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Playing Host Since 1948: Jordan's Refugee Policies and Faith-Based Charity

Stacey Gutkowski 

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ABSTRACT

Since 1948, Jordan has hosted successive waves of refugees from neighboring states. Since the onset of a new refugee crisis in 2011, the evolution of Jordan's humanitarian assemblage has provided opportunities for the marked expansion, institutionalization, and globalization of Islamic and Christian humanitarianism within Jordan. The level of international influence the Jordanian government has allowed during the crisis has helped facilitate greater *religious privacy* for local Islamic and Christian charitable actors to express their religious vision through their charitable work with refugees. The regime has responded by allowing, surveilling, and sometimes seeking to reshape such *religious effervescence* in its own image. These dynamics cannot be understood purely through the history of refugee hosting in Jordan but also as ongoing competition between the regime and other actors, particularly Islamists affiliated to its main opposition Muslim Brotherhood, over *din al-millah*, or everyday religious expression.

KEYWORDS

Humanitarianism;
international relations;
Jordan; refugees; religion;
Syria

Introduction

Jordan has hosted an exceptionally high number of refugees and migrants relative to its population. In 2018, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) noted the country had the second highest ratio of registered refugees to indigenous population in the world, after Lebanon.¹ It also has particularly high numbers of citizens of refugee-origin,² mainly Palestinian refugees under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), who comprise at

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¹These UNHCR figures do not include Palestinians, who fall under the remit of United Nations Relief and Works Agency. UNHCR, Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018 (UNHCR, 2019), 2–3, <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2018/> (accessed Sept. 3, 2021). See also, UNHCR, "Gulf Donors and NGOs Assistance to Syrian Refugees in Jordan" (UNHCR, June 2014), 8, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/45613> (accessed March 2, 2021); and Elizabeth Turnbull, "Jordan Remains Second Largest Refugee Host Globally – UNHCR," *Jordan Times*, July 28, 2019, <https://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/jordan-remains-second-largest-refugee-host-globally-%E2%80%94-unhcr> (accessed March 2, 2021).

²Marie Sato, "Islamic Charity and Royal NGOs in Jordan: The Rise of Monarchical Institutions in its Balancing Act," *Asia-Japan Research Academic Bulletin* 31, no. 1 (2019): 1–12.

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least half the population.³ Much has been written about Jordan's experience as a host state. With this most recent wave of migration from Syria (since 2011) and a small number from neighboring Iraq (since 2014), Jordan's migration and refugee policies have evolved.⁴ While some changes are more obvious, such as a return to the refugee camp model adopted in 1948 and 1967, other more subtle impacts within Jordanian society are also interesting to examine. Researchers have begun to explore the impact of forced migration on Jordan's economy as well as on its environment and social cohesion. This article adds to the discussion by focusing on religious charitable activity.

In the academic literature on forced migration, the Syrian refugee crisis has prompted new attention to religion. Researchers have analyzed the provision of "faith-based aid" by global and local civil-society actors in Jordan as well as Lebanon.⁵ They have also touched on religious dynamics among Syrian refugees and within their host communities in Jordan.⁶ Nevertheless, there is still much more to say on the matter. The article brings discussion of new, post-2011 forms of faith-based humanitarianism into conversation with an analysis of long-standing Islamic and Christian charity in the Kingdom. Such charitable work is a long-term feature of social welfare in Jordan. It fills gaps in state provision for the poor and vulnerable. Alongside other "privatized" forms of welfare, it has taken on new significance since Jordan began instituting neoliberal economic reforms after 1989.⁷

This study uses humanitarian assemblage as a conceptual framework to analyze first, how, as a small developing state, Jordan's policies toward forced migration have evolved and second, where Islamic and Christian charitable actors fit into this story. A policy assemblage is an area of public policy, like environmental or education policy. The concept of policy assemblage, which has become increasingly popular in academic studies of public policy, helps highlight the dynamics of motion, flows of power and the heterogeneity of actors and institutions that characterize this episode in Jordan's history as a migrant host state. The article begins by setting out this conceptual frame

³Géraldine Chatelard, "Jordan: A Refugee Haven," *Migration Information Source*, Migration Policy Institute, Aug. 31, 2010, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/jordan-refugee-haven> (accessed March 2, 2021).

⁴The number of Iraqis arriving in 2014 was substantially smaller than those who arrived as in the 1990s and after 2003. Syrian arrivals primarily drove the evolution of post-2011 government refugee policy.

⁵Stacey Gutkowski and Craig Larkin, "Spiritual Ambiguity in Interfaith Humanitarianism: Local Faith Communities, Syrian Refugees and Muslim-Christian Encounters in Lebanon and Jordan," *Migration Studies* 9 (2021), 1–21; Ann-Christin Wagner, "Giving Aid Inside the Home: Humanitarian House Visits, Performative Refugeehood and Social Control of Syrians in Jordan," *Migration and Society: Advances in Research* 1 (2018): 36–50; and Ann-Christin Wagner, "Remapping the Holy Land from the Margins: How a Jordanian Evangelical Church Juggles the 'Local' and the 'Global' in the Syrian Refugee Response," *Contemporary Levant* 3, no. 2 (2018): 95–109.

⁶Sarah A. Tobin, "Vernacular Politics, Sectarianism, and National Identity Among Syrian Refugees in Jordan," *Religions* 9, no. 225 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9070225>; and Kat Eghdamian, "Religious Identity and Experiences of Displacement: An Examination into the Discursive Representations of Syrian Refugees and their Effects on Religious Minorities Living in Jordan," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 30, no. 3 (2016): 447–67.

⁷Anne Marie Baylouny, *Privatizing Welfare in the Middle East: Kin Mutual Aid Associations in Jordan and Lebanon* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010).

and highlighting its novel contribution to the international relations (IR) literature on religion and foreign policy. It then describes the evolution of Jordan's humanitarian assemblage and how its post-2011 policy response to forced migration from Iraq and Syria fits into this. It then turns to Jordan's long-standing policies toward Islamic and Christian charitable work. This background sets the stage for analyzing Christian and Islamic charitable responses to displaced Syrians and Iraqis in Jordan.

Since 2011, the evolution of Jordan's humanitarian assemblage, particularly new forms of internationalization, has provided opportunities for the marked expansion, institutionalization, and globalization of Islamic and Christian humanitarianism within Jordan. This article argues that the level of international influence the Jordanian government has allowed during the crisis has provided local Islamic and Christian charitable actors with what I call "religious privacy" or a degree of more independence to quietly express their religious vision beyond the state's vision for *dīn al-dawlah* through their charitable work with Syrian and Iraqi refugees.⁸ The regime has responded by allowing, surveilling, and sometimes seeking to reshape such religious effervescence in its own image. These dynamics cannot be understood purely through the history of refugee hosting in Jordan but also as the evolution of ongoing competition between the government and other actors, particularly Islamists affiliated to its main opposition Muslim Brotherhood (MB), over *dīn al-millah*, or everyday religious expression.

Jordan's humanitarian assemblage

The initial theoretical inspiration for this article came from an ongoing discussion about religion and foreign policy in the academic discipline of international relations. Gregorio Bettiza has recently applied the IR concepts of regime and regime complex to the study of state foreign policies.⁹ He uses these concepts "to make sense of a 'constellation of ideas, institutional arrangements and interests' as well as the resulting combination of policies, rules and actions that 'make up the governing arrangements for addressing particular problems.'"¹⁰ Bettiza does so to describe newfound attention to religion within

⁸*Dīn al-dawlah* is the state's official vision for religious expression within Sunni Islam. An integral part of this since the 1980s – when it took over the promotion of proper Islamic behavior from the Muslim Brotherhood, to whom it had previously outsourced this – has been the state's promotion of both "moderate Islam" and "interfaith harmony." *Dīn al-millah* are vernacular conceptions and expression of Islam, which co-exist with *dīn al-dawlah*. Stacey Gutkowski, "We Are the Very Model of a Moderate Muslim State: The Amman Messages and Jordan's Foreign Policy," *International Relations* 30, no. 2 (2016): 206–26.

⁹Gregorio Bettiza, *Finding Faith in Foreign Policy: Religion & American Diplomacy in a Postsecular World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

¹⁰Peter J. May and Ashley E. Jochim, "Policy Regime Perspectives: Policies, Politics and Governing," *Policy Studies Journal* 41, no. 3 (2013): 426–52, 446; and Bettiza, *Faith*, 22.

American foreign policymaking after 9/11, where he contends there has been a “sustained turn toward making religion an organized subject and object of US foreign policy.”¹¹

Elizabeth Shakman Hurd and Winnifred Sullivan have pointed out that American foreign and domestic policies on religion can only be understood in concert.¹² I understand Jordan’s policies toward religion in the same way. I have argued elsewhere that Bettiza’s important contribution to the study of religion and state policy works well for larger, more powerful states in the international system, where it is possible to delineate clear lines of policy and directed activity, even where these intersect loosely.¹³ However, these concepts work somewhat less well for newer, small states like Jordan, where most policies and efforts by the government and the bureaucracy are geared toward regime survival and state development, and where there is less differentiation in bureaucratic activities or state discourse.

Scholars of public policy have recently begun to employ Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of assemblage.¹⁴ These efforts are still in their infancy methodologically. Nevertheless, the assemblage approach suits the study of public policies regarding religion in small, still-developing states like Jordan because it captures less-differentiated policy arenas, practice without official policy, and transnational penetration of domestic policy. In this article, Jordan’s “humanitarian assemblage” refers to state policies and informal practices as well as domestic and transnational civil society activity.¹⁵ Following Glenn Savage, this article understands that a policy assemblage has many “heterogeneous elements,” but that these “hold together in face of tension” and function coherently, though “without a single [driving] rationale.”¹⁶ Though the state is the most important force shaping public policy, power is polycentric. Resistance to particular policies by civil society or indeed from within the bureaucracy or government is an inherent part of public policy. This article also borrows from Savage the idea that public policies are always dynamic¹⁷; outcomes are not necessarily what policymakers intended; and domestic policies are shaped by transnational dynamics.

¹¹Bettiza, *Finding Faith in Foreign Policy*, 23.

¹²Elizabeth Shakman Hurd and Winnifred Sullivan, eds., *At Home and Abroad: The Politics of American Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).

¹³Stacey Gutkowski, “Moderation as Jordanian Soft Power: Islam and Beyond,” in *The Geopolitics of Religious Soft Power: How States Use Religion in Foreign Policy*, ed. Peter Mandaville (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022).

¹⁴Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

¹⁵Cf. Katharina Lenner, “‘Biting Our Tongues’: Policy Legacies and Memories in the Making of the Syrian Refugee Response in Jordan,” *Refugee Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (2020): 273–98, 283.

¹⁶T.M. Li, “Practices of Assemblage and Community Forest Management,” *Economy and Society* 36, no. 2 (2007): 263–93, 264–5; Glenn C. Savage, “What is Policy Assemblage?” *Territory, Politics, Governance* 8, no. 3 (2020): 319–35, 325.

¹⁷Savage, “What is Policy Assemblage?” 326; and T. Nail, “What is an Assemblage?” *SubStance* 46, no. 1 (2017): 21–37.

How did a humanitarian assemblage emerge in Jordan? What are its main ideational, institutional, and legal features? What is or is not distinctive about the post-2011 period? Where does religion feature in Jordan's humanitarian assemblage? Jordan's humanitarian assemblage developed and morphed with accumulated experience of multiple waves of migration, shaped by both the "policy legacy" of official state practice and also "policy memory."¹⁸ Historically, Jordan has experienced high levels of "migration to, from and across" its territory.¹⁹ Between 1878 and 1917, before the establishment of the state (1946), the Ottoman Empire granted settlement in Jordan and Syria to people arriving from the Balkans and Caucasus who were fleeing the Ottoman-Russian wars. The first Circassian community settled in Amman in 1878, followed by Chechens, and later Armenians from Anatolia who were fleeing genocide in 1915–1917.²⁰ Under the 1928 Organic Law, the authorities granted these migrants nationality by virtue of residence in Transjordan.²¹ Inward migration had a seismic impact on the new state, with a million Palestinians arriving only two years after independence and another 300,000 after the 1967 War.²²

Jordan has adopted different legal regimes toward different migrant groups. This legal heterogeneity is the salient feature of its humanitarian assemblage. Jordan is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee convention or the 1967 protocol, though its 1952 Constitution has a non-refoulement clause for those fleeing persecution.²³ When Jordan annexed the West Bank in 1950, Palestinians on the West and East Bank became Jordanian citizens who were also entitled to UNRWA services. UNRWA began operating in May 1950 and became the main source of relief aid, housing, financial, educational, and health support for Palestinians in the Middle East. UNRWA has since become "a permanent core feature of the humanitarian landscape in Jordan" and also a "quasi-state institution" that is "one of the largest employers for Palestinian refugees in Jordan . . . which foils any attempt to neatly differentiate between local and global agencies."²⁴

¹⁸Lenner, "Biting Our Tongues," 274.

¹⁹Chatelard, "Jordan: A Refugee Haven."

²⁰Dawn Chatty, *Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 116; and Rochelle Davis et al, "Hosting Guests, Creating Citizens: Models of Refugee Administration in Jordan and Egypt." *Refugee Studies Quarterly* 36 (2017): 1–32, 4.

²¹Joseph Massad, *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 34; and Davis et al, "Hosting Guests, Creating Citizens," 4.

²²Chatelard, "Jordan: A Refugee Haven;" and Davis et al, "Hosting Guests, Creating Citizens," 12.

²³Juline Beaujouan, "Syrian Conflict, Syrian Refugees – Part I. The Case of Jordan," Discussion Paper, Durham University, HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Sabath Programme, 2018, 6–7, <https://dro.dur.ac.uk/25240/1/25240.pdf?DDD35>.

²⁴Lenner, "Biting Our Tongues," 282; and J. Al Hussein and R. Bocco, "The Status of the Palestinian Refugees in the Near East: The Right of Return and UNRWA in Perspective," *Refugee Studies Quarterly* 28, no. 2–3 (2009): 261–2.

Following this first wave of Palestinians, subsequent forced migrants have found themselves in a “legal abyss” in Jordan.²⁵ Palestinians fleeing the West Bank and Gaza during and after the 1967 war were all entitled to UNRWA support, but officials granted them different legal status. From 1967–1988, West Bankers were deemed displaced Jordanian citizens. Gazans (who previously were living under Egyptian authority) are still treated as “Arab foreigners,” with two-year passports, the ability to rent property for three years maximum, no subsidized healthcare, and no access to state benefits or voting rights.²⁶ Since 1988, Jordan has treated West Bankers and Palestinians escaping subsequent conflicts in Iraq and Syria in the same way.²⁷ All Palestinians are eligible for UNRWA services but not those from UNHCR, which have been available to other refugees since that agency began operating in Jordan in 1990.

In addition to the tens of thousands of Palestinians who settled in Jordan voluntarily after 1967 and are not registered as refugees, the Kingdom has hosted small numbers of forced migrants from the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1991) and from Libya. Some 200,000 mainly middle-class Palestinians transited through Jordan during the Second Intifada (2000–2004), many of whom later settled in the West. Still, not all of Jordan’s migration has been due to war. Jordan forcibly expelled Communist sympathizers in the 1950s and 1960s, the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1970–1971, and four Ḥamās leaders in 1999. In the 1970s, it began importing unskilled labor, from Egypt, Sudan, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.

Multiple rounds of war and civil strife in Iraq (1991, 2003, 2014) brought further displacement. Before 2003, 250–350,000 Iraqis came to Jordan, including those who were seeking work.²⁸ Géraldine Chatelard uses the example of the 1 million Iraqis, many of whom were middle or upper class with capital or employable skills, who came or transited through Jordan before 2010, in order to demonstrate that it is often difficult to clearly distinguish between forced and voluntary as well as political and economic migration to Jordan.²⁹ From 1990–1991, some 300,000 people, 95 percent of whom were Jordanian-citizen Palestinians working in the Persian Gulf, were expelled by Gulf regimes to punish Jordan for not denouncing Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait. Of

²⁵Géraldine Chatelard, *Incentives to Transit: Policy Responses to Influxes of Iraqi Forced Migrants in Jordan*, Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies, RSC no. 2002/50, (Florence, Italy: European University Institute, 2002); and Davis et al, “Hosting Guests, Creating Citizens,” 10.

²⁶I. Feldman, “The Humanitarian Condition: Palestinian Refugees and the Politics of Living,” *Humanity* 3, no. 2 (2012): 155–172; and Davis et al, “Hosting Guests, Creating Citizens,” 12–3.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Joseph Sassoon, *The Iraqi Refugees: The New Crisis in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 33.

²⁹Chatelard, “Jordan: A Refugee Haven.”

those, Egyptians, Sri Lankans, and other groups working in Iraq and Kuwait passed through Jordan on their way to other countries, but the Jordanian- citizen Palestinians and a small number of Iraqis stayed.³⁰

UNHCR began operating in Jordan in 1990 to support those fleeing war in Kuwait and Iraq. Its role was formalized in 1998 by the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the government of Jordan. This added an additional layer to a complex legal regime. Registered refugees may remain or be eligible for third-country resettlement, but they cannot be legally integrated into Jordan.³¹

An important transition in Jordan's humanitarian assemblage came in 2005. Thousands of Iraqis fleeing sectarian violence in Iraq (and also some from Syria) arrived in Jordan before 2013 to find a state and UN bodies that were largely unprepared to welcome such an influx of economically vulnerable people. The intelligence services were also initially hesitant to take so many Shi'is, fearing potential Iranian influence, though Iraqis were ultimately accepted by the Jordanian government regardless of their sect. While the UNHCR granted blanket refugee status to this post-2003 group of Iraqis, the Jordanian government recognized them as merely "guests," who were eligible to receive traditional Arab hospitality but not formal integration. To support these new arrivals, the US and European Union provided substantial aid to the Jordanian government, which in turn chose to provide Iraqis with access to Jordanian schools and healthcare. This was a "temporary absorption model" that was based on the MoU with the UNHCR. The MoU does not permit long-term refugee settlement in Jordan. Nevertheless, these policies enabled Amman to make the case to international (mainly Western) donors to financially support not only Iraqis but also development in Jordanian host communities.³² Jordan requested high levels of international donor aid based on the high numbers of vulnerable Iraqi arrivals. These figures remain contested,³³ but in 2018 the UNHCR said there were a million Iraqi refugees living in Jordan.³⁴ Washington substantially raised its aid levels to its security partner in 2007.³⁵ In 2010, it implemented a free trade agreement with Jordan, which was first signed in 2000, after Jordan's 1994 Wadi Araba peace treaty with Israel. Gerasimos Tsourapas has called this strategy "refugee rentierism," whereby states use their host status for income generation beyond refugee relief.³⁶ While he pinpoints the shift as having started in 2013, at the beginning of the Syrian crisis, Davis et al marshal convincing evidence of its origins from

³⁰Davis et al, "Hosting Guests, Creating Citizens," 15.

³¹Ibid., 16.

³²Ibid., 17.

³³Lenner, "Biting Our Tongues."

³⁴Beaujouan, "Syrian Conflict, Syrian Refugees," 6.

³⁵Lenner, "Biting Our Tongues."

³⁶Gerasimos Tsourapas, "The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Foreign Policy Decision-Making in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 4, no. 4 (2019): 464–81.

2005, while Lenner dates the change from a substantial increase in US aid that occurred in 2007.³⁷ Another important shift occurred in the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Where previously UN bodies delivered aid, including through local charity partners, in the mid-2000s large international humanitarian organizations and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) began delivering aid as well. Some of these also subcontracted out their work with Iraqis to local charities.³⁸

Jordan's humanitarian assemblage evolved to manage arrivals from Syria from 2011 and small numbers from Iraq since 2014 but also still continues many of the policy trajectories developed to manage Iraqi arrivals during the preceding decade. As with Iraqis, Jordan refers to Syrians as "guests" whose refugee status is officially determined by UNHCR. Like Iraqis, officials have permitted Syrians to access healthcare, education, and other services.³⁹ As with Iraqis, Jordan operated an open border policy for Syrians until June 2013. During this initial period, it did not require Syrians to have a visa or residency permit for temporary stays.⁴⁰ UNHCR registration peaked in April 2018 at 661,859, but at this time there were an estimated 1.5 million Syrians in Jordan.⁴¹ It is also important to note other, smaller refugee populations who have arrived over the same period. In addition to 14,784 displaced persons from Yemen's civil war, as of 2020 there were 6,078 Sudanese and 746 Somalis.⁴² The latter two groups are often "invisible" refugees and suffer high levels of racism and discrimination while getting only limited aid from NGOs or the government. The Jordanian government deported 800 Sudanese in December 2015 for protesting poor treatment by the state.⁴³

There have been some key differences in Jordan's approach to these displaced people since the mid-late 2000s. First, as opposed to the high proportion of middle-class, Iraqi arrivals, the vast majority of those coming from Syria have been economically vulnerable and in need of aid, including high numbers of women-led families, where the men have remained in Syria to fight for the opposition or been killed. Second, while an estimated 80 percent of Syrians have lived in urban areas, competing with low-skilled Jordanian

³⁷Ibid., 469; Davis et al, "Hosting Guests, Creating Citizens;" and Lenner, "Biting Our Tongues," 282.

³⁸Nicholas Seeley, "The Politics of Aid to Iraqi Refugees in Jordan," *Middle East Research and Information Project* 256 (2010), <https://merip.org/2010/09/the-politics-of-aid-to-iraqi-refugees-in-jordan/> (accessed March 2, 2021).

³⁹Beaujouan, "Syrian Conflict, Syrian Refugees," 7–8.

⁴⁰L. Achilli, *Syrian Refugees in Jordan: A Reality Check* (Migration Policy Center, European University Institute, 2015), 3; S. Akram et al, "Protecting Syrian Refugees: Laws, Policies and Global Responsibility Sharing," *Middle East Law and Governance* 7, no. 3 (2015), 287–318; and Davis et al, "Hosting Guests, Creating Citizens," 21.

⁴¹Mohammad Ghazal, "Jordan Second Largest Refugee Host Worldwide—UNHCR," *Jordan Times*, March 8, 2017, <https://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/jordan-second-largest-refugee-host-worldwide-%E2%80%94-unhcr> (accessed March 4, 2021).

⁴²UNHCR, "Statistics for Registered Persons of Concern," May 15, 2020, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/76375> (accessed March 5, 2021).

⁴³Marta Vidal, "After Fleeing Conflict at Home, Refugees Battle Racism in Jordan," *Equal Times*, March 22, 2019, <https://www.equaltimes.org/after-fleeing-conflict-at-home?lang=en#.YEHURGj7TIU>, (accessed March 5, 2021).

workers' families for housing and employment, 20 percent are in five refugee camps. These sites each have a different humanitarian regime, and these differ from the urban experience where Syrians are more integrated into Jordanian society. Beyond security, there has been little Jordanian governmental involvement in Zaatari and Azraq, the two main camps.⁴⁴ Third, like Iraqis, Syrian "guests" have not been granted collective legal status protection. Instead, Syrians must approach the UNHCR to determine their refugee status before registering with the Ministry of Interior to obtain eligibility for education, healthcare, and other state services, which they like Iraqis can receive alongside nongovernmental aid.⁴⁵ Authorities amended the MoU in 2014 to extend the time allocated for UNHCR processing and getting ID cards, but did not alter the basic principle that one must have six months' residence before a "durable solution" can be found (though in practice Syrians have been able to renew their residency permits).⁴⁶

Building on its experience with the Iraqis, Jordan over time has become even more adept in its pursuit of "refugee rentierism." This culminated with the February 2016 Jordan Compact. The agreement with the EU shares features with the government of Jordan's approach to the issue in the period 2005–2011. For example, it secured a new EU free trade agreement in exchange for Jordan's hosting of Syrian refugees. Similarly, the US implemented its free trade agreement with Jordan in 2010, following Jordan's cooperation on security matters and in hosting Iraq refugees. The key difference between the two lies in how donor aid is tied to the formal, economic integration of refugees. In April 2016, the Jordanian government announced it would provide 50,000 work permits for Syrians to enable them to work in low-skilled employment. This new approach replaced the previously expensive system of obtaining work permits that drove Syrians into the shadow economy and raised unemployment among Jordanians who were competing with them for jobs. The roll out of the formal economic integration of Syrians has had some benefits both for refugees and the Jordanian economy but it also has led to many difficulties.⁴⁷

Savage has argued that while states play a substantial role in determining the flow of power within a policy assemblage, power is decentralized and capillary, with non-state bodies taking and redirecting power.⁴⁸ In some ways, the Jordanian humanitarian policy assemblage that emerged over the course of the Syrian crisis has been strategically driven by the Jordanian government in collaboration with the UN. In June 2014, Jordan's Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation developed a three-year National Resilience Plan. In

⁴⁴Sarah A. Tobin and M.O. Campbell, "NGO Governance and Syrian Refugee 'Subjects' in Jordan," *Middle East Report* 278 (2016): 4–9; and Lenner, "Biting Our Tongues," 283.

⁴⁵Davis et al, "Hosting Guests, Creating Citizens," 21–2.

⁴⁶Beaujouan, "Syrian Conflict, Syrian Refugees," 7.

⁴⁷Julia Morris, "Extractive Landscapes: The Case of the Jordan Refugee Compact," *Refuge* 36, no. 1 (2020): 87–96.

⁴⁸Savage, "What is Policy Assemblage?"

December 2014, officials launched a one-year Jordan Response Plan (that since has been renewed) to complement both its monitoring body, the Jordanian Response Platform for the Syria Crisis, and its hub for receiving international donations, the Jordan Resilience Fund.⁴⁹

However, the Jordanian intelligence services along with the Royal Court have played perhaps the most powerful role in setting policy direction. Matters related to Syrian refugees became “securitized” in 2013, when the Jordanian government created the Syrian Refugee Camp Directorate, replacing this body the following year with the Syrian Refugee Affairs Directorate, a branch of the security services.⁵⁰ Governmental and public attitudes toward Syrians changed in September 2014, when Islamic State (*Daesh*) violence in Syria markedly increased. Jordanian authorities had closed most of the border between Syria and Jordan in 2011, fearing high refugee numbers, but the last formal border crossing was closed in April 2015 for fear of *Daesh* influence and infiltration.⁵¹

In practice, a wide range of actors, which are not strategically coordinated and often compete with one another, have contributed to a “fractured institutional landscape.”⁵² This landscape includes Jordanian government bodies (the Royal Court, intelligence services, Ministries of Interior and Planning and the office of Prime Minister), multiple powerful UN bodies (UNHCR, UNDP and OCHA), and international NGOs.⁵³ The next section considers how this fractured landscape, particularly the presence of international NGOs and a system of local “shadow aid”⁵⁴ to Syrian refugees opened new opportunities for a small number of Islamic and Christian charities to not only strengthen their social position vis a vis the state but also to “spread the word” religiously.

Islamic and Christian charity in Jordan

In Jordan, Islam is a structural feature of society. Islamic social mores influence all areas of public policy and are given greater weight in some such as education, family life, and gender equality. Islam is therefore unsurprisingly a structural feature of the humanitarian assemblage. There is also a long legacy of both Islamic and Christian charitable work to support the poor and vulnerable, with the first voluntary association, the *Dar al-'Ihsan*, established by the Greek Orthodox Church in Madaba in 1912. Faith-based associations

⁴⁹Beaujouan, “Syrian Conflict, Syrian Refugees,” 9–10.

⁵⁰Ibid., 9.

⁵¹Ibid., 10.

⁵²Savage, “What is Policy Assemblage?”

⁵³Lenner, “Biting Our Tongues,” 280–1.

⁵⁴Elizabeth Dickinson, “Shadow Aid to Syrian Refugees,” *Middle East Research and Information Project* 272 (2014), <https://merip.org/2014/09/shadow-aid-to-syrian-refugees/> (accessed March 4, 2021).

expanded further in the 1990s after neo-liberal economic reforms reduced state welfare.⁵⁵ This legacy forms the basis for the substantial role played by faith-based actors in today's humanitarian assemblage.

Religious charitable support for the forcibly displaced predates the state and began with Christian organizations. Although the Ottoman authorities set up a Charity Commission in 1893 to provide aid and help integrate new arrivals from the Balkans and Caucasus, in the absence of government aid for subsequent Armenian arrivals, host communities, Western churches and the American Committee for Relief in the Near East helped them.⁵⁶ This pattern of local and Christian-led international aid was repeated with the first arrival of Palestinian refugees during the 1948–1949 war. Before the United Nations established UNRWA in 1949, Western organizations of Christian heritage (e.g., the International Committee of the Red Cross, League of Red Cross Societies, and the American Friends Service Committee) provided emergency relief to Palestinians in Jordan.⁵⁷ A branch of the Swiss, Catholic charity Caritas was established in Jordan to serve Palestinian refugees, but by the 1970s it needed to provide for all so as not to alienate its members from Muslim society.⁵⁸

Such activities are part of a complex system of interdependency between the Hashemites and the churches, wherein the regime has allowed them substantial institutional autonomy under the broad rubric of *din al-dawlah*. The government allows them what I call *religious privacy* with the tacit understanding that churches will support the regime both practically and discursively through their charitable institutions, including hospitals, schools, orphanages, retirement homes, hospices, dispensaries and maternity clinics. Chatelard has also noted that historically, highly developed church “institutions furthermore contributed to maintaining religious boundaries between Christians and Muslims, the preservation of which was necessary to the state” allowing it to portray itself as pluralist and modern to the West while not antagonizing the Muslim majority.⁵⁹

While the 1948 War catalyzed grassroots, voluntary assistance for Palestinians, more formalized Islamic charitable work expanded significantly in the 1960s, with *da'wah* serving as an outlet for social activism during the period when political parties were banned (i.e., 1957–1989). In 1963, Muslim Brothers and some independent Islamists established the Islamic Center Charity Society.⁶⁰ Between 1949 and 1956, following the first wave of

⁵⁵Egbert Harmsen, *Islam, Civil Society and Social Work: Muslim Voluntary Welfare Associations in Jordan between Patronage and Empowerment* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 169.

⁵⁶Chatty, *Displacement*, 44, 163; and Davis et al, “Hosting Guests, Creating Citizens,” 4.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁸Géraldine Chatelard, “The Constitution of Christian Communal Boundaries and Spheres in Jordan,” *Journal of Church and State* 52, no. 3 (2010): 476–502, 493, 499.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 501.

⁶⁰Harmsen, *Islam, Civil Society and Social Work*.

Palestinian migration, the regime developed a new political and legal apparatus to govern charitable work. Islamist vigor among Palestinian refugees prompted the passing of new legislation on Societies and Social Bodies, Law 33. It bans voluntary organizations from engaging in “political,” “sectarian,” or “religious” activity that may impact “social harmony.” The law empowers the Ministry of Social Affairs to do unannounced checks and even potentially close an organization. It is part of a wider regime-maintenance strategy to inspire self-policing among voluntary bodies, so as not to attract the attention of the Ministry or intelligence services.

Islamic and Christian voluntary work with Syrian and Iraqi refugees falls under the purview of Law 33. Still, in the context of Jordanian society where religion is so central nearly all civil society charitable bodies are in some way “faith-influenced.”⁶¹ While there are NGOs with an explicitly Islamist *modus operandi*, there are also nonaffiliated but conservative Muslim NGOs as well as liberal Muslim NGOs.⁶² Two Royal NGOs, the Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization (JHCO) and *Takkiyyat Umm ‘Alī* (TUA), also make reference to Islamic principles.⁶³ What is at stake is better understood as a matter of discourse, with those working for Islamic charities placing a greater degree of stress on working *fi sabīl Allah* (“for the sake of God”), striving collectively and progressively toward an ideal, just Islamic society where there is solidarity with the poor and “a spirit of mutual care and support.”⁶⁴ Lip service or adherence to international humanitarian principles such as non-discrimination toward recipients regardless of their religious background is a function of increasing coordination between Islamic charities and UN bodies or Western donors.

Islamic charitable work is part of a wider landscape, both of voluntary charitable organizations, whose numbers grew substantially from 1967–1989,⁶⁵ and of privatized welfare and social insurance, which grew after economic and political liberalization began in 1989. Kin-based mutual aid organizations are part of this “self-help” landscape as well, with their origins in the waves of Palestinian migration but also spreading to those in the East Banker population disadvantaged by the economic reforms.⁶⁶

Grassroots mutual aid is inversely related to foreign aid. For example, when US funding to Jordan increased in 2004, funneled through the Jordanian government, demand for mutual aid declined somewhat. However, where there is a need for funding beyond the official welfare provided by the Jordanian government or UN bodies, “shadow aid” became a lifeline. This

⁶¹S. El Nakib and A. Ager, *Local Faith Community and Civil Society Engagement in Humanitarian Response with Syrian Refugees in Irbid, Jordan. Report to the Henry Luce Foundation* (New York: Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health, 2015), 4.

⁶²Harmsen, *Islam, Civil Society and Social Work*.

⁶³Sato, “Islamic Charity and Royal NGOs in Jordan,” 9–10.

⁶⁴Harmsen, *Islam, Civil Society and Social Work*, 191.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 158.

⁶⁶Baylouny, *Privatizing*.

was the case during the first two years of the Syrian crisis as well as after 2015, when dwindling donor aid “heightened the relevance of grassroots and faith-based organisations to their [the Syrians’] survival.”⁶⁷

Gulf donations for humanitarian aid began in the 1960s with the oil boom and were facilitated by the Saudi Red Crescent after 1963. There was a substantial increase after September 11, 2001. Seven years later, the UAE established a humanitarian division in its foreign affairs ministry as did the Saudi-led Office of Islamic Cooperation.⁶⁸ Since the Arab Spring raised the specter of authoritarian regime change, Gulf states have provided even greater overall financial support for their allies, including Jordan. Non-governmental Gulf donors were also present in Jordan before 2011, but further expanded their activities with the onset of the Syrian crisis.⁶⁹ Such aid was not a benevolent gesture. The Gulf states feared that should the Hashemite regime fall in the wake of the Arab Spring their own populations might draw revolutionary inspiration from the Jordanian example. Gulf donor aid for Syrians has come into the country via four routes: first, bilateral assistance to the Jordanian government; second, multilateral aid through the UN (e.g., UNICEF, UNHCR, World Food Program, and World Health Organization) and international NGOs (e.g., Save the Children); third, direct support to Jordanian charities, mainly Islamic ones, but also to Royal Charities (e.g., Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development, Jordan River Foundation, Noor Hussein Foundation); and fourth, private donations to Syrian families via local Jordanian intermediaries, with 60 percent of philanthropists remaining anonymous.⁷⁰

Since 2014, the Jordanian government has encouraged that non-food donations from the Gulf are sent through the Royal NGOs, particularly the JHCO, both to ensure efficiency in distribution but also to monitor donations for ideological (i.e., Salafist) influence. Nonetheless, in the first three years of crisis, Gulf donations went primarily through local *zakāh* (almsgiving) committees as well as Jordanian Islamic charities, with Kuwaiti and Saudi donors supporting the Islamic Center Charity Association (founded in 1963 by the MB) and Qatari and Saudi benefactors backing *al-Kitāb wa-l Sunnah* (founded in 1992).⁷¹ The Solidarity Association Charity (*al-Takāful*), established in Ramtha in 2010, has grown dramatically in response to the Syrian crisis with the support of Kuwaiti donors.⁷² A smaller charity *al Ruhama Beinahum* has

⁶⁷Wagner, “Remapping the Holy Land,” 97.

⁶⁸UNHCR, “Gulf Donors,” 14.

⁶⁹Ibid., 20, 23.

⁷⁰Ibid., 20.

⁷¹Sarah Hasselbarth, *Islamic Charities in the Syrian Context in Jordan and Lebanon* (Beirut: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2014), <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/beirut/10620.pdf> (accessed March 4, 2021) 8; and

UNHCR, “Gulf Donors,” 13, 29.

⁷²UNHCR, “Gulf Donors”, 32.

also provided direct support to Syrians.⁷³ The Islamic Center Charity Association and *al-Kitāb wa-l Sunnah* have also subcontracted to smaller local organizations, beginning at the start of the crisis. Networks affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists respectively enjoyed more independence from regime oversight of their hiring practices and activities than local *zakāh* committees, who needed to show proof of their finances and their hiring practices while also disclosing their religious messages to the state bureaucracy.⁷⁴

While these Islamic charities have coordinated well with each other and with local actors, misgivings about “where the money is coming from” have complicated coordination with Jordanian Christian actors as well as international bodies.⁷⁵ Western NGOs question to what extent these charities uphold humanitarian principles, including aid neutrality to all in need, as well as ponder their capacity, professionalism, and willingness to embrace a rights-based approach.⁷⁶ Jordanian Christian actors see Islamic charity through a local lens. Since the 1980s, Christians have felt encroached on by Islamizing actors in the public sphere. *Daesh* attacks on Christians in Iraq and Syria have sharpened their fears. Anecdotal reports that Christian refugees have been turned away by Islamic charities and told “go to your churches” for help, regardless of their truth, have further increased sensitivities.⁷⁷

As with Muslim charitable work, Christian refugee support has also become even more internationalized. Alongside Muslim international NGOs such as Muslim Aid and Islamic Relief Worldwide, there has been the arrival of new international (Western) NGOs with a Christian ethos, such as Tearfund, World Vision International and the Lutheran World Federation. During the post-2011 refugee crisis, Jordan has seen many international donors – both “secular” and “faith-based” – work through existing churches and church-related institutions such as Caritas, because of their local knowledge. These long-established, church-related organizations have provided short term relief to both Muslim and Christian refugees in collaboration with Western INGOs. They function within the structure of Law 33, operating within secular humanitarian principles.

Additionally, individual churches from denominations historically recognized by the state have also provided short term relief while respecting religious differences, operating within an “Arab hospitality” mode of voluntary activity. (In Jordan, it is impossible to distinguish clearly between Bedouin

⁷³Myriam Ababsa, “Islamic NGOs Assistance to Syrian Refugees in Jordan and Gulf Donors Support,” *Conflicts et migrations*, Jan. 21, 2017, <https://lajeh.hypotheses.org/723> (accessed Feb. 28, 2020).

⁷⁴Hasselbarth, *Islamic Charities in the Syrian Context*, 15.

⁷⁵El Nakib and Ager, *Local Faith Community and Civil Society Engagement*, 23.

⁷⁶Ibid., 18. Cf. Lucy V. Salek, “Faith Inspiration in a Secular World: An Islamic Perspective on Humanitarian Principles,” *International Review of the Red Cross* 97, no. 897/8 (2015): 345–70.

⁷⁷El Nakib and Ager, *Local Faith Community and Civil Society Engagement*, 23; and Interview with Author, 2018, central Jordan.

hospitality traditions and religious charitable impulses, both among Muslims and Christians.)⁷⁸ At the start of the Syrian and Iraqi crises, many of the traditional churches allowed refugees to shelter temporarily in church buildings and provided food and money for medical aid. Fieldwork among seven denominations in 2018 revealed that over time those efforts had substantially diminished for most churches, though religious leaders across denominations recounted intervening practically and financially in cases of dire need, for example where there was an urgent need for medicine that Syrians or Iraqis were unable to afford. Some churches affiliated with preexisting, professional humanitarian institutions, such as Caritas or the Lutheran World Federation, developed educational and social-support programs for children and adults, vocational training and employment support, and trauma counseling and emotional support.⁷⁹ Traditional churches provided such assistance while trying to balance living their faith and “the gospel message [as] the agent to transform culture”⁸⁰ on the one hand with the imperatives of Law 33 and the delicate balance of Christian-Muslim relations in the Kingdom on the other hand. For example, a Roman Catholic priest noted that Syrians had asked to be baptized, hoping to gain resettlement opportunities in the West, despite the UNHCR’s universalist approach to resettlement. Clerics refused such requests so as not to upset Muslim-Christian relations in Jordan.⁸¹

Finally, several local, evangelically inclined churches with ties to Western churches started to professionalize their humanitarian work with Syrians and Iraqis along a secular, international-development model. In doing so, these churches moved from local partners for Western donors to becoming refugee-support, faith-based organizations in their own right.⁸²

Humanitarianism, religious effervescence, and state response

The article now turns to an interesting, though very rare phenomenon in the Jordanian context. Since 2011, the state has quietly permitted greater space for the expression of “religious effervescence” among a small number of faith-based humanitarian actors, affording these actors greater “religious privacy” or scope to help displaced people as they see fit, as long as such activities did not cross certain red lines.

Any expression of religious effervescence by civil society actors within Jordan’s humanitarian assemblage must be understood in the larger context of Law 33. Interestingly, while not developed with forced migration in mind, the legislation was originally developed adjacent to such matters. It was

⁷⁸Gutkowski and Larkin, “Spiritual Ambiguity in Interfaith Humanitarianism.”

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Interview with Author, Christian pastor, 2018, Amman.

⁸¹Interview with Author, 2018, Amman.

⁸²Gutkowski and Larkin, “Spiritual Ambiguity in Interfaith Humanitarianism.”

designed to set boundaries for Islamist activism among Palestinian refugee citizens, to protect the regime from such activism. Since its inception, the law has had an overall dampening effect on any overt religious activism beyond how *da'wah* is typically understood in Jordan, but since 2011, new forms of religious effervescence, however subtle in their expression, have been visible in the domains of education and emotional support. For Muslim charities, this must be understood within the overall logic of *da'wah*, which some interpret not only as being in solidarity with the needy (*al-Takāful*) but also as gently encouraging greater degrees of piety to build a more moral society.

First it is important to consider context. Many humanitarian activities focus on Syrian and Iraqi women, the heads of new, single-parent households living in Jordan while their husbands stayed behind to fight or were killed or jailed. These single parent families are understood in Islam as widows and orphans for whom there are religious obligations to care and protect even if the men are still alive. In turn, Syrian and Iraqi women living among Jordanians in rural areas and towns outside the capital have had to navigate a religiously conservative society in which they are strangers. In response to financial pressure and social pressure on mothers who are alone with their children, many Syrian women adopted the *niqāb* to signal respectability and ward off harassment by Jordanian men.⁸³ This religiously tinged survival strategy is a sign in many Jordanian eyes of staunch conservatism, perhaps even a harbinger of potential Islamic extremism. The dangers of such were brought home vividly to Jordanians in January 2015 with the tragic death of Jordanian Air Force pilot Mu'ādh al-Kasāsbah, whom *Daesh* burned alive in Syria. Another religiously shaded survival strategy for Syrian and Iraqi Muslims was to turn to Islamic voluntary associations and local churches for help to supplement aid received through official channels. This was particularly the case after 2015 when donor aid for refugees began to very substantially diminish and resentment began to set in among Jordanian host communities that were heavily impacted economically by the presence of refugees.

Large Islamic charities and the historically recognized churches working with displaced Syrians and Iraqis are vividly aware of their obligations to keep within the bounds of Law 33.⁸⁴ For example, a sheikh in one of the large Islamic charities described the importance of striking the right balance, describing himself as having two roles: one humanitarian and one as a religious leader. He said that their cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the *Awqāf* was to fight extremism through education and to ensure “peace and harmony in all the world.” Posters echoing the

⁸³Interviews with Author, 2018, northern Jordan and Amman.

⁸⁴The Jordanian constitution (1952) followed the Ottoman *tanzimāt* system, granting rights to Christians on a communal basis and recognizing the following denominations: Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic (Melkite), Armenian Orthodox, Latin (Roman Catholic), Anglican, Maronite, Syrian Orthodox, Evangelical Lutheran Church, and Seventh Day Adventist.

government's discourse on this were prominently displayed in the charity offices. Asked to elaborate more on his religious role, the sheikh noted that while he preached the government-sponsored sermons, he also tried to "develop a new Islamic language" to encourage the wider community to help Syrians. Accepting the government's strict secularization of humanitarianism as a condition for helping, he saw a fundamental compatibility between his two roles. He took the long view commenting: "a religious leader should be about patience. Good deeds and patience."⁸⁵ Another interviewee working in a small, local Islamic charity echoed the need among Syrian refugees for "spiritual guidance [and] more prayer" but bluntly noted,

We have pressure from the state that mosques should not be involved in refugee outreach. They would fire a sheikh if he really got involved in community relief. His role is to deliver the *khutbah* [Friday sermon] written by the state and leave humanitarian aid to charities.⁸⁶

In Jordan, the state has gradually bureaucratized and monitored religious activity since 1986. It has grown even stricter since the introduction of a new counterterrorism law in 2014, which was closely followed by five attacks in the Kingdom by gunmen inspired by *Daesh* between November 2015 and December 2016.

Anecdotal evidence gathered during fieldwork conducted in 2018 suggested that Islamic charities came under far greater scrutiny from the General Intelligence Directorate than did churches and church-affiliated Christian charities. This paralleled greater control by the state over mosque affairs, including the *khutbah*. Nonetheless, some charities working within a conservative Islamic framework and a very small number of churches with an evangelical bent saw humanitarianism not just as a matter of immediate relief but as part of a holistic understanding of personhood that transcends the material realm. Like many faith-based actors around the world working with refugees in different contexts, they rejected the state's sharp, secular division between humanitarian aid and matters of conscience, ethics, and piety. For example, *dars dīn*, or religion classes, led by Jordanians (and some of which are affiliated to Islamic charities) were not especially remarkable before November 2014 but had been a long-standing part of the religious landscape in Jordan.⁸⁷ For newly arrived Syrians, many of whom are women, joining such classes became an opportunity to socialize and for their children to play with others while the mothers have some childcare respite. They are also an opportunity for them to learn new things and to take their minds of their

⁸⁵Interview with Author, 2018, northern Jordan.

⁸⁶Interview with Author, 2018, central Jordan.

⁸⁷Tobin, "Vernacular Politics, Sectarianism, and National Identity."

troubles.⁸⁸ Studies of Syrian refugees in Jordan as well as case studies within and outside the Arab world show that those forcibly displaced often find strength and comfort in religion.⁸⁹

Notably, these religion classes are not new. Egbert Harmsen has previously described how Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated charities have in the past required recipient mothers to send their children to *al-Qur'ān* classes.⁹⁰ Donors sponsored particular families with the understanding that their children would be educated in Islamic values, with mothers admonished but not penalized if the children did not attend them. In a similar discourse to that of Christian charities interviewed in 2018, the MB called this its “comprehensive approach.”⁹¹ One interviewee who was working for an Islamic voluntary association in central Jordan noted that such classes became an important way to support Syrian families who were struggling with the misbehavior of children traumatized by war, flight, and resettlement. Some groups paid Syrian refugees for their attendance. In Ramtha, Syrians received 200 Jordanian dinars for participating in *al-Qur'ān* classes run by *al-Kitāb wa-l Sunnah*.⁹² What is novel, however, is suspicion of this long-standing practice among Jordanians with a different approach to Islam, “Syrian democratic forces,” and Westerners who work for international NGOs or the UN. They worry that rather than simply providing education and religious succor in a time of great need, such courses may be propagating interpretations of Islam that do “not comply with international human rights.”⁹³ Such concerns underplay the extent to which refugees are also free agents, who navigate such scripts, and who not just passively vulnerable to alleged “brain washing.”

In November 2014, the Jordanian government made legal changes on a similar issue. The new legislation addressed the religious teaching of some 5,000 Muslim clerics in the country and attempted to prevent them from saying anything that could be interpreted as “sectarianism and support for jihad and extremist thought.” The then-Minister for Islamic Affairs warned them, “once you cross the red line, you will not be let in.”⁹⁴ Still, civil society still has some *de facto* leeway in religious matters. For example, as Sarah Tobin points out about Jordanian-led *dars dīn* for Syrian women in the Cyber City refugee camp:

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Sarah A. Tobin, “Self-Making in Exile: Moral Emplacement by Syrian Refugee Women in Jordan,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 48, no. 4 (2020): 664–87; and Gutkowski and Larkin, “Spiritual Ambiguity in Interfaith Humanitarianism,” 6.

⁹⁰Harmsen, *Islam, Civil Society and Social Work*, 263–5.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Hasselbarth, *Islamic Charities in the Syrian Context*, 14.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴William Booth and Taylor Luck, “To Counter Rise of Islamic State Jordan Imposes Rules on Muslim Clerics,” *Washington Post*, Nov. 9, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/to-counter-rise-of-the-islamic-state-jordan-imposes-rules-on-muslim-clerics/2014/11/09/4d5fce22-5937-11e4-bd61-346aee66ba29_story.html (accessed Feb. 24, 2021).

the general Jordanian public and the government [...] care less about a women's class in a rural refugee camp that holds little promise of wider public integration than they [do] about the governmental response to a *khutba* given at a public mosque over the loudspeakers in a prominent Christian neighbourhood in Amman [Women's classes] are easily dismissed as politically and socially inconsequential, lacking political currency, and even mere gossip among women.⁹⁵

Extending Tobin's argument, I argue that both Muslim and Christian supporters of refugees operate within a "vernacular"⁹⁶ space, which is ostensibly public but where religious privacy is available because the intelligence services see such activities as being far from the most immediate threat they face. Muslim and Christian supporters understand providing in times of crisis as a kind of spiritual subsistence. Friendship and religious services, such as Islamic legal access to divorce, are entirely inextricable from forms of material aid, such as food, clothing, housing, vocational training, education, and medical and income support. As one pastor put it,

As a church we respond to refugees because we have a vision and we believe God will use them and make them missionaries, not just refugees Our focus is not just to meet the physical needs, but to give them a chance to hear about the gospel and pray with them . . . and we see [them as] people and we try to let them be part of our family.⁹⁷

In terms of Muslim-Christian relations, this is a new dynamic for Jordan, whereby evangelically inclined churches perceive forced displacement as a spiritual opportunity for Muslims to learn about the Bible, while at the same time accepting that Syrian Muslim conversion to Christianity is almost impossible. In Jordan there is an implicit restriction on proselytizing because conversion from Islam is apostasy under *shari'ah*, or Islamic law.⁹⁸ Such activity is more prominent in Lebanon, where the consociational democratic context and higher proportion of Christians creates greater openness.⁹⁹ Some have criticized these dynamics and have highlighted how Syrians have strategically responded to the scripts of evangelization to gain access to aid, including in Jordan.¹⁰⁰ The situation is complex in Jordan. Interviewees revealed other hopes, short of (illegal) Muslim conversion to Christianity. They hope such interactions will "make better Muslims who respect Christianity" and who, inspired by Jesus' Biblical example, will be moved to eschew violence and bring a commitment to nonviolence back to postwar Syria.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵Tobin, "Vernacular Politics, Sectarianism, and National Identity," 10.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Interview with Author, 2018, central Jordan.

⁹⁸Chatelard, "The Constitution of Christian Communal Boundaries," 477.

⁹⁹Kathryn Kraft, "Religious Exploration and Conversion in Forced Displacement: A Case Study of Syrian Muslim Refugees in Lebanon Receiving Assistance from Evangelical Christians," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 32, no. 2 (2017): 221–35; and Gutkowski and Larkin, "Spiritual Ambiguity in Interfaith Humanitarianism."

¹⁰⁰Wagner, "Giving Aid Inside the Home."

¹⁰¹Interview with Author, 2018, Beirut. I'm grateful to Craig Larkin for this wording.

Conclusion

Jordan has a long track record as a host state for refugees, starting in the early twentieth century and predating the development of the modern humanitarian architecture in the international system. This article has used the idea of a “humanitarian assemblage” to trace the historic development of Jordan’s formal and informal approaches to forced migration. It draws on Savage’s conceptualization of the policy assemblage to highlight several dynamics in the development of Jordan’s policy approach through the onset of the Syrian civil war. First, as Savage has observed about other policy assemblages, in Jordan’s post-2011 humanitarian assemblage, power has been polycentric among different state, civil society and international bodies. Second, Jordan’s humanitarian assemblage has contained within it a natural ebb and flow of resistance to the state and reassertion of state power. Third, Jordan’s response to forced migration since 2011 demonstrates Savage’s argument that domestic policy assemblages are highly porous to transnational influence.¹⁰²

In particular, the story about the reciprocal relationship between “religious effervescence” and “religious privacy” sheds further light on the ways in which Jordan’s humanitarian policy assemblage has been further internationalized since 2011. Several key factors have been instrumental in providing scope for greater religious privacy for faith-based charitable actors and an opportunity for religious effervescence for those so inclined. These are, first, the high level of international public and civil society attention to the Syrian war, particularly at its start, and second, new transnational funding and moral support from Western churches, individuals and charities in the Gulf, and Muslim and Christian international NGOs. In Jordan, this privacy includes a small number of activities which touch the boundaries of Law 33. However, in practice, churches have had more freedom than Muslim institutions because the intelligence services do not see these humanitarian activities as posing the same threat as Salafist preaching. The existence of such church activity is only possible in a context where state authorities have already decided that Jordan’s “refugee rentierism” and not upsetting Western donors is a more pressing national objective than investigating a few local charities. This is true only so long as such activity is kept quiet. Such activity, which is very limited indeed, is somewhat surprising in a sensitive context in which both the regime and the Jordanian public have been deeply concerned about social cohesion, the spread of jihadist ideas and the potential for sectarianism triggered by the Syrian civil war to spread to Jordan. During the Syrian war, the Jordanian regime has reinforced preexisting nationalist narratives about religious moderation and interfaith harmony to combat the spread of *Daesh* ideology, while pragmatically turning a blind eye to some religious effervescence in Islamic and Christian humanitarian aid.¹⁰³ Such state tolerance cannot be solely ascribed to

¹⁰²Savage, “What is Policy Assemblage?”

¹⁰³Tobin, “Vernacular Politics, Sectarianism, and National Identity,” 9.

international attention to the issue of Syrian refugees in the Kingdom. For decades, Jordanians have quietly engaged in living Islamic lives in conversation with but also beyond the bounds of *dīn al-dawlah*. Over time, the regime has both flexibly increased its surveillance of unauthorized preachers and also adopted a pragmatic attitude of “wait and see” toward their activities. New churches have also been allowed to quietly coexist among Jordan’s historic churches so long as they do not disrupt the status quo of Muslim-Christian relations in public life. Whether the state continues to permit this level of religious privacy once the humanitarian crisis has passed remains to be seen.

With that being said, this story about greater religious privacy and religious effervescence also highlights practices of regime maintenance since 2011. Authorities initially hoped that hosting Syrians and Iraqis would bring more foreign aid to an ailing economy and help bolster the regime.¹⁰⁴ However, a deep economic crisis ensued that was caused in part by the pressures of hosting large numbers of refugees. This development led to protests in the streets in 2018. By early 2019, Jordan was facing a public debt of \$40 billion, or 95 percent of its annual Gross Domestic Product, and was reeling under strict International Monetary Fund austerity provisions.¹⁰⁵

In 2015 international donor aid for refugees began to radically diminish. At this stage, the regime seems to have carefully weighed the *Daesh* threat to the Kingdom, the potential long-term implications of loosening or tightening its implementation of Law 33, and the overriding the necessity of maintaining refugee rentierism to fund regime stability, regardless of the source of income. The result was a situation where the Kingdom’s intelligence services allowed for a certain amount of quiet expression of religious effervescence so long as this did not threaten social cohesion.

This article has focused on religiously inspired, civil-society actors, but these dynamics have played out across the humanitarian assemblage more generally, with Jordanian civil society, the UN, and other Western and Gulf transnational actors leeching power from the state during the post-2011 refugee crisis. This work argues that such a development is the natural function of any assemblage, where power ebbs and flows through the conduct of state and non-state practices as well as formal public policies. The long-term impact of this episode on Jordanian society may or may not become apparent in years to come, as Jordan continues on its uneasy path to political reform and economic recovery.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

¹⁰⁴Gutkowski, “We Are the Very Model of a Moderate Muslim State.”

¹⁰⁵Suleiman Al-Khalidi, “Jordan’s PM Appeals for More Aid as Syrian Refugees Set to Stay,” *Reuters*, Feb. 20, 2019, accessed March 5, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-refugees-idUSKCN1Q928Q>.

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