Seeing Like a Humanitarian

Legibility in Lebanon's Emergency Response

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Contents

Abstract

This thesis examines how international humanitarian organisations in Lebanon see and respond to the populations they aim to support. It focuses on four different organisational practices used by humanitarian actors in programme implementation in Lebanon: classification, assessment, targeting, and empowerment. While these processes are couched in the language of impartiality, objectivity and neutrality, I argue that from design to deployment, they are profoundly social, politically embedded processes, which carry tremendous material force. By ignoring or obscuring the political, social and unintended material consequences of their work, humanitarian organisations are in danger of sustaining and reproducing the inequalities they aim to alleviate.

Drawing on 12 months' ethnographic research with international humanitarian organisations in Lebanon, I make three interrelated arguments. Firstly, I argue that legibility is established via socio-material networks of people, technologies, policies, and objects. Power relations are formed through these networks, which rely on 'invisible' work on the part of displacement-affected communities and front-line staff. Secondly, I argue that humanitarian legibility is established along gendered lines. Women are engaged with as vulnerable by humanitarian practitioners, while risks faced by adult men are rendered invisible. Thirdly, I argue that humanitarian organisations establish legibility in ways that are deeply embedded in the socio-political context of Lebanon: local and national dynamics have a profound impact on the ways that humanitarians see, and humanitarian actors actively shape the political and social environment around them.

While solidarity remains at the heart of the humanitarian enterprise, humanitarian schemes of legibility, even when shaped profoundly by the context, rarely afford the flexibility for staff members to put the humanity, dignity and experiences of displacement-affected people at their centre. Throughout this thesis, I argue that the networks that have evolved around schemes of legibility have standardised the ways that humanitarians see and consequently, the power they exert is formidable.

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Acronyms

ANT	Actor-Network Theory
AUB	American University of Beirut
CBT	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
CRTDA	Collective for Research Training and Development - Action
DFID	Department for International Development for the UK Government
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
ECM	Early and Child Marriage
FHH	Female-Headed Household
GAD	Gender and Development
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GBVIMS	Gender-Based Violence Information Management System
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IT	Information Technology
ITS	Informal Tented Settlement
LCRP	Lebanon Crisis Response Plan
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
MEB	Minimum Expenditure Basket
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
MUAC	Middle-Upper Arm Circumference
NFI	Non-Food Item
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PMT	Proxy-Means Testing
P(W)SN	People with Specific Needs
SDC	Social Development Council
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SMEB	Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
SUV	Sports Utility Vehicle

UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
VASyr	Vulnerability Assessment of Syria Refugees in Lebanon
WASH	Water, Health and Sanitation
WFP	World Food Programme
WID	Women in Development

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Preface

The roots of this research go back nearly a decade. In Spring 2011, I was living in Damascus, studying Arabic as part of my undergraduate degree. My classmates and I had been watching the Arab Spring erupt across the Middle East and North Africa since January, convinced it would never happen in Syria. We were soon proved wrong. By March, protests began in Dar'a and were beginning to rumble across other parts of Syria. One morning in April, I made my way to the University campus, a walk which took me along the Autostraad, the main highway in and out of Damascus. I will never forget the shock I felt that morning. The city that I knew and loved had been transformed overnight. The telecoms building had rolled what must have been a 50-foot Syrian flag all the way from the roof of the building down to the ground. Every billboard, every sign, every inch of advertising space had been colonised by a picture of Bashar al-Asad's face, sternly gazing out in front of a Syrian flag. And the traffic was different. The usual commuter traffic was absent and in its place was bus after bus, being driven in from the suburbs and the countryside, packed full of people waving Syrian flags and pictures of Bashar. They were singing and shouting, praising Bashar's name. I walked quickly along the Autostraad and into the University campus, politely declining the pictures of Bashar's face which were handed to me at the gate. The entrance to the campus thronged with people. When I tried to make my way towards the language institute where my classes were held, I was stopped and steered towards the crowd by the gates. Slowly, I realised that the crowd at the entrance was being herded onto more buses to be taken to the centre of the city, to what I would later find out was an enormous pro-Government rally. I stayed in the crowd until I was out of the gate, then I turned towards home and ran, my foreign appearance probably providing sufficient protection from retributions that other students may have faced had they tried to make a similar move.

I left a few weeks later, when the Government's violent responses to the protests had begun to escalate, and the British Embassy evacuated. For a long time after I got back from Syria, there would be an inevitable moment in my conversations when Syria or the Arab Spring would come up. On finding out that I had been living there when the protests began, people would often ask me what I thought of the situation, what I thought was going to happen. My response to these reasonable questions was invariably horror and bewilderment. Bewilderment that I was expected to distil a swirling storm of sorrow and confusion into a bit of analysis, or an insider's prediction. Horror that the progressive devastation of a country I loved could somehow be the subject of casual conversation. But most of all, horror born of guilt at my own privilege, at the ease with which I had left, the certainty and security awaiting me on my return to the UK, and that, in

contrast to the Syrians who fled for Europe – who were, and are, treated as a burden if they manage to make it here at all – I should be treated as some kind of expert on a country that I suddenly felt I didn't really know at all.

I graduated from my undergraduate degree in 2012 and entered the Graduate Scheme in the UK Department for International Development (DFID). They placed me on the humanitarian response to Syria, where I worked on humanitarian policy to begin with, before moving into programme management. The Syria Team was small when I arrived in September 2012 but grew rapidly over the subsequent 3 years, more than quintupling in size as the scale of displacement in Syria and the surrounding countries skyrocketed.

During those years, in the rare moments when I was able to think beyond the next action on my to-do list, anxieties began to niggle at me about the kind of work that we were doing. My colleagues were experts in humanitarian crises, rather than experts in Syria or the region. They had spent years moving between disasters and conflicts and started sentences with: 'In besieged areas in Darfur, we…' or, 'When we trialled that in Kosovo, it was a disaster, so…' or, 'We had to negotiate with armed militias in Sri Lanka…' This was precisely the kind of knowledge valued by the organisation, and with good reason. These humanitarian professionals had encyclopaedic understandings of international legal tools and standards and deployed them to impressive effect when negotiating with other parts of the UK Government or the United Nations (UN). The trouble was that the way that aid workers talked about Syria and Syrians seemed to bear no relation at all to the Syria I had lived in, and the Syrians that I knew. The country I had happily spent a year living in and travelling around became a flat map of governorates shaded in reds, oranges and greens to mark changing zones of control by the multiplying armed groups. Syrians were quickly divided into 'combatants' and 'civilians', or else 'parties to the conflict' and 'women and children', 'displaced persons' or 'refugees.' Most often, they were faceless results in a 'logframe' – the project management tool used ubiquitously by humanitarian organisations to measure achievements – where Syrians were represented as the number of people reached with food packages, hygiene kits or shelter assistance.

For all the talk of the importance of 'localising' humanitarian assistance – ensuring that communities had a say in the how, what, where and when of the assistance they received – the work we were doing felt very far removed from the realities of Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Iraq. For the majority of my time working on the Syria response, I was the only Arabic speaker in the team, yet I can count on one hand the number of times I was called upon to use it. There was simply no need. Most of the aid workers we worked with – the Country Directors, Grant Managers

and Heads of Programmes for the international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and UN organisations leading the response – were European or north American. All reports were written in English and all meetings were conducted in it. When I visited DFID-funded programmes in Turkey, Lebanon or Jordan, the visits were highly choreographed affairs, with the organisation arranging the visit providing several members of staff, including a translator, to mediate any exchanges with the carefully selected recipients of the programme.

A recurring thought struck me: If I struggled to relate the numbers and words on the page to the Syria and Syrians I knew, what was it like for the staff actually implementing the programmes? Field staff – the people who actually conducted needs assessments, distributed assistance packages and surveyed recipients in order to monitor and evaluate their programmes – had the unenviable task of mapping a neat world of logframe results, categories and thresholds onto the messy reality with which they were faced. How did they do it? And what were the effects? A small number of – mostly internal – reports began to emerge which added to my questions. These reports (e.g. International Rescue Committee 2015) cast doubt on the appropriateness of some humanitarian interventions in Syria and the region and the extent to which they adhered to their mandate of doing no harm.

I, like hundreds of others in the humanitarian world, have unwittingly built a career on the back of the conflict in Syria. Displaced Syrians may be more or less reliant on material humanitarian assistance, but humanitarian practitioners also need crisis-affected peoples. Without them their jobs and livelihoods would not exist; it is certainly not only the 'beneficiaries' who are benefiting. This thesis represents my attempt to hold the structures I worked within accountable, to direct the mirror onto the response, interrogate the everyday practices of humanitarian organisations and examine the relationships of power that form around them.

Introduction

Seven years after I left Damascus, I was sitting in the quiet Beirut office of a humanitarian organisation, six months into my fieldwork for this research. Dan burst into the office, visibly fizzing with excitement. 'Take a look at this new tool!' he shouted to no one in particular. 'I don't often say this, but this is really good!' Dan was the Deputy Head of Office for an international NGO,[1] one with which I had been conducting research for several months. He had a background in economics and, I had deduced by this point, an enduring love of metrics and data. He put his laptop down next to Khalil, the Area Programme Manager for north Lebanon, and together, they looked through the new tool in detail.

The tool, which had been sent to the NGO by another humanitarian organisation, was designed to rank every sub-district in Lebanon according to its socio-economic vulnerability. Based on this ranking, organisations could then decide on the sub-districts in which to target their programmes. As he and Khalil looked through the tool, Dan shouted excitedly to the room, announcing the different criteria that the tool was using to define and quantify vulnerability. 'Social tensions… shelter needs… number of households below the Minimum Expenditure Basket[2]…' I asked Dan if he could send me the tool. After a moment's thought, he agreed, on the understanding that if I wrote about it, I would anonymise its source and that I would not publish the tool itself or share it with anyone else.

When the Excel sheet arrived in my inbox, it consisted of a long series of columns. There were four columns for each criterion of vulnerability. The first column for each criterion was what might be considered the 'raw data', in that it had not yet been rendered commensurable and comparable for the purposes of the tool. For example, it used the actual number of households whose expenditure falls below the Minimum Expenditure Basket, or the amount of dollars per person in municipal funding.[3] In the second column for each criterion, on the basis of the data given in the first column, was a score of 1 to 3, where 1 was least vulnerable and 3 was most vulnerable. These numbers correlated to thresholds in the 'raw' data. For example, if there was fewer than $5 per person in municipal funding, all sub-districts falling under this threshold might be given a score of 3, while funding of $5-$7 per person results in a score of 2, and more than $7 would give a score

[1] All organisations in this research are anonymised and all names have been changed, as outlined in Chapter One.
[2] The Minimum Expenditure Basket, or MEB, was equivalent to a poverty line for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Its origins and the processes underpinning it are explored in more depth in Chapter Five.
[3] Some of the data were rather more 'cooked'. In order to quantify social tensions, for example, the first column gave a score out of 50, the result of formulae from a separate tool, designed by another humanitarian organisation.

of 1 and so on. There was no indication of how these thresholds had been decided. In the third column, each score was given a weighting – or coefficient – depending on the perceived importance of the criterion in measuring vulnerability. Again, no indication was given as to how importance was determined. The most important criteria were given a weighting of 4, while the least important criteria were given a weighting of 1. The fourth column under each criterion multiplied the score by the importance weighting to give a 'final score'. At the end of the spreadsheet, the last column added together the final scores for all the different criteria to give a total score out of a possible 45. The higher the total score, the greater the vulnerability of the sub-district. With a quick press of the 'sort by' button, the user could then rank the sub-districts from most vulnerable to least vulnerable and choose the areas in which to target their assistance accordingly.

The spreadsheet was certainly an astonishing feat of quantification, but what struck me most in that moment was the sheer joy which it had brought Dan. He believed wholeheartedly in the mission of his organisation – to save and improve the lives of people affected by the Syria crisis in Lebanon – and he believed that this spreadsheet was going to help him do it. His compassion and will to help found their conduit in this algorithm, which aggregated all kinds of complex social information into a single number to be ranked.

Though Dan's intentions were driven by a moral urge to help people in need, he – and the spreadsheet, and everyone involved in creating the spreadsheet – were in positions of considerable power when it came to determining who received assistance in Lebanon. Through complicated algorithms and systems of classification, they rendered the population *legible*, manageable, easier and simpler to respond to with assistance. This dynamic gets to the heart of one of the paradoxes of humanitarianism, identified famously by Didier Fassin: Humanitarian sentiment is rooted in an understanding of shared humanity, a 'politics of solidarity,' but it is focused on the most vulnerable, and thus is always the result of a 'politics of inequality' (Fassin 2012: 3). I begin the thesis with this paradox, because in what follows, I hope to demonstrate the morally demanding reality of delivering humanitarian assistance in a context of protracted displacement, dwindling financial resources and challenging political currents. Faithfully describing the socio-material processes of humanitarian assistance means showing the many imperfect ways in which humanitarian workers must grapple with that paradox, attempting solidarity, yet navigating inequality. By holding the paradox at the heart of this thesis, I will strive to convey the ethical complexity of humanitarianism, its high ideals, and the many ways in which it falls short.

Seeing Like a Humanitarian

The question I am concerned with in this thesis is this: *How and with what effects do humanitarian organisations in Lebanon make displacement-affected populations legible?*

By legible, I mean the ways that organisations codify, simplify, order or otherwise render more manageable the complex social world they encounter in the course of implementing humanitarian programmes. Humanitarian organisations can wield extraordinary power in their fields of operation, governing and providing for populations in much the same way that a state does (Barnett 2011). Rendering crisis-affected populations legible is foundational to humanitarianism; it is only through schemes of legibility that humanitarian organisations can decide what assistance to provide, where, and to whom. The international humanitarian apparatus has a complex array of global systems and tools to help them do this in ways that they deem to be neutral, impartial and independent. But while the tools may be global, they are always deployed *somewhere*, and this inevitably happens in context-specific ways. Critical studies of how this works in practice, in-depth explorations of the *somewhere*, can tell us much about the politics of solidarity and inequality in humanitarian settings.

The title of this thesis, *Seeing Like a Humanitarian* is, of course, inspired by James C Scott's *Seeing Like a State* (1998). In his seminal work, Scott explored the ways in which states have taken 'exceptionally complex, illegible and local social practices […] and created a standard grid whereby it could be centrally recorded and monitored' (1998: 2), systematising societies into organisationally 'legible' structures. This process was, he argued, influenced by a 'high modernist ideology' (1998: 3): an unswerving faith in technological process and scientific method, along which lines society could be rationally and aesthetically ordered. Scott contended that the process of making society legible was responsible for many of the failures of state-initiated social engineering projects of the twentieth century. It is my assertion that humanitarians, like states, are engaged in rendering populations 'legible' when designing and implementing their programmes. Though humanitarian organisations are usually non-state actors, they must nevertheless make sense of complex social realities when designing and implementing emergency programmes, scaffolding them with systems designed to simplify and codify. Many humanitarians, as we shall discover, also have real faith in technological process and cleave to aesthetic order in a similar way to the processes Scott describes. Nevertheless, my methodological and theoretical approach are quite different to those employed by Scott. While Scott uses a historical approach to investigate the top-down and bureaucratic practices of state, I am interested in legibility *ethnographically*, as a dynamic organisational process;

the ways that schemes of legibility shift in different contexts and are altered in translation by different actors.

In order to answer the question of how and with what effects humanitarian actors make displacement-affected populations legible, over the following chapters I will examine several processes which are involved in humanitarian programming. These practices are designed to render populations more manageable and respond to them; they are fundamental to the implementation of humanitarian programmes. They are used globally, but always deployed locally, and are key sites of 'seeing' within humanitarian responses. They can be summarised as processes of classification, assessment, targeting assistance and empowerment:

Classification is the production and deployment of categories into which displacement-affected populations in Lebanon are sorted by humanitarian organisations. Such categories are the lens through which aid workers understand the world they encounter, and the framework for their response. As such, categories do not simply describe but can actively help to produce the reality they are concerned with (Shore and Wright 1997). In this thesis, I will examine a number of categories and systems of classification that have been used to codify and rank vulnerability and need, such as 'female-headed household' and 'early marriage'. These categories are based on aspects of displacement-affected peoples' identity, circumstance and experience. They are used to produce research about displacement-affected populations, and in decisions about the distribution of assistance.

Assessment is the process of gathering data: conducting surveys, interviews and focus group discussions. It is a critical, though understudied, aspect of humanitarian practice. Aid organisations use surveys to gather data before, during and after the delivery of their programmes. Sometimes, the survey *is* the programme: Protection monitoring programmes, for example, use continuous surveying to keep track of the extent to which populations' rights, safety and dignity are being respected. Assessment is built on the foundation of classification; in this thesis I will show how categories travel and are deployed by means of these assessments. Gathering data usually involves a range of technical tools including tablets, databases and other software, and, treating these tools as actors capable of translating and deploying classifications, I will show how technology plays an increasingly important role in schemes of legibility in Lebanon.

Targeting is the means by which humanitarian organisations decide who is eligible for assistance. While targeting can be conducted on a categorical basis (for example, anybody registered as a refugee with UNHCR could be considered eligible for assistance), in Lebanon, the needs are too

high and funding too inadequate to deliver assistance on simple categorical bases. Humanitarian organisations have therefore begun to rely on technology and data to target their assistance in ways they deem to be more objective. Once categories are set, and assessments have been conducted, complicated algorithms – not unlike the one in the spreadsheet described above – are built to rank households and individuals by vulnerability or need. These rankings are then used to target assistance at those deemed to be the most vulnerable and in need.

Empowerment is the process by which aid organisations aim to build the skills, knowledge and confidence of participants. Empowerment programmes follow a curriculum that generally last between four and twelve sessions and cover a range of activities. These can include vocational skills such as sewing or Information Technology, and personal development sessions on topics such as decision-making, leadership and gender equality. Empowerment programmes in Lebanon are usually gender-specific, for example, offering 'women's empowerment', or 'masculinity training'. The curricula make use of the systems of classification mentioned above, and are particularly concerned with achieving greater gender equality through reducing gender-based violence and increasing economic participation for women.

Classification, assessment and targeting are used across all humanitarian sectors, but I have chosen in this thesis to focus on a smaller subset of sectors: programmes which fit into the protection-livelihoods-basic assistance nexus. These are three areas of humanitarian work that are closely related. Protection programmes target individuals with specific vulnerabilities or needs, supporting them with legal assistance, case management, emergency cash assistance and/or access to other services, as well as monitoring the extent to which rights are being respected among the population at large. Livelihoods programmes target socio-economically vulnerable groups with job-matching, apprenticeships and skills trainings; a stipend is sometimes paid to those on unwaged programmes. Basic assistance programmes target the most socio-economically vulnerable with cash assistance. There are deep linkages across these sectors. Specific needs often go hand-in-hand with more generalised socio-economic vulnerability, with cash assistance one of the interventions of choice. Empowerment programmes, often including a livelihoods component, are used as a type of protection intervention in Lebanon, based on the theory that education in topics such as gender equality or household decision-making can alleviate protection risks such as gender-based violence in the home, and that increased economic empowerment can contribute to greater gender equality.

These processes clearly do not exist in isolation from one another. Classification, assessment, targeting and empowerment are contingent on and entwined with one another and with a range of other socio-material processes which we will encounter over the course of this research. It is

the micro dynamics of these processes – the everyday ways that humanitarianism is *enacted* – that I am interested in. They are the means by which organisations make displacement-affected populations legible and are foundational to the humanitarian enterprise.

Outline of the Argument

Each of the processes described above is rooted in a commitment to neutrality and impartiality, principles which are central pillars in any humanitarian response. Staff members make claims to objectivity and neutrality through these processes by drawing on quantitative techniques, standardised categories, technological innovation and liberal feminist understandings of gender equality. For over 150 years, humanitarian organisations have cleaved to ideals of neutrality, impartiality and independence. In abiding by these principles, humanitarian actors theoretically treat all human life as equal and respond to suffering solely on the basis of need. The principles also serve an important pragmatic purpose: in maintaining a neutral presence, humanitarian organisations are better able to gain the trust of states and armed actors, and maintain access to communities in need (Bernard 2015; McGoldrick 2011; O'Callaghan and Leach 2013). The tools and processes explored in this thesis are designed to not only conform with, but actively enact these principles. My argument, however, is that from design to deployment, each process rests on practices of legibility that are profoundly socially and politically embedded. By downplaying or disregarding the political, social and unintended material consequences of their work, I argue, humanitarian organisations are in danger of sustaining or reproducing the inequalities they aim to alleviate.

Throughout the course of this thesis I will demonstrate this through three interrelated arguments: The first argument is that establishing legibility in the humanitarian context is dependent on socio-material networks, including people, technologies, policies and objects. Power is deployed in subtle and surprising ways through these networks. I will describe, for example, the ways that computer tablets, multiple-choice questionnaires and frontline staff come together to assess vulnerability; the ways that algorithms and national politics and econometricians decide who gets assistance; and the ways that global policy tools and gender experts suggest ways that people might be empowered or have their 'capacity' built. To use Susan Leigh Star's phrase, *communities of practice* (1990) have formed in the humanitarian response in Lebanon and it is only through these communities of practice that classification, assessment, targeting and empowerment get done. The processes are neither top-down nor bottom up, but are dependent on shifting constellations of power deployed through everyday interactions. The position of technologies and expert knowledge in these

networks lend these processes the veneer of objectivity and fairness while obscuring the deeply social and political manner in which they operate. Syrians and displacement-affected Lebanese communities are not included in the communities of practice, while field staff exist on their peripheries. All must nevertheless live in relationship with them, with many aspects of their time and resources dictated by the machinations of these networks. This, I will demonstrate, can require a great deal of 'invisible' work on the part of Syrians and front-line staff.

The second argument is that legibility is established in a heavily gendered manner. Humanitarian organisations are chiefly concerned with saving lives, reducing suffering and maintaining dignity. Each of the practices I examine in this research is consequently concerned on some level with vulnerability and need: classifying, identifying, quantifying, and responding to them. At every stage, gender is one of the key lenses through which vulnerability and need are understood. Thanks to the communities of practice that have formed around these processes, gender is treated as a matter of specialist knowledge, to be advised upon by experts. Despite efforts towards an intersectional and contextualised approach, I argue that gender is still understood and deployed by experts in a way that is rooted in a liberal and secular interpretation of feminism. Orientalised assumptions about the nature of gender inequalities in displacement-affected communities abound within policy literature, systems of classification and empowerment curricula. By making women legible as vulnerable and men legible as perpetrators of violence, gender experts participate in paradoxical practices, actively reproducing the dynamics they seek to eradicate. Nevertheless, beyond the realms of the experts, the ways that gender is deployed in processes of classification, assessment, targeting and empowerment remain unruly, particularly in interactions between field staff and beneficiaries, where expertise is translated in context-specific ways.

The final argument is that the process of establishing legibility for humanitarian organisations is deeply situated in the Lebanese context. While many of the policies and practices described in this research draw on international standards and tools, they are deployed in ways that are highly contextual, and not always consistent. Local politics, histories and identities play a crucial, though often unacknowledged, role in humanitarian processes of classification, assessment, targeting and empowerment. International humanitarian organisations navigate and participate in the Lebanese socio-political landscape and this not only shapes the way that they 'see' and interact with the communities they aim to support, but shapes the Lebanese socio-political landscape itself. The ways that this takes place can vary enormously: staff members are situated, and therefore interact with, the Lebanese humanitarian landscape in different ways. Nationality, class, gender, religious background and, crucially, seniority within the organisational hierarchy all play a role in the ways

that legibility is established in the office, in the 'field', and outside of work. Senior management navigate and shape national and local political realities alongside international mandates and expectations; middle management balance donor-stipulated bureaucratic imperatives with operational realities, budgets, staff time and performance; field staff must carry and translate the tools, language, expectations of their managers in their day-to-day interactions with displacement-affected communities, and translate what they encounter back in turn.

My goal through this research has been to offer a detailed picture of *how* humanitarianism works, exploring the many ethical and practical quandaries it throws up in the process. Asking 'how?' means focusing on people and their tools, and the way they come together to form communities of practice. Examining humanitarianism in Lebanon ethnographically allows us to consider the relationships between humanitarianism, power, gender and technology through the lens of everyday practice. Ultimately, it gives us new ways to ask: how can humanitarianism be done well?

I will return to that question in the conclusion. In the remainder of this introduction, I will situate my argument in the existing academic literature. I begin with a contextual section on Lebanon, which gives a brief history of displacement in the country and the social, political and historical factors which have shaped the response, as well as an overview of contemporary scholarship on the country. Following this is a discussion of anthropological and 'network analysis' approaches to humanitarianism, and the role of expert knowledge and technology as manifestations of neutrality and impartiality. Finally, I explore the literature around gender and humanitarianism and the key critical and instrumentalist approaches to these issues. In each section, I show how I aim to build on, and contribute to, these multi-disciplinary fields, empirically, theoretically and methodologically. At the end of the introduction, I will describe the structure of the thesis and briefly summarise the argument of each chapter.

Lebanon and the Response to Displacement from Syria

Syria and Lebanon have a lengthy shared history. The states of Syria and Lebanon as they exist geographically today were formed mid-way through the 20th Century, and prior to this were usually referred to collectively, along with modern day Jordan and Israel/Palestine as *bilād ash-shām* or greater Syria.[4] Displacement in this region is by no means a recent phenomenon. Indeed, under Ottoman rule the greater Syria region was characterised by large-scale forced population movements. These included Circassian, Chechnyan and other Muslim communities from the

[4] For further discussion on the history of the Levant region and the population movements that shaped it, see Khoury (1987), Philipp and Schäbler (1998), Chatty (2010) and White (2011).

Caucuses; Armenians, Assyrians and other Christian minorities; and Kurds. The Arab-Israeli conflicts in 1948 and 1967 prompted further movement as Palestinians fled into neighbouring Syria, Lebanon and Jordan (Chatty 2010; White 2017). As a result of these population movements over the 18th to 20th centuries, the communities living in the Levant region were – and still remain – highly cosmopolitan. They represent a diverse range of religious, ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In her historical ethnography of displacement in the region, Dawn Chatty describes this cosmopolitanism as 'integration without assimilation' (Chatty 2010: 2).

The 21st Century has already witnessed population movements of equally monumental size in the region. The Syrian conflict began in 2011. Its causes are complex, and highly contested. What began as a series of largely peaceful protests escalated, following violent Government responses, into a devastating conflict involving many actors, both domestic and external. The violence has taken hundreds of thousands of lives, destroyed infrastructure in many areas of the country and caused displacement of people on an enormous scale. When the conflict in Syria began to escalate from 2012, geographical proximity, a long history of familial and trade ties, and a relatively relaxed border policy meant that Lebanon quickly became host to a growing number of people fleeing the conflict. By 2014, partly owing to Jordan and Turkey closing their borders to new arrivals, the number of Syrians registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Lebanon had exceeded one million. Though registration of newly arrived Syrians with UNHCR was restricted by the Government of Lebanon from 2015, at the time of this research, the estimated number of Syrians in Lebanon was 1.5 million (Government of Lebanon and United Nations 2019). The United Nations (UN) recognises Syrians fleeing the conflict as refugees (*lāji'īn)* and has registered them as such, but the Government of Lebanon, which is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, has consistently referred to Syrians residing within its borders as 'temporarily displaced individuals' (*nāzi̱ḥīn)* (Government of Lebanon and United Nations 2019), a category that offers no legal protection.[5] It is estimated that Syrians now account for over a quarter of the population in Lebanon, making it home to the largest number of refugees per capita anywhere in the world, by a considerable distance. Displacement of Syrians into Lebanon is in addition to 174,000 Palestinian refugees already residing in Lebanon, as well as a large number of Palestinian refugees fleeing Syria (Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee 2018).

[5] For a full discussion of legal status and systems of refugee classification within Government and UN bureaucracies in Lebanon, see Janmyr (2016, 2018) and Janmyr and Mourad (2018).

From the beginning of the crisis, the Lebanese government insisted that the international response to displacement from Syria follow a 'no-camp' policy, a decision widely understood to be taken in light of Lebanon's experience with Palestinian refugee camps over the previous decades. The Government consequently refused to allow humanitarian organisations to set up the UNHCR-led formal camps that had become standard practice in situations of mass displacement, and which were in place in Jordan and Iraq. While the majority of Syrian families live in rented accommodation – including converted garages, disused commercial spaces as well as more traditional residential buildings – many displaced Syrians live in what the humanitarian community describe as 'informal tented settlements,' or ITSs, small camps on rented land, usually managed by a member of the community, the *shāwīsh*.[6] Though Syrians settled all over Lebanon, the highest numbers of displaced Syrians live in some of Lebanon's most impoverished areas, many close to the border in the Beqaa valley and Akkar regions.

The global humanitarian system went from having a negligible presence in Syria and its neighbouring countries – excepting the Palestinian territories – to establishing what became, according to the United Nations, the largest humanitarian response of the century (UN 2016). The response initially focussed on emergency support to people displaced from Syria, providing food parcels and emergency shelter assistance. However, as the Syrian population in Lebanon stabilised, the response morphed into a longer-term operation. The rapidly increased population placed considerable strain on Lebanon's already stretched infrastructure and services, exacerbating pre-existing inequalities in Lebanon (Fawaz, Saghiyeh, and Nammour 2014; Yassin et al. 2015). Despite being an upper middle-income country, wealth inequality in Lebanon remains high and the social security net for economically deprived Lebanese citizens is meagre (Karam 2015). By the time I arrived to undertake this research in 2017, the response to displacement had shifted away from 'pure' lifesaving humanitarian assistance into a mode of protracted humanitarian operations that was variously described to me as 'resilience,' 'development' and 'stabilisation'. In practice, this meant more support to municipalities and other local and national institutions, investment in Lebanon's infrastructure and services and, crucially, support to vulnerable Lebanese communities.

[6] Though the word *shāwīsh* was originally used to describe someone who managed labour networks, in recent years it has been used to describe the role of someone who occupies a management role in informal tented settlements in Lebanon. Usually a Syrian man (although there was often a female deputy), and appointed by the community, they negotiated rents with landowners, led decision-making processes, and were often the first point of contact for humanitarian organisations.

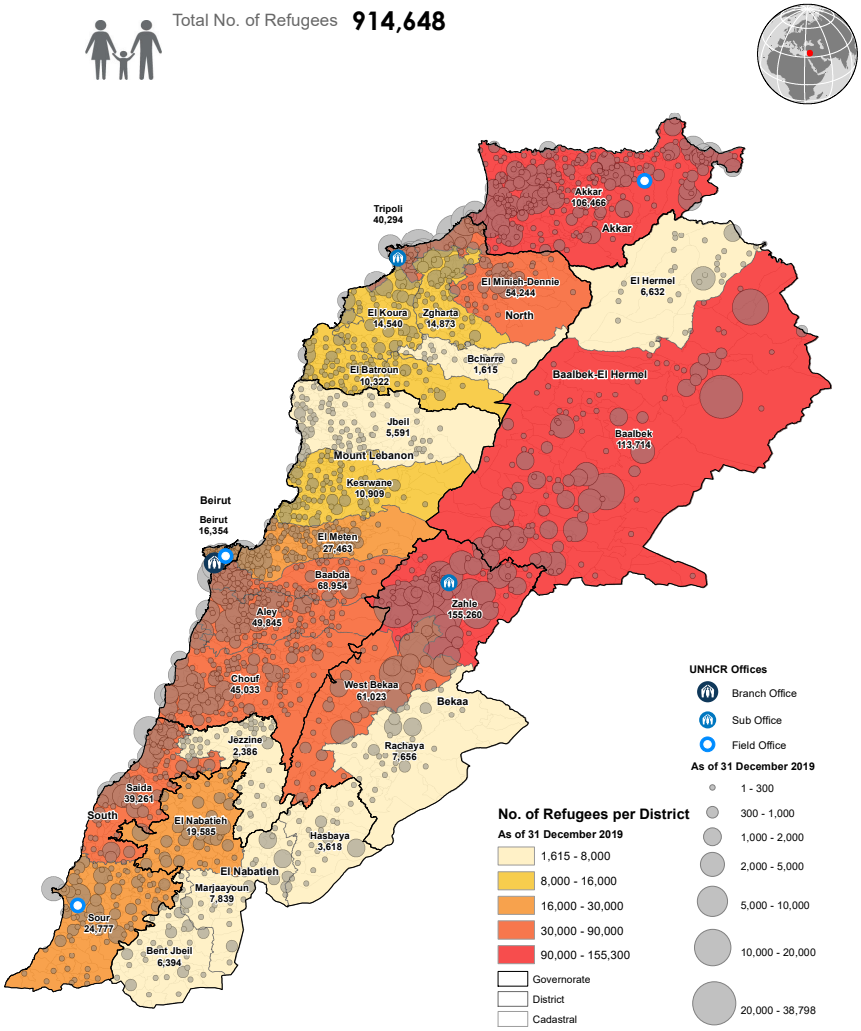

Figure 1: UNHCR Map of Lebanon with number of refugees registered, 31 December 2019. Source: Reliefweb

As a predominantly urban, middle-income country with a highly educated population, the humanitarian response in Lebanon presented a unique opportunity for humanitarian organisations to trial long-promised shifts in practice, for example, towards cash assistance and greater 'localisation' of support. In total, some US$6.7 billion in aid funding made its way to Lebanon between 2011 and 2019 (Government of Lebanon and United Nations 2019), and the humanitarian response thus came to play an important economic as well political role in contemporary Lebanon. Though the response was led by the UN, and the majority of funding was funnelled through international organisations, many national organisations were heavily involved in the response as implementing partners, including some long-standing organisations and others that were founded primarily in response to displacement from Syria. This, coupled with a 2015 Government stipulation that the vast majority of staff employed by international humanitarian organisations should be Lebanese citizens, meant that the humanitarian response also became a major source of employment in Lebanon.

Nevertheless, Lebanon also presented a complex political environment for international humanitarian actors to navigate. Beyond the decision not to allow camps, the response to displaced Syrians from the Lebanese authorities in the early years of the Syrian conflict has been described as a 'policy of the non-policy' (Abi Khalil 2015), primarily because of its *de facto* open-door approach to Syrians fleeing the conflict. In the early years of the conflict, Lebanon was mired in political stalemates which made it difficult for any leader to form a functional government. As Mourad (2017) points out, Government inaction shaped the landscape of the humanitarian response in quite as profound a way as action might have, compelling municipalities and the UN to take prominent roles in the response. From late 2014, however, the Government began to take more coordinated, increasingly restrictive action in response to people arriving from Syria, limiting registration and imposing bureaucratic and financial hurdles for those wishing to remain in the country legally.

Though the economic and infrastructural strains mentioned above doubtless played into the Government's shift in policy, security concerns were also at play. In 2014, following the arrest of one of their commanders by the Lebanese army, Da'esh (the so-called Islamic State) and Jabhat al-Nusra launched a joint offensive in the Lebanese border town of Arsal, a major reception point for Syrians fleeing the conflict. Though the Lebanese army launched a counter-offensive, broadly hailed as a success, the incident seemed to confirm to many in Lebanon the dangerous 'spill-over' effects of hosting Syrians on Lebanese soil.

It's important to recognise the ways that perceptions around the history of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon played into these security concerns. Following their displacement from Palestine, the 1969 Cairo Accords agreed autonomy for Palestinians encamped in Lebanon, and permitted them to launch attacks on Israel from Lebanon. The presence of Palestinians is consequently tied inextricably in the minds of some Lebanese citizens to the decades-long civil war, and many lay the blame for its beginnings at their door, notwithstanding the many complex factors involved in its outbreak (Haddad 2003; Khalili 2005; Picard and Philip 1996). Palestinians themselves are acutely aware of this perception: in her ethnographic portrayal of life in Shatila, a Palestinian refugee camp in southern Beirut, Diana Allan quotes one Palestinian as saying, 'when the Lebanese civil war ended, all the Lebanese who were left behind were angels, and the only ones with dirty hands were the Palestinians. All hung their bloodstained clothes on us' (2013: 13). In contemporary Lebanon, Palestinian refugees are prohibited from holding most jobs, owning property or seeking higher education. But if they are excluded from the regime of rights and benefits, they are, as Sari Hanafi observes, 'included in the regime of security, as subjects under permanent control and

surveillance (2011: 38). Palestinians have had little choice but to live for decades in securitised camps in Lebanon, heavily policed from the outside, and, though the Cairo Accords were abrogated by the Lebanese Parliament in 1987, politically autonomous within (Long and Hanafi 2010).[7] This autonomy, or extraterritoriality, as it is often described, has been instrumentalised within some political and media circles to construct Palestinians in Lebanon as the proverbial fifth column and it was these fears which played into securitised concerns with regards those fleeing the conflict in Syria. The same narratives that were frequently employed by politicians and some media outlets in Lebanon with regards the Palestinian camps – that they were dangerous and harboured terrorist threats – were now deployed towards the Syrian population in Lebanon.

Playing into these concerns were fears, on the part of some Lebanese citizens, around the permanent settlement of the Syrian or Palestinian populations, which are majority Sunni Muslim. Lebanon's system of governance is built upon confessional identity. The 1989 Ta'if accords, which were drawn up to provide the basis for the end of the civil war, apportioned political power among the eighteen officially recognised religious confessions in Lebanon. Seats in parliament are equally divided between Christians and Muslims, as are positions in cabinet, and positions of political power are split between different sects. The President, for example, is always Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister Sunni Muslim and the Speaker of Parliament Shi'i Muslim. The question of demographics is so fraught that a national census has not been conducted since 1932, when Christians made up 50% of the population, and it was this census upon which the Ta'if accords were based.[8] The rejection of resettlement of Palestinian citizens had, until the Syrian conflict began, been one of the few issues uniting Lebanon's often divided political factions. Indeed, Peteet (2005) has argued that prevailing mistrust of the Palestinian population and continued rejection of naturalisation actually constitutes a formative part of Lebanese post-war identity. The fear of disturbing these demographics is such that the preamble to the revised 1990 constitution states that there shall be 'no settlement of non-Lebanese in Lebanon',[9] a sentence widely understood to refer to Palestinians. Andrew Arsan (2018: 265) has charted the deep history of fear of *tawtīn,* or naturalisation, in Lebanon, which can be traced back to the 1950s and continues into the present day, having found a new object in the growing Syrian population. The prospect of the permanent settlement of the majority-Sunni Muslim Palestinian and Syrian populations is perceived by some in Lebanon – though of course not all – as an existential risk to the delicate political balance of the

[7] For a fuller exploration of the history and experiences of Palestinians in Lebanese camps, see e.g. Allan (2013); Knudsen and Hanafi (2011); Peteet (2005); and Sayigh (1995).
[8] Most current estimates suggest the Christian proportion of the population is now far lower.
[9] Available at: https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/lb/lb018en.pdf [accessed 12 March 2020]

Ta'if agreement, and by extension, to their own rights and status as citizens (Arsan 2018; Long and Hanafi 2010).

Beyond these considerations, the relatively recent memory of the Syrian regime as an occupying power in Lebanon also played a significant role in the reception Syrians received in Lebanon. Following their entry into the Lebanese Civil War in 1976, from the end of the war in 1990 until they were ousted in the Cedar Revolution of 2005, the Syrian security apparatus had effectively ruled in Lebanon, and this complicated public feeling towards those fleeing the current conflict. The Cedar Revolution was precipitated by the assassination of the Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, the leader of the Future Movement Party, believed by many to have been orchestrated by the Syrian Government. Some political factions – namely the Hezbollah-led March 8 political bloc – remained openly supportive of the Syrian government, while others – notably the March 14 Alliance, headed by Rafik Hariri's son, Saad Hariri – remained vehemently opposed. Even before the current Syrian conflict, John Chalcraft (2009) documented how high politics influenced the everyday social and economic lives of Syrian migrant labourers in Lebanon, who were routinely reviled and marginalised, in spite of the crucial role they played in the Lebanese economy, and who were compelled to return to Syria following the Cedar Revolution. The everyday lives of those fleeing the Syrian conflict were similarly subject to contemporaneous politics. These dynamics were most noticeable in the run-up to 2018's general election, when the fate of the Syrian population was instrumentalised by politicians on all sides seeking to increase their voter base.

These political and historical factors played into the Government's actions from late 2014, which had a profound impact on the ability of Syrians to enter Lebanon, and live and work safely within its borders. From January 2015, Syrians trying to enter Lebanon were required to have a permit, and Syrians already residing in Lebanon were subject to much more stringent visa and working conditions. It became increasingly difficult for Syrians to obtain legal residency. Two routes were available to Syrians: registration with UNHCR, an option which prohibited paid work; or a work permit obtained through a system of sponsorship (*kafāla*). Either route required renewing residency permits on an annual basis at a cost of $200 per person, a procedure involving travel to various bureaus and requiring a series of documents, making it prohibitively expensive and complicated for most (Human Rights Watch 2016). Despite a fee waiver being introduced for some households in 2017, by 2019 only 27% of Syrians in Lebanon had legal residency (Government of Lebanon and United Nations 2019).

Those who did obtain work permits were allowed to work in a very limited range of sectors, such as agriculture and construction, and were required to have a Lebanese sponsor. Under this system,

employers became responsible for the legal status, work permissions, healthcare and accommodation of their employee. It gave an employer the power to terminate employment and in doing so deprive the employee of their right to residency. Much like migrant workers from countries such as Sri Lanka, Ethiopia and the Philippines, whose residency and labour rights in Lebanon were also beholden to a sponsorship system, *kafāla* thus left Syrians in Lebanon at increased risk of exploitation. One NGO consortium report, for example, found that those employed under the *kafāla* system were much more likely to be paid less than minimum wage (79%) than those who had no legal residency (49%) (LEADERS 2019), while a Human Rights Watch report (2016) similarly found that sponsorship left Syrians vulnerable to various kinds of labour and sexual exploitation.

Though at the time of writing, the conflict in Syria is still ongoing, as more of the country has fallen back under the control of the Government, more vocal calls have been heard advocating a programme of returns to Syria. An increase in the number of mass evictions of displaced Syrians by host communities and local governments occurred in Lebanon from 2017 onwards (Human Rights Watch 2018), with an estimated 100,000 people affected by evictions each year (UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP 2019). In July 2018, as I was completing my field research, the Government of Lebanon announced an agreement with the Government of Syria, under which they would facilitate the return of Syrians in Lebanon back to Syria, and by March 2019, the Government of Lebanon had announced that over 170,000 people had returned. While the Government of Lebanon gave assurances that any such returns would be voluntary, and there has been no suggestion that the Government was physically forcing Syrians to register or board the buses to return, a number of humanitarian and human rights organisations have still called into question the extent to which Syrians in Lebanon – facing visa restrictions and mounting socio-economic constraints – can truly give free consent to return (Amnesty International 2019a).

Literature Review

Academic Literature on Lebanon

In the following section, I will outline some of the key literature on Lebanon and explain how my research builds on and contributes to this body of literature. A brief perusal of Oxford's Social Science Library's markedly short Lebanon section is instructive in understanding how Lebanon has been written about in much English-language scholarship. Words like 'fragmented,' 'fractured,' 'sectarianism' and 'war' stand out from the spines in red font, painting a picture of a broken and divided country before the reader has even begun. Academic writing on Lebanon within the social

sciences has been dominated by the civil war(s) of 1975-90 and the religious sectarianism that has characterised Lebanon's political structures for the last century. But if Lebanon has been an area of particular interest for political theorists and conflict studies scholars, it has historically been rather more neglected in anthropology. Some thirty years ago, Lila Abu-Lughod (1989) highlighted that the anthropology of the Middle East had certain 'prestige zones' that scholars favoured over other geographical areas, particularly highlighting a preference for studies located in Morocco and northern Yemen. More recently, Marcia Inhorn (2014: 69) undertook an exhaustive survey of anthropological monographs published in the intervening years, and argued that three decades had changed very little. The 'prestige zones' may have expanded to include Egypt, Iran and Turkey, but other countries, including Lebanon and Syria, remained excluded from the 'ethnographic mainstream.' What's more, the key 'zones of theory' in the anthropology of the Arab world, which Abu-Lughod identified as the 'holy triumvirate' of gender (qua veiled women), tribalism and Islam, had, Inhorn argued, retained their stranglehold on the discipline.

In that article, Inhorn argued for emerging scholars to choose some 'roads less travelled' in the anthropology of the Middle East, both geographically and thematically, calling for work on (contemporaneously) under-researched subjects such as forced displacement, masculinities and science and technology. Beyond anthropology, the landscape had already begun to shift. From the late 20th century, a new generation of scholars – particularly historians – began to move towards a broader and more nuanced interpretation of the nation's history. These scholars have worked to rigorously historicise both the conflict in Lebanon and the advent of sectarian politics, in order to 'dispel any illusion that sectarianism is simply or exclusively a native malignancy or foreign conspiracy' (Makdisi 1996: 2). In doing so, they have challenged simplistic assumptions about Lebanon's political and economic landscape. Building on early works such as Ussama Makdisi's seminal *The Culture of Sectarianism* (2000), they have begun to approach sectarianism as a process, showing how identity and politics have been shaped by Lebanon's intersecting histories of colonialism, class, urbanisation and trade (Abisaab and Abisaab 2014; Arsan 2018; Deeb and Harb 2013; Mikdashi 2014).

Lebanon's long histories of both emigration and immigration have also shaped the contours of its current economic, political and social landscape, and this dynamic has increasingly become an area of interest for scholars of Lebanon. More than a third of Lebanon's population emigrated in the late 19th and early 20th century, the vast majority of them from poor agricultural backgrounds. Building on the early work of Leila Fawaz (1983), scholars have demonstrated the enormous impact that these emigres have had over the last century on the formation of political and social

identity in Lebanon, including how gender, class, religious identity and whiteness have been shaped by the encounters of Lebanese emigres with French colonial rule in West Africa (Arsan 2014) the Americas (Khater 2001; Gualtieri 2009) and Australia (Hage 2002). Immigration *into* Lebanon has shaped its social and economic landscape in equally formative ways. Scholarship on labour migration from Syria into Lebanon has shown the ways that the daily social and economic lives of Syrian migrant labourers have been structured by – and contributed to structuring – the relationship between the two countries at a political level (Chalcraft 2009; Saleh 2016). Lebanon is also a major employer of migrant domestic workers, and in more recent years, academic attention has also begun to focus on their histories and social worlds (Fernandez and De Regt 2014; Mansour-Ille and Hendow 2018; Pande 2013, 2018). This scholarship has provided important insights into the precarity and inequality inherent in employment sponsorship arrangements in Lebanon.

While anthropologists of the Middle East might have historically focussed on gender *qua* veiled women (Abu-Lughod 1989; Joseph 2015), historians of Lebanon have been working to challenge and historicise assumptions about gender equality in the region. Elizabeth Thompson's *Colonial Citizens* (2000), for example, outlines how class, nationalist and anticolonial politics, and religious belief converged to shape women's rights movements in mandate-era Lebanon. Malek Abisaab's *Militant Women of a Fragile Nation* (2009), on the other hand, showcases women's labour movements in the tobacco and silk industries of early 20th century Lebanon. In doing so, he skewers the 'cultural approach' which describes religion – and particularly Islam – as a barrier to women's labour, 'often to such an extent that one gains the impression that Arab women do not work at all' (xxi). In recent years, the landscape of anthropological scholarship on gender and Lebanon has begun to change, too. Lara Deeb's *An Enchanted Modern* (2006) draws into question widely held assumptions about the relationship between gender, religion, and modernity, exploring piety and politics among Shi'i communities in the southern suburbs of Beirut. More recent anthropological work around gender sheds light on masculinity and fertility technologies (Inhorn 2012), the relationship between gender and sectarianism (Mikdashi 2014) and queer identity, exceptionalism and inclusion in Beirut (Merabet 2014; Moussawi 2017). These works demonstrate that issues of gender identity and gender equality in Lebanon, so often reduced to simplistic and orientalist tropes, have complex histories and multifaceted contemporary dynamics, a theme I will return to repeatedly over the course of this thesis.

In the last five years, the academic landscape in and on Lebanon has undergone perhaps the most dramatic shift of all. Just as humanitarian organisations have descended on Lebanon in

unprecedented numbers, so too have academics. Research into the Syria crisis is now a major industry (Sukarieh and Tannock 2019), and Lebanon has become a popular destination to conduct research for European and north American academics, the ethical dynamics of which I discuss in the Chapter One. The result is that numerous studies have been published in recent years examining the impact of the Syria conflict on contemporary Lebanon and the lives of Syrians who fled there. The political dimensions of the displacement crisis have come under the most academic scrutiny. Carmen Geha (2019a), Tamirace Fakhoury (2017, 2019), Geha and Joumana Talhouk (2018) and Lama Mourad (2017) all examine the response on the part of national government. They have analysed its transformation over time and its relationship with the UN, demonstrating how domestic politics and 'inaction' have shaped the response to the Syria crisis in fundamental ways, as well as how displacement has shaped the existing political system, which remains adaptive and largely resilient. The policies and actions of UNHCR, as leader of the refugee response, have also come under scrutiny, both in the aforementioned articles, and more deeply in recent articles by Maja Janmyr (2016, 2018) and Janmyr and Mourad (2018). Janmyr has focussed on the socio-legal dimensions of refugee registration and classification, providing a detailed examination of UNHCR's relationship with the government and its role in negotiating refugee status and rights, as well as the impact of these policies on the lived experience of Syrians in Lebanon. Ultimately, Janmyr and Mourad show, the lack of formalisation and legal mandate for UNHCR in Lebanon has resulted in a blurred and complex legal landscape for Syrians in Lebanon to navigate. The shelter sector within the humanitarian response has also been the subject of academic enquiry, with Mona Fawaz (2017), Lewis Turner (2015), Romola Sanyal (2017) and Nasser Yassin et al. (2015) all showing how informality in the planning sector and self-reliance among Syrians in Lebanon have come to play important roles as a result of the no-camp policy.

The impact of displacement on Syrians themselves has also become a major focus of research. The vast majority of research into the lives of Syrians in Lebanon is conducted by aid agencies or commissioned by them. The largest and most extensive of such studies is the annual Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, jointly published by the UN and the Government of Lebanon, based on data gathered by UNHCR, the World Food Programme (WFP) and Unicef (2019). These assessments, which I examine in more detail in Chapters Four and Five, ask questions about the respondents' access to basic rights and necessities, in line with the international SPHERE standards,[10] including food, education, shelter and WASH facilities, in order that humanitarian programmes can be designed and adjusted according to need.

[10] https://spherestandards.org/ [accessed 26 March 2020]

Beyond focusing on humanitarian need, other research has taken a more holistic or critical perspective on the lived experiences of Syrians in Lebanon, including their interactions with aid agencies. Rouba Mhaissen (2014), a Syrian activist, humanitarian practitioner and academic, was one of the first to do so, problematising victim narratives around Syrian female-headed households by foregrounding the political lives of Syrian women in informal tented settlements. Karr, Sajadi, and Aronson-Ensign (2020) similarly challenge victim narratives, examining the resilience strategies of Syrian children and youth in the Beqaa valley through a photovoice project, while Harb, Kassem, and Najdi (2018) take a different route, focussing on the entrepreneurial lives of Syrians in Beirut and their interactions with the socio-economic fabric of the city. Access to support and accountability have also been areas of focus. Parkinson and Behrouzan (2015), for example, examine access to healthcare for Syrians within Lebanon's largely privatised system. Grandi, Mansour, and Holloway (2018) and Mansour (2018) have focussed on the relationship between humanitarian organisations and Syrians in Lebanon, and particularly on the extent to which dignity is respected and protected through these interactions. Their research showed a disconnect between the way humanitarian professionals in Lebanon defined key aspects of humanitarian response, such as accountability, transparency and fairness, and the way Syrians defined them. Combined with external constraints on funding, they argued that this led to Syrians feeling their dignity to be undermined by the humanitarian response in Lebanon. Dawn Chatty (2017) has been more critical still, arguing that those in charge of humanitarian response have fundamentally misunderstood the region's history and that the response is deeply flawed as a result.

These recent studies, which I will draw on throughout this thesis, have provided important insights into the political and legal landscape of displacement in Lebanon, and increasingly nuanced perspectives on the lives and experiences of Syrians who live there. But with the notable exception of UNHCR's registration and refugee classification policies (Janmyr 2016, 2018; Janmyr and Mourad 2018), the practices of international humanitarian organisations in Lebanon have thus far remained largely outside the sphere of academic inquiry. As key providers of goods and services, focusing on these actors can greatly enhance our understanding of the dynamics of displacement in Lebanon. As I explain in the following section, examining everyday humanitarian practice is crucial in informing a broader and more nuanced understanding of power relations in situations of displacement and humanitarian response. By focusing on the practices of humanitarian organisations themselves, I hope to complement and contribute to the emerging body of scholarship on Syrian displacement in Lebanon from a new angle, continuing the work of recent anthropologists of Lebanon in taking some of Inhorn's 'roads less travelled' (2014), focusing

particularly on more neglected areas relating to gender, humanitarianism and science and technology.

Humanitarianism: Expert Knowledge, Technology and Networks

Humanitarian aid has typically received less attention in academic scholarship than its more well-researched sibling, development. However, since the 1990s, and the scrutiny which followed humanitarian responses to the Gulf War, the Rwandan conflict and the Darfur crisis in Sudan, humanitarian organisations have found themselves under an increasingly critical gaze. Much of the impetus for this came from within the humanitarian sector itself, and many early works were from the perspectives of aid professionals or human rights activists reflecting on their own experiences (see e.g. De Waal 1997; Terry 2003; Vaux 2001). Their criticism focussed on the failures of humanitarians, organisations and individuals, to enact the neutral and impartial values they espoused. Critical scholarship and memoires pointed to humanitarians' role in propping up violent regimes and their failure to prevent widespread human rights abuses, such as those in Rwanda and eastern Zaire in the 1990s (Macrae 1998). Despite their good intentions, these authors argued, humanitarians were actively doing harm.

The roots of this criticism go back to humanitarianism's foundations. While humanitarian sentiment and action have, of course, been present globally and across millennia, most historians of the modern-day 'international humanitarian order' as Michael Barnett (2011) terms it, invoke Henri Dunant, founder of the Red Cross movement, and his experiences at the battle of Solferino when describing the origins of contemporary humanitarian action (Barnett 2011; Hoffman and Weiss 2017; Scott-Smith 2020). The Red Cross Movement was founded upon the idea that relief should be neutral and impartial, taking no part in any conflict, showing no political affiliation and distinguishing civilians from active combatants (Harroff-Tavel 1989). These values were enshrined in the Geneva Conventions, and have underpinned international humanitarian interventions for the last seventy years. By the 1990s, however, it had become clear that, in some situations, neutrality and impartiality were impossible to enact in a way that upheld the humanity of those affected by the conflict or disaster. How, in other words, could one be neutral in the face of grievous human rights abuses (Slim 1997)? Beyond the crisis around neutrality and impartiality, there were also fundamental questions about the efficacy of humanitarian response, given increasingly complex operating environments and rising numbers of relief actors. Dunant had, after all, been keen to ensure that those working within relief movements should be 'thoroughly qualified' (Walker and Purdin 2004). Critics inside the humanitarian world began to call for greater accountability, coordination and the formation of some agreed minimum standards of aid.

The critical introspection had wide-reaching consequences and resulted in a number of reform initiatives. The most significant of these included the establishment of the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) in 1991, which collates and disseminates evidence on 'best practice' in humanitarian programmes; the transformative agenda in 2011, which renovated the UN-coordinated response mechanisms; and the Agenda for Humanity, following the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. At each of these moments of reckoning, organisations have looked for ways to codify and universalise what they see as 'best practice' (Calhoun 2010), intending to improve their operations and strive towards greater adherence to the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and needs-based assistance. Over the years, this has resulted, among other things, in a complete restructuring of humanitarian relief operations, and the professionalisation of the sector. It has prompted the production of vast swathes of policy and guidance: documents detailing how humanitarian programmes should ideally be run in order to meet the needs of affected populations while conforming to humanitarian principles, such as the Sphere Standards[11] and the Core Humanitarian Standards.[12] These policies and standards now scaffold humanitarian programme design, and are at the heart of this research. They are the product and manifestation of 'expert' humanitarian knowledge, built on decades of experience and years of negotiation. Over the course of this thesis, I will explore a number of tools and policies, and crucially demonstrate *how* they are put into practice, transported and translated by humanitarian staff members in their everyday work.

In tandem with these internal policy responses, a growing body of critical academic literature has emerged in the last two decades whose primary research subjects are humanitarian organisations and the responses they have been involved in. Using a Foucauldian lens to approach humanitarianism as a form of governance, demonstrating the ways that humanitarian sentiment can manifest as acts of control and domination, has emerged as a popular way to conceptualise the socio-political role of humanitarian actors in contexts of disaster and conflict. Much of this scholarship has been from a critical perspective, notably Mariella Pandolfi (2008), Ilana Feldman and Miriam Ticktin (2010), and Mark Duffield (2001, 2019a), all of whom have drawn attention to the ways that humanitarianism has worked to sustain global and historical inequalities, including the use of humanitarian claims to justify military intervention. Other scholarship on humanitarian governance has been, if not sympathetic, then alive to its many complexities and paradoxes. Michael Barnett (2011) takes a historical view on humanitarianism, exploring the principles

[11] Available at: https://spherestandards.org/ [accessed 14 March 2020]
[12] Available at: https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard [accessed 14 March 2020]

underpinning humanitarian action, and the ethical ambiguities that humanitarians have encountered for well over a century, ultimately arguing that it has developed into an 'empire' of humanity. Didier Fassin's *Humanitarian Reason* (2012) uses in-depth ethnographic analysis of particular moments or policies to unravel the assumptions and ambiguities involved in humanitarian sentiment both at 'home' and in 'distant' places. Peter Redfield (2013) offers a nuanced portrait of Médecins Sans Frontières and the 'minimalist biopolitics' of their interventions which value life above all else, highlighting as he does so, the inevitable mirror-like relationship between anthropology of humanitarian government and its object.

Within the literature, a number of authors have focussed on expert knowledge as a conduit for governance (Barnett 2011, 2013; Bliesemann de Guevara 2017; Calhoun 2010; Krause 2014; Merry 2016; Olivius 2016; Roth 2015). Expert knowledge, these authors argue, is disseminated through bureaucracies in the form of indicators, systems of classification and 'best practice' guidance. Through these tools and practices, humanitarian organisations are able to wield considerable power over the populations they aim to support. Barnett (2013) argues that humanitarian expert knowledge operates as a governmental tool in three ways: First, by using rationalising language, humanitarian agencies obscure the political landscape they are operating within; second, in deploying expert knowledge, it is the humanitarians who define and occupy the position of 'expert' to the exclusion of others; third, despite presenting expert knowledge as impartial and evidence-based, such knowledge is, Barnett argues, always political, with material consequences. Expert knowledge is crucial to the practices I describe over the course of this thesis. Classification, assessment, targeting and empowerment, as we shall see, are all dependent on the standardisation and deployment of different kinds of expertise.

Policies have received much critical attention, including the tools of expertise themselves. Tony Waters has unpacked the move towards professionalisation and the bureaucratic process of cementing expertise in policy in his book *Bureaucratizing the Good Samaritan*, drawing out the ways in which 'the "mercy" function has been broken down into tasks done by specialists hired and trained to do each action efficiently and effectively' (2001: 3). Waters contends that bureaucratisation is not in and of itself a negative phenomenon, and he actually argues for greater rationalisation of these processes. Monika Krause (2014) presents a more critical perspective, exploring the phenomenon of the humanitarian project, a marketable product governed by logistical frameworks or 'logframes' for which the consumers are institutional and governmental donors. This thesis builds on this body of research, in particular focussing on the relationship between such tools of expertise and everyday practice, demonstrating, for example, the ways that

global empowerment curricula play out in different locations around Lebanon, or how internationally mandated categories and systems of classification are deployed in context-specific ways.

More recently, the material and digital dimensions of expertise have received more attention. Expert knowledge can be manifested in objects. Drawing on Mol and de Laet's (2000) idea of fluidity in the Zimbabwe Bush Pump, Peter Redfield (2016) investigates the LifeStraw®, a water filtration device suitable for use in humanitarian emergencies, arguing that it straddles an uncomfortable space between commercialism and ethical concern. Tom Scott-Smith (2013) draws on post-Marxism to argue that two humanitarian objects – a therapeutic food called Plumpy'nut, and the MUAC band for measuring malnutrition based on upper arm circumference – have been fetishized within emergency nutrition responses. The materiality of humanitarian documents has also received attention, with Georgia Cole (2018) examining how documents shape UNHCR's conduct when it comes to decisions on refugee status. Expert knowledge is also manifested in digital technologies, and recent scholarship has covered the use of communications (Garman 2015), information management systems (Read, Taithe, and Mac Ginty 2016), drones (Sandvik and Lohne 2014), biometric registration (Jacobsen 2017; Jacobsen and Sandvik 2018; Jacobsen and Fast 2019), big data (Meier 2015), and digital mapping and remote management (Andersson and Weigand 2015; Andersson 2019; Chandler 2018; Duffield 2016; Givoni 2016). Much of this literature has drawn on the contributions of Science and Technology Studies to show that data and technology are always the result of a 'deeply social process' (Harper 2000: 23). They have investigated the ways that inequalities can be reinforced through humanitarianism's 'innovation turn', asking who it ultimately benefits (Scott-Smith 2016), and calling for greater critical engagement on its challenges (Sandvik et al. 2014). In this thesis, I will build on this literature, focusing particularly on two aspects of technology: the algorithms used in decision on how to target assistance, and the tablets used in the process of data collection for assessment. By approaching these technologies from the perspective of how their costs and benefits are distributed, I will draw into question their role in ensuring accountability and efficiency, as well as their role in upholding humanitarian principles.

Science and Technology Studies has influenced academic scholarship on aid in other ways, too, in particular the use of the actor-network approach (Latour 2005; Law 1999), which, along with an Long's 'actor-oriented approach' (2001), has increasingly been used as a tool in understanding how aid works in practice. Following the publication of David Mosse's *Cultivating Development* (2005), a new ethnography of aid emerged which focuses on the everyday lives of humanitarian workers

and the networks formed through everyday practice (Lewis and Mosse 2006). This work is not without its critics (Duffield 2019a; Escobar 2012), and I discuss the use of this theory in more depth in Chapter One. It has nevertheless inspired a series of 'aidnographies' which focused on the everyday politics of humanitarian intervention (Hilhorst and Jansen 2010; Hindman and Fechter 2011; Fast 2014). These authors approached the humanitarian and conflict resolution landscapes respectively as 'aidland' (Apthope 2011; Mosse 2011), and 'peaceland' (Autesserre 2014): bounded socio-material worlds complete with their own, at times paradoxical, sets of rules and practices. They have explored the spatial boundedness of aidland, and the importance of its material components, such as bunkers, hotels and SUVs (Smirl 2015). They have also suggested that the tendency towards 'bunkerization' in areas considered dangerous can be counterproductive, actively worsening risk through increased distance between aid workers and the populations they aim to support (Andersson 2019; Andersson and Weigand 2015).

The literature on aidland has greatly enhanced our understanding of the everyday worlds of international humanitarian workers, particularly from political economy, ethical and security management perspectives. However, in depicting aidland as 'a bubble of northern-based expatriate workers' (Harrison 2013: 274), the vital role that national staff members play is often side-lined. What's more, the everyday practices involved in the actual *implementation* of aid projects – the vast majority of which is undertaken by national staff members – remain remarkably understudied (Peters 2020). In a survey conducted by Heeks and Stanforth (2014) of articles published in seven leading development journals between 2000 and 2012, just five papers investigated the specific practices involved in project implementation. Those studies that do exist are often instrumental in nature, focused on identifying best practice for the purpose of influencing policy and guidance (Patel et al. 2017). These have an important role to play, but they are primarily interested in whether a humanitarian intervention has *worked on its own terms*, rarely questioning those terms, or engaging with the question of *how* it has worked. Within the literature that does exist on project implementation, the vast majority is also concerned with the practices of national and local organisations (Schuller 2012; Peters 2020). The day to day implementation of the projects of international humanitarian organisations – the Oxfams, Save the Childrens and Unicefs of this world – remain understudied. The reasons for this may be methodological: international humanitarian organisations are institutions of power, and 'studying up' (Nader 1974) brings a host of attendant challenges in terms of access and navigating institutional reputation, a topic I discuss further in the following chapter. This thesis builds on and contributes to the literature on aidland by focusing on the practices involved in project implementation, including the vital role of national staff members. It will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the role of expert knowledge

and technology in humanitarianism by looking at how they operate in a particular place and time, the networks involved in their deployment, the relationships of power that form around them and their wide-ranging political effects.

Gender and Humanitarian Aid

As I have indicated, gender is central, perhaps foundational, to the way that humanitarian organisations in Lebanon see displacement affected people. Within the literature on humanitarian aid, gender has received more attention than most subjects, often building on well-established bodies of literature on gender and development, and gender and human rights. At the risk of practicing the classification I aim to problematise, scholarship on gender and humanitarian aid can be very loosely grouped into two overarching narratives

The first narrative is what might be called the classic perspective, and is usually a variation on the following: *Patriarchal power dynamics are exacerbated in situations of conflict and displacement. Women (and children, the elderly, disability-affected people and others) are more vulnerable. Humanitarian organisations must target their assistance accordingly, taking gender (and age, disability etc.) into account*. The focus of this scholarship is on those affected by humanitarian emergencies, and the goal is a normative one: to call for better consideration of gender within humanitarian programming. Some take a historical approach, charting the integration of gender into humanitarian responses. Some focus on specific organisations, with Oxfam and UNHCR receiving the most attention (e.g. UNHCR 2013; Baines 2004; Williams 2004; van Dijkhorst and Vonhof 2005). Such research typically highlights the increased prevalence of gender-based violence in humanitarian situations (Stark and Ager 2011), or of women's comparative economic or social vulnerabilities in contexts of disaster or displacement. Another common theme is the pre-existing structural inequalities which undermine women's capacity in emergencies (Freedman 2010). Theoretically, this version of gender and humanitarian aid has its origins in rights-based liberal feminist thought, and often brings in discourse around Human Rights (Aolain 2011), or sexual and reproductive health. In more recent years, this classic perspective has taken on more nuance with the introduction of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991), with research pointing out that men can also be victims of sexual violence in humanitarian settings (Dolan 2014), or that sexual and gender minorities can be disproportionately affected too (Rumbach and Knight 2014). The normative approach means it is the most institutionally useful for humanitarian organisations justifying gender-oriented programming and indeed, it is often authored by researcher-practitioners.

The second version is the critical perspective, inspired by the postcolonial work of Chandra Mohanty (2003), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) and Lila Abu-Lughod (2002). It goes something like this: *Humanitarianism is a project of governance, founded on liberal feminist ideals about gender equality. These ideals are imposed in humanitarian emergencies, simultaneously casting women as victims and men as perpetrators of violence. The focus on women and girls is just another example of "white men saving brown women from brown men"* (Spivak 1988). This version is more complicated than the classic perspective. It comes from different angles and the focus is usually on unintended consequences of the policies of institutions offering support (Hyndman 1998). Some have focussed on governance through humanitarian systems. Elisabeth Olivius (2014), for example, has argued that participatory approaches as a method of gender mainstreaming are a technique of governance and control. Miriam Ticktin showed how humanitarianism in the French asylum context responds most urgently to physical suffering bodies, which are identified as being 'morally legitimate' (2011: 19), but only inasmuch as the asylum system is allowed to define what constitutes violence, which she argues is both gendered and racialised. Others have problematised the focus on women by shedding light on how this results in inadequate responses for those who fall outside humanitarian organisations' target groups. For example, Gaillard et al. (2016) highlight the experiences of gender minorities such as the *Bakla* in the Philippines or the *Waria* in Indonesia, while Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2013) explores how the construction of the 'ideal refugee woman' through humanitarian aid has been mobilised by particular groups in Sahrawi refugee camps to secure aid, to the marginalisation of 'non-ideal' women and girls.

These perspectives on gender and humanitarianism have both done important work. The classic perspective has helped drag a previously 'gender-blind' system into a position where it finally beginning to recognise and respond to the different ways that displacement and conflict affect different genders – and all the evidence suggests that they certainly *do* affect different genders differently. And the critical perspective has asked vital questions about the assumptions and colonial baggage that are involved in the processes of considering gender in humanitarian contexts. My approach in this research builds on and slightly moves away from these perspectives. Both these approaches proffer power, whether patriarchal or governmental, as an all-pervading explanatory phenomenon in how gender should be understood. Understanding power is vital, but, on its own, cannot adequately attend to all the messy complexities and specificities which make up the way that practitioners and recipients of humanitarian aid experience their circumstances. In this research, drawing on feminist scholars of science and technology such as Susan Leigh Star (1990) and Maria Puig de la Belacasa (2011), I describe how gendered ways of seeing gain force, circulate and are translated within the humanitarian landscape in Lebanon. I will demonstrate the

ways that vulnerability and need are coded in gendered ways through humanitarian systems of classification, routinely feminised, with material consequences in terms of who has access to assistance. But I will also demonstrate that these classifications can be unruly in translation, circumventing the intentions of their architects. I will draw attention to the ways in which the vulnerabilities of Syrian men, particularly those of working age, are made invisible through this gendered scheme of legibility. Finally, I investigate the ways that gender expertise is put into practice through empowerment curricula, the depoliticising work that it does, and the ways in which gender experts navigate the structural and political inequalities faced by their participants while attempting to follow their curricula.

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter One sets out the theoretical and methodological foundations of this research. The first part of the chapter describes how a 'flat ontology,' a focus on networks and translation in understanding how power operates, can be held in productive tension with a structural, historical reading of power in the humanitarian context of Lebanon. It draws on contributions from feminist technoscience and particularly the work of Susan Leigh Star (1990) to show how an attention to inclusion and exclusion within networks, as well as the work required to maintain them can support a critical, ethically engaged approach to these relations. I then outline a methodology which is rooted in careful assembly, situated knowledge and participatory dialogue. The final section describes how I attempted to put this 'loose, broad, and generous' (Law 2004: 4) methodology into practice, offering a history of the research project, the challenges that were thrown up in the process, and a detailed discussion of the ethical dimensions of the research.

I am arguing in this thesis for a situated approach to humanitarianism, and Chapter Two *'The Dream Posting'* provides some historical background and anthropological reflections on the humanitarian landscape in Lebanon – 'Aidland' as it was manifested in this particular context. The chapter focuses primarily on Beirut, and the mythology surrounding Lebanon and its capital as a 'dream' humanitarian posting for international aid workers. I unpack this mythology, demonstrating how it relates to perceptions around authenticity, liberalism and religion. I also explore the geographical limitations of this narrative, the constellations of go and no-go zones for international humanitarian staff. I demonstrate how these constellations are shaped by imperial and local histories and how they relate to conceptualisations of 'the field' within the humanitarian response for both national and international aid workers. I argue the humanitarian landscape in Lebanon is precarious, maintained through the socio-material interactions of its occupants. I shed

light on this precarity by exploring moments of friction, where the boundaries of the humanitarian landscape are infringed upon, and how its occupants react.

Tsing (2015a) tells us there is a landscape on a continent and a landscape on a leaf. Zooming in from the humanitarian landscape in Lebanon to the minutiae of policy, chapter three explores humanitarian modes of ordering: classifications and categories, the ways that organisations make the populations they are trying to support simpler to understand and manage. Expanding on theories of classification (Hacking 1999) and indicator culture in development and human rights (Merry 2016), I track the genealogies of these categories, and most importantly, their application in practice. My argument is that these classifications are culturally contingent, and that, as they stabilise and become more widely accepted, they circulate in humanitarian networks with significant power. I explore the prevalence of the term 'female headed household' and its relationship with socioeconomic vulnerability; the classifications codified in the inter-organisational gender-based violence information management system, and the classifications of early and forced marriage. In the final section, I explore some of the gaps created by this framework of categories, reflecting on the reasons for the non-existence of the category 'men at risk' and its consequences.

Building on this exploration of categories, I move in Chapter Four to examine their application more fully in what humanitarian practitioners term 'the field'. The aim of this chapter is to explore how data collection and assessment, a ubiquitous and astonishingly understudied aspect of humanitarianism, work in practice. I approach data collection practices as emerging from a stabilisation of networks, and through this, describe the complex relationships of power which form through and around these networks. I focus particularly on the tablet, which is hailed by senior humanitarians as a triumph of innovation and a time-saving device, as a crucial actor in these assemblages. Following a detailed ethnographic portrayal of data collection in an informal tented settlement in the Beqaa valley, I draw out the ways in which these tablets create labour for those who have to engage with practices of data collection, but have little influence or control over it. Ultimately, the chapter asks who benefits from such innovations in data collection, concluding that it is primarily those in positions of power within the humanitarian community.

Chapter Five explores targeting: the processes of quantification and analysis used by organisations to decide who has access to assistance, and who doesn't. These practices, which translate the messy social world into vast datasets and formulae and rank populations from most to least in need, are now used by many organisations in Lebanon to determine eligibility for assistance. Building on the idea of the 'black box' in Science and Technology studies, I argue that these eligibility formulae

operate in Lebanon as black *holes*. Black holes are characterised by their opacity, their unavoidable gravity and their capacity for distortion. The chapter explores two eligibility formulae in detail, an INGO formula for inclusion on a livelihoods programme, and the UN's 'Desk-Based Formula' used country-wide to make decisions on inclusion into the cash-based basic assistance programme in Lebanon. The chapter outlines the deliberate and incidental obfuscation that surrounds quantitative processes in humanitarian eligibility calculations, the way they distort the socio-political dimensions which affect them, as well as the unerring faith in their objectivity and fairness among management staff and the consequent gravity with which they circulate. It concludes with a reflection on the effects that these formulae have on those who fall outside the community of practice that deploy them, but must nevertheless live with the fact of their existence.

The final empirical section, Chapter Six, focuses on empowerment programmes. Based on data gathered through observations in a series of workshops, as well as extended interviews with practitioners who deliver them, I draw attention to the ways in which gender and gender equality are enacted in these spaces. I argue that gender equality is approached as a 'ladder of understanding', in which the higher rungs cannot be attained before the preliminary rungs are in place: the differentiation of sex and gender; gender equality in the domestic sphere; gender-based violence; and gender equality through paid employment. I then compare the empowerment sessions of international organisations with one I observed run by a national organisation as a way to consider what 'rungs' might be missing. The missing rungs include structural and political inequalities, and religious approaches to gender equality, which humanitarian organisations considered too 'sensitive' to approach. I conclude by arguing that empowerment programming in Lebanon is paradoxical, making gender equality legible primarily within the domestic sphere and as victims or potential victims of gender-based violence, while engaging with men primarily as perpetrators or potential perpetrators of violence.

In the conclusion, I revisit the three arguments put forward in this introduction. I draw on evidence from throughout the thesis to show the different ways that the humanitarian response in Lebanon is deeply embedded in its socio-political environment, exploring how embeddedness is different from 'localisation', a goal which has been on the international humanitarian agenda for some time. I revisit some of the networks explored throughout the thesis, showing the range of different actors involved in humanitarian schemes of legibility, reflecting on how power is exerted through those networks and considering the ways in which those who fall outside the networks must nevertheless live in relationship with them. I return to a consideration of the role of gender in practices of legibility, demonstrating the ways that vulnerability is gendered and the paradoxical

ways in which expert knowledge around gender equality is deployed. I reflect on the events that have passed in Lebanon since my return to the UK, and conclude with some considerations on what this research can offer in the way of suggestions for humanitarianism to be done well.

A Note on Terminology and Translation

In this thesis I have chosen, where possible, not to use the word 'refugee' to describe Syrians in Lebanon. A number of authors (e.g. Grandi, Mansour, and Holloway 2018; Janmyr and Mourad 2018; Mhaissen 2014) who have undertaken research directly with Syrian communities in Lebanon have noted the perceived stigma attached to the label and the preference among Syrians not to self-describe as refugees, an observation mirrored in my own conversations with Syrian friends. I have therefore limited my use of the term 'refugee' to quotations and, for clarity, when talking about specific aspects of policy and legal frameworks. Throughout this thesis, I refer to 'displacement-affected' populations or communities in Lebanon. As outlined in this introduction, it is not only Syrians who have been affected by displacement from Syria into Lebanon but Lebanese communities too, particularly those from poorer socio-economic backgrounds and those living in areas close to the border with Syria. Palestinians, both those fleeing Syria and those already resident in Lebanon are disproportionately socio-economically vulnerable and have also been affected by displacement from Syria, particularly as many of those escaping the conflict have found shelter in the Palestinian camps. Most of the humanitarian programmes I describe in this thesis were directed towards Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian communities, however some, such as the cash-based basic assistance programme described in Chapter Five, were targeted only at Syrians.

My interviews and observations were conducted in a mixture of English and colloquial Arabic, with some occasional French, reflecting the trilingual nature of the professional working environment in Lebanon. The documents that inform this research were written in either English or Modern Standard Arabic. For the most part, I have simply translated quotations, but in some cases, where a word or phrase conveys something less easily translatable, I have also kept the original French or transliterated Arabic, italicised. For Modern Standard Arabic transliterations, I have used the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES) transliteration system, and for colloquial Arabic transliterations, I have used an altered version of the IJMES system, which reflects oral pronunciation.

1. Theory and Methodology

'It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.'

Donna Haraway (2016b: 12)

The relationship between theory and the practice of research is always a dialectical one (Cerwonka and Malkki 2007). Throughout my fieldwork, I would come back to certain texts over and over again as I tried to make sense of my ethnographic data; reading, thinking and writing before heading back out to interviews and observations. This dynamic has prompted me to discuss theory and methodology together in this chapter. This is partly an ethical choice: as Haraway suggests in the quote above, the ways we do research have world-making effects (see also Barad 2007; Haraway 1988), and our theoretical approaches impact our research practice. Consequently, by discussing theory and methodology together, I hope to make clear my positionality and its consequences for the research. It is also a pragmatic choice. The ontological approach I took was primarily concerned with relationality: noticing and amplifying networks in order to demonstrate how humanitarianism is *done* in practice. Through this approach, rather than interpreting data through a fixed framework, I aimed to learn from actors themselves: 'by following circulations we can get more than by defining entities, essences or provinces' (Latour 1999a: 20). This ontological approach is hard to separate from its methodology. Indeed, it is so rooted in method that Latour argues that it isn't a theory at all (1999a: 19). The first section of this chapter outlines my approach, paying particular attention to the ways in which such a methodology can attend to relationships of power. The second part of the chapter describes how I put this methodology into practice. It gives a short history of the research and methods used, followed by a detailed discussion of the ethical challenges of the research and how I navigated them.

Approaches to Power in Development and Humanitarian Aid

The humanitarian practices examined in this research – classification, assessment, targeting and empowerment – might be considered 'political technologies,' which Michel Foucault (1977) saw as a defining feature of modern power. Political technologies, Shore and Wright sum up, are 'the means by which power conceals its own operation' (1997: 8; see also Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982). They operate under the guise of efficiency and effectiveness, they are couched in scientific language, drawing on ideas of objectivity and neutrality to shore up their legitimacy and worth.

Political technologies, Foucault argues, work on a dual logic of external 'subjection' and internal 'subjectification' (Foucault and Rabinow 1984). In other words, once imposed on individuals, political technologies become internalised, and societies begin to self-govern according to the norms prescribed in the technologies. Central to these subjection and subjectification practices is the role of experts, who deploy knowledge on the 'correct' ordering of things to design policies and procedures which have power effects. Foucault regarded political technologies as essential practices of governance, that is, the art of managing individuals, wealth and behaviours (Foucault 1991).

Power is clearly at the core of any investigation into expertise, governance and political technologies, but it is not always clear how power should be defined. Foucault argues that 'power is not an institution, a structure, or a certain force with which certain people are endowed; it is the name given to a complex strategic relation in a given society' (1976; cited in Gordon 1980: 236). Power, he posits, is the *relation*. Thus, for the researcher, Gordon argues in his discussion on Foucault, 'the task is… tracing the mobile systems of relationships and syntheses which provide the conditions of possibility for the formation of certain orders' (1980: 236). In other words, *how do people and things come together in ways that exert power*? Asking this question, however, has not necessarily been the approach of many self-described Foucauldian scholars. Instead of understanding power as a relation, power has often been approached as an *actor*. Consider, for example, how Shore and Wright describe their approach to understanding policy: Advancing an approach they describe as Foucauldian, they tell us they are interested in 'tracing ways in which power creates webs and relations between actors, institutions and discourses across time and space' (1997: 14). Shore and Wright make 'power' an actor in this explanation, as the *creator* of webs and relations, rather than the relation itself. It is this kind of analytical framework that Bruno Latour criticises, for treating power as a 'mysterious container that holds inside of it that which makes the many participants in the action move' (2005: 83). Instead, Latour argues, 'we have to be very scrupulous in checking whether power and domination are explained by the multiplicity of objects given a central role and transported by vehicles which should be empirically visible' (ibid). Latour's approach as set out in this passage doesn't sound so very different from the 'mobile systems of relationships' for which the Foucauldian scholar, Gordon (1980: 236), was advocating above.

Despite their mutual interest in relations, Latourian approaches have often been set up in opposition to Foucauldian approaches within the academy. Latour's insistence on keeping the social 'flat' (2005: 165), an approach which treats all actors as of equal potential importance and declines to fit them into preconceived structures of power, is often understood to be incompatible

with a Foucauldian approach, which is concerned with systems of governance. The debate has been taken up in the anthropology of development. Approaching aid as a form of governmentality, as we saw in the previous chapter, has been a productive area of scholarship for critical anthropology of development (see e.g. Escobar 2000, 2005, 2012; Li 2007; Gupta 1998). James Ferguson's *The Anti-Politics Machine* (1994) is an excellent example of how Foucauldian theories of political technology and expert knowledge can be used to critique development. Examining development projects in Lesotho, he builds an argument that development actors practice a kind of 'anti-politics', which, even as it has depoliticising effects, allows development projects to simultaneously *do* sensitive political work. This political work leads to the 'entrenchment and expansion of institutional state power almost invisibly, under cover of a neutral, technical mission to which no one can object' (1994: 256). Ferguson observes that under the guise of technical solutions to technical problems, development projects in Lesotho, though failures according to their own success criteria, actually acted as a conduit for the expansion of state power. This process, he argues, was not an intentional nor centrally coordinated expansion of rationalised power. Indeed, he uses the metaphor of the machine 'to capture something of the way that conceptual and discursive systems link up with social institutions and processes without even approximately determining the form or defining the logic of the outcome' (1994: 275).

Some fifteen years ago, a group of development anthropologists began calling for a new kind of scholarship, which moves beyond the 'blind alleys' of instrumentalist and critical approaches to one that acknowledged and investigated the complex cacophony of actors operating within development projects (Mosse 2005). Influenced by both Latour and the Manchester School of Sociology's 'actor-oriented' approach (Long 2001), these authors are interested in the relationship between policy and practice, the social life of development projects, and the perspectives of the actors themselves (Lewis and Mosse 2006; Mosse 2005, 2011; Bierschenk, Chauveau, and Olivier de Sardan 2000). One of their criticisms of scholarship such as Ferguson's is that, in this type of critical analysis, 'the relentless Foucauldian micro-physics of power occurs beyond the intelligence of the actors; although not, it seems, that of the decoding anthropologist' (Mosse 2005: 6). The critical school, the new anthropologists argue, deny the agency of development actors, even declining to talk to them. While not against a deconstructive approach in principle, this new anthropology of development endeavours to make deconstructivist principles '*methodological* rather than ideological' (Lewis and Mosse 2006: 5), a way of analysing relations and negotiations between development actors.

Within anthropology of humanitarian aid and emergency response, a number of scholars have used Latour-inspired or actor-oriented approaches to explore the complexities of the humanitarian landscape. This has included the detailed studies of a water pump (De Laet and Mol 2000), a water purification straw (Redfield 2016), emergency nutrition (Scott-Smith 2018b) humanitarian protection (Cropp 2019), the act of *témoinage* or witnessing (Givoni 2011), as well as broad ranging studies which look global organisations such as MSF (Redfield 2013), or 'aidland' as a whole (Mosse 2011; Roth 2015). Knowledge is still of paramount importance in this literature, but rather than understanding knowledge as totalising and unidirectional (Grillo 1997), it is possible to approach knowledge as a 'set of practices' (Desai 2006) – which not incidentally can be deployed strategically by actors *other* than Northern development agencies (Bending and Rosendo 2006). 'Knowing,' as Law and Singleton point out, 'is embodied, situated and embedded in practices, and practices are always *being done* somewhere' (2014: 486). We can even approach knowledge as a relationship (Mosse 2014).

The new anthropologists of development and humanitarianism have had their critics, however, who argue that so-called 'flat ontologies' do not pay sufficient attention to relationships of power, masking difference in *types* of connection (Escobar 2012: xv), and do not take seriously the aspirations and desires of the poor (De Vries 2008). Any critical study of aid, these authors argue, must draw attention to the global structural hierarchies of power which humanitarian assistance both operates within and sustains. The messy everyday interactions which constitute the lived reality of humanitarian intervention have the potential to both confirm and contest such a reading. This messiness has been regarded by some as a dangerous dilution. Duffield has specifically called out Latour's 'flat ontology' for not only being incompatible with a politically committed critique of humanitarianism but actively contributing to 'dissolving' it (2019b, 2019a). Similar criticisms have been levelled at Long's theories: if actor-oriented approaches escape a structuralist strait-jacket, they may simply imprison the researcher in a new one (Gledhill 1994: 134).

I confess I see no such incompatibility, and would argue that such a charge is rooted in a somewhat ungenerous reading of these approaches. As we have seen, Latour is deeply concerned with power; he is interested in *explaining power*, rather than in power *as the explanation*. Meanwhile, the aim of an actor-oriented approach, as Long (2001) sees it, is not to ignore structural factors but rather to explore the reasons for a diversity of responses to the same structural environment. Indeed, if a tension exists between the two 'god tricks' (Haraway 1988: 584), of an actor-oriented versus a structural approach, I regard it as a productive one. Everyday socio-material relations can shed light on broader structures of power that might otherwise go unnoticed. They provide nuance to

our understandings of how power relations form. They can offer hope. Research which has employed – to a greater or lesser extent – actor-oriented or 'flat ontology' approaches to understanding global structures of power have greatly enriched our understanding of the micro-processes and diverse actors involved, thereby enabling the authors to challenge power (Bowker and Star 2000; Callon 1986; Law and Singleton 2013; Mol 2002; Tsing 2015b). The relationships of power I describe in this thesis are often complicated and sometimes paradoxical. They encompass tablets and categories and mathematical formulae as well as people and policies. Understanding how these relationships work in practice can tell us much about the ways that power is exerted in humanitarian settings, and consequently equip us with new ways to challenge it. In the next section, I set out how I deployed this productive tension methodologically.

Unravelling Power Through Relational Research

Humanitarianism encompasses many people and things. Their linkages stretch out across the globe and yet remain deeply entwined with local topographies and histories. Latour might call these people and things 'mediators'. He has argued that the social 'circulates and is visible only when it shines through the concatenations of mediators' (Latour 2005: 136). Mediators, according to Latour, are 'actors endowed with the capacity to translate what they transport, to redefine it, redeploy it, and also to betray it' (1993: 81). But if the world we are trying to understand comprises entanglements, understanding these mediators, the component parts of those entanglements, isn't enough. We have to focus on the relations. For Latour, it is the *networks* formed between such mediators that must first be understood, and then amplified through research. Networks is just one way of putting it. Many metaphors have been deployed to describe these relational webs, from rhizomes (Deleuze and Guattari 1988), to partial connections (Strathern 2004) to cat's cradles (Haraway 1994, 2016b), to meshworks (Ingold 2011), to assemblages (Law 2004; Tsing 2015b). I do not wish to flatten difference – each of these authors approach these relations with their own particular ontology. But when it comes to the relations, as Law and Singleton point out, the metaphor is not the point: 'What's important is that the relations also define or characterize the "actors" caught up in that unfolding web. The shape they take depends on all the webby relations.' (2013: 490).

Tracing networks to make sense of the socio-material world brings some challenges. Relational approaches are often interested primarily in how networks grow, and Latour in particular has certainly focussed on the powerful actors within them, for example in his work on Pasteur (1988). What can such approaches offer for those who have little or no power? Can they *challenge* power?

To answer these questions, I turn to authors such as Susan Leigh Star and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, who have combined Latour's network approach with feminist theory to ask how the tracing of networks can be deployed in such a way as to understand the experiences of the powerless, or to challenge power.

Star's (1990) focus begins with communities of practice, and the stabilisation of networks. She offers the example of her allergy to onions, and her resulting interactions with McDonalds as a way to understand these dynamics. Being allergic to onions, Star came to realise that McDonalds had a standardised practice when it comes to their burgers. One that invariably involved onions. Trying to order an onion-free burger at the fast-food chain consistently resulted in a 45-minute wait for Star, McDonalds being incapable of accommodating her extraordinary request. In other words, there was a community of practice around these burgers, of which Star, owing to her allergy, could not be a part. Star decided instead to order a regular burger and scrape off the onions herself. The work of scraping off the onion, she argues, is an example of 'permanently escaping, subverting, but nevertheless in relationship with the standardized' (1990: 39). The example is a prosaic one, but it highlights an important way to look at networks of association – from the perspective of those falling outside them, as much as from the actors within. Humanitarian actors in Lebanon form a community of practice to make displacement-affected populations legible. Management staff are powerful actors within these networks, while field staff exist on their peripheries, with limited scope to influence standardised practices. Displacement-affected populations are rarely included within the networks, but must nevertheless engage with them in order to access assistance. Understanding how power is exerted within humanitarian networks, therefore, means approaching them from the perspectives of those outside, or on their peripheries.

For de la Bellacasa, (2011) the question is how to challenge power through sociomaterial research. Taking inspiration from Haraway (1988) and Barad (2007), it is her assertion that 'ways of knowing, theories and concepts have ethico-political and affective effects on the perception and re-figuration of matters of fact and sociotechnical assemblages, on their material-semiotic existences' (2011: 86). As such, she brings a critical edge to Latour, through the notion of 'matters of care'. Care, she argues 'stands for a signifier of necessary yet mostly dismissed labours of everyday maintenance of life, an ethico-political commitment to neglected things and the affective remaking of relationships with our objects' (2011: 100). This approach is intended to go farther, assembling relations by highlighting the ways that researchers contribute to the 'becoming' of the things they are studying. In other words, de la Bellacasa advocates caring as a way of 'thinking with' rather than thinking on, as an approach for research that can contribute to 'caring relationalities and life

conditions in an aching world' (2011: 100). Critique, in other words, should not simply 'cut' but actively contribute to improved relations (97. See also Biruk 2018). By critically engaging with humanitarian staff members on issues such as power inequalities and accountability, 'thinking with' is something I attempted to put into practice through my daily research, as I discuss further in the following sections.

Star and de la Bellacasa also introduce us to the notion of *work*. Work is crucial to understanding power within relations. Attending to dynamics of labour can tell us much about the ways that networks operate. Star – along with Geoffrey Bowker and Anselm Strauss – expands upon this theme in her later work (Bowker and Star 2000; Star and Strauss 1999; Star 1999). Each of these studies attends to the matrices of visible and invisible work that is involved in any network of practice. They ask crucial questions: what counts as work? Who defines it? What makes work visible or invisible? These questions are of paramount importance in this thesis; the functioning and maintenance of the entanglements I am concerned with require huge amounts of work. Senior humanitarian staff members design surveys and logframes and empowerment curricula. That is one kind of work, and it is remunerated. Junior staff members conduct surveys, complete logframes, and deliver empowerment sessions. That is another kind of work, also remunerated. But those staff members do other kinds of work that is less visible, and not necessarily considered in calculations of value: translation, affective labour, navigating bureaucracy to ensure that particular individuals or families receive support. Then there is the work that Syrians and Palestinians and Lebanese host communities do: the work of presence, of waiting around to be surveyed or assessed, to hand over their details again and again; the affective work of reliving and retelling experiences, hardships and trauma so that humanitarian staff can rank and sort them according to their frameworks of need; work of translation, too, for it is not only junior staff who must navigate the lattices of classes and categories which scaffold the humanitarian response. These kinds of work, as we shall see, are rarely valued and almost never remunerated. At the same time, certain kinds of work *are* valued and promoted when it comes to the 'beneficiary' population in Lebanon: Livelihoods programmes are designed to encourage economic 'self-reliance' among communities affected by displacement, while empowerment programmes promote income-generating participation in the capitalist economy as a means to gender equality. Finally, there is the work done by the other actors in these networks: the technologies, formulae and *things*. These actors do work of transportation, and of translation too, but can also, as we shall see in chapter five, do work of obfuscation and distortion. By focusing on the question of labour when considering the webby relations by which humanitarian aid is implemented, it becomes possible

not only to explain power, but, by drawing attention to labour that is not valued, remunerated or even thought of, to begin to challenge it.

A further challenge, as articulated by Anne-Marie Mol, asks: 'what if there are two or more networks? How then to articulate the difference between associations *within* and *between* networks and – more important still – might it be the case that different networks hang together in different ways, are there different *kinds* of associations?' (2002: 70-71) In other words, how to attend to multiplicity? How to describe the relations between actors, especially when the boundaries of where things and people end and begin is not often clear? Mol draws on Marilyn Strathern's idea of *Partial Connections* (2004) to explore the idea that practices might be coordinated, that the things being enacted might be 'more than one and less than many' (Mol 2002: 82). Specifically, she draws on Strathern's idea of being simultaneously a feminist and an anthropologist. The two identities form one another, but they are different. But they are not so different that they are two people, or indeed one person split in two. From this Mol draws the counterintuitive title for her work: the body multiple. In the coordinating practices surrounding atherosclerosis in the hospital that is Mol's field site, the body (singular) becomes many. Multiplicity – or pluralism as Mol puts it (2002: 84) – might be a lazy way to explain complexity (Nelson 2016), but coordination, partial connections, are not. The question then, is how these different enactments relate to one another and how to trace the coordination between them. Over the course of my research, I saw the category 'early and child marriage' used in diverse ways, depending on context and individuals. I spoke to staff members who extolled the virtue of tablet computer-based assessment, and spoke to staff members who treated tablets with the height of mistrust. By tracing the networks around the tablet, or the category of early and child marriage, however, it became possible to understand the connections between these diverse views and practices, and in doing so, amplify the power relations which explained the diversity.

Finally, what about the nature of associations between actors? How to theorise the relations between the human and the material? One way to understand them is with Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's notion of precarity. Precarity is, she says, 'a state of acknowledgment of our vulnerability to others. In order to survive, we need help, and help is always the service of another, with or without intent.' (2015b: 29). Vulnerability, precarity, and needing help to survive are not new ideas for thinking through humanitarian situations. But Tsing is suggesting something different: that precarity describes *all* relations when it comes to survival. What does this mean in the humanitarian context? Syrians and others may be more or less reliant on material humanitarian assistance in Lebanon, but, as I outlined in the Preface, humanitarian practitioners also need Syrians. Without

them their jobs and livelihoods would not exist. Whole organisations, manufacturing processes, not to mention research institutions, depend on the presence and needs of these so-called 'beneficiary' populations (see also Andersson 2014). By focusing on the relations surrounding those distributing assistance, and the physical artefacts and infrastructures of assistance themselves, we can begin to see how relationships of reliance actually manifest through everyday practices in humanitarian programmes, and how they might subvert the assumption that the benefactor-beneficiary relationships in humanitarian contexts go only one way.

Gathering, Ramifying, Situating

What could a methodology that focuses on relations and embraces ambiguity look like? Strathern argues that academic writing is caught between an atomistic view and a holistic one (2004: 26). To begin with then, research that focuses on the relational must embrace the partial, or the in-between, the space that exists between what Haraway calls the two 'god tricks' (1988: 584) of the singular, totalising reality of Euro-American thought, and the endless plurality of relativism. Drawing on Haraway and Strathern, John Law argues that there is a third family of options: 'It is possible to observe, in one way very matter-of-factly, that the world, its knowledges, and the various sense of what is right and just, overlap and shade off into one another. That our arguments work, but only partially' (Law 2004: 63). He argues that an ethnographic study of practice is the only way to investigate such complexity and continuity. Ethnography allows for messiness, fluidity and layering. And he goes further, arguing that instead of simply attempting to represent these realities, social science method should be a process of allegory and of gathering:

> 'Method assemblage is the process of enacting or crafting bundles of ramifying relations that condense presence and (therefore also) generate absence by shaping, mediating and separating these. […] If we think this way then reality, realities, take on a different significance. No longer independent, prior, definite and singular as they are usually imagined in Euro-American practice, they become, instead, interactive, remade, indefinite and multiple.' (Law 2004: 122)

I wanted to draw together actors and relations to assemble a landscape of humanitarianism that is, as Donna Haraway puts it, 'rich in world' (2016b: 11). This meant attending to the many ways that the material and conceptual combine with the living in the creation of the landscape. It meant developing 'arts of noticing' (Tsing 2015b) when following the practices of humanitarians in order to observe how relations are built and maintained through practice, and deploying Geertz's 'thick

description' (1973) as a way to attend to entanglements in microscopic detail. Three questions guided my approach:

1. What kinds of actors are involved in making displacement-affected populations legible and how do they relate to one another?
2. What kinds of work are involved? Who does this work? What work is valued, and what work is 'invisible'?
3. Who falls outside this community of practice, and how do they engage with it?

I spent extensive time with humanitarian staff, accompanying them in the mundane and variable work of implementing humanitarian programmes. As I describe in more detail below, it was a multi-sited process (Marcus 1995), often following classifications, formulae or surveys from web portals, to head offices in Beirut, to the 'field' and back to the office in the form of data. Through observations and interviews, I gathered together those moments where relations and networks became standardised, forming communities of practice, and ramified these in the process of writing. Some of the relations I ramify in this thesis are those between people and technologies, such as computer tablets, formulae and databases. Elsewhere I look at the relationship between humanitarian staff and the topography of Lebanon, in particular the urban environment of Beirut. I show how humanitarians are actively engaged in world-making in the city, and the ways that they attempt – with mixed success – to map and marshal the city. Most importantly, I focus on *work*. Maintaining a community of practice involves extraordinary amounts of work from a plethora of actors, and I endeavoured to understand the different kinds of work that made humanitarian projects possible, the work that was valued, and the work that went unnoticed.

However, method assemblage, as Law notes, 'does politics and is not innocent. In its different versions it operates to make certain (political) arrangements more probable, stronger, more real, whilst eroding others and making them less real.' (Law 2004: 149). Latour has argued that through this approach – the tracing and describing of networks – it is the actors themselves who define how their social world is ordered. This represents a move away from a mode of social research in which the researcher imposes order and sense on the social worlds of their participants. A struggle against the superiority of the researcher is at the heart of Latour's approach: 'we have to resist pretending that actors have only a language while the analyst possesses the meta-language in which the first is "embedded"' (Latour 2005: 49). Ethical research, in other words, can only be made possible by 'acknowledging our own involvements in perpetuating dominant values, rather than retreating into the secure position of an enlightened outsider who knows better' (de La Bellacasa 2012: 197). Humanitarian staff members work in morally demanding, ethically complex

environments, and are often engaged in profound critical engagement with the work they do (Macrae 1998). My ontological and epistemological starting point, then, could well be articulated with Bruno Latour's question: 'Why would you be the one doing the intelligent stuff while they would act like a bunch of morons?' (2005: 150).

These observations are particularly pertinent given my own history as a humanitarian practitioner. If I am arguing that humanitarianism in Lebanon is situated – historically, politically, phenomenologically – in particular local and global structures of power, then my own position as researcher is also situated. My research, my methods and my physical presence cannot sit outside humanitarian practices, observing and analysing them from afar. They are not only part of those webs they seek to analyse, but also bring their own set of relations, embodied experience, an academic hinterland, a personal history, a set of sociocultural preconceptions and practices, to the process. As with any research, the rules and practices of my method 'not only describe but also help to produce the reality they understand' (Law 2004: 5).

Feminists, postcolonial scholars and anthropologists have engaged with questions of positionality for decades, and it is this literature which frames my approach to the problem. My first guiding principle is to practice, and attend to, what Haraway calls 'situated knowledge'. This is her re-definition of objectivity, which requires 'that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not as a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as a slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and his authorship of "objective" knowledge.' (1988: 592). This means a commitment to tracing the ways that the actors *themselves* assemble their worlds, an endeavour that, as we have seen, requires a focus on practice, on the mundane activities through which networks are created and maintained. It involves listening to people as if they were their own ethnographers – people who can tell us how they 'do' humanitarianism in practice (Mol 2002).

A second type of objectivity is the next guiding principle – this time Latour's re-definition of the word: Objectivity as the ability of participants to be able to object to what is being said about them. I put this into practice throughout the research process, most importantly, during the observations and interviews themselves. I recounted my observations back to my participants and asked if I had understood particular practices properly, if there were things I had missed. I engaged critically with participants on my observations, inviting challenge. This was my attempt to 'think with' participants (Haraway 2016b; Strathern 2004), or as Tim Ingold puts it: 'A practice of observation grounded in participatory dialogue' (Ingold 2007: 87). Participatory dialogue has also been important in the writing process, during which I have shared chapters and sections with participants (cf. Mosse 2006). This has been particularly important with sections such as Chapter

Five, where full anonymisation is difficult, given the specific and high-profile nature of the Desk-Based Formula. Nevertheless there were limitations to this objectivity: While humanitarian staff members who were my primary participants could be given the opportunity to 'object', Syrians and other displacement-affected communities in Lebanon, whose practices are not the primary focus of this research, and with whom I did not conduct interviews, have thus not been given the same opportunities to 'object'. I discuss the ethical justification for, and implications of, this decision below, but it will always remain a gap in this research.

Finally, and most importantly, is a methodological focus on the nature of power within the relations I have gathered and described. At the core of this thesis is an attempt to understanding how power is deployed within and between networks, and how those who sit outside of those networks have to navigate and interact with them on a daily basis. It is a commitment to recognising the gaps left by humanitarian practice and the unnoticed work involved in its enactment.

A History of the Project

In this second half of the chapter, I describe how I went about putting this approach into action. I conducted research during a year-long stay in Lebanon between July 2017 and August 2018. At the outset, the scope of the research I had planned included the offices and other professional spaces of humanitarian organisations, spaces where aid workers and aid recipients interacted, as well as the daily lives of aid recipients and other crisis-affected peoples, outside of distribution centres and empowerment classrooms. I had also anticipated focusing the entire project on the ways that gender was enacted through humanitarian programming. The reality of research was, of course, quite different to how I had envisaged it. Hammersley and Atkinson have noted that the ethnographer's 'orientation is an exploratory one […] It is expected that the initial interest and questions that motivated the research will be refined, and perhaps even transformed, over the course of the research' (2007: 3). Such was certainly the case for me.

To begin with, the sites of research were narrowed: for ethical reasons which I explain further in the following section, I limited the research to humanitarian organisations and the spaces in which they worked, deciding against doing research with Syrians and Lebanese host communities directly. If the sites narrowed, the research questions became much broader. I had envisaged focussing my research on gender-specific programmes, and the ways that gender considerations were integrated into more general programmes. My experience conducting research led me in quite different directions

In his article revisiting Laura Nader's (1974) call for anthropologists to 'study up', Gusterson observes that participant observation 'may not be readily portable to elite contexts […] where ethnographic access is by permission of people with careers at stake, where loitering strangers with notebooks are rarely welcome, and where potential informants are too busy to chat' (1997: 116). This was indeed my experience with international humanitarian organisations in Lebanon. While I arrived in Lebanon having (I thought) secured access to do research with two major INGOs, both partnerships fell through within weeks of my arrival. I had invested significant time into developing relationships with these organisations, but I soon found I had been speaking to the wrong people. While middle-management members of staff were keen to help – many telling me about research they themselves had done for postgraduate qualifications, or else envisioning how the research might benefit the quality of their programmes – when it came time to secure approval from senior management, things became much more tricky. Senior management staff had different priorities, and reputational protection was a major factor. One organisation was only willing to be involved on the understanding that they held editorial control over my research, which they hoped would form the basis for policy recommendations 'almost as if to prove what we already know/assume works,' as they put it one email. The other organisation got cold feet once senior management staff realised the time commitment involved with anthropological fieldwork. By the end of September 2018, it became clear that neither partnership was feasible.

I worked quickly to try and secure alternative partnerships, conducting interviews with staff members from as many organisations as I could in the meantime. While arranging interviews was rarely an issue, trying to convince staff members to engage with my research in a more substantive manner proved far more difficult. As I outline in the following chapters, a major component of humanitarian organisations' day-to-day work is research: needs assessments, monitoring, evaluations, conflict and market analyses. Around these research practices have evolved limited understandings of what constitutes valuable research. In the minds of many humanitarian professionals, valuable research was overwhelmingly quantitative, comparative, statistically representative, with inflexible, policy driven research questions. It was also, unsurprisingly, almost always focussed on the populations that these organisations were intending to support. The research I wanted to do was ethnographic, slow, inductive, focussed on humanitarian organisations rather than displacement-affected populations, and was not statistically representative or comparable. The organisations I approached often suggested changes to the project to make it fit their mould of what good research looks like. One organisation, in trying to convince me to conduct a multi-country comparative study wrote: "We see the tremendous amount of work that you have laid out – and time spent – being a lost opportunity if it's only serving the Lebanon

program, rather than others in the region". I also came up against numerous fundamental misunderstandings about the focus of the research, usually from people who were too busy to read the introductory email I had sent them, who willingly offered to put me in touch with beneficiary populations, but balked at the idea that they or their staff members could be the subject of research themselves.

By the beginning of December 2018, I had managed to arrange partnerships with two alternative INGOs. Having learnt my lesson I approached these organisations through their senior management staff first, finding access was far easier to secure when it was sanctioned from the top (on which more below). The nature of these two partnerships was quite different. My partnership with one of these organisations was formalised as an 'internship'. The formalisation of the partnership was, I was told, the easiest way to assure regular ethnographic access to the organisation. I was allowed full access to the offices and staff to conduct anthropological research on the reciprocal understanding that I would simultaneously conduct research *for* the organisation and present them with my findings, with recommendations to improve their policies and practices. I was given a line-manager (the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Coordinator), a laptop, a desk and a (voluntary) contract. The contract was necessary primarily for safeguarding purposes, as a written commitment to following the organisation's code of conduct, and did not cover my own research. My agreement with the organisation regarding my own research was confirmed over email, and simply stated that I could conduct observations and interviews as I wished, on the understanding that I would fully anonymise the organisation and all members of staff in any published work. The Country Director sent an email stating as much to all members of staff, telling them they were free to participate in the research or not, as they wished.

It was in this organisation that my ethnographic work most represented what James Clifford described as 'deep hanging out' (1997: 56). This partnership was instrumental in shaping my research, and the ethnographic work I was able to do while 'embedded' within the organisation forms the bulk of empirical data for chapters four and five, as well as substantial parts of chapter three. I was based in the organisation's head office in Beirut, alongside the management and technical staff, and generally worked there with my laptop when not conducting interviews or observations elsewhere. While the Beirut office was the centre for policy and programme design, the organisation did not implement in the Beirut area. In order to understand the practice of implementing humanitarian aid, I therefore regularly undertook visits to the organisation's three field offices in Tripoli, the Beqaa valley and north Lebanon. While some of these visits were day trips, I also took a number of trips that lasted a week or longer, staying in hotels or with friends.

As part of the internship arrangement, this organisation asked me to undertake a review of their assessments, a process which, as I have indicated, contributed to a significant change of direction in the focus of my research questions. As part of my understanding with the organisation, the observations I made while conducting research on their behalf often found their way into my own field diary, and later into this thesis. The access that the partnership provided enriched my research incalculably, but the nature of being a member of the organisation (albeit in a voluntary capacity) while undertaking my own research on it presented particular ethical and methodological challenges, which I discuss in more detail below in 'Ethical Challenges: Researching organisations'.

My relationship with the other organisation was far more informal – a reflection, perhaps, on the informal ways of working within the organisation more generally. I was given an open invitation to accompany two teams to the field – the protection empowerment team, which delivered the empowerment sessions which form the basis for chapter six, and the neighbourhoods team, which implemented a holistic, multi-sector programme using a location-based approach. This organisation operated solely out of Beirut, with most of their 'field' zones located in greater Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Their head office was thus a very different space to that of the first organisation, full of movement as field staff trooped in and out. I spent very little time in their office, usually arriving just in time to jump in the car with the teams as they set out for the day. Over the course of a few months I built strong ties with the protection empowerment team, and accompanied them to their protection empowerment sessions at least once, but usually two or three times a week. Building a relationship with the neighbourhoods team proved much trickier in the end, a situation I discuss further below, and I ended up spending far less time with this programme.

Alongside these more in-depth observations, I continued to conduct interviews with staff members from a broad range of organisations, including a number of national organisations whose work in some way related to practices and policies I was focussing on. Interviews played an extremely important role in this research, given it would have been far too burdensome to follow some participants through all the multiple spaces in which they moved (Wentzell 2013). This was particularly the case where my presence as an observer would have been inappropriate or harmful, for example, in masculinity empowerment programmes or in programmes designed to respond to incidents of sexual and gender-based violence. During these interviews, inspired by Mol's research I endeavoured to talk to people about their experiences, to listen to them *as if they were their own ethnographers* (2002: 15) – people who could tell me about their own practices and engage in critical reflection on them. Initially, I approached participants through a sort of snow-balling approach,

asking interviewees if they knew of someone else that would be interesting for me to talk to, which they invariably did. As my research progressed and my processes of gathering became more focussed, I took a more targeted approach. I sought out a number of staff members to interview about the desk-based formula I discuss in chapter five, for example. Similarly, I spoke to staff members from a number of organisations regarding their empowerment programmes for chapter six, and approaches to classification for chapter three. In addition to these interviews, I was also invited to conduct short-term observations with a number of organisations, particularly gender-related capacity-building sessions for staff members, which I describe in more detail in chapter six. Informed consent was gained orally and/or over email prior to the interview, with participants being told that they would be anonymised unless they requested otherwise.

The pattern of my days was usually the same: spend the day observing and interviewing, taking handwritten notes where I could, before returning home in the evenings and attempting to type everything up through inevitable exhaustion. On slower desk days, particularly ones spent in the Beirut office of the first organisation, I was often able to type short notes as encounters and conversations took place. When I first started conducting formal interviews, I generally took handwritten notes and typed them up on return to my flat. I found I was rarely able to quote verbatim with confidence from these interviews, however, so began instead to record interviews, when participants were willing for me to do so. Though I was nervous that this would change the nature of the interview, and the extent to which participants felt able to speak fully and frankly, I found that this was not the case. Willingness to speak frankly seemed, in the end, to depend far more on the character of the participant, their level of confidence in their employment, and their perception of how the research would be used.

Ethics and Challenges Part 1: Researching in a Humanitarian Context

Research in any humanitarian context brings with it some thorny ethical questions. There are many similarities between humanitarian organisations and those who do research on conflict, disaster and displacement. Academic research into humanitarian contexts *depends* on the existence of crisis-affected populations quite as much as humanitarian responses do, and carries rather more danger of being extractive, offering potentially very little in return. I am in agreement with Mackenzie et al that any researchers working in humanitarian contexts have an ethical obligation 'to design and conduct research projects that aim to bring about reciprocal benefits for refugee participants and/or communities.' (Mackenzie, McDowell, and Pittaway 2007: 301). But what does this mean? Anthropologists have been grappling with the question for decades. Should we act as advocates, barefoot shock-troopers as Nancy Scheper-Hughes suggests (1995)? If so, then who confers the

ethical obligation to 'speak out,' and who gives permission? Whose voices and experiences are represented? The politics of representation are not easily navigated, as Hastrup and Elsass (1990) have demonstrated. Moreover, the potential to actively compound harms and inequalities is a real danger. There is, for example, a long history of communities, especially refugee communities, being over-researched in Lebanon and the surrounding region, seeing little reciprocal benefit for time and energy given (Sukarieh and Tannock 2013). Keeping these questions in mind, my approach throughout the research has been to strive for 'a highly developed, ceaseless, daily engagement with ethics as a process' (Cerwonka and Malkki 2007: 4). While undoubtedly far from perfect, this engagement has shaped my research in fundamental ways.

As I have indicated, when I first conceived of the research project, in late 2014, I had planned to take a multi-sited approach, looking at the world of humanitarian organisations, the lives and experiences of displaced Syrians, and the spaces where the two came together. At that time, there were very few academic publications on the Syria humanitarian response, and, to my knowledge, no academic research into the experiences, aspirations or daily lives of displaced Syrians. Non-academic research at that time was highly instrumental in nature, focussed on raising funds, and using tried and tested imagery of suffering women and children (Malkki 1995; Enloe 2004). There was, as I saw it, an urgent need for the experiences of Syrians to be better understood, and their voices to be heard through careful research, in order to hold the humanitarian response properly accountable. By the time I arrived in Lebanon in 2017, however, the landscape had shifted significantly, and academic research into the Syria crisis had become a major industry. Sukarieh and Tannock observe that: 'from 2014 to 2018, at least 33 research grants for projects focusing wholly or partly on Syrian refugees in Lebanon totalling more than £28.2 million were awarded to UK academics' (2019: 668). By the time I arrived, a number of academic articles had already been published, and I met many more researchers in the process of producing research on the experiences of Syrians in Lebanon from varying perspectives (e.g. Carpi 2014; Fawaz 2017; Grandi, Mansour, and Holloway 2018; Janmyr 2018; Mhaissen 2014; Tarshishi 2015; Turner 2015). Aside from academic research, humanitarian organisations were conducting more research than ever, as they tried to build their 'evidence base' in an increasingly competitive funding environment. The moment of 'urgency' – as I had seen it – to undertake research which paid attention the lived experiences of Syrians in Lebanon had faded and in fact given way to a culture of over-research.

Lebanon was not unique in this regard. Heath Cabot (2019) has charted the boom in anthropological studies of the 'migration crisis' in Greece and elsewhere in Europe from 2015. Academics chase crises as much as humanitarians do in their efforts to remain current – and

funded. Unlike humanitarian organisations, who theoretically use their research to improve the relevance of their programmes, academic researchers are rarely in a position to make any grand claims about purported benefits of their research for displacement-affected communities, and even when they are, the process is fraught with challenge (Andersson 2018). Anthropology, as Nyamnjoh (2015) notes, is 'a field science whose expertise is predicated, in a fundamental way, on the generosity of others'. Ethnographic research takes considerable time and can become a burden for participants. As I explore in more detail in Chapter Four, the clamour for data in Lebanon meant that Syrian communities were being continually pressed upon to relate their experiences to all manner of researchers and organisations, many of whom could offer very little in return.

What, then, could ethical research look like in this context? On a fundamental level, Shahram Khosravi has questioned Western scholars' sense of entitlement to knowledge about the Other; their belief in their *right* to knowledge, which he regards as a colonial entitlement. 'The demand to understand,' he argues 'has always been on the colonizers' terms' (2019: 284). Even with the best of intentions to produce or co-produce careful, in-depth participatory research with Syrian communities in Lebanon, as a white, British, Oxford-affiliated, INGO-affiliated, ex-DFID employee, my presence would bring with it myriad forms of social and institutional power, few of which would be easily navigated simply through processes of informed consent or relationship building. What's more, as a doctoral student without a clear platform, I could offer little guarantee on any anticipated impact of the research for communities impacted by the Syria crisis. Given all these considerations, I decided that any attempt to represent the lives and experiences of Syrian communities in Lebanon was likely to duplicate existing efforts, be partial at best and extractive at worst. Instead, I decided to focus primarily on the practices of international humanitarian organisations.

There is, of course, a trade-off that comes with restricting the focus of my research to humanitarian organisations. A detailed portrait of the perspectives and experiences of Syrians and other communities who are (or are not) recipients of the humanitarian projects I focus on will always be a gap in this research. There is certainly an argument that such an exclusion in any investigation of humanitarian programming in Lebanon is in itself unethical (Masterson and Mourad 2019). In short, there are no easy answers. But, as I have indicated, there is a rich emerging body of research, both academic and institutional, as well as a huge variety of creative and artistic productions, which do explore the experiences of Syrians and other communities in Lebanon including their interactions with aid agencies. Many of these outputs are created by writers or artists with Syrian and Lebanese backgrounds, or by people who have been involved as activists or practitioners in

the humanitarian response. I have drawn as much as possible on these secondary sources to complement my own research. What follows then, is not the barefoot shock-trooping that Scheper-Hughes advocates, but it is nevertheless *committed* politically and ethically, to understanding and critically challenging the ways that power is deployed in humanitarian practice. Part of the way that manifested was through sustained critical dialogue with research participants, which I discuss in more detail below.

While the focus of my research was the organisations themselves, in the course of my fieldwork I regularly observed interactions between these organisations and recipients – or potential recipients – of their programmes: Syrians, Palestinians and socio-economically vulnerable Lebanese individuals. These interactions formed a vital component of the ethnographic data and though I strictly anonymised such interactions, it was nevertheless important for me to gain informed consent from those involved. During group discussions or questionnaires, it wasn't unusual for people to share personal details and experiences and in that context, it was important for them to understand who I was, what I was doing and be given the opportunity to refuse to participate, or refuse my presence, if they wished. I soon found that the process of informed consent was easier in some contexts than others. Easiest by far were the capacity building and empowerment sessions which I cover in chapter six. I always agreed in advance with the facilitator that I would be introduced at the beginning of the session, and either I or the facilitator would explain the nature of the research and give everyone the opportunity to opt out of the research (without having to opt out of the session) at any point. These sessions lasted at least a couple of hours and in many cases continued over a period of a few weeks. Facilitators, I learned, do not like silent observers in their sessions. What's more, they are keen to draw on all kinds of knowledge and experiences to drive their point home. As such, I was very much an active participant-observer during these sessions, and the participants got to know me quite as much as I got to know them. The sessions offered a substantial period of time during which I was able to build relationships of trust and undertake a rigorous and iterative process of informed consent, in which conversations about my research came up regularly. In these sessions, participants would often involve me directly in activities, sharing their perspectives on issues such as division of household labour and asking me about my own.

Accompanying field staff on their assessment and surveying rounds, as described in chapters three, four and five, presented rather more difficulties in terms of informed consent. Staff had a quota of assessments to complete each week. They were keen to get through the process quickly and usually took full control of the interaction. At the beginning of each assessment I was introduced,

and my research explained, but in practice there was little time to explain in much detail. While staff members always asked if respondents were happy to talk to us before proceeding with the assessment, consent to participate in my research was often (though not always) bound up with consent to participate in the organisation's survey. As I outline in chapters four and five, rare was the occasion when someone would refuse to participate in an assessment, for fear of losing out on material support as a result. As such, I rarely felt as though assessment respondents were given any meaningful opportunity to refuse to participate in my research. When writing about these encounters I have focussed primarily on the staff members, anonymised any personal details relating to the respondents, including location, while at the same time trying to faithfully reproduce the complex relationships of power I had observed.

Ethics and Challenges Part 2: Researching Organisations

Though I refer to 'studying up' when describing my attempts to access humanitarian organisations, once that access was gained, 'studying up' was not a particularly accurate description for the research I was doing. After all, many of the participants were people whose professional and personal experiences mirrored my own to a greater or lesser extent. Gusterson has described such research as 'studying across' (1997: 114), though I find this description raises as many problems as it solves. International humanitarian organisations are large and complex, with intersecting layers of hierarchy across many locations. Depending on their seniority and role, the staff members I interviewed might report to Field Office Managers, to Area Managers, to national-level sector coordinators, to a Country Director in Beirut, to a Regional Office in Amman, to a headquarters in Europe or north America, or to institutional and governmental donors all over the world. They might speak many languages or only one, they might hold postgraduate degrees from elite institutions, or they might have never attended university. To use 'studying across' would flatten both these hierarchies and potential relationships of power between myself as researcher and the participants. Instead I prefer to use what Reinhold (1994) has called 'studying through', an approach picked up by Shore and Wright, who describe it as 'a method for analysing connections between levels and forms of social process and action, and exploring how those processes work in different sites – local, national and global' (1997: 14).

My positionality as researcher carried the weight of my identity and experiences. Like Fassin (2007) and Mosse (2005), I have a professional background in my chosen research field. While my positionality was – initially at least – rather less complicated than that of Mosse or Fassin, having at least resigned my job at DFID two years previously, a number of my contacts in humanitarian organisations in Lebanon were nevertheless brokered through ex-colleagues with whom I

remained friendly. The fact that my previous employer was a major governmental donor lent this process of brokerage a weight I felt uncomfortable with. NGO staff are rarely wont to refuse the request of a donor, even if made in a personal capacity. I became more uncomfortable when every Country Director I had been put in touch with responded almost immediately suggesting a meeting. In the end, however, the Country Directors passed me onto their coordinators and programme managers, who sent me to field-level managers, who paired me up with field officers and assistants to do my observations. The lines of introduction were often so long that the person with whom I was conducting observations was rarely aware that the original introduction had been made through their Country Director, or carried the weight of DFID connections.

Early on in my research, before I had established formal research relationships with any organisation, I was asked by someone I'd met a couple of times, a Gender Adviser for an international NGO, for advice on how to evaluate the programme she was running; she had recently been promoted and was inexperienced in evaluations of this kind. I was circumspect about the request, unsure about the implications of giving advice on my position as researcher. How could I write about a programme that I had helped – even if in a small way – to design? I relayed these concerns to my supervisors, one of whom reminded me: 'This may be on the more explicit end of the spectrum in terms of shaping an organisation's research or behaviour, but your presence will do that in all kinds of ways anyway.' As Fassin notes, there is nothing very extraordinary in overstepping the boundaries of the professional anthropologist (2007). This was just the first time I was forced to fully appreciate that I had become part of the network I was trying to understand. The dilemma became much more explicit when I began to do research for one of my partner organisations, alongside my own doctoral research.

How to navigate this positionality presented a constant source of dilemma. Of course, my presence did influence the practices of those around me, but it wasn't always visible to me *how* I might be influencing things, and where it was, it often happened in unexpected ways. I found my reception with field staff varied wildly. Some treated me (very kindly) as a total novice to the world of humanitarian aid, to whom everything must be slowly explained, while others treated me as an expert, asking me for my advice on technical issues. Management staff in the NGO where I held an internship treated me almost like a staff member, asking for support with different pieces of research, requesting my presence at meetings and asking my advice on areas they knew my research was on. The request that I provide support on a review of assessments with one of the NGOs, as described in Chapter Five, meant that I was both researching an aspect of the organisation's practice for both this DPhil and for the organisation itself. I was, as Crystal Biruk puts it 'complicit

as I critique[d]' (2018: 17), and it was precisely the complicity that enabled me to understand these practices in depth. I tried to navigate this with openness, critically engaging with management staff on the findings, and presenting them to the participants in a workshop. Field staff often seemed to regard me as a conduit to the more senior staff in the Beirut Office. Though management staff often visited field offices and occasionally programme sites, it was rare, if not unheard of, for them to sit through a full day's repetitive work with Field Assistants and Officers. Field staff knew my research findings would be presented to the management staff, and they wanted to make sure their views on the practices of the organisation were represented. All these relations influenced the ways in which I assembled worlds for this research. They made me more aware of some relations, and doubtless shielded others from my view. To paraphrase that often-quoted line of Donald Rumsfeld's, I have tried to make clear the known unknowns throughout this thesis. However, the unknown unknowns remain.

The relationships I developed were not always easy. As I have indicated, my partnership with the neighbourhoods programme with the second INGO was not a particularly successful one. Early on in the partnership, I was travelling in a car on the way back from a community engagement session with two field assistants and their boss, the Programme Manager. Various things hadn't gone to plan that day and one of the field assistants was complaining in Arabic about the behaviour of one of her colleagues. The Programme Manager – the only one of the three who knew I spoke Arabic – quickly shut the conversation down, glancing at me and telling her they'd discuss it back at the office. Later in the journey, the other staff member began to gossip about a colleague. Again, the Programme Manager shut the conversation down, this time referring to me directly, and jokingly calling me a spy. I was forcibly reminded that I was one of Gusterson's 'loitering strangers with notebooks' (1997: 116). My research with the team had been brokered through the organisation's senior management, and, though I had known him for several weeks, I could not seem to shake the Programme Manager's perception that I was auditing or evaluating the programme, and by extension, him. In my effort to put him at ease and build trust, I left the ball in his court when it came to my observations on the programme, leaving him to invite me to sessions rather than taking up the 'open invitation' suggested by the senior management. The result was that I ended up spending very little time with this programme.

Finally, a word on documents: those tools and policy notes and logframes and spreadsheets and reports which proliferate endlessly in the humanitarian landscape. Documents form an important component of the data in this research. In situations where observations were impossible or inappropriate – for example, empowerment sessions with adolescent girls or men – I was often

given the curricula to read and discuss with the facilitator. Many interviewees sent me their policies or logframes or research notes, often at my request. The experience described at the beginning of the introduction, of requesting, and subsequently being given limited access to humanitarian tools, typifies some of the limitations of this thesis. Many of the classificatory systems and tools I describe in these chapters exist in what Redfield describes as 'the grey area between public and private, moving closer to the light as the urgent moment of its creation fades' (Redfield 2013: 5). They may have been strictly internal documents, or they may have been shared between technical staff working for different humanitarian organisations. Sometimes they were only shared between organisations when requested by a Country Director, and even then, with only a limited number of staff. They may have been published on password-protected sharing portals which hundreds of people nevertheless had access to, or perhaps uploaded onto public portals. I have erred on the side of caution when it comes to these documents, choosing to describe, rather than quote, documentation which is not publicly available.

Ethics and Challenges Part 3: The Fuzzy Field

Being a part of, and yet apart from, the lifeworld I was studying blurred the boundaries of what might normally be considered 'the field' in anthropological research. Gupta and Ferguson (1997) have highlighted how the traditional idea of the field is often conceptualised as the Trobriand Islands in Malinowski's research: bounded zones, set apart from the researcher's 'normal life'. The separation has been drawn into question, they argue, by globalisation and the reconfiguration of space and place in recent decades (see also Cerwonka and Malkki 2007; Marcus 1995). The practice of studying up, or across, or through, blurred these boundaries still further. Many of my friends in Lebanon worked in the aid sector, and many of the staff members who participated in the research invited me to socialise outside of their normal working lives. These experiences, as I show in Chapter Two, were vital in understanding the many ways in which humanitarian organisations are situated in Lebanon. Early on in my research I found myself recounting social encounters in my field diary and agonising over the problem of informed consent – at what point, to paraphrase Thorne (1980), should I stop taking notes? Certainly, all of these people knew I was researching aid organisations and their practices, but I began to realise I had not necessarily given them cause to think that the research would extend to their social worlds as well as their professional ones. For the most part, this was because I had not initially planned on including it in the research.

In the end, I opted for a combination of open dialectical tactics to obtain informed consent: sometimes I reminded people of a certain situation or conversation after the fact, and asked if they were happy for me to write about it in my research, an approach that also gave me the opportunity

to engage with the person involved about the encounter, to ask about it from their perspective; I arranged semi-formal, recorded interviews with a number of friends and colleagues to talk through certain topics and practices in more detail, an opportunity that allowed me to quote them directly, rather than relying on less-than-perfect field notes; finally, as the research progressed, and my relationships strengthened, I became much more comfortable with asking to note something down in the moment – a practice usually greeted with much hilarity and some embarrassment on my part. I tried as much as possible to engage in critical dialogue with the humanitarians I spoke to in these encounters, to challenge them on their practices and invite their challenge on my own in turn. These approaches were not possible for every situation, particularly those where I did not directly know all the people involved. I have usually chosen not to include such situations in the thesis. A very small number of exceptions are included in the research, relating to encounters between humanitarian workers and Syrians in Chapter Two where I have judged the moral imperative to be on the side of inclusion in the research in spite of grey areas around informed consent, because of what they can tell us about how power configures in the world-making practices of humanitarians in their everyday lives. These encounters have nevertheless been rigorously anonymised.

These encounters are not the only parts of the research that have been anonymised. I made a decision early in the research project to anonymise all people and organisations I spoke to. This stemmed from both pragmatic and methodological considerations. From a pragmatic perspective, I found that people were much more willing to be involved in the research, and much more likely to speak openly when assured of their – and their organisations' – anonymity. From a methodological perspective, this research approaches international humanitarian organisations and their staff members as a community of practice. There are many shared practices within this community. Policies, assessments and algorithms are shared between organisations to ensure comparability and complementarity. Staff members attend joint training sessions and are beholden to the same international standards and legal instruments in their work. There is diversity of practice within the community, of course, and where this exists, I have tried to faithfully reproduce the diversity I observed in these pages. What is notable, however, is that diversity exists within organisations as much as between them.

2. 'The Dream Posting': Mapping and Marshalling the Humanitarian Landscape in Beirut

A few months into my fieldwork, a friend who was working in central Africa remarked to me that the humanitarians she worked with kept talking about Lebanon. They described it as the 'dream posting', the holy grail of humanitarian destinations. There was even a Lebanese bakery in the city where humanitarians would go to reminisce about, or else imagine a future in, the fabled country. The rationale behind this narrative was always the same. The humanitarian response in Lebanon was high-profile, well-funded and challenging, which meant the work was interesting, but – in Beirut at least – it was also possible to 'really live', as one aid worker put it, outside of the cloistered enclaves that characterise life in many humanitarian responses (Andersson 2019; Autesserre 2014; Smirl 2015). Beirut was the avant-garde of culture, with pop-up galleries, a lively bar and clubbing scene, arthouse cinemas, Melbourne-style cafes serving flat whites and sourdough toast, and farmers markets filled with local organic produce. Outside Beirut there were ski slopes, beaches, mountain hikes and magnificent roman ruins. It was possible, so the narrative went, to live an authentically Lebanese, cultured and cosmopolitan high life, all while fulfilling one's vocation by doing essential humanitarian work on the Syrian refugee response. It was a discourse I'd encountered many times during my years both as a humanitarian practitioner and as a researcher. Indeed, on some level, it probably played a role in my decision to conduct research in Lebanon. The 'dream posting' is our entry into the humanitarian landscape in Lebanon, but, as we shall discover, it is a postcard, a portrait of the landscape through a wide angle, rose tinted lens. The granular detail provided in this chapter paints a very different picture, a shifting landscape continually shaped by the humanitarian network through practices of mapping and marshalling.

It has been a popular approach, over the past decade, to approach the humanitarian landscape as 'Aidland' (Autesserre 2014; Fechter and Hindman 2011; Hilhorst and Jansen 2010; Mosse 2011). Coined in Apthorpe's satirical essay (2011), Aidland is described as being both there and not there – a sort of virtual reality, *sociology nullius*, *history nullius*, *uneconomics*. The idea of Aidland and its occupants has inspired numerous 'aidnographies,' detailed ethnographic portrayals of the world(s) of aid professionals. Some of the essays in the eponymous book, edited by David Mosse (2011) in which Apthorpe's chapter appears were keen to emphasise that the policies and practices of aid professionals were not as generalisable and global as they claimed to be, but were deeply embedded in local contexts, getting 'unravelled as they are translated in the different interests of social/institutional worlds and local politics in ways that generate complex and unintended effects'

(Mosse 2011: 3). Nevertheless, despite efforts towards nuance, as Elizabeth Harrisson (2013: 274) points out, Aidland is often mis-represented as 'a bubble of northern-based expatriate workers', a cohesive community of practice, the focus on which, she argues, diverts attention from development outcomes and too neatly categorises actors into donor or recipient. What's more, as Benton (2016) and van Voorst (2019) have observed, much of the literature often fails to take into account heterogeneity among Aidland actors, deploying vague terminologies such as 'international' and 'local'. Both have observed that expatriate aid workers are often assumed to be white and Northern by default, when in reality this is not the case.

In this chapter, I want to sketch the backdrop against which the professional practices the rest of the thesis is concerned with take place: the socio-material landscape which forms and is formed by the humanitarian community in Lebanon. In doing so, I hope to burst the Aidland bubble. Indeed, far from being 'inexactly a somewhere' (Apthope 2011: 201), I suggest that the humanitarian landscape in Lebanon is deeply situated; it is politically, temporally, geographically and historically contingent. It is an intimate tapestry that weaves together the local and the global. But it is not a stable universe that exists 'out there,' which one can simply enter and leave at will. It exists within and among other landscapes, and its maintenance requires a lot of work. In what follows, I suggest that the humanitarian landscape in Lebanon is continually formed through socio-material practices and encounters, deliberate or otherwise. In other words, aid workers are in a reciprocal relationship with the urban landscape and people around them. I want to draw attention to the specific worldmaking schemes which humanitarian professionals employ in Lebanon, investigating the relationships of power, the people, infrastructures and identities on which these schemes are contingent, and the encounters through which these worlds are formed.

I refer above to the humanitarian landscape in Lebanon. In doing so, I employ Tsing's (2015a) definition of the word landscape. Tsing moves beyond a traditional picturesque and static understanding of the word, drawing on Olwig (2002) to allow for a definition of 'landscape' that is lively and generous. A landscape is a gathering in making, she tells us. They are 'simultaneously imaginative and material. They encompass physical geographies, phenomenologies and cultural and political commitments' (Tsing 2015a). The landscape I outline in this chapter is precarious, contingent and shifting, continually formed by those who inhabit it. It is historical, but it disrupts historical narrative arcs. Drawing on Tsing's notion of precarity (2015b), I explore the ways in which humanitarian staff are reliant on others for the survival of their life's work. But crucially they are also reliant on others for the survival of their way of life, their world-making ventures.

Such ventures, I will argue, require a great deal of mapping and marshalling work, through which displacement-affected populations are rendered spatially and socially legible by humanitarians.

This chapter is focussed primarily on the humanitarian landscape in Beirut, for it is in Lebanon's capital that the dynamics I describe below are most remarkable. It is where all international humanitarian agencies have their head offices and where the vast majority of senior humanitarian staff reside – including most international staff members. The focus is also a function of practicality: Beirut was my home and the place I knew best in Lebanon. However, in focusing my attention on Beirut, I am uncomfortably aware that I am conforming to convention. The vast majority of writing about Lebanon focuses on Beirut, to the extent that particular narratives about the city have evolved and now dominate: its sectarian geography (Deeb and Harb 2013), its traffic 'chaos' (Monroe 2011), the shadow of the civil war on the built environment (Nagel 2002) and the rampant post-war privatisation (Makdisi 1997; Baumann 2016). Much of this work has enhanced our understanding of Beirut, and of Lebanon more generally, but other areas of Lebanon remain woefully neglected in the literature. At the end of the chapter I reflect on the broader humanitarian landscape in Lebanon and the relationship between Beirut and Lebanon's smaller urban centres and rural areas. However, this relationship, as well as the particular dynamics of the humanitarian landscapes in Tripoli, the Beqaa valley, and north and south Lebanon – each with their own topographies, histories and demographic characteristics which make the dynamics of the humanitarian landscape unique – would merit much more detailed investigation.

Exceptionalism and Authenticity

While conducting my research in Beirut I started to notice that there were certain places I was going back to again and again, for formal interviews, for socialising with humanitarian staff members and for events. If you were to look at these points on a map, they would be clustered around particular areas: Achrafieh, and Rmeil and in the east of Beirut, Badaro in Mazraa in the south-east, Saifi in central Beirut and Hamra and the University area in Ras Beirut to the west. The vast majority of INGOs and UN agencies had their offices and housed their expatriate staff in these areas. Some of these locations seemed to inspire particularly large volumes of humanitarian traffic, and there were two or three specific cafés that were suggested as meeting places to me over and over again by a whole range of people, most notably the Starbucks branch situated prominently on Sassine square in the heart of Achrafieh (cf. Merabet 2014), and an independent café in the fashionable Gemmayze district in Saifi. Over the course of many interviews (and eye-wateringly expensive coffees), I began to think of these places as creating constellations, not least because –

when travelling with aid workers at least – I moved between them in air-conditioned vehicles along Beirut's main highways, without stopping in any place between.

Figure 2: The 12 Quartiers of Beirut. Source: Elie Plus, licensed under the Open Database License

I accepted the constellations as a quirk of the community and settled into a pattern which moved among those locations, adding a few of my own. For the sake of my research, at any rate, it was useful to run into humanitarians and their friends in the well-worn nodes along these constellations. It was an opportunity to build my network in the city and recruit potential participants in the research. Later in my fieldwork, and having a much better knowledge of other parts of the city however, I began to think more critically about the peculiarly restricted nature of the humanitarian landscape. I recounted my rudimentary list of places-humanitarian-workers-go to a friend who was a UN staff member, a European national. He had lived in Beirut for a number of years, spoke fluent Arabic and often passed for Lebanese in his daily interactions, giving him perhaps a more nuanced perspective on the constellations I was describing. I asked him for his

reflections on why these particular places were so ubiquitously frequented by humanitarians to the exclusion of other areas. He responded:

> "There is this very indulgent Beiruti, wealthy, predominately Christian Maronite echelon within Lebanese society, which is essentially Achrafieh, right? And it seems that the majority of expats seem to insert themselves in to that social milieu, whether or not they actually choose to engage with the other people who are Lebanese within it, and tend to – it's really weird – normatively adopt their code, and as a result self-censor, in terms of where they're willing to go and not go."

Achrafieh was a wealthy suburb in the east of the city, historically associated with the Maronite community, though in 2017, its inhabitants were in reality far more diverse, including many foreign nationals and Lebanese citizens from other confessional groups. What this friend was telling me was that the geographical boundaries to the humanitarian landscape in Beirut mapped onto other topographical boundaries. The world that humanitarians created for themselves seemed like a palimpsest, superimposed on the world-making practices of a particular strata of Lebanese society: Maronite elites. Except, of course, it wasn't a palimpsest. By living and socialising in particular areas, humanitarians were contributing, socially and economically, to the life of the neighbourhood, with far reaching effects.

One explanation of this dynamic would be a preference among aid workers to live in and frequent affluent areas, and Achrafieh certainly fitted the bill in that respect, though, like many neighbourhoods, it played host to serious poverty as well as mind-boggling wealth. But such an explanation is partial at best. There were other areas of Beirut, such as Menara, Verdun and Sanayah which were equally as affluent, with malls, restaurants and bars, but were frequented much more rarely by foreign aid workers. Meanwhile, Achrafieh's neighbour, Rmeil, where many humanitarian staff members also lived and socialised, had historically been a lower-middle-income area (Krijnen 2016), the domain of mechanics, tailors and other traders. Certainly, to many Lebanese and Syrian people I spoke with, the subject presented something of an amusing puzzle. 'Why do all the foreigners live in Geitawi[13]?' A Syrian friend asked me one day. On another occasion, a Lebanese librarian, spotting me peering at a map from the early 20th century, declared laughingly: 'I know what you're looking for! Mar Mikhael[14] is over here!'.

[13] A sub-district of Rmeil frequented and inhabited by many humanitarians
[14] Another sub-district of Rmeil frequented by humanitarians, encompassing a large number of bars, restaurants and cafes.

What was at the roots of this dynamic? As outlined at the beginning of the chapter, the established narrative among the international humanitarian community was that Beirut was 'not like other places in the Middle East' as one participant told me. It was exceptional: a place where one could drink alcohol, go out clubbing, and dress however one pleased. A place where they could 'really live'. On closer inspection, however, the localities where humanitarians actually undertook such activities were confined to particular areas. Widespread perceptions among the humanitarians I met and socialised with indicated that 'really living' was not something one could do everywhere in Beirut. One humanitarian told me with horror about being driven to a meeting with a colleague of his who was wearing a summer dress. The driver had got lost, and they had ended up passing through the Shatila checkpoint twice: 'She was dressed appropriately for downtown Beirut, but not there!' he told me. We will return to Shatila – a Palestinian refugee camp to the south of Beirut – and the way it formed a part of the humanitarian landscape later in the chapter. Most of the districts where the majority of international humanitarian staff conducted the majority of their 'real living', Saifi, Rmeil and Achrafieh, were in historically Christian parts of the city. Hamra, which neighbours the university district, and has a long history of intellectual café culture and a cosmopolitan population (Harb, Kassem, and Najdi 2018), was an interesting exception to this rule. The dynamics had shifted over time. When I was a student studying in Damascus in 2010, we visited Beirut occasionally on weekends. At that time, the majority of Northern foreigners in the city were not humanitarians, but journalists and Arabic students, and they socialised almost exclusively in Hamra. Only after the advent of the humanitarian crisis in Syria, and the arrival of humanitarian organisations with their strict protocols around security did the constellations of 'ex-pat' living in Beirut begin to shift eastward towards the historically Christian part of the city.

In order to fully understand this dynamic, it is necessary to first go back some 30 years. During the civil war in Lebanon, Beirut was bifurcated by 'the green line', diving the city into west and east. Though pre-war demographic compositions of east and west Beirut were somewhat mixed in terms of confessional identity, and despite the fact the alliances and enmities during the conflict were not only forged along sectarian lines, during and immediately after the war, the green line came to be seen to demarcate the Christian part of the city in the east, from the Muslim part of the city in the west. The division was immortalised in Ziad Doueiri's film *West Beirut.* For some years after the war, it was still unusual for people from one part of the city to venture to the other side, with taxi drivers reluctant to cross the boundary (Sawalha 2010: 12). While these days, the demographics on both sides of the city are much more mixed, the green line still exists in the minds of many who live in Beirut, not least international humanitarian staff and other Northern expatriate workers, who regularly bifurcated the city in everyday speech into east and west.

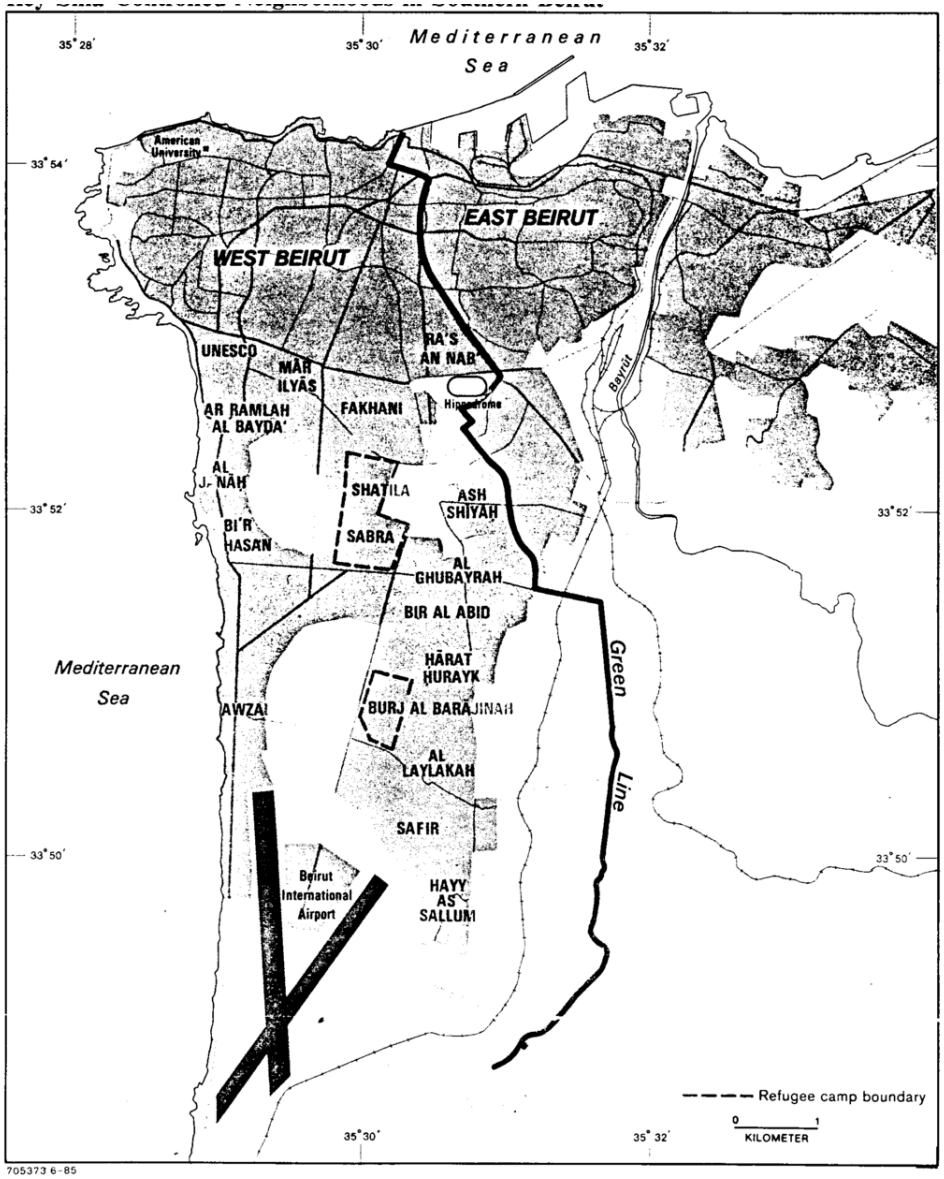

Figure 3: The Green Line. Source: Central Intelligence Agency

There were deeper historical continuities at play here too. The narrative of Lebanon as an exception to the rule in the Middle East, as an enclave of modernity and liberalism in a sea of traditionalism is not a new one. The roots of Lebanese exceptionalism were established in the colonial imaginary well over a century ago. Makdisi has explored how Europeans in the 19th and 20th centuries saw Mount Lebanon as a 'non-Muslim enclave from which the movement to civilize and reform the "fanatical" and "Mohemmedan" Ottoman Empire could be launched.' (1996: 24). In the mandate era, Makdisi argues, this exceptionalism became concrete in the formation of the Lebanese state, which the French hoped would act as a protectorate for Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East. The French Government took this action with the support of a number of Lebanese elites, in particular those of Maronite Christian background, who,

Makdisi shows, responded to the particular colonial interest with appeals to European powers along religious lines.

While the mapping practices of this network of humanitarian staff members and their organisations played into and to some extent reproduced historical and colonial patterns, they also flattened the complexity of them. Sectarian identity is neither fixed nor geographically bounded in the way that humanitarian security protocols seemed to consider them to be, but formed through everyday relations and practices (Nucho 2016). Ideas of social conservativism or liberalism, religiosity or secularism are hardly confined to particular confessional groups. Any notion of sectarian community in Lebanon is deeply entwined with other socioeconomic markers such as gender and class (Deeb and Harb 2013; Mikdashi 2014). Ghassan Moussawi (2017) demonstrates this in his study of queer exceptionalism in Beirut, a city that has been widely hailed as exceptional within the Arab world for its 'tolerant' attitude towards the LGBTI community. Moussawi finds that 'discourses of sexual openness and gay friendliness in Beirut (seen as markers of cosmopolitanism) are laden with a value structure informed by gender, class, and religion' (2017: 175), and argues that access to gay friendly spaces in Beirut is predicated on conforming to secular, upper-middle class and gender-normative identities. The relationship between class and the ability to 'really live' was not lost on some humanitarians I spoke to, one of whom commented:

> In Lebanon, there is quite an extreme commodification of pretty much everything, including public space, and including culture, almost without exception. I think that as long as you're able to pay for it, you can access that 'liberal lifestyle' which, if we're looking at it slightly more holistically, is obviously not that liberal [laughing]… I guess it's… *exclusively* liberal. But it's not liberal exclusively. See what I did there?

Beyond the notion of being able to 'really live', there were other reasons that Rmeil held particular charm for international humanitarian staff. Rmeil's subdistricts Geitawi and Mar Mikhael had witnessed a great deal of change in recent years. In explaining the 'unrelenting process of gentrification' Mar Mikhael has experienced, Krijnen notes that 'The architectural typology of local buildings that date back to the first decades of the previous century as well as the presence of [arts, crafts and design industries] allowed for a rebranding of this lower middle-income residential neighborhood as the 'hip' place-to-be, targeting a specific clientele that appreciates "authenticity", the proximity of [arts, crafts and design industries], and a vibrant nightlife' (2016: 7). In contrast to the compounds and four-wheel drives which characterise the experience of many humanitarian settings for aid workers, part of Rmeil's attraction was not only the notion of being able to 'really

live,' but the ability to have, as many humanitarian workers put it to me, an 'authentic' Lebanese experience. A Mar Mikhael property developer, quoted by Andrew Arsan (2018: 242) best sums up what was meant by this vision of authenticity: befriending 'the man'kouche[15] salesman from the Nile', learning words in Armenian, or playing backgammon with the hairdresser's friends. The presence of wealthy humanitarian staff members, of course, was implicated in the accelerating process of gentrification described by Krijnen (2016) in Geitawi and Mar Mikhael. The high rents they were willing to pay, and their ready disposable incomes were quickly pricing the man'kouche salesman and hairdresser out of their own neighbourhood.

Merlyn Thomas has explored the search for authenticity among travellers to the global South, and Lebanon in particular, noting a trend among people visiting Beirut to think that 'unless they see the grittier side of life, they feel they've been fed a lie' (Thomas 2018). Claims of authenticity were a regular occurrence in my conversations with aid workers about Beirut, but such claims were often hotly contested. While a number of European aid workers told me that they liked living in the Gemmayze/Mar Mikhael area, because it's French-style turn-of-the-century architecture felt 'more authentic' in comparison with the modern tower blocks in other areas of the city, many of those who had been in Beirut longer felt differently. Authenticity began, perhaps, to ring a little hollow when one was continually running into the same, finite group of other aid workers and journalists drinking flat whites in the cafes of Gemmayze and Mar Mikhael. Many of these 'older hands' instead idealised Tripoli, Lebanon's second city in the north of the country, as representing 'authenticity'. At a party one night, I was in conversation with two European aid workers, one of whom had just been on a trip to the north of the country. She remarked: 'We love Tripoli. It's our favourite place in Lebanon. It's not like Beirut, it's a *real* city.' 'Well, it's an *Arab* city' her friend responded. Their perspectives contrasted sharply with a conversation I'd had with a Lebanese friend the previous month. This friend, who was not involved with the aid sector, had remarked, 'I love Tripoli. It's small, the people there are very traditional, very sweet. It's not a real city, not like Beirut'. While for my Lebanese friend, modernity, cosmopolitanism and size were what defined a real city, for the European aid workers it was precisely the opposite. For a place to feel like a real Lebanese city to them, it seemed it was necessary for it to feel distinctively 'other,' untouched by the creeping forces of globalisation. The implication was that Beirut was not an Arab city and did not feel sufficiently Other to be 'real'.

The search for authenticity thus prompted some few humanitarians to venture outside the constellations I describe above, in their thirst to experience the 'real' Lebanon or the 'real' Beirut.

[15] A man'kouche is a cheap bread-based snack, popular and widely available throughout Lebanon

Security restrictions varied according to the organisation, and for some members of humanitarian staff – notably those working for embassies – certain areas of Beirut and Lebanon were off-limits. It was a rite of passage for these staff members to undertake clandestine visits to the roman ruins at Baalbek in the Beqaa valley in the days before the final departure from the country. Others took pride in seeking out areas of Beirut that were off the beaten track. Mid-way through my field work my brother came to visit, attending a party hosted by a number of international humanitarians. When chatting to him about his experience of Beirut so far, one European aid worker entreated my brother to take a taxi to Shatila – one of the Palestinian refugee camps in the south of Beirut – and go for a walk around it, in order to 'see what life here is really like'. Not all humanitarians agreed with this approach however, and the aid worker's suggestion earned him a sharp rebuke from a colleague – also European – who stated unequivocally: 'you don't do tourism in refugee camps.' I was hardly immune from these dynamics, of course. Even if I was critical of seeking out danger or engaging in poverty tourism, I still felt the need to regularly escape the well-worn humanitarian constellations of Achrafieh and Rmeil. I would often spend Saturdays wandering the streets of Bourj Hammoud, the Armenian district just over the river from my flat. I jumped at any chance to accompany friends who knew the city better than me on trips to go antique shopping in Bashoura or watching the horse racing in Mazraa. Such practices were a search for authenticity too.

When trying to engage critically with certain humanitarian friends on these practices, they raised a different kind of longing for authenticity. Being able to 'really live' had left some humanitarians doubting the extent to which they were really following their vocation. One told me unequivocally that his next job would be 'a real hardship posting', while another told me that Beirut had 'corrupted' him, and spoke with longing about his next posting in southern Africa, where there would be considerably fewer amenities and where he could rediscover a purity of purpose. 'There'll be nothing for me to do there.' He told me, 'I'll just read my books'. What these friends had in common was that they rarely had the opportunity to spend any time in 'the field' – the spaces that humanitarian programmes were actually implemented. When all their time was spent 'really living', they began to lose their grip on what it meant to be a humanitarian. The practices of project implementation were just as important in forming the humanitarian landscape as the practices of leisure and office-based work.

Mapping the Field: Spaces of Safety and Danger

'The field', or *al-arḍ* in Arabic, constituted a very different set of constellations in Beirut. Darryl Stellmach (2020) has described the shifting nature of the humanitarian field: for staff sitting in headquarters in New York, London or Geneva, Beirut is the field. But once in Beirut, the field shifts again. Often, the field meant areas outside Beirut, the Informal Tented Settlements inhabited by Syrians, for example. But the field was also to be found within Beirut itself. According to the organisations who implemented in Beirut, the 'field' within the city encompassed the main Palestinian refugee camps along with a number of other socio-economically deprived areas of the city: Mar Elias camp, Bourj el Barajneh camp, Tariq-el-jedideh, Cité Sportive, Ghobeiry and Shatila camp to the south-west of Beirut, Bourj Hammoud and Sin el-Fil to the far east of the city and Chiah in the south were all areas I visited with humanitarian organisations. The boundaries of field and non-field, go and no-go zones were wrapped up in discourses of safety and danger – not unlike the anthropological conceptualisation of 'the field' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). In his exploration of designated global spaces of safety and danger, Ruben Andersson (2019: 17) has called for a move away from a focus on maps, to a focus *mapping*, the process of defining safety and danger, and the ways in which such processes go hand in hand with political action. In this section, I explore the ways that Beirut is mapped by humanitarians into living zones and field zones, in other words, spaces of safety and spaces of danger.

When I arrived in Beirut, I began to do my own version of mapping. As soon as I had my bearings, I began to walk everywhere I could. This decision stemmed primarily from a visceral hatred of sitting in stationary traffic, an occupational hazard of trying to get anywhere in Beirut by car or bus. But as De Certeau (1988) has suggested in 'walking out', and as Merabet (2014) and Arsan (2018) confirm with respect to Beirut, it also gave me a different perspective on the city I was living in. Indeed, perhaps it too was a search for my own version of authenticity. My walking routes took me all over the city, including to areas I would never have otherwise visited. There was one walk that proved to be somewhat instructive in understanding how humanitarians mapped the city. While, as I have noted, the vast majority of humanitarian agencies housed their headquarters in Achrafieh, downtown or Hamra, UNHCR had recently moved to Jnah, a residential suburb in the south west of the Mousaitbeh district. Over the course of my research I had to travel there on several occasions to conduct interviews. Hailing a shared taxi (*service*) willing to go so far south was nigh on impossible, and hiring a private cab would have cost at least $15 for a return journey, so I decided to walk. It was not a short or easy walk, being some six kilometres and crossing several major highways, but it was an interesting one. My route took me from my flat in the eastern most

corner of Rmeil through a number of different residential neighbourhoods, including several that I had never had cause to visit in the course of my daily interactions with humanitarian organisations. One of the landmarks I noted in passing was an UNRWA school. I assumed this meant I was passing through an area with a high Palestinian population but thought little more of it than that.

A couple of months later, I was invited by an INGO to accompany their staff to 'the field'. I met them at their office in downtown Beirut and climbed into a car with three staff members. I was told that we were heading to the Mar Elias Palestinian refugee camp. As it was the first visit for the team, they didn't know the route. When we neared the destination, the driver tried to find the UNRWA school where the forum was to be held, but was unable to locate it. At some point, I realised that the road we were on was on my route to Jnah and managed to direct the driver to the school. The staff members – all Lebanese – were appalled and shocked when they realised that I had walked through the area on my own: 'You didn't experience any problems? You were lucky,' they told me. In my ignorance, I had transgressed the fragile boundaries of safety and danger in the humanitarian landscape of the city.

Another trip with this INGO took me to Cité Sportive, a neighbouring district with a high proportion of Palestinian inhabitants. When we took a lunch break, having signed the NGO's safety protocols meant that I was not allowed to go out to collect the sandwiches with the Lebanese staff members, and was instead asked to stay inside the community centre with the only European member of staff. The organisation placed higher security restrictions on non-Lebanese nationals travelling under its protection. The implication was that the lives of international and Lebanese staff were understood differently by the NGO. When they were explained to me, the security restrictions were couched in language of risk: walking around 'field' zones was riskier for non-national staff than it was for nationals. But the rationality underpinning this risk assessment was never made clear, and the protocols therefore functioned in a way that appeared to place greater value on the lives of international staff, a phenomenon by no means confined to Lebanon (Andersson 2019; Fassin 2012). While the staff members in Cité Sportive were keen that I follow the security protocol for my own protection – and perhaps theirs, and their job security too – other aid workers took a very different approach to mapping. One staff member for a national NGO told me with outrage about European aid workers who would not enter Shatila, the Palestinian refugee camp, because their security protocols considered it too dangerous. 'What does that say about the lives of the people who live there?' she asked me.

Palestinian camps were routinely demarcated as 'field' and spaces of danger within the humanitarian landscape. Though Palestinian communities were heavily securitised in Lebanon, as we saw in the introduction, because of a fear of violence, what I saw enacted in the practices of humanitarian staff members of this INGO suggested fear of something rather different. In the community centre in Mar Elias camp, hand sanitizer was in near constant use. When one member of staff began coughing, another cautioned her that she was bound to get sick, being 'in the heart of the camp' every day. Another told me about her academic background studying biological terrorism, and how she was reminded of it every time she walked through the area and observed the practices of its meat vendors, a conversation which brought to mind Mary Douglas' observations about purity and danger (1966). These practices around hygiene and cleanliness were a kind of mapping in themselves, demarcating certain area as dangerous, a health hazard. Another, perhaps less pernicious, example came a few days later, when I visited an informal tented settlement outside of Beirut with a different NGO. It had been raining heavily, and the ground around the tents was deep mud. On our way back to the office, the driver stopped at a car wash, where we turned the pressure hose on our boots, literally cleaning the camp off us before our return to the city.

Another area routinely mapped as 'dangerous' within the humanitarian landscape was Dahiya. Nadya Sbaiti (2010) has chronicled the way that Dahiya, an area in south Beirut which was widely known for being a 'stronghold' of Hezbollah, has been described in various tourism guides to the city. Indeed, one such guide described by Sbaiti, *Beyroutes: A Guide to Beirut* (2010, cited in Sbaiti 2010) had a special pull-out 'survival guide' to the suburb, which painted a picture of a chaotic, anarchic danger zone, peppered with caricatures of large, poverty-stricken Shi'a families. As Sbaiti points out, such descriptions belie the socio-economically diverse reality of the suburb, which plays host to middle- and upper-middle-class residents as well as poorer ones. In reality, many of the aspects of life in Dahiya the guide is advising the tourist on how to 'survive', such as power cuts, traffic jams and petty crime, are to be found in the vast majority of Beirut (and indeed, many other urban centres the world over). Nevertheless, mapping of Dahiya as dangerous was enacted in the practices of all international humanitarian organisations. Indeed, whenever I visited Lebanon in the course of my work for DFID, my journey from the airport to the hotel was always conducted in an armoured vehicle, precisely because the airport road traversed the suburb of Dahiya. Sbaiti notes that it is significant that Burj Hammoud, another suburb 'synonymous with a particular group' – Armenians – does not come in for the same exceptionalising treatment in the guide. The Armenian community, of course, is Christian.

Mapping in Beirut was intrinsically linked with mobility. Beirut is a highly securitised city and military checkpoints and roadblocks operate all over the city; often springing up or disappearing overnight, they are particularly present around the boundaries of zones of political control. It is also a site of huge inequalities, accommodating extraordinary wealth alongside severe poverty. Monroe (2016) has described the dynamic by which securitisation in Beirut coalesces with this wealth inequality, disproportionately impacting those who are already disenfranchised. The ability to pass through checkpoints and roadblocks, she notes, often rests on presentations of class, wealth and membership of particular social groups. Visual markers like dress, hairstyle and mode of transportation play an important role in determining mobility in the city. Cars, and especially 4x4s and armoured vehicles, form an important part of the network through which spaces are mapped as 'field' or not. Humanitarian workers did not walk in 'field' zones, but were transported by vehicles. Cars, as Lisa Smirl (2015) has explored, are the means by which humanitarians carry their sense of safety with them when transgressing boundaries of safety and danger. They allow humanitarians carry their comfort around them, blocking out the heat, humidity and noise, a material enactment of the inequalities between aid workers and the communities they aim to support.

For those outside of the humanitarian network, these boundaries, and the senses of safety and danger that come with them, operated differently. Safety for one group of people spells danger for another. A number of Lebanese friends from Muslim backgrounds told me that, though things were changing, in previous years they had feared going into Achrafieh. One friend recounted that, in spite of overwhelming fear, she had forced herself to visit a friend there after the war because, 'if we don't make the change, who will?'. Another friend told me about a colleague, a north American citizen of Lebanese background, who was housed in Achrafieh by her INGO employer. She had invited her Lebanese cousin over to visit, but when her cousin arrived, she was not wearing her hijab, out of fear that if she presented as visibly Muslim, she might be attacked in this predominately Christian part of the city. For Syrian refugees, the majority of whom do not have legal residency, areas such as Achrafieh and Rmeil are some of the most dangerous parts of the city, given the prevalence of security forces, and the accompanying risk of arrest and detention. Syrians and Palestinians, particularly those who were working-age men, have nothing like the mobility enjoyed by humanitarians, and their presence in the humanitarian constellations of Beirut, as we shall see in the next section, is strictly marshalled.

Transgressions: Marshalling the Boundaries

Worldmaking by humanitarians in Beirut is a continuous process, and its product is fragile. In the course of their daily lives, humanitarians had various encounters that shaped their landscapes. Our encounters, as Tsing has noted, change us and our world-making projects (2015: 27). Certain encounters I witnessed during my fieldwork were notable for the way they shaped the humanitarian landscape, practices which struck me as a kind of marshalling of the boundaries. Incursions on this space came in various forms, but the most striking to me were impromptu encounters between international humanitarian staff members and Syrians. These encounters were not in 'the field' but in the constellations of living and office zones, primarily in Achrafieh, Saifi and Rmeil. One of the earliest instances I witnessed of an aid worker marshalling the boundaries of the space came just a month or so into my field work. I was invited out for a dinner by a European staff member for an INGO. What follows is an edited extract from my research diary:

> 'I went out with S [an INGO staff member] and her friends from [UN organisation] on Saturday night. When we were walking in the street after dinner we were approached by a Syrian man and his son selling water. K [a UN staff member] felt some kind of benevolence towards him and bought his remaining 6 bottles of water. When he then followed us down the street, she became angry. She thought he was asking for more money, and began shouting at him and at us, saying she'd given him more than enough. A bottle of water costs 500 lira, and she'd given him something like 10,000. He didn't speak English, and when I asked him in Arabic what was wrong, he responded that his wife was sick, his father had died… there was a long list of other family members in need of support, I was overwhelmed and have now forgotten the details. The other girls were asking me what the issue was, but they were angry and a little drunk and the situation was escalating, all the while the man was telling me his story, with his young son at his side. I completely froze, unable to translate, but eventually managed to get something out. Later, S, who had remained fairly calm and who also speaks a little Arabic, said 'it's something I never quite know how to handle.'

Another encounter took place while I was sitting in Starbucks, Sassine doing an interview with the Country Director for an INGO, who was telling me about his organisations work with Syrians in Lebanon. At some point, we were approached by a little girl, probably 6 or 7 years old and almost certainly Syrian, who held out her hands and asked us for money. The Country Director

fastidiously ignored her and carried on talking as though she didn't exist. Caught between frantically trying to write down everything the Country Director was saying, and wanting to engage with her, I again froze, all too aware of the $8 coffees on the table. After a few seconds, the men on the next table over noticed her and started yelling at her in Arabic to leave the café. I tried to motion to them to stop, that it was ok, but she had already fled. The Country Director continued talking as if nothing had happened.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I began trying to discuss such encounters critically during my interviews with aid workers. I recounted these moments of marshalling during one interview with a UN staff member, and he responded with a story of his own:

> The single worst and I think most disgusting reaction I've seen of someone was from a woman who works at [INGO]. She was approached by a [Syrian] flower seller while outside a bar in Mar Mihkael, and she just did this awful – and I watched the whole thing and the flower seller did not… you know, he was a kid. He was not being predatory as far as I could see – and the way she reacted was as if she needed to be protected from some kind of infection that was trying to attack her. She physically recoiled into a wall … it was so fucking horrible. And then her friend, who's British-Lebanese, kind of shouted at this poor flower seller, and… the whole thing was just really horrible.'

These anecdotes again recall Douglas' observations on purity and danger (1966). For the humanitarians described here, danger came in the form of Syrians – mostly children – 'out of place': outside a bar, in Mar Mikhael; outside a restaurant on Monot street; in Starbucks. These places were at the epicentre of the constellations where humanitarians considered themselves able to 'really live'. Being confronted by the consequences of the Syrian conflict on their nights out or during their mid-morning coffee was not something they were willing to countenance. Wilfully ignoring someone who is asking for money is not an uncommon practice in any part of the world, as anyone who has taken a tube journey in London will recognise. Neither, unfortunately, are actions born of fear or anger. David Graeber, inspired by the work of bell hooks (1992), has described this phenomenon as a lopsided exercise in imagination, or 'interpretive labour'. While 'those at the bottom of a social ladder spend a great deal of time imagining the perspectives of, and genuinely caring about, those on top,' he tells us, when those on top are confronted with unrelenting poverty, 'otherwise sympathetic observers are simply overwhelmed and are forced, without realising it, to blot out their existence entirely' (2015: 72). What was striking in these instances though, was that improving the lives of Syrians was what these staff members were paid

to do, the majority of them considering it a vocation. But for these humanitarians, suffering was geographically bounded to 'the field'. Encounters with it outside of the area they had specifically designated it to exist within were met with strict marshalling.

The marshalling practices of international humanitarian staff members coexisted and interacted with marshalling practices towards Syrians in Lebanon more generally. Prejudice towards Syrians was commonplace in the Lebanese population (Arsan 2018; Moussawi 2017), and this extended to Lebanese humanitarian staff members too, though undoubtedly to a lesser extent. Nevertheless, a number of international aid workers I spoke to were extremely concerned about the issue, and one advised me to focus my entire doctoral research project on it. His senior staff had had to perform a number of interventions with field staff in response to incidents of prejudice, and they had provided extensive training on the issue. He remained suspicious about what went on when he couldn't be present. In evidencing his own perspective, another aid worker described a conversation he'd had the previous day with one of his Lebanese colleagues: for lunch, he'd suggested that they go to a restaurant which was a social enterprise, employing Syrians to cook the food. His colleague had vigorously demurred. 'She told me "No, we can't go there. They might spit in the food! They hate us!" I heard my own fair share of throwaway comments over the course of my research, too. While casually chatting to one humanitarian worker about how to fit exercise in around work, she mentioned that she didn't feel safe walking around her neighbourhood in the mountains above Beirut at night anymore: 'because there are no streetlamps, and there are a lot of Syrian workers in this area now'.

I do not wish to give the impression that all aid workers engaged in such severe marshalling practices. Two of these examples were notable for their severity and indeed the discomfort they inspired in those around them. I also witnessed aid workers responding to such encounters with grace and kindness, an extraordinarily difficult thing to do given the inherent power dynamics. These were the examples I ultimately tried – however imperfectly – to emulate in my own behaviour. But these instances were, unfortunately, the minority. The vast majority of encounters I witnessed mirrored the second encounter described here – pretending it wasn't an encounter at all. It exposes, if nothing else, the deep inequalities ingrained in the humanitarian landscape, the work that humanitarians do to maintain a sense of ease in their everyday lives, and the work that Syrians and others outside of the humanitarian network must do when they are forced to engage with it.

What Makes a Humanitarian?

At the beginning of the chapter, when I asked my friend about places *humanitarians* go, the reader may have noticed that he responded by talking to me about '*expats'*. Such an elision was common, but it is worth investigating. Tsing reminds us that selves emerge from histories of contamination: 'The evolution of our "selves" is already polluted by histories of encounter… The diversity that allows us to enter collaborations emerges from histories of extermination, imperialism, and all the rest. Contamination makes diversity.' (2015b: 29). The observation is pertinent when considering categories such as 'humanitarian', 'national' or 'expat' in Beirut. Being an expat denotes being 'not-from-here,' but the category occludes a more complicated reality. Expat in the sense that my friend used the word did not simply mean ex-patriate, but foreigners of particular origins, and doing particular kinds of work. The many foreigners in Beirut who hailed from the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia and elsewhere, who cleaned houses and streets, who built apartment blocks and cared for the children of wealthy families, were called expats by precisely no one. They were called migrant workers, and their existence in the city was precarious and fraught with threat. Foreigners in Beirut who hailed from the UK, Sweden, France and the US, who designed needs assessments and logframes, who wrote articles for newspapers and analysed conflict dynamics, were not called migrant workers despite the fact that they had, of course, migrated to work. They were called expats, or increasingly 'international,' as a growing discomfort with the term expat prevailed. Their existence in the city was characterised, as I have already discussed, by wealth, cultural consumption, and a general sense of safety. The distinction, in other words, was class-based and racialised (Cranston 2017; Fechter and Walsh 2010; Knowles and Harper 2009; Leonard 2010).

Despite the widespread racialisations in understandings of who foreign aid workers were, however, many international aid workers in Beirut were, of course, not white. Benton (2016) has explored the experiences of African expatriates doing humanitarian work in African countries, and the ways in which their professional lives are racialised. In Beirut, for non-white foreign nationals, the experience of the humanitarian landscape could also be racialised, though in a different way to the dynamics Benton describes. A couple of months into my time in Beirut, I met up with a friend who was of South Asian origin. I had been running late that morning and left the house without ironing my shirt. When I arrived, I apologised for the dishevelled state of my clothing. She laughed and then observed: 'I can't do that. I have to dress smartly, otherwise I get mistaken for a domestic worker.'

Migrant domestic workers in Beirut, as I have indicated, lived an extremely precarious existence in Lebanon, subject to the *kafāla* system of sponsorship, under which many domestic workers are confined to the home, with their passports withheld, at significant risk of detention or deportation should they attempt to leave without the authority of the employer. A recent Amnesty International report found that migrant domestic workers were subject to 'significant and consistent patterns of abuse' (2019b: 5), findings consistent with those of diplomatic missions from the labour-sending countries of Ethiopia, Kenya, the Philippines and Sri Lanka.[16] Being mistaken for a domestic worker thus put this friend at heightened risk. Her offhand comment exposed the extent to which my relative mobility and sense of safety in Beirut – and those of the majority of international humanitarian staff – were contingent on whiteness, contrary to what the security protocols described earlier in the chapter would have us believe. This friend later talked to me in more detail about her experience of living in Beirut. In her short time in the city, she had experienced regular incidences of sexual harassment and racism, including incidents which had threatened her physical safety. She reflected:

> '[Before I came to Beirut] I'd heard that it was super liberal, in comparison to lots of places in the Middle East: In terms of what you're allowed to wear, in terms of alcohol. Everyone says that it's a party city […]. Did it meet my expectations? It let me down in some ways. I feel like everyone who I'd talked to, I realise now looking back… they were all white [laughs] they were white, so I think the experience is very, very different. In terms of what you can wear as a woman– people told me, 'wear what you want, you'll be fine' and I just have not found that to be the case.'

In addition to race, gender also clearly played an important role in terms of the kinds of harm that she felt more exposed to, through wearing particular kinds of clothes. Status also played a role. This friend volunteered with a national, rather than international, NGO and as a result, she was not afforded the luxuries that many international aid workers get – free housing in an affluent area and a car or private taxi firm at their disposal – which smooth their mobility in the city. She travelled mainly on foot and in buses and shared taxis. The coalescence of her status, gender and ethnicity combined with widespread racism and violence towards migrant workers in Beirut in a

[16] Though migrant workers are undoubtedly subject to significant abuse, there are movement of resistance against the *kafāla* system. Anti-Racism Movement (ARM) is a grassroots collective of migrant workers and Lebanese activists in Lebanon. They have collected many testimonies detailing the experiences of migrant workers in Lebanon, which can be found on their website: https://www.armlebanon.org/testimonies [accessed 27th January 2020]. For ethnographic work which challenges narratives of victimhood among migrant workers in Lebanon, see Fernandez and De Regt (2014); Mansour-Ille and Hendow (2018); Moukarbel (2009); Pande (2012, 2013, 2018).

way that required her to put in much extra work in order to ensure her own safety and well-being in the city. Put simply, the ability to engage in the practices of 'really living' in the humanitarian landscape of Beirut, was deeply affected by intersections of race, gender, and status (Crenshaw 1991).

The distinction between international and national in the context of Lebanon was also complicated. A sizeable proportion of the senior humanitarian workers I met in Beirut were dual passport holders: Lebanese-American, Lebanese-Canadian and Lebanese-Australian among other combinations of nationality. Even among those senior Lebanese staff members who weren't dual nationality holders, many had been educated abroad, at degree or post-graduate level, or had spent part or the whole of their childhoods abroad, their families having fled the war in the 1980s. What was notable, however, was that I only really met people like this in Beirut, and they always occupied more senior positions within humanitarian organisations. Dual nationality and education abroad were markers of socio-economic privilege, and the ability to speak fluent English and usually French was a prerequisite for most high-ranking humanitarian jobs (see e.g. Roth 2019). For these humanitarian staff members, the humanitarian landscape in Beirut was not necessarily dissimilar than the landscape of their non-national colleagues. When I asked some staff members who I'd accompanied to Mar Elias camp if they'd ever visited this area outside of their humanitarian work, for example, their answer was no. They referred to the area as *al-arḍ* and moved around it in air-conditioned vehicles in just the same way that international staff did. For other staff members, however, and particularly those recruited and working outside Beirut, the 'field' could also be home. The practicalities of living in Beirut and travelling to other areas for only short periods of time means that this aspect of the humanitarian landscape is a gap in this study. The experiences of these staff members, and their interactions with the mapping and marshalling practices of their colleagues would certainly merit further critical attention.

Beyond Beirut

So far in this chapter, I have focussed on the humanitarian landscape in Beirut. But the majority of implementation of humanitarian projects took place outside Beirut. The major humanitarian hubs outside of Beirut were Tripoli, up the coast from Beirut; the Akkar region, further north still on the border with Syria; Zahle, the city at the 'gateway' to the Beqaa valley, Saida, (Sidon) down the coast from Beirut, and Sour (Tyre) in the very south of the country. The largest hubs, corresponding to the largest communities of refugees, were in Zahle, Tripoli and Akkar. Most major humanitarian organisations had 'field offices' in at least one and often all of these locations.

They were the offices out of which the majority of programmes were actually implemented, with populations swelling in the morning and late afternoon, before and after the field staff ventured out to do their work. While many field staff were recruited from the local area, a significant number of Lebanese staff came from elsewhere in the country. These 'in-pats,' as they were occasionally called, were often young graduates cutting their professional teeth, sometimes unsuccessful in securing the coveted and competitive Beirut-based roles. Senior and specialist roles in the field offices were taken by more experienced Lebanese staff and international staff members.

I had the opportunity to get to know the humanitarian landscapes in Tripoli and Zahle in particular, where I stayed for more extended periods of time while visiting field offices for interviews and observations. In Tripoli I usually stayed with a friend who worked for the UN. He lived in an apartment block in Mina – technically a separate port city in its own right, but adjacent to the main city of Tripoli, and a demographically diverse, though predominately Christian orthodox area. The block, a beautiful old municipal building that had been converted into a series of one and two-bed apartments, was almost exclusively inhabited by humanitarian staff. Some were Lebanese members of staff who had moved to Tripoli for work, and some were from Europe or north America. However, the friend I was staying with told me that the majority of international humanitarian staff – and UN staff in particular – lived some 15km south of Tripoli in a resort called Anfeh. 'And when I say in a resort, I mean *in an actual resort*,' he told me. Eschewing the charms of Mina, these staff members chose to live year-round on the Mediterranean beach resort, complete with swimming pools, a cinema and an on-site shop, driving to Tripoli each day for work. For those that did choose to live or socialise in the city, certain areas of Tripoli were 'off limits' according to the protocols of most international humanitarian organisations. Travel to these neighbourhoods – namely Bab-at-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen, between whose respective Sunni and Alawi-majority communities there had been recurrent outbreaks of conflict, much exacerbated by the conflict in Syria – involved significant amounts of paperwork and security protocols and was not to be undertaken outside of work commitments.

The dynamics in Zahle were different again. The largest Christian city in Lebanon, the city itself came with none of the narratives of unsafety associated with areas of Beirut or Tripoli. As in Tripoli, a number of Lebanese 'in-pats' had moved to Zahle for work. Humanitarians without family ties in the area, whether Lebanese or not, tended to socialise with one another in one of the city's bars, hiking or taking trips to local vineyards on their days off. Zahle was also the headquarters for programmes being managed in the Beqaa valley, which included areas under the jurisdiction of Hezbollah. Working in Hezbollah-controlled areas was a significant draw for

humanitarians who considered Lebanon's extensive social and cultural possibilities anathema to the humanitarian vocation. One senior humanitarian reminisced fondly about his risk-filled negotiations with the local Hezbollah leaders, telling me it was the most fun he'd had since arriving in Lebanon. After the dangers of working in Gaziantep in Turkey, he found 'safe' Zahle pretty boring. Nevertheless, Lebanon was a small country and humanitarian offices in both Zahle and Tripoli existed under the considerable shadow of Beirut. The capital held a strong gravitational pull and staff members who were not local to the area often returned to Beirut on weekends to stay with friends or family and take advantage of everything on offer there, an 'indulgence that people come down to engage with,' as one humanitarian put it.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sketched a portrait of the humanitarian landscape in Beirut. It is a portrait of a particular moment in time, and it has changed significantly in the time since I have left.[17] What it shows is that humanitarian networks, made up of people, air conditioned offices and cars, actively worked to map the landscape, zoning some areas as safe, and others as dangerous through everyday practice and movement. Humanitarians marshalled its boundaries vigorously, responding to perceived incursions with anger, fear and strategic silence. Membership in the network was predicated on race, nationality and social class, but even those who existed outside it were compelled to navigate it nonetheless. In spite of these mapping and marshalling practices, the humanitarian landscape in Beirut was neither bounded nor static. It intersected and overlapped with recent and less recent histories as well as contemporary socioeconomic dynamics. Humanitarians contributed to the socio-material fabric of their surroundings through their practices. Their wealth and spending practices were heavily implicated in the 'gentrification' processes that had taken place in Rmeil and more recently in the Furn ech-Chebbak and Badaro areas. Their use of amenities such as private beaches and exclusive sea-front hotel pools was likewise implicated in Lebanon's much-discussed processes of privatisation (Baumann 2016).

These dynamics form the background to the classification, assessment, targeting and empowerment programmes that we will explore in the following chapters. Humanitarian networks are entangled, socially, politically and historically, in their surroundings. In the following chapters

[17] Many of the 'living zones' I describe in this chapter, particularly Mar Mikhael and Geitawi, were close to the epicentre of the explosion that took place in Beirut's port on 4 August 2020. Few people in the city were unaffected. Homes, shops and cafes were destroyed in the blast, and parts of the area remained uninhabitable close to a month later. I reflect on these changes more fully in the Conclusion of the thesis.

I will shift the focus from mapping and marshalling to the practices involved in implementation, the messy, everyday ways in which humanitarian aid gets done.

3. Foundations of Seeing: Humanitarian Classification

وأنتم أيها الضيوف ختيلوا أن كل
شخص ترونه يناديكم الجئ
وخيتفي إسمكم إبل األبد
ماذا سيكون أحساسكم عندها؟؟؟؟؟ .

And you, visitors, imagine that
everyone you meet calls you "Refugee",
your name evaporates forever.
How would you feel then?????

Jamal Ibrahim Al-Abboud, age 13. From *Haneen*, a collective work of Syrian and Lebanese artists on the impact of war on childhood.

January 2018, and in Tripoli, north Lebanon, it was cold and raining. I was spending the day accompanying two Protection Officers from an NGO on their monitoring visits. Hagop, the driver, took Basma, Jad and me out towards the suburbs of the city. We each had a computer tablet, onto which a Protection Monitoring survey was uploaded. This survey was designed to ascertain the 'protection needs' of the Syrian population in Lebanon. This involved ascertaining the extent to which their rights were being respected, their access to assistance, and whether they were subject to any risk of violence. Jad and Basma used their tablets to input answers as interviewees gave them. The completed surveys would then be uploaded in the database to be analysed by the Protection Coordinator. I used my tablet simply to follow along with the assessment. We pulled up outside what looked like a block of garages – single story concrete blocks with rusting metal doors. We got out of the car and Jad knocked on the first door, stamping his feet and tucking his chin into his NGO-and-donor-branded coat to keep out the cold. His arms were wrapped around his tablet. No answer. We moved on to the next door. A teenage boy opened the door cautiously. Basma took the lead, explaining who we were, and then asking him if his parents were home. 'My mum' he answered, 'but she doesn't hear very well.' Basma asked him how old he was, he answered that he was 16. Jad explained to me in a low voice that they were not allowed to interview anyone under the age of 18. Basma suggested we move on, but the boy stopped her, telling her that if they could ask him the questions, he could relay them to his mum, and she could answer.

Basma agreed, and the boy's mother came to the door. She invited us in – it was still raining, and the cold air was doubtless coming in through the open door – but Jad and Basma politely declined.

They later told me that they didn't like to intrude. In any case, it was polite to take one's shoes off when entering someone's home, and in winter this involved pulling off large heavy boots, which took some time. It was quicker and easier to stand outside, notwithstanding the freezing conditions. Basma began to go through the survey, periodically wiping the raindrops off her screen with her sleeve. She started off with the basic questions – the questions that all humanitarian organisations in Lebanon asked everyone they surveyed – which staff referred to as 'biodata'. What nationality were they? Were they registered with UNHCR? How many people lived in the household? What ages were they? Were they male or female?

A few questions later, we arrived at: 'Why did you leave Syria?' The proforma on the tablet required that three reasons must be given. Basma asked the question, and the boy relayed it to his mother, who responded: 'Our house was destroyed' and Basma selected 'destruction of property' from the multiple-choice list. 'And?' she prompted. The boy looked at her, questioningly. 'We need to put down three reasons' she explained. 'Our house was destroyed! what reason do you need beyond that?' he said, astonished. Undeterred, Basma prompted him, 'was there conflict where you were living?' The boy nodded, and she selected 'Civil unrest, armed conflict and/or insecurity in place of origin' from her multiple-choice list, then asked, 'and your family weren't able to provide for yourselves anymore in Syria?' 'Of course not,' the boy responded. Basma nodded, satisfied, and clicked 'Unable to meet basic needs' on her list.

We came to a question on whether there were 'people with specific needs' in the household. 'People with specific needs' was a nebulous term, often shortened by staff members to PWSN or PSN. It was classification used by humanitarian organisations in Lebanon to describe people who might require dedicated protection assistance. The broad classification included people falling under the equally nebulous categories of: children at risk; unaccompanied children; women at risk (including from gender-based violence); elderly people at risk; single parents or caregivers, disability-affected people, people with serious medical conditions, people with specific legal and physical protection needs and victims of torture. Rather than going through this long list, Basma asked if anyone in the household needed specific assistance – was anyone ill, for example? The boy answered no, thank god, no one was sick, and Basma checked 'none' on her tablet, notwithstanding the conversation we had just had about his mother's hearing impairment.

We continued through the survey, arriving at a section which was designed to establish whether there were any 'children at risk' in the household. After asking some questions about access to education and whether the boy was doing any paid work, Basma came to a question subtitled 'child abuse'. The question on the tablet was framed as follows: 'Are you witnessing any changes in your

child's wellbeing since your arrival in Lebanon? For example, physical illness, increased psychological distress, etc.' Basma looked at the question for a fraction of a moment, sighed, turned to the boy and asked: 'Do you remember the war?'

'Not really, thank god,' he answered, 'I was only eight or nine when we left.'

Basma nodded and clicked 'no' on the form.

*

Jad and Basma were both experienced Protection Assistants and had conducted this survey countless times over a period of many months. They were also, it became clear, skilled in rapidly translating the lived experiences of respondents into the classes and types that were available on their screens. The translation process was at times idiosyncratic, and if the assessment I witnessed that day was far from what managerial staff might consider a model of best practice, it was nevertheless fairly representative of the many imperfect assessments, the many rapid and less-than-ideal translations, that I would observe over the course of my fieldwork. Watching assessment staff attempt to translate the messy socio-material reality with which they were confronted into the classifications and categories provided on their screens often felt like a bizarre and reductive process. Not least because people rarely responded to questions in ways that fitted neatly into the confines of the multiple-choice answers provided. Questions such as 'did you arrive in Lebanon via a border crossing or informal routes?' often elicited long, detailed and sometimes emotional answers about the respondent's journey, their reasons for leaving and hardships faced along the way. These were details they felt it important for the NGO worker to know, and it cost considerable emotional labour to relive them. For the purposes of the survey, however, such details were extraneous to the data point that was needed: did the respondent arrive legally or 'informally' (read: illegally)? Experiences that did not fit into the limitations of the categories provided were simply noise in the data.

The work that Jad and Basma were doing that day was what Hacking (1986; 1999) has called kind-making, the work of sorting things into classifications and categories. Hacking argued that kind-making was an integral part of worldmaking, and that kinds – ideas, categories, classes – exist within matrices, the sociomaterial conditions within which they emerge and are continually shaped (1999: 10-11). He called this continual process of shaping a 'looping effect'. Categories, in other words, do not simply describe but actively help to produce the reality they are concerned with (see also Shore and Wright 1997). In humanitarian settings they have significant material influence,

dictating who has access to what kinds of assistance. In this chapter, I will explore humanitarian classification in practice, the networks or matrices within which certain categories emerge and the work that they do.

As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, categories constitute integral, though unruly, lodestones in the humanitarian landscape. When considering the process of classification in humanitarian settings it is important first to understand its purpose. Systems of classification are vital to the day to day functioning of humanitarian organisations. If humanitarian organisations are concerned with saving lives and reducing suffering, classification is the means by which they determine *who* is vulnerable, who is in need, and how to support them. Categories such as 'refugee,' 'unaccompanied child' or 'survivor of sexual or gender-based violence' help humanitarians make sense of the socio-material world they encounter. The questions Jad and Basma were asking – and the list of acceptable answers to them – were exclusively concerned with generating data on different kinds, classes and types of need. Without classification of vulnerability there would be no simple way to agree on the matter of who is in need of humanitarian assistance. Once categories are in place, they allow humanitarian organisations to *count* and communicate to donors the scale of need. How many refugees? How many unaccompanied children? How many survivors of sexual and gender-based violence? Without being able to count, there would also be no way to *compare* the needs in one area with those in another. If there are 50 refugees in one village and 10 in another, humanitarian organisations will decide that needs are greater in the first village and implement their programme there. Without the ability to compare, there would be no way for them to target their assistance. Finally, systems of classification allow humanitarian organisations to *measure* the success of a humanitarian intervention. How many survivors of sexual and gender-based violence have been assisted? They are the foundations upon which policies are written and enacted in practice (Bowker and Star 2000; Merry 2016; Shore and Wright 1997).

For all that they were integral to the functioning of humanitarian programmes, categories, as my experience with Jad and Basma shows, were also highly unruly. As highlighted in the introduction, the term refugee is one such unruly category, which Maja Janmyr (2016, 2018) has explored in detail in the context of Lebanon. As Janmyr outlines, the UN and other international humanitarian organisations recognise Syrians who have fled the conflict in their own country as refugees, in accordance with their understanding of international legal frameworks. The Government of Lebanon, on the other hand, is not party to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and as a result interprets its rights and obligations with respect to the Syrian population within its borders according to its own laws and regulations. The Lebanese Government refers to Syrians

who have fled to Lebanon as a result of the war not as refugees, but as 'temporarily displaced individuals' (*nazi̱ḥīn*). Living between the dual reality of these two categories, Janmyr demonstrates, leaves Syrians in a 'deeply precarious legal position' (2016: 78), forced to choose between leaving Lebanon or staying and accepting exploitation and marginalisation. Syrians themselves, as evidenced in the extract from Jamal Ibrahim Al-Abboud's poem with which I began this chapter, often associated the term 'refugee' with suffering, poverty and lack of dignity (see also Janmyr and Mourad 2018; Grandi, Mansour, and Holloway 2018). Anna Tsing reminds us that 'if categories are unstable, we must watch them emerge within encounters. To use category names should be a commitment to tracing the assemblages in which these categories gain a momentary hold' (2015b: 29). Throughout this thesis, I examine other practices – assessment, targeting and empowerment – which rely heavily on processes of classification. I inevitably use categories myself. This chapter, then, represents a commitment to tracing the assemblages around some of those categories; to understand how, why and when they are used, by whom and to what effect.

In this chapter I will explore three categories used to make displacement-affected peoples – and particularly Syrians – legible in Lebanon: 'Female-headed household', 'gender-based violence' and 'early and child marriage'. I came across many categories and systems of classifications over the course of my research, all of which would merit anthropological investigation, but I have chosen to focus on these three because they came up so regularly in my day-to-day research on protection and empowerment programmes, and because the configurations around them were particularly instructive in demonstrating the gendered ways in which humanitarians 'see' vulnerability and need. The networks surrounding 'female-headed household,' 'early and child marriage', and the GBVIMS demonstrate the power of expert knowledge within humanitarian schemes of legibility. The classifications are defined in deterritorialised spaces of international meeting rooms. They are then transported and translated via policy documents, frameworks and gender experts themselves and are situated in the context of the humanitarian response in Lebanon. Through these processes of transportation and translation, the networks around these systems of classification work to emphasise the importance of particular kinds of lived experience in categorising vulnerability and need, while erasing others. Experiences of individualised violence or the threat of individualised violence are highlighted and responded to, while experiences of systemic inequalities or structural violence are not captured, and therefore not responded to.

In any system of classification, there are always areas that are left 'wild, or in darkness, or even unmapped' (Bowker and Star 2000: 32). In this chapter I aim to approach each classification in light of the practices that surround it, and to attempt to highlight those areas left in darkness or

unmapped as they became clear to me in the course of my interviews and observations. Approaching each category in this manner is not enough, however. What about the non-categories? The categories that might have been, otherwise? At the end of this chapter, I explore one such non-category, which, in the style of UNHCR's people with specific needs categories, I have named 'man at risk.' I demonstrate how the intersections of being a working-age man, poor and a Syrian in Lebanon means being at particular kinds of risks. While some humanitarian actors are slowly beginning to recognise these risks, I argue that the relations that surround gender in the humanitarian response operate in such a way as to make recognising and responding to those risks extremely difficult. The needs of this group, in other words, were *illegible* to humanitarian actors.

Gender, Expert Knowledge and Language

Before we explore the categories in more detail, it is first worth examining the global and regional contexts within which these networks emerged. All of the categories described in this chapter are configured in gendered terms. Humanitarian organisations 'see' displacement-affected populations in highly gendered ways, and in this chapter, we will observe that gender is one of the primary lenses through which humanitarian organisations classify vulnerability and need in Lebanon. Notwithstanding many decades of scholarship, activism and labour and on the part of women's movements, collectives and gender theorists from the global South, the theoretical and ethical foundations of gender in development and humanitarian programmes remain deeply tied to successive waves of Northern feminist thought (Mohanty 1988; Mukhopadhyay 2016; Razavi and Miller 1995; Visvanathan 2011). The categories here reflect these foundations, which prioritise individualism, autonomy and equality (Merry 2016). The language and categories surrounding gender and gender equality in the international development and human rights context, as Lila Abu-Lughod has observed (2009), are consequently a type of what Talal Asad (1986) has called 'strong language' – language *into* which other languages must be translated.

What kind of work does a 'strong language' do? In 'The Concept of Cultural Translation,' Asad argued that fundamental transformations had taken place in modern standard Arabic over the 20th Century in order for it to more closely approximate – lexically, grammatically, semantically – European languages, thanks to the growing, unidirectional traffic of translation, including scientific, sociological and philosophical literatures from European languages into Arabic. He wrote:

> Such transformations signal inequalities in the power (i.e., in the capacities) of the respective languages in relation to the dominant forms of discourse that have been

> and are still being translated. There are varieties of knowledge to be learnt, but also a host of models to be imitated and reproduced. In some cases knowledge of these models is a precondition for the production of more knowledge; in other cases it is an end in itself, a mimetic gesture of power, an expression of desire for transformation (Asad 1986: 158).

In the decades since Asad wrote those words, a whole vocabulary has emerged in Arabic to approximate the (predominately English) language of gender theory, and in the last few years, this has coincided with a burgeoning aid industry in the Arab world, bringing with it its own 'strong language'. Roth (2019) has explored the hegemony of English as lingua franca within the aid industry, its colonial legacy, and the linguistic capital it confers on those that speak it. In Lebanon these dynamics came together to create a fixed strong language – in English – around gender in humanitarian settings. The strength of this language was such that conversations that I held during my research that were otherwise in Arabic were often littered with English terms like 'GBV'. Indeed, a gender dictionary was published by the Lebanon Support initiative (2016), which bilingually explores localised usages of gender terms such as 'patriarchy', 'feminism' and 'violence' in Lebanon, their transnational roots and journeys. Asad's observations are therefore particularly pertinent when it comes to humanitarian practices of classification in Lebanon. We will see in this chapter the ways in which knowledge of particular models – for example, of vulnerability, or of gender-based violence – is a prerequisite for the production of more knowledge, and the ways in which some knowledge is an end in itself. We will also see this 'strong language' of gender expertise in action, and the way that complex experiences and identities are translated *into* the codified and simplified categories and systems of classification I have outlined here.

Female-Headed Household

> *As an activist and development practitioner in the first instance, and a researcher in the second, I find it hard to talk about "Syrian women" as a category. In fact, I even find it difficult to discuss "married and widowed Syrian women, displaced to Lebanon, without their husbands" as an entity. Within the latter group, no woman I met perceived herself in the same way. No woman defined what it is to be a woman, let alone a woman heading a tent, in the same manner.*
>
> (Mhaissen 2014: 75)

A few weeks after my visits with Basma and Jad, I accompanied another pair of protection assistants, Heba and Khaled, while they did their rounds in a rural area in northern Lebanon. They

were undertaking the same protection monitoring survey as Basma and Jad. We drove to a small group of converted garages and newly refurbished flats and knocked on a couple of doors. They went through the questionnaires as usual, but after Heba and Khaled had spoken to a number of families, one of the men they'd already spoken to came over and had a quiet word with Heba. He gestured up a flight of stairs between two buildings. She nodded and motioned for me to join her, giving me a significant look. As we walked towards the stairs, she whispered in my ear: 'there is a female-headed household up there.'

The category 'female head of household', according to all the policy literature and guidance at least, indicated a household where a woman was the primary decision-maker. Usually, though not always, this also meant the primary income earner. In practice, however, it was interpreted near universally as a household where no adult male was present, and was used as a by-word for vulnerable, at-risk and in need of assistance. The category was closely related to the categories of 'woman at risk' and 'single woman at risk', which emerged from UNHCR's specific needs classification system: a 'standardized and exhaustive list of an individual's particular characteristics, background, or risks that may provoke protection exigencies' (UNHCR 2009: 2). This was the list of categories that was used as a basis for typologies of vulnerability within the humanitarian response. While many of the categories were too specific ('child engaged in worst forms of child labour') or too generic ('unmet basic needs') to be of much use in day to day implementation, female headed household had taken on a life of its own outside the specific needs classification system. It was regularly shortened to FHH in written documentation, and, despite its clunky formulation, was used in its full form in everyday speech, as evidenced by my interaction with Heba. Just as with GBV, female-headed household would always be articulated in English in conversations that were otherwise in Arabic

Heba's serious reaction to hearing about the woman up the stairs was rooted in her understanding of the female-headed-household as the exemplary humanitarian beneficiary, the most at-risk, the most vulnerable, the most in need of protection and support. She was far from alone in this. The female head of household was the Syrian quoted in the advocacy reports and the fundraising documents, the quota that had the be filled in any programme purporting gender parity. Heba's use of the category in its full form even in informal speech was demonstrative of the life it had taken on beyond the policy documents. She wanted me to see and understand what she considered to be the most important part of her job: reaching the most vulnerable and ensuring they had access to support. When we actually arrived at the top of the stairs, we were greeted by a self-possessed and confident woman, who, as it would turn out, was being financially supported by her

husband who was working in another part of the country. Not at all what I had been expecting based on Heba's introduction.

The way the category 'female-headed household' functioned in assessments varied. Depending on the survey being conducted, there would sometimes be a specific question on who the head of a household was. The way this question was asked depended on the member of field staff asking the question and the training they'd received. I regularly saw field staff answer this question themselves, without asking the respondent. If they were speaking to an adult male, for example, they would assume that he was the head of the household and click the 'adult male' option on their tablet. Alternatively, they might ask the question in a way that presumed male authority within the household. This happened particularly if the respondent was a woman. Rather than asking who the head of the household was, they would instead ask if the woman's husband lived in the household with them. This approach was mirrored in the data processing practices of the staff in head office, who, when dealing with data sets for assessments which did *not* ask who the head of household was, worked out the number of female-headed households by simply filtering out the households with an adult male present.

Occasionally, field staff – perhaps those who had been more recently (re)trained or who had more experience of surveying practices – asked the question as it was written in the assessment: 'who is the main decision-maker in the household?' On the rare occasions that I witnessed this, the answers were far more varied than the assumptions described above would suggest. Most commonly, men and women would answer that they and their spouse made decisions together. Depending on the structure of the household, older children, grandparents or adult siblings might also be involved. The forms did not allow for these options, of course, but rather asked for the age and gender of a single decision-maker for the whole household. Only once did I see a member of staff categorise a dual-parent household as female-headed. In that situation, the woman was the primary income earner and, she told the staff member, made the majority of financial decisions for the household. He wavered over the button on the tablet for a long time before clicking 'adult female' under the category 'key decision maker', clearly uncomfortable about the implications of what he had done.

The configurations around the category's use thus had some interesting data effects. 'Female-headed-household' in practice almost always meant single-parent household, while data on male-headed-households encompassed *both* single-parent households and households where two or more caregivers were present, without differentiating between the two. While UNHCR's specific needs codes theoretically encompassed single parents and caregivers, in practice, data on

households headed by a single male was rarely captured, and never presented in needs assessment reports. The data in the annual Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, for example, disaggregates data only by female-headed and male-headed, with the unwritten assumption being that female-headed households are also single parent households. While the data showed female-headed households to be more vulnerable than male-headed according to most (though not all) measures, there was no data on male-headed single parent households (UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP 2019). As such, it was impossible to differentiate between needs that came about as a result of being a single-parent household and needs that came about as a result of being a female head of household, with all the attendant consequences for single male parents. Later in the chapter, I will investigate the lack of classifications relating to men more generally within humanitarian typologies of vulnerability.

The category had significant material effects. Heba's reaction was not an uncommon one. I regularly saw staff members go out of their way to ensure that female-headed households were not overlooked when it came to receiving support. At the head office level, this meant the inclusion of the category as a heavily weighted metric in targeting formulae, which I describe in more detail in Chapter Five. In the field, it meant seeking out female-heads of households whom staff members had been informed about by neighbours, referring them to multiple sectors and organisations to ensure they had every opportunity to access support, or perhaps appealing against decisions where they had been excluded from a programme because a particular formula had found them ineligible. During my observations on a livelihoods programme, for example, the Livelihoods Counsellor selected female-headed households for the livelihoods pathway which provided a monthly stipend, telling me afterwards that they were the ones most in need of the financial assistance.

Gender-Based Violence

Having experienced, or being at risk of experiencing, gender-based violence was another fundamental marker of vulnerability within the humanitarian response in Lebanon, and in humanitarian responses globally. This marks a major shift from humanitarian responses of 30 years ago, and is a direct result of a growing body of evidence that gender-based violence increases in situations of disaster and conflict, and much advocacy on the part of activists within the humanitarian apparatus (Hyndman and De Alwis 2003; Williams 2004). Once responding to and preventing gender-based violence was included within the framework of humanitarian response, it had to be made legible – defined, understood and rendered manageable. The gender-based

violence information management system, or GBVIMS, is a tool used in these efforts towards legibility. The GBVIMS is now used globally for the collection, storage and sharing of data on gender-based violence in humanitarian response settings. Its creation story lies in a UNHCR evaluation of gender-based violence response programmes in Tanzania some twenty years ago. The evaluation team, to their horror, found that humanitarian organisations were using a range of different terminologies and classification systems for classifying gender-based violence, which were, the report stated, 'guided by subjective impressions and not by analysis of data and evaluation of intended outcomes' (GBVIMS 2019).

The classification tool was developed precisely because there was a great deal of variation between practitioners, organisations and contexts in how GBV incidents were being classified. According to the GBVIMS website: 'what one individual may classify as rape another may classify as domestic violence; what one organization may classify as forced marriage another organization may classify as sexual assault. This variation between and within organizations is negatively affecting the accuracy of GBV data and the effectiveness of inter-agency information sharing and coordination.' (GBVIMS 2016). The GBVIMS was thus 'created to *harmonise* GBV data' through, among other things, the use of 'six core GBV types that *standardize* GBV definitions for data collection purposes' [emphases added]. The tool's purpose, then, is to render a broad spectrum of incidents, behaviours and practices, that fall into the category 'gender-based violence,' commensurable and comparable. Much like the list of core indicators approved by the UN Security Council to define violence against women, whose genealogy was chronicled by Sally Engle Merry (2016), this process of commensuration smooths the complexity of gender-based violence and abstracts it from its socio-material landscape.

The six core GBV types as they were understood in the GBVIMS were as follows: rape; sexual assault; physical assault; forced marriage; denial of resources, opportunities or services; and psychological or emotional abuse. In order to classify an incident in the GBVIMS, a practitioner had to ask themselves a series of questions in the following order:

1. Did the reported incident involve penetration?

If yes, classify the GBV as "Rape". If no, proceed to the next GBV type on the list.

2. Did the reported incident involve unwanted sexual contact?

If yes, classify the GBV as "Sexual Assault". If no, proceed to the next GBV type on the list.

3. Did the reported incident involve physical assault?

If yes, classify the GBV as "Physical Assault". If no, proceed to the next GBV type on the list.

4. Was the incident an act of forced marriage?

If yes, classify the GBV as "Forced Marriage". If no, proceed to the next GBV type on the list.

5. Did the reported incident involve the denial of resources, opportunities or services?

If yes, classify the GBV as "Denial of Resources, Opportunities, or Services". If no, proceed to the next GBV type on the list.

6. Did the reported incident involve psychological/emotional abuse?

If yes, classify the GBV as "Psychological / Emotional Abuse". If no, proceed to the next GBV type on the list.

7. Did the reported incident involve GBV?

If yes, start over at number 1 and try again to reclassify the type of GBV (If you have tried to classify the GBV multiple times, ask your supervisor or GBVIMS focal point for support) If no, classify the violence as "Non-GBV"

From Appendix B – Classification Tool (GBVIMS n.d.)

In another extraordinary step of abstraction, each incident reported by a service provider could *only be classified as one type of GBV*. The first appropriate classification on the list was always the final classification of the incident. The GBVIMS fact-sheet, and indeed, all the staff members responsible for it whom I interviewed were keen to stress that the ordering of types was to ensure statistically comparable data, and, according to a footnote, was 'NOT intended to express an implied 'value' of the GBV types (i.e. rape is worse than forced marriage)' [emphasis in original] (GBVIMS n.d.: 3). The footnote was somewhat meaningless, given the nature of the tool and the way staff were trained to use it. If a person had experienced rape in the context of a forced marriage, the incident would be classified as rape. If a person had experienced rape, physical assault and psychological abuse in the context of a detention facility, that incident, too, would be classified as rape. The hierarchy was built firmly into the functionality of the tool, notwithstanding the intentions outlined in the footnote. At the time of this research the tool was in use in 25 countries and was used exactly the same way in each in order to gather data on GBV. The coordinator in Lebanon summed up the challenges and opportunities this presented: 'We really can't amend anything… it's a challenge and a limitation. When we engage new actors, they often say it doesn't work for them. But we all have the same understanding when it comes to sexual violence, it makes things super easy. We all have the same understanding, we all classify in the same way, we all have the same data points, so it's also a strength.' The strength, as this staff member saw it, was in being able to provide clear – and presumably therefore more compelling – data to inform policy and programmes.

Almost all humanitarian organisations in Lebanon who worked in gender-based violence response used this tool – including three major national NGOs. When I interviewed a staff member who worked on coordinating the tool in Lebanon, she was keen to stress that it was never used *during* a case management session, so as not to disrupt or affect the service, but was filled out afterwards. Staff responding to gender-based violence were given one 'admin' day each week, during which time they used their notes to enter each case as an incident in the information management system. She also emphasised that they never used data from the GBVIMS exclusively in any of their reports, but triangulated it with qualitative data from participating organisations. Nevertheless, the data carried significant weight; the coordinator told me that 70% of the SGBV section of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan – the key planning and strategy document for the humanitarian response in Lebanon – had been written using GBVIMS data.

Hacking has suggested that a concept is well understood if it is 'clear enough that one can go about asking the question "how many?"' (1999: 143). The interesting thing about the GBVIMS in Lebanon was that neither prevalence of GBV in the population nor incidence of GBV were ever released publicly. The answer to 'how many' was never given. Instead relative data points were provided, for example, the percentage of GBV incidents reported which were rape, the percentage of survivors who were under 18, or the average number of days between an incident taking place and someone reporting it. The primary reason for this reticence was data protection – the numbers of incidents and responding organisations in certain areas of Lebanon could be so low in some months that there was a real concern that individual cases might be identified. But the approach was also grounded in more fundamental belief about the way data should (not) be used in determining what services should be provided:

> 'Our argument is that we know that GBV is happening, and we don't need numbers to know that. Whether its five or a thousand cases, it's the same thing. It's a trend, and services need to be provided. If you use numbers, it turns it into an *indicator*. And people will say, for example, well that's a lot of money for only 10 survivors. We fund services so that people will feel able to come forward in the first place.'

The purpose of the tool, as stated above, was data collection, storage and comparison. But staff working in the GBV sector learnt to use it during their training and, I found in interviews, it had informed the way they conceptualised their daily work in a fundamental way. When I interviewed a gender-based violence Case Worker about her day-to-day work, for example, one of the first things she said to me was: 'You know there are six types of GBV?' before going on to list the types

according to the GBVIMS list. The neat typology had slipped beyond data collection, storage and comparison, and into her framework of understanding.

One of the more fascinating aspects to kind-making when it came to gender-based violence was the impact the humanitarian sector was having on the broader landscape in Lebanon. The phenomenon of gender-based violence existed in Lebanon and Syria before the humanitarian response, of course, as it does everywhere. While there is evidence that it increases in times of conflict and displacement, with the conflict in Syria being no exception (UN Economic and Social Comission for Western Asia 2015; UN Human Rights Council 2018; Freedman 2016), it was crucially not only those who were affected by conflict and displacement who were being supported with gender-based violence response and prevention programmes under the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, but *anyone* who needed services.[18] While some services had existed to respond to gender-based violence prior to 2011, interviewees told me, they had very little in the way of resources, and were limited to the Beirut area. It was only following the arrival of major humanitarian organisations that gender-based violence began to circulate as an urgent problem to be tackled, and resources began to pour in from international donors. Gender-based violence, in other words was a long-standing social issue that was being met with a humanitarian response.

Humanitarian gender-based violence experts were aware of these dynamics, and for the most part saw it as an opportunity to create change within the national framework of gender-based violence response and prevention in Lebanon. One senior UN employee described the ways policies her teams had designed circulated within the Lebanese Government and gained traction:

> It's MoSA's [the Ministry of Social Affair's] role to write national SOPs [Standard Operating Procedures for gender-based violence], we can't do that. But they don't exist yet. But because we're in the framework of an emergency response, we can write SOPs for the *crisis*. And we're faster, we can dedicate a team to it. So now we have these SOPs, and we can give them to MoSA, and say, you know, 'these are available until yours are finalised, and if you want to look at them when writing yours…' And the MoSA case management toolkit - they didn't have one. They've developed it, but the endorsement and roll out process took time, so *we* developed

[18] Access to services remained an issue, however, and comprehensive services for survivors of gender-based violence were not available in all areas. In some areas only certain kinds of services were available, for example, psychosocial support, while other areas had very few services at all. Many of the centres where services were provided were women-only spaces. Beirut was by far the best-served area when it came to access to comprehensive case management and support, including healthcare, psychological support and legal assistance, and also in terms of *who* support was available for, with some dedicated staff members or organisations responding to male survivors of SGBV and/or LGBTI individuals.

> case management minimum standards and gave them to be used in the meantime – we couldn't work in a vacuum. And social workers *are* using this.

The Ministry of Social Affairs, this humanitarian told me, had the willingness to engage in gender-based violence prevention and response, but simply didn't have the capacity, experience and resources that major humanitarian organisations had. Humanitarian actors were willing and eager to fill that gap with their own knowledge, expertise and practices. Humanitarian networks were thus shaping the way that gender-based violence made legible and responded to in Lebanon in fundamental ways. While their expertise meant that survivors of gender-based violence were more likely to be met with a comprehensive and confidential response, albeit one heavily dependent on psychosocial forms of care (Lilleston et al. 2018), the reliance on an emergency model prevented any engagement with the socio-economic root causes of gender-based violence. Instead the acts themselves were removed from their context and responded to on the individual level.

Early and Child Marriage

Another major focus for many humanitarian organisations working on the response to the Syria crisis involved responding to and preventing early- or child-marriage, often referred to with the acronym ECM. Early marriage was considered in the international response plan to be a 'negative coping mechanism' (Government of Lebanon and United Nations 2019: 41) and was defined within international guidelines as anyone married under the age of seventeen.

In practice, many Lebanese members of staff I met took a more nuanced approach to early marriage. They differentiated between forced marriage and early marriage and were much more likely to place importance in the age *gap* than in the actual ages of the couple. Numerous staff members offered variations on the following example during interviews: A 17-year-old girl entering willingly into a marriage with a 19-year-old boy, a situation which they did not consider to be concerning, compared with 19-year-old girl being coerced into marriage with a 45-year-old man, a situation which they considered to be wrong and harmful. This attitude, informed by the staff members' own moral frameworks and day-to-day experiences of working with Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian communities, has been backed up by the evidence of researchers who have done extended interviews with adolescent girls who were married or engaged (Knox 2017; Alhayek 2015).

When I mentioned these nuances in attitude to a senior European member of UN staff, however, she reacted strongly against such prevarication:

> 'If you're 17, you shouldn't be married. We'll abide by the international standards… It doesn't change anything for us, these examples. This focus on the difference in age… for me, it steers the discussion away from the impact on the person that is married. Rape from a 45-year-old or rape from a 19-year-old is not different. I know lots of people are confused and frustrated with this, but what we need people to understand is that it's the consequences that matter.'

At the time, this statement was a little shocking to me; as far as I was concerned, we had not been discussing sexual violence. For this staff member, however, the logic was clear. In her view, it was not possible for an adolescent younger than 18 to consent to marriage, so she didn't consider that there was a difference between forced and early marriage. She proceeded from this assumption directly to the consequence as she saw it: rape. She did, however, tell me that the response to early marriage would differ considerably depending on the age of the child in question. A marriage of a 9-year-old would be considered a high-risk case and require immediate action, whereas for a 17-year-old, they would provide support only if requested to do so by the teenager.

The approach to early marriage among the national organisations I interviewed was somewhat different, and the category seemed to carry rather less moralising force than it seemed to operate with in international circles. A member of staff for a national rights and advocacy organisation told me:

> 'Marriage is definitely a survival mechanism in situations of displacement, when the financial situation is rough. Marriage is used to make certain the future of their daughters. They say a daughter that is married and experiences violence at the hands of her husband is better off than a girl that is not married. She is *mastūra* [covered]. That's what they call marriage in the local dialect - *sutra* [covering]. Marriage gives a social status to a woman. And it has logical roots: When a person is mature and ready to raise a family, they are deserving of respect.'

But more than this, she told me that in many cases, the young women she worked with desperately wanted to get married. She described one adolescent girl whom she had met in Tripoli: 'She wanted to get rid of her mother and establish her own authority of sorts. Marriage means independence, it means establishing your own household… mothers can be extremely protective of their daughters in emergency situations.' The young woman in Tripoli's attitude towards marriage was framed by her own experience of conflict, displacement and her family's reaction to protect against their perceived threat of outside violence. This staff member was saddened by the attitude, and

didn't consider the girls she worked with to be ready for marriage, but her first and most important task, she told me, was listening to the women she worked with and learning about their priorities. Understanding the context within which a young woman might choose early marriage, as well as the alternative living situations which were available to her was crucial (cf. Merry 2016: 63).

From everything I was told in interviews, Syrians seemed to be under no illusions as to the INGO's perspective on early marriage. During one interview, a Lebanese gender expert for an international NGO told me about a visit she had done with her European colleague to the home of a Syrian man who was included in one of their programmes. His son had received a scholarship to study abroad, but had been unable to take it up 'because of his wife'. When they had expressed confusion, the father said, 'because she's 15!' at which point, the European colleague had stopped talking in shock. Later on, as they were leaving, she had turned and said, 'I'm sorry that I was so shocked at what you said earlier, it's just that is not something that happens where I live,' to which the man had responded, 'yes we know!' in a good-natured way. The Lebanese staff member I interviewed was of the impression that he knew exactly how things happened in 'the west' and that it was unlikely that they would have heard this information had they asked the question directly. The families they worked with know exactly how the information would be received, she thought, but that didn't impact their own attitude as to whether or not it is an acceptable thing to do. On the contrary, she thought that for many families with whom they worked, early marriage was not only *halal*, permissible, but actively desirable: 'when she is young, she is still malleable. She can become like a daughter to her in-laws. It is better for the cohesiveness of the family. This is what they think' she told me.

These families' circumspection when admitting to early marriage within the family was perhaps not surprising, given the tremendous stigma surrounding it within the humanitarian landscape. I witnessed the stigma in practice on numerous occasions. During an awareness session in a community centre in Beirut, a young woman arrived with a toddler and registered with the staff member on the front desk, telling her that she was seventeen years old. The staff member did not wait for her to be out of earshot before turning to me and saying in English 'it breaks your heart, she must have been sixteen when she married'. On another occasion, during a focus group discussion in the north of Lebanon, the facilitator asked whether there had been any incidence of early marriage in the community. The women present motioned towards a young woman in the group, who, it turned out, had been married some weeks earlier. The facilitator proceeded to question her on the circumstances of her marriage in front of the whole group, to her visible embarrassment.

Early marriage was a subject that came up regularly in the many gender empowerment sessions I attended, and it always presented a challenge. Indeed, in almost every event I attended, when child or early marriage was defined, at least one person would interject to say that they themselves, or their spouse, their child or another family member, had been married below the age of 18. In one such session, a woman related how her niece and nephew had got married while still teenagers. Following their displacement from Syria, it was impossible for their fathers – two brothers – to afford the rent on individual flats for their families, and the two families had found themselves under the same roof. When the cousins became romantically close, both families had agreed it was much better for them to be married as soon as possible. Here, the circumstances of displacement had expedited marriage that might otherwise have occurred in any event. Nor was this limited to displacement-affected communities. When early marriage cropped up during capacity building sessions for humanitarian staff on gender-based violence, I regularly witnessed staff members stating – often reluctantly, but occasionally defiantly – that they, or indeed their children, had been married under the age of eighteen.

The way early marriage configured in practice eventually began to force humanitarians to adjust their programmes. One organisation involved in gender-based violence response ran a curriculum of empowerment and education programmes for young women they thought to be at risk of early marriage, and their parents. The aim was ultimately to prevent early marriage and provide information such as the risks of early pregnancy. The programme encouraged participants to explore the benefits of delaying marriage so that girls could enjoy their adolescence, complete their education and have a chance to develop personally and physically. It explained the content of international legal tools such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and offered scenario-based exercises in which a teenage girl had her rights curtailed by her husband. The GBV coordinator for this organisation told me that they'd had so many married teenage girls attending the programme, who had felt stigmatised and upset by the content of the curriculum, that they had instead developed an alternative programme, with a focus on response rather than prevention, which discussed things like family planning and reproductive health.

Philippe Bourgois' (1995) ethnographic research in El Barrio, New York in the 1980s shows clearly the importance of socio-material context when considering phenomena such as early marriage. While marriage was not necessarily an aspiration for the young women he interviewed, motherhood certainly was. Bourgois describes how motherhood offered romantic escapism as well as the potential for concrete material support from the Government. He writes of two of his interlocutors: 'Both Maria and Carmen were young, but their enthusiastic embrace of motherhood

should not be dismissed as the fleeting romantic whims of immature women. The dearth of alternative scenarios for female adulthood on the street not only normalizes motherhood at an early age but also makes it attractive' (Bourgois 1995: 275). Alternative scenarios for adolescent Syrians in Lebanon were equally thin on the ground. With little chance of higher education, meaningful work, and with basic mobility severely constrained, for some adolescents, marriage seemed an attractive option. It not only offered escapism and the potential for independence from the childhood home, but for girls and women marrying Lebanese men, it offered the chance to take on Lebanese nationality themselves, regularising their status, along with that of their potential children, with all the attendant 'benefits' of basic rights and services. In categorising the situation as a violation of international law and an incidence of gender-based violence, such vital context was lost, and a coping mechanism stigmatised. Rather than being symptomatic of poverty, precarity and structural inequality, the classification 'early marriage', like GBV, circulated within the humanitarian landscape as a cultural issue, responded to on the individual level. Nevertheless, it did not circulate quite as intended by its architects in international policy spheres. Programmes were changed to respond to rather than prevent it, while staff members often struggled to disentangle their own thoughts and experiences on the topic from the official message. Syrians and other communities affected by displacement often knew how early marriage would be seen and responded to by humanitarian staff members, with potentially stigmatising effects.

Missing Categories: Men at Risk

On a weekday morning in Spring, I was being driven to a field office in the Beqaa by an NGO Security Adviser who'd picked me up on his way to the office. As he drove, he pointed out landmarks to me. We passed a huge concrete structure surrounded by barbed wire. 'This is a prison' he told me. 'It's the second biggest prison in Lebanon. It's full of Syrians. The police can't find Lebanese wanted criminals, so it's easy for them to just pick up a Syrian guy'. 'But have they actually committed crimes?' I asked. He shrugged. 'They don't have residency. That's all. If they don't have residency, the police can arrest them and imprison them for ten days… then they get released and then if they still don't have residency, they will just arrest them again, and the second time they can imprison them for 2 months.'

I attempt, throughout this study to look as much at what is not there, as what is. Who falls outside the community of practice? When it comes to classifications of vulnerability in the humanitarian architectures in Lebanon, the UNHCR's 'People with Specific Needs' categorisation framework (2016) tells us much when we look at who is *not* included, as well as those who are. According to

this framework, men aged 18-65 as a group, in any formulation, did not appear to be at risk. The available evidence did not back up this omission. Indeed, research actually suggested that Syrian men were subject to particular forms of violence and structural oppression both in Syria, and on their arrival in Lebanon.

Experiences of the conflict in Syria before fleeing to Lebanon varied widely, but men and boys were disproportionately subject to detention; 94% of prisoners and 97% of disappeared persons in Syria were men (Chynoweth 2017), and a report by the International Commission of Inquiry on Syria pointed to widespread and systematic abuse, sexual assault and torture in Syrian detention facilities (Human Rights Council 2018). On arrival in Lebanon, the risk of violence remained high for Syrian men and boys. As outlined in the introduction, the process of regularising residency status was complicated and costly, and 80% of Syrians did not have official residency permits. In the context of an environment where Syrian men were routinely being portrayed by the media as a security threat, and the subsequent fear and mistrust instrumentalised by politicians in order to win votes, men were far more likely than women to be stopped by security forces at checkpoints – of which there were many. They were also much more likely to face incarceration for lack of residency documentation. The prison system that they would be confined within was described to me by a member of humanitarian staff that had experience of a number of prison systems as 'the worst in the MENA region.' Lack of residency also left Syrians vulnerable to exploitation by employers or neighbours who could report them at any time. But even regularised immigration status offered little protection. The main way for Syrians to regularise their status was through the *kafāla* or sponsorship system, whereby an employer could sponsor an employee's residency, becoming responsible for their legal status, work permissions, healthcare and accommodation. It gave an employee the power to terminate employment and in doing so depriving the employee of the right to residency. Significantly, an NGO consortium report found that those employed under the *kafāla* system were much more likely to be paid less than minimum wage (79%) than those who had no legal residency (49%) (LEADERS 2019). The sponsorship system left all Syrians vulnerable to exploitation, but it was men who made up a disproportionate majority of the Syrian workforce (UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP 2019), and though no statistics were available on the gender split of Syrians employed through the *kafāla* system, the staff I spoke to were under the impression that it was overwhelmingly men who gained residency through this channel.

These circumstances not only left Syrian men vulnerable to physical violence, but to sexual violence too. A harrowing report commissioned by UNHCR and published in late 2017 suggested that the prevalence of sexual violence perpetrated against men and boys could be significant, with

one focus group of Syrians estimating that 30-40% of those who had been in detention in Syria were subjected to sexual violence. The report detailed various characteristics of sexual violence against men in Syria and refugee hosting countries, including conflict-related sexual violence, especially in detention, sexual violence against LGBTI persons, sexual assault against boys, and sexual violence and exploitation in the context of refugee employment, where the residency and sponsorship systems described above left men and boys particularly at risk, given they made up a disproportionate majority of the labour force. The GBVIMS in Lebanon in 2015 showed that 22% of all rape cases were reported by male survivors, while in 2016 the proportion of all reported sexual violence incidents was 19% male (Chynoweth 2017). This, in a context where underreporting was widely believed to be a huge problem, owing to the increased stigma associated with being a male survivor of sexual violence, suggested a significant minority of sexual assaults were being experienced by men and boys.

Using Crenshaw's intersectional lens is helpful here (1991), as it was not only their gender that left Syrian men and boys at risk of particular forms of violence, but the intersection of their gender and status as Syrians (whether regularised or not), with other factors such as age and (perceived) sexuality also playing a role. Very few humanitarian staff I interviewed saw the issues in these terms, however. When the issue of men at risk of violence came up, almost without exception they would argue that Syrian men were at risk of violence because of their refugee status, even while they acknowledged that Syrian men were far more likely to experience certain kinds of violence – at checkpoints or in detention – than women. In a gender-based violence training session for staff working in the protection sector, for example, I witnessed the facilitator categorically refusing to accept the suggestion of a participant that the violence men experienced at the hands of state authorities was gender-based violence. On another occasion, while I was working in the Beirut office of one of my INGO partners, one of the Regional Directors came down to speak to the Protection Adviser, with whom he was drafting a proposal for a new programmer: 'you've written "women, girls, men and boys who have experienced gender-based violence"' he told her, 'shouldn't it just read "women and girls?" how can men and boys have experienced gender-based violence?'

'Well, LGBTI folk are at increased risk of sexual violence' the Protection Adviser responded

'But that's because of their sexuality not their gender'

'Well, yes, but it's all related!'

The short exchange was demonstrative of some of the ways that men and gender-based violence were made legible within the humanitarian system in Lebanon. One understanding was that men simply could not be subject to gender-based violence, while the other approach made an immediate link between being a male survivor of sexual violence and being LGBTI, an elision I heard countless times during the course of my research, and one potentially stigmatising to both survivors of sexual violence and those identifying as LGBTI. One factor influencing these elisions was that one of the only organisations running a support specifically for male survivors of sexual violence was a local Lebanese organisation which was set up to support the LGBTI community.

Despite overwhelming evidence on the needs of and potential risks to men and boys, when it came to gender-specific aid programmes no organisation I interviewed was responding to the particular gendered *risks* faced by men and boys. Such an approach is not without historical precedent. Writing specifically about Iraq, Jawad Syed and Faiza Ali note that more men than women suffered brutal human rights abuses under Saddam Hussein's, but that 'there remains a dominant tendency in the Western chivalry-oriented culture to treat the suffering of women and children as worthier than that of men' (Syed and Ali 2011: 359). Programmes targeted at men did exist, but, as we will see in Chapter Six, they engaged with men primarily as perpetrators or potential perpetrators of violence, rather than as victims or survivors. Conversations around men and risk of violence were beginning to shift, as they were elsewhere, with a global increased focus on the role of masculinity in situations of conflict and displacement (Turner 2019). Certainly, some of my interviewees expressed their concern about the gap, but those conversations had yet to precipitate a shift in practice. Such a shift would take time, would involve learning a new skill-set, and navigating the very security dynamics which put these men at risk, as one of UN staff member set out:

> The issue with men is, if it [sexual assault] has happened in detention, it's *different*. Safe Spaces are not going to work the same way! What, they're going to come and talk about their experiences? No. We need to not stigmatise. And besides, in the north, gathering a group of men together is considered a security threat, we can't do it.

There were indications that Syrians themselves were aware of the gendered way in which vulnerability was seen by humanitarian organisations. Whenever I attended a forum or awareness session facilitated by an NGO in order to register people for potential assistance, around 90% of the attendees were women. Staff members confirmed that this gender imbalance was very much the norm. When I asked them why this was the case, I was occasionally told that men were at work – forums were usually held during working hours – but I was most often that there was a

widespread understanding amongst the Syrian population in Lebanon that women were more likely to receive assistance than men, a perception that – for certain kinds of assistance, at least – was rooted in reality (International Rescue Committee 2015).

Conclusion

Susan Leigh Star observed that stabilised networks 'seem to insist on annihilating personal experience' (1990: 48). The networks that had evolved around humanitarian classification were no exception. Complex lived experiences were distilled into neat categories that fitted onto the tablet screens of field staff, to be sorted into spreadsheets, tables and graphs by Information Managers, to inform decisions made by Programme Managers. Classification was the foundation upon which humanitarian implementation was built. It's easy to be critical of processes of classification writ large, but to some extent categorisation is always necessary. Without it, there would be no way for organisations to *see* the populations they were trying to support, no way to understand their needs and no way to determine what support to provide. The aim of this chapter, then, is not to dismiss categories, but to take seriously the ways in which they contribute to forming the world they purport to describe.

As such, I have demonstrated *how* categories operated, socially, politically and materially. Categories were dependent on networks of experts and non-experts. Management staff (the experts) working in programme design used their knowledge of international legal tools and systems of classification to write categories into surveys and data apparatus, and trained non-experts in their use. Field staff – the non-experts – deployed the categories in their day-to-day work, translating experiences and identities to fit the classifications on their screens. Categories thus operated within the humanitarian landscape in Lebanon as a kind of strong language into which the experiences and identities of displacement-affected populations were translated. This strong language was highly gendered. The categories and systems of classification outlined in this chapter showed the deep relationship between gender and vulnerability in humanitarian schemes of legibility. Vulnerability and need circulated in heavily feminised ways in both policy and implementation. Women were seen as objects of care, vulnerable as a function of their gender, while masculine forms of vulnerability remained largely illegible. Humanitarian organisations thus operated paradoxically, actively creating the gendered inequalities they sought to eradicate, a topic I explore further in Chapter Six.

This strong language did significant political work in Lebanon, shaping responses to gender-based violence well beyond the humanitarian sphere. Gender-based violence – which of course, is

structural, endemic and global – was made legible as a humanitarian issue in Lebanon, responded to with humanitarian funds and by humanitarian organisations. Social and material context were stripped from data collection methodologies, rendering any full understanding of the structural issues underpinning gender-based violence impossible. Without this understanding, any possibility of tackling the socio-economic drivers of gender-based violence was likewise impossible. The individualised response mechanism was nevertheless being incorporated into Lebanon's own social care framework, as Government bodies began to see like humanitarians, too.

There was, however, a tension in the process of translation. While categories functioned as a strong language in *policy*, in *practice* the language itself could nevertheless be shaped by the context. Outside of policy circles, early and child marriage functioned flexibly as a humanitarian category, often acted upon at field officers' discretion. As these staff members began to recognise its stigmatising effects and relate their experiences to managers, programmes were slowly adjusted to meet the needs of the context. When classifications seemed to fit inexactly, as we saw at the beginning of the chapter, field officers were compelled to do the translating. This process could often be unruly, as field staff's own understandings of vulnerability shaped how they asked questions and interpreted answers. Hacking has argued that categories are always 'lived in' (1999: 10), and the ways that displacement-affected populations contest or are complicit in these categories, while largely outside the scope of this research, would certainly benefit anthropological study. What we began to see in this chapter is that classification required a great deal of work in order to function, and the primary labourers were front-line staff and displacement-affected communities. It was in the practice of conducting assessments that humanitarian classifications were enacted, and it is to these processes that I turn in the next chapter.

4. Over-Surveyed, Underserved: Legibility Through Humanitarian Assessment

To begin this chapter, I want to return to my rainy January visit to the row of garages, repurposed as shelters, near Tripoli, which I described in Chapter Three, where Basma and Jad were conducting protection assessments, designed to monitor the levels of protection needs among the Syrian population across Lebanon. The last door we knocked on that morning was at the end of the row, a double garage. A young man opened the door. Basma began her set-piece introduction but was interrupted by a call from inside. It was the young man's father: 'What do they want?' The son stepped aside to hand over the interaction to his father, and Basma began explaining who we were. Again, he stopped her in her tracks: 'We're not answering any more questions unless you are actually going to do something. Can you give us assistance?'

The answer to this question for staff conducting monitoring assessments, like Jad and Basma, was, unfortunately, not a simple one. The primary purpose of a monitoring assessment like this was to provide information on the general level of need among the population. This information could be used for advocacy purposes, and in the design of programmes, but the survey was not designed to ascertain eligibility for direct assistance. That said, the answers that a family gave to a survey *might* mean that they could be eligible for assistance, but them accessing it relied on Jad or Basma being aware of this and making a referral, either to another team within their own NGO, or to another organisation. Following this, the team or organisation to which the family or individual had been referred would then almost certainly come and ask more questions. Perhaps they would confirm their eligibility for a particular programme, or perhaps not. Perhaps they would make a referral themselves. In other words, there was no short answer to the question 'can you give us assistance?' because the process by which a family *might* access assistance through the interaction was so convoluted and dependent on circumstance. This lack of clarity was a regular source of frustration for those being surveyed, as well as for those doing the surveying.

On that rainy morning in Tripoli, it was our knock that tipped the frustration of the father in the last garage. He insisted that we come into his home to hear what he had to say, and, after some muted protestation from Jad and Basma, who by this point had deduced that he would not be answering their survey questions, we sat down and were immediately served coffee by another of the man's sons. There was a discernible shift in the dynamics I had been used to while out with the surveying teams. While Basma had often taken the lead in speaking with families, in this situation she had fallen silent and Jad was the one doing the talking. Jad, for his part, was not

attempting to drive the conversation, but was instead listening to what he was being told with his head bowed, every so often responding with a 'yes' or 'I understand'. He addressed the father with a term of respect, *Hajj*, and his tablet and clipboard – like Basma's – lay dormant in his lap with his hands folded over them. The father laid out his frustrations in no uncertain terms: Almost every week, representatives from one aid agency or another would knock on his door. They would ask their questions, they would note it all down on their tablet computers ('they're always taking notes', his wife agreed), they would leave… and then nothing. No assistance, no follow up, just a different aid agency turning up asking the same questions the next week.

In my experience accompanying NGOs on their assessments, it was relatively rare for someone to refuse to be surveyed – not least because they feared that they would be excluded from assistance as a result. Nevertheless, this was not an isolated opinion. Those doing research on the experiences of Syrians in Lebanon have long documented the frustrations of being continually assessed and receiving nothing in return. Indeed, it was precisely this research which prompted my own decision to focus my research on organisations rather than displacement-affected communities. As one Syrian told Kholoud Mansour, during the course of her own research in Lebanon, 'We feel like lab rats. International organisations come to us with countless needs assessments and questionnaires; they leave and we never receive assistance from them. They think we do not have anything else to do in our lives except filling in their forms and answering their questions. This is disrespectful to us. We have dignity too' (Mansour 2018: 5).

This chapter explores how the assessment practices of humanitarian organisations might result in Syrians feeling stripped of their dignity, over-surveyed yet underserved. I provide a detailed ethnographic portrait of what these assessments look like in practice, how networks of actors come together to shape these interactions, how these assessment practices stabilise in such a way as to leave the respondents – those falling outside of the network of practice, but nevertheless having to exist in relationship with it – bound by invisible work. What follows is an exploration of the temporal and political effects of humanitarian data collection, focussing particularly on material technologies. Ultimately, I want to attend to the small but significant ways in which power is exercised when communities of practice form and are mobilised. In Chapter Three, we saw how humanitarian organisations translate the messy social reality they are daily faced with into neat systems of categories and classes, filters by which they render the populations they are trying to support more legible. These ways of knowing are important to bear in mind in this chapter, as it is precisely these systems of classification that form the backbone of the questionnaires uploaded onto computer tablets and that frame the assessment interaction. Technology, as Susan Leigh Star

observes, 'freezes inscriptions' (1990: 32), locking knowledge inside black boxes which then circulate as part of socio-technical networks.

Such technologies are crucial here, because the relations I am interested in are not simply human-to-human relations, but relations mediated by the material world: by tented settlements, branded gilets, clipboards, computers and tablets. Bruno Latour has argued that artefacts such as these should be recognised as 'full-fledged actors in our collective' (1999b: 174). As I came to realise over the course of my observations, these artefacts did indeed play pivotal roles in interactions between humanitarian organisations and crisis-affected communities in Lebanon. They acted as mediators, that is, 'actors endowed with the capacity to translate what they transport, to redefine it, redeploy it, and also to betray it' (Latour 1993: 81). But it was a complicated picture. There were a great many artefacts, all playing their own inter-linked roles, and the sociotechnical networks which form around them are far too numerous and complex to follow simultaneously. Following the examples of scholars who have done research in similar contexts, including De Laet and Mol (2000), Darling (2014), Redfield (2016), Cole (2018), and Scott-Smith (2018b), this chapter reflects on the networks which form around one object in particular. Other artefacts will crop up along the way, but the object I'm most interested in is used extensively in humanitarian assessment in Lebanon: the tablet.

This chapter takes seriously Susan Leigh Star's observation that 'much work, practice and membership goes unrepresented in analyses of technology and socio-technical networks' (1990: 44). By following the networks that have been built in humanitarian assessment, and the tablet in particular, I hope to pay attention to the work, practice and membership that might otherwise go overlooked. Crucially, drawing on the work of Andersson (2014) and Shahram Khosravi (2018) I look at the temporal uncertainty and control created by the processes surrounding the tablet and affective labour required of field staff and displacement-affected communities to make the process of assessment function. The crucial question that Star asks, when considering the intermingling of humans and machines, is whether this intermingling is characterised by exclusion, violence, extension of power, or empowerment. In other words, *who benefits?* (1990: 43). The answer to this question, I will argue, is neither displacement-affected people nor field staff, but senior humanitarian staff.

The Tablet

In the years between 2012 and 2015, when I was working on the response to the Syria crisis for the UK Department of International Development, the use of mobiles or tablets to collect data was being heralded as something of a game-changer. Organisations would present them in their pitches for funding as being a cutting-edge technology, giving them the ability to do more for less. Though at that time the technology was still in its infancy, by the time I arrived in Lebanon in 2017 to undertake this research, the use of tablets for conducting assessments had become par for the course for most major INGOs and UN agencies. Though it was by no means ubiquitous – the equipment and software were still prohibitively expensive for many smaller, less generously funded, organisations – it was widespread enough that one manager I interviewed verged on taking offence when I asked her if her staff conducted their assessments on tablet. 'Of course!' she answered, 'this is 2018!' Her response recalls Cole's observation that, for humanitarian organisations, 'tangible 'things' are positioned as indispensable contributors to an actor's legitimacy, growth and influence' (2018: 1492). For this member of staff, by 2018, tablets were integral to her understanding of the organisation's legitimacy as a modern, effective actor.

If tablets were indeed a game-changer, how did the game change? Sandra Harding writes that 'moments of scientific and technological change are always sites of struggle over how the benefits and costs of change will be distributed' (1998: 5). Most technological change has benefits and costs, and innovations in humanitarian assistance are no exception. For decades, technological advancement has been presented as the answer to the perennial humanitarian question: How can we provide appropriate assistance quicker and better for less? As such, money has poured into projects aimed at technological innovation. Since Sandvik et al.'s (2014) call for a more critical approach in research on humanitarian technologies, there have been a number of studies focussing on the use of technology by humanitarian organisations. Some have focussed on particular technologies, such as communications (Garman 2015), information management systems (Read, Taithe, and Mac Ginty 2016), results-based management, biometrics and cash-based modalities (Jacobsen and Sandvik 2018), while others have directed a critical gaze more broadly at the faith placed in technological innovation by humanitarian practitioners. Scott-Smith, for example, has traced the genealogy of an innovation turn in the humanitarian world – a phenomenon which he describes as neophilia – back to the utopian techno-determinist pioneers of Silicon Valley in the 1990s (2016: 2232). This movement, which placed its faith in technology as a liberating force, combined the rebellious counter-culture of the New Left with the market-driven logic and radical individualism of the New Right. Scott-Smith (2016: 2239), echoing the concerns of Star and

Harding, asks who humanitarian innovation is really *for*, ultimately responding that it is not crisis-affected communities, but *humanitarian practitioners* that request, drive and benefit from technological advancements in humanitarian aid.

When it comes to the collection of data via mobile technology, Harding's question of how the benefits and costs of this technological change are distributed is highly illuminating, considering the distinct yet contingent networks which form around these tablets. The tablets had unquestionable benefits, and Grant Coordinators and Advocacy Managers from various humanitarian organisations sang unqualified praise for them. They were able to say at the press of a button (or, at least, a press of their Information Manager's button) how many registered Syrians were living in substandard accommodation in a particular governorate, or how many people of what gender and in which vicinity were being reached with which each kind of assistance. This was data which humanitarian agencies could translate into sleek infographics with which to convince donors and governments of their funding needs and policy recommendations. The Information Managers I met in the course of my research extolled this technological ability to collect 'clean' and accurate data, preventing contradictory or duplicate information being collected and smoothing the mess of social reality. When I interviewed Programme Directors, Sector Coordinators, and Information Managers, they too were evangelical about mobile technology for data collection, telling me that they were able to crunch data with ease in order to plan their programmes according to needs assessments and monitor their progress by numbers. Moreover, with technologies such as encryption and self-destructing data available on these devices it was a far more secure way to collect information, which was invaluable when delivering services such as case-management for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, where ensuring the privacy and security of the beneficiary was paramount. Tablets also, they told me, freed up time for their field staff. Rather than writing down information on paper and then inputting it into a computer later, effectively doing the work twice, field staff could do it all in one go, theoretically freeing up their time to interview more people. Below is an excerpt from one interview, which is typical of what Sector Coordinators told me when I asked for their reflection on the use of tablets for data collection:

> For example, if internet is not available, they [field staff] can still input the data and upload it when they get the internet. And it's user-friendly, making it simpler for them to do so. It's also safer. Otherwise we have forms locked in cabinets, which is not always safe.

> Tablets decrease the risk of a data breach if something happens in areas such as Arsal.[19] With data on tablets, we can optimise it to delete information after 24 hours, or delete after sending.

What's important to note about these reflections is that they came from a certain kind of humanitarian practitioner: The Grant Coordinators, Advocacy Managers, Sector Coordinators, Programme Directors, and Information Managers. What the people in these positions had in common was that they were based in head offices – invariably in Beirut – where they worked primarily with each other and their counterparts in other organisations. But while they were the champions and masterminds of tablet technology for data collection, as well as the primary users of its proceeds, they were not the primary users of the tablets themselves. The primary users were the field staff.[20] And when I spoke to the field staff, a rather different story emerged. As I shall demonstrate, their feelings towards the tablets they used each day were deeply ambivalent.

My own first encounter with a tablet shed significant light on the situation. In the Beirut office of the NGO I was researching, I was preparing to accompany field staff on their assessment rounds. Sara, the Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator at this NGO, had asked Pierre, an Assistant from the Information Management Team[21] to bring me a tablet so that I would be able to look through the surveys that were loaded onto them, before accompanying the teams in the field. He brought one over and asked if she would show me how to use it. She raised her eyebrows in an amused and emphatic no: 'I don't *use* the tablets!' she told him. While the bread and butter of Sara's work was to analyse and quality-assure the data collected through the tablets, she had no idea how to navigate the things themselves; she didn't collect the data, so there was no reason for her to know. She simply had to request the completed dataset from the information management team and a spreadsheet would appear in her inbox. Pierre was thus landed with what would turn out to be the somewhat Sisyphean task of showing me how to use the tablet.

There were three applications downloaded onto this tablet: Delta (the database application); Facebook; and Candy Crush. Ignoring the second two, Pierre clicked on the Delta application,

[19] Arsal is in the North Bekaa Valley, close to the border with Syria. Until late 2017, the area had experienced high levels of insecurity as a result of spill-over from the conflict in Syria, and regular security operations by the Lebanese Armed Forces as a consequence. As the security situation was highly dynamic, it was one of the more difficult areas in Lebanon for international humanitarian organisations to operate in, and programming decisions often had to be made on very short notice.

[21] An understanding of the organisational hierarchy may help shed some light on this interaction. As a Coordinator, Sara was in a managerial role, senior to Pierre in rank, and responsible for overseeing Monitoring and Evaluation across all the offices in Lebanon. Pierre's role was technical, focussing on database software and statistics, responsible for assisting rather than managing staff.

which popped up with a log-in page. We inputted my newly acquired credentials and waited. Nothing happened. 'It's slow,' Pierre told me, by way of explanation. After waiting a few minutes, he shut down the application and started it again. I inputted my credentials again. Again, nothing happened. We repeated this process four times. On the fifth attempt, the application finally loaded, and Pierre showed me how to download the latest database. He explained that field staff had to do this each morning, in order for them to be able to check the details of each person against data previously collected before they started the survey, to ensure that they were not duplicating entries into the database. Depending on the strength of the internet connection in the field office, and the length of time since the database was last downloaded onto the tablet, this process could take anything from a couple of minutes to a couple of hours. On this occasion, it took around 40 minutes. Once it had downloaded, Pierre showed me how to open up the different questionnaires in the application. Each time I clicked through to the next question, or saved an answer, at least a few seconds, and occasionally a few minutes, would pass before the page fully loaded.[22] It was, in short, a highly frustrating afternoon.

Enumerator, Tablet, Enumerator-Tablet

In the next section, I will describe how I witnessed these tablets being used by the NGO's field staff, but first I want to situate the discussion in some of the literature around how to theorise the relationship between humans and technology. The most commonly held assumption, though perhaps rarely stated, is that technologies are simply idle objects over which we humans have more or less complete control. Plenty of recent scholarship has reinforced this basic point: that we tend not to think of the everyday objects around us – be they doors (Latour 1992), scallops (Callon 1986), medical technologies (Cussins 1996), even our own bodies (Mol 2002) – as being active agents in our lives. Much policy-oriented writing on technological innovation in humanitarian settings is built on this perspective, subscribing to the idea that technology is a product of human expertise and progress and, paying small regard to its ethical implications, that it can be used neutrally to improve the way we do things (e.g. IFRC 2013; Betts and Bloom 2014). At the other end of the spectrum is the view that it is technology that dominates everything. This is Heidegger's argument (1977): that technology will eventually take over, stockpiling and rationalising the natural world interminably. Taking umbrage with Heidegger's perspective, Latour caricatures the two

[22] It's worth noting that neither the software nor the hardware we were using were outdated or of poor quality. On the contrary, the application and the database behind it were brand-new. It was the sheer complexity of the database and the volume of information held within it, along with the high number of functions that the database had to perform, which meant that even with cutting-edge technology, the application was frustratingly slow. The strength of the internet connection, however, was highly variable.

opposing worldviews in *Pandora's Hope* by using the debate around the second amendment in the USA as an example. Those against gun control argue that guns don't kill people, people kill people. Those in favour of gun control, meanwhile, tend to argue that it is the gun that makes (otherwise law-abiding) citizens dangerous. Latour follows a thought experiment, a situation with a man and a gun, to argue that neither man nor gun can ever be a neutral actor. The gun cannot be fired without the man, while the man is incapable of doing such damage so effortlessly without the gun. He argues that the technology and human together create a new, hybrid, actor: the gunman (1999b: 178-80).

Following Latour's gunman, it might be helpful here to try our own thought experiment. Imagine a member of humanitarian staff is sent into a camp, tasked by her manager with assessing the needs within the camp. She speaks to a number of people and comes away with a certain impression of what is needed. Yet when she relays the information to her manager, her manager is concerned. People only seem to have told this member of staff about their immediate needs and she hasn't brought back information on certain topics the manager needs to inform the donor about – for example, whether children are involved in income generation – because nobody brought it up in conversation. So, the manager gives the staff member a tablet with a pre-designed survey uploaded on it, with questions that should prompt answers with all the information that she needs to design the programme and convince the donor to fund it. The staff member, now an 'enumerator', goes back into the camp and the interaction changes. The enumerator no longer looks too much at the person she is speaking to, because she has to read from and enter answers into, the tablet. The dialogue is no longer a conversation, but a series of questions and answers. The topics covered within the dialogue are no longer driven by the unique interaction of the staff member and the person living in the camp, but by the questions in the survey itself. Who are the actors in this situation? The staff member is no longer acting independently. But the tablet isn't acting independently either: send a tablet into a camp on its own and it will accomplish very little. So, it is the hybrid of the two, the enumerator-tablet. To paraphrase Latour, the enumerator is different with a tablet in her hand, the tablet is different with her holding it (1999b: 179).

The thought experiment is, of course, an abstraction. The network of relations created when an enumerator goes into the camp with a tablet is, in reality, a much messier affair. It is a concatenation of lived social relations, akin to Haraway's cyborg (2016a), which involves not only the tablet and the enumerator, but the person being surveyed, the manager, the donor, the survey designer and the classifications they are using, the information manager who uploaded it, the software they used, the tents and the weather and much more besides. In order to critically

approach such a network, to understand whom it benefits, and who bears its costs, it is first necessary to trace its various relations in detail.

Data Collection in the Beqaa Valley

Although tablets were used to collect data on nearly all of the field visits I accompanied, one visit in particular stands out. During the Spring of 2018 I spent some time in the Beqaa office of one of my INGO partners, accompanying their outreach and assessment teams in their work. On this occasion I was accompanying the protection team on their visits to some informal tented settlements in the Beqaa valley. The visit stands out in my memory more because of the ways that tablets were *not* used as much as, and in combination with, the ways that they *were*. This strange turn of affairs had come about as a product of the tablets not functioning as their architects and champions thought they might. It was, to put it in Latour's terms, a product of the black box returning to visibility and needing to be opened up due to its failing (1999b: 183-84). Once the functionality of the tablet was brought into question, the mediating role of the tablet became all the clearer, and the nature of the relationship between enumerator and tablet, and more crucially, enumerator-and-tablet and subject of assessment, was redefined. The mediating role of the tablet began to be a sort of lively inertia. A dynamic slowing down, even stoppage, in the data collection process. Though this dynamic was far from unique in my experiences of doing assessments with tablets, the ways in which the NGO staff had decided to navigate the inertia was illuminating.

We left the office at around 9.30 in the morning. There were five of us in total, including Maher the driver, who stayed in the car for the duration of our visit to the tented settlements. Mira, the Legal Officer, was there to give awareness sessions on how to register the birth of a child, while Lina and Dalia were Protection Assistants, whose job it was to conduct assessments and take note of attendees of Mira's awareness sessions. Lina, Dalia and I were armed with tablets, but on this occasion Lina and Dalia also carried clipboards with a registration sheet for the legal awareness sessions as well as a separate, paper-based survey. As we drove towards a cluster of tented settlements I asked if I could take a look at this paper-based survey. It was, as far as I could tell, a much simpler version of the survey on the tablet, collecting much of the same information, such as names, genders and ages of household members, whether they were registered with UNHCR, as well as a blank space for noting specific needs or concerns. By this point, I was familiar enough with the questions in the survey on the tablet to know that all of this information would also be recorded there. I asked why they were collecting the same information twice. 'It's so that we can do follow up, make referrals and so on,' Lina told me. 'But isn't it possible to do all those things

through the database system?' I asked, for that was what everyone in Beirut had told me. 'No, you can't.' Lina answered. Then paused: 'Or, maybe you can, but we don't know how. With paper assessments it's so much easier, we put them in the filing cabinet and they're there whenever we need to consult them. Sometimes assessments go missing on the database and there's nothing you can do. It's happened so many times, we don't trust it. Our manager told us to use paper versions for our own work to do follow up and referrals, but we still have to do it on the database for Beirut so that they can do reporting and so on. So, we do both.'

We arrived at the first of a group of adjoining settlements: each was a cluster of around 20 UNHCR-branded tents in a muddy field. The deputy *shāwīsh* of the settlement came and greeted us, chatting about recent events. There was a bedbug infestation in the settlement, and lots of the children had been badly bitten. There had also been a minor outbreak of Leishmaniasis. As she spoke, the deputy *shāwīsh* guided us to the middle of the settlement, where some crates had been positioned for the team to stand on. Mira began speaking to the gathering crowd. The awareness session took around fifteen minutes. Mira informed those gathered about the complicated process they needed to follow in order to get their children registered with the Lebanese authorities and the Syrian embassy, answering some of their questions when she had finished. Could the NGO provide them with the money required to register children? Unfortunately, not. What about transportation to the registration office? Unfortunately, they couldn't help with that either. At the end, she asked everyone to make sure they had registered their names with Lina and Dalia before they left. Everyone moved forward, *malāf*[23] in hand, towards Lina and Dalia, who began the painstaking process of writing down each person's details by hand onto their clipboards. As each person came forward, they would briefly glance up in greeting, before quickly taking the *malāf*, and copying out the details onto their clipboards, asking questions without looking up.

The reason that the team were taking everyone's details, it had been earlier explained to me, was because they needed to report on how many people attended the awareness session for their donors. It was one of the 'outputs' in their logframe, a target number of people to reach with legal awareness sessions. However, the database system they had to use was built around *individual* beneficiaries, rather than awareness sessions or other programme 'outputs'. Staff had to add an

[23] A *malāf* is the name of the identity document given to all Syrians who have registered with the UNHCR. It has the names and photos of all members of the household, along with all their personal details. Humanitarian staff always asked Syrians to provide their *malāf* as a prerequisite to registering for assistance, to prevent identity fraud (Palestinian refugees and Lebanese citizens had different identity documents which they were also required to provide). The documents themselves bore the signs of frequent use. Some had been carefully laminated, while others had become so fragile and torn that they had to be handled very delicately. For a detailed discussion of the role of physical documents in processes of migration and asylum see, for example, Cabot (2012) and Cole (2018).

individual to the database in order to enter details about which services and programmes they had accessed. In order to add a beneficiary to the database a certain basic level of information was required to ensure there was no duplication. This included their UNHCR registration number, their names, phone numbers and address. There was no recourse within the database to simply record an awareness session and the number of attendants. So, while in theory, it should have been sufficient for the NGO's reporting purposes for Lina and Dalia to simply count the number of people present and write down a number, instead, they and the attendees had to spend forty minutes – more than twice the length of time of the actual awareness session – filling in their registration form for each person present, which they would later have to input again into the database. When I asked why they weren't inputting peoples details straight into the tablet, I was told that it wasn't possible yet to do so while at the same time indicating that they had attended an awareness session, it was only possible to do this in the office on a desktop computer. Here, the tablet application, even when *not in use*, was creating vast amounts of work for both the field staff and the attendees.

The people coming forward to register their details, however, were not at first informed that the NGO staff were collecting their information for reporting purposes only. In fact, it was clear from the number of people who came forward with the *malāf* of a relative or neighbour, asking if they could register them too, that they were under the impression that they were registering for some kind of potential assistance. Moreover, while only thirty people or so had actually listened to the awareness session itself, word had spread through the tented settlement that the NGO staff were present, and more and more people began to arrive, wanting to register. Eventually, Dalia realised what was happening, and with weary frustration began telling people that they couldn't register if they hadn't attended the session. For those who had by this point been waiting in line for considerable time to register, this was upsetting news, and several began pleading with Dalia to let them register anyway. Only at this point did Dalia finally inform them that no assistance would come as a result of them registering, at which the queue of people dispersed. Navigating the technologies of the database and tablet had prompted staff to behave in a way that inadvertently raised expectations among residents of the informal tented settlement and ultimately cost everyone time.

Eventually, Dalia and Lina were able to get on with their assessments. The survey they were conducting that morning was a protection assessment of households with school-age children. They aimed to establish whether children were in employment or education, whether they were exposed to any kind of risk, and whether their nutritional needs were being covered. Lina had

arranged with the *shāwīsh* in advance for a number of parents to come to a specially designated tent to be surveyed that morning. They were already ready and waiting when we arrived. Though the NGO had specified only that they wanted to speak to parents the space was exclusively dominated by women. The session began with the familiar wait for the Delta application to load on the tablet. Then, using phone numbers or UNHCR registration numbers Dalia and Lina checked whether each parent had previously registered with the NGO. Depending on the outcome, they then either entered or double checked all of the basic details about the family. Here, it was possible to see the enumerator-tablet in action. Everyone was sat cross-legged on the floor, gathered around Lina and Dalia, with their *malāf* ready. Dalia and Lina held their tablets in one hand, faces illuminated under the dark canvas by the light of the screen, while their paper-based assessments lay on clipboards in their laps. They filled in details on the tablets first, and then on paper, their eyes shifting from tablet to paper and back again. Because the nature of the information they were collecting was complicated – phone numbers, detailed addresses, lengthy UNHCR registration numbers – it was impossible to memorise, necessitating them to ask each beneficiary for these key bits of information twice. More than once, the tablets crashed before saving the data. When this happened, some parents had to give the same information three times or more. In this way, the non-functionality of the table, this time in use, again created huge amounts of extra work for both the field staff and the respondents. Finally, once all twenty or so of the parents who had come along had gone through the assessment, we stood up, thanked the *shāwīsh*, and moved into the neighbouring camp, to repeat the whole process all over again.

At some point after the proceedings, while Dalia and Mira were speaking to a family regarding a referral, a man approached Lina and I: 'Your colleague came to see us about our broken water tank last week, and she said that you would come back and fix it, but no one has come,' He told us. Lina was confused. 'Her?' she asked, pointing at Dalia. 'Yes, her!' he answered. 'It can't have been her' Lina told him, 'we weren't here last week, and besides, our organisation doesn't do things like water tanks. It must have been a different organisation.' They went back and forth in this vein for a moment or two before the man finally stood back and said with incredulity, 'It really wasn't her? What do I know, *kulkun tushbihū* [You all look the same...]'. It was an interesting comment because, looked at a certain way, front-line staff members for international humanitarian organisations *did* tend to look similar. Often – though of course not always – they were young women, in their first or second job after graduating university. They dressed similarly, were immaculately turned out, and, invariably, wore gilets or coats stamped with the branding of their NGO or UN agency, heavy boots, and carried their tablets and clipboards. For this man, the steady stream of enthusiastic tablet-carrying aid workers through the tented settlement where he lived

had become somewhat indistinguishable from one another. In his observation, I heard the mirror of the homogenising language that I often heard used by NGO staff during off-hand generalisations about Syrians – 'they all', 'none of them' – along with comments that 'all Syrians' dressed or looked a particular way, and that they [the NGO staff] 'just knew' by looking whether or not someone was Syrian.

These offhand comments raise the question of whether the networks around assessment practices had stabilised in such a way, so entirely mediated by tablets, papers, gilets, that neither party was inclined to remember or distinguish effectively the *individual* they were interacting with. What was noticeable though, was that while the anonymising effect seemed to impact both parties to these mediated interactions, there was only one party for whom this effect necessitated increased work: the man in need of a new water tank. This particular dynamic was not observable in the processes of data collection I had already witnessed, where the tablet technology created extra work for both the respondent and the enumerator. The burden of invisible work *following* a needs assessment seemed to fall far more heavily on the man in need of the water tank. He had to wait in a long queue for an opportunity to approach the aid organisation to try and follow up on assistance he was promised, only to find that his efforts had been in vain – that it was someone else, from another one of the seemingly interchangeable organisations, who had spoken to him. It appeared to fall to him to navigate the complex landscape of aid organisations in Lebanon – the community of practice of which he was not a part, but which he nevertheless must exist in relationship with – in order to access clean water.

Waiting and Work

One of the things that was most striking about that day was the sheer amount of time it took to get anything done. It was all the more striking because in my experience the tablet had always been lauded to me as a *time-saving device*. It was supposed to mean that field staff didn't have to collect data on paper in the field, and then perform a separate data entry exercise when they got back to the office. These efforts towards efficiency were more than just rhetoric. I had sat in multiple meetings where managerial staff had made detailed (and, as I was to find out, wildly unrealistic) calculations about how many surveys could be completed by field staff each day. The conversation was fundamentally about money. Staff time was an organisational resource, and as the situation in Lebanon had stabilised, funding had started to move elsewhere. Humanitarian organisations were under twin pressures: to justify the need for their programmes, which they could only do by

collecting more data, and to be able to present themselves as being the best 'value for money' in what had become a saturated market, which they could most easily do by reducing costs.

The painstaking process that I witnessed, then, was clearly far from ideal. It was not at all the streamlined affair that the managers and statistical staff had envisaged it to be. In fact, when I returned to the head office in Beirut and told the coordinator of the programme about what I had witnessed, she was appalled, and tellingly, shocked at the levels of duplication. She proceeded to send off a flurry of concerned emails to the field office. As Sara showed us earlier in the chapter, senior managers had no need to actually *use* the tablets, and the tablet consequently operated in their imaginations like Latour's black box – a mute intermediary, entirely determined by its function, made invisible by its success (1999b: 183). But according to the staff attempting to use it in their day-to-day work, the tablets did not function as smoothly as they did in managerial imaginations. Tap-and-wait and shut-down-and-restart were patterns that provided the rhythm to the days when I accompanied NGO staff in their assessments. These regular and lengthy pauses were the rule rather than the exception, and the number of occasions where I witnessed the tablets or the applications functioning slowly – or not at all – are far too numerous to count. Almost invariably, these pauses were met with forbearance from both the staff member doing the assessment, who would occasionally sigh or offer an apology, and the individual being assessed, who sometimes responded with '*mā mushkileh'* or *'ma'lay'* [no problem], but most often responded with '*'ādi'* [it's normal/to be expected].

Power was exercised with a kind of trickledown effect. The tablets made life considerably easier for the coordinators in Beirut because it saved them time. They expected the managers in the field office to learn how to navigate a database system they themselves had the educational background, training and experience to be able to navigate with ease. They anticipated the tablets to run as smoothly and reliably as their mobile phones. The managers in the field office – at least, those who could *not* navigate the database as their seniors expected them to – wanted to be able to do their jobs effectively and asked their field staff to compensate by collecting data both on the tablet and on paper. All staff expected respondents to the survey to have the time and patience to sit through all of this information being taken slowly, and multiple times. This then, was how the network around the tablets in this particular NGO had stabilised. All kinds of work were required of field staff and survey respondents that had not been factored into the NGO's calculations. The respondents to the survey had very little power to influence this, and yet were required to be 'in relationship with the standardized' (Star 1990: 39), a position which, as I shall outline below, required substantial work.

The work of field staff and respondents was fundamental to the practice of assessments, and it was work that they had little option but to partake in. But this work went almost entirely unnoticed by staff members in positions of power within the organisation. When it came to field staff, the work required of them consisted of translation, waiting and repetition. Sometimes, this was quite literally translation from English into Arabic because the language of assessment varied: the forms were almost invariably originally written in English, but some management staff had made efforts to make sure their assessments were translated into Arabic, and these translations were always into Modern Standard Arabic, which diverges significantly from the dialects spoken by the staff members and communities being surveyed. Often, staff would interpret the questions they were reading into spoken Levantine dialect as they went along. But subtler forms of translation were also needed, to make the 'NGO-speak' of the questionnaires intelligible for the respondent, who might not know what was meant by words such as 'specific needs' or 'early marriage'. The work of waiting and repetition, however, was the most time-intensive and energy-sapping work. The monotony of it required endless patience from the field staff as they waited for a question to load or watched the application crash over and over again.

When it came the respondents, certain amounts of translation were required to render their situation intelligible to the humanitarian classificatory system, along with the same waiting and repetition that the field staff performed. But other kinds of work were required in addition to this. The first could be described as presence: respondents were expected to *be there*. If they were not, they may miss out on a chance to receive assistance. If they were informed in advance that an assessment would take place – which, while considered best practice, was by no means the default – the timings given were often vague ('in the morning'), during the middle of a working/school day, and subject to last-minute change. This required presence inevitably had a gendered dimension to it. Surviving with dignity for many Syrians in Lebanon usually involved a combination of both trying to maintain an income and – because work was unreliable and pay was meagre – trying to access various forms of humanitarian assistance. Most often, it was male members of the household who went in search of employment during the day, and women who remained behind to liaise with the humanitarian organisations. As I indicated in the previous chapter, staff gave me a number of reasons why this gendered split happened. Some thought that men considered asking for assistance humiliating, others told me that Syrians considered women more likely to successfully elicit the sympathies of humanitarian organisations and receive assistance. I was also told that it was because women 'didn't work' and that their movements were more restricted owing to concerns about their safety, so they stayed in the camp. Such statements reveal much about humanitarian staff members' understanding of gender roles among the communities they were

supporting - a topic I will cover in more detail in Chapter Six - but for now it is important to note that the work being done was, more often than not, *women's* work. It was women who were disproportionately engaged by the socio-technical networks that had sprung up around assessment practices.

The second kind of work respondents were expected to do might be thought of as disclosure. They were expected to provide the details of their personal lives and histories, in the form desired by the organisation. This meant they must have all of the necessary identity documents with them. On multiple occasions, I witnessed Syrians, who had journeyed some distance to register for assistance, have to turn around and go back again, because they didn't have their *malāf* with them. They would return some hours later, document in hand, to try again. Each household would only receive one *malāf* which covered all members, meaning that only one member of the household could be in possession of it at any one time. Beyond the *malāf,* it also meant that they were expected to go over details of their personal history and situation, with a stranger, in a public space, often within hearing distance of others. They had to answer questions such as 'how many times did you eat meat last week?' 'why did you leave Syria?' 'have your children showed any signs of psychological distress?' and 'did anyone in your household marry under the age of 18?'. The questions could be emotionally taxing, distressing, even humiliating. Here, it was often not only the field staff who had to engage in the work of translating, but the survey respondents too. They had to translate complex situations into single sentence answers which fitted into the multiple-choice answers prompted by the field staff. The network had stabilised in such a way as to normalise respondents to surveys having to provide this kind of information over and over again, work which was not considered in the efficiency modelling of the humanitarian organisations.

The third kind of work might be described as forbearance. This was not only the patience required in waiting one's turn, waiting for the question to load on the tablet, and waiting for the application to restart; it involved a willingness to repeat information over and over again. The waiting that was expected during the assessment process was also mirrored in more waiting further down the line: after the assessment respondents had to wait to hear if they were eligible, and then later wait at distribution centres for assistance. This work took its toll in many ways. Economically, the time spent waiting prevented survey respondents from pursuing other avenues for survival. Psychologically, there was the uncertainty over whether the survey would lead to any assistance, as well as the lack of dignity and respect that many respondents felt in being forced to give up their time. In a recent study into dignity in displacement among Syrians in Lebanon, one respondent stated that 'the process of queuing for assistance is humiliating' (Grandi, Mansour, and Holloway

2018: 4). Yet this forbearance was the work that humanitarian organisations required of Syrians and other communities impacted by displacement into Lebanon. Indeed, the only position they could take other than forbearance, was, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, outright refusal. Even this option required significant work: explaining to Jad and Basma the reasons for his refusal cost the father living near Tripoli energy and time, and courtesy dictated that he provide us with coffee.

In recent years, in the context of (forced) migration, a number of scholars have begun to look more closely at the temporal politics of state practices. Ruben Andersson (2014) and Shahram Khosravi (2018), for example, have drawn attention to aspects of speed and stasis in border zones and the 'theft' of futures effected during deportation processes respectively. Both authors point to the ways in which detention, deportation, stasis and other forms of temporal uncertainty are leveraged by state actors over migrants as an emphatic means of control, arguing that authorities 'engage in an active usurpation of time' (Andersson 2014: 796). I saw no evidence that humanitarian organisations in Lebanon were using temporal 'theft' and uncertainty as an *emphatic* means of control or an *active* usurpation of time. Indeed, if anything, humanitarian management staff seemed to think that using tablets would benefit respondents as much as organisations in terms of saving time. In spite of the NGO's best intentions, however, temporal control and uncertainty remained the effects of this network of practice. In their efforts towards organisational efficiency, humanitarian organisations placed great worth in staff time, while affording the time of beneficiaries very little value indeed. The reality of how this worked in practice, involving much waiting on the part of the field staff, was not factored into humanitarian organisations' calculations of efficiency and economy. The work of survey respondents, on the other hand, was not discussed at all. Being in relationship with the standardised, tablet-centric assessment practices of humanitarian organisations required Syrians and other affected communities in Lebanon to give up sovereignty over their own time and submit to waiting, waiting, repeating themselves, and waiting some more.

Conclusion

In concluding this chapter, I want to return to the question of who benefits from the introduction of tablets in humanitarian data collection. The community of practice that exists around this process is a complex one. It involves international governmental donors, various elements of international organisations, from headquarters to country offices to field offices, and all the staff in-between. It is an intermingling of humans and machines, social mess and frozen inscriptions of

knowledge and classification. When thinking about how the benefits and costs of this technological innovation have been meted out, it's inevitable that we come back to staff members like Sara, *who do not use the tablet*, but for whom the proceeds of the technology are so indispensable. For Coordinators and Managers, mobile data collection technology and the legibility it makes possible really does make their jobs easier. It enables them to easily produce swathes of the quantitative evidence with which donors are so enamoured, giving them a better chance of securing funding, and the extension of their own contracts. It helps them plan programmes and assess the extent to which they are effective (according to their own parameters, of course) much faster and with far fewer analytical labour-hours than would otherwise be required.

When it comes to how the *costs* of the technology are born, however, by considering the process of humanitarian assessments as socio-technical networks of practice we are able see the power effects of data collection. Power is exerted in subtle ways *within* humanitarian organisations as much as it is *by* them over the populations they aim to support; the NGO field staff were in many ways as excluded from influencing and shaping the practice of data collection as the respondents, and certainly, their membership in the network and the work required from them by it went unnoticed in the higher echelons of the organisation. With no easy way for field staff to communicate the daily frustrations and inertia of data collection to the management staff, the management staff's belief that the tablets made things easier and more streamlined for everyone went unchallenged.

The network surrounding the tablet described in this chapter is consequently an agent of subtle power, the temporal rhythms of which field staff and survey respondents have no choice but to submit to. The tablet dictated – even in its lack of, or mis-use – the nature of the interaction between enumerator and respondent, between NGO and the inhabitants of the informal tented settlement. The frozen inscriptions it carried required field staff and respondents to force-fit their complex social worlds into the narrow confines of the humanitarian classificatory system. Its complexity and non-functionality a necessary maze for them to navigate. They were the delegated to, the disciplined, the actors who existed outside of, and yet in relationship with, the standardised community of practice. It was they who bore the brunt of the costs, and their labour which went unnoticed. While humanitarian organisations were carrying out these assessments with the intention of solidarity and assistance, the act of carrying them out thus sustained and created inequalities.

5. Black Holes: Opacity, Gravity and Distortion in Humanitarian Eligibility Formulae

One cold and bright morning in February 2018, I made the 50km journey from Beirut, on Lebanon's coast, to the city of Zahle, in its mountainous centre. The Beqaa valley, where Zahle is located, comprises some of the poorest areas in Lebanon, with some of the highest concentrations of Syrians. Nevertheless, Zahle itself seemed to be thriving, partly due to the business driven its way by international aid organisations and their staff. The Livelihoods Centre, where I was to spend my day, consisted of half of the second floor in a nondescript residential building. It was run by one of the NGOs with whom I was conducting my research. The livelihoods programme had been set up in response to a need for more sustainable solutions to the humanitarian situation in Lebanon: by linking Syrians and Lebanese communities in need of work with local businesses, providing skills training, paid internships and apprenticeships, the NGO hoped both to support the local economy and to equip Syrians and Lebanese communities with skills that could help them become economically self-reliant and resilient to economic shocks.

By the time I arrived the Livelihoods Centre had just opened for the day and a small group of people were waiting register with the aid organisation, hoping to be deemed eligible for assistance. The livelihoods programme's services, including apprenticeships, vocational training, and job referrals were brightly advertised in Arabic on the walls: 'Sewing', 'English Lessons', 'Catering'. Four of the five adults in the waiting room were women and most had brought children with them. Some of those hoping to be eligible had been referred by other humanitarian organisations, some had been informed of the programme through the NGO's own outreach efforts, while others had heard about it through friends or neighbours.

I sat down in a small office with Ahmed, the Livelihoods Assistant, who was preparing for the day's arrivals. The first person to arrive that day was a young woman, who walked in with her toddler. Ahmed gave her a brief introduction to the programme while opening up the information management system on his desktop computer to begin going through the 'Livelihoods Profiling Tool', a questionnaire that determined eligibility for the Livelihoods Programme. The screen monitor was facing towards Ahmed and away from the young woman. The tool was only available in English on the desktop, so she would likely have been unable to read it anyway, had the screen been visible to her. As it was, Ahmed's English was also limited. He told me he'd memorised most of the questions, recognising them by certain words as they come up on the screen. He proceeded to conduct the interview in Arabic, translating in his head as he went along.

As we went through the questions in the profiling tool, I began to notice that there were occasions when Ahmed wasn't asking the questions that were on the form. There were instances where he formulated the questions differently, and times he marked different answers to the ones the young woman gave. Sometimes he narrated these decisions to me in English: 'This question is pointless, no one has a dishwasher' he told me, clicking 'no' on the form without asking. 'How are your mathematical skills?' he asked her. She nodded and answered '*tamām',* fine. He clicked 'somewhat unconfident' on the form. He didn't ask her about her advanced mathematical skills, instead clicking 'very unconfident' on the form. There were long silences while Ahmed clicked through questions he didn't ask, or else waited for the next page to load. The young woman watched Ahmed's face as he stared at the screen. Her son began to get impatient and wriggly.

When the questionnaire finally came to an end, Ahmed said: 'Now we'll check and see if you're eligible, and if you are, you'll have a meeting with the livelihoods counsellor, who will discuss with you what options are available'. She nodded and thanked him, before leaving the room.

Ahmed turned to me saying, 'let's go and see if she's eligible!'

'Do you think she will be?' I asked.

He shrugged. 'I don't know. sometimes you're sure they will be, and they're not, other times you can't see why they would be, and they are…'

'So… you don't know what the criteria are?'

'No, we're not allowed to know the formula… we can guess, but we don't know'

We trooped through to the Livelihoods Counsellor's office. The Counsellor, Maryam, was there, along with the Livelihoods Officer, their manager, who was in charge of the centre. The four of us gathered around Maryam's computer. She opened up the application and clicked through to questionnaires that had been completed that day. She clicked on the button which said, 'check eligibility', and a small green 'eligible' appeared next to the young woman's name. 'She's eligible!' The counsellor announced. We all smiled at each other.

*

So far in this thesis, we have investigated classes and categories, and we have seen how they are deployed in surveys and assessments, but we have not yet discussed how humanitarian organisations actually choose the people they are going to support. So, how do they target? How

do they measure whether one person is more in need of assistance than another? In the years following the start of the conflict in Syria in 2011, aid organisations were, relatively speaking at least, flush with funding, and able to provide 'arrival packages'[24] of assistance to everyone arriving from Syria. But eight years into the conflict, the majority of Syrians in Lebanon had been living there for years, their arrival packages long since used up. Humanitarian funding from international donors to Lebanon began to dwindle as the number of people from Syria stabilised. Levels of humanitarian need among the Syrian population, meanwhile, remained high and aid organisations faced the choice of who or who not to support. To tackle this, they began to rely on data-driven formulae and metrics to help them differentiate the most-in-need from the least-in-need, apportioning their diminished resources according to these formulae. This, they reasoned, was the fairest and most objective way to distribute assistance.

This chapter critically examines two examples of recipient selection formulae used in humanitarian programmes in Lebanon. Drawing on the concept of the black box used in social studies of science, I argue that while, at first glance, these metrics seem to fit the description of black boxes, on closer inspection they in fact operate more like black *holes*. Black holes for the purposes of this chapter have three important attributes. The first is *opacity*. Like black boxes, one cannot see the internal workings and machinations of a black hole. Collapsed into the formulae described below are the arguments of econometricians, policy managers, programme coordinators and politicians: arguments about what data to collect and how to weight it, delicate political wrangling and historical baggage. But while black boxes close off disputes that have been more or less settled, black holes suck in unresolved disputes and hide them from view entirely. The second attribute is *gravity*. Unlike black boxes, which generally go about their business unnoticed, 'made invisible by their own success' (Latour 1999b: 304), black holes circulate with magnetic, unavoidable gravity. These formulae suck up attention, cropping up again and again in conversations, meetings and conferences. They are the subject of much confused discussion, drawing consternation, doubt, even despair. The third attribute is *distortion*. Like black boxes, they are unknown by all but a select few. But unlike black boxes, which can ultimately be opened up again, their logic explained and understood, the sheer complication of black holes renders them effectively unknowable. They are visible instead in their distorted 'event horizons' of jargon and myth. Yet at the same time, they are widely rationalised as being the best option, the fairest and most objective way to apportion aid.

[24] Arrival packages consisted of essential 'non-food items' such as stoves, kitchen sets, mattresses and blankets

In order to try to understand these black holes, it is vital to trace the networks that come together around them: the people, the mechanisms, the interactions and interruptions. What follows, to use Dear's terminology, is an epistemography of sorts (2001), a chronicle of knowledge-making in the humanitarian aid community in Lebanon. The study covers two tools, the contested understandings of which were related to me during a series of interviews, conversations and observations with various senior technical humanitarian staff members in the UN and International NGOs. The tools I focus on relate mostly to the socio-economic welfare of Syrians and vulnerable Lebanese communities. They determine and rank the socio-economic status of households in order to assess their eligibility for inclusion in humanitarian programmes. I will first concentrate on the 'Desk-Based Formula', a widely used tool designed and implemented by the UN-led Basic Assistance Working Group to ascertain eligibility for multi-purpose cash assistance, before returning to the 'Livelihoods Profiling Tool' designed and implemented by an international NGO.

Up until the moment in the Zahle livelihoods centre described above, I had assumed that staff members knew what the eligibility criteria were for the programme they were implementing. Clearly, I was wrong. Indeed, the decision to keep front-line staff in the dark, as I was to find out, was a deliberate move on the part of the senior management of the organisation – ostensibly to prevent 'manipulation' of the results. I will return to the Livelihoods Profiling Tool later in this article, but it must first be stressed that this move to opacity by senior management was by no means an anomaly within the humanitarian sector in Lebanon. Precious few of the field staff that I interviewed over the course of my year in Lebanon were able to tell me *precisely* the eligibility criteria for the programme they were implementing. As this became clearer to me, I became fascinated with the culture of secrecy that seemed to surround eligibility criteria and their use, not just in this NGO, but across the humanitarian apparatus in Lebanon. On multiple occasions during my research, I was blind copied into emails to which were attached excel spreadsheets from one organisation or another. These spreadsheets were filled with complicated metrics for the ranking and sorting of districts, households, or individuals. 'NOT FOR FURTHER CIRCULATION' was emblazoned across the emails.

States have long used quantitative methods to render their populations legible and manageable (Scott 1998). Indeed, numerical tools are so tied up in narratives of modernity and progress that their use has become considered a way to signal legitimacy to other states (Hein 2004). In their comprehensive review of sociological approaches to quantification, Espeland and Stevens (2008) argue that any process of quantification is fundamentally a social one: 'an artifact of human action,

imagination, ambition, accomplishment, and failing' (2008: 431). They draw on works by Latour (1987, 1988) and Callon (1986) to posit that the authority imbued in quantitative methods is reliant on networks of humans and non-humans which become sturdy and indisputable. These networks make use of 'grammars' and 'vocabulary' of quantitative language to convey claims to knowledge. Quantification and its sibling, audit culture (cf. Strathern 2000; Shore and Wright 2015; Merry 2016), have thus become integral to the language of accountability within state and institutional practice. Policies and decisions are backed up with quantitative evidence, their effectiveness measured with quantitative tools.

Humanitarian organisations are by no means exempt from this practice of quantification. As chronicled by the likes of Stephen Hopgood (2008) and Michael Barnett (2011) the international humanitarian aid system often steps in to fill the void left by state actors and institutions in situations of conflict or emergency. In order to perform this role, aid agencies have to understand and respond to the needs of the populations for whom they find – or ascribe – themselves responsible. What's more, they are no outsider to neoliberal, market-driven logics which characterise the broader global economy (Redfield 2013, 2016; Scott-Smith 2016, 2018a, 2018b, 2020). Hopgood argues that decades of chronic underfunding has contributed to the humanitarian system functioning more than ever on a market-based logic (2008: 103); organisations are increasingly professionalised and bureaucratised, promising their donors value for money in the forms of greater economy, efficiency, and effectiveness (see e.g. UK Department for International Development 2011). A major part of the move to professionalise the aid sector has been an increase in the use of, and faith in, quantitative assessment and indicators are used for the measuring, ranking and sorting of information regarding humanitarian needs and the programmes responding to them.

Quantitative processes are often the bedrock of black *boxes*, but there is nothing inevitable about them leading to a black hole. On the contrary, Shore and Wright describe audit culture as a '"glass cage" of coercive transparency' (2015: 422). Whether coercive or not, there is often an assumption of transparency associated with quantitative methods, that they lead to greater accountability, appearing 'pragmatic and instrumental rather than ideological' (Merry 2016: 4). But the metrics and formulae described here are far from transparent. As I will demonstrate, these selection processes do not just disregard the need for clear communication on eligibility for inclusion in humanitarian assistance, they actively render such accountability impossible, through the use of econometric tools that are barely understood by senior technical staff with training in economics or statistics, let alone front-line staff or the Syrian population.

This chapter will further explore the role of technology as an enactment of expert knowledge, and its role in the socio-material networks which have formed around targeting within the humanitarian response. While these technologies are hailed as objective and best practice, the reality is that they are deeply embedded in the Lebanese political landscape, with both local and national political considerations impacting the ways that vulnerability among Syrian and Lebanese communities is made legible. We will see, once again, the ways in which humanitarian schemes of legibility are complicit in reproducing the inequalities they seek to address.

The Desk-Based Formula

Before the desk-based formula, the decision about who was eligible for humanitarian assistance in Lebanon was a less complicated one. When the humanitarian response for Syrians in Lebanon first began in 2011, assistance was generally distributed on a categorical basis: if you were registered with UNHCR, you qualified for support from humanitarian organisations. As is the case in any UN-led humanitarian response, assistance was demarcated conceptually and in practice into 'sectors' such as food, health and education, each coordinated by a Working Group, led or co-led by a UN agency and/or an international NGO. The 'Non-Food Items Sector' (henceforth NFI sector) comprised actors aiming to provide for the basic household needs of newly arrived Syrians. The humanitarian organisations working within this sector distributed in-kind assistance packages containing items such as mattresses, blankets, stoves, kitchen equipment and clothes.

A few years into the crisis, and at the behest of donors such as the DFID and the European Council Humanitarian Office (ECHO), humanitarian organisations increasingly began to turn to various forms of cash assistance. Typically, these ranged from vouchers, exchangeable with certain pre-agreed vendors for limited types of goods, to e-cards, which recipients could use to either withdraw cash to spend as they needed or use directly with vendors. Given that the humanitarian sectors had been founded on *type* of assistance, as opposed to *modality*, a person might end up receiving several small cash grants from various actors, each for a different purpose (for example, food, education and basic household needs). This had the potential to become very complicated. To combat the problem, a Cash Working Group was set up to coordinate these interventions across the different sectors. The economic context in Lebanon, I was told many times, lent itself well to cash-based modalities. 'There is,' one of my interviewees told me, 'a market for every single thing in Lebanon. Regardless of the efficiencies or formality of that market, there is a market for everything.' Furthermore, the majority of Syrians in Lebanon lived in urban settings, and so theoretically had access to these markets, though, as we saw in Chapter Two, in reality this was

hampered by severe restrictions on their movements, particularly for those who did not have legal residency in Lebanon – some 74% of Syrians aged 15 and over (VASyr 2018).

In late 2014, the international humanitarian apparatus acknowledged the protracted nature of the displacement from Syria and moved away from the yearly emergency Regional Response Plans, which covered Syria and its four neighbouring countries, to longer-term nationally based response plans. The Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP), which was co-led by the UN and the Government of Lebanon was launched. Facing diminishing funds and an expanding Syrian population, the leaders of the humanitarian response in Lebanon recognised that it was no longer possible to provide long-term assistance on a categorical basis to all Syrians, and instead began targeting assistance according to vulnerability. As part of this process, the NFI and Cash Working Groups were merged to form the Basic Assistance Working Group. According to its Coordinator, the Basic Assistance Sector 'responds to economic vulnerability using monetised assistance', working alongside the Food Security sector to support the most economically vulnerable Syrian households with multi-purpose cash assistance. The great challenge for the Basic Assistance sector, of course, lay in defining economic vulnerability, and ascertaining which households, from a Syrian population of more than one million, were the most economically vulnerable.

The answer that the Basic Assistance Sector Working Group chose was to use proxy means testing, or PMT. Proxy means testing is a targeting method used by both governments and aid organisations for social safety nets and poverty relief programmes, typically in low and middle-income countries. It was first used in Chile in the 1980s, and has since gained popularity, particularly in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa (Coady, Grosh, and Hoddinott 2004; Grosh et al. 2008; Stoeffler, Mills, and del Ninno 2016). The practitioners I interviewed claimed that this was the first time PMT had been used in a refugee response, and that it was something of an experiment. Proxy means testing ideally follows two steps. First, it uses a nationally representative dataset to design a formula in which household characteristics such as household size or ownership of particular assets are, through regression analyses, used as weights to predict economic welfare. So, for example, if the dataset showed that larger household size was linked to lower welfare, this indicator would be given a greater weight in the formula. Second, a survey based on the selected indicators would be conducted with potential beneficiaries to determine their eligibility in the programme (Stoeffler, Mills, and del Ninno 2016).

One of the key supposed benefits of PMT was that it used observable indicators to estimate economic welfare by proxy rather than using self-declared income or expenditure. Studies of PMT tend to assume that such indicators lead to more objective or scientific targeting, because they are

'relatively difficult for the household to manipulate just to get into the program' (Coady, Grosh, and Hoddinott 2004: 52). This was the line that was repeated to me over and over again by humanitarian practitioners: that, in order to truly know whether someone was poor, you must be able to examine their home and check, for example, that they didn't have a dishwasher, that the roof was damaged, or that they were all sleeping in the same room. There was an inherent mistrust of anything that Syrians *said*. Practitioners voiced this mistrust to me with varying degrees of scepticism:

> 'Their income will vary a lot from week to week, so it's difficult for them to give an accurate answer'
>
> 'They will say their income is nothing, but they are surviving somehow, so how are they doing it?'
>
> 'They will all just say nothing [to the question 'what is your monthly income'] in order to receive assistance'

Indeed, this mistrust was actively built into survey methodology, as the annual Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon notes: 'Teams made appointments with the interviewees the day before the visit in order to reduce the risk of "preparation" by the household prior to the visit and therefore minimize bias' (WFP 2017: 8). This assessment, known as the VASyr for short, was the nationally representative dataset that the Basic Assistance Sector used in order to design the formula. The report, officially co-authored by the Lebanese Government and the UN, was based on a survey carried out each year by the World Food Programme (WFP), UNHCR and Unicef on a sample of just under 5,000 Syrian households, which had been selected to be both statistically and geographically representative of Syrian households in Lebanon (VASyr 2017). The VASyr was a substantial survey, some 90 pages long, designed to take around an hour to complete, though in reality I was informed it often took longer than that. It contained questions on household demographics, details of the family's arrival in Lebanon, their registration status, concerns regarding protection and their needs with regards shelter, water and sanitation, assets, health, education, security, livelihoods, expenditures, food consumption, coping strategies, debts and access to humanitarian assistance as well as infant and young feeding practices.

Before the desk-based formula was implemented, UNHCR and WFP were collectively attempting to reach every Syrian household with a very similar survey, called the Household Profiling Questionnaire, focusing particularly on questions relating to food security and economic

vulnerability. Over two years, the teams made around 250,000 visits to 185,000 Syrian households in Lebanon to undertake surveys. A representative from the UN told me that each visit cost around $40 and that the costs of conducting the assessments had become prohibitive given the diminished resources.

Instead, WFP approached a team from the American University of Beirut (AUB) and asked them to create a formula. When UNHCR registers Syrians, it collects a small amount of information in its registration database, PRoGres. This information is referred to by practitioners as 'bio-data'. It includes basic details such as the number of people in a household, their ages, genders, whether they have 'specific needs', and where they are living. The team from AUB suggested looking at the ways that expenditure data, taken through the VASyr, correlated with various demographic variables available through the registration database. As one practitioner explained it:

> 'through multiple regression analysis, you come up with the variables that have a significance on poverty or wealth. From a long list, we ended up having a short list of x number of variables that were statistically proven to correlate with wealth.'

The regression analyses took considerable time, meaning the team somehow had to prioritise which demographic variables they tested. Initially, the Basic Assistance Working Group agreed on a simple list of demographic variables to test. But in addition to this, each year, consultations were held with other sector working groups, such as Protection and Health. The members of these working groups were offered a chance to 'make the case' for particular variables pertaining to their own sectoral expertise to be tested for significance, and, in some rare cases, for particular variables to be included in the formula even if the regression analyses had not shown statistical significance.

Within the formula, every possible answer to a variable was given a score. For example, if the data showed that larger household size correlates with reduced expenditure per capita, a household size of 6 or more might give a score of 0, a household size of 5 might give a score of 1, a household size of 4 might give a score of 2 and so on. Next, each of these scores was given a 'coefficient' or weighting – a number it was multiplied by, in other words – depending on the strength of the correlation to expenditure and the importance placed on it by sector working groups, as communicated to the team of econometricians.

Finally, in the words of a UN employee: 'from your representative sample, you have designed this model, you run it, for testing purposes, on the representative sample to see how it behaves, and then you run it on the total population' (Interview, July 2017). Thus, the Desk-based formula

individually ranked each and every household in the entire Syrian population in Lebanon by socio-economic vulnerability, from the most vulnerable to the least vulnerable, based on their predicted expenditure. If having a large household size or living in Akkar were statistically correlated with low expenditure, such households were much more likely to be classed as economically vulnerable according to the desk-based formula. If, on the other hand, smaller households living in Beirut were correlated with high expenditure per capita, these households were much more likely to be classified as the least economically vulnerable. The actual formula was never given to me in writing, and in any case changed in August 2018 based on the new VASyr data, but I was told that there were around 10 demographic variables, each with its own coefficient.

So far, so complicated. But it got more so. The newly ranked households were then categorised into four groups: Severely vulnerable; highly vulnerable; mildly vulnerable; and least vulnerable. The groups were not arbitrarily defined, but mapped directly onto expenditures outlined in the 'Minimum Expenditure Basket' (MEB) and 'Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket' (SMEB) for Syrians in Lebanon. These expenditure baskets operated like poverty thresholds within the humanitarian response in Lebanon. According to an official summary: 'The Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB), covers the basic needs of a Syrian household to live with dignity and the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB), covers the requirements to exist and meet lifesaving needs while displaced' (Basic Assistance Working Group 2017).

In my experience interviewing humanitarian staff working on these formulae in Lebanon, the confidence they exhibited in the statistical tools seemed invariably to come with a contradictory acknowledgement of their inherent weakness. I was told on numerous occasions that the idea of a national-level expenditure basket was ridiculous, considering that the price of goods and rent varied considerably depending on where you were in the country. Indeed, as stated plainly in the VASyr itself, rent and food cost considerably more in Beirut and other urban centres than they did in the rural areas of the Beqaa valley or Akkar in the north. Furthermore, staff that I spoke to acknowledged that other factors could significantly affect the amount of money a household needs to survive: the cost of medication for a chronic or serious illness, for example, an unforeseen cost like a funeral, or a relocation following an eviction. Another issue voiced to me by a number of humanitarians was how far removed this all seemed to be from actual information pertaining to the poverty of the household. 'They decide if you're eligible based on only three things: household size, gender and location' is how the Information Manager for one major international NGO put it to me, incorrectly. Whether this was a deliberate exaggeration or a misunderstanding, I never found out, but the implication was clear: for him, it was an abstraction too far.

In 2018, the MEB was calculated to be $571 per month, and the SMEB at $435 per month. Both assumed a household size of five, meaning that the SMEB assumed that $2.9 was needed daily for each person to meet basic survival needs, while the MEB assumed that $3.8 was needed daily for each person to 'live with dignity'. Those whose expenditures fell below the SMEB were categorised as severely vulnerable, which in the summer of 2018 accounted for 58% of the Syrian population. The poorest 50% of the severely vulnerable were eligible for multi-purpose cash assistance, while all households categorised as severely vulnerable were eligible for food assistance. Those whose expenditures fell below the MEB accounted for a further 18% of the Syrian population, meaning that, all together, 76% of Syrian households in Lebanon were considered to be 'poor'. All of the households living below the MEB received seasonal winter assistance in the form of cash grants from October to February.

The expenditure baskets also had direct consequences on the *amount* of financial support eligible households were given. The Basic Assistance partners provided a monthly sum of $175 in 'multi-purpose cash transfers', while the World Food Programme supplied an additional $27 per capita per month for food assistance. These two cash transfers were loaded onto the same chip-and-pin card, known to beneficiaries as 'the red card'. Together, they were intended to provide around 70% of the survival minimum expenditure basket. The remaining 30%, a UN employee informed me, would, they assumed, be sourced by the household 'though informal labour, remittances, or secured by any other programmatic intervention by other sectors.'

These numbers were mentioned over and over again by the practitioners whom I interviewed, reflective of the gravity with which the desk-based formula circulated. The experts were clearly well-rehearsed, accustomed to reeling off the figures for donors, researchers and journalists, and there was impressively little variability in the numbers given to me by the various staff-members I interviewed. But it also seemed that, for the humanitarian workers charged by the international community with the mammoth task of ensuring their basic survival and dignity of Syrians, this statistical song-sheet rendered this population, and their complex needs more manageable, more intelligible, more tangible. During interviews, the economic vulnerability of Syrians was frequently *drawn* rather than explained for me in the form of a graph. Most often, practitioners would draw expenditure along one axis and household size along the other and then stab their pen repeatedly into the page to indicate the thousands of Syrian households. The Syrian population, as they saw it on the page, was 'densely poor' because that is how it looked when plotted on a graph: a dense cluster of dots, through which these practitioners would then draw straight lines to demonstrate how they differentiated severely, highly, mildly and least vulnerable.

Given the centrality of the expenditure baskets in determining both who was eligible for assistance and the amount of assistance they received, as well as the inevitable assumptions bound up in them, I was keen to understand how they were calculated and what research they were based on. In early interviews with UN officials I was told that they were both based on declared expenditure data gathered through the VASyr and equated to the Lebanese Government's national poverty line, without any indication that these two sources were incongruous. However, I later interviewed a senior member of staff whom I'll call Salim. Salim had been working on the response for many years. He told me that when they first developed the minimum expenditure basket, it was much higher than US$3.8 per person per day. However, when they had presented this figure to their interlocutors in the Government, they encountered resistance. What follows is an extract from the interview:

> Salim: They [the Government] said, 'do not assume that refugees need more than vulnerable Lebanese. You need to revisit those packages and you need to either equate it to the poverty line or decrease it [even further].' We said fine, that's the way to go.
>
> Me: But presumably there was a reason the MEB was higher than the national poverty line?
>
> Salim: Because the national poverty line was outdated. It's as simple as that.
>
> Me: And the Government didn't want to recalculate the poverty line?
>
> Salim: It would trigger a huge political, administrative and legal discussion in the country regarding social security and so on. This estimation is from 2008. That was the last poverty study in Lebanon. Some informal estimations – unofficial ones – say that it's around $8 [per person per day].
>
> […]
>
> Me: So hypothetically, many of these people that are categorised as mildly or least vulnerable might also be living under the actual poverty line of $8?
>
> Salim: Everyone. All the refugee population. But it's not official, so we don't use it. You would not be able to see it in any of the documents.

By this point, I felt rather like Dorothy finally meeting the Wizard of Oz. Beneath the dizzying structures of random sampling, proxy means testing, and regression analyses, beneath the jargon-ridden reassurances about data-driven approaches, coefficients, inclusion and exclusion errors, seemed to be a foundation of fallacy. By Salim's own admission, it made things 'really sticky'. He was fully aware that best practice in proxy means testing meant recalibrating expenditure baskets on a yearly basis, something that was politically impossible for them to do.

At the same time, it's possible to overstate the importance of the expenditure baskets on multi-purpose cash programming in Lebanon. While the amount of money in cash grants were determined by these baskets, the resources available to humanitarian organisations distributing the grants were determined by donors and remained severely limited. As of July 2018, I was told there were only sufficient funds to support half of the group categorised as 'severely vulnerable' with multi-purpose cash assistance, which was why only the most vulnerable 50% of households in that category received assistance. Besides, while theoretically a readjustment of the expenditure baskets should have resulted in fewer Syrian households getting more resources to ensure that the 70% of the household's survival needs would still have been met, there were other factors at play. A separate stipulation, also imposed by the Lebanese Government, dictated that Syrians in Lebanon could not receive a total assistance package worth more than the minimum wage in Lebanon, equivalent to $450 per month. This ceiling was mentioned to me by a number of staff members, though I did not find it anywhere in writing.

It would be easy in these circumstances to depict the Lebanese Government as a villain, deliberately curtailing humanitarian assistance to a population in dire need. Or, perhaps, to depict the UN as a collection of spineless bureaucrats, bending to every whim of the Lebanese authorities, rather than advocating for the rights of communities in desperate need of support. But the reality is more ethically complex than such a reading of the situation would allow. As we know, Lebanon had experienced an arrival of displaced people as a proportion of its population which was globally and historically unprecedented, with around one in person in every four in Lebanon being Syrian (Government of Lebanon and United Nations 2018). Notwithstanding the long history of Syrian migrant labour in the country (Chalcraft 2009; Saleh 2016), this increase in population put enormous pressure on already-stretched public services and infrastructure. Despite being an upper middle-income country, wealth inequality and youth unemployment in Lebanon were high and the social security net for economically deprived Lebanese citizens was meagre (Karam 2015). Little wonder, then, that the Government was concerned that Syrians might be perceived by Lebanese

citizens to be better provided for than themselves. The context in which the UN was negotiating support for Syrians was extremely fraught.

In this short conversation with Salim, it was thus possible to see the extent of the opacity and distortion with which the desk-based formula operated. The dispute about the poverty line, unresolved, was subsumed into the black hole, along with the delicate political context within which the UN had to negotiate. The rationale behind the MEB, the SMEB, the number of people receiving assistance and the amount of cash assistance they received, all of which were based in pragmatic fudging and imperfect statistical methodologies, were distorted by the veneer of the econometric lexicon, the sheer complication of the quantitative processes underpinning the desk-based formula.

The Livelihoods Profiling Tool

Let us return now to a black hole operating in a slightly different context, through the Livelihoods Profiling Tool mentioned at the start of this chapter, which was being used by one of the INGOs with whom I was partnered for my research. At the time I began the partnership, the Livelihoods Profiling Tool was an unwieldy document, some 166 questions long. This was largely as a result of multiple adaptations and additions over the course of its 18 months of use by a series of technical coordinators. The field staff who had to use the tool on a daily basis hated it. They complained that it took far too long and that many of its questions weren't even relevant for the programme: 'They come in thinking they're signing up for English classes, and we ask them what kind of toilet they have!' commented one member of staff. Its purpose was somewhat unclear, even to the Livelihoods Coordinator, Gabriel. While it functioned first and foremost to determine eligibility in the Livelihoods programme, it gathered a wide range of additional information, not used for that purpose. These questions were ostensibly to find out information on the socio-economic circumstances of the beneficiaries, as well as their experience and wishes when it came to education and employment. But the NGO didn't have staffing capacity to do such analysis, so the data sat quietly on its servers, unused. Gabriel, along with other technical management staff, was also concerned that the questions in the profiling tool overlapped with too many of the questions in the organisation's other assessments and questionnaires. Staff time was a precious commodity in this new era of diminishing resources, and the management team were keen that 'duplication should be minimised'. I was asked, in my capacity as 'intern' to conduct desk-based research on the extent of duplication across the NGO's tools, with the intention that my research would help support the re-design of the livelihoods profiling tool. I agreed, on the proviso that I

could also interview staff and conduct observations to investigate how the tools were used in practice, both for the purposes of my own research and to enhance my research for the organisation. They agreed, and I returned to the livelihoods centres to continue my observations. On my return, I delivered a report to Gabriel, and discussed some of my reflections with him on the opacity around targeting. Gabriel then organised a consultation with field staff, to redesign the tool collaboratively.

When the time came for this meeting, front-line staff, Livelihoods Managers and Area Managers had travelled to Beirut from all the NGO's field offices. Gabriel began by stating that he wanted to cut the questionnaire to just a few essential questions and he asked the teams what they thought were the most important questions. People began to make suggestions, which Gabriel started writing on a whiteboard. At this point, I became quite confused. Didn't we have to know how eligibility was determined before we could decide which questions should get asked? I raised my hand and suggested as much. Gabriel responded, 'yes… ideally.' He looked at Sara, the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Coordinator. She looked around warily.

'No one's really supposed to know the formula for how eligibility is calculated.'

'Who made that decision?' Gabriel asked

'Dan,' Sara answered, referring to the Director of Programmes.

It was decided that Sara should go and ask Dan if the team could know the eligibility criteria before they went ahead and redesigned the profiling tool. She came back and informed us that Dan had decided we could know the criteria, but not the coefficient, or weighting, each criterion was given and the formula with which these scores were used to ultimately determine eligibility. All heads turned expectantly back to Gabriel, who was still at the front of the room. He shook his head: 'Even me, I don't know what the criteria are!' It turned out the formula pre-dated Gabriel's arrival in the organisation, and he had never been allowed in on the secret. Dan, together with Gabriel's predecessor, had devised the criteria and asked Sara to design the formula, meaning she was the one person in the room who had access to the information, and one of only two people left in the whole organisation. She opened up a document on her laptop to remind herself and read out the criteria.

Most people in the room were unsurprised to learn that the criteria were different for Lebanese and Syrian applicants. The livelihoods programmes were meant to be targeting a ratio of 70% vulnerable Lebanese citizens to 30% Syrians. This was in line with the Lebanese Government's

stipulations regarding livelihoods assistance. Not only this, but legally providing for Syrians with sustainable livelihoods support was highly problematic given they were restricted to working in a limited number of sectors such as construction, agriculture and even permits for this type of work were dependent on legal residency, something which, at that time, less than 20% of Syrian households held (VASyr 2018). Nevertheless, the majority of applicants presenting at the NGO's livelihoods centres were Syrian, meaning that in order to come even close to achieving a 7:3 ratio, the criteria had to be considerably more lenient for Lebanese citizens.

It wasn't just the criteria that were different for Lebanese citizens, it was also the questions in the survey. Gabriel, a European national and the only non-Lebanese member of staff at the meeting, was unhappy about this. Historically, staff had fought against asking Lebanese applicants certain questions, which they considered to be 'sensitive', and Gabriel decided to bring up the issue. The question that came in for particular criticism was regarding what kind of toilet the respondent had at home. The difficulty was that this question was taken directly from the VASyr questionnaire. In order for the NGO's data to be comparable with the UN's national data, they must use the same questions, but the UN only surveyed Syrians, not vulnerable Lebanese communities. Lina, one of the Livelihoods Managers told Gabriel, 'It's not culturally appropriate to ask Lebanese people what kind of toilet they have.' 'But it's fine for the Syrians?' he countered. 'Well… no, but they're used to it'. 'Then we should make the Lebanese get used to it as well!' Gabriel half-joked, sounding exasperated.

He was in a bind: he and I had spoken about this issue on multiple occasions over the course of my time with the NGO. He had three options: ask everyone – Syrian or Lebanese – the question; continue asking only Syrians; or ask no one at all, removing the question from the survey altogether. He didn't think the questions were culturally appropriate any more than Lina did, and he understood that Lebanese staff might feel uncomfortable asking their compatriots these questions, but it grated against his egalitarian principles that this should not be a problem when they asked Syrians. He viewed the differentiation as an extension of the prejudiced and discriminatory treatment that Syrians regularly faced in Lebanon. But all his economic training and experience in the aid sector told him that unless the data they gather was comparable with the humanitarian apparatus in Lebanon more broadly, it was meaningless. Facing a wall of resistance from every member of staff in the room, he conceded defeat and agreed that they would continue asking only Syrians the question, his commitment to statistical best practice ultimately winning out over his egalitarianism.

From there, the debate moved onto a broader discussion of whether the organisation should be using our old friend, the Desk-Based Formula, to select beneficiaries, or the questions from the VASyr. There was a long discussion about this, fuelled by considerable confusion about whether these two things were the same, or separate. There was the option to use only these tools, to build them into the NGO's own tool, or to ignore them completely. The Information Manager, Hamid, was vehemently against using the Desk-Based formula, arguing that it could not be accurate using so little information – and besides, he argued, no one actually knew how it was calculated. The Area Programme Manager for Tripoli and the North, however, thought that the NGO should be harmonising its targeting with the basic assistance working group. Two of the NGO's other projects *only* used the Desk-Based Formula to decide who is eligible for assistance. 'We can't say it's good enough for one project and not good enough for the other!' he exclaimed. At this point, the discussion morphed into several simultaneous conversations, all in Arabic, and Gabriel, the only person in the room who didn't speak Arabic, sat back looking exhausted.

Eventually it was decided that, to ensure comparability, the new profiling tool would ask the 10 key questions in the VASyr, which were used to determine economic vulnerability, though some of these, such as shelter type, would only be asked of Syrians. It would also ask a number of supplementary questions, such as ability to attend the trainings in question and willingness to work. As we left the meeting room, Sara turned to me, looking pleased: 'It was a good meeting, no?' I stared back at her, bewildered. I was still unable to grasp how it was supposed to be possible to redesign a tool to calculate eligibility if we didn't understand how that eligibility was currently calculated.

Gabriel's long-term aim, as he told me after the meeting, was that he would actually design a metric to give a 'socio-economic score'. This would use proxy means testing to assess people's economic vulnerability, ranking them into 'better off', 'poor', and 'very poor', not unlike the Desk-Based Formula. However, rather than simply using the score to select beneficiaries, Gabriel wanted front-line staff to be responsible for choosing who was able to access the livelihoods programme. Using the socio-economic score, along with their own knowledge about the potential beneficiary's circumstances, their suitability for the range of livelihoods support on offer, and their judgement of the applicant's genuine wish to find waged employment, staff would be able to make an informed selection. For Gabriel, this was a genuine attempt towards devolved authority. He believed that front-line staff best understood the communities with whom they were working, as well as the particularities of the job markets in their areas of operation. He wanted to empower them to make the all-important decision of who was included in the programme.

Unfortunately, this attempt towards devolved authority, robbing the formula of its opacity and its distortion, acted like a loosening of the pull of the black hole. When the centre couldn't hold, things began to fall apart. Gabriel's new approach proved unpopular at first with staff. Indeed, I witnessed the moment that Gabriel first mentioned his plan to Sara, the M&E Manager, and Hamid, the Information Manager in the open-plan office in Beirut where we all worked. Sara – ever understated – raised her eyebrows and cautioned that regular spot-checks would probably be needed. Hamid was more explicit in his fears that staff bias would compromise the selection process. Gabriel responded, 'if we don't trust the staff… I don't want to go down this path. We have to trust them to do their jobs'. Hamid shook his head but walked away. Ultimately, it was not his decision to make. He came over to Sara's desk later, though, to express his concern again: '*Fī shay ghalaṭ*', there's something wrong about this.

Throughout my research I regularly heard comments or asides from senior humanitarian management staff – both international and Lebanese – regarding the apparent lack of objectivity of front-line staff. Front line roles were lower paid and tended to be filled by less experienced staff, and staff who had not gone through an English- or French-speaking education system. These comments tended to come from two perspectives. The first, more positive, perspective was that front-line staff would have too compassionate a reaction to displaced households. Indeed, this expectation was written into the process of some assessments. The VASyr questionnaire, for example, had a section at the end entitled 'subjective assessment', asking the enumerator to make a judgement about how s/he would categorise the household's vulnerability. Rather than take these judgements on their own merit, technical staff would then compare the formula's calculations to the subjective assessment, anticipating that staff would routinely classify people as more vulnerable than their own calculations. Cases where there were large discrepancies in either direction would then be put on a list for verification. The second, more negative, perspective came from management staff who believed their front-line staff members to be prejudiced against Syrians.

I sat in with one of the frontline livelihoods teams as they trialled the new process. We had just come back from a community centre where four members of the team had painstakingly taken the details of the potential beneficiaries. Rather than giving applicants an immediate answer, the livelihoods team would make a decision together on each person's eligibility and then call them to follow up. The socio-economic scoring was not yet functional, so the Livelihoods team would have to make a judgement themselves for the time being. The Livelihoods Manager, Dima, extracted all the data for the assessments made that day from the database into an excel spreadsheet. She then began filtering and cleaning the data, while in a sort of rhetorical dialogue

with her team, who responded with muted sounds of agreement: 'OK, what criteria should we use… whether they are head of household, household income, individual income, which is better? Household income. Then number of people in household, number of people with specific needs, if they're accessing external support, debt… from this we can work out their net income' At this point, she created a new column in the spreadsheet and calculated the income minus debt for each respondent. 'If they have worked in the past month, if they are looking for a job, and… unsafety or fear of movement'. After another moments' thought, she created a further column, to show net income per capita, using the number of people in household column.

With all the information now in front of her, Dima then took each applicant one by one. She called out the name, and then identified the team member who had done the profiling. 'What do you think?' She asked. Together, they went through the answers the applicant had given. Many people were unequivocally deemed eligible, 'priority one,' by the team; those with very low incomes, who had not worked in the last month but had been actively looking for a job. Others, whom they were less sure about, they marked as 'maybes'. There was a woman who already had a job but who wanted to sign up for English classes. 'Doing English classes for three hours a week isn't going to help you get a job' Dima reasoned, undermining the whole point of the programme, 'so there's no reason she shouldn't be able to take it'. No one was deemed ineligible.

There was one applicant in particular, who stands out in my memory, who I'll call Abu Hossam. Dima reeled off a series of details about him, at which point Ghassan, a Livelihoods Assistant who had not been with us at the community centre piped up: 'Abu Hossam from Tal Akhdar? I know him! He's a liar!'. 'Really?' Lina asked, concerned, and read out some of his answers from her spreadsheet. Ghassan then proceeded to refute much of the information that Abu Hossam had given. He was his neighbour and Ghassan was convinced that his situation was not nearly as dire as these answers would indicate. Dima frowned. 'OK let's come back to that one'. Afterwards, when the Assistants and Officers had set off home, I sat with Dima while she finalised the selection. She indicated Abu-Hossam's name. 'I won't take him out. I can't, it's not fair. They could all be liars… we just wouldn't know'. She sighed. 'We don't like this. I hope this will be the only time we have to do this. We don't like the responsibility.'

The resistance of the front-line staff to the new suggested approach stemmed as much from practical as theoretical consternation. The machinations of the formula had offered them a sort of computer-says-no impotency which, while potentially disempowering, had prevented any weight of responsibility – and its associated guilt – from falling on their shoulders. Moreover, as I had witnessed during my visits to the livelihoods centres, the de-personalised selection process had

enabled them to effectively commiserate with unsuccessful applicants. They were not the decision-makers and could no better understand the selection process than the applicant. They were able to (and did) deliver the unhappy news to unsuccessful applicants with genuine sadness and concern. It seemed to me unlikely that this would be possible if they were instead making the decision themselves. Of course, as one afternoon's observations had revealed, the use of staff judgement to decide eligibility for humanitarian programmes was a thorny issue, rife with potential for bias to play a role. But crucially, these 'subjective' assessments were no more or less problematic than the formulae they were replacing. They were just problematic in a more visible way. While the biases and assumptions inherent in personal judgement were there for all to see, the assumptions, injustices and compromises built into the formulae were hidden away, sucked into a black hole, with no clear information on them available, and no discussion possible. In this way, the opacity of the black hole served an important functional purpose for humanitarian staff, taking difficult and potentially contentious decisions out of their hands.

This episode highlighted the paradoxical nature of humanitarian eligibility formulae. While purported as objective and impartial, they were in fact deployed in ways that were highly contextual and did significant political work. In his article on the Middle-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) band, used by humanitarians to determine inclusion in emergency nutrition programmes, Scott-Smith (2013) argues that the MUAC band has most value for humanitarians themselves, transferring difficult ethical decisions out of their hands while giving the impression of impartiality. He points out that the MUAC band 'fail[s] to interact with the detail of an individual's experience, to enable their participation in recovery or to reveal the structural determinants of their hunger' (2013: 923). In a similar way, the livelihoods formula functioned primarily for the humanitarian organisation and staff. Its deployment was highly contextual, even arbitrary, but the opaque mathematics lent the process a veneer of objectivity that carried the burden of ethical decision making. The objectivity was, of course, an illusion, masking both the politics of the formulae and the structural inequalities that caused socio-economic vulnerability in the first place.

Conclusion

It's not an exaggeration to say that it took me months of fieldwork to try to understand the data and processes underpinning the Desk-Based Formula, and no one was ever able to provide me with the details to understand it completely. The lengthy investigation process was, in no small part, because I was regularly given incorrect information by humanitarian practitioners themselves. Misunderstandings about eligibility formulae were rife. In the Summer of 2018, I was invited to a

Basic Assistance Sector meeting on the recalibration of the Desk-Based formula, which was attended by key staff members in humanitarian organisations responsible for implementing multi-purpose cash assistance and other programmes aimed at alleviating economic vulnerability: experts, in other words, in poverty alleviation programmes. During the presentation – a series of complicated slides full of graphs and formulae – I noticed some of the delegates looking at each other and shaking their heads, bemused smiles on their faces. After the presentation, there was some time for questions. Each and every person who raised their hand prefaced their question with something along the lines of 'I'm not sure I understand everything, but…', or, 'I'm sure this is a stupid question, but…' And this from the experts. Misunderstandings about the formula were so widespread that it was difficult to get any accurate information without speaking to the staff-members directly responsible for it, and even then, I found that these senior staff claimed that they *did not know what the actual formula was*, though they had some idea of the variables it included. The precise details, it seems, were known only to the out-sourced econometricians and their software.

Small wonder, then, that these processes were opaque for the Syrians and other displacement-affected communities whose access to assistance was dictated by them. This was perhaps the most important feature of the black hole logic. Not only were these formulae deliberately kept secret to prevent any 'gaming' of the system, they were also too difficult for even the expert – never mind the layperson – to understand or explain. Unknown and unknowable. This dual impossibility was often called upon to shut down any conversation about making eligibility criteria public in my interviews. As one information manager said:

> You cannot make [eligibility criteria] public because it can cause changes in the demographics of registration. If you show that by having more kids, you are more likely to be included, they start having more children. You never know with these things… But it's not only about fraud; it's a very hard thing to explain. How would you explain, even if you know *exactly* the formula, how would you humanise it? It's this times that, minus this, plus this, times this…

The question of whether or not to disclose eligibility criteria was not simply a theoretical, or even just an ethical one. It could have severe consequences for the ability of humanitarian organisations to safely implement their programmes. In my final meeting with an NGO staff member from another organisation, I mentioned that I had not heard from her colleague in a long time. He had promised to invite me back to a programme he was managing in a suburb of Beirut, but never got in touch. She grimaced and said that he had been busy, giving me a significant look. There had

been an incident, his team had been doing cash distributions in the community centre and a man who had previously received financial assistance had turned up to find his name not on the list. The staff had not been able to give him any explanation beyond that his household was no longer considered among the most in need. The situation had escalated, and the man who had been removed from the cash programme had pulled out a gun. Though no one was harmed, staff had been understandably scared and angered that the situation could have happened. She shook her head. "Half the team have quit." This was by no means the first incident that I had heard about regarding inclusion in humanitarian programmes. In one of the more devastating incidents I heard about, in January 2018, a friend and humanitarian practitioner texted to say that a Syrian had poured diesel on himself and set himself alight outside their offices in Tripoli, protesting his family being removed from a cash assistance programme.

Each time there was a recalibration of the formula, which happened at least once a year, many hundreds of households were denied eligibility for assistance they had previously been relying upon to survive. Usually, this happened without anyone coming to their household to do a survey, and the explanation they were given as to their exclusion was opaque: the eligibility criteria had changed, and they were no longer eligible. While the UN was attempting to implement appeals mechanisms for those who had been deemed wrongly ineligible, these were not widely known about, and not easily accessed. When I broached the topic of accountability with humanitarian management staff, however, while they acknowledged that the situation was difficult, they invariably justified the process as normal and the only way possible. An Information Manager who worked in the Basic Assistance Sector told me:

> 'Beneficiaries definitely don't like this tool. It's very difficult for them to understand how I, sitting in my office in Beirut, determined their eligibility without the facts. Without needing to see them. I know there is a lack of clarity among refugees of why they are or aren't being selected, and I know it must be really difficult on them, especially the ones that get taken out or see their neighbours being included but this is the same as any other social safety net programme.'

Except, it isn't. In many places around the world, eligibility for assistance is decided on a categorical basis. In the UK, for example, eligibility for universal credit is clearly available on the government's website, and, while complex, is at least transparent. The trouble in Lebanon was that almost the entire Syrian population, along with a sizeable proportion of the Lebanese population, was so manifestly poor that using any of the usual categorical criteria would leave the aid organisations with an eligible population far larger than they could afford to support. 'Let's say the lowest [PMT]

score that we get is $22 per capita [per month],' one practitioner working on the Desk Based Formula told me, 'the following case is $22.00000001, then $22.00000002 and so on. Even if you compare a severely vulnerable [household] to a highly vulnerable, you don't see that much difference.' In other words, the margins of poverty within which these organisations were working were extremely slim. As one of the academics working on the Desk-Based formula noted, without a hint of irony, 'the good thing is it's very hard to assist the wrong people in this response'.

Categorical inclusion is not a panacea, of course. As outlined in Chapter Three, categories are generally defined by those in positions of power. They are, by their very nature, imperfect, too simplistic to capture the depth and breadth of social complexity. But categories can also be a source of accountability. Where categories are used to define eligibility, institutions can communicate clearly and openly regarding who is eligible for support. More importantly, there is room for contestation in the grey areas left by the imperfection of categories. Where categories are *known* by potential beneficiaries or humanitarian staff to open doors to certain kinds of assistance, they can, used strategically, become the keys to accessing that assistance. In situations where categories and their imperfect boundaries are well understood, aid workers and affected communities can capitalise on the flexibility afforded by this imperfection to ensure access to services. Though not without its own problems – as we saw above when Gabriel made moves towards devolved authority – the subversive navigation of these systems of classification can be understood as a method by which crisis-affected communities and front-line staff can exert agency within – or even productively protest – bureaucratic systems of humanitarian governance.

By contrast, the opaque metrics described here have become the foundations upon which all other facts and arguments are 'stacked' (Merry 2016: 30). When the foundation is a black hole, contestation is rendered impossible. The opacity of the formulae described in this chapter disallow any possibility of creative agency being exerted, because the eligibility criteria *cannot be understood*. The rhetoric that surrounds these formulae – of humanitarian impartiality and quantitative objectivity – are consequently impossible to challenge, distorting the political and social processes by which they are created. Unlike black boxes, which operate unnoticed, these formulae circulate with unavoidable, magnetic gravity, drawing the attention and consternation of anyone who wants to be included within a programme, reaping terrible consequences in their obtuse opacity. Yet the faith placed in them – and, indeed, in their opacity – by humanitarian organisations remains unshakeable, so they remain in place at the centre of the networks through which targeting takes place, unknown, and unknowable.

6. Paradoxes of Empowerment

One morning in late Spring 2018, I jumped in the car with Fida, a staff member on the Protection Team in the NGO with whom I held an informal partnership. We headed out to the mountains above Beirut for a session in an empowerment programme on which I had been a participant-observer on for a couple of weeks. The empowerment programme was being run in a number of neighbourhoods scattered around Lebanon, the majority of them close to Beirut. Each neighbourhood had a three-hour weekly session, with a curriculum lasting a total of ten weeks. Alongside these sessions, participants took part in two more trainings each week to enhance their employability through skills acquisition, usually English or IT classes. In fact, participation in the empowerment sessions was a prerequisite in order to attend these skills classes. The empowerment sessions included subjects such as gender and protection, gender and society, decision-making, cognitive behavioural therapy, and responsibility.

The sessions were held in the local Social Development Centres (SDCs). Lebanon had over 200 SDCs, which were affiliated with the Ministry of Social Affairs, and were often the first point of contact for NGOs wanting to work within communities. Fida's organisation had selected around 20 SDCs to work with. The NGO provided the SDC with resources, such as toys and furniture, and building upgrades as part of the partnership, and used the centre to implement their empowerment programme. While the empowerment sessions were theoretically open to both men and women, in practice, only four of 130 participants on these programmes were male, and the group at the community centre we were visiting that day were all women, a mix of Lebanese and Syrians, all of a Druze faith background.

The session Fida was facilitating that morning was on cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). The session began by going over some of the topics we had covered the previous week: 'gender and society.' Fida began by asking the women to stand in a straight line. She handed out slips of paper to each participant, on which was written a short description of a character for them to become for the exercise, for example:

> 'Young woman, aged 22, single, living in refugee camp, cares for the two children of her sister who passed away'
> 'Country Representative of NGO, female, 42, living in the capital, university-educated'
> 'Soldier in army, male, aged 29, 10-year veteran'

Fida then told us she would read out a series of statements. For every statement for which their character could answer 'yes', the participants could take one step forward. Fida proceeded to read out the statements:

> 'I have access to health services when I need them'
> 'I am not in major danger of being sexually abused'
> 'I can name some of the laws of my country'

After eleven statements along these lines had been read out, the women were staggered across the room, some having taken many steps forward, others having taken none. Fida then asked the women at the front and at the back to read out their characters from the slips, discussing with each the factors that gave each of them power, and the factors that disempowered them. The group knew Fida and each other well by this stage, and the exercise was accompanied with a lot of laughter and a lively discussion on whether certain characters should have taken steps forward at certain points.

The rest of the session explored CBT in more detail. Fida began by asking the group what the difference was between thoughts and feelings, before asking people to name some feelings, which she wrote on the whiteboard. She then proceeded to explain the problem-solving approach of cognitive behavioural therapy: that thoughts prompted feelings, and that feelings prompted behaviours. By changing our thought patterns, we could consequently change how we felt and how we behaved. She gave an example: If a boy is raised to believe he can achieve anything, he will apply for a job he really wants, but if a girl is raised not to believe that she can do anything she wants to, she might not apply for a job that she desired. The participants countered that sometimes, girls really couldn't do things that boys could do. Taking a *service* – a shared taxi – alone at night, for example, was inherently more dangerous for a woman than a man. Thinking differently wouldn't change that. Fida conceded that we had to be realistic about what we could change on a personal level, but tried to convince the group that CBT could still have a huge impact on our daily lives. She explained that our early experiences shape our fundamental beliefs, which in turn shaped our assumptions and expectations. 'If you communicated those expectations to those around you, for example, to your husband, and ask him to communicate his to you, this can improve your relationships.'

Fida then asked the participants what was most important to them in their lives. The group answered: family, marriage, raising children, friends, work, health, faith, society, the environment, and personal growth. Fida wrote these on the whiteboard as they were called out. She then handed

out some work sheets, asking the group to choose one or two of these aspects of their lives, and note down what they would want to change about them in order to be happier. For example, under health, they might want to give up smoking. After a short time of writing, one woman looked up and asked Fida, 'what about money?' Fida looked at the whiteboard, and responded, 'do you think that's covered under work?' before adding '/money' next to 'work' on the whiteboard. For the final exercise, Fida asked the group to work in pairs on creating diaries for themselves, in order to formalise the time they would set aside for making these changes in their lives.

*

The word 'empowerment', as chronicled by Cronin-Furman, Gowrinathan, and Zakaria (2017), was first suggested in the late twentieth century as a development goal by feminists from the global South (Sen and Grown 1988). At its birth, the concept of empowerment was explicitly political: a way to mobilise against structural oppression for radical transformation. However, as global development actors began to embrace the idea, its scope quickly became narrowed. Rather than radical politics, development actors were focused on technical programming goals, 'cemented by the growing mania for measurement in the aid industry' (Cronin-Furman, Gowrinathan, and Zakaria 2017: 3; see also, Krause 2014; Merry and Conley 2011; Eyben and Napier-Moore 2009). In the subsequent decades, criticism of contemporary empowerment programming has come from a number of quarters. Some scholars have commented on the 'fuzziness' of its definition, which can cover anything from lending a woman a sewing machine to a programme to ensuring greater representation of women in parliament (Cornwall and Rivas 2015). Some have argued that it privileges goals related to efficiency, individuals and economic growth (Eyben and Napier-Moore 2009) while crowding out goals around collective action and gender justice (Cornwall and Rivas 2015). Others have drawn on postcolonial feminism to argue that, despite its anti-colonial roots, contemporary empowerment programming has been co-opted and functions today as a kind of 'antipolitics' (Ferguson 1994), setting women's empowerment up in opposition to cultural norms (Kabeer 1999), and sustaining imperial patterns which regard the 'third world woman' as the exemplary victim in need of saving (Cornwall and Rivas 2015; Eyben and Napier-Moore 2009; Lokot 2019; Mohanty 2003; Olivius 2014; Spivak 1988).

Despite the lively debate around the purpose and effectiveness of empowerment programmes, they continue to generate huge amounts of funding from donors, particularly those programmes targeted at girls' education, tackling gender-based violence, and improving health outcomes. Lebanon was no exception to this. While empowerment programmes have typically been implemented in development rather than humanitarian contexts, as soon as humanitarian

organisations in Lebanon realised that displacement was likely to be protracted, they began to make empowerment programmes a priority. Many of the humanitarian organisations I interviewed over the course of my research conducted some kind of empowerment programme. Sometimes these were focussed on 'protection' issues, such as legal registration of residency, marriages and births, preventing and responding to gender-based violence or early marriage. These courses were often wide-ranging, and involved sessions in personal development, such as negotiation skills, decision making and cognitive behavioural therapy. Others were more focussed on economic empowerment, providing skills trainings such as sewing or IT lessons, job placements or apprenticeships. Some, such as the course described at the beginning of this chapter, were a combination of the two. While some were targeted primarily at Syrian communities, many targeted both Lebanese and Syrian communities.

While the majority of empowerment programmes in Lebanon were targeted at women and adolescent girls, there was also a growing trend for personal development programmes targeted at men and adolescent boys. Two organisations I spoke to were implementing programmes for men, and another organisation was scoping out the possibility when I interviewed them. The architects of these programmes were cognisant that empowering women in and of itself did little to reduce gender-based violence, and occasionally risked making the problem worse (see e.g. International Rescue Committee 2015). Engaging with the perpetrators of intimate partner violence was the only way to reduce its incidence, and these programmes were built on the premise of changing models of masculinity in order to achieve this. The concept of masculinity was cresting a wave of popularity during the course of my research in Lebanon. The vogue was such that some people, particularly gender experts, used the term often, almost lazily, and sometimes without clear meaning: 'we want to do some work on masculinities' was a phrase I'd often hear, implying a certain but vaguely formed desire to work with men.

Lewis Turner (2019), who conducted research on men and masculinity within the humanitarian response in Jordan, wrote that his interlocuters eyes 'lit up' when he mentioned the words 'men and masculinity' in interviews, a reaction I often encountered in Lebanon. Cornwall and Eade's edited volume (2010) scrutinises the 'buzzwords and fuzzwords' in development discourse, which 'gain their purchase and power through their vague and euphemistic qualities, their capacity to embrace a multitude of possible meanings, and their normative resonance.' (Cornwall 2010: 2). Buzzwords act as shibboleths, signifiers of one's expertise in a given issue, and the term masculinity was certainly a buzz/fuzzword within the humanitarian landscape in Lebanon. It was vaguely, if ever, defined. Indeed, many practitioners preferred to talk about the concept in its plural form,

'masculinities', indicating the possibility – or perhaps desirability – of multiple forms of masculinity. It was also often preceded with the term 'positive', rooted in a vision of a new model of male allies in the struggle against patriarchy. It was a word only used by those at the vanguard of what might be thought of as 'gender work'. It was not, for example, a term I ever heard used by seasoned women's rights campaigners, whether Lebanese or international staff. Use of the term not only inferred membership into a network of gender experts, but to a subnetwork that was cutting-edge. These gender experts were typically young, from Beirut, with postgraduate degrees in gender studies or social science from prestigious universities.

Over the course of my research, I attended a number of empowerment sessions run by international NGOs, including many with Fida and her team, across a range of neighbourhoods in Lebanon. There were programmes, however, that it would have been inappropriate or disruptive for me to attend as an observer. The masculinity programmes, for example, were designed to be an all-male space in order to build trust among the participants. With this in mind, rather than trying to attend these sessions, I interviewed a number of staff members who were responsible for implementing them, either as programme managers or as facilitators, and asked them to tell me about their practices. I often asked for copies of the curriculum so I could talk through specific activities with the facilitators and find out how they worked in practice. Despite the range of participants and goals, the format and content of empowerment and masculinity sessions in Lebanon were markedly similar.

I will argue in this chapter that these curricula, both a product and practice of humanitarian legibility, operated paradoxically, creating or sustaining inequalities even as they attempted to alleviate them. Gender-based empowerment programmes run by international humanitarian organisations in Lebanon were rooted in liberal and secular understandings of feminism and made gender equality legible in highly limiting ways. Empowerment was conceived as operating on an individual level, and, by focusing on gender equality within household relations, often re-inscribed women's place as being within the domestic sphere. There was a strong emphasis on reducing gender-based violence, making Syrian and socio-economically disadvantaged Lebanese women legible as victims or potential victims of gender-based violence, while men from these communities were made legible primarily as perpetrators or potential perpetrators of violence. 'Empowerment' thus functioned to sustain colonial narratives about what Abu Lughod has termed the perceived 'pathology of Arab gender culture' (2009: 85). While they attempted to bring about change in gender culture at the household level, the curricula were depoliticising, failing to engage with the legal, political, religious and social realities of the participants. Nevertheless, in practice, facilitators

were often forced to engage with the lived realities of their participants, even when participants' views and experiences contradicted the tenets of the curricula. Many did so with openness and empathy, but the curricula rarely afforded the flexibility to engage in a meaningful or transformative way, and some facilitators chose to shut such conversations down entirely. Moreover, the measurement criteria of the programmes, as we shall see, did not capture such interactions or their consequences.

Gender experts approached gender equality as a trajectory, a ladder on which the first 'rungs' of understanding must be in place before the higher rungs could be reached. The curricula mirrored this trajectory, and over the course of this chapter, I will explore each rung in detail. The first rung I will discuss involved the differentiation between sex and gender, a separation which gender experts felt it was vital for participants to understand before they could begin to understand gender equality. The next rungs I will cover are gender equality within the domestic sphere, gender-based violence, and finally, gender equality through women's income generation. In the final section of this chapter, I will compare the empowerment sessions of international organisations with an empowerment session I witnessed being facilitated by a national women's rights organisation, in order to explore some of the gaps in humanitarian empowerment curricula: structural inequalities which I have termed the 'missing rungs'. Before exploring empowerment programmes in more detail, however, it is worth understanding the context.

Gender Equality in Lebanon: Some Context

What might empowerment in Lebanon look like? From a socio-legal perspective any notion of gender empowerment in Lebanon is complex. Gender and religious sect interact in Lebanon to structure an individual's (non)citizenship. There are 18 officially recognised sects or confessions in Lebanon, and 15 associated personal status laws, which are applicable to matters of family law such as marriage, divorce, inheritance and adoption. When personal status laws interact with a person's officially recognised gender, there are consequently 'almost thirty articulations of structural sex-based differentiated citizenship in operation.' (Mikdashi 2013). Personal status laws mean that if a woman born to a Maronite Christian family wanted to divorce her husband and maintain custody of her children, she would apply to a different court and have different rights to a woman born to a Sunni Muslim family. A citizen can change the legal structures to which they are beholden by converting to a different confession, a choice that many make for practical purposes, even if they remain practicing members of the religion in which they were raised. The most high profile example of such a conversion was Riad al Solh, Lebanon's Prime Minister from

1943-45, who secretly converted from Sunni Islam to Shi'a Islam in order to ensure his five daughters inherited his estate, two thirds of which, in the absence of male offspring, would have gone to his closest male relative under Sunni personal status laws. The overarching civil law, to which all Lebanese citizens are beholden, also differentiates citizens by gender, stipulating that citizenship can only be transferred to spouses or children by men. This means, for example, that children born in Lebanon to a Lebanese mother and a Syrian or Palestinian father do not inherit Lebanese citizenship while children born to a Lebanese father and Syrian or Palestinian mother are Lebanese citizens by birth.

Against the backdrop of this gendered socio-legal context, Lebanon has a substantial history of women's rights and gender justice movements. Women's labour movements began in the early 20th century, particularly among silk and tobacco producers, and were deeply entwined with class struggles and anti-colonial resistance (Abisaab 2009). In the 1970s, civil society movements began to call explicitly for changes to Lebanon's gendered citizenship structure, arguing that women should be allowed to confer on their nationality to spouses and offspring too (Joseph 2000; Agosti 2016). The movement continues to the present day with the '*jinsiyyatī haqq lī wa li'asratī*' [My nationality is a right for me and for my family] campaign, spearheaded by the Collective for Research and Training on Development – Action (CRTDA). Concurrently, campaigns from the 1970s onwards have also called for changes to laws on gender-based violence (Khoury and Wehbi 2016; Sabat 2013). A sustained effort from a group of organisations, most notably KAFA – Enough Violence and Exploitation, led to the drafting of a law to protect women and families from domestic violence, which was approved by the Lebanese Cabinet in 2010 and – though with revisions – by the parliamentary joint committees in 2013. Abaad, another Lebanese organisation whose mission was to end gender-based violence, launched a high-profile campaign in 2017 for a change to Article 522, a law which stipulated that a perpetrator might avoid punishment for rape if he marries the victim, using the slogan 'A white dress doesn't cover the rape'. Arresting images and a video of a woman in a torn and bloodied wedding dress made from bandages were used during the campaign, while a sculptor hung wedding dresses along the popular Corniche seafront walkway in Beirut (Abaad 2016). Article 522 was repealed, but other articles remained in place stipulating similar conditions, and specifically relating to assaults against minors, leading some organisations to question if there was much to celebrate (KAFA 2017).

Beyond these organisations, which advocated primarily for the rights of Lebanese – and to some extent Syrian and Palestinian – women, NGOs advocating for the rights of other marginalised groups were also active. The Anti-Racism Movement, an NGO for the rights of migrant domestic

workers in Lebanon, for example, used empowerment techniques to equip migrant workers in Lebanon with the resources, space and skills to self-organise, advocate and campaign against the restrictive *kafāla* system and other forms of oppression faced by migrant workers in Beirut. Organisations such as MOSAIC and Helem, meanwhile, provided practical support, resources and advocated for the rights of the LGBTI community in Lebanon.

If Lebanon's NGO community suggested active and influential gender justice movements, its political structures seemed to suggest the opposite. While feminist movements began as explicitly political and labour-oriented, they became 'NGO-ised' at the end of Lebanon's civil war in the early 21st century, mirroring a global shift in the late 20th century away from feminist activism in political movements and towards feminist activity as part of NGOs (Alvarez 1999; Bernal and Grewal 2014; Lang 1997). While some NGOs were keen to improve women's political participation through political empowerment programmes for women, from 2009 until 2018, just four members of Lebanon's 128-person parliament were women. Following the 2018 elections, where a record 86 women ran, this number climbed only to six. Only 17 women have ever been elected to Lebanese Parliament in total, and all of those were wives, widows or daughters of male politicians. Carmen Geha (2019b) has chronicled the structural and institutional barriers discouraging women's participation in Lebanese politics, arguing that lack of competition in Lebanon's sectarian power-sharing system systematically disadvantages women who try to enter politics. Until these structures have shifted, she argues, any idea of women's political empowerment remains a myth.

Despite the strength and diversity of women's, migrants' and LGBTI rights movements in Lebanon, it was, for the most part, a world set apart from the international humanitarian system. International humanitarian organisations engaged with only a select few of their national counterparts. They primarily chose to fund, support and promote those few organisations that worked on 'morally urgent' issues of gender-based violence prevention and response. There was one NGO in particular that nearly every person I interviewed mentioned to me, often immediately on hearing that I was interested in gender. They were unanimously acknowledged to be doing 'good things on gender' and had received considerable funding from international donors. Not only did they deliver a range of empowerment programmes themselves, they were often heavily involved in the design and development of empowerment programmes for international organisations, who were keen to capitalise on their contextual expertise. The organisation focussed almost exclusively on preventing and responding to gender-based violence. I interviewed a number

of members of staff from this organisation and asked them to reflect on their relationship with the international humanitarian organisations. One responded:

> 'I think of us as one of the "blessed". There are "blessed" organisations who are identified by the INGOs and UN organisations as the most aligned. We speak your language, we can sit at your table with confidence. We use your terminologies and understand what they mean. We get street credit because we look like you. Which for me is a bit problematic.'

What did it mean to sit at a table with INGOs and the UN with confidence and speak their language? What did it take to be identified as aligned?[25] An interview with a high-level staff member for an international NGO who worked on advocacy gave me some insight. When I told her that I was interested in gender, she recounted with great excitement a presentation the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the 'blessed' NGO had given recently to a group of international donors and UN organisations:

> 'We were sat in this boring meeting about how effective some funding had been. The tone of the meeting was really flat – lots of PowerPoint, people looking at their phones. Then [the CEO] gets up and plays a video, which demanded everyone's attention. It was a close-up interview of a veiled woman – her face was covered – who was a service user of the Safe Space[26]. She'd been gang-raped in Syria, her husband was murdered. It was really powerful. We were all sat there in shock. And it showed the role that the funding had played in keeping these safe spaces open. She [the CEO] had interrupted the shape of the discussion and made the voice and face of the refugee central. The passion with which she spoke was entirely different to everyone else. Other people working on gender wouldn't have been invited, or certainly wouldn't have had that space. There would have been no discussion on gender issues if this NGO hadn't put it front and centre.'

[25] It should be noted that the reasons an organisation might become 'blessed' were more complex than just appearing to be politically aligned. The staff member I quote here was also keen to point out that the NGO's financial accounting procedures were in line with the demands and stipulations of international donors, something they had prioritised in the early years of their operations as it made them less of a risk in the eyes of these donors. Another staff member highlighted the importance of their CEO, a charismatic and well-connected woman who had worked hard to put the organisation on the map.

[26] A centre for women and girls, in which empowerment trainings were delivered and women and girls could seek case management support for incidents of gender-based violence.

The video put before these organisations was exemplary in its moral legitimacy and urgency, as evidenced by the profound affective responses of those present. The staff member who told me about it noted how the CEO had 'made the voice and face of the refugee central.' While this was true, it was also true that the voice and narrative that was given space was that of a survivor of an exceptional, particularly extreme case of violence (Abu-Lughod 2013). As such, it perhaps reflected the dominant concerns and fears of the international humanitarian community when it came to gender-based violence: the figure of a veiled Syrian woman, raped and alone, made everyone sit up and take notice (cf. Ticktin 2011; van der Veer 2006). Despite being morally compelling, the video was not necessarily representative of the work that the organisation did through their safe spaces: Just 5% of reported incidents of gender-based violence in Lebanon were classified as 'rape' under the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS 2016), notwithstanding the shortfalls of that tool. Indeed, this was, perhaps, a social enactment of the hierarchy inherent in GBVIMS, as described in Chapter Three. But the fact that the vast majority of service users at these centres did not share the experience of the woman in the video was not discussed. Other forms of violence and structural oppression simply did not elicit the same strength of response (see e.g. Abu-Lughod 2002; Hyndman and De Alwis 2003; Olivius 2014; Ticktin 2011; Turner 2015). The 'blessed' NGO, presumably aware of these dynamics, made themselves and their work legible to international donors through an example of gender-based in its most extreme form, while other kinds of violence and structural oppression were not given the opportunity to enter the room.

Beyond the 'blessed' NGO, the vast majority of organisations implementing empowerment programmes with humanitarian funds were international, and, as far as I was able to ascertain from interviews with national organisations, had little to no interactions with women's, migrants' or LGBTI rights groups working against structural inequalities in Lebanon. Despite the fact that there were a number of explicitly political empowerment initiatives in place in Lebanon for marginalised groups (see e.g. Geha 2019b), and despite the fact that these groups faced many of the same structural and legal barriers faced by displacement-affected populations in Lebanon, humanitarian organisations chose not to engage with organisations running these programmes when developing their empowerment curricula. Instead, the organisations I interviewed drew on expertise in the form of short-term gender experts flown in from head offices, or adapted curricula developed in other humanitarian locations around the globe.

The Ladder of Gender Equality

The strategy that Fida took in the training described at the beginning of this chapter was typical of many other training and empowerment sessions I observed. The experts that led these sessions often described themselves as 'there to facilitate discussion' and frequently assured participants – and me – that all suggestions and opinions were welcome. Of course, the open and flexible attitude existed in friction with the fact that all training sessions were based on highly structured curricula which stipulated the points that must be covered, session by session, minute by minute. These points that had to be covered were normative in nature, for example:

> 'A person's gender identity is not assigned by nature, but defined by society. For example, girls play with dolls while boys play with cars. These are just societal norms and can be changed. There is no reason why boys can't wear pink or girls can't play with a tool set instead of dolls.'[27]

In other words, there was stability within these curricula around 'correct' and 'incorrect' understandings about gender. Stability of concepts – or, as we saw in Chapter Three, of categories – is not an innate feature of course, but one that comes about as a result of social processes. During my observations, when facilitators didn't get the answer they wanted to their seemingly open-ended questions, they would always supply it themselves. They would not hesitate to correct or challenge participants who gave an answer which didn't fit with the direction they wished the group to follow. One facilitator was a little more explicit in his description of his approach, which he described as 'a Socratic dialogue that leads to an inevitable conclusion.' This was as clear an example as one could wish for of what Shore and Wright describe as: 'normative claims [being] used to present a particular way of defining a problem and its solution, as if these were the only ones possible, while enforcing closure or silence on other ways of thinking or talking' (1997: 3). The inevitable conclusion this particular expert wished the participants to come to was the acceptance, acknowledgement and eventual deployment of a series of 'facts' about gender, sex and social roles.

Nevertheless, facilitators were often met with challenge when presenting these concepts and understood their role as meeting this challenge and guiding participants towards new conclusions. They were keen to emphasise in interviews that social change happened slowly. There was, as they saw it, a trajectory of understanding when it came to gender equality which operated almost like a

[27] From unpublished NGO empowerment curriculum training handbook, Lebanon, 2018, p8. Copy in possession of author.

ladder. The first rung involved defining gender, and crucially, the difference between sex and gender, the second rung examined domestic gender roles before participants moved up the ladder to equality in the workplace, and finally culminated with an understanding of forms of gender-based violence including early marriage. Higher up the ladder still were acceptance of different sexual orientations, reproductive choice, gender diversity, and sex workers' rights. These rungs were not covered in any empowerment session I came into contact with, but *were* covered in capacity building sessions for humanitarian staff members. It is perhaps no coincidence that the order of steps in the ladder roughly mirrors the chronology of issues debated within western feminisms.

The curricula that were shared with me were built upon this ladder of understanding, taking each topic in turn to build up an understanding of gender equality. They began by differentiating sex and gender, moved onto gender equality in domestic duties, before moving onto topics considered to be more sensitive, such as gender-based violence. For those programmes which included an economic empowerment component, participants achieving income generation was the last rung on the ladder. Moreover, facilitators were highly cautious about 'jumping ahead' before ensuring that the first rungs were in place. In a discussion with a group of facilitators about an empowerment programme they were in the middle of implementing, I was told that, in one of the first sessions, they had discussed the toys that children played with in order to introduce the idea of gender norms. Some of the participants had expressed concern that giving a doll to a boy might lead to that child growing up to be gay. Rather than engaging the participants in this discussion, the facilitators had moved the conversation on. They told me they were very wary of allowing the conversation to stray into such territory so early on in the programme: 'We were very cautious about how we were presenting the thing… we wanted to control where the conversation was going, that it was not going into, you know, should we allow our children to be gay or not, or is being gay a choice or not.' At the time of our discussion, however, the facilitators were five weeks into the curriculum, and crucially, had built up relationships of trust with the participants. They told me that, now, they felt much more comfortable entering into more 'sensitive' ground with participants, even if they knew participants might be unlikely to agree with them on certain topics.

Step 1: Differentiating Sex and Gender

Without fail, every gender empowerment curriculum with which I came into contact in Lebanon – at least, every curriculum implemented by a humanitarian NGO – began with the differentiation between sex and gender. All facilitators considered this an essential foundation for everything else they would cover in their curriculum. Sex meant the body, while gender was based on an

understanding of social roles. Sex was biology, and gender was culture, in other words: nature and nurture. The orthodoxy around this was particularly fascinating given ongoing discussions on precisely this topic outside of the humanitarian sphere. The relationship between sex and gender, and their fixity or fluidity, remain the subject of lively debate within the field of gender studies and beyond, and our understanding of these terms continues to evolve as boundaries are tested and blurred (Butler 1990, 2011; Haraway 1988). In the world of humanitarian empowerment curricula, however, this debate seemed to have been closed off and distilled into fact.

The word 'gender' itself does not have an easy translation into Arabic. The accepted translation among experts is *naw' 'ijtimā'ī,* literally 'social type' , but beyond the realm of gender experts, I often witnessed the use of this phrase result in confusion, with non-experts interpreting it to mean something akin to social class, and most humanitarian staff instead choosing to borrow the English word 'gender/*al-gender*'. Many of the facilitators I spoke to told me they used the 'gender box' method to teach participants the difference between gender and sex. The facilitator drew two boxes, one labelled 'man', one labelled 'woman'. They asked participants to supply attributes or skills they associated with being a man or a woman., before discussing whether these attributes were biologically determined, or the result of the roles society expects one to play. This inevitably sparked discussion, particularly on issues such as the ability to care for children or perform manual labour, which participants might consider biologically determined, but facilitators would inform them was, in fact, socially constructed. Finally, the facilitator drew a third box, labelled 'human', into which all of the non-sex-attributable descriptions were then shifted.

One curriculum took a different approach. The participants were given written instructions to imagine a farmer working in a field and to draw the scene, giving their farmer a name. The instructions explicitly stated that 'never should the farmer be referred to as he or she or by any other pronoun or word that might imply the sex of the farmer,' with the presumption being that the majority of participants would make gendered assumptions about the farmer, and the facilitator could then use this as an opening to talk about subconscious biases surrounding gender and social roles. The training, which had specifically been adapted for Lebanon, had unfortunately been designed by an English speaker, who must have had little idea that Arabic is a highly gendered language – all nouns have genders and all verb declensions are also gendered. As is the case with most gendered languages, the male gender form is also used as the neutral or universal gender, meaning that the written instructions essentially told the participants that the farmer was a man. Unsurprisingly, when completing the exercise, almost all participants drew the farmer as a man.

In practice, however, the 'fact' of gender and sex differentiation was often met with confusion, not only in empowerment sessions, but among staff members themselves. Middle-class, university educated humanitarians struggled to map their evolving understandings of the fluid identities they were witnessing in their personal and cultural lives onto the strict binary they were required to deploy within their professional lives. The debate was far from closed off in the minds of the people delivering the training, even as they worked to draw discussions on it to an inevitable conclusion. In a discussion with three facilitators of an empowerment programme, who were describing the gender/sex discussion in the sessions they'd run, one made an aside that she was irritated at seeing proforma in much of the official documentation in Lebanon ask people to identify their gender, rather than their sex: 'It should say sex. Gender is something that society gives you. Sex is male or female, but gender is different.' Her colleague disagreed, saying, 'but if you're trans, it's better to use gender, then you can choose what you identify as.' Such matters seemed to be far up the imagined ladder of gender awareness, however. For example, while the Interagency Standing Committee's (IASC) guidelines on mainstreaming gender-based violence suggested that options for non-binary or transgender identity should be on registration forms, when I asked a UN staff member working on GBV response whether this had ever been discussed, she answered: 'No. Right now the front-line staff do not have the capacity to ask this kind of question. They would not be able to do it in a way that didn't stigmatise. They're not ready, we're not there yet.' Her response demonstrated the ways that field staff, like empowerment programme participants, were excluded from humanitarian networks of gender expertise. While, as we saw in Chapters Three and Four, they were compelled to engage with the networks around gender expertise in the form of classifications and assessment, the extent of their engagement in the networks of gender expertise was limited: Experts considered that field staff did not have the 'right' gender knowledge to be able to deploy certain aspects of inclusive programming.

Step 2: Gender Equality and the Domestic Sphere

While the vast majority of humanitarian staff I spoke to over the course of my research did not understand gender equality primarily in terms of the domestic space, when it came to the empowerment sessions they facilitated and attended, the relations that facilitators were most concerned with were between husband and wife, and between parents and children. Indeed, improving gender equality in the domestic sphere was the primary object of all of the empowerment sessions targeted at men. The theory behind this was that improving gender equality within the home, through better negotiation and dialogue, would directly lead to a decrease in

gender-based violence. As one facilitator described it to me: 'when men aren't able to have a dialogue, they just use violence.'

Within these sessions, there was also a focus on raising children, and thinking critically about the expectations that parents might have of their children based on their gender. Fida and her colleagues discussed the use of the phrase *subyān mā byabkū* (boys don't cry) when raising boys, and the impact that this might have on their emotional development. They discussed the toys that they gave their children to play with, and the long-term impacts that these might have on the career options that their children might consider available to them. Fatherhood was similarly a major aspect of the masculinity sessions. Facilitators told me they encouraged participants to think of ways that they might model positive fatherhood for their children by behaving as an 'ally' to their wives and daughters, as well as through joint decision-making and negotiation with their partners.

In the empowerment sessions facilitated by Fida and her colleagues, gender equality was the third session in the curriculum. The main focus of the session was a film called 'the impossible dream', a nine-minute dialogue-free animation produced by the UN in 1983. The film depicted a day in the life of a family of five: a mother, father, young boy and young girl, and a baby. Throughout the course of the day, the mother was shown doing the vast majority of domestic work. She got up earlier than her partner, got the children dressed and ready for school, did the cooking, shopping and cleaning, as well as working a paid job in a clothing factory. Her wages were spent on provisions for the family. Her husband worked in construction and was shown spending his (much higher) earnings on beer with his friends after work. The girl was depicted helping her mother with household tasks, while the boy watched sport on the television with his father. When the family eventually went to sleep, the video depicted the mother's 'impossible' dream of her husband and son helping out with household work. Participants in the empowerment sessions had, Fida and her colleagues told me, unanimously loved the video, immediately identifying with the overworked mother.

Masculinity trainings, facilitators told me, used a similar tactic, mapping out with participants what 24 hours looked like in the life of a family. One facilitator recounted how he might map out the day in the session:

> 'Sam and Nina are the father and mother, and they have a daughter and a son. We see what these people do between 8am and 11pm. At night, Sam might go and have a shisha with his friends or watch the football, while Nina stays at home because the children are sleeping. And during the day Sam works, and Nina is

> working inside the house. But they don't count it as work, because it's seen as her duties. And we speak about what Nina does when she wakes up, what Sam does. You can see that Nina is overloaded, but Sam wakes up, has his coffee, goes to his work, then takes a nap after work, then goes out with his friends. He is able to be engaged with his community, and the community gives him permission to be engaged.'

These exercises gained traction with participants to some extent. The women in Fida and her colleagues' empowerment sessions were, for example, keen to discuss strategies to engage their husbands in a greater proportion of the domestic labour. But, while participants might have been eager to share household labour, many were far less enamoured with the idea of gender roles shifting in a more fundamental way within the household. The idea of going out to work while their husbands stayed at home taking care of household duties and caring for the children was not an attractive option to any of the participants. 'This they rejected *so strongly,*' Fida told me, 'there was uproar in the group.' Fida and her colleagues were disappointed by what they considered to be the double standards of this attitude, but were somewhat sanguine about the reality. Indeed, they drew on their experiences of gendered divisions of labour within their own households to illustrate the difficulty of making changes in a patriarchal society.

The focus on nuclear family relations was not necessarily surprising; it was reflective of priorities in other areas of feminist work, including in gender research (Moore 1993: 200). But it was paradoxical, and it did political work. Humanitarian organisations were ostensibly trying to advance gender equality while simultaneously circumscribing the arena of change to the same domestic sphere that feminists had long been exhorting the need for women to break free from. By this logic, the feminist slogan 'the personal is political' was inverted, and political goals were understood in purely personal terms. What's more, with by focusing on skills such as cognitive behavioural therapy, decision making and communication, humanitarian organisations were shifting the onus of advancing gender equality onto individuals – and primarily women – while ignoring the structural factors involved in sustaining gendered inequalities.

Step 3: Gender-Based Violence

Once an understanding of the differentials between sex and gender, and gendered roles in the domestic sphere had been established, empowerment curricula moved into discussions of gender-based violence. Gender-based violence featured in all the empowerment sessions I came across. The widespread focus on the phenomenon was a function of the weight it carried within the

humanitarian response, as I discussed in Chapter Three. It was a subject that staff from international humanitarian organisations often seemed to find indistinguishable from the subject of gender more broadly: Often, in interviews, I would ask someone about gender equality, and they would talk back to me about gender-based violence. When I tried to unravel the link between gender-based violence and gender equality with empowerment facilitators, one told me:

> 'we're trying to achieve gender equality, but one of the main hinderances to attaining gender equality is the presence of gender-based violence, due to gender inequality, so it's a cyclical issue. But at least from where we're standing, our approach to achieving gender equality is primarily through addressing gender-based violence.'

Within the empowerment curricula, gender-based violence was approached in a number of ways. Often, facilitators used fictitious scenarios or examples from the media as a way of opening up the conversation. These examples were often extreme and even bizarre. In a session on decision-making, Fida and her colleagues asked participants to discuss the following scenario: A woman is raped by someone with special educational needs and becomes pregnant. What should she do? The NGO's intention was to use this example to discuss the damaging implications of Article 522, which allowed rapists to marry their victims as a route to avoid punitive justice. When I witnessed this exercise with one group in Beirut, there had been a large variety of responses from participants, including suggestions that the woman should terminate the pregnancy and report the incident to the police. When Fida and her colleagues told me about facilitating the same discussion in different areas outside Beirut, however, they had encountered very different responses. Fida reported:

> 'they sat there listening to me talk [about Article 522] and everything and then at the end they were like, "Ok, are you done? She should get married to her rapist. She has no other option. Nobody's going to want her. She can't live alone. What do you mean live alone? No!" [laughing] they let me do my talk and at the end they were like: 'Nope. Not here.' I asked them, what if it was your daughter, what if it was you? They said, "I would want her to have a future.'"

Her colleague agreed:

> 'In my sessions, they said they should be married too. I told them: "No! You can't tell me this after five sessions! Of course there's something wrong with that – it's rape." But there's a lot of ignorance.'

Fida continued:

> 'The thing is, that they come from a perspective where they actually have been married. They might not have been raped by their husband, but their husband was chosen by their parents. So, in a way, they were forced into their own marriages, and they have this experience that… well, they've managed. Either love has come, or no love has come but they've created their family, had children and this is what life is, so how is that even different to a person who was raped and then married? She didn't choose and I didn't choose.'

The subject of early marriage, which was presented within empowerment programmes as an example of gender-based violence, often met with a similar response among participants. Reflecting on a session she had conducted on the topic in a Druze-majority area, Fida again noted the structural issues that influenced participants thinking around the issue. 'In this area, women often marry around the age of 14. Those that hadn't had bad experiences didn't think it should be something they were opposed to. They told me that divorce is not an option in this area – your name needs to be attached to someone else's for your own protection, even for widows.'

These conversations showed that gender-based violence was a far more complex issue than it was often portrayed to be within empowerment curricula and humanitarian policy and practice more broadly. While the participants recognised that gender-based violence at the domestic level could be harmful, it was not their primary concern; violence at a structural and societal level was far more worrying to them. Empowerment training, with its focus on cognitive behavioural therapy and negotiation skills could do nothing to mitigate the risks they perceived themselves facing as women without a husband or father in a protective role. Many of the women in these empowerment sessions, therefore, considered managing in and navigating these structural factors to be an exercise in agency itself. During one activity, we listened to two short podcasts exploring social stigma. One was about a woman who had been unfaithful to her husband while he was abroad for work and fallen pregnant. She had had to flee her conservative community and go into hiding. The other podcast was about a Lebanese woman who had married a Palestinian man from a different confessional background, whose children, as a result of nexus of their parents' nationalities and gender, were effectively stateless, unable to obtain passports or travel abroad. The women in the empowerment session I attended in Mount Lebanon had little sympathy for either woman, considering them to have made poor choices *given the context they were living within*. They were well aware that things might be different in Sweden or Canada, that different choices might be available to women there, they said, but within their community, and in the context of the communities of

the women in these podcasts, their choices had been the wrong ones. Participants would often draw on religious teachings – including Christian, Druze and Muslim doctrine, depending on their religious background – in exercising judgement on these situations. The facilitators, meanwhile, would attempt to bring the conversation back onto secular, rights-based ground.

Step 4: Gender Equality and Paid Employment

Supporting women into paid employment was a major part of many empowerment programmes in Lebanon. As noted at the beginning of the chapter, the protection empowerment sessions I attended with Fida's organisation were a mandatory component of a skills training programme designed to support refugee and host communities to find employment. Indeed, there was a great deal of overlap between empowerment and livelihoods programming in Lebanon, with many livelihoods programmes offering women-only classes in skills trainings such as sewing, English or Information Technology. The focus on finding paid employment was a component only in the empowerment programmes targeted at women; none of the masculinity trainings I encountered had a livelihoods component to them. In fact, facilitators of the masculinity sessions assumed that their male participants were already in paid employment, timetabling their sessions in the evenings to allow men to attend after work. Empowerment sessions for women, meanwhile, were always timetabled in the middle of the working day.

Empowerment through income generation was rooted in a desire to move towards 'self-reliance' among the displacement-affected population in Lebanon. Humanitarian organisations could not support Syrian and vulnerable Lebanese populations indefinitely, so they were increasingly trying to shift to a model whereby they could support these populations to support themselves, thereby reducing reliance on humanitarian assistance. This mirrored efforts towards 'resilience' or 'self-reliance' within the humanitarian sector globally. Evan Easton-Calabria and Naohiko Omata (2018) have noted that self-reliance is typically used as a means for humanitarian organisations to minimise their own costs in contexts of prolonged displacement, often at the risk of eroding protection for displaced people. Others have been more critical still, arguing that resilience is rooted in neoliberalism and pessimism about the State's ability to act (Duffield 2012), depoliticising risk and shifting the onus for survival onto individuals (Neocleous 2013; Evans and Reid 2013). Scott-Smith (2018a) has pointed out that these scholarly critiques contradict the critiques of humanitarian practitioners, who argue that resilience is *too* political, pushing at the boundaries of 'pure' humanitarian principles, in envisioning a model of society. He points out, however, that humanitarian action is always an exercise in politics, whether it includes components of resilience

or not, and calls for critical attention to focus on the diversity of resilience programmes, their differences, and their achievements and failures in different contexts.

The model of self-reliance in Lebanon operated within significant structural and economic barriers. Employment restrictions on Syrians, as described elsewhere in this thesis, were severe, and there were limited opportunities for work even for those who were able to do so legally. While reliable statistics on unemployment in Lebanon were hard to come by, government ministers in 2017 gave figures from anywhere between 25% and 46% (Chehayeb 2020). The focus on getting women in particular into paid employment was based on an understanding that, as it was put to me many times by both Lebanese and non-Lebanese humanitarian staff members, 'women here don't work,' or sometimes the more specific 'Syrian women don't work'. These statements stemmed from a misunderstanding of women's labour history in Syria and Lebanon and was rooted in a particularly middle class assumption about gender roles in the region.[28] As Malek Abisaab's ground-breaking study shows, working-class women's labour has a long history in Lebanon and Syria, particularly in the agricultural sector, and women's working movements played a crucial role in the anti-colonial struggle (Abisaab 2009). It also belied the fact that many Syrian women *did* work – 11% of the population in fact (UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP 2019), which, while not a huge proportion, was nevertheless significant considering the many employment and mobility restrictions they faced.

Nevertheless, the understanding that 'women don't work' circulated with some force within the humanitarian network. Part of the reason it resonated was thanks to the ways that Syrian men were made legible as patriarchal authority figures in humanitarian practice. One morning, I attended a forum held by an INGO where people living in the nearby refugee camp could come and register for various kinds of assistance. I sat at a desk with a member of staff signing women up for an empowerment programme with an ultimate goal of placing women in paid employment. At one point she commented to me: 'Their men are so controlling. Many of the women tell us that they need to check with their husbands before registering. We tell them, "just register! Then if you get a place, you can talk to him."' The course in question involved attending three-hour sessions three times a week for ten weeks in a row, a significant time commitment. It would not be unreasonable to assume that many people might want to discuss such a time commitment with their spouse before making a decision, but this is not how the staff member understood what she was being told by the women who expressed an interest. Instead, she was frustrated by it and chalked it up

[28] I am grateful to Ziad Abu-Rish for this observation, made during a workshop at the Lebanon Doctoral Dissertation Summer Institute in June 2018.

as evidence of a cultural problem of 'controlling' men. Despite this, only 6% of respondents in the *Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon* reported that they chose not to work because of 'gender considerations.' The greatest barriers to working among Syrian women were caring for dependent children, which 20% respondents reported, and continuing education, reported by 19% of respondents (UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP 2019: 117). Precisely how this data was collected, and what kind of answer might be interpreted by an enumerator as a 'gender consideration' would, of course, merit further investigation.

Many humanitarians therefore saw women's income generation not only as a route to self-reliance but as a route to dismantling gendered inequalities. However, assumptions around women's ability to work outside the home led some organisations to be concerned about the social impact and uptake of a programme that promoted potentially destabilising social dynamics within households. These organisations advocated home-based working as a route to income generation, providing participants with sewing machines, make-up or hairdressing kits, enabling them to work in garment manufacture, cosmetics or hairdressing without having to leave the house. Other organisations were openly dismissive about this kind of work, arguing that it did nothing to promote gender equality and, at worst, actively eroded it. For example, home-based work left those Lebanese citizens who would otherwise be eligible for National Social Security Funds without recourse to health or maternity benefits that might come through other kinds of employment, and more generally re-inscribed women's place as the domestic sphere. Nevertheless, implementing organisations defended this kind of programming as not only realistic, but actually responding to the desires stated by participants in their assessments.

Organisations that were keen to 'empower' women to work outside the home faced other challenges. A lack of childcare facilities and sufficient wages through employment meant that childcare remained a major barrier for women wanting to work outside the home. Public transport infrastructure in much of Lebanon was negligible, meaning many women were unable to access work outside their own neighbourhoods, or unwilling because of safety concerns. Securing safe and legal employment for Syrian women was extremely difficult, requiring the participant to have legal residency and for her to work in a very limited selection of (manual) sectors. What's more, employers often acted discriminatorily in their hiring practices, a challenge that INGOs regularly had to navigate. One livelihoods counsellor, frustrated at placing women in employment only for the position to immediately fall through, showed me an off-the-record spreadsheet she had created detailing the employment criteria for the different enterprises she was in contact with. It had columns for 'accepts Syrians' and 'accepts headscarves', with many entries indicating that neither

were welcome. She told me that many employers, even if their own wives wore a *hijab*, were reluctant to hire women in headscarves for front-of-house positions, as it 'gave the wrong impression' to customers. What's more, wage and sexual exploitation within employment were widely acknowledged to be an issue anecdotally, though there was little evidence as to how widespread it was due to underreporting and under-research.

The focus on paid employment within empowerment programmes thus operated according to a number of paradoxes. For those organisations who were promoting home-based economic activities, empowerment and gender equality were assumed to be achieved through income generation, even while it confined women to their domestic spheres. Meanwhile, in promoting income generation without adequately acknowledging and attending to the difficulties of navigating domestic duties while in paid employment, particularly for those organisations who encouraged women to work outside the home, humanitarian organisations were treating as invisible precisely the dynamics they had spent numerous hours discussing in their empowerment sessions. Finally, the objective of empowering women through paid employment paid scant attention to the structural forces that sustained gendered inequalities, even while these programmes were surrounded by narratives about the cultural barriers to employment.

The Missing Rungs

In order to understand some of the gaps in humanitarian empowerment, it is worth comparing the 'rungs' of their curricula with the content of the more explicitly political empowerment sessions being implemented by national women's rights organisations. Soon after I arrived in Lebanon, I was invited to some empowerment sessions run by a national NGO. The empowerment curriculum they used was based on one designed by a partnership of twenty women's rights organisations from the Global South, of which this NGO was a member. The content and focus of these empowerment sessions were markedly different from those of the INGOs and 'blessed' national NGOs I would later observe and discuss with facilitators, though the format and Socratic style of the sessions was much the same. The curriculum was targeted at women who had some experience in community organising and was designed to build their skills in leadership. While the sessions were run in Arabic, the NGO did not target by nationality, and I met Palestinian, Syrian, Lebanese and Jordanian women over the course of these sessions.

Unlike every other empowerment curriculum that I encountered, rather than beginning the sessions by defining gender, the facilitator, Farah, began the first session by defining leadership. She asked the group to name attributes they associated with leadership, before prompting them to

name examples of good leaders. Examples ranged from political leaders to the participants own mothers. Farah then asked participants to discuss the relationship between leadership, democracy, rights and participation, and whether true leadership could exist in the absence of these things. She asked the group to name factors that can disempower and empower women, and they volunteered answers such as access to education, inheritance rights, reproductive rights, female genital cutting, social expectations and the ways men were raised. Farah then asked the participants to identify whether these factors were social, political, legal or religious, prompting a long discussion about Islamic jurisprudence and the extent to which these factors were religious, or interpreted as being religious. A session on how to communicate successfully was followed by a role play exercise, in which some of the participants had to advocate for children's right to play, arguing against a religious cleric played by another of the participants. During this role play, and others throughout the course, participants drew on detailed and in-depth understandings of Islamic jurisprudence to make their cases on both sides of the argument.

The second day began with Farah asking the group to imagine their ideal scenario for 15-20 years' time. What would they like to have achieved? A wide range of aspirations were discussed – from creating a small business enterprise, to helping promote peace in Syria, to building a safe and happy retirement community for women. Farah then asked the women to spend some time considering what steps they might begin to take to make these goals achievable. The second exercise was done in pairs, constructing a series of sentences in the format 'X strengthens democracy and not Y.' Farah then spoke for a while about how the women might implement democratic principles in their own lives, in professional, community and familial settings. She conceded that democratic principles were much harder to implement when the other parties involved don't accept your methods. The third exercise involved the groups reading an article on a change in the law on domestic violence in Malaysia. It focussed on why the campaign to change the law was successful, and Farah used the was an opportunity to discuss methods of advocacy and resistance. The group discussed techniques such as shared vision, planning, a strict timeframe, division of responsibilities, benefitting from local and international resources. At the end of the session, one of the participants questioned the scope of the training: 'is it just for us, in our personal lives?' She asked, 'or is it supposed to have a broader social impact?' Farah answered that an improvement in the women's leadership within their own personal lives was not the ultimate goal, which envisioned broader transformations in society, but it was the start.

These sessions were, perhaps, no less normatively prescriptive than their counterparts run by INGOs. There was a heavy focus on the merits of participatory and democratic leadership styles.

Religious – and more specifically, Islamic – approaches to leadership were always set up in opposition to an idealised secular, rights-based approach to leadership within the role play exercises. Nevertheless, the content of these sessions was deeply political, and participants were encouraged to engage rigorously with aspects of law and religious thought. While Farah advocated a secular approach to negotiating gender equality within her own teaching style, she did not prevent or denounce participants who drew on their knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence to advocate for women and children's rights within the role play exercises. On the contrary, she applauded these approaches and discussed their merits following the role play.

These broader societal structures were largely absent in humanitarian empowerment programmes. Some of the sessions I witnessed touched on aspects of law – and particularly as it pertained to gender-based violence and early marriage, but these sessions usually failed to make a link between the law and any kind of direct action participants might take. Politics and religion, meanwhile, were conspicuous in their absence within the empowerment curricula. Indeed, when they were raised, I often witnessed facilitators actively trying to move the conversation on, not wanting to get into 'sensitive' territory. One facilitator even described removing a participant from his masculinity sessions when he voiced objections to what they were being taught, rooted in his understanding of religion. After the participant had been removed, he told me, the sessions had run much more smoothly. They were, he had been keen to emphasise to me at the start of the interview, a 'non-political, non-religious' organisation.

While I have styled these structural factors 'missing rungs' in the INGOs' ladder of gender equality, they also highlight the wrongheadedness of envisioning gender equality as a ladder in the first place. The way the national NGO approached gender equality was not as an additive process: there did not seem to be any kind of prerequisite knowledge or understanding about gender or gender equality in place in order for participants to be empowered. No particular vision of gender equality was promoted or assumed, and participants were instead encouraged to imagine the societal changes they would wish to see, before being equipped with tools that the NGO hoped could make those changes happen.

The differences in curricula were also reflective of the differing priorities of the organisations. The national NGO was explicitly concerned in building leadership skills in its participants in order for them to become stronger political actors within their local and national communities. The empowerment sessions spent little to no time on domestic relationships, and gender-based violence was discussed primarily in relation to violent conflict in a conversation on the effects of war. Income generating activity was not an objective of this empowerment curriculum; many of

the participants did work part-time. International humanitarian NGOs, by contrast, were much more concerned with empowerment as means to particular humanitarian ends: 'protection' and 'resilience'. Their priorities were reducing gender-based violence and encouraging women to become economic actors. The limitations of humanitarian seeing, wishing to remain neutral and impartial on issues considered political or 'sensitive', meant that empowerment was made legible as a domestic- and individual-level phenomenon.

Conclusion

Just before I left Lebanon in August 2018, I met up with Fida to share our reflections on the programme. Fida, I was surprised to find, was deeply pessimistic about the impact the programme had had. After the final session, the empowerment team had followed up with participants in order to match them with jobs but had struggled to get the vast majority of Lebanese participants into paid employment. When offered jobs that the NGO had found for them, most women responded that they weren't appropriate: the hours were too long, or it was too far from home. Making matters more difficult was the fact that the end of the empowerment training coincided with the beginning of the school holidays, when many of the participants were juggling increased childcare. Nevertheless, the NGO had gone to great efforts in the selection process to ensure that potential participants wanted to work, and were comfortable doing so outside the home and Fida was deeply confused about why the participants had signed up for the training, only to turn down the jobs they were offered in the end. She told me about a mother and daughter who had attended the sessions together. The NGO had found a placement for the daughter, but it was in a different neighbourhood to the one they lived in. The mother, in the end, had decided not to allow her daughter to take it up. 'I know what will happen,' Fida told me frustratedly, 'she'll get married, she'll have babies and that will be it.' Once the daughter had started a family, Fida saw little chance of true empowerment for her. Fida told me she had not found the same 'choosiness' among the Syrian participants, but legal restrictions on their ability to work meant that the NGO had found paid opportunities for very few of them.

What made Fida more despondent still was that, according to the post-test they'd conducted with participants, only 39% respondents considered there to be a difference between sex and gender, compared with 23% in pre-test. She had spent so much time on this, she told me, and it was very important to her. She was extremely disappointed with the result. 'It wasn't really empowerment in the end,' she told me sadly, describing the post-test scores as evidence that the participants did not truly believe in gender equality.

Fida's despondency was surprising to me, as I had regularly witnessed participants challenging and sparring good-naturedly with her on many of the issues that were included within the curriculum. That a majority of participants might come to the end of the ten-week programme and remain unconvinced by the tenets of the training was not, to me at least, an enormous shock. Indeed, in my conversations with Fida before and after the sessions, she had often poked fun at herself as being on a 'high horse', recognising the gulf in experience between herself and some of the participants and the impact that might have on their differing views around gender equality. What's more, Fida's despondency failed to take into account the broader positive possibilities the programme might have had. The strength of the friendship bonds between the women, or the opportunity to participate in exercises of critical thinking as part of an engaged and interested group, for example, struck me as being potentially far more valuable product of the sessions than their views on the differentiation between sex and gender.

However, friendship, social bonding, critical thinking and all their benefits and potential multiplier effects were not measured in the pre-post-test. Indeed, such things are exceedingly difficult to measure, with the effects often being felt over a much longer period of time than a ten-week curriculum. Instead, to ascertain whether or not the programme had succeeded, the NGO measured 'knowledge, attitudes and practices' immediately after the conclusion of the sessions by asking them to rate whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements, and counted how many participants ended up in paid employment. According to its own measures of success, the first phase of the programme had therefore been a failure. Fida's despondency should perhaps have been less surprising to me, in light of these measurement criteria, which had a real impact on her professional life. Empowerment was made legible within this humanitarian programme as the percentage of people agreeing to a one-sentence statement. That something as complex, multi-faceted and transformational as empowerment should be reduced to a measure like this demonstrated the absurdity of these schemes of legibility, their misplaced priorities, and their inadequacy at capturing complex social phenomena.

The practice of empowerment thus made displacement-affected communities legible to humanitarians in paradoxical ways. Beginning empowerment curricula with the binary between sex and gender assumed that a Eurocentric theoretical understanding of gender was a prerequisite to gender equality, shutting down potential alternative visions of gender equality or agency and denying participants the agency to explore alternative theories, including religiously informed models (Mahmood 2005). By concentrating their efforts on gender equality within the home, facilitators re-inscribed women's space as the domestic realm. The heavy focus on gender-based

violence, meanwhile, was indicative of a widespread perception of what Abu-Lughod has called the perceived 'pathology of Arab gender culture' (2009: 85), whereby men were routinely engaged with as perpetrators or potential perpetrators of gender-based violence, and women were paradoxically engaged with as potential victims within a programme meant to 'empower' them. Paid work was seen as the key route to empowerment, no matter the appropriateness or desirability of that work, making women legible primarily as economic rather than political actors. Meanwhile, key social, political and legal constraints to gender equality were side-lined within the curricula, too complex and too 'sensitive' for INGOs to engage with.

7. Conclusion

Around 10 months into my field research, I was sitting in the office of the INGO where I was an 'intern', staring at a logical framework on my laptop screen. 'Logframes,' as they are more usually known, are ubiquitous in the humanitarian and development sector. They aggregate and abstract humanitarian assistance into a series of 'outputs', measured through a set of indicators. Successful delivery of these outputs lead 'logically' to achievement of outcomes, whose successful realisation leads in turn to attainment of the impact. Below is a simplified example:

Logical step	Goal	Indicator
Impact	To contribute to economic self-reliance and resilience of displacement-affected populations	% households exceeding the poverty line
Outcome 1	Strengthened employability and access to work for displacement-affected populations	% project beneficiaries reporting increase in number of monthly working days
Output 1.1	Jobseekers acquire skills that match labour market demands	# trainees who graduate from skills development courses

Figure 4: Example logframe section.

I spent much of my professional life with DFID sitting in air-conditioned headquarters, studying logframes that implementing organisations had sent me, measuring the tiny numbers in the results column against what they'd planned to achieve. Trying to make sense of what they had done meant piecing the numbers into a jigsaw that I always felt showed me the trunk, leg, tail, ear of the elephant, but never the elephant itself. Monica Krause (2014) has charted the logframe's genealogy back to the rise of results-based management in western government from the 1980s. In effect, their function is to abstract and simplify not only humanitarian programmes themselves, but the environment that they operate within and impact they have on it. As Wallace, Bornstein and Chapman point out (2006: 34), proponents of the logframe note its usefulness in summarising complex programmes and sharing information easily between donors and implementers. Nevertheless, logframes have become much more than a tool to summarise and communicate; they have established themselves as a distinctive 'way of thinking' (Bakewell and Garbutt 2005: 5).

The logframe I was staring at in Beirut was for a programme I knew well. I had spent considerable time interviewing staff members, and observed the different aspects of it being implemented and measured. I was pondering the disconnect between what I had seen, and what I had read when I turned to Gabriel, the Coordinator of the programme, and asked at what point the logframe became a central component of his plans. The conversation was so striking to me that I wrote it down immediately afterwards:

> Me: 'When you're designing a programme, does the logframe or the programme come first? Do you make the programme fit the logframe or the logframe fit the programme?'
>
> Gabriel: 'For me, the programme is the logframe. The logframe comes first… What do you mean by the programme? The activities?'
>
> Me: 'Sort of… not necessarily just 'activities' as set out in the logframe, but everything that happens in practice.'
>
> Gabriel: 'You're talking about implementation and results?'
>
> Me: 'Implementation, yes. I suppose I'm thinking about the programme as its implementation.'
>
> Gabriel: 'It's not. It's not. The programme *is* the logframe.'

It was clear Gabriel and I had been talking at cross-purposes. I imagined programmes as broad, complex and iterative activities with a range of objectives and results, for which a logframe was a necessary but imperfect tool of measurement and planning. For Gabriel, there was no programme without the logframe. It captured everything the programme was intended to achieve and *only* the things it intended to achieve.

The logframe in question was for a livelihoods programme, and the aim (an edited version of which appears in Figure 1) was: 'to contribute to the economic self-reliance and resilience of displacement-affected populations in preparation for durable solutions.' This projected impact was to be achieved by 'strengthening employability and access to salaried work opportunities, particularly for youth and women,' which in turn was to be achieved by matching job seekers to opportunities and training participants in skills to match the demands of the labour market.

I had seen various parts of this programme in action. I had observed numerous eligibility screenings, job counselling appointments, and visited skills workshops and employers with the

monitoring and evaluation teams. The activities I had seen included, but also went well beyond the 'logical' steps outlined in the logframe. In the practices of one of the livelihoods' counsellors, for example, the programme functioned almost as a social safety net. She used her counselling sessions not only to ascertain a participant's professional and educational background, but also to establish their sources of income, their caring responsibilities, and the extent to which they were in need of economic assistance. She would then direct those she deemed in particular need of extra cash, who were often female-headed households, towards a vocational training scheme which paid $200 a month, and those she deemed to have sufficient financial resources towards English classes or IT skills workshops. Even Gabriel's ambition for the programme, I knew, went well beyond what was captured in the logframe. In previous conversations, he had told me explicitly that he wanted to empower women by encouraging them to work outside of the home, as he strongly believed that women's empowerment could not be achieved through home-based work. This interventionist approach to gender equality was not reflected anywhere in the logframe.

The logframe, with its clean lines, classification, and counting made displacement-affected populations legible to senior management and donors, but for field and even some management staff working on the programme in question, legibility occurred in a more varied and context-specific manner. A programme intended to boost self-reliance functioned almost as an emergency cash assistance programme in the minds of field staff implementing it, who knew better than most the scale and severity of poverty and social exclusion faced by those wishing to be included in the programme. For Gabriel, it was not only about increasing the resilience of the displacement-affected population, but about prompting deep changes to gendered inequality as he saw it, even while he insisted that the programme was fully encapsulated in the logframe. For me, this short conversation exemplified many of the patterns and paradoxes that had begun to emerge over the course of my research.

Seeing Like a Humanitarian

At the beginning of this thesis I set out the question that had guided me throughout the research: How, and with what effects do humanitarian organisations make displacement-affected populations legible? How do they *see* these populations through their everyday practices? In order to answer this question, I have engaged in what Bruno Latour has called additive empiricism (Latour 2016: ix). Rather than deploying empirical evidence to furnish a single narrative, shutting down alternative realities in the process, I have attempted, through this research, to use empirical evidence to add to existing narratives, to complicate the picture, and prompt new questions. In

order to do this, I have focussed on the people that implement humanitarian programmes, the tools and technologies that they deploy in the process, and crucially, the relationships that formed between them. I have followed humanitarian practice in its most mundane forms, where, I would argue, it is at its richest: in the repetitive tasks of everyday implementation, in jargon-filled interagency meetings, and the quiet, ever-proliferating mass of data and algorithms.

Practices of classification, assessment, targeting and empowerment are means by which humanitarians see and respond to the communities they aim to support. Through these practices, humanitarians scaffold and make sense of complex social realities. They decide what counts as a vulnerability, what counts as a need, and how to rank them. Some ways of seeing are oppressive, closing down possibilities in their straitjacketing approach. The eligibility formulae described in Chapter Five, characterised by their opacity and distortion and circulating with unavoidable gravity, leave little room for contestation. The schemes of legibility we have encountered through this research, however, are not simply top-down processes, imposed on displacement-affected populations by powerful actors. Some ways of seeing are lively, dynamic and generative, opening new ways of being through their use. The practices involved in delivering empowerment sessions described in Chapter Six shaped the views and understandings of facilitators as much as they shaped those of the participants, while the contextually informed practices of field staff with regards early marriage, as we saw in Chapter Three, had altered humanitarian programmes in fundamental ways.

What can this tell us about humanitarianism in Lebanon and more broadly? I want to come back to another question I have posed periodically throughout the thesis: who are these processes really for? The argument I have been building over the course of this thesis is that the schemes of legibility in classification, assessment, targeting and empowerment in some ways hold more value for humanitarians themselves than they do for displacement-affected populations. While their purpose is to facilitate and deploy humanitarian assistance, the *way* they are built and utilised prioritises the needs and beliefs of senior humanitarian staff members. These staff members use their positions as experts and managers within humanitarian networks to ensure processes of legibility are transported widely, leaving field staff and displacement-affected populations with no choice but to navigate them. Far from being neutral and impartial, schemes of legibility do extensive political work. They render certain kinds of risk, vulnerability and need visible, in highly limited ways, while obscuring others. The risk of women being vulnerable to intimate partner violence is made visible, for example, while the risks Syrian men face at the hands of the State are disregarded. Furthermore, they mask the structural causes of these vulnerabilities and needs and

conceal humanitarian organisations' own role in sustaining them. These ways of seeing have profound material effects. On a fundamental level, they shape who has access to which resources. On a functional level, the vast majority of work that is required to maintain the networks around them is taken on by displacement-affected populations and field staff. This work is not visible – or at least, not seen – to those in positions of power. In other words, humanitarian legibility may be rooted in a politics of solidarity, but it is deployed in, *and in many ways contributes to*, conditions of deep inequality.

But here I want to temper my critique. The landscape I have described over the course of this thesis is far from bleak. Solidarity remains at the heart of the humanitarian enterprise, and I witnessed staff members at all levels – but most notably front-line staff – navigate the seemingly unbendable strictures of classification, assessment, targeting and empowerment, in a way that strove to put the humanity, dignity and experiences of displacement affected peoples at their centre. The trouble was that schemes of legibility, *even when shaped profoundly by the context*, rarely afforded the flexibility for staff members to do this meaningfully or effectively. The networks that had evolved around them meant that they had become standardised in such a way that the power they exerted was formidable.

Relational Seeing: Legibility as a Product of Networks

The first argument put forward in this thesis is that seeing like a humanitarian is relational, dependent on networks which include people, policies, technologies and objects. The networks in question stretch across the globe as well as across Lebanon, as policies, tools and systems of classification travel and gain force. Expert knowledge is a critical part of these networks. Recognised experts exert significant power within networks and their ways of seeing gain traction as they exercise their influence. Their knowledge is transported and translated through classifications, tablets and surveys. Technologies and quantitative processes like the Desk-Based Formula play an equally important role, gaining influence through their claims to objectivity, neutrality and fairness. Together, these networks constitute communities of practice, where particular behaviours and understandings are standardised and deployed at scale throughout the humanitarian response.

In chapter three, I demonstrated how categories and systems of classification circulated within the humanitarian sector in Lebanon. Acts of gender-based violence were defined in an office in New York, based on frustrations experienced in Tanzania around lack of commensurability and being able to count. The resulting tool was used in Lebanon to abstract acts of gender-based violence

from any social context – even from other acts of gender-based violence – in order to ensure that data was commensurable and comparable. It was promoted and advocated for at the highest levels by gender experts, who convinced managers in humanitarian organisations both local and international to use it. These managers trained their staff in its use, and this in turn profoundly shaped the framework through which staff members understood gender-based violence. The data was used to secure funding and determine what kinds of assistance should be available, and was increasingly used at the national level by state actors who had been influenced by humanitarian ways of seeing.

We also witnessed, however, the frictions that occurred when international schemes of legibility came up against locally informed understanding of these issues. Field staff who worked with displacement-affected communities understood very well the complex structural and socio-economic factors involved in decision-making around marriage for under-18s. Their theoretical understanding of the clear and uncompromising international legal frameworks and policies existed in friction with their experiential understanding of the multitudinous factors at play in this issue. This impacted the micro-processes of their daily work, where they used interpretive and vernacular methods to hold together the two opposing versions of reality. Eventually, this friction resulted in tangible changes to the humanitarian programmes themselves.

We have also seen that in order to understand these networks, it is equally important to understand them from the perspective of those who fall outside them as those who fall within. I have shown how Syrians, Palestinians and socio-economically vulnerable Lebanese people are excluded: given little to no input in the formation of categories and classifications, excluded from any knowledge of how targeting operates, and having no say in the design and development of surveys or curricula for empowerment programmes. They are nevertheless required to engage with these networks, to give their time and their labour to ensuring the successful data collection of humanitarian organisations, and to navigate the increasingly complex networks of humanitarian actors in order to secure assistance.

We have thus seen that establishing legibility requires a great deal of work both within and outside of these networks. Vinciane Despret has noted that 'work is made invisible when everything functions well' (2016: 181) and it was indeed in the moments when things didn't go quite as they were supposed to that certain types of work were thrown into relief. These could be in small disruptions or large ones. Witnessing staff member adjust the questions or wording on their tablets during needs assessments, as described in Chapters Three and Four, highlighted the bluntness of the categories and jargon-like nature of the language when attempting to apply them to a lived

experience. When the Syrian father refused to participate in a needs assessment unless he was sure it was going to have some benefit for his family, as we saw in Chapter Five, the functionality of the network surrounding those needs assessments was disrupted and suddenly the work involved in maintaining them became visible. The networks relied on the invisible labour of humanitarian field staff, who translated international tools and systems of classification to make them fit the socio-material reality with which they were faced and translated that socio-material reality back into terms which fit the international tools and categories. They also relied on the labour of Syrians, Palestinians and Lebanese communities, to be present for needs assessments, to show up to information sessions, to answer repetitive and interminable surveys on their needs and experiences. Their time and labour were rarely acknowledged and never remunerated.

In assembling my ethnographic observations in a way that highlights these networks, this thesis contributes to a growing body of scholarship that uses network or actor-oriented approaches to examine humanitarian and development aid. Approaching the aid sector with this analytical lens highlights the micro-processes involved in implementation. My aim in this approach, however, has been to consider these networks in a way that is politically committed, which pays attention to local and global structures of power. By focusing on the invisible labour involved in maintaining these networks, as well as on the ways in which Syrians and others are excluded from, but must remain in relationship with them, I have shown the ways that these networks are complicit in creating and sustaining power inequalities within the humanitarian response.

Gendered Seeing: Legibility as a Product of Liberal Feminism

The second argument is that 'seeing like a humanitarian' involves seeing in a highly gendered way. This is significant in that it represents a profound shift in humanitarian practice over the last two decades. Humanitarian programmes have gone from being 'gender-blind', taking little to no account of the ways that gender affects experiences of disasters and displacement, to using gender as the primary lens through which humanitarians make populations legible. The processes I examined in this thesis were concerned with vulnerability and need: systems of classification were used to categorise different kinds of vulnerability and place them in hierarchies; assessments were used to ascertain the level and severity of needs; targeting processes were designed to ensure that those with the highest needs received assistance; empowerment programmes were created in the hope that they would respond to and reduce vulnerability. At every stage of these processes, gender was the primary – although not the only – lens through which vulnerability and need were understood.

This gendered understanding was rooted in a liberal and secular interpretation of feminism, with deep colonial roots. Vulnerability and need were routinely feminised. In Chapter three we saw how gender was written into the classification system in a way that understood being female as a byword for risk. Women and girls were consistently understood in policies and practice to be more vulnerable on account of their gender. Crucially, as we saw in Chapter Three, the evidence that was used to support this approach had been collected in a way that presupposed it. The collapsing of single-parent and female-headed household categories meant that a true gendered analysis of vulnerability was nearly impossible. In Chapter Five we saw the material effects of these data and technology practices, which prioritised female-headed households for assistance. Practices of assessment, we saw in Chapter Four, were deployed in ways that required disproportionately more work of women affected by displacement, as it was women who usually remained at home in order to respond to the endless carousel of humanitarian organisations conducting surveys.

Meanwhile, Syrian men were routinely engaged with as potential perpetrators of violence. In Chapter Two we saw how international humanitarians reacted to Syrian men and boys with fear and anger when they came across them outside of the zones they had designated as 'field'. In Chapters Three and Six, we saw how male experiences of structural and sexual violence, for which there was significant and widespread evidence, were discounted or ignored within humanitarian systems of classification and programmes for empowerment. Male-focussed personal development programmes engaged with men primarily with the intention of preventing them from becoming perpetrators of family violence.

Humanitarians working towards gender equality in Lebanon were thus often engaged in paradoxical practices, habitually reproducing the dynamics they sought to transform. They treated women as inherently more vulnerable even as they sought to dismantle gender stereotypes. They championed women's economic participation but failed to acknowledge the structural constraints they faced. But beyond the policy documents, practices around gender equality remained unruly. Field staff filtered their practices around early marriage through an experiential and ethical understanding of its structural causes, rarely engaged with in the policy literature. Empowerment facilitators were challenged by their participants, and attempted to navigate the structural, political and intersectional realities of gender in Lebanon in a curriculum that held no space for them.

While there is a huge body of literature on gender and aid, and a growing body of literature that might be grouped under the moniker 'feminist technoscience', which combines feminist theory with insights from science and technology studies, overlap between the two bodies of literature remains vanishingly rare. In an age where digital technologies are increasingly being relied upon by

humanitarian organisations, and at a time that humanitarian organisations are beginning to see crisis-affected populations primarily through a gendered lens, a commingling of these approaches is vital. Together, they allow us to investigate how the costs and benefits of technology are meted out in humanitarian contexts and how gendered inequalities are created, sustained or dismantled through their use. In this thesis I have attempted to bring together these two bodies of literature together in order to understand the ways in which gendered inequalities and power are enacted through relationships between people and technologies in the humanitarian setting.

Situated Seeing: Legibility as a Product of Context

The final argument is that humanitarian schemes of legibility are shaped profoundly by the Lebanese context. They may draw on internationally agreed standards, indicators and tools, but they are situated in local politics, histories and identities.

In Chapter Two, we saw how the international humanitarian apparatus inserted itself into Lebanese socio-economic life in very specific ways. The go- and no-go-zones of international expatriate staff mapped onto those of an elite strata of Lebanese society, bounding different areas of Beirut and Lebanon more broadly in narratives of safety and danger, cleanliness and dirt. This zoning behaviour was built on colonial foundations and contributed to sustaining them, privileging historically Christian areas of the country while marking historically poor, Muslim areas and refugee camps as dangerous. We saw how international humanitarian staff marshalled the fragile boundaries of the exclusive living space they had carved out for themselves in Beirut, reacting to Syrians 'out of place' with anger, fear or indifference.

In chapters Three and Four, we saw the ways that classification systems and surveys, dreamed up in international offices in New York and Geneva, circulated and were translated in the everyday humanitarian landscape. Categories like early marriage, originally intended to describe a type of gender-based violence and violation of international law, caused friction when deployed in Lebanon, where staff members found them an insufficient way to describe the complex social and structural dynamics they encountered. Other systems of classification, such as those surrounding gender-based violence more broadly, were not translated but transported whole into Lebanon's humanitarian response, and subsequently into its social and political milieu more broadly, fundamentally shaping national policies and practices in the process.

Despite the veneer of objectivity that classification, assessment, targeting and empowerment were imbued with, humanitarian ways of seeing did significant political work, navigating and

participating in Lebanon's political landscape in ways that were deliberately obscured. In Chapter Five, we saw that a supposedly objective quantitative desk-based formula was, in fact, built in a way that accommodated many strategic political considerations: the dwindling acceptance of Syrians by the Lebanese political elite, the meagre social safety net for vulnerable Lebanese citizens, and the finite and diminishing fiscal resources from institutional donors. 'Seeing' socioeconomic vulnerability in the implementation of basic assistance programmes meant, first and foremost, seeing the parameters within which such implementation could take place. Humanitarian schemes of legibility had been adjusted to the context in other ways too, employing practices which enacted mistrust of both potential beneficiaries and field staff in the processes of assessment and targeting. Management staff deliberately withheld the details of the formulae in their efforts to stop 'gaming' of the system, in direct contradiction of globally recognised best practice when it came to ensuring accountability.

Humanitarian schemes of legibility were thus deployed in context-specific and sometimes inconsistent ways, depending on the individuals deploying them. Staff were situated differently depending on their own socio-economic background, educations and level of seniority in their organisations, and this had significant effects on the way that legibility was established during the implementation of humanitarian programmes. Senior staff members, who were educated in elite institutions, and came from wealthy socioeconomic backgrounds, held significantly more power in shaping the ways that schemes of legibility were standardised, transported and deployed. Field staff held far less power within these networks, and the extent to which they could influence 'seeing' was more limited.

There is, of course, a tension inherent in my argument. On the one hand, I am arguing that communities of practice have standardised behaviours and processes when it comes to legibility, and on the other I am arguing that those processes are inconsistent and embedded in the context. This tension reflects the tension within which humanitarian organisations themselves operate: caught between the best practices mandated by the headquarters of their organisations, and the operational realities of implementing programmes. Sometimes these processes were cyclical, with new, contextualised practices solidifying into 'best practices' as they are shared between organisations and deployed at scale across the country. Such was certainly the case for empowerment programmes, the curricula for which were circulated widely, and elements of which were copied by colleagues across organisations. Sometimes the processes by which this happened were opaque; the political and material forces shaping the desk-based formula had been

deliberately obscured and shrouded in the rhetoric of neutral and impartial 'best-practice,' while in reality adhering to none of it.

Embeddedness, as I outlined in the introduction, should not be confused with localisation. Localisation has, like innovation, become a buzzword in humanitarian aid. Like innovation, it has often been deployed uncritically as both a desired roadmap and destination (Scott-Smith 2016). Ensuring greater localisation of aid was a major focus of the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 (UN General Assembly 2016), which championed the inclusion of local actors and their perspectives as a remedy for poorly adapted and inappropriate interventions (Roepstorff 2020). When viewed in these terms, the humanitarian response in Lebanon could be seen as localised, with national staff and organisations playing leading roles in the design and implementation of the response. As this research shows, however, adaptation to the context in and of itself cannot be seen as a panacea. Such an approach does not capture the inequalities involved in that process, its colonial legacies, and the complexities surrounding representations of what it means to be local, when the intersections of class, gender, educational background and confessional identity are considered.

In centring the situated nature of humanitarian practice in Lebanon, then, I have also hoped to contribute to, and perhaps subvert, the growing body of scholarship on 'aidland'. When Apthorpe coined the term aidland, he described its '*trompe l'oeil* quality [as] one of something being both there and not there. Not a nowhere exactly but inexactly a somewhere.' (2011: 201). The portraits I have offered both are and are not aidland. The practices I have described are often caught up in webs of global logics and generalised expertise, but they are very definitely deployed *somewhere*. They are deeply embedded in the Lebanese context. They are informed by the history of the region and they disrupt it. They are shaped by Lebanon's socio-material environment and they play a major role in shaping it. Nor are these practices stable. They are continually being adjusted by humanitarian practitioners the better to fit the operational environment as they understand it. And these local adjustments shape global logics even as they are shaped by them. These practices are not the objective 'best practice' results of evidence-based learning, because what this research shows is that things *might have been otherwise* (Hughes 1971). Humanitarian practice is historically and culturally contingent, (Stoler 2013). Just as people are not bounded in a separate 'space' of aid, isolated from the outside political context, nor are their standards, indicators and tools. Instead, these humanitarian toolkits which are supposed to be universally applied the same everywhere are actually profoundly shaped by local politics, histories and identities. Particular ways of knowing

are privileged and disseminated through organisational hierarchies, made manifest through the networks of relations which I have described.

Economic Collapse and a Pandemic

An occupational hazard of researching humanitarian contexts is that research is often out-of-date the moment it is written, and this thesis is no exception. Much has taken place in the time it has taken for me to write these chapters. Lebanon's economy, which had been somewhat precarious for years, has deteriorated at an alarming rate since the summer of 2019, as mounting national debt, fiscal deficits and capital outflow began to take their toll. In October 2019, the Government of Lebanon announced a series of proposed new taxes, including on web-based calls. Many people living in Lebanon rely on platforms like WhatsApp for making calls, given the prohibitively expensive rates for standard mobile calls. Protests against the new taxes quickly morphed into a huge generalised uprising protesting the ruling political elite which continued well into the Spring of 2020. The Lebanese Lira had been officially pegged to the US dollar at a rate of 1,500 for 30 years, but in the face of a dollar shortage it began to climb. The Government announced an economic package in April which fixed the exchange rate at 3,500 lira to the dollar, formalising a price hike of at least 50% for all goods and services. By July 2020, the lira was trading unofficially at 9,200 to the dollar (Chulov 2020), and with 30 consecutive days of monthly inflation at more than 50% was officially in a state of hyperinflation, with the third highest inflation rate in the world (Hanke 2020).

The situation has been compounded with the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic. While the pandemic might have brought the protests to a swift halt, the underlying socio-economic issues remain. These have been exacerbated by the medical emergency, which has resulted in many businesses closing for the foreseeable future. One effect of the economic crisis has been a huge fall in the imports on which Lebanon relies, as businesses generally take payments in Lebanese lira but make payments in US dollars. As Lebanon imports all of its medical equipment, this has had a profound impact on the health sector leaving many health workers concerned about the country's ability to cope with Covid-19 (Human Rights Watch 2020a). The pandemic has also had wide-reaching social effects. The Government of Lebanon has imposed a country-wide curfew in the evenings to limit the spread of the virus, but many local authorities have imposed further, more restrictive measures specifically and exclusively on Syrian communities living within their jurisdiction. These have included total restrictions on leaving homes or receiving visitors in some areas, and curfews from 1pm until 7am in others. These measures have been enforced by municipal

police with the threat of confiscation of legal documents among other measures (Human Rights Watch 2020b).

The world's attention was brought to Lebanon on the evening of the 4 August 2020, when 2750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate, which had been stored in Beirut's port in the east of the city for years despite several warnings from officials, exploded. 200 people were killed and 6000 wounded, and huge numbers of homes, businesses and other infrastructure were destroyed or damaged. Hospitals were overwhelmed with patients and forced to perform emergency operations by torchlight in the face of widespread electricity cuts. Thousands of people returned to the streets in protest in the subsequent days, with rage at the negligence that had made the explosion possible, and increasing anger at the entrenched political structures that kept power in the hands of a few families who were, the protesters argued, failing the Lebanese people.

The impacts of these multiple crises have, predictably, hit Syrians, Palestinians and vulnerable Lebanese communities the hardest. The price of food and essential services has skyrocketed, leaving ever larger numbers of people unable to meet their basic needs. In November 2019, the World Bank predicted that 50% of Lebanese people would be living below the poverty line by the end of 2020, up from 30% in 2019 (World Bank 2019). In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, with inflation rising ever more steeply, and half a city to rebuild, that prediction now resembles wishful thinking.

In the face of such widespread and profound hardship the need for, and ultimate futility of, humanitarian action becomes all the more starkly apparent. While the World Food Programme have increased the amount of cash distributed for food assistance, they have not done so at anywhere near the rate of inflation (WFP 2020). All the dynamics I have described over the course of the last few chapters have become more pronounced in the wake of recent events. Inequalities are sharpening at an alarming rate. The socio-political landscape has become a more complex place to navigate, but navigating it has become even more crucial. The disparity between humanitarian needs and the resources available to meet them has increased exponentially. The question of how to do humanitarianism well has never been more urgent.

Final Reflections

In *Seeing Like a State*, James C Scott (1998) describes state-led schemes of legibility as a tragedy, in part because at their root lay a fatally flawed desire to *improve* the human condition. I do not argue that humanitarian schemes of legibility are a tragedy – though they certainly have some tragic, and

tragi-comic, elements – because I don't believe they can be said to have failed as such. They are imperfect, certainly; flawed, but not fatally so. Critical scholarship on humanitarian aid has for some time recognised the dual dynamic of care and control involved in providing support in emergencies, the simultaneous politics of solidarity and inequality. In this thesis I have tried to add texture and nuance to our understanding of that paradox, to show how it plays out in a particular place, at a particular time. In doing so, I have tried to demonstrate the value of such an approach, which rather than seeking to make grand arguments about humanitarianism being inherently good or bad, successful or unsuccessful, attempts to show *how* it works, and the many ethical and practical quandaries it throws up in the process.

The way I've conducted this research has, of course, had its limitations. The empirical scope has focussed on programmes providing protection, livelihoods and basic assistance, and within those programmes, focussed primarily on practices of classification, assessment, targeting and empowerment. Other sectors operate in markedly different ways, and other practices involved in the everyday implementation of programmes – distribution and monitoring, for example – could tell us equally fascinating things about the ways that humanitarianism gets done. A greater limitation and ethical challenge has been my focus on the practices of humanitarian workers, while concentrating far less on how those practices impact the lives of displacement-affected populations themselves. While I have drawn on the rich empirical literature on the *experiences* and *perspectives* of displacement-affected populations in Lebanon, a gap still remains when it comes to an understanding of the *practices* of displacement-affected populations and their relationship to the humanitarian networks described here. Such a study, were it possible to conduct in an ethical manner, could tell us much more about the invisible work undertaken by displacement-affected communities as they navigate the humanitarian landscape around them.

What can this study offer? I do not believe that my approach, situated and specific though it may be, is 'a lost opportunity', as one organisation described it, when trying to convince me to change my plans and conduct a comparative or regional study. Instead, I follow Didier Fassin's assertion that an in-depth study of specific practices can be far more illuminating than comparisons or overviews, that it is precisely 'through this work at the margins that we can grasp the logics and the assumptions, the ambiguities and the contradictions' of humanitarian action (Fassin 2012: 13). In my methodology, I drew on the work of de la Bellacasa (2011), who reminds us that a critical cut must always involve a re-attachment, and that the new relations we create should be reparative and caring. By focusing on how power is deployed through relations, I hope that this research allows us to ask *how humanitarianism can be done well* in new ways. Answering this question will require

much detailed and context-specific work, but I believe this thesis has highlighted some important guiding principles for how this work should be done.

Firstly, doing humanitarianism well means taking seriously the ways that humanitarian organisations rely on the unremunerated and unrecognised labour of field staff and affected populations. I have demonstrated numerous times over the course of this thesis the extensive work and time required of displacement-affected populations to access assistance. They are compelled to translate their own experiences and circumstances into the limited schemes of legibility designed by humanitarian organisations and navigate complex bureaucratic and organisational structures, giving up vast amounts of time in the process. We saw that women were disproportionately the ones doing this work. While field staff are remunerated for their labour, the skills involved in transporting and translating schemes of legibility and helping affected populations navigate humanitarian structures are rarely acknowledged by senior staff members, who continue to regard front-line workers as lower-skilled and biased. Taking this work seriously would mean a genuine and sustained attempt by those in management positions to understand the extent of the work involved in the implementation of humanitarian programmes, recognise the ways that this work is distributed, before taking steps to show that the work is valued and finding ways to alleviate the burden they are placing on field staff and displacement-affected populations.

Secondly, doing humanitarianism well means learning from the experiences of field staff and affected populations, recognising mistakes and working iteratively to improve practice. So often over the course of my research, I witnessed staff members recognise the inappropriateness or even potential damage of a scheme of legibility, but know they were powerless to change it. Assessment staff realised when targeting criteria were unfair, but had little recourse to remedying the situation. They were well aware that systems of classification were ill-suited to the situations they were encountering, or that empowerment participants may have markedly different priorities to those outlined in the curriculum. They had not designed these schemes of legibility and systems were not in place for them to contribute to changing them. While organisations usually had extensive monitoring, evaluation and learning mechanisms in place, these mechanisms almost always measured whether or not a programme was working on its own terms. They certainly weren't assessing the measurement criteria themselves. Humanitarian organisations must open up the space to learn from the experiences of field staff and affected populations in the programme beyond the outcomes in the logframe. They must make efforts to understand whether their ways of seeing are appropriate and how they might do harm, and iteratively adjust their programmes accordingly.

Thirdly, and relatedly, doing humanitarianism well means valuing the knowledge and experiences of affected populations and giving them the opportunity to shape humanitarian assistance. It means recognising that a gender expert's vision of gender equity might be out of step with an empowerment programme participant's, and that, in such a situation, it is the programme participant's vision that should be prioritised. It means acknowledging that a displacement-affected family might consider early marriage the only way to ensure their child's future in the face of mounting legal, social and economic barriers, and making genuine efforts towards alleviating those structural issues rather than stigmatising the family for making the choice. Humanitarian organisations can begin this work by co-creating knowledge about affected populations with the populations themselves, ensuring that communities are able to shape the schemes of legibility that will be used to make decisions about the assistance they have access to.

Fourthly, and finally, doing humanitarianism well requires organisations to be open and honest about their decisions, the rationales behind them, and the limits of what they are able to do as humanitarian actors. It means communicating these decisions, rationales and limits respectfully with affected populations. In other words, practicing accountability. The constraints that organisations were operating within when it came to basic assistance under the desk-based formula were undeniable: limited funding, political barriers and extensive needs within the Syrian population. But none of this was communicated to the Syrians themselves. Moreover, the decision-making underpinning the desk-based formula was deliberately withheld. The constraints that humanitarian organisations face in implementing their programmes globally are likely to remain, and quite possibly worsen over the coming months and years as climate change drives further displacement and conflict. Rather than sucking this context into a black hole in an effort to appear neutral or impartial, humanitarian organisations must be honest about the decisions they have made, and the processes underpinning them, invite challenge and ensure that challenge shapes their future decisions.

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