

Cultural and Structural Violence in the Lives of Syrian Refugees

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Abstract

This article examines the phenomenon of structural violence as well as, to varying degrees, cultural violence, in the lives of refugees. In addition to the overt physical violence of war, as well as nationalistic violence faced in subsequent host countries, Syrian refugees have faced cultural biases reinforced by rules, regulations and other restrictions that undermine their ability to rebuild most aspects of their lives, including their health, their livelihoods and their spirits. This is intentional violence to some degree, but to perhaps an equal measure it is violence by neglect, or by default, collateral damage that occurs while succumbing to a combination of pragmatic, socioeconomic realities and irrational nationalistic pressures.

Keywords: Syrian refugees, structural violence, cultural violence, indirect violence, invisible violence, descriptive, humanitarian

Introduction

As of March 2017, at least 11 million Syrians were “on the run,” with 6.3 million internally displaced and another 4.8 million escaping to other countries, all uprooted by a violent civil war (Mercy Corps, 2016). Since 2011, refugees have been pouring into neighboring countries by the hundreds of thousands, and as those nations have become less receptive, the Syrian refugees have headed north to Europe (Migration Policy Centre, 2016), still hoping to find some semblance of the normal lives they once lived, with their families and communities reunited (Sovcik, 2016). But their lives have continued to prove extraordinarily harsh throughout their journeys. Initially, competing military forces were the primary concern in-country, where they raped, kidnapped, and killed on a massive scale (European Commission, 2017). But both within and beyond Syria, unethical smugglers and opportunistic criminals often proved dangerous as well, robbing their clients, taking many captive, (Buchan, 2016) raping, torturing and killing (Di Giovanni, 2017).

Yet even beyond these atrocities, having escaped barrel bombs, Sarin gas attacks, snipers, robbery, and in many cases near-drownings at sea (Al Jazeera, 2016), and having found means of entry into host countries, refugees continued to face violence at the hands of governments, separatist groups, criminal gangs and others throughout the displacement journey and the resettlement process (Di Giovanni, 2017).

Such horrors, while widespread, have not been universal. Many host-country citizens have been extremely generous and even heroic in their efforts, but others have responded with hostility, and the same range of responses can be seen on the national level. Some countries welcomed the refugees with open arms initially, but as the immensity of the challenge overwhelmed them they changed their tune, rolling out barbed wire and turning their backs on those pleading to be let in (Baczynska & Ledwith, 2016). Compassion fatigue, inadequate funding, political considerations and social tensions, along with a lack of management, shelter and service capacities wore many nations down. Even some cities that had willingly taken in thousands are now pleading for help. In May, 2017, the Mayor of Athens made this abundantly clear, saying the problem is “spiraling out of control,” and that more efforts should be made to distribute refugees to other parts of the country (ANSAmед, 2017). As hostile citizens have become emboldened, and as government responses have fallen short, more and more refugees have found themselves increasingly vulnerable, fearful, and in too many cases the victims of violence.

In some cases, this has occurred in official refugee camps. Theoretically, camps should be safe havens for people fleeing from war and disasters, but they often fail in this respect. Many official camps have been sites for attacks on refugees, not only by the recognized warring parties but by other players, including conflicting refugee groups (such as rival tribes or incompatible cultures living together), or anti-refugee groups in host nations.

Yet despite official refugee camp shortcomings, unofficial camps, squats, shelters, streets and sidewalks proved no safer. As refugees became increasingly visible and active in the public realm, encounters and conflicts with locals became more common. In Turkey, for example, this led to “several lynching attempts, stereotypes, prejudices, communal conflicts and other forms of harassment against Syrians” (Gokay, 2015; Kaya, 2016), and an erroneous presumption that “Syrian refugees are associated with criminality, violence, and corruption” (Kaya, 2016). Overt violent attacks on refugees, migrants or other foreigners by followers outside camps in Greece increased as well.

Unfortunately, such blatant, acute, direct violence is only the tip of the iceberg. There are other, often insidious, chronic manifestations of violence woven into the day-to-day reality of many refugees, causing them grave harm in ways not always recognized as forms of violence, but very much worth examining. Researchers refer to these types of violence as invisible, indirect, cultural or structural violence (Burtle, 2013).

Overt physical violence is blatant and clear-cut when it occurs. While there may be controversy about who is to blame, there is little debate that it is indeed violence and that it has caused grave harm to human beings. But other manifestations of violence are often subtler and less direct, and a particular focus for this research. While many studies emphasize direct violence, and many tackle aspects of indirect violence, a much smaller number specifically tackle the various manifestations of indirect violence in the lives of refugees, experienced throughout their displacement and resettlement journeys. The purpose of this descriptive study is to answer the following questions: (a) To what extent is indirect violence present in the lives of Syrian refugees, as narrated by refugees and aid workers; and (b) Within that broad category, what common themes are apparent?

Background

General

The Syrian civil war is widely recognized as the greatest international humanitarian crisis since World War II (United Nations [U.N.], 2015). It was triggered largely by the Arab Spring pro-democracy uprisings in 2011, and the subsequent violent official response, that within the following five years devastated the country, causing hundreds of billions of dollars of damage, wounding 1.9 million individuals, and torturing, murdering or otherwise indirectly causing the deaths of at least another 470,000 citizens (Erlich, 2016). In the midst of the chaos, a complex mix of idealistic and opportunistic militarized forces, with ever-shifting loyalties, emerged, adding to the fragmentation of social, economic, political, and cultural structures throughout the country (Syrian Center for Policy Research, 2016).

Articles

Millions of Syrians still in-country are in dire need of assistance. Over five million others have fled to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Greece and points north, where they have frequently encountered severe neglect and abuse, exacerbated by a shortfall in U.N. funds due to unfulfilled pledges from member nations (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2017). Forced to choose between miserable, under-resourced camps and arduous lives in the streets, refugees have been heading further north ever since.

What initially was seen, and to some degree dismissed as a manageable migration crisis, rapidly escalated into an alarming flood of refugees. Hundreds of thousands trudged through the Balkans, with their eyes set on resource-rich Western Europe. Macedonia, Hungary and Serbia responded with everything from barbed wire fences to courteous safe passage and everything in between, but it made little difference: regardless of their efforts, the refugees continued to come. In 2010, approximately 2,400 refugees made it into Hungary; by mid-2015 that number had already jumped fifty-fold. Farther south, by late 2015 as many as 9,000 people were landing on Greek islands daily (Kingsley, 2017).

Europe has struggled to accept refugees. At least a couple of countries earnestly rose to meet the challenge in the earliest years, but they were the exception rather than the rule; as the trickle turned into a flood it became clear that most countries were feeling overwhelmed. One major attempt at crafting a solution took the form of a March 18, 2016 agreement between Turkey and the European Union which required that refugees who arrived in Greece from Turkey (clearly intending to head north into Western Europe) be sent back, and accepted by Turkey (European Commission, 2016). In return, the EU would accept one Syrian refugee from Turkey for each refugee returned from Greece. It would also pay Turkey six billion Euros along with additional political benefits. But strict adherence to the agreement ran contrary to the EU's commitment to existing international law, both in letter and in spirit (Collett, 2016). This has led to a state of confusion and semi-paralysis, a kind of purgatory for refugees lacking a place to go (Holehouse & Weise, 2016).

For example, in Greece, as of late May, 2017, the Vial and Souda camps were occupied at almost twice their stated capacity, hosting over 1,000 people each, including many who were obliged to sleep on the open ground or out on the streets, despite the fact that ministry of migration inspectors reportedly told aid workers the camp was now empty (Are You Syrious, 2017). Chios island volunteers advised that conditions are "deteriorating rapidly" with at least 3,000 refugees on the island, and dozens of new refugees arriving daily (Are You Syrious, 2017).

Furthermore, those who fled during the early days of the war (especially if they could support themselves) were met with a much greater degree of civility, including many acts of human kindness, on a broad scale, and on the human, one-to-one level, such kindness continues. The nations closest to Syria have taken on by far the heaviest load, making efforts to support millions of refugees despite a severe shortage of funding (Sobelman, 2015). But in most cases, as the years have dragged on, prejudice, real-world costs and compassion fatigue have set in, leading to a shift in attitudes by national governments as well as sub-populations (Holden, 2016) and as services deteriorate refugees appear further motivated to move on, heading for Europe, where more conflict awaits them (Erlanger & Freytas-Tamura, 2015). Political philosopher Slavoj Žižek sees Europe as trapped between two major forces, one being an inclusive, liberal-left model unprepared for a flood of immigrants, the other being an anti-immigrant populist/fascist

model unwilling to recognize that large migrations are inevitable harbingers of what the future holds (Žižek, 2017). Increasingly, this angst has led to a number of seriously overwhelmed national governments implementing largely improvisational responses, intended to discourage further migrations, but often with remarkably inept as well as inhumane consequences. Increasingly, host countries have taken in refugees begrudgingly, sometimes even with open hostility, while many have stopped accepting refugees entirely. Austria, for example, is building more fencing and has declared a state of emergency in order to justify restricting the right of asylum otherwise guaranteed under international law (Hume, Shubert, & Veselinovic, 2016).

Background of Structural Violence

Indirect Violence is a term for formal or informal social arrangements that hurt particular groups of people, (Farmer, Nizeye, Stulac, & Keshavjee, 2006) such as the poor, women, or refugees. These obstacles make most aspects of daily living much harder, ranging from keeping your hut in a shantytown to receiving adequate medical care (Burtle, 2013). Overt violence can range from blatant individual abuse to outright war, but indirect violence manifests in other ways, by informally (through cultural beliefs, behaviors and attitudes) or formally (through rules or laws) causing harm to human life.

Furthermore, indirect violence can take many forms, such as harming people by impeding access to living wage jobs, healthcare, education, training, housing, healthy food, potable water, clean air, self-agency (control over one's life), or self-identity (religion, sexuality, gender, marriage or citizenship) (Farmer, 2009). Some manifestations of indirect violence can be fairly clear-cut, and hard to defend, when the damage is pointed out. With other manifestations, challenging indirect violence can be both uncomfortable and controversial. For example, cultural beliefs can permit behaviors in one location that in others would be considered unconscionable, such as genital mutilation, spouse abuse, child abuse, prostitution, slavery, drug use or polygamy. Widespread cultural violence is often invisible from within a culture, even while it may be a glaring injustice when observed from the outside. Nevertheless, red flags might be raised by such behaviors if they are selectively inflicted upon only certain subsets of society.

On a closer look, other iterations can require equally careful attention. Neglect, or denial of services, under some circumstances, can do as much harm as may be caused by other more direct actions. For example, withholding medication, food or water can easily be fatal, but such actions can also contribute to a slow deterioration that is not as dramatic. In a similar vein, restricting access to income, shelter or even human contact can destroy people's lives without being clearly recognized or acknowledged as doing harm. Both direct and indirect violence can be culturally rationalized (by demonizing or dehumanizing particular castes, races, religions or sexual orientations), and can then be reinforced structurally (formalized by regulations and the rule of law). They can also be parsed as to whether they are conscious, hostile acts (such as slavery) or something less obvious (such as paying less than a living wage, or even failing to deliver adequate care out of ignorance, lack of resources, or religious beliefs).

Once such behaviors become integrated into laws or social mores, instigators may find themselves in positions of rationalizing their acts simply because "that's what we do, or what we believe," or "I was only doing my job, following orders or obeying the law." Questioning these behaviors can draw defensive or antagonistic responses. Nevertheless, as people have become

increasingly aware of harm associated with these practices, a growing number of researchers have zeroed in as well, attempting to shine a light on the many manifestations of violence, raise awareness about their findings, and determine what interventions appear promising (Farmer, 2009; Sørensen, 2014).

To muddy the waters further, the study of indirect violence can easily fracture into a variety of nuanced subcategories. For example, a distinction might be made between structural violence and structural deficiency—the former actively, and usually intentionally, handicaps a particular subset of the population, while the latter simply fails to deliver—it may even handicap a wide swath of the population. If structural obstacles impede refugees, women, children or seniors from accessing healthcare, jobs, shelter or food, that would be structural violence. If the rules and regulations of a society allow the top 1% of the population to prosper at the expense of the bottom 99%, that is structural violence as well. For example, police services may be fully accessible to upstanding citizens and power brokers, but may be at least perceived as far less available to minority groups, people living in poverty, or homeless individuals, and indeed refugees in Europe express considerable anxiety about turning to police for assistance, and in some cases report being victimized by the police directly (Strickland, 2015). Structural deficiency can put all of this in a different light -- if a country is bankrupt, it truly cannot provide more services. The difference here, once again, is whether or not the deficiency harms everyone equally, or selects only certain subpopulations for inequity.

In addition, one curious aspect of the indirect violence phenomenon is the striking difference in perceptions, or even rationalizations. Structural violence usually reflects cultural violence, which means that cultural judgments contribute directly to the creation of laws formalizing and enforcing that judgment. The violent impact, even if acknowledged, is rarely recognized as a problem by those in power, who may declare themselves innocent of wrongdoing since they are only doing their jobs, regardless of whether such declarations are sincere or not; whereas it is starkly apparent to those who are suffering the consequences. In other words, they may have conflicting paradigms or beliefs regarding what is real or valid.

It should also be noted that in terms of the Syrian refugee crisis, Greeks in particular face a paradox—they are acutely aware of the structural violence imposed upon them by austerity measures, and commonly express a belief that they are being held hostage by the IMF (BlogActiv, 2017). So it is ironic that they increasingly find themselves, as a nation, backed into an economic corner, and as a result treating refugees with even greater levels of austerity than they consider palatable for themselves. How long this can go on is a matter of open debate (Debating Europe, 2017).

The Pervasiveness of Indirect Violence

Refugees and front-line workers consistently reported experiences with indirect violence throughout the resettlement journey, to a point where it can be reasonably recognized as pervasive – it is the rule, rather than an exception, that refugees will experience cultural or structural violence as part of the phenomenon of the diaspora, with only the specifics varying to some degree from person to person.

Solutions can be looked at from at least two perspectives: (a) fixing the system, or (b) mitigation by working around the system. If a nation wants to move in a more compassionate

direction, then fixing the system makes sense. If the powers-that-be are hostile toward such changes, then work-around options may be the only realistic options, at least in the short run.

Most (but not all), government refugee camps throughout the region have been criticized harshly by the press, refugees and volunteers alike, and those criticisms should be taken to heart (Banning-Lover, 2017). But at the same time it should be acknowledged that, despite their flawed performances, a handful of countries have taken on the lion's share of refugees for years now: Egypt, 127,681; Iraq—244,527; Jordan—632,762; Lebanon—1,075,673; Turkey—2,181,293 (Ali & Ritzen, 2015). Lebanon's case is even more astounding when it is recognized that for roughly every five citizens they also officially shelter one refugee (Refugee Compacts, 2017). Unofficially, it is even more extreme: one official estimates one out three residents of the country are refugees (Malkawi, 2015). Another 1.2 million refugees are scattered throughout Europe, (International Rescue Committee [IRC], 2017a), of whom 62,000 are currently stuck in Greece, seeking permission to move on (IRC, 2017b). On top of all that, there is reasonable suspicion that the official numbers are far from accurate. In at least one case, Jordan believes the actual number is at least double the figure listed above, with 80% of Syrian refugees living in "host communities" outside of official camps (Malkawi, 2015). By way of contrast, a mere 18,000 Syrian refugees have gained entry into the United States (Zong & Batalova, 2017).

Gap in Research

An extensive literature review reveals that there is a large gap in the current body of research on indirect violence as it pertains to the lives of Syrian refugees, and particularly in terms of what can be done about it. Therefore this study will target this particular population's experiences, using a theory as a foundation to outline indirect cultural and structural violence as well as a lens for guiding principles for data collection and analysis purposes, and a conclusion with evidence of promising interventions that can be emulated.

Theoretical Research Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based on Galtung's Theory of Violence Triangle. Galtung created a model that divides violence into two categories; visible, which includes direct violence, and invisible, which includes cultural violence and structural violence (Galtung, 2015). In recent years, Galtung's theory has been used to understand contemporary violence issues facing refugees as narrated by refugees. This theory provides a solid foundation to build upon in parsing the complexities and typologies of indirect violence. The following concept definitions clarify the differences and similarities, and help to specifically distinguish cultural and structural violence.

Direct violence. Direct violence is when one person directly commits an act of violence toward another individual such as torture, rape, or withholding life giving items such as food and water (Ho, 2007).

Cultural violence. Cultural violence, like structural violence, is considered unseen or non-direct and involves the division of cultures, religion, or differences in ideology, and that leads to unequal access or opportunity for individuals to reach their full potential (Galtung, 1990).

Articles

Structural violence. Unlike direct violence, where there is a person that commits a direct act of violence upon another that is easily recognized as such, structural violence is considered unseen or indirect. Structural violence can further be defined as any system or structure that prevents a person from achieving their full potential (Galtung, 2015).

For the purposes of this article, we will utilize the term “indirect violence” as synonymous with Galtung’s term “invisible,” which in turn includes both cultural and structural subcategories. The latter two subcategories will be specified as well when it’s productive to make the distinction.

Method

Design

The gap in research regarding indirect violence makes a compelling argument for the need to study where and how violence occurs from the perspective of refugees and those who deliver services. This study is a qualitative descriptive design. Creswell (2013), suggests that a qualitative inquiry is suitable for complex topics with little known about the subject. A descriptive approach helps to identify where the phenomenon occurs and its various manifestations (Elliot & Timulak, 2005). Descriptive studies also reveal “patterns and connections that might otherwise go unnoticed” (NEDARC, 2010) and provide information for further research.

Guiding philosophical assumptions for this descriptive study are rooted in a postmodern perspective. Creswell (2013) claims that the basic concept of the postmodern perspective is that the knowledge asserted must be set within the context of the world today and seen from multiple perspectives. To that end, this study focuses on the views of Syrian refugees with supporting views from community leaders, and non-governmental organization (NGO) workers.

Sample and Setting

Data was collected in refugee squats in Athens, Greece and displacement zones on the Greek Island of Chios. A typical case sample was utilized to recruit participants based on the NGO’s contacts with refugees and aid workers. A flyer was posted in service centers and refugees volunteered to participate. A typical case sample will allow for average or typical participants for this case study as recommended by gatekeepers or aid workers (Creswell, 2013). Inclusion and exclusion criteria included men and women over 18 years of age, who fled Syria through Turkey and who have resided in refugee camps (either authorized, formal camps or unauthorized camps, including “squats”). Aid workers and gatekeepers will need to have delivered services for at least six months.

Data Collection

Refugees (n=56), and staff of NGO’s (n=18), were invited to participate in (12) semi-structured interviews and (8) focus groups. Focus groups of six to ten people were led through an open discussion to allow a large enough group to generate a rich discussion (Polit & Beck, 2012). Focus groups and interviews began with a review of the IRB’s paperwork and establishing consent to the interview. Interview questions focused on the overall displacement experience, continued with questions on difficulties and challenges throughout the resettlement process, and concluded with specific inquiries on structural violence. Examples

of questions include: “How did you get here?” “What difficulties have you faced throughout the displacement process?” and “What are the current challenges you face in the resettlement process?” More specific follow up questions focused on policies, health care, safety, and security in Greece. In focus groups, refugees were encouraged to build on each other’s responses. As recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985 in Creswell, 2013), several modes of documentation and data collection methods were used to enhance the trustworthiness of this study.

Data Analysis

Authors transcribed interviews verbatim. All identifying data was removed from the transcripts. Numbers and pseudonyms replaced all stakeholders identities. Transcripts were individually analyzed and open-coded by authors. Keywords, lexicons, sentences, and paragraphs generated new codes. Researchers’ individual codes were discussed, refined, and redefined through continuous comparison and reviews of data sources. Following Miles and Huberman’s (1994) guidelines for building confirmability and trustworthiness in data analysis, authors spent substantial time referencing assumptions with transcripts as well as results from the literature review.

Ethical Concerns

Special care and consideration was implemented in the creation of interview questions to reduce the triggering of traumatic experiences. Also, privacy for focus groups can be an issue in overcrowded areas, as well as gender sensitivity. Participants may also be fearful to share stories due to fear of being stereotyped or due to lack of trust in other individuals or agencies. Furthermore, from the participant perspective boundaries between the roles of researcher, learner, and friend may be unclear.

Biases

Research team biases were addressed by constant reflection, consultation, and debriefing after focus groups and throughout the study. Specifically, the research team managed biases by noting their own feelings and thoughts during data collection in a dedicated space, and openly discussed them during analysis. The research team conducted daily briefing sessions to assure checks and balance in terms of biases and assumptions.

Findings

Indirect violence was apparent in each participant’s interviews and focus groups. Furthermore, by using the concepts from Galtung’s Theory of Violence, indirect violence variables (cultural and structural) were clearly illuminated. Under structural violence, sub-themes have emerged as well, including inadequate nutrition, shelter, security, healthcare, work opportunities, and access to education. Though these themes are obvious in literature from an outside view, viewing these themes through a theoretical lens of indirect violence offers new insight for intervention and change. In addition, a substantial amount of refugee input illustrated cultural violence manifesting in the form of dehumanization and alienation. Within the structural violence variable, refugees identified specific, inadequately met physiological and safety needs for food, shelter, safety, health care, work and education, exacerbated by dysfunctional policies and procedures, with details as follows:

Inadequate Food and Nutrition

This subset includes not only inadequate *quantities* of food and water to meet minimum caloric needs, but inadequate food quality in terms of nutritional standards, sanitation and palatability. Many refugees were already severely malnourished before fleeing Syria, as a result of months or years barely staying alive in war zones. “Bulgur, we only ate bulgur,” one mother explained. “No bread. For two months, that is all we lived on. We could not afford food.” But things only improved relatively in host countries. Another woman told us, “The kids’ questions are constant, why we don’t have house, why we don’t have food, why you must wait, why dad doesn’t have job, why, why, why?” Typically, refugees characterized the food they did receive at official refugee camps as “very, very bad,” and usually distributed only once daily. One refugee showed us a photo on his phone of a piece of meat that he’d been served that had a live worm in it; an NGO representative advised us that camp residents frequently threw away food rather than eat it, because the quality was “so bad.”

Inadequate Shelter

This subset within the basic needs category involves sufficient protection from the elements as well as from human or animal threats. More specifically, this includes the need for protection against inclement weather, vehicle or industrial exhaust, noise, mud, flooding, insects, vermin, military attack and individual human intruders. None of the refugees and NGO representatives we interviewed for this study felt that the camps were succeeding, based on those standards or expectations. One refugee reported, “The camp is so bad, there are no toilets and the bathrooms are dirty, the place is dirty. Trash is everywhere.” Another shared his experience with a particular camp, which he describes as, “The worst refugee camp in the world. It has worms and snakes. It was previously a pig farm. They took pigs out, but they put people in...the food was awful...we didn’t take a shower for a month and a half.” A third refugee confided, “I feel that life in the refugee camp took me back to the Stone Age.” “They put us in a camp but I didn’t expect the camp to be like that,” one woman told us. “You hear how bad they are but I was shocked.” Shelters that fall short in terms of any of the above undermine residents’ abilities to gather, sleep, rest or rejuvenate--indirect violence that causes harm on many levels.

In some cases, the consequences can be deadly. One female refugee told us, “Last November, a whole Iraqi family burned to death in the refugee camp. It was cold, they had a small fire heater, blankets caught fire and burned the whole family. The camp management told us that it was the family’s fault for starting the heater in the tent.” She found this absurd in that, “Anyone with children must provide heat for them in the midst of freezing weather, and this was the only source for heat.”

In at least some camps, corruption and poor management are allegedly blatant. Unprofessional crisis and camp management can not only undermine health and safety, but demoralize residents as well. “The level and quality of treatment depends on the refugee camp director’s liking and mood,” one refugee told us. “We lived in prisons, not camps. We spent weeks restrained in the camp. They closed the camp doors and camp directors didn’t allow us to leave. The Greek government controlled the camp, the Greek Army and Police managed the camp...The Greek government also sent secret service to spy on us in camps.” A refugee woman shared her impressions from her camp experience as well: “There was fighting between African people and Pakistani people, because they put all the families in [crowded] compounds and locked us in. When the fighting started all the organizations ran away, and all the police. And

then the fighting started, for 2 or 3 hours and then they started a fire and by then it was night. For us, we were by the trees and the fire was on the trees and coming toward us. The children were screaming and crying. I felt like at that moment I was in Syria, when fire was all around and they were still fighting with rocks so we were stuck inside. Some people from the other side broke [through the fence] to make a way for all people to get out of the camp. It felt like the last day on earth when everyone runs, no one cares if you fall down, everyone just tries to save themselves. After that, when they made a way to run, everyone just run, run, run. You feel like you are in Syria. So, we are still outside after the fire had damaged everything and only when the fighting ended did the police come... As we ran, the police just stood and watched us. That was the worst thing, when people were with their children running and the police just watched everything and did not help. After that, the fireman comes, we stayed outside the camp. After that we came back to the camp with that smell, that smell... but where could we go? So we had to go back to the camp. It was so dirty and smelled like smoke. Of course, everyone got sick because so many were living in one room.”

Many desperate refugees leave official camps and find shelter in illegal squats, but these are far from perfect environments as well. One mother lamented, “...it is my right to stay in a safe place. Not like the squat that is subjected to attacks from gangs, mafia. When you live in a place with a lot of people of diverse groups for an extended amount of time you are going to face conflict.” Another woman told us, “I don’t care about my health here, I don’t want to see anyone, I just want to get out of here. [I need] a house, comfort for my children (loud voice), I would love to wear nothing (unzips shirt). I cannot take my hijab off at all, I need privacy.”

Unfortunately, when refugees do manage to arrange housing it’s usually off-the-books, overcrowded and substandard. One refugee told us, “I got a house finally... it was very bad, very bad, very bad. All fighting happened while I was inside. I took pictures. It was 30-40 people in one room with children, with all, we just made a wall with blankets...”

Inadequate Security

Effective security arrangements would provide refugees with sufficient protection against threats to allow them to live their lives free of fear, allowing them to move beyond a fight or flight mentality and at least attempt to rebuild their lives. Unfortunately, no refugee gave us any indication that they felt safe, or confident that they could turn to authorities if they were in danger.

Almost all refugees had frightening experiences with military, paramilitary or police officers at some point in their journeys, including being assaulted or arrested for no clear reason, to the point where anyone in uniform made them nervous. One camp resident provided insight into his perspective: “There were a lot of soldiers. We were already escaping from war and soldiers, and they put us in a camp that is monitored by the army. It was overwhelming and scary. I didn’t want to see any semblance of war, I didn’t want to see soldiers. So much so that, even today, if any one of us walks in the street and sees Greek soldiers, we run and hide from fear.”

Refugees reported police failing to protect them on numerous occasions. One refugee who had lived in an official camp reported, “The Afghans bullied us, caused problems and kept picking fights with Arabs. In the midst of the fights, the Greek police would stand, watch and do nothing. They didn’t protect us...The police didn’t care. They accused us of being angry people who can’t control our emotions and because of that, they decided not to protect us.” In

more than one case, officers reportedly refused to intervene when refugees were being attacked by other groups of refugees, including one incident when Molotov cocktails were being thrown into an occupied squat. "I have fear here," one woman explained. "I am afraid there will be a problem with [my husband] and police, that he will be arrested." In fact, one of her elementary-aged children was arrested by host country police while enroute to participate in a school play, carrying a prop that made the police suspicious.

Another refugee relayed her understanding of a recent incident in which unscrupulous smugglers and a refugee had a dispute. "The police arrested the refugee for stealing the phone that the smuggler gave him. The smuggler spoke Greek, but the refugee didn't... the refugee had no idea what was happening to him. This is a new economy, people are pretending to be smugglers, taking money from refugees and then fleeing. The refugee is now in prison. It is hard to trust people here."

With all of these reports from refugees it was not surprising, when we asked, "If you feel unsafe, who would you turn to?" that a refugee replied, "This is secretive...we would not turn to officials. People will be really scared...we have our own network to resort to."

Inadequate Health Care

This subset focuses on inadequate access to medical personnel, facilities, treatment and medication, without which refugees can suffer serious, sometimes fatal, harm, undermining their ability to move forward in their lives. Even before leaving Syria, many struggled with inadequate care. One woman explained, "Because I am Palestinian, I was born in Syria, my parents were born in Syria, but my grandparents are from Palestine, I have to pay for any treatment in Syria. Even in Syria there is a distinction made regarding descendants of immigrants, I am less than a refugee."

In Greece, the health care system has been on a crisis footing for many years, thanks to the economic crisis; but as poor as it is for the Greeks themselves, it appears even worse, at least in some cases, for refugees. Access to health care varies considerably in refugee settings, where the demand is usually quite high. Even commonplace ailments are not always treated. For example, "There are no dentists for refugees," one man told us. "You will just get a painkiller pill." Refugees stated that access to free public health service was theoretically an option, but even in those cases the wait time and quality of service was often sub-par for refugees. One woman told us, "everything just takes forever, that is the biggest problem. If you go to the doctor they say to fast and so I go at 7 a.m. but do not get a test until 4 p.m."

One female Syrian refugee told us of her experience taking her husband to a hospital: "So his gall bladder was so big, 4 centimeters, he was in so much pain. They took him to a Greek hospital, they told him we had no spaces, so they had him sleep in the corridor for two days. And then they did testing, they did IV, he said what is going on? They gave him painkillers. He was the only one sleeping outside in the corridor on a mattress. Second day I was visiting him with a Spanish volunteer, when a woman comes out starts berating me, you need to leave. The volunteer starts to sob, why are you mistreating this woman? I was the only visitor not allowed to visit their husband. The woman yelling was just another visitor, she didn't even work at the hospital. And so I was asking her, why are you telling me to leave, who the heck are you? And then the lady called the police on me, and the police told me to leave, but I stood my ground

and said, “if I’m going to leave, everybody should leave here. That is so unfair. Because I’m veiled. And it was within visitation hours. So I stood my ground, and the police went and kicked everybody out, all the guests. After five days in the hospital...oh guess what, the physician was Syrian but he tried to speak to my husband in English, when he could have spoken in Arabic but didn’t. I asked him why were we treated like that—because they are overcrowded, or because we are refugees? And he said predominantly because my husband was a refugee, although it may have also been because I was veiled and because I’m a woman... in the end there was no resolution for his gall bladder, and so he pulled out the IV and he left.”

For refugees, after the horrors of war and the subsequent demoralization that comes with unwelcoming host countries, latent medical needs may be of minor consequence in contrast to the underlying traumatic physical and emotional injuries that most refugees carry with them, including the stresses of living in camps as well as the stresses of surviving bombardments and other horrors.

For example, when asked about her emotional state, one woman replied, “It is so bad. Sometimes I felt it was better to be dead in Moria. It was so hard when you suddenly are so far from your mother, brothers and sisters, and it is so hard. Especially now, my mother is still in Syria and still in danger. Sometimes I hear that bombs come, so...so hard.” When asked about her health, one refugee retorted in exasperation, “How do you think it is? I live here in a box, there is no health here.”

Inadequate Work Opportunities

Inadequate work opportunities raised refugees’ concerns at many stages along their journeys from Syria to the north. Contributing factors included clear-cut manifestations of structural violence, such as legal restrictions on refugees’ rights to work, less direct manifestations such as broad economic conditions in the host countries and manifestations of cultural violence, including anti-refugee biases and related political tensions. Even where work could be found, structural violence was apparent. One man told us, “In Turkey, locals take advantage of Syrians. They, employ them [illegally] but pay them half. It felt like they were sucking our blood.” He found circumstances in Greece to be no better. “The Greeks themselves can’t find work. There is no work for Syrians, we can’t speak the language, and the locals always state, “our people are more important than Syrians.” Another refugee reported, “There are a lot of Egyptians that work here who are not even refugees and they only make 200 euro a month. We can’t make even that here. We can’t work, we don’t speak Greek.”

The right to work is guaranteed to refugees by the United Nation’s (1948) Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but for the vast majority of refugees, opportunities to actually find legitimate employment remain highly elusive. Unfortunately, this puts refugees in a terrible bind — whether to rely entirely on charity, or work illegally at sub-poverty wages, or engage in more lucrative criminal activity. Working illegally generally means working for substandard pay, working in the black market or engaging directly in crime. One refugee stated, “I had to work illegally in Turkey to save money with which to pay smugglers to transport me to Greece...I had to sleep under my sewing machine, in a textile factory for 6 months, as I was paid very little and couldn’t afford housing.”

Inadequate Access to Education

Beyond basic survival, refugees yearn for at least a hint of forward motion in their lives. Education for themselves and for their children is one of the only opportunities that potentially could allow this to happen. One refugee, a mother of four small boys, stated, “my three year old boy has never been to a classroom. I was pregnant when I left Syria and he doesn’t have opportunity to go to school. I just want him to learn in any classroom.” When access is denied, refugees suffer further, losing hope for the future. She continued, “We are still waiting for our paperwork. I am afraid it might be too late for him for school.”

Refugees widely recognize education as a potential means of self-improvement that can empower them to qualify for higher-paying jobs or to live more fulfilling lives. Unfortunately, even when host nations welcome refugee children to attend school they often fall short in making the experience functional or productive. This is not an unusual occurrence with structural violence—there may be no malice involved, but the outcome remains disappointing. For example, refugees in Athens consistently reported that while schools technically accepted their children, they made no special accommodations to help them learn the Greek language or behavioral expectations; but the refugees we interviewed did not perceive this shortcoming as malicious — just a reflection of the fact that the Greek schools are poorly funded. “There is no infrastructure or support for Syrian students,” one refugee explained. “It was all in Greek, so the kids couldn’t understand and left the classes.”

Cultural Violence

Structural and cultural violence usually go hand in hand, with structural rules and procedures developing that reinforce cultural beliefs and prejudices. The distinctions blur largely in terms of the degree to which they are spelled out. Initially, cultural beliefs and prejudices tend to evolve organically, on a psychological and emotional level. (Although they can be provoked or reinforced through various media.) They may be based on historical conflicts, but frequently are manufactured or provoked to political ends, such as to divide diverse populations and disempower them -- an approach commonly used in Colonial conquests and civil wars (Hallinan 2004). Those beliefs and prejudices may then be leveraged and formalized as rules and regulations which reinforce or weaponize those biases. The end result is that particular subsets of the population suffer efficient, systematic disempowerment and harm.

The harm done may be blatant (i.e. the outright banning of one group from voting) but it can also be obscured (requiring unreasonable types of identification, ostensibly with innocent intentions, such as to improve the voting system). The root of the structural violence may be cultural biases or prejudices, but it is also conceivable that it emerges from thoughtlessness, inefficiencies, incompetence, or greed. However, for purposes of this discussion, within the cultural violence variable, one broad subset became apparent through this research--dehumanization and alienation.

Dehumanization and Alienation

In general, all of the deficiencies experienced under “structural violence” have invalidating impacts on individuals, reinforcing a sense of dehumanization and hopelessness that can swamp the more practical concerns on an emotional level. For example, while the lack of employment opportunities has a clear structurally violent impact, obstructing purchasing power for essential

belongings, it is also extremely discouraging for many. One refugee woman explained that the cumulative effect of all they had been through, surviving Syria and ISIS, crossing the Mediterranean and barely surviving for the past year in Greece, only to see no light at the end of the tunnel, was overwhelming and demoralizing. "I don't want my kids to see me crying. My husband and I go on walks to cry. He tells me 'Cry, don't hold anything in your chest, you have to release these feelings, if you suppress your feelings and keep them inside you, this will affect your health, if you have a chance, leave and cry to comfort yourself.' My husband sits and cries with me. Then I feel sad for his tears. My husband's response is 'I am unable to provide normal lives for you and for my family, I feel very sad, I am the man and must provide a better life, but I can't. What can I do?'" Another woman reported, "I just miss my children and cry every day."

One Greek citizen believes mistakes were made when the government reined in the provision of services by humanitarian groups and volunteers in the heart of communities, and instead tried to isolate refugees in controlled camps, away from humanizing contact with the locals. "When we had the first arrivals we [local volunteers] organized everything just by ourselves. The food, the place to stay in the center of the city, our garden, all of society was next to the problem. And then they organized the camps, they organized [their own] clothes center and from that time big, big problems came, because they had the refugees in prison...From that time...society started changing, and started looking at the refugees like troubles, not like human beings who are suffering and are here. So this built up a totally new situation."

Stories of dehumanizing experiences were unfortunately fairly easy to come by, often from the very first point of contact with the host country. In one such case, a boatload of terrified refugees was rescued from stormy seas in the middle of the night. Grateful, but frozen, they were shocked to find their rescuers, the Greek Coast Guard, abruptly shifting from serving as rescuers to serving as prison guards. "They treated us like animals," one refugee told us. "We thought we were finally safe, but instead they treated us like animals. We had to squat on the floor, with every man behind every man, and we could not talk, we could not say anything, and we were freezing. Drenched. Everyone was panicking, they're shouting, 'Shut up, you're not allowed to say anything!' Now the swamp of Europe started. It's filthy and sinks you down."

One family in Athens has been waiting over a year for Germany to approve their request for reunification with their 11 year old son who is living in foster care. The foster mother rarely lets him talk to them on the phone, "because he cries so much afterwards." A sympathetic Greek bar owner describes the refugee perspective as follows: "In Turkey I get in a boat...the boat stops here, I say OK, now I did it. Then suddenly they put me in prison. I am a woman with my child without my husband, and I don't have milk for my baby, you know? Of course, this makes the refugees think 'what's going on here?'" One woman explained her initial experience in Greece as follows: "They just took us and put us in a camp and locked it. My husband asked to go outside. We felt like criminals in jail. Men, women and children, all. So for 40 days we didn't know what was going on, we couldn't leave. Not only that, they started saying, 'We will get you back to Turkey' - That was so hard on me. I did all of this and we crossed the border and the sea and now you will get us back to Turkey? It was so hard, we were locked in, it was so hard."

One refugee we interviewed was so demoralized that he was willing to consider drastic measures. "I applied to go back to Syria. I went back to asylum organizations and requested being sent back to Syria. I was dying here anyway, at least I can die in dignity in Syria. But we don't even have the funds we would need to be smuggled back to Syria...at least a quick death

in Syria would be better than a slow death here. Life here is torture, it's like being slowly burned by a candle... a slow miserable death." Demoralizing, dehumanizing treatment overall, whether intentional or as a by-product of bureaucratic intransigence, is just as damaging as any of the other areas of concern described above.

Inadequate Policies and Procedures

Dysfunctional bureaucratic policies and procedures play integral roles in structural violence, sometimes overtly, (i.e. "do not hire refugees") but just as likely entirely through less tangible factors, such as indifference, inefficiency, incompetence, lack of resources or just general unresponsiveness. This is a fairly common problem reported in a number of countries refugees visited throughout their journeys. As an example, one refugee explained, "The Turkish side wanted a passport. Where am I going to get a passport? We didn't have any. We barely escaped our homes, barely escaping Syrian government shelling. We fled in the midst of the night to the suburbs, dodging the crossfire between the Free Syrian Army and the Syrian government army. All of our paperwork and personal items had to be left behind, in the war-zone. We couldn't go back for them." Further frustrations with red tape were common once refugees made it to Greece. One refugee lamented, "...there are no benefits to receiving residency in Greece, nothing. We had to go back to zero here in Greece. In fact, we are below zero, the situation here is worse compared to Syria. Other European countries support your living somehow when you arrive, but not here. We lost everything and continue to lose everything. I have nothing to lose anymore." Yet another man told us, "Even though we applied before March 20th, the paperwork is long, rules, regulations and processes are very, very slow. I have residency, I have a Greek ID, but I am not allowed to work or live a normal life here, there is no help to even exist here. The locals tell us, "We don't even have work or funds for our own people let alone for refugees." When asked how long it would take to get paperwork approved, he replied, "No one knows, there is no set rule."

One refugee woman reported, "There has been nothing good or helpful. It is hard being someone like me who is in danger. A lot of people keep getting refused permission to be resettled in Athens with no reason. No one can leave the island. There is a paper that if you get a stamp you can leave the island, you have to have the right color of stamp...some people have been here over a year and not getting the stamp." Even turning to NGOs led to some frustrations. A woman informed us that, "Every time I ask for help, they say we can't help you because you have "Lam Shamel" [permission for family reunification]. If your status was "resettlement" we would have been able to give you housing. With "Lam Shamel, it is difficult. Unless you have a dangerous health issue. I tell them we are refugees, we are similar to resettlers... we all came as refugees." One refugee told us, "They are all liars here...If I go talk to a Greek employee and tell them what I need they just say, "go away." Similar sentiments were widespread, as was reflected by an incident that occurred the day before our arrival on Chios, when a man self-immolated out of frustration and despair, after waiting in vain for processing for most of the past year. A female refugee told us, "What happened yesterday, I saw a man burned to death because he didn't get the stamp. I had nightmares, I cannot forget it. He was going back and forth and ran right in front of me, on fire..."

NGO's have to maneuver through a web of bureaucracy as well. One refugee told us, "One of the local aid organizations secured a home for me and my wife because we are classified as vulnerable. However, the moment we get our Greek residency, the organization will kick us out

of the house. They told me, “you are on your own when you obtain your residency here.” So if I ever get residency I will immediately become homeless... we are learning here that when safety and security is granted from one angle, it is taken away from another angle.” Ironically, as it turns out, it is reportedly just as difficult for NGOs to register their organizations with the Greek government as it is for the refugees themselves, with long waits and frequently lost paperwork.

Discussion

The current refugee dilemma has forced the world to wrestle with remarkable moral, social and pragmatic challenges, challenges that remain largely unresolved. Refugees continue to experience violence in a variety of manifestations, from direct obvious violence, to indirect structural violence. As is understandable, the blatant direct violence is more noticeable, and more likely to draw media attention. Unfortunately, the less dramatic and indirect violence is often subsequently overlooked, either intentionally or simply by default. As a result, structural violence can slip under the radar of public outrage or media coverage, failing to draw attention, and at least from a research perspective making it more difficult to pinpoint or document.

Nonetheless, refugees experience structural violence throughout their journeys. This type of violence shows up, for example, in restricted access to resources necessary in order to meet basic food, shelter, healthcare and educational needs. Structural violence against refugees begins to take shape when hosting countries fall short in offering the same basic rights and resources as are available to mainstream citizens, regardless of the official reasoning or justification.

Furthermore, a discussion of structural violence as it pertains to refugees would not be complete without at least touching on unintended consequences. Repressive measures invariably drive people toward alternative means of self-fulfillment, such as finding ways of earning an income on the black market or through crime, or simply off the books. Bare-subsistence camps, regardless of good or bad intentions, invariably inspire desperate residents to look for ways to improve their lot, in order to increase food rations, find ways to earn an income or just plain survive. In all of the above, criminal behavior is fostered, and the state loses an opportunity to generate tax revenue. Structural violence can also undermine trust in authorities—refugees, or other repressed groups, don't feel safe turning to the system for justice and, in some cases, will choose to resolve conflicts on their own, through vigilante action. Even if they were merely witnesses to crimes, they might not come forward to offer evidence for fear of retribution from a system that has already made their ability to stay in-country tenuous.

Ultimately, there is value in teasing out the distinctions between intentional (malicious), and unintentional, thoughtless structural violence. Either approach can lead to similar results, but understanding the underlying motivators may still be helpful when crafting improvements and interventions. Some rules may be based on xenophobia, while others may be based on economic limitations or political perceptions. Many nations that drew criticism cited in this report may be driven by a little of both; the same nations that have compassionately taken in the most refugees are now struggling with economic crises, conflicting world views, and increasingly xenophobic attitudes. An inadequate level of international financial support undoubtedly hampers their ability to provide higher quality service to more refugees, but resentment, prejudice and nationalism also have to be factored into any political equations. These particulars can have a powerful influence in selecting which paths to pursue, especially in the political

realm. Boosting funding, building in checks and balances, or nurturing pro-social grassroots efforts each hold promise, but still have to be mindful of political resistance to meeting the actual needs of the refugees, as prioritized by refugees and anti-refugee sentiments.

Limitations

Limitations in terms of both time and permissions on our preliminary tour precluded any visits to government-run refugee camps. As a result, we were limited to gathering second or third hand feedback or discussions outside of camps, on the refugee camp experience. A more in-depth examination of camps could be productive, especially if unfettered access could be arranged. Additional limitations include language barriers; more participants may have participated if able to speak English.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore indirect violence through the lens of refugee and aid worker perspectives. In addition, this study sought common indirect violence themes. Accordingly, this new perspective helps lay out a basic understanding of indirect violence, in order to help craft solutions, with the ultimate goal of helping refugees reach their full potential. This particularly makes sense when it is recognized that letting refugees into the local economy benefits the host nation in the long run, while keeping refugees in limbo does not (Legrain, 2016).

But for all the considerable good many countries and groups may do, and their excellent intentions, there is a fair chance that they lack the perspective or understanding of how their choices work in the real world, at the ground level, for actual refugees—a group not often invited to the bargaining table when plans are made. Access to school, for example, is a lofty goal, but unless planning incorporates evaluation and feedback tools to determine what actually works, with input from actual front-line workers and refugees, it is only going to look good on paper. One report determined that only 1 out of 3 host countries include refugees in national poverty surveys, and even in those cases they exclude camp residents (Forced displacement, 2016). Planning has to look at such details as: how safely to get to school, obtain shoes, pencils and notebooks, receive adequate support for special needs, be fitted for eyeglasses, receive medication, etc. It is only by sitting down with refugees and asking them how programs are working that the flaws become glaringly apparent, but it is precisely those details that get lost when answers are aggregated into quantitative reports. As one example, food is provided to camps under catering contracts, which may look fine on paper, but the refugees we interviewed consistently reported the food was inedible—a success at the political level, but ultimately an expensive, ongoing failure.

Indirect violence is widely prevalent for refugees and their journeys. By addressing the themes found in this study, nations and NGOs may be able to make improvements to their service delivery models, so as to serve better and even empower refugees. Broad issues worth examining might include: (a) The quantity versus quality dilemma—is it justifiable to pack more people in, in exchange for a diminished quality of support—in other words, structural deficiency? (b) The corruption quandary—how can researchers determine the level of corruption, or make recommendations for restoring honest operations, and how can countries become motivated to clean-up corruption? (c) What innovations have been introduced at

camps, and which hold promise? (d) The empowerment question—to what degree is self-actualization for refugees an option? and (e) How can transparency in operations and budgeting be promoted, whether for funders or for visiting researchers? Robust, sincere support for major innovations to address indirect violence will prove critical in addressing the Syrian Diaspora and helping refugees rebuild their lives.

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