition as a movement from temporary adjustment toward recognition of long-term uncertainty. As a result,

[101] Wendy Pearlman, *Becoming a Refugee: Syrians in Exile* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).
[102] Mitra Naseh et al., "Syrian Refugees' Perspectives and Service Providers' Viewpoints on Major Needs and Future Plans in Jordan," *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 5, no. 14 (2020).

identity becomes tied not only to loss of place, but also to the experience of navigating unfamiliar administrative environments and constrained mobility within host-state systems.

Experiences of waiting play a particularly important role in structuring this process. Rather than functioning solely as a passive condition, waiting emerges within refugee narratives as an active dimension of identity shaped by anticipation, decision-making, and adaptation to prolonged instability. The concept of "double waithood," developed by An Van Raemdonck, captures how displacement delays major life transitions such as employment, marriage, and household formation, especially among younger Syrian men in Jordan.[103] In this context, refugee identity is experienced not only through spatial displacement but through temporal suspension, as individuals navigate extended uncertainty about both present opportunities and future possibilities.

Refugee narratives also highlight how identity formation is shaped by ongoing negotiation between attachments to Syria and experiences of life in Jordan. Rather than representing displacement as a simple transition from one national context to another, these accounts frequently describe a condition of partial belonging to multiple places at once.[104] Memories of prewar life, relationships with relatives remaining in Syria, and expectations of eventual return continue to shape how displaced Syrians understand themselves even after years of residence in exile. Refugee identity therefore emerges not as a replacement for prior forms of belonging, but as an additional layer within a more complex and evolving sense of self. In this way, displacement is narrated less as a moment of rupture than as an extended temporal condition through which identity is gradually negotiated.

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[103] An Van Raemdonck, "Syrian refugee men in 'double waithood': ethnographic perspectives on labour and marriage in Jordan's border towns." 2023.

[104] Mitra Naseh et al., "Syrian Refugees' Perspectives and Service Providers' Viewpoints on Major Needs and Future Plans in Jordan," *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 5, no. 14 (2020); Wendy Pearlman, *Becoming a Refugee*, 2019.

Taken together, these narratives demonstrate that refugee identity cannot be understood solely through institutional categories such as vulnerability or resilience. Instead, identity develops through a process shaped by uncertainty, waiting, adaptation, and shifting expectations across time. By foregrounding displacement as an ongoing experience rather than a fixed status, refugee-authored accounts offer an alternative framework for understanding how Syrians in Jordan interpret their own trajectories in exile. This process-oriented construction of identity contrasts with the more static representations examined in the previous chapter and provides an essential foundation for analyzing the social and relational dimensions of displacement explored in the sections that follow.

5.3 Gender, Family Responsibility, and Social Role Transformation

Refugee-authored and refugee-centered narratives also construct Syrian refugee identity through changing family roles, gender expectations, and everyday responsibilities in exile. Rather than presenting displacement solely as a condition of vulnerability, these accounts frequently describe identity as something reshaped through new forms of labor, caregiving, and moral obligation under conditions of prolonged uncertainty. In this context, refugee identity emerges not only through legal status or institutional classification, but through participation in evolving social roles within households and communities.

Displacement often alters patterns of economic participation and authority within Syrian refugee families in Jordan. Many narratives describe women assuming expanded responsibilities as income earners, caregivers, and decision-makers in response to restrictions on male employment and mobility.[105] These changes do not simply reflect economic necessity; they also reshape how women interpret their own positions within family structures and social networks. Refugee-

[105] Dina Sidhva et al., "In Exile, the Woman Became Everything': Middle-Aged Syrian Women's Contributions to Family Livelihoods during Protracted Displacement in Jordan," *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* (2021). 4-15.

centered accounts frequently emphasize the importance of maintaining dignity, stability, and continuity within the household despite the disruptions produced by exile.[106] Identity, in this sense, becomes closely tied to the ability to sustain family life under constrained conditions rather than to institutional categories of vulnerability alone.

At the same time, narratives produced by displaced men often describe displacement as a disruption of expected pathways to adulthood, employment, and social recognition.[107] Restrictions on formal labor participation and uncertainty about long-term residence in Jordan contribute to experiences of suspended responsibility and delayed life transitions. Rather than framing these conditions solely as economic hardship, refugee-centered accounts frequently interpret them as challenges to social identity and moral obligation within family structures. In this way, displacement reshapes not only material conditions of life but also expectations about gendered responsibility and belonging.

Family relationships themselves play a central role in shaping how refugee identity is articulated across these narratives. Decisions about education, employment, marriage, and mobility are frequently described as collective rather than individual choices, reflecting the importance of kinship networks in structuring everyday adaptation to exile. Refugee-authored accounts often emphasize obligations to support relatives remaining in Syria, maintain transnational family ties, and prepare for the possibility of return even after extended periods of residence in Jordan.[108] These responsibilities complicate institutional portrayals of refugees as isolated beneficiaries of assistance by foregrounding the relational dimensions of displacement

[106] Sarah A. Tobin, "Self-Making in Exile: Moral Emplacement by Syrian Refugee Women in Jordan," 2020.
[107] An Van Raemdonck, "Syrian refugee men in 'double waithood': ethnographic perspectives on labour and marriage in Jordan's border towns." 2023.
[108] Mitra Nasel et al., "Syrian Refugees' Perspectives and Service Providers' Viewpoints on Major Needs and Future Plans in Jordan." *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 5, no. 14 (2020).

that extend beyond humanitarian service environments. Rather than appearing primarily as recipients of protection, refugees emerge within these narratives as actors responsible for sustaining households, negotiating uncertainty, and maintaining continuity across disrupted social worlds.

Narratives of caregiving further illustrate how identity is negotiated through everyday practices rather than through formal classifications alone. Parents frequently describe efforts to preserve children's access to education, maintain cultural continuity, and protect family cohesion despite uncertain legal and economic conditions.[109] Such accounts position displacement not only as a condition of loss, but also as a context in which individuals actively work to sustain moral and social stability within their households. Identity is therefore constructed through practices of endurance and responsibility that are only partially visible within institutional representations of refugee life.

Taken together, these narratives demonstrate that refugee identity in contexts of protracted displacement is deeply relational, shaped by changing gender roles, family expectations, and intergenerational responsibilities. Rather than appearing primarily as vulnerable recipients of humanitarian protection, displaced Syrians frequently describe themselves as parents, workers, siblings, and community members navigating altered social environments while attempting to preserve continuity with pre-displacement forms of belonging. By foregrounding these relational dimensions of identity formation, refugee-authored narratives provide an alternative framework for understanding displacement as a social process embedded in family life and everyday

[109] Dina Sidhva et al., "In Exile, the Woman Became Everything': Middle-Aged Syrian Women's Contributions to Family Livelihoods during Protracted Displacement in Jordan," *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* (2021). 4-15.

obligation rather than as an administrative condition defined solely through institutional categories.

5.4 Belonging, Uncertainty, and Everyday Life

Refugee-authored and refugee-centered narratives further construct Syrian refugee identity through experiences of uncertainty, partial belonging, and the negotiation of everyday life under conditions of prolonged displacement. Rather than presenting exile as a temporary interruption preceding return or resettlement, these accounts frequently describe displacement as an extended and indeterminate condition in which individuals must continuously adapt to shifting legal, economic, and social constraints.[110] Within these narratives, identity emerges not as a stable outcome of displacement but as an ongoing process shaped by the challenge of living between imagined futures and constrained present realities.

A recurring theme across refugee-centered accounts is the experience of suspended permanence.[111] Many displaced Syrians in Jordan describe their lives as structured by uncertainty about whether they will remain, return, or move elsewhere, producing a condition in which long-term planning becomes difficult or impossible. Decisions about education, employment, housing, and family formation are frequently framed within this uncertainty, reflecting the difficulty of establishing stable expectations for the future. Refugee identity therefore develops not only through loss of place but through the experience of navigating life without predictable trajectories of settlement or return.

This uncertainty also shapes experiences of belonging within host communities. Refugee narratives often describe relationships with Jordanian institutions, labor markets, and neighborhoods as characterized by both inclusion and limitation. Access to services, employment

[110] Wendy Pearlman, *Becoming a Refugee: Syrians in Exile* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).
[111] Morgan A. Chalmiers, "Life Is Tight Here: Displacement and Desire amongst Syrian Refugee Women in Jordan" 2021.

opportunities, and education may create forms of everyday participation in local society, yet legal restrictions and temporary protection frameworks continue to reinforce the provisional nature of refugee presence. As a result, displaced Syrians frequently articulate a sense of conditional belonging that exists alongside continued attachment to Syria as a place of origin and imagined return.[112] Identity in exile is therefore constructed through simultaneous connection to multiple social and geographic contexts rather than through simple integration into a single national environment. This layered experience of belonging challenges humanitarian representations that frame displacement primarily through service access and protection status rather than through lived negotiations of place and future possibility.

Narratives of everyday adaptation further highlight how displaced individuals actively negotiate these conditions rather than simply experiencing them as constraints. Refugee-authored accounts frequently describe strategies for maintaining stability through informal employment, community networks, educational aspirations, and religious or cultural continuity.[113] These practices illustrate how identity is shaped through routine acts of adjustment that enable individuals to sustain a sense of purpose and direction despite structural uncertainty. Rather than appearing solely as subjects of humanitarian assistance, refugees emerge in these narratives as participants in ongoing efforts to create livable futures within environments defined by instability.

At the same time, experiences of uncertainty often coexist with persistent expectations of eventual return. Even after years of residence in Jordan, many refugee narratives continue to frame displacement as temporary, emphasizing the importance of maintaining cultural ties, property

[112] Khalifah Hameed Alfadhli, "The Role of Shared Social Identity in Mutual Support Among Refugees of Conflict: An Ethnographic Study of Syrian Refugees in Jordan," *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 28, no. 3 (2018): 142–155.
[113] Isinsu Koc. "Creating Existential Spaces: What do oral history interviews held with Syrian refugee men tell us?" 2018.

claims, and family connections inside Syria.[114] These attachments complicate institutional representations that treat protracted displacement primarily as a governance condition requiring adaptation to long-term residence outside the country of origin. Instead, refugee-authored narratives reveal how identity remains oriented simultaneously toward past homes, present survival strategies, and uncertain future possibilities.

Taken together, these accounts demonstrate that refugee identity in contexts of prolonged displacement is shaped not only by institutional classifications or family responsibilities, but by everyday efforts to navigate uncertainty and sustain belonging across multiple social worlds. By foregrounding lived experiences of waiting, adaptation, and conditional inclusion, refugee-centered narratives provide a more dynamic understanding of displacement as an ongoing negotiation rather than a fixed humanitarian category. These perspectives further illuminate the differences between institutional representations of refugee populations and refugees' own interpretations of their lives in exile, preparing the ground for the comparative analysis developed in the following chapter.

5.5 Interim Conclusion: The Refugee Self-Constructed Subject

The refugee-authored and refugee-centered narratives examined in this chapter demonstrate that Syrian refugee identity in Jordan is constructed through lived experience, social responsibility, and temporal uncertainty rather than through the administrative categories that structure humanitarian discourse. Across memoir-based writing, ethnographic research, and testimony-centered scholarship, displaced Syrians describe identity not as a fixed legal designation but as an evolving process shaped by waiting, adaptation, family obligation, and negotiated belonging under conditions of prolonged displacement.[115]

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[114] Waed Athamneh and Muhammad Masud, *Defiance in Exile: Syrian Refugee Women in Jordan*, 2024.
[115] Wendy Pearlman, *Becoming a Refugee: Syrians in Exile* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

A central finding of this chapter is that refugee identity emerges gradually rather than instantaneously. Rather than adopting the label "refugee" at the moment of border crossing, many displaced Syrians describe a prolonged transition during which expectations of return shift over time and displacement becomes recognized as a longer-term condition. Identity is therefore experienced as something that develops through uncertainty and adjustment rather than as a stable category imposed externally through humanitarian classification systems. This temporal dimension of identity formation contrasts with institutional narratives that tend to represent refugees as already legible subjects within established protection frameworks.

Refugee narratives also highlight the importance of family responsibility and changing gender roles in shaping experiences of displacement. Accounts of expanded caregiving responsibilities, disrupted employment pathways, and intergenerational obligations illustrate how identity is negotiated within relational contexts that extend beyond humanitarian service environments.[116] Rather than appearing primarily as beneficiaries of assistance, displaced Syrians frequently describe themselves as parents, workers, and community members navigating altered social expectations while attempting to maintain continuity with pre-displacement forms of belonging. These relational dimensions of identity remain only partially visible within institutional representations structured around vulnerability and resilience.

Experiences of uncertainty and conditional belonging further shape how refugee identity is articulated across these narratives. Displaced Syrians often describe life in Jordan as characterized by participation in local institutions alongside continued attachment to Syria as a place of origin and imagined return.[117] Identity therefore emerges through simultaneous orientation

[116] Dina Sidhva et al., "In Exile, the Woman Became Everything': Middle-Aged Syrian Women's Contributions to Family Livelihoods during Protracted Displacement in Jordan," *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* (2021). 4-15.
[117] Mitra Naseh et al., "Syrian Refugees' Perspectives and Service Providers' Viewpoints on Major Needs and Future Plans in Jordan," *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 5, no. 14 (2020).

toward multiple social and geographic contexts rather than through linear processes of integration or settlement. Everyday strategies of adaptation, including informal labor participation, educational aspiration, and maintenance of transnational family ties, illustrate how individuals actively negotiate conditions of prolonged displacement rather than simply experiencing them as constraints imposed from outside.

Together, these narratives demonstrate that refugee self-representation extends beyond the categories that dominate humanitarian policy discourse. While institutional frameworks frequently emphasize vulnerability, resilience, and productivity as organizing principles of refugee identity, refugee-authored accounts foreground waiting, responsibility, dignity, belonging, and uncertainty as central features of lived experience in exile. These differences do not simply reflect alternative descriptive perspectives; they reveal distinct ways of understanding displacement itself. Humanitarian discourse constructs refugees as governable subjects within systems of protection and assistance, whereas refugee narratives present identity as an ongoing negotiation shaped by memory, obligation, and the anticipation of uncertain futures.

This contrast provides the foundation for the analysis that follows in the next chapter, which places institutional representations and refugee-authored narratives in direct dialogue in order to examine how displaced Syrians challenge, complicate, and reframe dominant humanitarian constructions of refugee identity in contexts of protracted displacement.

Chapter 6: Institutional and Refugee Narratives in Dialogue

6.1 Introduction: Bringing Institutional and Refugee Narratives into Dialogue

The preceding chapters examined two distinct but interconnected discursive fields through which Syrian refugee identity in Jordan has been constructed between 2012 and 2022. Chapter Four analyzed how humanitarian organizations, particularly UNHCR, produced institutional representations of refugees through categories such as vulnerability, resilience, productivity, and long-term administrative integration. Chapter Five then examined how refugee-authored and refugee-centered narratives described displacement through lived experiences of waiting, family responsibility, conditional belonging, and uncertainty about the future. Taken separately, these discursive registers reveal different dimensions of displacement. Considered together, however, they illuminate the tensions that emerge between institutional frameworks of representation and refugees' own interpretations of identity in contexts of protracted exile.

This chapter places these two bodies of discourse in direct analytical dialogue in order to address how refugee-authored narratives challenge, complicate, and reframe institutional constructions of Syrian refugee identity. Rather than treating humanitarian discourse and refugee narratives as competing accounts of the same reality, the analysis approaches them as distinct interpretive frameworks shaped by different purposes, audiences, and structures of authority. Institutional texts are designed to coordinate assistance, justify intervention, and render displaced populations legible to donors and policymakers. Refugee-authored narratives, by contrast, articulate identity through memory, obligation, adaptation, and everyday negotiation of uncertain futures. Examining the relationship between these discursive forms makes it possible to identify not only differences in representation, but also differences in how displacement itself is understood and narrated.

A central argument of this chapter is that humanitarian discourse does not simply describe refugee experience, but organizes it through categories that make displacement administratively visible and governable.[118] As demonstrated in Chapter Four, institutional representations shifted over time from emergency-oriented frameworks of vulnerability toward development-oriented narratives emphasizing resilience, productivity, and long-term adaptation. These shifts reflect changing priorities within humanitarian governance rather than transformations in refugee identity alone. At the same time, Chapter Five showed that refugee narratives consistently foreground temporal uncertainty, relational responsibility, and negotiated belonging as defining features of life in exile. Bringing these perspectives together reveals the limits of institutional categories for capturing the complexity of refugee self-representation.

The comparison that follows therefore examines how key organizing concepts within humanitarian discourse intersect with, diverge from, and are reinterpreted within refugee-authored accounts. In particular, the chapter analyzes tensions between institutional framings of vulnerability and refugees' experiences of waiting, between resilience-oriented policy language and narratives of social responsibility, and between development-centered representations of productivity and refugees' descriptions of conditional belonging in host societies. These points of contrast do not indicate that humanitarian discourse misrepresents displacement entirely; rather, they demonstrate how institutional narratives prioritize forms of knowledge that support governance, while marginalizing others that emerge from lived experience.

By placing institutional and refugee-centered narratives in dialogue, this chapter contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how refugee identity is constructed across multiple discursive arenas simultaneously. Refugees appear not only as subjects of humanitarian

[118] Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

classification but also as authors of their own interpretive frameworks through which displacement is understood and navigated over time. Examining the interaction between these perspectives reveals how identity in contexts of protracted displacement is shaped through both institutional representation and everyday self-articulation. The sections that follow therefore analyze the points at which these discursive constructions converge, diverge, and reshape one another, demonstrating how Syrian refugee identity in Jordan emerges through an ongoing negotiation between governance frameworks and lived experience. This comparative analysis does not treat institutional and refugee-authored narratives as mutually exclusive representations of displacement, but instead examines how they operate simultaneously within overlapping systems of governance and lived experience.

6.2 Vulnerability and Waiting

One of the most significant differences between institutional humanitarian discourse and refugee-authored narratives concerns how displacement is framed in relation to time. Humanitarian organizations frequently construct Syrian refugees through categories of vulnerability that emphasize urgency, exposure to risk, and the need for immediate protection.[119] Refugee-authored narratives, by contrast, describe displacement primarily through experiences of waiting, uncertainty, and gradual adjustment to conditions of prolonged exile.[120] These differing representations reflect not simply alternative descriptive perspectives, but distinct temporal frameworks through which refugee identity itself is understood.

As demonstrated in Chapter Four, early humanitarian discourse surrounding Syrian displacement in Jordan relied heavily on the language of emergency response. Institutional reports emphasized rapid population movement, protection needs, and the expansion of registration and

[119] Roger Zetter, "Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 4, no. 1 (1991): 39–62.
[120] Wendy Pearlman, *Becoming a Refugee: Syrians in Exile* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

service delivery systems in response to escalating crisis conditions. Within these texts, vulnerability functioned as a central organizing category through which refugee populations were rendered visible to international actors and positioned as legitimate recipients of assistance. Even as humanitarian programming shifted toward longer-term governance frameworks after 2016, vulnerability remained embedded within institutional narratives as a continuing justification for intervention and resource allocation. Refugees therefore appeared within these documents as populations defined primarily by exposure to risk rather than by their own interpretations of displacement over time.

Refugee-authored narratives, however, describe displacement less as an immediate crisis than as an extended condition structured by uncertainty about the future. Rather than adopting the category of vulnerability as the primary framework through which their experiences are interpreted, many displaced Syrians describe exile as a period of waiting during which expectations of return gradually shift and long-term residence outside Syria becomes increasingly normalized. In these accounts, refugee identity emerges not at the moment of border crossing but through the accumulation of experiences associated with delayed decision-making, constrained mobility, and suspended life trajectories. Waiting therefore appears not as a passive condition but as an active dimension of identity formation shaped by ongoing negotiation with uncertain futures. In this way, refugee narratives reposition displacement from a moment of crisis to a condition of duration, challenging institutional timelines structured around intervention and resolution.

This contrast reflects broader differences in how institutional and refugee-centered narratives interpret the temporality of displacement. Humanitarian discourse tends to frame vulnerability as a condition requiring immediate response within structured intervention timelines, even when displacement becomes protracted. Refugee narratives, by contrast, emphasize duration

rather than urgency, describing exile as a gradual transformation of everyday life shaped by shifting expectations across months and years rather than by a single moment of crisis. Through this temporal lens, displacement is experienced less as an emergency event than as an evolving social condition that reshapes relationships to home, work, and family over time.

The emphasis on waiting within refugee narratives also complicates institutional assumptions about the trajectory of displacement. Humanitarian frameworks frequently organize refugee response around movement toward durable solutions such as return, resettlement, or integration. Yet refugee-authored accounts often describe life in Jordan as structured by uncertainty about whether any of these outcomes will materialize. Waiting thus becomes not simply a transitional phase preceding resolution, but a defining feature of everyday existence in exile. Refugee identity in this context is shaped by the experience of navigating extended indeterminacy rather than by progression toward clearly defined policy endpoints.

These competing temporal frameworks illustrate how vulnerability and waiting function as distinct modes of representing displacement within institutional and refugee-centered narratives. While humanitarian discourse constructs refugees as populations requiring protection within crisis-oriented timelines, refugee-authored narratives present identity as emerging through prolonged negotiation with uncertainty and delayed futures. Bringing these perspectives into dialogue reveals how institutional representations prioritize forms of legibility necessary for coordinating intervention, while refugee narratives foreground the lived temporal realities through which displacement is experienced and understood. Together, these contrasting constructions demonstrate that refugee identity in contexts of protracted displacement cannot be fully captured through vulnerability-based frameworks alone, but must also be understood through the temporal experience of waiting that shapes everyday life in exile.

6.3 Resilience and Responsibility

A second point of tension between institutional humanitarian discourse and refugee-authored narratives emerges in the distinction between resilience as a policy framework and responsibility as a lived experience of displacement. As demonstrated in Chapter Four, humanitarian organizations increasingly adopted the language of resilience and self-reliance after 2016 as central components of refugee response strategies in Jordan, particularly following the introduction of development-oriented approaches associated with the Jordan Compact.[121] Refugee-authored narratives, however, describe adaptation to displacement less in terms of resilience as an institutional objective and more through everyday practices of caregiving, household support, and intergenerational obligation. Examining these contrasting representations reveals how humanitarian discourse reframes displacement as a problem of adaptation, while refugee narratives emphasize responsibility as a central feature of identity in exile.

Within institutional policy frameworks, resilience functions as a key organizing category linking humanitarian assistance to long-term governance strategies. Rather than describing refugees solely as vulnerable recipients of protection, humanitarian reports increasingly portray displaced populations as capable of developing coping strategies that reduce dependence on aid and facilitate participation in host-country economies. In this context, resilience is presented as both a measurable programmatic goal and a desirable characteristic of refugee populations navigating prolonged displacement. Institutional narratives therefore position refugees as adaptable actors whose capacity for self-reliance supports broader strategies of stabilization within host societies.

[121] Suzan Ilcan and Kim Rygiel, *Refugees and Global Governance: Responsibility, Resilience and Reception* (London: Routledge, 2019).

At the same time, refugee-authored narratives describe adaptation to displacement through forms of responsibility that are not easily captured by resilience-oriented policy language. Accounts of everyday life in exile frequently emphasize the importance of maintaining family cohesion, supporting relatives across borders, and preserving social continuity under conditions of uncertainty. These responsibilities often involve managing household finances, securing educational opportunities for children, and sustaining transnational relationships with family members remaining in Syria. Rather than appearing primarily as evidence of resilience in the institutional sense, such practices are described within refugee narratives as moral obligations that structure decisions about work, mobility, and long-term planning.

Gender plays a particularly important role in shaping these experiences of responsibility. As discussed in Chapter Five, many displaced Syrian women describe assuming expanded roles as caregivers and income earners in response to shifting labor conditions and legal restrictions affecting male employment opportunities.[122] Similarly, displaced men frequently interpret barriers to stable employment as disruptions to expected pathways of social responsibility within family structures. These experiences illustrate how adaptation to displacement is negotiated through relational expectations rather than through individualized coping strategies alone. Identity in exile therefore emerges not simply through the capacity to adjust to changing conditions, but through participation in evolving systems of obligation linking individuals to households and communities.

This contrast highlights an important difference between institutional and refugee-centered representations of agency. Within humanitarian discourse, resilience is often framed as an indicator of successful adaptation to protracted displacement and as a justification for policy frameworks promoting economic participation and reduced reliance on assistance. Refugee-

[122] Sarah A. Tobin, *Everyday Piety: Islam and Economy in Jordan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016).

authored narratives, by contrast, emphasize responsibility as an ongoing commitment shaped by family relationships and social expectations rather than as an outcome of development-oriented programming. Adaptation in these accounts is not primarily a technical achievement measured through employment indicators or service access, but a moral process through which individuals attempt to sustain stability within disrupted social environments.

Bringing these perspectives into dialogue reveals how resilience and responsibility operate as distinct but overlapping frameworks for interpreting displacement. While humanitarian institutions emphasize resilience as a strategy for managing prolonged refugee presence within national systems, refugee narratives foreground responsibility as a central component of identity formation under conditions of uncertainty. This comparison demonstrates that adaptation to displacement cannot be understood solely through institutional measures of self-reliance, but must also be examined through the relational obligations that structure everyday life in exile. Together, these contrasting representations illustrate how refugee identity is shaped simultaneously by governance frameworks promoting resilience and by lived experiences of responsibility that extend beyond the categories through which humanitarian organizations interpret displacement.

6.4 Productivity and Belonging

A third point of divergence between institutional humanitarian discourse and refugee-authored narratives concerns the relationship between economic participation and belonging in contexts of protracted displacement. As demonstrated in Chapter Four, humanitarian organizations increasingly framed Syrian refugees in Jordan as potential contributors to national development strategies, particularly after the introduction of the Jordan Compact in 2016.[123] Within these institutional narratives, access to employment and participation in regulated labor markets were

[123] Government of Jordan and the International Community, *The Jordan Compact: A New Holistic Approach between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the International Community to Deal with the Syrian Refugee Crisis* (London Conference Supporting Syria and the Region, 2016).

presented as pathways toward reducing aid dependency and strengthening both refugee livelihoods and host-country resilience. Refugee-authored accounts, however, describe economic participation less as a marker of integration or productivity than as one component of a broader effort to navigate uncertainty while sustaining connections to Syria and maintaining conditional belonging within Jordanian society.

Institutional discourse during this period positioned employment as a central mechanism for transforming refugee identity from that of a vulnerable recipient of assistance to that of a productive participant in national systems. Policy documents emphasized work permit initiatives, vocational training programs, and sectoral partnerships designed to expand access to formal labor markets for Syrian refugees. Within this framework, productivity functioned not only as an economic objective but also as a discursive category through which refugees were represented as capable contributors to development-oriented governance strategies. Participation in the labor force was therefore framed as evidence of successful adaptation to protracted displacement and as a justification for shifting humanitarian programming toward longer-term stabilization frameworks.

Refugee-authored narratives, by contrast, frequently describe employment as unstable, informal, or constrained by legal and administrative barriers that limit access to long-term economic security. Rather than presenting labor participation as a pathway toward integration, many displaced Syrians describe work primarily as a strategy for sustaining households under uncertain conditions of residence. Employment appears within these accounts not as a marker of belonging within host societies but as part of a broader effort to maintain continuity with family responsibilities across borders and prepare for uncertain futures shaped by the possibility of return.

Economic participation therefore functions less as an indicator of settled identity than as one component of everyday survival within environments defined by structural precarity.

This distinction reflects broader differences in how institutional and refugee-centered narratives interpret the meaning of participation within host-country systems. Humanitarian discourse frequently frames employment as a mechanism through which refugees become incorporated into national development strategies, thereby aligning humanitarian assistance with broader economic planning frameworks. Refugee narratives, however, emphasize the provisional nature of these forms of participation, describing access to labor markets as shaped by regulatory limitations, fluctuating opportunities, and the continued expectation that displacement may not be permanent. In this context, productivity does not necessarily translate into social inclusion or long-term belonging, but instead coexists with ongoing uncertainty about legal status and future mobility.

Experiences of belonging within refugee-authored narratives therefore extend beyond the economic categories that dominate institutional representations of displacement. Many displaced Syrians describe life in Jordan as characterized by partial participation in local institutions alongside continued attachment to Syria as a place of origin and imagined return.[124] Employment, education, and access to services may facilitate forms of everyday engagement with host communities, yet these experiences rarely produce a stable sense of incorporation into national society. Instead, identity emerges through simultaneous orientation toward multiple social contexts, reflecting the complex realities of living within long-term but officially temporary protection environments.

[124] Khalifah Hameed Alfadhli, "The Role of Shared Social Identity in Mutual Support Among Refugees of Conflict: An Ethnographic Study of Syrian Refugees in Jordan," *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 28, no. 3 (2018): 142–155.

Placing these perspectives in dialogue reveals the limits of development-oriented frameworks that treat productivity as a central indicator of successful refugee adaptation. While humanitarian institutions emphasize labor participation as a pathway toward resilience and reduced dependency, refugee narratives demonstrate that economic activity does not resolve the uncertainties that shape everyday life in exile. Productivity may support household survival and expand access to resources, but it does not eliminate the conditional nature of refugee presence or the continued significance of return as an imagined future. Examining this tension highlights how institutional representations of economic participation simplify the relationship between work and belonging, while refugee-authored accounts reveal the more complex ways in which identity is negotiated across shifting legal, social, and geographic contexts in protracted displacement settings.

6.5 Administrative Identity and Lived Experience

A final point of contrast between institutional humanitarian discourse and refugee-authored narratives concerns the relationship between administrative classifications and lived experience in the construction of refugee identity. As demonstrated in Chapter Four, humanitarian organizations rely on categories such as vulnerability, resilience, productivity, and protection status to render refugee populations legible within systems of assistance and governance.[125] These categories function as essential tools for coordinating interventions, allocating resources, and communicating priorities to donors and host-state institutions. Refugee-authored narratives, however, describe identity through memory, dignity, responsibility, and uncertainty in ways that extend beyond the boundaries of administrative representation. Examining the relationship between these

[125] Roger Zetter, "Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 4, no. 1 (1991): 39–62.

frameworks reveals both the necessity and the limits of institutional categories for understanding displacement as a lived condition.

Within humanitarian reporting structures, administrative identity plays a central role in shaping access to protection and services. Registration systems, vulnerability assessments, and eligibility criteria translate complex social realities into standardized indicators that allow institutions to prioritize assistance and monitor program outcomes. Through these mechanisms, refugee identity becomes closely tied to forms of bureaucratic visibility that determine inclusion within humanitarian response frameworks.[126] Institutional discourse therefore constructs refugees as identifiable populations whose needs can be assessed, categorized, and addressed through structured intervention strategies. This process does not simply describe displacement; it produces a governable subject whose identity is legible within international protection systems.

Refugee-authored narratives, by contrast, frequently describe identity in ways that resist reduction to administrative categories. Rather than emphasizing vulnerability indicators or service eligibility, displaced Syrians often foreground experiences of dignity, continuity, and moral responsibility as central components of life in exile. Memories of prewar communities, obligations to relatives across borders, and efforts to sustain cultural practices in unfamiliar environments appear within these narratives as defining elements of identity formation. Such accounts illustrate how displacement is experienced not only through interaction with humanitarian institutions, but also through ongoing negotiation with social relationships, personal histories, and imagined futures that remain largely invisible within policy documentation.

This contrast is particularly evident in the relationship between institutional legibility and everyday uncertainty. Humanitarian discourse relies on classificatory systems that stabilize

[126] Lewis Turner, "Who Is a Refugee in Jordan? Hierarchies and Exclusions in the Refugee Recognition Regime," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 36, no. 4 (December 2023): 877–896.

refugee identity within recognizable administrative frameworks, enabling organizations to plan interventions across extended time horizons. Refugee narratives, however, frequently emphasize the instability of life under temporary protection regimes in which legal status, employment access, and mobility opportunities remain subject to change. Identity in this context is shaped not by fixed categories of eligibility, but by the experience of navigating shifting institutional environments that structure everyday decision-making without fully resolving questions of long-term belonging.

At the same time, refugee-authored narratives do not exist outside humanitarian governance structures altogether. Access to registration, documentation, and assistance programs remains central to the material conditions of life in exile, and displaced Syrians frequently engage with institutional systems as part of their strategies for managing uncertainty. Rather than rejecting administrative classifications entirely, refugee narratives reinterpret them within broader frameworks of lived experience that incorporate memory, responsibility, and anticipation of future movement. Identity therefore emerges through interaction with humanitarian institutions as well as through social and cultural practices that extend beyond them.

Bringing these perspectives into dialogue highlights the limits of humanitarian representation as a framework for understanding refugee identity in contexts of protracted displacement. Administrative categories remain necessary for organizing large-scale protection responses, yet they capture only a portion of the experiences through which displaced populations interpret their lives in exile. Refugee-authored narratives reveal dimensions of identity that cannot be fully translated into indicators of vulnerability or measures of resilience, demonstrating how displacement is lived through relationships, obligations, and expectations that exceed the scope of institutional documentation. Recognizing these limits does not diminish the importance of humanitarian classification systems, but instead clarifies the need to place them alongside refugee-

centered accounts in order to produce a more comprehensive understanding of how identity is constructed across multiple discursive arenas simultaneously.

6.6 Conclusion: Reframing Refugee Identity Beyond Humanitarian Categories

This chapter has examined how institutional humanitarian discourse and refugee-authored narratives construct Syrian refugee identity through distinct but overlapping interpretive frameworks. By placing these perspectives in direct dialogue, the analysis demonstrates that refugee identity in contexts of protracted displacement cannot be understood solely through administrative classifications such as vulnerability, resilience, and productivity.[127] Instead, identity emerges through an ongoing negotiation between institutional representations designed to coordinate governance and lived experiences shaped by waiting, responsibility, belonging, and uncertainty.

Across the comparison developed in this chapter, important differences become visible in how displacement is framed temporally, socially, and politically within these two discursive registers. Humanitarian organizations frequently construct refugees as vulnerable populations requiring protection within structured intervention timelines, while refugee-authored narratives describe displacement as a prolonged condition defined by waiting and shifting expectations of return. Similarly, institutional frameworks emphasize resilience and self-reliance as indicators of successful adaptation to long-term exile, whereas refugee narratives foreground responsibility to family members and the maintenance of social continuity under constrained conditions. These contrasts illustrate how humanitarian discourse prioritizes forms of legibility necessary for governance, while refugee narratives emphasize the relational and temporal realities through which identity is experienced in everyday life.

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[127] Suzan Ilcan and Kim Rygiel, *Refugees and Global Governance: Responsibility, Resilience and Reception* (London: Routledge, 2019).

The comparison between productivity-oriented institutional frameworks and refugee narratives of conditional belonging further highlights the limits of development-centered approaches to displacement. While humanitarian policy documents increasingly frame labor participation as evidence of integration and stabilization, refugee-authored accounts demonstrate that employment does not resolve uncertainty about legal status, future mobility, or long-term residence. Economic participation therefore functions less as a marker of incorporation into host societies than as a strategy for sustaining households within environments shaped by structural precarity. This distinction underscores the importance of examining belonging as a negotiated social process rather than as an outcome of participation in formal economic systems alone.

Finally, the contrast between administrative identity and lived experience reveals how humanitarian classification systems both enable and constrain representations of displacement. Institutional categories remain essential for organizing protection responses and allocating assistance across large populations, yet they capture only part of the meanings through which refugees interpret their own experiences. Rather than suggesting that humanitarian discourse misrepresents refugee experience, this analysis demonstrates that it produces a particular form of representation shaped by the institutional requirements of governance, coordination, and intervention. Refugee-authored narratives instead foreground dignity, memory, obligation, and anticipation of uncertain futures as central components of identity formation. These perspectives do not reject humanitarian frameworks entirely, but they extend beyond them, demonstrating how identity is constructed simultaneously through institutional interaction and everyday social practice.

Taken together, these findings suggest that refugee identity in Jordan is produced through the interaction of multiple discursive arenas rather than through institutional representation alone.

Humanitarian discourse shapes the categories through which displacement becomes governable, while refugee narratives articulate alternative understandings grounded in lived experience and relational responsibility. Recognizing the coexistence of these perspectives makes it possible to move beyond simplified portrayals of refugees as either vulnerable beneficiaries or resilient economic actors and instead understand identity as an evolving process shaped by uncertainty, adaptation, and negotiation across time and space. This reframing provides the foundation for the concluding chapter, which reflects on the broader implications of these findings for humanitarian governance, refugee representation, and future research on displacement in protracted crisis contexts.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Summary of Findings

This thesis examined how Syrian refugee identity in Jordan between 2012 and 2022 has been constructed through two interconnected but distinct discursive arenas: humanitarian institutional discourse and refugee-authored and refugee-centered narratives. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis, the study analyzed how humanitarian organizations, particularly UNHCR, represented refugees through categories such as vulnerability, resilience, productivity, and long-term adaptation, and compared these representations with narratives produced by displaced Syrians describing experiences of waiting, responsibility, conditional belonging, and uncertainty in exile. Rather than treating refugee identity as a fixed legal designation, the analysis approached identity as a dynamic process shaped through interaction between governance frameworks and lived experience in contexts of protracted displacement.

Chapter Four demonstrated that humanitarian discourse constructs refugee identity through shifting institutional priorities over time. Early emergency-oriented representations emphasized vulnerability, protection needs, and registration as central organizing categories of displacement response. As humanitarian programming expanded beyond immediate crisis management, these frameworks increasingly incorporated coordination mechanisms, resilience-based strategies, and development-oriented approaches linked to labor participation and long-term stabilization. These shifts did not simply reflect changes in refugee experience, but rather transformations in humanitarian governance structures designed to manage prolonged displacement environments. Through these categories, institutional discourse produced a refugee subject simultaneously positioned as vulnerable enough to justify intervention, resilient enough to sustain extended displacement, and productive enough to participate in national economic systems.

Chapter Five demonstrated that refugee-authored and refugee-centered narratives construct identity differently from institutional frameworks. Rather than describing displacement through administrative classifications, these narratives emphasized waiting, family responsibility, and negotiated belonging as central dimensions of life in exile. Refugee identity emerged not at the moment of border crossing but gradually through prolonged uncertainty about return, shifting household roles, and adaptation to host-country environments shaped by temporary protection regimes. These accounts revealed how displaced Syrians interpret their experiences through relational obligations, memories of prewar communities, and expectations about uncertain futures that extend beyond the categories used in humanitarian reporting.

Chapter Six placed institutional and refugee-centered narratives in dialogue in order to examine how these discursive constructions intersect and diverge. The comparison demonstrated that vulnerability-oriented institutional timelines contrast with refugees' experiences of waiting as an extended temporal condition, that resilience frameworks differ from lived experiences of responsibility structured through family and social obligation, and that productivity-centered representations of economic participation coexist with narratives of conditional belonging shaped by uncertainty about long-term residence. Rather than suggesting that humanitarian discourse misrepresents refugee experience, the analysis showed that institutional narratives produce particular forms of representation shaped by the requirements of governance, coordination, and intervention. Together, these findings demonstrate that refugee identity in Jordan is constructed through interaction between administrative classification systems and everyday practices of adaptation in exile rather than through institutional discourse alone.

7.2 Implications for Humanitarian Governance and Representation

The findings of this thesis have important implications for understanding how humanitarian governance shapes representations of displacement in contexts of protracted exile. By tracing the evolution of institutional discourse between 2012 and 2022, the analysis demonstrates that categories such as vulnerability, resilience, and productivity function not only as descriptive tools but also as mechanisms through which refugee populations become administratively legible within international protection systems.[128] These categories structure access to assistance, define expectations of participation in host-country economies, and shape the terms through which displacement is interpreted by donors and policymakers.

Recognizing the institutional functions of these representational frameworks helps clarify how humanitarian discourse organizes refugee identity in ways that support coordination across large-scale response environments. At the same time, the comparison with refugee-authored narratives reveals the limits of these classifications for capturing the relational and temporal dimensions of displacement as lived experience. While vulnerability remains central to emergency response strategies, refugee narratives emphasize waiting as a defining feature of prolonged exile. Similarly, resilience-oriented programming frames adaptation as a technical objective linked to labor participation and service access, whereas refugee accounts describe responsibility as a moral and social process shaped by family obligations and intergenerational expectations.[129]

The contrast between productivity-based institutional representations and refugee narratives of conditional belonging further illustrates the limitations of development-centered approaches to displacement governance. Employment participation may reduce reliance on humanitarian assistance, yet it does not resolve uncertainty surrounding legal status, mobility, or

[128] Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).
[129] Suzan Ilcan and Kim Rygiel, *Refugees and Global Governance: Responsibility, Resilience and Reception* (London: Routledge, 2019).

future return. Refugee narratives therefore demonstrate that economic participation does not necessarily produce stable incorporation into host societies, but instead operates alongside continued attachment to Syria as a place of origin and imagined future return.

Together, these findings suggest that humanitarian governance structures shape refugee identity through frameworks designed to coordinate intervention rather than to represent the full complexity of lived displacement experience. Integrating refugee-centered perspectives into analyses of humanitarian policy therefore makes it possible to develop more comprehensive understandings of how identity is constructed across overlapping systems of representation in long-term displacement environments.

7.3 Contributions to Scholarship

This thesis contributes to scholarship in critical refugee studies, humanitarian governance research, and discourse-based analyses of displacement by demonstrating how refugee identity is produced through interaction between institutional representation and refugee self-articulation across time. First, the study contributes to critical refugee studies by challenging assumptions that refugee identity can be understood primarily through legal status or administrative classification.[130] By foregrounding waiting, responsibility, and negotiated belonging as central components of refugee self-representation, the analysis demonstrates that identity in contexts of protracted displacement emerges through relational and temporal processes rather than through institutional designation alone. This perspective supports growing scholarship emphasizing displacement as an ongoing social condition rather than a temporary interruption preceding durable solutions.[131] Second, the thesis contributes to research on humanitarian governance by showing

[130] Roger Zetter, "Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 4, no. 1 (1991): 39–62.
[131] Wendy Pearlman, *Becoming a Refugee: Syrians in Exile* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

how institutional discourse constructs refugee populations as governable subjects within evolving response frameworks. The shift from vulnerability-centered emergency narratives to resilience- and productivity-oriented development strategies illustrates how humanitarian representations adapt to changing policy priorities over time. Examining these transformations highlights the role of discourse in shaping expectations about refugee participation in national economic systems and long-term stabilization initiatives. Third, the study contributes to discourse-oriented analyses of displacement by placing institutional and refugee-authored narratives in direct analytical dialogue. Rather than treating these representational frameworks as competing accounts of the same reality, the thesis demonstrates how they operate simultaneously within overlapping systems of governance and lived experience. This approach provides a model for examining how identity is constructed across multiple discursive arenas in other contexts of protracted displacement. Together, these contributions advance understanding of how refugee identity is produced through interaction between administrative classification systems and everyday practices of adaptation in exile.

7.4 Limitations and Future Research

While this thesis provides a detailed analysis of refugee identity construction in Jordan between 2012 and 2022, several limitations suggest directions for future research. First, the study relied primarily on institutional documentation and published refugee-authored narratives rather than original interview-based fieldwork. Although these sources offer valuable insight into representational frameworks shaping displacement, future research incorporating direct qualitative interviews could further expand understanding of how identity is negotiated in everyday contexts of exile. Second, the analysis focused primarily on UNHCR discourse as a central institutional actor within the Syrian refugee response in Jordan. While this approach allowed for detailed

examination of one of the most influential humanitarian organizations operating in the region, future research could extend this framework by comparing representations produced by additional international agencies, non-governmental organizations, and host-state institutions in order to examine how different actors construct refugee identity across overlapping policy environments. Third, the thesis examined refugee identity within a single national context. Comparative research across multiple host countries would make it possible to assess how variations in legal frameworks, labor market access, and education systems influence the relationship between institutional representation and refugee self-articulation in different displacement settings. Future research might also explore how emerging forms of digital storytelling, community-based documentation, and social media platforms shape refugee self-representation beyond the formats examined in this study. Such approaches would contribute to broader understanding of how displaced populations participate in producing narratives of identity that circulate alongside institutional frameworks of governance. By examining refugee identity as a process shaped through interaction between humanitarian discourse and lived experience, this thesis provides a foundation for future scholarship investigating how displacement is represented, interpreted, and negotiated across multiple discursive arenas in contexts of protracted crisis.

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