RESILIENCE OF REFUGEES UNDER RESTRICTIONS ON ASYLUM AND ACCESS TO THE LABOR MARKET FROM THE EXPERIENCES OF YEMENIS AND SUDANESE IN JORDAN

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Abstract - This study investigates the dynamics of legal marginalization faced by Yemeni and Sudanese refugees without asylum in Jordan, focusing on how this marginalization impacts their job opportunities and daily lives and examining their capacity for adaptation. The research utilizes semi-structured interviews and in-depth discussions with refugees active in the Jordanian labor market, conducted between 2022 and 2023. Key findings reveal that refugees encounter limited job opportunities due to constraints related to their legal status, a notable absence of fundamental workplace rights, and restricted access to essential services and assistance. In response to these challenges, refugees employ resilience strategies through community engagement and social networks to navigate their circumstances and seek stability within their host communities.

Keywords - Refugees, Resilience, Marginalization, Social Recognition

I. INTRODUCTION

The plight of Yemeni and Sudanese refugees in Jordan became particularly acute in 2019 when the UNHCR suspended the registration of new asylum seekers[1]. This policy left thousands of Yemenis and Sudanese without formal refugee status, restricting their ability to obtain work permits and compelling many to wait indefinitely for asylum applications. In 2023, the UNHCR recorded 12,794 Yemeni and 5,270 Sudanese refugees in Jordan[2]. Many of these individuals entered the country under various pretexts such as studying, receiving medical treatment, or seeking employment. While some were permitted to work in specific sectors with proper work permits, a significant number remain undocumented, working informally and facing the constant threat of deportation.

The decision to withhold formal recognition has exacerbated the legal, economic, and daily hardships faced by these refugees. Legal documentation is crucial for avoiding deportation, accessing essential services and aid, and securing legitimate employment. Without official status, refugees must rely on their personal resilience to navigate these challenges.

This study explores the legal marginalization experienced by Yemeni and Sudanese refugees in Jordan and examines its impact on their employment opportunities and daily lives. It aims to understand how refugees adapt to their circumstances, focusing on their resilience as a key factor in sustaining their livelihoods, accessing the labor market, and achieving social stability within their host communities.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Resilience is defined as the capacity of individuals to access psychological, social, cultural, and material resources, enabling them to negotiate these resources both individually and collectively (Ungar, 2008: 225). The literature indicates that the development of resilience is influenced by various personal, environmental, and material factors, including optimism, safe spaces for emotional expression, and strong identity connections (Cohen, 1988; Lepore & Revenson, 2006; Boğaç, 2009). Norris et al. (2008) link community resilience to social capital, which comprises three key dimensions: social support, social participation, and community connections (Likita, 2018).

Research on refugee resilience highlights the significance of social support programs, both psychological and emotional, provided by institutions in host countries. These programs predominantly benefit registered refugees (Sim et al., 2019). Additionally, grassroots initiatives by Yemeni refugees in Egypt have proven vital, as they enhance resilience through services such as rights awareness and social and material support (Al-Mhadi, 2023).

Studies have also underscored the role of collective identity experiences in fostering support and altruism among refugee groups, such as Syrians in the UK.(Stewart, 2020). Other research demonstrates how cultural and social capital bolster the resilience of refugees in Addis Ababa, with individuals utilizing cultural resources, like selling traditional foods and perfumes, to sustain themselves within the host community (Adem et al., 2023).

[1]Human Rights Watch, 30 Mar- 2021 ،https://t.ly/eWKoK
[2] UNHCR, Registered People of Concern Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Jordan, https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/registered-people-concern-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-jordan-28-february-2023

Local studies have emphasized the importance of social networks for Yemeni and Sudanese refugees with asylum documents. These networks, combined with their engagement with Jordanian culture, play a crucial role in addressing the challenges they face (Johnston et al., 2016; Clifton, 2016).

This study employs Axel Honneth's theory of the struggle for recognition as its theoretical framework. Honneth's theory identifies three interconnected domains of recognition: love, solidarity, and rights. Recognition is pivotal in the relationship between individuals and others (Bo Abdullah, 2017).

Honneth posits that love involves successful personal relationships that provide emotional security and bolster self-confidence (Boumnir, 2010: 109). Solidarity emerges from shared experiences within a group, such as conflict, which fosters social bonds, overcomes barriers, and cultivates empathy (Honneth, 2015). Despite lacking legal recognition, the refugees in this study have experienced recognition in terms of love and solidarity within their host community

III. METHODS

The study utilized a qualitative research methodology, investigating the experiences of 10 Yemeni refugees and 5 Sudanese refugees through comprehensive individual interviews. In addition, there were 3 focus group discussions with 7 refugees from both nationalities.

The individual interviews provided insights into the refugees' experiences within the host community and highlighted key qualitative variables such as education, age, marital status, and work experience. This approach helped in understanding their social, familial, and economic backgrounds. The focus group discussions further clarified their collective social environment and enhanced the analysis by capturing their life experiences, social interactions, and self-organization within the host community.

Furthermore, we adopted a participant observation method by spending time in the neighborhoods or areas where the refugees live and work. Our observations focused on their daily routines, communication practices, and ways of expression and engagement.

The study focuses on Yemeni and Sudanese refugees living in the Ma'an and Aqaba governorates in southern Jordan. According to local statistics for 2022-2023, there are 1,750 Yemeni refugees and 300 Sudanese refugees in these areas, with most residing without legal status These governorates are situated over 350 km from the capital. It is probable that the refugees selected these areas as their initial destination upon arriving in Jordan because of the cultural and social similarities with these regions, as well as the conservative nature of the area, especially Ma'an, which might provide them with a sense of security and protection.

The study included refugees who do not have legal residency, are over 20 years old, married, and have between 1 and 4 children. Most participants have diverse educational backgrounds, ranging from university degrees to secondary and intermediate education, with one individual being literate. They serve as the main providers for their families, while their wives are not employed. Most of these refugees have been living in Jordan for over 10 years.

Informed consent was secured from all participants before conducting the individual interviews and focus group discussions. The sessions were held in Arabic, and the recordings were transcribed into written texts. Data was analyzed using descriptive coding techniques.

IV. RESULTS

Under Jordanian law, Yemeni and Sudanese nationals are subject to residency restrictions and must obtain a residency permit. Individuals who do not comply face a daily fine of 1.5 Jod, leading to substantial financial burdens over time.

"I don't have residency or a work permit! I work illegally. We are a family of 5, and I have a fine of over 4,000 Jordanian dinars, which is an enormous amount for me. I am at risk of deportation!". (J-MA035, Yemeni, dry cleaner, Sunday, August 14, 2022, Ma'an Governorate).

Refugees who want to obtain a work permit are given the choice to either keep their UNHCR documentation or relinquish it.

"I had to cancel my refugee card to obtain a work permit. I am now working at a shoe store. As a Yemeni, I have faced discrimination due to international regulations".(J-MA042, Yemeni, shoe store worker, Sunday, June 19, 2022, Ma'an Governorate).

Our analysis of employment opportunities for Yemeni and Sudanese refugees examined various factors, such as the types of jobs they hold, the rights afforded to them, their work environment, whether their income is sufficient to meet their needs, and how the work environment affects their daily lives and challenges.

The findings indicate that legal restrictions compel this group to take up work in precarious sectors

lacking labor rights. Additionally, the high cost of living in Jordan puts them under considerable pressure to manage expenses related to healthcare, education, and housing**.**

Despite these challenges, Yemenis generally have better job prospects compared to Sudanese. They are involved in culturally familiar activities, such as sewing traditional Arab garments, which are in high demand during festivals and holidays. They also work in restaurants that serve popular Yemeni dishes or in the coffee industry, both of which have strong local demand. Although they run these businesses themselves, they do not own them and operate under the supervision of a local "ALKAFEEL ".

These jobs fail to provide adequate income to cover living expenses and lack essential benefits such as set working hours, paid leave, overtime compensation, written contracts, social security, and health insurance. The absence of legal status makes it challenging to secure these rights. Many participants end up working over 16 hours a day**.**

"I don't have a regular income; I struggle to collect my pay from people. Some of them don't settle their debts, and as a result, I end up working for free ***"!.***(J-MA014, Yemeni, mechanic, Saturday, July 16, 2022, Ma'an Governorate).

In Aqaba, Sudanese refugees face limited opportunities in the job market. They are often involved in highly precarious activities that require few skills, taking on jobs with very low pay and long hours. Their work mainly includes car washing, cleaning, and selling smuggled goods in open-air settings under the intense sun. As one Sudanese individual described**:**

"My working hours are open-ended; I wait for cars every day from 7:00 AM until 11:00 PM, every day! I don't have any official leave. Cars don't have a fixed schedule, and sometimes I might wait a whole day or two without anyone showing up to buy from me, which means I have no income on those days **".**(J-AQ-006, Sudanese, works in smuggled goods, Tuesday, May 30, 2023, Aqaba Governorate)**.**

The earnings from the jobs held by Sudanese individuals are insufficient to meet their basic needs. As one Sudanese person describes**:**

"My rent is 130 dinars, and I need 200 dinars to cover my basic expenses. My income is less than this amount, so I work about 18 hours a day to meet these costs. Despite this, I am still falling behind on my financial obligations **".**(J-AQ-006, Sudanese, works in smuggled goods, Tuesday, May 30, 2023, Aqaba Governorate)**.**

Most participants reported having positive relationships with local residents, though Sudanese individuals often prefer to limit their interaction with the community. They all follow the social principle of "Stranger, be courteous," which keeps them vigilant. Many have successfully addressed conflicts and problems through social mediation and generally avoid using formal legal channels due to their irregular status.

Discussion

This paper explores the resilience strategies of Yemenis and Sudanese, emphasizing their informal, self-managed, and collective approaches. These mechanisms are developed and sustained without the involvement of international organizations or institutions, highlighting the refugees' ability to create effective solutions to face challenges despite lacking legal recognition and being marginalized in the workplace.

In this context, the models of empathy and solidarity appear to play a crucial role in shaping these strategies, reflecting a form of social recognition. This understanding enhances our grasp of resilience mechanisms. Furthermore, the use of social capital is evident in the development of these strategies. However, the integration of social capital among Sudanese and Jordanians is generally less effective compared to Yemenis, likely due to greater cultural differences.

In a broader perspective, the interactions between Yemeni and Sudanese refugees and local citizens are marked by social recognition, including respect and appreciation. Additionally, these refugees do not encounter overtly racist attitudes or stereotypes portraying them as burdens on the host society.

For instance, the common belief among Jordanians that certain refugee groups have taken job opportunities is more often directed at Syrian refugees rather than Yemenis or Sudanese. This lack of negative stereotyping towards Yemenis and Sudanese can be attributed to several factors: their smaller numbers within the community, their lack of access to specific employment benefits and international aid, and the relatively similar tribal and cultural backgrounds they share with the local population.

This paper outlines three frameworks to understand how Yemeni and Sudanese refugees demonstrate resilience despite their vulnerable legal and economic situations. These frameworks are informed by models of love and solidarity, which have offered functional

benefits and contributed to a degree of psychological and social stability in their daily lives. We noted some differences between the two groups**.**

The resilience mechanisms are summarized in the table below:

Within a single community	Through social networks	As an individual practice
Resilience Practice for Sudanese Refugees: Resilience Mechanism: Operates within the group, avoiding visible interactions with the local community and public presence. Internal solidarity is demonstrated through communication, strengthening support, offering financial aid, and creating job opportunities for new members of the group.	Resilience Practice for Yemeni Refugees: Resilience Mechanism: Utilizing shared cultural connections with the local community to gain employment opportunities and receive protection from employers. They also sometimes benefit from intermittent support provided by local charitable organizations. Moreover, there is strong communication and solidarity within the group.	Fragile Resilience Model:** This model applies to refugees without families who are unemployed, lack legal status, and face accumulating financial fines. Their resilience strategies include staying hidden, offering limited support to fellow group members, and residing in remote villages where they are less likely to face scrutiny from inspection committees compared to urban areas.

V. CONCLUSION

The legal marginalization experiencedby Yemeni and Sudanese refugees has significantly worsened their already challenging living conditions, as limited job opportunities often come with minimal labor rights. Despite these difficulties, refugees have drawn on their cultural and social resources to endure and integrate into their host communities. Nevertheless, the harsh realities of their daily lives reveal a profound vulnerability that suggests individual resilience alone may be insufficient to address their ongoing struggles. To improve their overall well-being and mitigate these challenges, it is crucial to provide legal recognition and institutional support.

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