SAME SPACE, DIFFERENT PLACES:

HOW BONDS TO PLACE AFFECT WELL-BEING AND SOCIAL-COHESION IN SYRIAN REFUGEES AND THEIR LEBANESE HOST COMMUNITIES

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report aims to inform the work of project developers in the area of social inclusion and conflict mediation in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other organisations working on displaced peoples and their host communities. The report presents initial results and analysis from an academic research project called Precarious Places: Social cohesion, resilience and place attachment in refugee-host interactions, funded by the British Academy in the UK and led by King's College London in collaboration with the NGO Association Najdeh.

Reading the report will give you an understanding of how refugees (both Syrian and Palestinian) and host populations (both Lebanese and Palestinian) in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon experience feelings of home and homesickness and how this affects their attitudes and their actions. The results are grouped under seven key themes: Connections to a real and symbolic Syria; Home as freedom in Syrian refugees; Homemaking as a site of control; Diverse refugee communities and the particular experience of Palestinians; Rootedness and changes in community dynamics as a threat to place identity; The natural environment as a common denominator; and Changing together. Through these results, we show the shared placelessness of both host and refugee populations, and suggest place-building as a way to ease tensions between groups, with the natural environment a good place to start.

We hope reading this report might help in programming and policy, by highlighting the role of place attachment in generating feelings of security and self-efficacy, so crucial to well-being. While basic needs must be met, after years of displacement, so must other social needs. An approach to humanitarian assistance that is sensitive to the emotional bonds to place, can help to increase the efficacy of any interventions. However, we stress that this approach need not equate with extra expense or the deflection of resources from humanitarian needs.

If you have questions or comments after reading this report, I encourage you to get in touch with me. In addition, if you like the research, the results are also contained in a graphic novel entitled: *The Stepping Stone* and you can download the original transcripts of the interviews (in Arabic, with English translations) from the UK Data Archive. While the results contained here relate to Lebanon, we hope that the lessons drawn from the research are more widely applicable. Finally, if you would like to know more, it would be a pleasure to come and present these results in person to your organisation.

Best regards,
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research provides information on place and place attachment in refugees and their host communities to inform programming on social inclusion and conflict mediation. Place attachment describes the emotional bonds that people form to meaningful locations and the communities that live within them.

The concept is important because attachments to place affect human well-being and behaviour in complex ways. We wanted to understand not only the feelings of placenessness (and potential nascent feelings of home) in refugees, but also the perceptions of the local population to the changes occurring around them.

Emotional bonds to place take many forms. Attachments can be strong or weak; positive or negative; actively created or unconsciously experienced. Emotional bonds can contribute to personal identity, or can help people meet material needs such as income. Different attachments can overlap in one individual; to different places, or to the same place at different times. Also, emotional bonds to place can extend beyond current physical locations to symbolic homelands or former residences.

Therefore, changing location, or locations changing, will affect people differently. Also, the nature of bonds that people form to a place affects how they respond to changes. For example, people rooted in place may take more action to defend their village than a newcomer.

We interviewed Syrian refugees, Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS), Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (PRL), and Lebanese locals living in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon. The village in which we worked had seen its population increase four-fold in the past few years because of the arrival of refugees from Syria. We asked questions on their everyday life; significant people, places and objects; ideas of home; memories; and changes to places over time.

In total we interviewed 45 people. For this report, we analysed five interviews from each of these groups, selecting across type of housing (tented settlement or commercially rented), socio-economic status and gender. We coded the transcripts using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo, using themes from the place attachment literature. The key results that emerged are summarised below.

1. **SIMULTANEOUS CONNECTIONS TO A REAL AND SYMBOLIC SYRIA**

We found that connections of refugees to Syria are still strong, maintained through communication with people still living in, or who had visited Syria, and through sharing memories with other Syrian people in Lebanon. While these memories provide an escape from the drudgery of everyday life and provide a way for diverse refugee communities to come together, the associations become increasingly symbolic as the Syria remembered no longer exists.

2. **HOME AS FREEDOM IN SYRIAN REFUGEES**

Lives of Syrians and PRS in Lebanon are precarious and insecure. This can lead to refugees feeling trapped, both physically and emotionally; unable to self-actualise. This trapped feeling was manifest almost ubiquitously in the boredom of everyday life, sitting and doing nothing inside one-roomed homes. The corollary is that refugees described home and belonging in terms of freedom of expression, behaviour and opportunity.

3. **HOMEMAKING AS A SITE OF CONTROL**

However, respondents showed diverse relationships to their place of residence. While some experienced their homes as oppressive spaces, others found peace of mind in the places they had created. However, more than this, the act of building and/or customising homes, provides a site of agency and control that is severely lacking in other life domains.

4. **DIVERSE REFUGEE COMMUNITIES AND THE PARTICULAR EXPERIENCE OF PALESTINIANS**

The experience of Palestinian refugees from Syria in Lebanon differs from that of other Syrian refugees. Palestinians are experiencing a double refugeehood; they have experienced an even greater fall in living standards, as Lebanon grants fewer rights to Palestinians than

Syria; and Palestinians receive different forms of aid since they come under the remit of UNWRA rather than UNHCR. However, the respondents also described divisions within the Syrian refugee community.

5. ROOTEDNESS AND CHANGES IN COMMUNITY DYNAMICS AS A THREAT TO PLACE IDENTITY

The locals (particularly, but not exclusively Lebanese) were firmly rooted in place, keenly aware that their village was part of their identity. Many respondents linked that rootedness to home ownership, contrasting starkly with the precarious situation of refugees. The increase in population has meant the loss of a tight knit community that was sometimes expressed by locals as a feeling of insecurity. There is also a perception that Syrians have increased economic hardship by creating competition for jobs and in business.

6. THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AS A COMMON DENOMINATOR

Appreciation of the natural beauty of the Bekaa valley was shared by both locals and refugees. However, a tension exists. While the refugees are unable to access and enjoy the benefits of the natural environment despite living on its doorstep; some of the local population considered the population growth and an increase in the built environment as the cause of environmental degradation (although in reality this had begun long before the refugees arrived).

7. CHANGING TOGETHER

Yet, not all locals hold negative perceptions of the changes occurring in the area. Respondents enjoyed going to the new market, appreciated the benefits and services available in the larger settlement, and admired the newcomers for their tenacity and hard work. Some respondents perceived the beginnings of cultural exchange between locals and the refugees; small changes in behaviours and practices, resulting from continued co-existence.

Thus, there are opportunities to incorporate place into interventions on social cohesion. In practice, this means creating opportunities for refugees and locals to interact in meaningful ways to generate new place meanings together. For example, events organised by the local municipality or NGOs to create new monuments, gardens, artworks or marketplaces created and thus, appreciated, by all.

Furthermore, the natural beauty of the Bekaa valley was valued by all groups. As such, social cohesion activities based in the natural environment might represent a low-hanging fruit. Activities could include regenerating degraded environments; creating parks and open spaces for joint enjoyment; or guided trips to picturesque locations by locals for newcomers.

Thus, we argue that both refugees and their host communities have had emotional bonds to place broken: refugees through their forced migration, and locals through the radical alteration of their rural village with the arrival of the refugees. Both, in a sense, have been displaced. The purposeful building of new and common emotional bonds to the transformed location has the potential to increase the well-being of both populations.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are over 1.5 million refugees from Syria registered with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency) in Lebanon, with many in the country unregistered, and a considerable population of Palestinians from Syria[1] . Over seventy percent of the Syrian population in Lebanon is living below the poverty line. Weak governance and limited resources exacerbate tensions with host populations, often themselves struggling financially, and threaten social cohesion[1]. The response from the international community has been humanitarian, focusing on (but barely) meeting the basic needs of refugees. However, well-being is multidimensional, and material conditions are rarely sufficient for a good life. As the crisis in Syria enters into its eighth year, there is a transition from emergency triage to longer term interventions for refugees and their host communities that are economically and socially sustainable.

At this junction, it is important to understand non-material aspects of well-being. This report focuses on the nature of, and changes to, emotional bonds to place. Emotional bonds to place (also known as place attachment and sense of place) are important to study in this context because the literature shows that they are core to people's identity and well-being[2] . While refugees are displaced, emotional attachments to place form and persist over time and distance. Meanwhile, the places in which the refugees now find themselves, are significant and valued by the local population.

The research is informed by two key insights from the academic literature on place attachment: 1) that emotional bonds form to multiple places, often distant from the individual and potentially never visited; and 2) that bonds to place can be broken (with associated negative impacts) without a person moving if a place changes sufficiently. The first point allows us to look at the ways in which a population living in insecure conditions, where the local population and government policy opposes permanent settlement and integration, are maintaining or creating bonds that (may) allow continuity in identity and support well-being. The second point allows us to understand the ways in which refugees might threaten place-based identity and cause feelings of exclusion in the local population, leading to anti-refugee sentiment. Thus, bonds to

place can be broken by leaving, but also by places changing over time.

Thus, we argue that both refugees and their host communities have had emotional bonds to place broken: refugees through their forced migration, and locals through the radical alteration of rural villages through the arrival of the refugees (among other factors). Both, in a sense, have been displaced, and thus solutions to increasing the well-being of both populations lie in the purposeful building of new and common emotional bonds to the transformed location. While this may be a less palatable option for local policymakers keen to see the refugees return to Syria, we argue that a secure base will aid refugees in returning to rebuild their country; and while that option remains in the distant future, the purposeful creation of new meanings of place within Lebanon will ease social tensions.

The results are structured around seven key themes: Simultaneous connections to a real and symbolic Syria; Home as freedom in Syrian refugees; Homemaking as a site of control; Diverse refugee communities and the particular experience of Palestinians; Rootedness and changes in community dynamics as a threat to place identity; The natural environment as a common denominator; and Changing together to create community. However, we first provide some background of the concept of place attachment and why it is important to analyse the refugee situation from this perspective, some context on the refugee situation and response in Lebanon and a description of the research methodology employed.

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1   Under the remit of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
2   Well-being is an absence of poverty, and can be described as having the conditions necessary to live a good life. This can mean for example, material wellbeing, good health, good social relations, feelings of security, and control over one's life.

2. PRECARIOUS CONDITIONS OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON

Although the Syrian refugee crisis began in 2011, it was only in October 2014 that the Lebanese government adopted a plan to deal with the ever-increasing influx of Syrian refugees to Lebanon, in which one of the main goals was to decrease the number of refugees entering the country. In the initial years of the crisis, Lebanon had an open border policy– though it can be characterised as less of a policy and more of a lack of policy and recognition of the refugee crisis.

The Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon has had distinct phases, starting with emergency response that was loosely organized, then moving into a more coordinated response plan that focuses on both refugee and host population needs, centralized around the government and international organizations, primarily the UNHCR. The Syrian refugee response in Lebanon is complicated by the long history Lebanon has with refugees, namely Palestinian, amongst a backdrop of complex relationship with the Syrian government, that intersect with the response strategy to both the refugees and affected areas in Lebanon.

Common with many other countries, temporary and not permanent has been the government's primary approach in dealing with refugees. They are characterised as being in transit, and thus barriers put in place to their effective integration into the country and host communities. This manifests in a lack of legal status, and a "no camp" policy. Refugees have settled or been forced to settle - in temporary informal tented settlements (ITS) and in sub-standard housing conditions [1]. Refugees have faced great difficulties in securing or renewing residency papers, for those who have them, as the costs are high, 200 USD. There have also been strict policies on refugees' ability to work, and, as such, they are prohibited from working in any sector other than agriculture, construction and environment (cleaners)

As of 2014, the Lebanese government no longer allows Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) to enter the country and has limited the number of Syrian refugees allowed to enter; it should be mentioned here that since 2015 there has been a freeze on registration of all new refugees which is effectively a ban on entry. In addition, the PRS do not fall under the mandate of UNHCR, but rather of United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), further complicating their options and their status in Lebanon. Thus, the legal conditions which govern the lives of refugees is the starting point of their precarious existence in Lebanon, and the starting point of the barriers they face to adapting to new places.

The region that hosts the highest population of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is the Bekaa valley, the area of this study, where the refugee population is estimated to number half of the population. This agricultural region is one of the poorer regions in Lebanon, historically marginalized by the government, and in which certain powerful local families exert much influence[2]. Historically, the Bekaa region has had continuous trade and labour relations with Syria, with Syrian seasonal migrant workers coming to work in the agricultural sector in the Bekaa. With the crisis and the influx of the refugees there has been a spike in the demand for employment but the local economy is struggling to meet those needs. The dire economic conditions, however, are not rooted in the Syrian crisis, but the deteriorating political conditions locally and regionally – despite perceptions that the hardships are a direct result of the refugee crisis[3].

In this context, the Bekaa region also hosts the second largest percentage of informal tented settlements, 38 percent, second to the Baalbak-Hermel region (50%), noting that the majority of refugee households (73%) live in residential structures[4]. The issue of shelter of the refugees is one of the most significant ones to date, with no clear shelter policy in place, partially stemming from the perception that camps encourage permanent settlement, something seen as negative owing also to the experience with Palestinian refugees in Lebanon[5].

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1   There is also a minority who have better living standards – mostly the more educated and well-off, who have managed to find work, often with NGOs or INGOs including Syrian.

# 3. PLACE ATTACHMENT FOR PROGRAMMING IN PROTRACTED REFUGEE SITUATIONS

Place attachment or sense of place are terms used to describe the emotional bonds that people form to places. A place is defined as a meaningful location – a location that means something to a person. People can form bonds to other people in a place or to the physical attributes of a place, through meaningful social and psychological interactions[6]. Some attachments are composed of feelings of rootedness that are difficult to articulate; other attachments are built through active engagement with the history and culture of the place. Attachments can also be negative, for example people can actively dislike the place in which they live or associate it with trauma[7]. Thus, people are attached to different aspects of an environment and in different ways; as such being forced to leave, or changes to place, will not affect everyone in the same way.

Attachments to place are important for human well-being, through for example, their contribution to our identities, and feelings of continuity and control[8]. Thus, breaking bonds can have serious psychological implications with accompanying socio-economic impacts[9]. When places to which people are attached change around them people can feel loss, stress, marginalisation and displacement even without leaving the location[10]. Attachments thus do not always contribute positively to well-being, for example, if being attached to a place means that people are unable to accept the inevitability of change in any place[11] or, for example, if they prevent people from making positive changes and moving out of degrading or risky locations[12]. Thus, an understanding of how refugees feel about where they live is necessary for protecting and improving well-being of refugees and their host populations.

The presence of bonds to place (whether strong or weak)[13] affects the way a person reacts to changes in their environment. The existence of bonds to place, through their importance to life satisfaction and identity, influence behaviour[14] . Attachments can contribute to community resilience by facilitating collective action[15]; and can enable behaviours to protect places threatened by outside influences, for example people resist development projects that threaten valued places . Attachment creates a 'loyalty' that means people do not want their places to change[16]. Attachments to place are also related to perceptions and management of risk; for example, people take different actions to project themselves from flooding, depending on the basis of their attachment (e.g. rooted, economic factors, or religious)[17]. Thus, depending on how attached a person is to their place, and in what way, they may take different actions.

One final point about the nature of our attachments to places important to displaced populations. Emotional bonds to place can extend beyond current physical locations. People form bonds to places only visited infrequently such as recreational sites[18], symbolic places they have never set foot in (for example, diasporic homelands[19]), and former homes[20]. Attachments are also formed to multiple places at the same time – represented in translocality or transnationality. While this is true of all migrants; for forced migrants and refugees, the maintenance of such connections takes on additional meaning.

People engage in various practices to create safe spaces, make places feel more like home and actively build positive associations with where they live. Often these are simultaneously maintaining connections to more distant places. These include use of smart phones and social media[21]; eating, cooking and hospitality[22]; and practices such as gardening[23] that alter the environment to make it more like home. Thus, when studying the role of place attachment in well-being for refugees and their host populations we have to look beyond the physical location to distant and symbolic places.
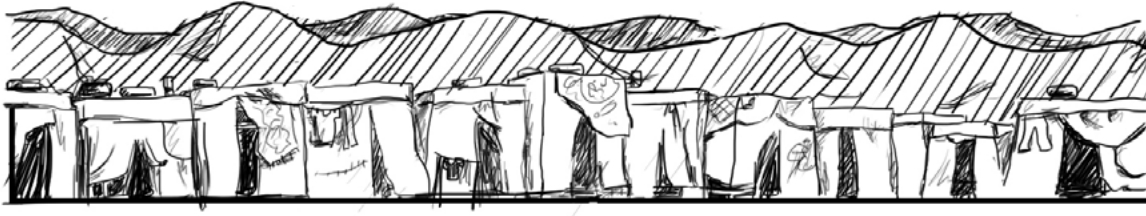
4. Research methodology

We carried out **45 semi-structured interviews over two weeks** in July 2017 in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon. We were introduced to potential participants by the local non-governmental organisation Association **Najdeh** and members of the local refugee and host community. Informed consent procedures were carried out with every potential participant and each interview lasted from between **half an hour to 90 minutes**. Interviews were recorded if the participant agreed, if not, then written notes were taken. Topics covered in interviews included everyday life and daily routines; significant people, places and objects; places people considered as home or where they felt at home; connections to other places; memories; and changes to places over time. Home was defined broadly, using multiple terms, such that it could encompass residences, neighbourhoods and nation/country.

We interviewed **Syrian refugees and Lebanese residents** living in one area of the Bekaa Valley. We do not name the location in which the research took place in order to provide an additional safeguard to the anonymity of respondents. Within each of these populations, **half of the respondents were Palestinian**, so that we could take into account the particular experiences of Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) and Palestinian refugees from Lebanon (PRL). Anybody who had come from Syria under conditions of stress or duress since 2011 were considered Syrian refugees. We interviewed **people both in tented settlements and privately rented accommodation**. We interviewed the household head or their spouse (if a male household head was absent), or the female household head if husbands were absent. In many of the interviews other family members were also present and took part in the interview.

Of the 45 interviews, **20 were selected for transcription in Arabic**, translation in English and subsequent analysis. We chose five from each sub-group (Syrian, PRS, Lebanese and PRL) based on a balance across gender, type of accommodation and socio-economic status. We analysed the written transcripts of the interviews using a series of themes extracted from the place attachment literature: **significant place**s (past, present and imagined or future), **subject of attachment** (housing, geographical location from the immediate neighbourhood to country or nation, material objects, social connections including relationships with family members, neighbours, host community or refugees), **levels of well-being** across multiple dimensions (material, health, security, agency and self-assessed), **levels of mobility**, **ways of attaching** (emotionally, cognitively, through behaviours and practices) and the **characteristics of attachments** (positive, negative or ambivalent). English versions of interviews were coded using the qualitative analysis software NVivo.

5. RESULTS

In this section we summarise the results of our analysis, describing the displacement situation in Lebanon from a place-attachment perspective. Results are grouped under seven key themes, each addressed in turn below: Connections to a real and symbolic Syria; Home as freedom in Syrian refugees; Homemaking as a site of control; Diverse refugee communities and the particular experience of Palestinians; Rootedness and changes in community dynamics as a threat to place identity; The natural environment as a common denominator; and Changing together.

5.1 SIMULTANEOUS CONNECTIONS TO A REAL AND SYMBOLIC SYRIA

Connections to Syria are maintained through interactions with other Syrians in their neighbourhoods, people who have visited Syria and returned, or communication with friends and family still living there.

> *"There is a series on television in which I see the streets and the area of Damascus. Even through the phone we enter to the Damascus areas and the Hamidieh souk. I always ask my brother in law about the news from Hamidieh souk. What is the news? (laughter)"*

Memories of Syria, bolstered by sharing those memories among other Syrians, help to maintain these bonds. Thus, memories of Syria serve to connect people together in their shared imagination of a lost place and provide a brief respite from the trials of the day-to-day life in Lebanon.

> *"We got used to the situation since there are others like us. You would see a Syrian here and a Syrian there. You would be nostalgic. You sit with them and he would soothe you a bit and you would soothe him a bit. This is how we adapted and we live hoping to return one day..."*

While refugees also maintain connections to the Syria of the present through their family members and returned visitors, Syria as a place becomes increasingly symbolic. As two Syrian women stated:

> *"Yesterday a lady came from Syria, and people were all around her asking her about Syria. It's like she is going to the haj. How is Syria? How is the situation in Syria? It is as if you are asking about your son..."*

People remember shared spaces that are symbolic of their Syria, such as market places. This was also particularly true when PRS spoke of their quarter of Damascus, the Yarmouk refugee camp. In memories of Yarmouk, refugees spoke of the harmony of the camp, the freedom with which they were able to live, and the bustling nature of the markets. Memories of Yarmouk, and indeed all memories of places lost, had become idealized, and some of the refugees spoke of this tension between attachments to the real versus imagined Syria, as one respondent stated, *"We want the Syria of the past, we don't want Syria of the future".*

5.2 Home as freedom in Syrian refugees

The choices available to Syrian refugees in the Bekaa are limited and the ability to lead a full life severely curtailed. The spaces in which refugees moved on a regular basis can be confined to their doorway, street or their tented settlement due to a lack of papers, fear of security check points, or a reluctance to spend money on transport over food or other necessities. Thus, freedom – to go out late at night and to feel safe, to socialize, to work – is often associated with former lives and homes in Syria. As a Syrian man tells us:

> "I used to go out in Syria at night, after 12, 2, 3 we would go out... you wouldn't feel afraid. Here you cannot go out, you would worry that someone might attack you..."

This is both a physical freedom and a mental freedom; some respondents mentioned having to act in ways inconsistent with their own habits and values because of the insecurity and precarity of their existence. The quote below by a Palestinian woman from Syria, characterises this well.

> *"I used to be the master of myself, but not here. Even if you did not do anything wrong, you will have to apologize, even though that you can see what's wrong but you have to turn a blind eye on some things... if I was in my country I would get my right, but not here."*

These ideas are also reflected in how people feel about their homes. The boredom of the daily routine within the confines of the home was almost ubiquitous in the interviews. Refugees have accepted the conditions they are in and almost against their will have adapted to the new realities within the places they find themselves. This idea is expressed well in the quotes below by a Palestinian woman from Syria and a Syrian woman respectively:

> *"We wake up, we clean, we move stuff, if we want to cook, we cook. If not, we sit. This is the daily routine, nothing much, no change. You sit amidst the smell; do you see the sewers beside us? You think: Where would you go? You can't rent a house. You are suffocating from all sides. Same routine every day."*

> *"[After] four years I will eventually be forced to adapt, there is no escape."*

Syrian and Palestinian refugees from Syria mentioned the negative psychological impacts of insecure tenure, and Palestinian refugees from Lebanon talked of underlying insecurity because legally they cannot own property.

5.3 Homemaking as a site of control

However, the relationship of refugees to their housing situation is complex. For example, refugees in Lebanon tend to value places because they meet material needs such as employment or lower-cost accommodation, as a Syrian woman explains:

> "We arrived to this place, some people we know took us to their house, then they set us with a job to work and live, then we moved when the work was over. Other people took us to work for them. At first we worked in the lands when we arrived, then we started moving according to our livelihoods."

This needs-based attachment also manifests in the objects to which people assign meaning and why. While possessions brought from Syria, such as such as photographs, jewellery and trinkets, are valuable for the memories with which they are imbued; objects obtained in Lebanon are valued because they were hard come by, and because they come to represent the ability to own something in the face of great hardship as a Syrian woman noted:

> "In this house? Everything has a value, because I worked hard to get it. Everything here has a value. At the moment this has more value than Syria... because we worked harder here."

The lives of the refugees are characterised by insecurity. Thus, for some, the home itself does become a place of safety with positive associations. As a Palestinian woman from Syria expresses, the house she inhabits has become her home, despite lacking basic amenities:

> "I became comfortable in it. Let me tell you something, I rarely leave the house. You would always find me here. I move this here and I move this one there... this is what I do. As you can see, the house is a bit spacious. It is not in a corner. Thank god, it is good, yes...don't forget that I have been here in it for three and a bit years. I would feel bad if I had to leave it".

However, homes can become more than a site of refuge. The act of building and/or customising homes, homemaking, provides a site of agency and control, severely lacking in other life domains, as shown below in the quote by a Syrian woman living in a tented settlement.

> "We built it. It was built but with only three blocks. I brought a block and built it, I painted it. The tent had collapsed totally and you couldn't stand inside it...This is a tent, four meters long by four meters wide. We stretched the entrance till here, we split the wall...to me it is better than all the houses in the world because I have become comfortable in it."

However, many respondents expressed their relationship with their residence in negative or ambivalent terms. Some respondents associated their living arrangements with feelings of oppression and described them in terms akin to a trap: they do not go anywhere or do anything, there is insufficient space to move about and they live with leaky roofs, bad sanitation and tiny cooking spaces.

5.4 Diverse refugee communities and the particular experience of Palestinians

While both Syrians and Palestinians from Syria became refugees under the same circumstances, fleeing the same violence and threat to security, there is a specificity to the PRS experience. This was due to two main factors. First, the double refugeehood they faced – themselves being Palestinian refugees in Syria, and now experiencing the reality of forced displacement described by their parents and grandparents. Second, on arrival to Lebanon, they were differentiated from the Syrian refugees and increased attention was paid to the Palestinian part of their identity. This is due to the different approach to refugees by the Syrian and Lebanese governments since 1948, and because Palestinian refugees are under the remit of UNWRA rather than UNHCR. Much international aid for the support of refugees is channelled to UNHCR thus limiting access to Palestinians since they rely on UNRWA for support, which many complain does not meet their needs.

Thus, our Palestinian respondents spoke of an experience where they were "othered" and excluded from society in Lebanon, legally and socially as refugees in contrast to a local) but also excluded from the dominant refugee experience as a Palestinian refugee under the remit of UNWRA. However, PRS also talk with pride of their Palestinian identity, contrasted to what they were forced to experience as a result of their refugeehood as a Palestinian woman from Syria expressed.

> *"When we first got here the treatment was not good, whether from the Lebanese to the Palestinian or to a Syrian. We are human beings and we were raised in luxury. Forget about the Syrians. We as Palestinians we shouldn't be treated this way, we were born in luxury, this shouldn't be the case with the [our] treatment."*

According to many of the Palestinian Syrians interviewed, while being Palestinian has always been a source of pride and a part of their identity, this identity was not something that caused them any kind of burden in Syria. While they did not have fully citizenship rights, for example being unable to vote or own property, they felt Syrian. However, their current refugeehood has prompted some to connect more deeply with the Palestinian part of their identity and to research their Palestinian heritage. Finally, despite recent intentions by the UK government to widen the scheme to allow Palestinian refugees from Syria to apply for resettlement[24], PRS still face the issue that, being under the mandate of UNRWA, they are not eligible to apply for resettlement. While the chances of resettlement are small in general, for PRS, they are non-existent. This was the driving force for one interviewee resorting to fleeing to Europe by boat.

However, divisions are drawn along multiple lines. While there is significant focus on the stark divide between host communities and refugee communities, and to a lesser degree between the Palestinan and Syrian refugee populations, refugees interviewed also spoke about the internal divisions within the Syrian refugee community itself. Often this involved the dissolution of once strong friendship and familial ties, and for some it also included a general sense of exploitation by one's "own" people, highlighted for example in this quote by a Palestinian from Syria:

> *"Don't think that only the locals are oppressing us...Whatever the local do to us we would say that he is a stranger. But the Syrians and the Palestinians are oppressing us now. The close people will hurt you before the stranger...The Syrian I work for thinks of me as a maid... I am not a maid, I am an employee and I have my dignity and my honour."*

Yet, slow progress in building social cohesion is clear. In places such as the tented settlements where refugees' lives are much more separate from local communities, and where in some cases they are more "controlled" by informal camp authorities, interviewees spoke of the ways in which they lived with each other as one Syrian woman mentioned.

> *"I got used to them and they got used to me. The girl you saw going up a while ago is the neighbour's daughter. They feel safe to leave her here...I have been with my neighbours for three years and thank god till now I never fought with any of them at all..."*

5.5 ROOTEDNESS AND CHANGES IN COMMUNITY DYNAMICS AS A THREAT TO PLACE IDENTITY

Attachment to place among Lebanese was a deep-rooted, unconscious attachment – most people expressed an unwillingness to be away from the Bekaa for long periods of time, and showed a deep connection to the people that composed their community. The quote below from a Lebanese respondent articulates these ideas well, where he describes himself as a fish out of water when he leaves his village:

> "I am one of the people who cannot go outside the area because I have a connection to this place. I can't stay one week away from home and the area, I feel that something has been taken from me, even if on holiday, I would go crazy if I stay for more than one week outside the... I have lots of relations with the area and the house and the family, like fish [out of water] (laughter)..."

The ability to own property played a significant role in generating attachment. Where PRL families that had managed to own their own homes, they were more rooted in their communities. The attachments imbued by property ownership are highlighted in the quote below from a local Palestinian woman:

> "In the evening we sit outside for coffee and we feel it's our home... instead of going to your neighbour and sitting for an hour and coming back here. This is your home, this is for you, your property."

The change in the area as a result of the increase in refugees is experienced both in terms of changes to the community composition, and the built environment; the local population has strong emotional bonds to their village and thus the changes are felt acutely. The feeling of a loss of sense of community came across strongly, as expressed by this Lebanese man from the Bekaa:

> "The feeling towards this place changed after the Syrian crisis. You used to pass by anywhere in the village and would say hi to 90% of the people because you know them. Imagine now, I only meet my relatives and the other villagers on occasions. If you go for a walk, you wouldn't say hi to more than half of the people because you don't know them."

> "We have become the immigrants and they are the residents... they are more than us, that's the difference"

Some members of the local population went so far as to describe their village as having been "taken over" or, more even more extreme, as "surrounded"; even those interacting in positive ways with the refugee community, for example, through providing assistance. Yet, this kind of terminology has also been reflected in the speeches of Lebanon's leaders, notably President Michel Aoun's 2017 speech to the UN where he talked of "an invasion".

"They are surrounding the village from inside and from the sides, it's like we are trapped, especially that many times guns were found in the camps and this is a threat. This scares us because, god forbid, you do not know when these refugees might turn into criminals. They might kill to feed their children or for them to survive."

This idea of refugees as a security threat was echoed by another respondent who had spent her entire life in the village:

"The village changed a lot, the thing that changed the most is that we have foreigners now in the village. Yes. It is not safe anymore. Even if you're sitting here you'd still be afraid."

The primary means by which refugees were seen as "taking over" places was through the establishment of businesses. Many interviewees associated deteriorating economic conditions with the arrival of the refugees who are perceived as being in direct competition with local businesses. These sentiments are expressed by both Lebanese (first quote below) and Palestinian Lebanese populations (second quote below). The second quote shows the resentment felt by this man, as he compares his lack of rights as a Palestinian with the rights he perceives the Syrians to have, although these perceptions differ from the legal reality.

"Even the economic situation is bad. I used to work here a lot but since they came we did not work at all. We used to pay a certain amount for the shop but since the Syrians came the rental increased. Do you see?"

"The Syrian is considered like a Lebanese... he can own [property], can drive, can open a company, can be a manager in a factory... even all the factories are now managed by Syrians and full of Syrian workers."
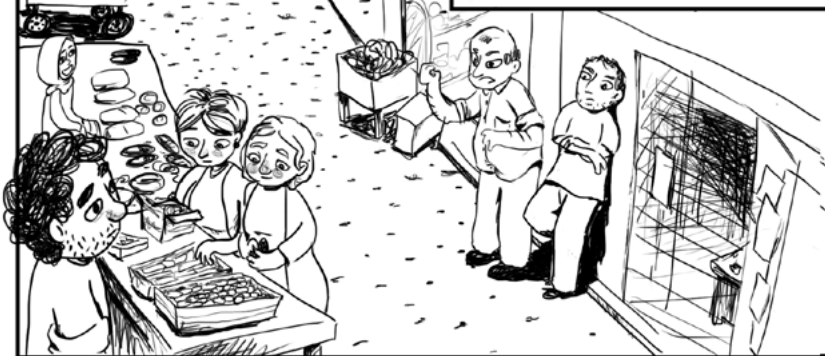
5.6 The natural environment as a common denominator

Lebanese and PRL interviewees mentioned the natural environment as a meaningful place: as a site of recreation and relaxation (e.g. on camping trips) and was associated with happy childhood memories (e.g. swimming in the local river). This love of the natural environment was often expressed wistfully while describing places lost due to development within the area, as a Lebanese man and Palestinian man express below.

> *"But the places where we had these memories are gone already... we had a playground to play in but now they built a school above it... there is so much buildings over memories...we had a river that we used to swim in, but unfortunately now it is sewage..."*

> *"the hardest of all, I remembered from my childhood in school... right next to the river... I am imagining if I was today at that school, I would have been exposed to cancer diseases..."*

Some local respondents also attributed a negative change in the natural environment to the influx of Syrian people. One change was related to an increase in built up areas as a result of the rapid increase in population. One respondent, a landowner and shop keeper, expressed his dissatisfaction in the following way:

> *"There was a farm here now there is a house. They sold the cows to make space for the Syrians. It was a cow farm, they removed the cows and put humans in it for rental. The farms have moved down. There are no more farms in the village."*

However, the arrival of refugees added to, or coincided with, an already changing environment for local respondents and problems are caused by unplanned development and a lack of environemntla regulations that preceded the arrival of the newcomers.

Furthermore, the refugees shared the appreciation of the beauty of the local environment. The natural beauty of the Bekaa Valley was mentioned by several refugee respondents as a place to which they had begun to attach meaning. The countryside surrounds the refugees, especially those living in tented settlements, and the vast landscape of the Bekaa contrasts with the claustrophobic conditions of camp life. One female Syrian respondent talked about how she would like to go and rest under the shade of a tree in an orchard nearby to drink a cup of tea with her husband. However, while nature is on the refugees' doorstep it is inaccessible; this refugee woman feared being accused of trespassing by an unsympathetic local landowner.

Also, while some of our Lebanese respondents did mention seeing Syrians able to enjoy certain public spaces with their family, for example in public parks, the Syrian respondents interviewed for this report spoke of inability to access areas of interest or beauty. This was often driven by the cost of travelling to places and competing demands on very scarce resources, as this woman below elaborates:

> *"There are very nice areas in Lebanon and people would go and change their mood. I hear about very nice and comfortable places, but we cannot afford it. If I want to go out I will pay one-month's salary. Right?"*

5.7 Changing together

Thus, there are places that are valued by locals and refugees alike. It is also true that not all locals perceive the changes occurring in the area negatively. In the first quote below a Palestinian man from Lebanon reflects on the benefits of growth and activity in the village. In the second quote, a local Lebanese man expresses his admiration of the Syrian people.

> "First of all you have a very big town to an extent that it is a city now. You can feel its streets are more alive and its residents, there is a movement. You wouldn't be bored. If you go out you would see people different than the old days... there are lots of shops, there is everything... as a city it has all living requirements, you can find anything you want."

> *"Many people say that the Syrian presence destroyed us and stopped our work and bla bla bla... I will tell you something; the work that the Syrian does cannot be done by a Lebanese. If we ask the Lebanese to work like a Syrian he will not work... 70 percent of the work is not done by Lebanese, they are all managers..."*

The places respondent repeatedly mentioned as sites of interaction are market places. Here, refugees have been able to, in one way or another, participate in the local economy and social life by opening shops and restaurants. Some local respondents perceive a degree of cultural exchange: slight changes in the habits of both refugees and their own communities due to their co-existence. There is evidence of a the beginnings of a new shared identity, as one Lebanese respondent noted.

> *"When I used to visit Syrian areas in the past I used to notice that the women in Syria would not go out in some villages without the face veil, but here they go out in a normal veil. If you take food as an example, if you want to eat Shawarma you had to go for a long distance to get it, but now you find a Shawarma place everywhere you look. Of course, we found something to enjoy, so we moved on... there is a change, I feel it is a small change inside us and a small change inside them."*

6. DISCUSSION

This research focused on understanding how refugees and host communities attach to place. For Syrian and Palestinian Syrian refugees interviewed, emotional attachments are still to places in Syria. Where refugees have developed attachments in Lebanon it is generally limited to their dwelling, and not much further since most interviewed had very limited mobility. Attachments to the dwelling relate to the fact that it is the only place where refugees can exercise some agency and control over their own life. More often attachments are negative and dwellings are perceived as traps and are symbolic of their powerlessness. The reality is one of insecure and impotent placelessness in Lebanon, that contrasts with the freedom people attach to life in Syria where they had a home and agency. Memories of home, shared with other refugees, bring the diverse refugee community together and provide a respite from the drudgery of daily life; yet the home they are recalling is increasingly symbolic and distant.

The local host populations have strong emotional attachments on all scales, from their dwelling (which they generally own), to the local community and the Bekaa region as a whole. Both the physical aspects of place (especially the natural environment) and the people within that place (the close-knit community) form the basis for those attachments. The arrival of refugees has impacted on both of these – a tight-knit rural community has been subsumed into an almost-city that has brought degradation of both connections to people and the quality of the natural environment. However, some view this urbanisation as an interesting addition and diversion in what was a sleepy rural village. The people local to the area were deeply attached to where they lived, and some were struggling to come to terms with changes to a place that was part of their identity. At times this manifested as a hostility towards, and fear of, the newcomers.

Palestinians from Syria and Lebanon experience place differently. The Palestinians from Syria have had their place identity radically altered on arrival in Lebanon, where they are primarily defined by the Palestinian part of their identity and differentiated, through aid streams and registration policies, from other Syrian refugees. Palestinians from Lebanon, just as attached to the Bekaa Valley and their village as their Lebanese neighbours, feel the same threats of newcomers and the same hurt of a place changed, while themselves being excluded from fully participating in society, for example, through restrictions on employment and house ownership. Yet they also empathise with the new refugees. While placelessness has severe intergenerational socio-economic and psychological impacts and but the shared experience of placelessness can provide a common bond across nationalities and generations.

Thus, the research shows that attachments to place both to support and undermine well-being in the populations being studied and multiple types of attachment could occur in one individual to the same place. For example, memories of Syria could provide both a respite from the drudgery of daily life (reminiscing about times gone by) and a source of pain (reminding respondents of all that they had lost and a sense of futility regarding their lives in Lebanon). Place attachment causes undesirable outcomes when strong attachments to place, rootedness and strong place identity elicited place-protective behaviour in the local population, manifest as animosity towards the newcomers. However, on a positive note, there was a sense of stability that came for those who had, over time, "built" a home in Lebanon, by customising and adapting their rented tents or rooms.

7. CONCLUSION

If emotional bonds to place matter, what would building place-based social cohesion look like? Other actors have highlighted the need to shift from emergency response to development as the conflict in Syria has become more protracted, and this shift has been occurring in Lebanon. The information contained in this report builds on those efforts by enabling a place-based approach to social cohesion that is sensitive to people's diverse and complex attachments to current and former places. The approach recommends building common spaces that these diverse groups can occupy as a way to find issues that unite rather than divide. The idea is to embed social cohesion in place.

In practice, this could be implemented by creating opportunities for refugees and locals to interact in meaningful ways to create new place meanings together. This could happen, for example, through events organised by the local municipality or local NGOs to create new monuments, gardens, artworks or communal marketplaces that are created and appreciated by all. Indeed, so much of Syrian and Lebanese culture is similar and shared, activities that are place-based could highlight these rather than differences, for example through food practices, home gardens and norms of hospitality. Furthermore, the natural beauty of the Bekaa valley was valued by all groups. As such, social cohesion activities based in the natural environment might be another good place to start. Activities could include regenerating degraded environments such as the river; creating parks and open spaces for joint enjoyment; or organising guided trips to picturesque locations by locals for newcomers.

However, we recognise that there are wider structural political barriers to the successful integration of people in place and, as such, the activities will only be successful when accompanied by changes in national and international policies and laws. For example: changes in the legal status of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (both Syrian and Lebanese) and increased funding in the short term; and changes to legislation that allow refugees a full suite of rights within Lebanon. A secure base from which to rebuild their lives refugees helps refugees to prepare both practically and emotionally for eventual return when safe and desirable.

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