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Gendered aspirations and realities-

Enactment of agency by Syrian adolescent girls in the displacement situation in
Bekaa, Lebanon



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The MFS Scholarship Programme gives Swedish university students the opportunity to carry out fieldwork in low- and middle income countries, or more specifically in the countries included on the DAC List of ODA Recipients, in relation to their Bachelor's or Master's thesis.

Sida's main purpose with the Scholarships is to stimulate the students' interest in, as well as increasing their knowledge and understanding of development issues. The Minor Field Studies provide the students with practical experience of fieldwork in developing settings. A further aim of Sida is to strengthen the cooperation between Swedish university departments and institutes and organisations in these countries.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to add to the understanding on how structural elements of gender shape identity and agency of Syrian adolescence girls in the current displacement situation in Lebanon. The thesis was primary based on findings from interviews and focus groups with Syrian displaced girls in the age of 14 enrolled in a school in the region of Bekaa, east of Lebanon. The theoretical framework was based on theories of gender, agency, and connectivity. Connectivity can be explained as interconnectedness between family members' self-worth and identities. The interviewed girls shaped their identity in highly gendered structures where aspects of honour were inherent and channelled by connectivity. It contributed to internalisation of certain practices and inequalities. Identities and aspirations had its foundation in their gendered reality. Since the individual was tied together with other family members' status and self-worth, it is likely that agency will take other expressions than solely challenging power norms since it would not only impact the individual, but also the family. The results aim to contribute to a more inclusive understanding on how empowerment projects can be designed for displaced adolescents in a similar context.

Key Words: Displacement, refugee, Syria, Lebanon, adolescence, gender, agency, youth, gender, honour, teenagers, Middle East

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ITS Informal tented settlement

NGO Non-governmental organisation

LIST OF ARABIC TERMS

Haram Religiously forbidden

Halal Religiously allowed

Hijab Veil

Jallabiya Traditional long dress for females

Sharaf Honour

TABLE OF CONTENT

1. INTRODUCTION	8
1.1 Aim and research question.....	10
1.2 Demarcation	11
1.3 Disposition	11
2. CONTEXTUAL INSIGHT	12
2.1 Background to the Syrian context.....	12
2.2 Background to the Syrian conflict and the displacement in Lebanon	14
3. METHODOLOGY	17
3.1 Research approach.....	17
3.2. Ethical considerations.....	19
3.3 Sampling strategies	20
3.3.1 Interviews and focus groups with adolescents.....	21
3.3.2 Interviews with NGO and educational professionals	22
3.4 Data analysis and source criticism	22
3.5 Reliability and validity	23
4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	24
4.1 Agency and gendered structures	24
4.2 Honour and connectivity	25
5. INTRODUCTION TO ANALYSIS	28
5.1 Locating honour and connectivity in the displacement situation	28
5.2 Fear in relation to honour and connectivity	29
6. ANALYSIS	30
6.1 The individual	30
6.1.1 Being Syrian in Lebanon	30
6.1.2 Religious identification.....	31
6.1.3 Sexuality.....	34
6.2 Family.....	35
6.2.1 The institution of family in a displacement situation	35
6.2.2 Gendered responsibilities	36
6.2.3 Marriage.....	37
6.3 Community	41
6.3.1 A gendered public space	41
6.3.2 The labour market.....	42
6.3.3 Harassment.....	43
6.3.4 Perceived value of education	44

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS	46
REFERENCES.....	47
APPENDICES.....	51
Appendix 1, Record of interviews with respondents in the age of adolescence.....	51
Appendix 2, Record of focus group with respondents in the age of adolescence	52
Appendix 3, Record of Respondents in an educational and NGO setting	53
Appendix 4, Interview questions that served as a foundation for the interviews	55

1. INTRODUCTION

“She gets her period. She learns stuff, she learns how to cook, clean the floor, and wash the dishes. She starts studying. Everything. She starts taking decision of her own.” -Maha, 14

The quote above was said by a 14 years old Syrian girl called Maha who now lives in a refugee camp in east of Lebanon. It illustrates some of the physical and psychological changes girls undergo during adolescence; the time when individuals commonly start reflecting about who they are, who they want to become, and their role in the world they live in (Dixon-Mueller 2008). Adolescence can be a difficult period in stable situations, but displacement is likely to make this period even more challenging since these girls were uprooted from the life they are used to. In the transition many lose their material and immaterial resources, such as social identity, their place, family members, and their support system (George 2010, UNHCR 2014). Within the displacement situation young girls need to figure out how to operate in a new social context and to negotiate their role of being female in the sphere of family and community (Gregg 2005). Within this period of life gender norms become increasingly important and it is not uncommon that girls start to face more restrictions than boys, like when it comes to public mobility and educational opportunities (Mensch et. al 2003).

Four years ago, the Arab Uprisings reached Syria and both young and old persons took part in nonviolent demonstrations that demanded change. In response to the violent crackdown by the government, the peaceful demonstrations transformed into an armed resistance which later, along with other complex regional factors, plunged the country into a civil war (International Crisis Group 2013). Maha and many other children who witnessed the uprising have since then become adolescents and many families have fled Syria. One in ten Syrian children, which is more than 1.2 million, are now residing in the neighbouring countries, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey (UNICEF 2014). More than 490 000 of them have escaped to Lebanon, which is now the country in the world that receives most refugees per capita (Anera 2014). The displacement situation for many Syrian refugees in Lebanon is characterized by poor accommodation, health status, lack of livelihoods and educational opportunities (UNFPA 2014).

Several reports (International Rescue Committee 2014, UNHCR 2014, UNICEF 2014) are mentioning increased occurrence of violations on women's rights in the current displacement situation in Lebanon, and addresses the need for empowerment initiatives in which individuals regain their voice and ability. However, few reports are sufficiently elaborating upon adolescents' ties and relations to their social context. Therefore, a more inclusive understanding both of the local context and how Syrian adolescents shape their identities and agency in the displacement situation is necessary. For this, it is important to hear the voices of young girls themselves when it comes to conveying their reality and their aspirations. These voices need to be understood within their context, which includes the ties and relations they have to their families, communities and overall culture. This thesis seeks to assert the need for an inclusive approach, one which responds more adequately to the empowerment agent of development projects.

1.1 Aim and research question

Several reports have highlighted how diverse aspects of structural elements of gender are reproducing practices of gender inequality for young girls in the current displacement situation in Lebanon (Anani 2013, UN Women 2013, Save the Children 2014). I have chosen to define structural elements of gender as expectations, norms, and values, concerning how individuals should be and act in the society according to socially constructed characteristics of femininity or masculinity assigned to their biological sex. Gender inequalities are experienced and considered differently, where the subjective experiences are influenced by several factors including one's background, class, nationality, ethnicity and sexuality (Jackson and Scott 2002). It is not uncommon that gender inequalities become unconscious for individuals, i.e internalized and a natural fact due to that they grow up and operate in realities where certain gendered ideas are inherent in many aspects of society (Bimbi 2014).

One particular aspect impacting how gender inequalities are viewed is how individuals' self is located in the social context and the author Gregg (2005) considers the self in traditional Middle Eastern areas to be bounded in a connectivity system. That means that individuals' self-worth, honour, and identity are interconnected and in relation with the deeds and behaviour of other family members (Joseph 1999). I argue that it is important to use the connectivity lens when exploring individuals' abilities to act according to their expectations and aspirations on who they want to become, also called agency with another word. Understanding the formation of the self and enactment of agency by young girls in the particular displacement situation is a step to better acknowledge their concerns and voices.

The thesis aims to discuss how structural elements of gender operate in the lives of Syrian adolescent girls and how girls enact their agency within the displacement situation in Lebanon. My research question is: *How do structural elements of gender shape the identity and agency of Syrian adolescent girls in the current displacement situation in Lebanon?*

- How do structural elements of gender operate in a conscious and unconscious way in the displacement situation?
- How does the system of connectivity influence how agency is enacted by the girls in the displacement situation?

In relation to my research problem I find it important to mention that my thesis is built upon stories from young Syrian girls in the age of 14 enrolled in a school run by a local NGO located in east Lebanon. Since education is one factor which is considered to be fundamental to increase women's agency (Kabeer 2005), it is important to highlight the sampled group's unique opportunity to study. That shows that their families place a value on education for girls; particularly since few Syrian girls in this age have the opportunity to attend educational services in Lebanon (UNFPA 2014). However, the girls still face other factors of influence besides schooling, such as religion, family, and the societal norms about the expected life of a girl. Therefore, it is fundamental to explore how they shape their agency in their local context.

1.2 Demarcation

I would like to highlight the importance to remember that Syria, like all countries, exists of different intersecting ideas, subcultures, layers and socioeconomic groups with particular ways of structuring their life (Gregg 2005). Therefore, I find it important to note that this particular study is based on the case study of Syrian girls belonging to a lower socioeconomic segment in society, now enrolled in school in the displacement situation in Lebanon. I do not intend to generalize the results to adolescence girls in displacement in general or to Syrians. Gender is a large concept and embraces many factors in life and due to the limited scale of the thesis I have had to focus on particular notions that I found to be relevant in relation to my research problem.

1.3 Disposition

The first chapter aims to bring clarity about the aim with the thesis and why it is of relevance to development. The second chapter will be talking about the Syrian and Lebanese context in relation to gender and the displacement situation. In the third chapter the reader will understand how the study was conducted. The fourth chapter will elaborate upon theoretical general concepts of agency and gender in relation to a Middle Eastern context. The fifth chapter is locating connectivity and honour in the context of the displacement situation. The sixth chapter, which is the result section will be divided in three parts: the individual, family, and community. The theoretical lens will be used within this chapter in order to present findings relevant for the addressing the research problem. The last section will include the conclusions of the thesis.

2. CONTEXTUAL INSIGHT

This chapter presents the reader with the background to the displacement situation in Lebanon, as well as discusses how particular structural elements of gender operates in Syria.

2.1 Background to the Syrian context



Source: UN (2012)

As shown by the map above Syria is located in the Middle East. Syria it is a multi-ethnic and religiously diverse country in which 90,3 % are Arabs, and ethnic minorities include Kurds, Armenians, Circassians, and Turks. The country has a Christian minority that represent approximately 10 percent of the population (CIA World Fact book 2015). A majority of the Syrian inhabitants, 74 % adhere to the Sunni school of Islam (CIA World Book 2015). It is often

regarded to be the traditional and orthodox branch of Islam, and a majority of the world's Muslims belong to this branch. The split between Sunni and Shia; Islam's two major branches occurred in the early times of the religion when the power of the leadership of the new Muslim community was to be decided. Still today, sectarian issues between the branches are visible in the region (BBC 2014).

Syria gained independence in 1946 after years of French colonisation. The independence was followed by a number of various coups until year 1963 when Hafez el Assad took power by a military coup. He belonged to the religious minority groups Alawites, adhering from the Shia branch and was a member of the Ba'ath party (Totah 2013). The Ba'ath party had its foundation in socialism and Arab unity, and enhanced a secular ideology. However, its political power came to be based in an authoritarian system and there was no room for criticism against the state, the party, or the president. Media restrictions were strict and so was punishment towards dissidents (Gallagher 2007).

Despite the totalitarian system of governance certain indicators of human development, such as education and access to health care, did increase during the rule of the Assad family (Gallagher 2007). One particular focus area of the regime has been the establishment of a system of free education for both girls and boys, and it contributed to high levels of enrolment in the educational system (Gallagher 2007:232). The free and public educational system was a way for the Syrian state to make women enter the labour market, and several authors talk about a form of state feminism in the case of Syria (Totah 2013, Olmsted 2011). To a certain degree the regime tried to promote policies aiming to increase women's participation in the public sphere in order for the state to gain economical benefits. Middle-class women were quite well-represented in particular educational and governmental services (Totah 2013) and this might be one reason to why it is possible to see that women's employment has gained increased acceptance in Syria (Gallagher 2007). However, it was another situation for lower and often rural income households, which tended to have more conservative attitudes regarding women's employment outside the domestic area (Gallagher 2007:232). Despite promoting women's participation in certain instances, the governmental institutions still bore and reproduced patriarchal norms, and

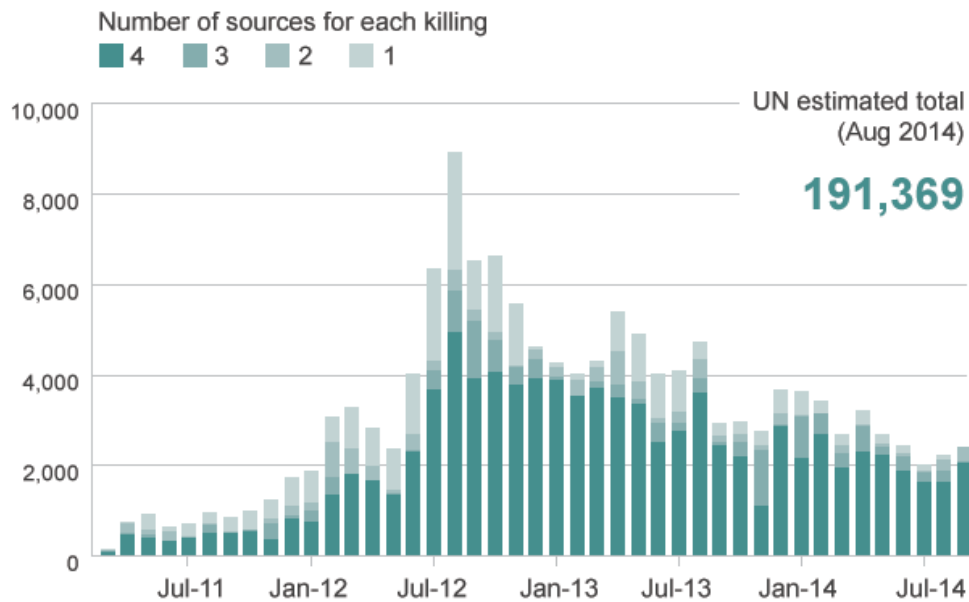
many times the president depicted himself as the patriarch of the family when claiming his power for the country (Totah 2013).

2.2 Background to the Syrian conflict and the displacement in Lebanon

In year 2011 the Arab Uprisings entered Syria and a number of peaceful and nonviolent protesters demanded political and social change. The protests were violently crushed by the regime’s military forces and it led more people, hundreds of thousands, to join the protests (BBC 2015). Different rebellious groups were formed with different agendas and ideologies, both secular and religious, and as time went on the initial peaceful protests evolved into a civil war between the Syrian regime and various rebel groups. The conflict has caused more than 200 000 deaths and there is still no sign of a stop to the conflict (BBC 2015).

Syria conflict death toll

Documented killings per month



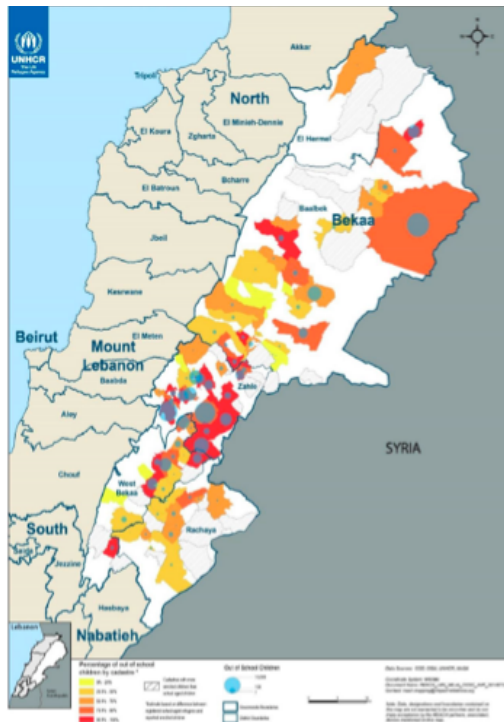
Sources: Violations Documentation Center, Syrian Shuhada, Syrian Network for Human Rights, Syrian Center for Statistics and Research

Source: BBC (2015)

In year 2010 Syria had 21,5 million inhabitants (World Bank 2015). Now more than a million of them have fled to Lebanon (Syria Regional Refugee Response 2015), which is a small neighbouring country with a population of only 4,4 millions (World Bank 2015). The refugee situation has come to affect Lebanon in several ways. It has raised light on the weak Lebanese dysfunctional state apparatus, which has not recovered since it faced an own long-going civil war, and since the Lebanese state is fragile and lacks proper infrastructure it has caused constraints on limited resources, such as electricity and water. The inflow of the refugees has also fired up fears of demographic changes based on religious affirmations and one reason is that Lebanon is built on the structures of sectarian belonging (International Crisis Group 2013:1-15). Religious belonging is partly a determinant of how different sectarian groups express their support to different actors within the Syrian conflict (International Crisis Group 2013:1-15). Lebanese Sunni Muslims generally support the Syrian opposition, while the Shia population, as well as the terrorist labelled group Hezbollah, support the current Syrian regime. This has lead to tensions between these and other Lebanese actors, as well as affecting relationships to the refugees. In the beginning of the crisis Lebanese host communities welcomed the refugees with open arms, however, as the crisis prolonged and the numbers of fleeing people increased, Syrians have progressively been regarded as a burden and there are growing tensions and violence between the two groups (International Crisis Group 2013:1-15).

Policies regarding Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon were implemented as the crisis started, and the current practices are built on the foundation of the Memorandum of Understanding with UNHCR (Bidinger 2014). One of the reasons behind the on-spot implementation is that Lebanon is not a member of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Furthermore Lebanon's history with events of violent resistance activities in the Palestinian camps has affected the policy of not establishing any formal refugee camps for Syrians in the country. However, despite the authorities' resistance to establish formal camps, a large number of informal tented settlements (ITS), unplanned housing not following building and planning regulations, have been established by refugees and private landowners themselves (Norwegian Refugee Council 2014). More than 94 000 people are residing in informal tented settlements in Lebanon (Syrian Refugee Response map 2014), which equals 16 % of all Syrian refugees in Lebanon (Norwegian Refugee Council 2014). Informal tented settlements in both Lebanon and the neighbouring countries are characterized by poor

sanitation and a general low level of human development, and families are facing daily hardships and stress (Ibid).



As the map shows, one particular area that contains many informal tented settlements is the Bekaa region in the east of Lebanon. In the Bekaa region is also where the majority of the data collection for this thesis took place, in a school located in an informal tented settlement. The region is famous for its agricultural land and already before the refugee influx it faced a high level of poverty; 30 % lived below the poverty line in year 2008 (Masterson et. Al. 2014:1). In Bekaa, as well as in other areas in Lebanon, many Syrian children are out of school. There are several barriers to education for children in the current displacement situation and three frequent answers are that the families cannot afford tuition, that there are no educational opportunities around, and the cost of transportation to the school (UNHCR 2014).

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses methodological approaches, such as the research design, validity and reliability, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research approach

My study is looking into adolescents' subjective experiences within a bounded reality and therefore I have chosen my research strategy to be a qualitative case study. I considered it suitable since qualitative research and case studies look into how groups and individuals consider their own settings and realities (Creswell 2009, Mack et. al 2005). My ontological view is based on the perception that humans construct and give meaning to the world according to their social reality, known as social constructivism (Creswell 2009). In order for me to better understand how I myself constructed and perceived my new reality I wrote daily reflections in my research journal and I will use certain sections from that in this methodology section.

One way for me to better understand how my respondents constructed their own social reality was to use elements of participatory methods, commonly called Participatory Rural Appraisal, which are a set of tools and methods aiming to create increased processes of participation (Mikkelsen 2005). Within my study I planned a number of methods, such as using drawings and clay in order to make the respondents more comfortable to talk about themselves. However, as documented in my research journal, the methods often had to be simplified due to the logistic situation: *“Was a bit difficult to go deeper into it since we were sitting outside, was cold and lack of privacy. I didn't do the drawing things... Too cold”*. In the end I bought blankets and gloves for the cold days in order to be able to conduct more comfortable interviews. Despite of the initial challenges with the logistics, the methods used helped me to better understand the lived reality of the girls and how it impacted their formation of identity. Making them both physically and mentally comfortable was important in order to facilitate the process of sharing their personal lives and thoughts.



One session included the use of puppet dolls.

One particular challenge was to be open to alternative interpretations and views outside my own personal feminist and liberal worldview. Social realities particularly the displacement situation in Lebanon, is complex and includes many aspects connected to culture, religion, Syria, and modern ideas. Therefore, the thesis has its basis in what Bryman (2012) calls interpretivism- that it is important to consider alternative meanings and understandings when exploring social relations and phenomena. Also, it is important to be open for alternative meanings within the same sample group. One example of this is how a gender activist, compared to other professionals in the field, put a different meaning to the contract of marriage:

*“It is not a marriage contract, it is called a “f***** contract” or a sexual. You can sit with the religious person who will try to tell you that nikha could also mean other things, but Nikha means literally f*****”. -Angelica*

The example shows, as stated by Creswell (2009), that the same phenomenon has different meaning for different individuals because the meaning they attach to a phenomenon is based on the individual's own previously lived experiences, and a foundation of social constructivism (Creswell 2009:8).

3.2. Ethical considerations

The colonial history of the region, both Syria and Lebanon having been colonised by the French, highly impacted my position as a Western woman conducting research in these settings. So does the orientalist history where Europeans depicted the region as exotic land, unchangeable, uncivilized and undeveloped (Gregg 2005). Despite my knowledge of Arabic, as well as being female, which helped me gain trust, I was outside my own setting in a new situation, in a setting where both the conflict in Syria as well tensions with the Lebanese community were close and visible.

Personal stories of gender violations became obvious when I least expected it, such as when I interviewed Sarah, a child protection officer in a local organisation. I wrote in my field journey:

“Today I had my first interview. She had herself married at the age of 14 and she started to talk about her personal experiences. I saw that it one time became a bit difficult for her. I hadn’t really considered that also local professionals in the field have a story themselves”.

It was even more difficult to talk with one of the girls who clearly faced problems at home:

M, the bright, but very emotional girl, took my heart today. I didn’t understand everything she told me but she has a lot of problems. I could see that. Her sister got married as 16 years old. Her mom is not with her”.

These were two particular times where I felt the deep complexity of our social world and that I was given a gift of trust listening to their stories. However, it was not easy to know how to best act and show my support and empathy, and in order for myself to process the feelings of inability that these conversations gave me, I used my field study journal for reflection.

The field study was done in cooperation with the local organisation hosting me, and their staff in the particular school helped me in the processes of planning and conducting the field study in a suitable way. The study was conducted on the principle of informed consent, and information was given about the purpose of the study, as well about confidentiality and rights. All respondents were given fictive names and all details that could reveal their identity have been removed. It was important that the participants felt comfortable, particularly since they were

young and in a vulnerable situation. Therefore, the questions asked were semi-structured and aimed to create a space for the participants to express themselves more freely.

3.3 Sampling strategies

The World Health Organization defines an adolescent to be a person between 10-19 years (WHO 2015). However, it is possible to divide adolescence into three subcategories: early adolescence 10-14 years; middle adolescence 15-17 years; and late adolescence 18-19 years (Dixon-Mueller 2008). My sampling strategies were to talk with Syrian displaced girls in early adolescent, at the age of 14 who were enrolled in a school in Bekaa, east Lebanon. The particular school that hosted me during my field study was located inside an informal tented settlement. The enrolled students came from the particular settlement and nearby settlements, as well as lived in apartments in the nearby town. They came from different geographic areas of Syria, and according to the respondents most families were large and consisted of more than five children. Despite that living conditions might be similar in informal tented settlements, differences are to be found also in the same region. The particular settlement was characterised as better functioning than others according to staff working in the organisation. They considered parents to be valuing education more in this particular camp than in others where they had schools.

I used purposeful sampling, which involves pre-selection of criteria that were relevant to my research questions (Mack et. al 2005:5). The criteria for the participants were that they were 14 years old, enrolled in education, from Syria, living in either an informal tented settlement or in an apartment (since the school hosted both kinds of students). Interviews and focus groups were conducted with both girls and boys, however more interviews and focus groups were conducted with girls due to the focus of the research. I did not put any criteria for religion or ethnic background, but all participants considered themselves to be Muslims. The interviews were semi-structured and included certain participatory elements, such as drawings and using clay.

Furthermore, a number of interviews were conducted by NGO professionals with a gender focus, as well with employees in the educational sector in Bekaa, following purposeful and snowball sampling strategies. Snowball sampling is based on the principle that one informant refers the

researcher to another suitable candidate to talk with (Mack et. al 2005). I found this useful since certain professionals recommended me to other professionals in their network.

3.3.1 Interviews and focus groups with adolescents

Since my field study had more of an inductive approach, where the data from the interviews and focus groups guided me to my research problem and questions, I found interviews to be suitable since it is an efficient method in order to understand the perceptions and thoughts of the participants (Mack et. al 2005:2). It was important to have semi-structured questions, but to be open for the issues the respondents wanted to address. A number of five individual interviews of girls were conducted and most girls participated in one or more of the three focus group sessions. The reason that not everyone participated in all the focus groups is that not everyone were present at the school at the time of the focus groups.

I decided to also conduct focus groups since they can be an efficient method in order to describe different perspectives within a target group and since they highlight certain processes and dynamics within a group (Mack 2005:51). The focus groups were a step to create conversations about certain topics of everyday life, such as being 14 years old, the future, and being a girl or a boy. They created highly interesting conversations, however, it was sometimes possible to see that some girls spoke a lot while others were more quiet. Two focus groups were conducted with four boys, and one of them also participated in an individual interview.

The interviews and focus groups were done by myself in Syrian Arabic in order to reduce the distance between me and the participants. Since I did not understand exactly all details of the conversations, the interviews were recorded by using a voice recorder, and the recordings were later properly translated together with a native Arabic speaking person. There were positive and negative sides of conducting the sessions myself in Arabic. The most positive aspect was to be able to directly communicate with the respondents and it was a way for me to gain trust. Challenging aspects were to ask suitable follow up questions since I sometimes had problems of understanding all the details in the conversations.

3.3.2 Interviews with NGO and educational professionals

A total of nine interviews with teachers and employees within the school sector were performed, with both male and female respondents from different ages. Seven interviews with female gender experts in a diverse range of civil society organisations were conducted. The interviews were semi-structured and took place in Bekaa and Beirut.

The interviews with employees of the schools were done in Arabic with the same procedure as previously described. The interviews in Beirut with gender professionals were done in English and also recorded. The aim of the interviews was to gain a deeper understanding about the local reality in relation to structural elements of gender, as well as gaining a better understanding of the local context.

3.4 Data analysis and source criticism

The interviews and focus groups in Arabic were transcribed word by word with help from an Arabic speaking person to make sure that I understood everything correctly. When everything was transcribed a data analysis based on the steps of Creswell (2009) was conducted. I started with organising the data and then reading through it and coding it. After the coding I identified the themes and started to think about how these could be represented, and thereafter it was time to start the process of interpreting the data according to the themes.

Creswell (2009) mentions the importance of being critical towards one's sources and what kind of bias they have. The primary data sources were interviews and focus groups with adolescents, as well as interviews with gender professionals, and employees within the educational setting. It is likely that the background of the respondents affect their perceptions and since the professionals operated either within the educational system or within humanitarian organisations focusing on gender it is likely that they highlight the importance of equal right of education for children. The same goes for the adolescents who were all enrolled in a school. These conditions are important to be aware of when analysing the data.

As written before, one particular challenge was to face and interpret data from a more conservative setting, which was outside of my own cultural area. As Sadaf, a young female teacher, stated: *“Because that's our beliefs. Girls belong to the house and that's her job”*. The article by Avishai et. al (2013) talks about findings that go against established feminist research and how to be reflexive and critical also towards the feminist discourse since it can lead to orthodox truths, especially since feminism has its background and agenda in both politics and production of knowledge. Important ways for me to enhance what Avishai et al (2013) calls institutional reflexivity has been to discuss my findings with individuals with a background in the Middle Eastern context and thereby gain a more inclusive understanding. Furthermore, it was important to read articles and reports from both local and international authors and organisations in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

3.5 Reliability and validity

Qualitative reliability is about having a consistent approach throughout the research, and validity can be said to be about applying certain procedures in order to control the accuracy of the results (Creswell 2009). Within the research process a number of measures were taken in order to assure both reliability and validity of the data. The first procedure applied has been to check the transcripts, re-listen to the interviews, and find out if the findings were accurate from the perspective of myself, as well as other readers (Creswell 2009). Secondly, I used triangulation to a certain dimension, which means that different data sources were used in order to validate that my findings were coherent (Creswell 2009:145). For example, in the case of early marriage I used interviews, reports from humanitarian organisations, and academic research in order to validate my findings. Thirdly, Creswell (2009) states that bringing bias to the front is one way of enhancing reflexivity, which I am doing with the use of my research journal.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework aims to discuss both general and culturally specific concepts in relation to gender and agency.

4.1 Agency and gendered structures

Agency operates in social structures of gender and in the context of development have much literature developed from Sen's (1999) concept about human development and capabilities. There are several definitions of agency available (Ibrahim and Alkire 2007) and the definitions impact how agency is explored and looked into. Kabeer (2005) describes agency to occur when individuals consider themselves to have real authentic choices in their life, and considers agency to involve ways that challenge power relations. However, there are authors such as Mahmood (2001) who finds it important to extend the understanding of agency outside the settings of individualistic cultures and societies. She has been writing about agency in the Middle Eastern and North African context and considers agency not only as actions, which challenges power relations directly, but rather as "capacity for action" (Mahmood 2001:18). She highlights the fact that agency of individuals occurs within the given societal and cultural frames, as well in the context of individuals' cultural and religious aspired virtues, and that these shapes how forms of agency are expressed and enacted (Mahmood 2001: 25-30). Therefore, I find it important to consider agency to be more than obvious acts of resistance of power relations.

Agency takes place in gendered social structures, and gender can be defined as: "...a social structural phenomenon but is also produced, negotiated, and sustained at the level of everyday interaction" (Jackson and Scott 2002:1). Gendered structures are dynamic, contain both formal and informal rules, and intersect with each other continuously in a number of interlayered ways (Jacksson and Scott 2002). They might take different shapes in different societies and therefore it is important to explore how structural elements of gender operate in the local reality in the lives of the adolescent girls. This is particularly so since they guide personal actions and abilities, and may act as a moral and norm-based guideline of individuals' lives (Kabeer 2005). By empowering and constraining social actions, they reinforce and legitimize how the lives of women and men should look like within society, and establish a hierarchical social system (West

and Zimmermann 1987:142,146). Since different societies are exercising culturally specific concepts in order to reinforce gender divisions (Jackson and Scott 2002) it is significant to look into the local context of the displacement in Lebanon and to the concept of honour, that was mentioned directly and indirectly by the respondents several times.

4.2 Honour and connectivity

Honour translates to “*Sharaf*” in Arabic and could be seen as a kind of social capital since it indicates status and membership in social networks, as well be described as a multidimensional and dynamic ideology about the right way of living rather than a fixed code. It includes a set of gendered values and virtues for both females and males (Baxter 2007:743) and family can be considered a centre point. One important aspect in the honour system for females is to act upon the societal feminine norms, such as being modest, and to keep their virginity intact until marriage. One important role for males is to assure protection of female family members (Gregg 2005). In times of poor economic resources and weak legislation it is not uncommon that the concept of honour gains increased importance (Quis 2009:452-462). Moreover, it is essential to note that the concept of honour takes different forms and levels in different settings, and is influenced by factors such as social class, educational level and residential place (Baxter 2007). It also extends and is interlinked to other arenas in society and it reinforces particular virtues, such as modesty, respectfulness and piety (Baxter 2007) and that might influence how adolescents shape their identity in a displacement situation.

In the age of adolescence gender might be more actively negotiated and reproduced than before, and it is common that within the age of adolescence bodily processes and changes become linked to ethical ideals, social roles and larger patterns within the particular local context, and it makes gender norms to become larger and of more importance (Gregg 2005). The role of honour as a set of ethical gendered ideas in the local context can be considered to be intensified and reinforced by the system of connectivity. The author Joseph (1999) explains the system of connectivity to mean that individuals’ identities are reproduced and put value on by interweaving relations with other family members. In short, the actions and ways of being an individual are linked to and affect the status of other members in the family (Joseph 1999). It is fundamental to

state that connectivity does not take away individuals' agency (Joseph 1999), however, it might shape its expressions because, together with honour, it is likely to reinforce and sustain societal ideas of what women are capable of since actions against established norms would not only impact the woman but her whole family.

Many times honour has been considered as belonging to males alone and women being put outside as passive victims. However, more than solely looking into men's acts of domination, it is important to look into females' role and participation within these structures in order to understand how the self operates within this context. Being considered as honourable, such as being modest and acting in a societal appropriate behaviour, is one way females can gain respect and rewards, such as physiological and emotional support and approval given by their family and in the community, as well religious deeds. It might even be a foundation for achieving their personal aspirations, particularly in a religious and more traditional setting (Mahmood 2001). It is therefore fundamental to consider the identity of adolescent girls to be shaped and located within the gendered societal system rather than outside. As well, consider females as active participants and reproducers of the system.

One reason that adolescent girls are active participants of the gendered system of honour is that they are born into it and guided along in it (Baxter 2007). Being exposed and participating in certain cultural or ideological norms can make gender inequalities and power relations to appear normal and therefore groups who are subordinated in the society are likely to accept or even enforce the existing structures (Gregg 2005:295, 458). It is possible to see that connective selfhood together with local patriarchal norms can become a way to enforce internalisation of domination, and Joseph (1999) names it as patriarchal connectivity. It could be defined as: "...the production of selves with fluid boundaries organized for gendered and aged domination in a culture valorising kin structures, morality, and idioms" (Joseph 1999:13). The patriarchal connectivity governs how relations and actions of control are put in place and it becomes an effective tool for compliance of gender norms. The connectivity setting impacts how ideas of masculinity and femininity are formed; they are formed in relation to each other. One example of patriarchal connectivity is certain brother-sister relations, in which the brother shapes his masculinity in relation to his sister 's compliance to culturally specific feminine ideals (Joseph

1999:1-21). Since individuals grow up within these structures it is not uncommon that certain ideas already have become unconscious, also called internalised within the age of puberty (Gregg 2005:295, 458).

In order to understand how agency is shaped in the age of adolescence it is central to look into the period of adolescence in the local context, which contains several competing and compatible notions of the self (Gregg 2005). The period of adolescence is often interpreted with Western psychodynamic theories where the formation of the self is based within an individualistic centred setting (Gregg 2005) rather than in a collective and connective context. While the period of adolescence in West has a focus on individuals to become more independent from their families (Gregg 2005), the study of (Mensch et. al 2013) mentions that this period for Egyptian adolescents rather was about learning to be a part of social networks. It shows the importance to recognising the local context when discussing adolescent's formation of identity and look closer into influencing factors. Certain factors of importance when adolescents negotiate and shape their identities, more than the existence of honour, and connectivity is the divide between ideas of modernity and traditions, which has been created and fuelled by the history of colonization, independence movements, and Western cultural domination in the Middle Eastern area (Gregg 2005:289). Many times do youth in the region create a hybrid between ideas of modernity and tradition, and converge them in suitable ways (Gregg 2005). It highlights that identity formation is dynamic and that we need to consider how the self is shaped in order to look into individuals' expressions of agency.

Several studies (Abu-Rabia-Queder & Weiner-Levy 2013, Abu-Lughod 1990, Mahmood 2001) illustrate examples where agency of women in more traditional areas of Middle East and North Africa departs from exercising their own existing cultural resources in the social structures in order to negotiate their positions and opportunities in the society. They highlight the fact that women might negotiate their agency in order to comply with religious, cultural, and ethical values and expectations about what it means to be a woman, but still act upon their aspirations (Abu-Rabia-Queder & Weiner-Levy 2013, Abu-Lughod 1990, Mahmood 2001). I find this essential to remember since identities and self-worth of individuals in the particular context are in relation with other family members, and bounded in the societal gendered structures of

honour. Therefore, agency might take other forms than openly challenging existing structures since it is likely to give consequences for not only the individual, but for other family members. Acknowledging the local context, I therefore find Mahmood's (2001) theoretical lens of agency to be suitable in order to explore agency, which is outside the obvious acts of resistance category. Her more inclusive definition of agency is a way to explore how adolescent girls in a traditional setting negotiate and express their agency for reaching their aspirations within their displacement situation.

5. INTRODUCTION TO ANALYSIS

This section aims to locate aspects of honour and connectivity in the local context.

5.1 Locating honour and connectivity in the displacement situation

"This is a boy. This is a thief. Comes "tick, tick", her brother comes to protect her, wherever they go, the brother is with her. If the guy comes and sees her brother, he will not attack her. This is the honour of the family". -Maha, 14

This particular quote explains what the word "sharaf", honour, meant for one of the girls; it also exemplifies how the girls refer to their identity, honour, safety, and moral as connected to other family members' values. Therefore, I consider honour to be operating in their sphere of life and being channelised by the connectivity system. Additionally, the quote illustrates the importance of the protection of girls in the public sphere due to the existence of unfamiliar men with possible bad intentions and desires.

Maha: The honour of the girl and boy. So the guy is responsible for his own honour and his sisters'. He doesn't need anyone.

Aisha: The guy protects himself, but a girl cannot because she is afraid.

The relations of brothers and sisters are of particular importance in traditional Arab contexts (Joseph 1999). The two quotes above illustrate that the brothers are responsible for reassuring their sister's safety in the public sphere. Furthermore, they could be considered examples of patriarchal connectivity since the sister receives protection in exchange of acting and following her brother; the brother is the one in control of her acts. Within this framework expressions of femininity and masculinity are shaped, and a connectedness of the masculinity of the brother can

be linked to societal appropriate ways of feminine behaviour of the sister. This further means that if the sister does not act in accordance to the societal appropriate expectations for females, her brother's status and masculinity might be downgraded which in turn may impact the status of the family as a whole. Brothers' duties for their sisters' protection are many times expressed to be in the name of love and safety (Joseph 1999). This is why sisters may accept and embrace their brothers' control and protection, and even internalize their brother's protection to feel safe (Joseph 1999). Additionally both girls and boys are encouraged to follow these patterns because they are rewarded and acknowledged when following these norms, and that probably also contributes to making these relations stronger.

5.2 Fear in relation to honour and connectivity

“They assault girls so we hide ourselves and go inside so no one can rape us, and for my younger sisters not to be kidnapped. Yesterday they kidnapped two girls, they slayed them and pushed them in the river” -Aisha, 14

The quote above is one of many which highlights the perceived lack of security and the fear for sexual violence of females in the displacement situation. Aspects of honour are involved in the discourse of fear and despite the fact that sexual violence is a stigma in most societies; the consequences and fear of sexual violence can be said to be larger in the context of honour. One reason is that the girl's virginity is fundamental not only for finding a husband for herself, but also for the reputation of her sisters and family. The quote by Aisha illustrates how connectivity operates in instances of illegitimate social actions, and how it can affect other family members: *“...and a lot of people would talk about her. Haram [forbidden]. And if they have a younger daughter no one will propose to her”*. Since sexual violence or illegitimate behaviour would create large consequences for the family it can be said to be a reason why families take extra precautions in a displacement situation concerning protection of their girls.

6. ANALYSIS

This section aims to explore gendered structures in the displacement situation and how spheres of agency are operating within that. It is important to acknowledge that the formation of the self is not static and but happens in many different intersecting levels, such at an individual, family, and community level.

6.1 The individual

6.1.1 Being Syrian in Lebanon

In order to understand the complex reality the girls lived in it is fundamental to acknowledge factors shaping their identity, and one particular foundation for the girls' identity was the fact that they were Syrians and lived outside their own country involuntarily. Since the girls were old enough to remember their life in Syria they did many comparisons between their current situation in Lebanon and their life in their hometown. Maha says: *...we are living in a house with plastic bags*. As so many other displaced persons their standard of living had strongly decreased in Lebanon and everyday life reminded them about this.

Chatty (2010) explains that a shared past is a way for displaced persons to create a sense of belonging in displacement situations. Imagining a common homeland is a common expression and many times are problems and difficulties in the past forgotten and overseen in the creation of an imagined and shared view about the country of origin (Chatty 2010). Their identity as Syrians was also enforced in relation to the Lebanese host community since the formation of one's identity and group belonging is largely created in relation to other groups (Chatty 2010). These aspects are important to have in mind since it might impact how other parts of their identity is shaped and how they place themselves in the displacement situation.



Drawing made during one focus group, which says “My home in Lebanon”

6.1.2 Religious identification

Religion is particularly important when it comes to influencing the formation of the identity of young people. It is intertwined in the honour system in different ways, and it contributes to persons’ constructions of themselves. It includes a system of both self-care and self-monitoring (Gregg 2005:129) and it creates a set of culturally specific sentiments, motives and social selves. Particularly important elements are the fear of divine judgement after death, purity and being righteous. Gender is inherent in the religious system and operates both from inside and outside and creates a basis for the individual's’ identity, and links bodily processes with spiritual (Gregg 2005). All respondents considered religion as an important part of their life, however their religiosity took diverse forms in everyday expression and activities. One particular example of this is one girl who stated that she did not listen to modern Arabic music, and instead preferred listening to the Quran but all of them stated religion to be important in their life. This illustrates that there are many competing factors of influence, as well as interpretations of religion in the lives of the girls. Even though religion is one of the main influences in their lives, it does not shape completed and static set of identities. Therefore, individuals and their religious identities might be different from each other despite living in a similar context (Gregg 2005:111).

Islam contains gendered virtues and expectations, and those valued for girls are modesty, piety, and faithfulness. These can be expressed in several ways, are valued at many different levels, and linked to the connection with a higher power (Gregg 2005). These virtues could be linked to the practice of veiling this is wearing a scarf, called Hijab in Arabic. Many girls started to do this when reaching puberty, and Aisha refers to it like this: *“That’s a sign that you grow up. You need to cover”*. It could be considered as an important cultural transition and it brings more responsibilities, such as starting to behave in societal gender appropriate ways for girls (Gregg 2005). Veiling could in this case be seen as an example of a bodily practice linked to a moral goal, since it includes paying attention to virtues of modesty and religious piety by the way of dressing and covering one’s body (Gregg 2005).



A self-portrait of one of the girls, showing her hijab.

The veil has been seen as a practice that oppresses and makes women powerless in Middle East but also on a more general level (Behiery 2013). However, the veil has many different meanings and expressions, such as cultural identity, religious belonging, tool for mobility, anti-colonial protest, and a way to create agency. It has been considered both a tool for men to suppress women but also a tool for women to gain agency and be empowered, and due to its complexity it should not be understood one-dimensionally (Behiery 2013). The practice of veiling was not questioned by the girls, rather considered as a natural part of life since they all found religion to

be important in their life. However, one girl expressed that she would rather continue to wear her current modern clothes together with her veil, instead of the more traditional clothes she was expected to change to when she grows older. This is expressed in the conversation below:

Maha: *We learn from our mom and dad. When you grow up you start to read the Quran. You cover and we were long pants. Now I'm young. When I grow older I will wear the jellabiya [a traditional long dress]*

Sofia: Do you want to wear it?

Maha: *My dad wants, because when we die God will hold my father accountable and not us.*

Sofia: What clothes do you like?

Maha: *I like this. But haram [forbidden]*

Sofia: What do you mean?

Maha: *Religion and God are the important things.*

Aisha: *So our dad teaches us about religion and it is haram to wear that.*

The conversation illustrates that Maha's choice of clothes is connected to her dad and judgement after death. Even though she would rather continue to wear the clothes she had on, she considered it more important to satisfy her dad's wishes because religion is important to her and she cared for her father and would not like to be guilty of causing him problems. What is interesting to note in this case is that religious adherence operates in a similar way as honour does, that is connecting family members' actions and morals with each other. Secondly, the conversation illustrates the dynamic processes between modern and traditional aspects of the lives of the girls, as well as this particular girl's desire to combine modern with traditional elements of clothing. The wish for combining these aspects are not always free of friction, as the example shows, particularly since these processes take place within structures of patriarchal connectivity. Therefore, how she decides to act on her aspirations will not only affect herself but also family members, even in a higher spiritual level.

Additionally, the quote illustrates the strong emphasis of actions considered as haram and halal. Haram means actions that are religiously forbidden and halal is the opposite, permitted actions. One particular issue the girls referred to as haram in several conversations was to expose themselves uncovered to men outside their family. Regarding this Maha said: "*Her body is only for her husband and family to see. Her uncle can see the hair. Uncle, father and brother only*". Veiling negotiates gender interaction with men outside the family and in the age of adolescence it can be said to bring new ways of behaving thus being aware of appropriate roles of interaction with men outside the family. The veil can be said to remind both herself and people she interacts

with about her role as a female, which is connected to religious virtues of modesty. Women are in Islam important carriers of divine sanctity, and since her moral is connected to her family (Guindi 1999) it is likely that individuals take larger responsibility for their own religious acts, and avoid actions causing troubles to other family members.

6.1.3 Sexuality

Sexuality within the Islamic religious discourse is considered to have its place in the institution of marriage (Gregg 2005). I found a clear underlining of the norms and expectations regarding sexuality and females' virginity as illustrated by Yousef during one focus group:

“If a man had sex with a girl and she was bleeding, that means she was not tried before. But if she did not bleed, that means she was tried. And no one comes near her”.

It highlights the societal expectations for females who must proof their sexual innocence in time for marriage; and as with many other instances her sexuality and body become connected to the reputation and worth of other family members. Through out the conversations it was also possible to see that boys were more expressive about their own sexuality, this mirrors the societal gendered structures of how females and males sexuality is considered.

In traditional areas, it is common that mothers-in-law control if bleeding occurred after the wedding night (Fernea 1995:10). This can be considered as one way of exercising power over the new woman in the family and thereby gaining own power (Ghanim 2009:150). Many times the power of older women in Arab societies increases when they reach a certain age and it is not uncommon that they use the patriarchal structures in place in order to advance their status further. One reason might be that they experienced a lack of status in life and the welcoming of a new woman to the family might be the first opportunity to change their own low status they had as brides. Even though not everyone follows that example, it shows that certain women might use the existing system in order to higher their position and thereby reproduce patriarchal hierarchical relations, which makes the oppressed become the oppressor (Ghanim 2009:150). It illustrates that women are active participants in the gendered structures, and might use the same patriarchal system they were victims of in order to reach their aspirations.

6.2 Family

6.2.1 The institution of family in a displacement situation

Family is a fundamental institution in most societies and it plays a particularly large and essential role in Middle Eastern societies (Gregg 2005). Within crisis situations it is not uncommon that lack of work and income opportunities for men create what Baxter (2007) calls a masculinity crisis. Lacking influence over traditional masculine spheres, such as bringing an income to the family can become a source of distress and the home then becomes the only existing arena for exercising power and authority (Baxter 2007). Nina, a psychologist working with Syrian displaced women in Bekaa considered the stress within the family to increase the rates of domestic abuse and to create a vicious circle of violence in the family settings. It is also not uncommon that displaced Syrian girls accept increased levels of violence in the family due to the difficult situation (UNFPA 2014). Within these situations Maria, an art therapist working with refugee children in the displacement situation mentioned that children she met often became more responsible than their age, and that they enhanced protective measures towards siblings since they lost family members in the war. Operating in the system of patriarchal connectivity, it could therefore be considered likely that brothers take increased measures to protect their sisters, and at the same time the girls accept this more easily.

The physical space also impacts the lives of families and individuals thus living in a small tent or an overcrowded apartment with a large number of family members can be stress factor. Many families are dysfunctional after the war and many children grow up without their mother or father present (International Rescue Committee 2014). At the same time, there are aspects which might not be counted as violence but still create anxiety and difficulties for the girls, this is the case of Magda, the girl who lived with her brother and his wife: *“It is a small tent and my brother and sister in law got married two years ago. We sleep in the same room... And that makes me upset, I don’t like that”*. Despite that she is not directly saying what was upsetting her, I interpreted it as sexual relations between her brother and his wife. It exemplifies the daily

hardships the girls might have in their lives, and it is likely to shape how they develop their identity.

6.2.2 Gendered responsibilities

Within the Middle Eastern system of family a patrilineal system can be found, this means that both decency and rights come after the male. Therefore, children who within a traditional context take the nationality, religion, and name of the father have more societal value (Joseph 1999:175). That can be illustrated by Moustafa a 14 years old boy who replied the following when asked if there are any differences between girls and boys: *“There is no difference. It is the same thing, but there are some who like boys better since the boy would carry the family name”*. There are also underlying gendered notions of what kind of management and leadership responsibilities men and females can carry in their life; the same boy says: *“.. if his father died he can be the man of the family, he is responsible for the house. A boy can take the responsibility but girls can’t”*. Growing up with these gendered norms in the family are likely to affect how the agency of young girls are shaped since they from the beginning will have an idea about what responsibilities they can handle.

Another aspect of these gendered norms within the family are that they easily become internalised and enhanced by both females and males. As an example, both girls and boys indicated the different responsibilities females and males have in their life; men focusing on bringing an income to the family, and women of being responsible for the household. Responsibilities of females were constructed in the name of biological features of reproduction, as well as mental and physical abilities. The internalisation of these practices occurs in the everyday reproduction of gender norms children grow up with, as Moustafa states: *“My sisters help my mom and I help my dad with everything”*. Within these daily actions young people learn what their surroundings expect of them. Both girls and boys in the study could be considered to have incorporated societal gendered values and expectations, and Gregg (2005) mentions that these are commonly internalised in the time they are mastered.

6.2.3 Marriage

Marriage and giving birth are considered as something significant in a woman's life, therefore, many women face pressure from the family and the society to get married. Marriage acts as an important transition ritual to adulthood for both females and males (Olmsted 2011:53, 54, 402) and the ties between families are one important aspect in traditional Middle Eastern settings. Marriage in traditional settings has commonly taken place within the patrilineal line and between cousins, which could be considered to further intensify the connectivity aspects of the self since the groom already is connected to the larger family (Gregg 2005:60).

Several reports have mentioned the increased occurrence of early marriages in the current displacement situation (Anani 2013, Save the Children 2014, UNICEF 2014) and it was also described by the girls. Early marriage can be defined as marriages where one of the two spouses are below the age of 18 years (UNICEF 2014), but in order to understand the girls' own understanding of what is early from their perspective they were asked how old a girl should be as the minimum and what a suitable age is. Some of them considered the minimum age in order to get married to be around 14 years, but none found this age suitable. Despite that menarche within a traditional and religious discourse is considered a sign of readiness for marriage for girls (Gregg 2005); but this it was not mentioned by any of the girls when discussing the topic. Most respondents considered that girls should be at least 20 years old in order to marry and that is exemplified in the timeline one girl draw:



During one exercise; the girls were asked to draw the timeline of a girl's life.

Although that the girls opposed early marriages, there are differences among the arguments they and international organisations highlight as risks with the practice. Aisha explained the negative consequences with marrying too young:

“Her dreams are broken; she has dreams of growing up, playing, learning, all these dreams collapsed. And when she marries she becomes a mom and have a husband and children, and she doesn't know how to raise them. She has a home but she doesn't know how to manage it”. -Aisha, 14

None of the girls mentioned physical health related problem as humanitarian organisations commonly highlight (Save the Children 2014, UNICEF 2014). Instead several girls talked about the risk of letting young girls marry since they might neglect their home and husband's needs resulting in the marriage becoming a divorce. The suitable age for a girl to enter marriage was particularly linked to her abilities to manage the household, and they were all aware of the domestic responsibilities a wife had. Possibly as a reason, none of the girls themselves aspired to marry, and rather wanted to focus on their education.



Picture draw by the girl who said: *“We don't want to get married. Early. We can get married when we are 40”*.

“My cousin got married in that age [13] because someone proposed and her family was fearing for her. That she might be kidnapped” –Jihane, 14

One reason why early marriages are occurring can be illustrated with the example above; the perceived lack of security and the fear for sexual violence. The construction of fear is in the context bounded with gender notions in connection to women's bodies and sexuality, and is fed by the social stigma of sexual violence and loss of virginity. Gossip is playing part of creating and sustaining the feeling of fear (Ghanim 2009) and within certain conversations were stories of child slaughtering told, which seemed to be based on high levels of secondary sources and

possible gossips. Regardless of those stories being true or not, they impacted the girls enhancing a feeling of fear within themselves. That might lead to the girls more easily accepting restrictions on their mobility, or marriage proposals.

Sofia: When a girl gets married. Who decides?

Maha: Her dad or her mom. Father or mother.

Sofia: What's happening if she doesn't want to?

Aisha: There are some of them Sofia. Her father died in the war. So her mom is worried about her because she might not be able to raise her, so she marries her away. To secure her future. Do you understand me?

This conversation above illustrates two interesting issues. Firstly, that early marriages operate within the system of honour and marrying them young becomes a solution for certain families not only to reduce economical costs, but to gain protection for the girl and her family, since an assault on her would affect the whole family. The female participants of the UNFPA (2014) survey among Syrian youth residing in Lebanon considered it to be understandable if a female marries someone who could take financial care of her and offer protection, since she then could escape the displacement situation (UNFPA 2014). That could be linked to what the particular girl above said concerning “securing her future” and can be seen in connection and agreement of societal gender expectations and norms of what is valued in the life of a girl, such as protection by a husband and within a home.

Secondly, the decision of marriage is centered around the family and the conversation illustrates that parents wishes were important for the girls to listen and consider, particularly in times of hardship. In times of stress families often rely on the available social support network in the community (Farhood et. al 1993) and within the displacement situation the guilt and concern for the family might make the girls more easily accept to get married given that in conflict situations children and youth take more responsibility for their parents (James et. al 2014). The importance of respecting the wishes of one's parents in marriage matters were confirmed by the participants of the UNFPA (2014) report that stated the importance to obey the parents when it comes to those issues. It highlights the importance of ties and the opinions of other family members and that is likely to affect the girls' expressions of agency, since it might be of increased importance to keep the family's position in the social system in the vulnerable displacement situation.

It is important to note that families are different and have different attitudes towards marriage of their daughters and that was highlighted by Aisha:

Two weeks ago a man came and proposed to my sister. The father asked the daughter if she accepted and she said no and then the father said "No we will not give you our daughter". Our parents don't force us to get married. –Aisha, 14

Regardless being forced or not, arranged marriages were considered as the norm according to the girls and they considered it common that the bride and groom did not know each other well before the marriage; the more quiet girl called Jihane said: "...after they deal with each other in the marriage she starts loving him". It illustrates a perspective on love, which is gradually growing. Despite this, some girls described their own personal feelings of love and romance their age, such as Maha:

"There is no girls who is not loving someone. I like someone, and she likes someone. I like someone that my friend also likes. Whenever I like someone, my friend likes him as well. So I leave him and start to like someone else, but then my friend start to like him as well. And the one who ends up with him is my friend and not me". –Maha, 14

It highlights that romantic feelings are present also in a restricted reality, and some of the girls also talked quite openly about boys and in a humorous way:

Maha: *In Syria the guys were more handsome.*

Rania: *How can you say guys in Syria were more handsome? They are all Syrians here.*

Passionate love stories are visible in the Middle Eastern poetic traditions despite of restricted social realities. One example is the study of Abu-Lughod (1999), which discusses the negotiation of personal relationships in poetry based on stories about forbidden love. The poetic tradition does many times contain stories of non-acceptable societal actions of passionate love, however, they are still much appreciated and told. Within the sphere of the girls they rather mentioned passionate forbidden love stories from the TV-series than poetry. Even though they themselves did not consider it realistic to run away, the series can be said to have contributed to alternative discourses of love and quite a bit of fascination. It is interesting to note that in the same reality polygamous relationships are found. Aisha tells me about her sister: *"My sister is a second wife. But all of them live separately, in a separate house. The two wives really like each other, they are like sisters. I ask her what she thinks about it and she tells me: Normal. But if they were not on good terms...No... If they didn't like each other, either he divorce that one or the other.*

As the conversation above illustrates polygamous relationships are not considered as something unusual or extraordinary for the girls, and neither are passionate love stories of exclusive love. It highlights the different factors of influence in the spheres of the girls. Despite of the various influencing factors in their lives, differences on how individuals act upon these are likely to be found since some actions are socially accepted and others are not. The individual would need to face two major obstacles when breaking norms within the family and community. Firstly, she might need to encounter personal consequences that might be difficult to handle within a system where social security is based on being a part of social networks; even more in a displacement situation. Secondly, due to the connectivity system she would need to face the guilt for impacting the life opportunities of her other family members with her actions. That might make individuals more prone to work for their aspirations within the given framework and find ways of acting upon their agency inside their system rather than breaking free from it.

6.3 Community

6.3.1 A gendered public space

“We were very happy, we had many friends. In Syria we could go out any time safely, but here after 7 we lock the door and go inside” -Aisha

The quote illustrates the reduction of mobility for young girls and what they considered to be important in Syria; their friends and that they had certain mobility options. In Syria adolescents experienced many types of different lives depending on their socioeconomic level, and geographic location. Youth in the urban and more liberal settings received commonly larger freedoms comparing to youth who lived in rural and more traditional settings (Mahdi 2003). Even though these girls also in Syria lived in a traditional setting, they perceived themselves to have a large portion of freedom of mobility in Syria comparing with Lebanon and this is their frame of reference. It highlights the fact that mobility and opportunities of being among friends are important for them and something they aspire for. However, despite that many aspired for this and highlighted the problems they had with the lack of security and restrictions of mobility, few comments, similar to the quote below was heard:

“The lives of boys are very fun, they are always happy. But girls are afraid of boys and hide themselves inside. Boys are not afraid of anything in the night. They are boys, everyone put a knife in his pocket so that no one will attack him. They go and buy whatever they want, like food and nuts. We can’t buy these things. We can’t go outside, and we don’t even have blankets to warm us”- Aisha 14

This conversation was one of the few where girls openly considered and questioned the inequalities of life styles between girls and boys, such as boys having more freedom. Reasons might be several but as the quote illustrates is internalisation of ideas concerning protection visible, and that is likely to impact how girls consider and express their thoughts regarding gender inequalities since the fear together with the honour dimension function as a legitimate reason for them to have less freedom. Several factors contribute to a gendered public sphere, religion being one of them. Within the religious discourse the home is considered as a sacred place for females (Guindi 1999) and that could be linked to physical spaces of praying for males and females. Maha says: *“A woman’s mosque is her home. They pray at home. And the men at the mosque”*. That is likely to enforce divisions of private and public life also in other spheres than religion.

6.3.2 The labour market

It is possible to see that also the context in Syria contained a gendered public space, linked to the societal gender norms for males and females in relation to labour opportunities. One boy expressed himself as: *“The responsibility for the boy is to work outside and girls should work at the house, cleaning and cooking. Their work is at the house. The boys can work and do anything”*. Despite that the girls did not express themselves like this, they still had a clear frame of reference about what kind of jobs were suitable for girls; the words of Aisha highlight this point: *“Not everything girls are capable of but boys can become anything. He can build houses. He can sell. He can do agriculture and be a driver”*. Another factor of influence might be found in the article of Gallagher (2007). She mentions that suitable jobs for women in Syria many times depended on how much they affected the domestic possibilities of the woman. An illustration of this was said by Rania:

“She can work with something light that she can handle, and then in the same time she goes back home and work home. She cleans everything before her husband comes because he will be tired. And heats the water and makes food”. –Rania, 14

None of the girls questioned the extra responsibilities the woman had to take even when she was working, or that they could not work with whatever they wanted. One reason might be the internalisation of what girls and boys are capable of and the fact that they did not think of an alternative option since they were not a perceived reality. That is likely to shape the expressions of girls' aspirations since it is difficult to aspire something when is not inside one's imagination.

6.3.3 Harassment

Magda: *If she is beautiful, a guy comes and whistles. Tells her "Ohh you are like a moon". This is harassment.*

Sofia: How does she feel? Sad or happy?

Magda: *She becomes sad. She is telling him no. Becomes sad.*

The quote illustrates harassment, one particular aspect of the public space and it contains strong gendered elements for girls and boys since men's sexuality is displayed as strong, public and aggressive, while females' are considered the opposite. Within the displacement situation it is possible to see that the boys of the study defined the harassment the girls talked about as flirting. One boy explained it as: *"Here he flirts and tells her: Where are you beautiful? When the boys grow up they go outside the girls' schools"*. This example illustrates how boys showcase their masculinity in public while female family members' sexuality is expected to be hidden and protected. Expressions of masculinity can be said to be based in the notions of being a honourable man by ties to female family members; to a large extent it can be based on being cautious towards outsider men given the importance of protecting women inside the own family (Gregg 2005:64).

Two girls had two different strategies of handling daily harassment. Hala decided to walk to school with her sister:

"We walk because we can't afford paying for the bus.... There are bad boys and we have to run, what can we do. They speak things that shouldn't be spoken. For example, you are beautiful. My sister and I start running and we can't tell my father because we don't want him to stop us going to school".- Hala

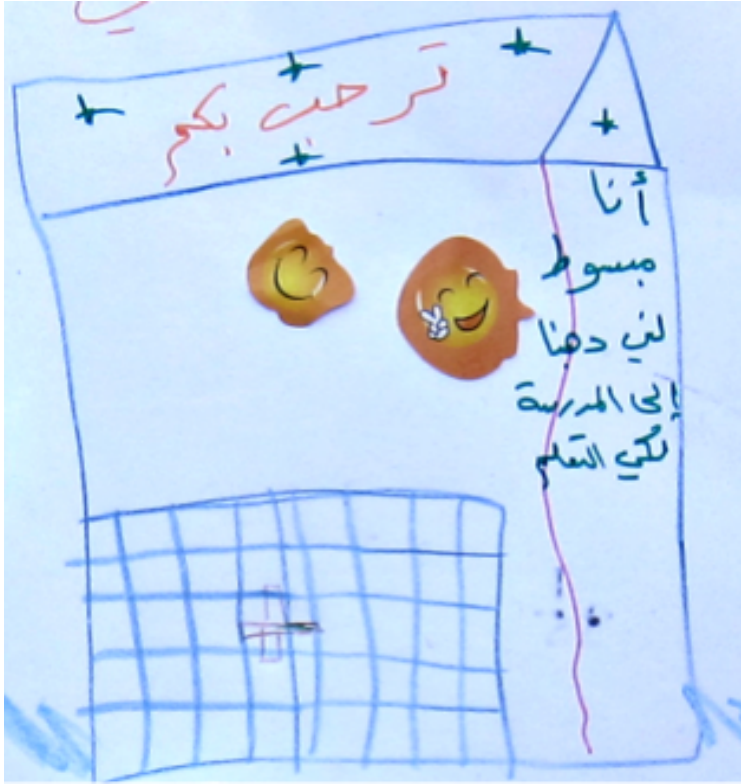
She valued education so highly that she rather faced these difficult circumstances than stopped going to school. A male relative accompanied the second girl to the school in order to assure her safety. Similar to the first girl her goal was as well to receive education, which she managed with

this solution. She herself did not consider it to be anything unusual with this kind of protection, rather she considered it as something normal and had earlier expressed that girls cannot protect themselves. I find it important to point that despite that she might have internalised the idea of protection for girls, she still managed to act upon her priorities in life, which was to receive education. It shows that individuals use diverse strategies in order to achieve their aspirations within the context of a restrictive structure. These strategies do not always follow feminist directions or thoughts, but they could still be considered as types of agency.

6.3.4 Perceived value of education

When I get out of the tent, and I see the school I'm happy. I'm happy because I'm going to the school and to learn. When I see the school, I'm happy. -Maha

The school can be said to be a large contributor to the girls' well-being in the current displacement situation. Before being enrolled within their current school many of them had been out of school for several months or even years due to the conflict. Therefore, many mention the day they had a chance to continue their education in the displacement situation as something fundamental in their life. Within their school they could regain daily routines and their learning process. Several teachers in the particular school mentioned that the students had undergone positive changes from when they started; from being angry and aggressive to being more calm and harmonious. However, there were many girls who were not yet satisfied that they could not receive a formal certificate that could make them continue to a higher degree. Although, it was possible to see that the boys had a stronger emphasis on professions, while the girls rather focused on the importance of education and did not put the same emphasis on what they wanted it to lead to later. One particular reason for the stronger emphasis by the boys might simply be that they grow up with the expectation of being the breadwinner and entitled to a profession, while women are valued by other characteristics and not given the same space as expressing professional aspirations.



Drawing of the school during one of the focus groups.

The girls expressed education and their school to be one of their top priorities in their lives, and it became one of the few possibilities for them to exit the domestic sphere for a couple of hours and to mentally challenge norms that say that girls should only be sitting at home or get married. That could be considered as an expression of agency and it shows that agency might not always take forms of open physical resistance, but rather in the terms of mentally challenging ideas in areas where the girls themselves considered that they should have equal right and access to. The priorities of the girls is the foundation of where and how agency is expressed. The girls' focus on their education could be considered as one strategy for them to achieve their aspiration of learning, and still keep their religious, cultural and gender identity intact and not lowering their families' status in the society and in the current displacement situation.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

At the same time spring arrived this year; the Syrian conflict entered its fourth year. As the children of Syria grow older so does the conflict. There is still no solution to be seen neither to the conflict or the tragic displacement situation in the neighbouring countries. Behind the scene of different groups fighting for resources and political gains is the group of adolescent girls to be found. Many times are girls in this age depicted as being outside the construction of patriarchal gender norms, however, this thesis has shown that girls are highly involved in its reproduction. Structural elements of gender operate in several ways, and many times in an unconscious manner where internalisation of domination and inequality occur at an early age. The need to be protected by a male family member is particularly internalised and high levels of fear in the displacement enforces the dimension of honour. Honour channelled by connectivity is likely to have a strong influence on how adolescent girls shape their identity and agency since it enforces a rigid gendered norm system and close ties to family members. Therefore, actions of rebellion will not only affect the individual negatively, but also the whole family in an already vulnerable situation.

I consider that these girls negotiate their agency within their given gendered and cultural framework rather than trying to break out from it in order to reach their aspirations. Their aspirations are as well shaped, and many times based on their gendered reality and it governs what they consider as a priority or not. Understanding the formation of female adolescents' gendered selves and enactment of agency in a displacement situation is fundamental in order to go behind simplifications where girls are expected to express their agency as if it would be located in the same individualistic sphere as in the West. Rather development and emergency relief organisations should acknowledge how the connectedness between family members and the underlying honour dimensions might influence the expressions of agency taken. Thereby, better understanding how to support young girls in their struggle for reaching their goals by designing more inclusive empowerment projects.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1, Record of interviews with respondents in the age of adolescence

Name (fictive)	Type of interview	Date	Age	F/M
Maha	Semi-structured	21/11/2015	14	F
Aisha	Semi-structured	27/11/2015	14	F
Magda	Semi-structured	29/11/2015	14	F
Hala	Semi-structured	29/11/2015	14	F
Jaan	Semi-structured	10/12/2015	14	F
Aisha Maha	Semi-structured group interview	10/12/2014	14	F
Moustafa	Semi-structured	12/12/2015	14	M

Appendix 2, Record of focus group with respondents in the age of adolescence

Name of participants (fictive)	Date	Age	F/M
Rania Magda Jihane Hala Maha	1/12/2014	14	F
Maha Jihane Magda Rania Aisha	2/12/2014	14	F
Maha Aisha Rania Hala	4/12/2014	14	F
Moustafa Yousef Mohannad Emir	1/12/2014	14	M
Moustafa Yousef Mohannad Emir	2/12/2014	14	M

Appendix 3, Record of Respondents in an educational and NGO setting

Number	Date	Name (fictive)	Type of interview	Age	M/F	Characteristics
1	18/11/2014	Josefine	Semi-structured interview	40s	F	Officer in a local Women's Organisation
2	9/12/2014	Sandrine	Semi-structured interview	60s	F	Director of an academic gender institute
3	27/11/2014	Maria	Semi-structured interview	30s	F	Art therapist
4	25/11/2014	Nina	Semi-structured interview	30s	F	Psychologist
5	18/11/2014	Sandra	Semi-structured interview	20s	F	Officer in a humanitarian organisation
6	16/10/2014	Sarah	Semi-structured interview	40s	F	Protection officer with focus on gender
7	28/11/2014	Abraham	Semi-structured interview	30s	M	Teacher
8	20/11/2014	Osra	Semi-structured interview	30s	F	Principal of primary school
9	20/11/2014	Sadaf	Semi-structured interview	20s	F	Teacher
10	20/11/2014	Minna	Semi-structured interview	20s	F	Support staff in a school
11	4/12/2014	Gina	Semi-structured interview	50s	F	Principal of a primary school
12	4/12/2014	Iskandar	Semi-structured interview	30s	M	Teacher

13	18/12/2014	Malaha	Semi-structured interview	30s	F	Teacher
14	18/12/2014	Nael	Semi-structured interview	30s	M	Teacher
15	2/12/2014	Jenna	Semi-structured interview	30s	F	Teacher
16	28/11/2014	Angelica	Semi-structured interview	30s	F	Activist

Appendix 4, Interview questions that served as a foundation for the interviews

General questions

1. Age, year of birth
2. Members of household
3. Years of schooling
4. Year of arrival in Lebanon
5. From where in Syria are you from? How would you describe your home town in Syria?

Question in regards to life situation

1. How would you like to describe yourself and your life?
2. What is important for you in life?
3. How would you describe the village and environment you are living in here in Lebanon?
4. How does an ordinary day look like for you?
5. What are the main challenges you experience in your life and what are the challenges of your female friends in the same age?
6. How would you like your situation to be in one year?
7. What do you think is important for a woman when she get married?
8. What do you think is important for a man when he get married?
9. What do you consider a good age for a woman to get married and why?
10. Do you think there are any particular negative outcomes for when girls marry in your age in the current situation? What things?