

# Expat, Local, and Refugee

## “Studying Up” the Global Division of Labor and Mobility in the Humanitarian Industry in Jordan

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■ **ABSTRACT:** In migration studies, humanitarian work and workers are studied as benefactors or managers of migrants and refugees. This article inverts the gaze from “researching down” refugees to “studying up” the humanitarian structure that governs them. The article studies how the humanitarian industry ballooned after the Syrian refugee response in Jordan due to the influx of expatriate humanitarians as economic migrants from the global North to refugee situations in the host country in the global South. It examines the global division of mobility and labor among expatriate, local, and refugee humanitarian workers, investigating the correlation between geographic (horizontal) mobility and social/professional (vertical) mobility, demonstrating that the social and professional mobility of workers depends on their ability to access geographic mobility. Thus, rather than advocating for and facilitating global mobility, the humanitarian industry maintains a colonial division of labor and mobility. This raises the question: who benefits most from humanitarian assistance?

■ **KEYWORDS:** economic migration, expatriates, global North to global South migration, humanitarian industry, Jordan, refugees, “studying up”

### Introduction

Since 2012, over a million Syrians have fled to Jordan, 671,551 of whom are registered refugees (UNOCHA 2019). Due to economic instability and rising unemployment in the country, the incoming demographic was scapegoated for Jordan’s socioeconomic issues, such as “driving up housing costs, forcing down wages, and increasing unemployment among Jordanians” (Zyck and Armstrong 2014: 6). At the same time, an unprecedented influx of expatriate humanitarians arrived to address the forced displacement of Syrian refugees. However, despite the presence of a new transnational industry and foreign labor force in the country, their implication on labor in Jordan remained undebated and understudied in national and international discourses.

This article asks, how does the transnational humanitarian industry shape a global division of mobility and labor among expatriate, local, and refugee workers? How does access to mobility configure access to labor nationally and internationally? And what implications does this have on humanitarian aid? Using the methodology of “studying up,” which I expand on below, this article observes the managers of displacement—or the humanitarian industry—as a trans-



national industry, and its workers as economic migrants from the global North to the global South. The article advances the study of North-South migration, an understudied migration flow, among north-centric migration scholarship, the field's narrow focus on South-North migration, and its increasing interest in South-South migration (Castles 2010). By looking toward the transnationalism of the industry and mobility of expatriates in the context of refugee containment, the article gleans questions about the (il)logic of global mobility as practiced by the humanitarian model of refugee relief. Where abundant knowledge is produced in studying the containment of refugees in camps, studying the transnationalism of the humanitarian industry and the mobility of humanitarian workers contextualizes spaces of containment. Mobility provides a new way to look at power in transnational contexts in addition to other indicators such as workers' wages.

The article analyzes the organizational structure of refugee relief organizations among expatriate, local, and refugee humanitarian workers. It argues that the relational mobility between workers shapes the global division of mobility and labor in a transnational humanitarian industry. Here I attempt to define humanitarian expatriates simply as economic migrants from the global North to the global South. As the term "expatriate" is politicized and racialized in varied contexts and across industries, I use a relational analysis to define humanitarian expatriates in relation to locals and refugees, as "the relationship between mobility and immobility . . . define each other" (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013: 196). The article views mobility in terms of both geographic (horizontal) and social/professional (vertical) mobility to examine the correlation between workers' access to geographic mobility and social and professional mobility in transnational humanitarian work. It reveals that the humanitarian model of aid utilizes existing regimes of mobility that "normalize the movements of some travelers while criminalizing and entrapping the ventures of others" (ibid.: 189). Thus, the apparatus that claims to advocate for global mobility, particularly the rights of refugees to the freedom of movement, enforces a regime of mobility that reproduces that of state borders.

## Methodology

In her 2017 article, rather than "researching down" refugees, anthropologist Anaheed Al-Hardan "studied up" anthropologists, questioning their motives to study refugees as a claim to "give voice to the voiceless" (n.p.). She characterized the power relations between researcher and subject as disparate, whereby "the exchange value for the researcher is professional advancement in the Global North, [while] the exchange value for the research participant, the proletarian laborer in this scholarly multinationalism, is, for the most part, nothing." As Al-Hardan has done to anthropology, I aim to invert the gaze from refugees to the transnational power structure of the humanitarian industry that governs them. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Patricia Daley explain that methodologies conceptualized from the global South highlight "ways of resisting rather than reproducing unequal power relations and modes of exploitation" (2018: 5). This article adopts the method of "studying up," developed among critical feminist anthropologists, namely, anthropologist Laura Nader (1972), and later conceptualized by sociologist Dorothy Smith, who developed institutional ethnography as a methodology to understand how institutions produce subjectivities and material inequalities (Billo and Mountz 2016: 203). I utilized institutional ethnography by carrying out semistructured interviews with humanitarian workers involved in the Syrian refugee response in Jordan. Although interviews are in conversation with the existing literature, the testimonies of interview participants are central to the article, and full credit goes to their experiential knowledge and shared reflections.

The research was carried out in the summer of 2018, and interview participants consisted of nine international staff, four locals, and two Syrian refugee humanitarian workers. The sample prioritized interviews with expatriate humanitarian workers as the main subjects of study and triangulated the testimonies of locals and refugee humanitarian workers to achieve a relational analysis that contextualized their power relations. The research was informed by my own experience in the field, and my sample was collected by snowballing through past colleagues and meeting new contacts through their networks. Each interview took approximately one hour and focused on participants' professional and personal experiences. Although I spoke with a wide range of interview respondents, most were junior to mid-level employees, which affected the sample, as their experience was overrepresented. The number of Syrian refugee humanitarian workers interviewed accounted for a very small demographic who have been contracted by NGOs to work on short-term projects, reflecting their underrepresentation in the industry. However, this breakdown does not include other significant migrant populations in the country and industry, including migrant workers who fulfill cheap labor positions in humanitarian organizations such as janitors or security guards, or migrant domestic workers employed in the homes of humanitarians. Although these are highly relevant, the article focuses on the three tiers of workers employed directly in refugee relief work.

All of the expatriates I interviewed held North American and European passports, of whom many were women and some were people of color, which influences their perspective in both Jordan and the industry. As Elisa Pascucci states, the humanitarian industry is shaped by broader contextual socioeconomic relations whereby class and race determine the extent of "locality" and in turn mobility among workers (2018: 11). Financial privilege or class would have had wide implications on my study of access to labor and mobility; however, I did not delve in detail into the intersectional identities of respondents, as this would answer questions this article does not ask. It is, nonetheless, important to note that these groups are not monolithic, and class plays a large part in people's access to mobility and labor. While I use the term "local" generally, Maysoun Sukarieh points to a distinction between "young global Arabs" (with a Western education or dual citizenship) and "local Arab youth" (from a lower income bracket who shape a constant social fabric of the local space) as two disparate categories, especially in how they are regarded or employed by international forums, including the humanitarian industry (2012: 431; see also Carpi 2018).

As I prompted respondents to discuss sensitive workplace issues, interviewees are referred to in pseudonyms to protect their identity. I also translated interviews carried out in Arabic into English. I was able to interview employees from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Rescue Committee, Norwegian Refugee Council, Danish Refugee Council, and two other organizations that I was asked to anonymize. For specificity and relevance, I further narrowed the scope to INGOs that address refugee issues primarily. Although in the case of South-South humanitarianism, local and faith-based NGOs are significant in the global South and Jordan (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2018b; Wagner 2018), I chose to focus on INGOs from the global North, as it reveals power imbalances of mobility in a transnational industry.

The article is organized in sections. The first section provides a macro-level analysis contextualizing the impact of a transnational industry in a host country, detailing the entrance of the humanitarian industry in Jordan and its impact on local and refugee labor. The article goes on to provide an exploration of the humanitarian model of aid, analyzing how compensation is rationalized within the industry, materializing a global division of labor. The final section discusses the correlation between mobility and labor among workers in the transnational industry, or how

access to geographic mobility yields social and professional mobility, also raising the question: who benefits most from the humanitarian model of aid?

## Background

During the peak years of the Iraqi refugee crisis (2006–2009), the government of Jordan received roughly \$50 million in donor funds (Zyck and Armstrong 2014: 7). At the peak of the Syrian refugee crisis in November 2013, it garnered a pledge of \$668.8 million (ibid.). In previous refugee crises, donor money was channeled to or through Jordanian government institutions; however, since 2012, the “expansion of resources has been accompanied by a growth in the number and size of international NGOs and aid agencies” (ibid.: 8). In 2014, the Syria Response Plan included financial allocations for 59 international organizations (UNHCR 2014). According to the *Jordan Times*, in 2017, Jordan hosted 450 local and international NGOs. As Barbara Harrell-Bond stated decades before, “the amount of publicity the emergency receives influences the number of NGOs which converge on the scene” (1986: 65). While the host country remains a major stakeholder in the response to the Syrian crisis, the NGO-ization of humanitarianism and the neoliberal model of refugee governance shaped the Jordan response to Syrian refugees (Tobin and Campbell 2016). Sari Hanafi and Linda Tabar analyze the growth of the humanitarian industry as an “encounter between the global and the local in an era of globalization [and] new institutional arrangements of neoliberalism” (2003: 211). As a result, NGO-ization creates new forms of social and political capital and exclusion such as funding competition and elite class formation (ibid.: 210).

Meanwhile, humanitarian and development organizations pride themselves on bringing jobs to host communities or training local workers (Harrell-Bond 1986: 60). For example, alongside other impact indicators, the Norwegian Refugee Council (n.d.) boasts that it employs 544 local staff in Jordan. Indeed, the entrance of the humanitarian industry produced new jobs, fulfilling a need in Jordan where “over 60,000 people enter the labor market each year but only 10,000 new jobs are created annually in the public sector” (El Rayyes 2014: 2). The growth of the humanitarian industry created new opportunities for work, especially as “the highest unemployment rates are found among women and the highly skilled” (ibid.: 4), who suitably fill positions in the industry. However, at a larger scale, the arrival of INGOs and international aid resulted in outsourcing responsibilities to international actors and usurping responsibilities from local actors (Harrell-Bond 1986: 12). One Jordanian organization, the Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development, published a report on the relationship between INGOs and local actors stating that international actors “assume local actors . . . do not have the skills and experience to play a greater role in international development and humanitarian aid” (ARDD 2014). As a result, “only 1.6 percent of funding goes directly to local actors” (ibid.). Despite efforts to expand the localization of aid agenda globally with pressure from international donors since the World Humanitarian Summit of 2016, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2018a) notes that its institutionalization as part of the international system defeats its purpose to be truly local and benefit marginalized communities. She suggests new responses that challenge structural inequalities such as formulations of solidarity and refugee-refugee humanitarianism (ibid.).

For an economically unstable host country during a refugee crisis, the Jordanian government’s main challenges were to solicit funds and to protect the national workforce (UNOCHA 2019). The discourse among the host government and international actors prioritized labor as a shared interest between the host and refugee communities. In a recent report, the International Labor Organization (ILO) perpetuates the narrative that “the Syrian refugee crisis affected the

Jordanian labour market in terms of downward pressure on wages, increase in child labour, displacement effects—especially for lower-skilled jobs and migrants” (2019: n.p.). As international funding waned, the humanitarian industry got creative under a protracted crisis: “forced migration experts, humanitarian organizations, NGOs and governmental actors move[d] their focus from ‘traditional’ humanitarian work toward labor market interventions” (Lenner and Turner 2018: 4). In collaboration with the UNHCR, migration and development scholars Alexander Betts and Paul Collier advocated for a “refugee-driven economy” that opens up a zonal informal economy of export-oriented manufacturing and factory work, removing the economic burden over the local economy while avoiding competition with Jordanian workers (2015: 86; for a critique, see White 2019). The solution was promoted as one that addresses multiple issues simultaneously—refugee integration, Jordanian development, and European security—as “employment possibilities in neighboring states, would provide the incentive for Syrians to stay where they are, rather than attempt the journey to Europe” (Lenner and Turner 2018: 4). It was implemented in the form of the Jordan Compact, an initiative that facilitated the issuance of 80,000 work permits by January 2018 (Lenner and Turner 2019: 49). The humanitarian industry carries the flame to sustain “the plan until 2020 with total funding of \$7.3 billion” (*Middle East Monitor* 2018), while encouraging the refugees it services to join informalized labor opportunities. As this number continues to grow, refugee labor remains informal and precarious.

Although humanitarian organizations have always provided cash assistance per household, they do not provide refugees with the opportunity to participate in managing their livelihoods and in so doing earning a sustainable living wage. Despite restrictions by the host country government, humanitarian organizations created cash incentive volunteerships for Syrian refugees (Turner 2015: 389); however, refugees have reported that such programs pay what it takes to commute to and from the job (Ali, interview, 2 July 2018). When I asked Ali, a Syrian refugee on a short-term contract with a humanitarian organization, how he thinks the humanitarian industry could better aid refugees, he quickly answered: “It would employ them” (*ibid.*). However, the act of providing aid rather than employing the needy keeps humanitarian workers employed. “The image of the helpless refugee, desperately in need, reinforces the view that outsiders are needed to help them” (Harrell-Bond 1986: 12). Despite humanitarianism’s role as an advocate for refugee mobility, humanitarians from the global North disproportionately travel toward refugees in the global South to contain them, rather than facilitating their movement from the global South toward refuge in the global North. Thus, the humanitarian industry employs an imported workforce from the global North and sustains the existence of refugees in positions of need in the global South.

### The Humanitarian Divide

Since their inception, humanitarian missions initiated by donor countries have depended on “Western” humanitarians in developing countries. The humanitarian model began with a European vision, whereby volunteers from the global North “move out from metropolitan centers to serve those suffering in former colonies” (Redfield 2012: 362). Today, the humanitarian model has evolved “as a routine enterprise, rather than an exceptional act of volunteerism” (*ibid.*: 376). INGOs increased their capacity, employing more international workers that can rotate abroad, as well as local workers who can sustain projects in one place over time. Unlike expatriates who traveled with missions abroad, locals received the industry in the host country. This results in at least two sets of regulations for workers at the national and international levels, and in the

case of refugee relief, at the subnational level where refugees are permitted access to mobility and labor. The UN employment structure reveals a historical model that perpetuates a global division of mobility and labor.

In the UN, local staff salaries are standardized to “reflect the best prevailing conditions found locally for similar work” (UNOHRM n.d.), while salaries for international staff working in developing countries are set to compare with similar jobs in the United States federal civil service (ibid.). Although international and local workers may be doing similar work in the same field, they are regarded as separate and unequal based on this logic of compensation. International staff receive benefits by virtue of being non-local, which include rental subsidies, dependency allowances including education grants (for spouse and/or children), travel and shipping expenses, nonfamily hardship allowance, and hazard pay (ibid.). While there, “their foreign status partly insulate[s] them from the outcome of both local politics and individual risk” (Redfield 2012: 370). In the event of threat or emergency they receive special attention or evacuation, and in the nature of their work in crisis zones, they are the only workers eligible for monthly rest and recuperation breaks.

One respondent explained that high compensation is justified by the lulls between jobs that expatriates may experience in a highly transient and transnational industry: “The [long] hiring process justifies the [unequal] pay scales between expats and Jordanians. If I work at UNHCR for three months and get paid 3,000 JOD (approximately \$4,230 USD) a month, and it takes me another year to get another post, I won’t worry because it doesn’t cost me that much to live here” (Doreen, interview, 13 July 2018). While this sentiment seems to be in defense of an unequal pay scale, it is important to note that it is a response to the casualization of labor. In their study of North-South migration, Matthew Hayes and Rocio Perez-Ganan note that “individuals interpret their mobility in terms of increasing the relative value of savings . . . by relocating them across latitudes of the global division of labour” (2017: 117). In turn, Glenda Garelli and Martina Tazzioli look at the reconfiguration of migration landscapes whereby underemployed European citizens migrated to Tunisia as Tunisians left to Europe, asking what analysis can be drawn about migratization and precarization processes across the regions (2017: 6). In effect, humanitarian workers travel through the global South building their careers and “receive wages that allow them a standard of living far above even what most could afford at home” (Harrell-Bond 1986: 67). The humanitarian model of employment perpetuates a colonial practice by rewarding those with access to global mobility in the global South higher compensation than aspiring workers from recipient communities.

Expatriate migrants are also entitled to higher compensation for the hardship they are said to endure traveling and working abroad. In my interviews, only one respondent spoke about the perils of being away from family, while the vast majority of respondents expressed their eagerness to seek opportunities abroad. In fact, “migrants report improved health, greater happiness and more social connections” (Hayes and Perez-Ganan 2017: 123) when working abroad. After speaking to humanitarian workers, I found that interview participants were not convinced by the claim that relocating was a sacrifice, yet many of them still raised the justification as fact when defending the unequal pay grade.

Laden is the assumption that “expertise” from the global North is more valuable than local knowledge in the global South, but also that the knowledge acquired by expatriates is more valuable than that acquired by locals. As Silke Roth states in her study on professionalism in the industry, “international humanitarian workers . . . are the ‘experts’ dispensing knowledge and assuring the implementation of procedures accepted by donors” (2012: 1468). One pillar of their expertise is based mainly on the cultural capital they bring with them from Western education and Western standards of professionalism or “managerialist ‘state of the art’ approaches, taught

at universities in the Global North” (ibid.). Although the hierarchical structure is not explicitly addressed, it is evident in the labels that “to employ the nomenclature expatriate or expert rather than the more accurate term, migrant worker, emphasizes the superior status outsiders expect to be accorded” (Harrell-Bond 1986: 67).

Peter Redfield states that for international staff, “it is hardly a personal failing” to arrive at the field with no historical background or understanding of the local language, as “it place[s] a premium on translation and the mediating skills of local staff” (2012: 370). Although this has been presented as the basis of a collaborative partnership, it is a configuration of their inequality. Language characterizes the global division of labor, as the English language is viewed and treated as invaluable cultural capital, while the language of the host country and recipients is treated as disposable. One local respondent, Sami, questioned the humanitarian system’s underestimation of locals by stating the importance of the beneficiary’s language and regional knowledge: “Our work in communication is not just translation, it interprets culturally relevant information, that is critical and if misunderstood or misrepresented could do a lot of harm” (interview, 8 July 2018).

As the UN system is structured in “grades” signifying position and salary, local staff have a grade ceiling at the managerial level that they cannot transcend. In my experience working at a UN field office in Amman, the building, which had six floors, was structured mirroring its workers’ professional grades. The bottom four floors, designated for officers, was majority local staff, while the top two floors, designated for higher management positions, was almost fully occupied by international staff. A local humanitarian worker, Sawsan, shared that despite her 33 years of experience and credibility, she cannot compete with an international staff member with five years of experience (interview, 22 June 2018). She stated that the structural separation between local and international staff is felt as “even young Western volunteers are given more purview than local staff because they have closer bonds with Western managers” (ibid.). Due to their qualifications, locals with MBAs and PhDs are frustrated at being treated inferior to Westerners in the field (Pascucci 2018: 4). Local workers are positioned as liaisons between international staff and the recipient community in the host country, which determines their interminable mid-level status in the hierarchy.

As the humanitarian sector offers locals more pay and better benefits than public and private sectors in developing countries, it absolves itself of the inequality it fosters between its national and international staff. As Rula described, “you would make more if you worked with an INGO than by being an engineer at a telecommunications company. It’s a difference of approximately 500 JOD (\$705 USD)—a local wage per month—and 1,200 JOD (\$1690 USD)—INGO wage for local staff per month” (interview, 27 June 2018). In turn, locals expressed that despite the inequality with their international staff colleagues, they “cannot complain” because the humanitarian industry provides them with better opportunities and wages than other industries in the country. The argument used to justify current pay inequality for locals is that they live at “home” and don’t incur high expenses when living with their families and in their country, while expatriates move for the job and are burdened by travel and relocation. However, as Fahed said, “Jordan is expensive for everyone” (interview, 4 July 2018). In fact, Amman was ranked the least affordable city in the Arab world (*Economist* 2018). Youth in the country struggle to find jobs, and aging families struggle to provide for their children who remain dependent on them (World Bank 2013). Local staff are not more financially stable or able than international staff, as family ties and home life often mean more responsibility.

While humanitarian migrants may create jobs and help develop the host community, their higher incomes have gentrifying effects (Hayes and Perez-Ganan 2017: 129). North-South migration can drive up real estate prices, place a strain on health and social services, create

competition with local labor, and overburden labor markets (Laczko and Brian 2013: 16). This is visible, as certain residential areas in central Amman have now become unaffordable to locals since foreigners can afford higher rent. One such area is Jabal al-Weibdeh, where humanitarian workers have chosen to live, dislocating some of its residents (Thomas and Vogel 2018: 233). Although the humanitarian industry boasts expatriates' benefit to the local labor market, it undervalues the expertise and experience of local staff and drawbacks on the local community.

While the hierarchization of international and local staff in humanitarian work is historically enduring, the positions adapted for refugees, or those from the recipient community, are improvised and in turn more precarious in lived experience. As a Syrian refugee in Jordan, Taher was lucky to find an opportunity with an INGO, the highest-paying industry in the country, rather than cheap labor industries such as construction earmarked for refugees. However, due to his status as a refugee, he cannot reap the benefits of the humanitarian industry: "I don't have paid leave, health insurance, access to paying utility bills, transportation, or subsidized accommodation. I don't say anything because I need this job" (interview, 30 June 2018). Taher retold the story of how a few days before Eid (the holiday that celebrates the end of Ramadan), everybody in his office received the Eidieh (a holiday bonus) except for him: "Those who came from America and don't celebrate Eid received Eidieh and I didn't. You may consider this unimportant but . . . it hurt me" (interview, 30 June 2018). He expressed that the label "refugee" did not only leave him without institutional benefits, but also stripped him even of social considerations among his colleagues in the workplace.

In response to my question about the pay gap, partly because of their close association with the recipient community, both refugee humanitarian worker respondents, Ali and Taher, expressed that they were more concerned about the divergence in aid distribution than the wage gap. Ali described how much money is being channeled within the industry, yet how little of it reaches the most in need. For example, Ali's colleagues decided to spend part of a project budget on new IKEA furniture (rather than second-hand or more affordable furniture), leaving less money to go directly to participants. Taher made a similar point: "A few weeks ago they fired all Syrian teachers from the refugee camps on the basis that there was no more funding [See *Jordan Times* 2018]. A Syrian teacher's salary is not more than 250 JOD (\$350 USD), so if an expat who receives 10,000 JOD (\$14,100 USD) spares 1,000 JOD (\$1,410 USD) from their salary, we could pay the salary of four Syrian teachers" (interview, 30 June 2018).

In her study of the humanitarian workplace, Roth claims that although international staff are the benefactors of aid, they 'present themselves as 'beneficiaries' by noting the privilege of sharing the living conditions and perspectives of the local population" (2012: 1468). Taher sarcastically noted that "since a large amount of the budget goes to salaries of humanitarian workers, maybe they are the real beneficiaries of humanitarian projects" (interview, 30 June 2018). By "studying up" humanitarian workers as workers and economic migrants in a labor market as perceived by those people who are labeled as "idle recipients of aid," we are able to consider the imbalance of agency and wealth in the industry.

## Geographic Mobility Yields Social and Professional Mobility

In the face of regional refugee crises, Jordan, among other host countries in the region, has become aggressive toward migrants (ILO 2015). According to Tamkeen, an organizational advocate for migrant workers in Jordan, 50,000 migrant domestic workers and 30,000 irregular workers are excluded from labor laws and social protection (2016: 16). While migrant workers have become more prone to denials from entering the country or obtaining permits, migrants



from the global North to the global South, specifically humanitarian expats, have not been affected. I asked expatriate interviewees about their experience navigating and accessing labor in Jordan to evaluate mobility as a measure of power. Ellen explained that since applying for work permits is a lengthy application process with logistical difficulties, instead of completing them, she registered as a volunteer while getting paid into a foreign bank account (Ellen, interview, 3 July 2018). Another expatriate shared that in order to stay in Jordan as a resident, she overstays and renews her tourist visa, as her organization covers the penalty (Zara, interview, 19 July 2018). Humanitarians' ability to move is a measure of their power in the transnational structure of the humanitarian industry. Mobility or the notion of transferability between the global North and the global South demonstrates differential access to labor and livelihood. In fact, the humanitarian industry conditions attaining higher positions such as jobs in headquarter offices on experience in developing countries in the field (UNICEF 2017). This is resonant to Hayes and Perez-Ganan's point that migrants from the global North to the global South utilize developing countries in pursuit of their professional and personal goals, as this migration flow "structurally privileg[es] people from the Global North in developing countries" (2017: 126).

From my interviews with humanitarian expats, many INGO workers are motivated to live and work in Jordan for its regional proximity to sites of conflict. One entry-level respondent explained: "Amman is a hub for refugee studies, humanitarian work on Syria, and development work for Jordan, I knew that if I wanted to pursue this field it would be a good idea to gain experience here" (Alex, interview, 20 June 2018). A mid-level worker stressed that Jordan is a great post as it offers a more comfortable and urban setting relative to refugee response settings in African and Asian countries (Doreen, interview, 13 July 2018). In addition to expatriates' satisfaction with Jordan for its relative safety and stability, the international placement still fulfills their desires professionally. Zara explained how getting an INGO job in Jordan catalyzes her career because she can access a higher position than a job in her home country of the United States: "I want to be published and I want to learn software . . . and that is accessible to me here" (interview, 19 July 2018).

By virtue of being a small and global demographic, international expatriates form close-knit social communities that enable them to move with even more ease. One respondent described the benefit of having a transnational network of professional contacts in the field: "You go to these house parties and meet people who are working with different international organizations . . . people travel so it's transient. They're here and they're in Iraq next, or in Lebanon, or Egypt, or Geneva . . . so you have a network you can rely on when future posts open up" (Alex, interview, 20 June 2018). Indeed, expat hubs open up social and professional networks and opportunities that help humanitarian migrants in their next potential post. Like migrants from the global South to the global North, humanitarian expatriates gravitate toward networks; however, unlike economic migrants from the global South, "their foreign status partly insulated them from the outcome of both local politics and individual risk" (Redfield 2012: 370).

Due to the transience of the sector and the ease of travel for Western passport-holding humanitarians, expatriates can seriously consider and preempt their next career move. Zara expressed, "I would leave [Jordan] in a year because by then I would have been here for a year and a half. I am interested in Tanzania next because . . . it provides good opportunities for my career interests" (interview, 19 July 2018). Bill, who worked in cross-border operations between Jordan and Syria, observed that due to the changing nature of the conflict "we already see humanitarian workers moving to other sectors and countries. There may even be a shift to Syria as we move into a post-conflict phase" (Bill, interview, 28 June 2018). Compared to national staff, expatriates are able to plan their careers internationally and ascend in them.

The motivation for expats' interest in Jordan is not only professional but personal: through interviews, it became apparent that many humanitarian expats moved to fulfill their desire to travel. At least three interview participants arrived in Jordan primarily to learn the Arabic language and applied to jobs to sustain living there. Doreen said that she is learning Arabic because, due to refugee resettlement in Europe, Australia, Canada, and the United States, the prospect of applying her knowledge of Arabic in other settings is high: "Even in my hometown, there are initiatives to work with Arabic-speaking refugees" (interview, 8 July 2018). Moreover, humanitarian workers are not only motivated by their geographic placement and humanitarian career, but by the prospect of learning a skill that transcends their geographic placement. One respondent said, "There is just so much outside of the U.S. I don't know that there's any reason to stay in one place all your life" (Mary, interview, 14 July 2018). Ida Danewid problematizes the role of "European subjects" in refugee activism to critique their disconnect from "imperialist histories and present complications" (2017: 1674). Ellen expressed that it is not the act of traveling, but where she goes that attracts her to the industry: "When I say I work here, [friends and family] say 'I'd never go to the Arab world.' That is attractive to me. I like going to places that challenge prejudices and perceptions" (Ellen, interview, 3 July 2018).

As Estella Carpi has pointed out, humanitarian workers weave their professional aspirations with personal interest, mixing "personal affection with necessity and collective compassion with professional aspirations" (2019: 296). Similarly, John stated that his interest in the humanitarian response to Syrian refugees materialized as a desire to feel "proximity," not only to the geography of a global crisis but "this political moment in history" (interview, 6 July 2018). Meanwhile, migrants from the global South are held hostage to geographies of global crises and the politics of the historical moment. In her ethnographic research on faith-based humanitarianism in Mafraq, Ann-Christin Wagner shows that Western volunteers often pair missionary objectives with aid delivery, attempting to "bridge the gap" between material aid and eternal salvation (2018: 105). While Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2011) and Wagner (2018) show that localized faith-based humanitarianism is connected to a transnational network with a global mission, this article shows how humanitarian work itself is a transnational network that attempts to translate work in local chapters into a portfolio for a global career.

Expatriate humanitarians embrace change by constantly moving, yet a local staff respondent expressed fear at the prospect of change because moving to another country or to another industry is difficult, considering the status of the Jordanian economy internally and the Jordanian nationality (lack of visa power) internationally (Sami, interview, 8 July 2018). Sami stated that if international funding levels continue to fall, this could result in the unemployment of an entire labor force and fewer opportunities to move on to in Jordan (*ibid.*). As humanitarians from the global South struggle to obtain visas or to travel and work abroad, local humanitarians fill the need to sustain projects at home. Roth comments that local staff miss out on benefits because they do not have international staff status perks such as "higher salaries [that] allow international staff to participate in training courses or enroll in a postgraduate degree" (2012: 1470). Even in their positions locally, local staff fail to achieve management positions in international INGOs because they do not have the international experience deemed prerequisite to attain higher grades in the UN system or other INGOs.

One local respondent who was temporarily posted in Iraq compared his experience in international and local posts. After being relocated from Jordan to Iraq, he described how he experienced more respect from colleagues and emphasized the implications of higher pay: "I had a huge pay increase and I could do more with that in my personal life. Because I was living comfortably, I felt I could also do better at my job" (Fahed, interview, 4 July 2018). Now, Fahed's goal is to be posted in Iraq permanently to receive a higher wage, save money to start a family, and

grow in this career path. He has set his hopes on Iraq because it is one of the few countries he can access without visa issues. Thus, while migrants from the global North to the global South can be characterized as “footloose [with] a lifestyle marked by careerism and repeated migration associated with the ambitious” (Ryan et al. 2014: 199), locals are unable to “move on or move up” (ibid.), even in their own country, as professional mobility is based on access to international mobility. Thus, while expatriates can utilize the humanitarian industry as a platform to expand their careers, locals are utilized by the humanitarian industry to sustain projects locally, without the ability to grow their careers internally beyond an industry ceiling.

### Who Benefits?

Humanitarian workers from the global North travel toward refugees in the global South to manage their containment rather than facilitate their migration to the global North. Polly Pallister-Wilkins (2018) argues that the humanitarian model of aid that enables reliance and enforces state restrictions is a form of governance as effective as carceral architecture in keeping refugees contained. Beyond the study of spatiality, analyzing who is able to participate in the labor of humanitarianism demonstrates who benefits from it. As most refugees are locked out of humanitarian work, they are merely recipients who can survive on charity rather than participants who can re-establish their livelihoods. The humanitarian industry has been more successful in providing employment and benefits to their employees—migrant workers from the global North—than their beneficiaries, refugees in need of aid and means. Pallister-Wilkins aptly differentiates between displacement at the bottom among refugees, and at the top among humanitarians, highlighting a contradiction between humanitarian objectives to “save distant strangers” and “keep strangers distant” (ibid.: 4).

In discussing expatriates’ relative access to mobility and labor, Taher asked, if expatriates get perks such as paid leave because of their migrant status, why is it that refugees do not benefit from migrancy when they work in the field? “My manager left her country and is residing and working here, and so am I. Just because I have the UNHCR registration should not disqualify me from the benefits. Within the industry, I could consider myself an expat, what’s the difference?” (interview, 8 July 2018). While Taher exaggerates the similarities between expat and refugee, his point is sound: The lived experience of migrants is determined based on their nationality.

Although locals and refugees cannot attain the professional positions of expatriates, both groups of respondents expressed the disparity within the humanitarian industry by aspiring for expatriate status. Local respondents attempted to hold on to posts in neighboring countries to transcend the glass ceiling and grow their careers, while refugee respondents challenged their legal status in relation to expatriates. However, the boundaries between expatriates and refugees are well-defined in their international status. As a result, the expatriate is highly mobile, the local is less mobile, and the refugee is immobile.

While the model of humanitarian work is accepted and justified, the disparate hierarchy between local and international workers has increasingly become subject to critique. However, mobility as a measure of power disparity among humanitarian workers, particularly in the context of refugee relief, reveals the stark geopolitical division of labor that facilitates the power imbalance. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1978) famously quoted Benjamin Disraeli, who said: “The East is a career” (1847 II, xiv). For humanitarian expatriates, the humanitarian industry in host countries in the global South is a career. Although locals are employed and refugees are aided in the process, as humanitarian expatriates from the global North to the global South move through the transnational industry, their careers grow.

## Conclusion

In their study of NGOs in the Arab world, Noura Erekat and Nizar Saghie call on scholars to study the growth of NGOs since the start of the uprisings in the region (2016: 7). This article offers a case study of the influx of INGO workers and its impact on the labor market in Jordan, while simultaneously maintaining a general analysis of the humanitarian model of aid globally. As power is often absent in the discussion of humanitarian aid, the article situates power at the center, highlighting the geopolitics of transnational humanitarianism and mobility as measures of power. It explores power relations across the transnational industry by analyzing differential access to mobility and labor. Increasingly, scholars are dissecting the humanitarian structure of aid in terms of social class and geography, and this article offers a migration lens view that contributes to this contemporary concern.

The principled methodology of the article inverts the academic gaze from “studying down” refugees as recipients of aid and subjects of migration to “studying up” the humanitarian industry and humanitarian workers as a transnational industry at the macro level, and as mobile and immobile workers at the micro level. “Studying up” was done by speaking directly to humanitarian workers about their access to labor, putting in conversation the testimonies with existing literature at the intersection of humanitarianism, migration, and labor. The epistemological principles used to carry out the research mirror the analytical framework of the article, which is structured to maintain a relational analysis of mobility. In turn, the article attempts to challenge logics and justifications of the humanitarian model of aid with rebuttals coming directly from refugee and local workers, supported by critical literature on the topic that serve as the main learnings of the article.

The article draws a correlation between the geographic mobility and social or professional mobility of workers, demonstrating how workers’ access to geographic (horizontal) mobility has enabled their access to social/professional (vertical) mobility, sustaining a global division of labor. Thus, expatriate humanitarians who move freely are able to access and accumulate work experience globally, ascending in their careers, while national staff in host countries are employed to assist as local informants or implementation partners, and refugee access to geographic and social mobility is contained in designated areas. At the intersection of labor, mobility, and humanitarianism, the article takes an ethnographic approach to political economy, disrupting traditional academic boundaries. Having scratched the surface of unequal mobilities and labor in the humanitarian model of aid, through its epistemological approach, this article provides the basis for future potential studies to delve deeper into the nuances of nationality and social class in humanitarian aid and the centrality of mobility in studying humanitarian spaces.

### ■ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the Tibawi Trust Award for funding my fieldwork and the interview participants for their shared time and knowledge. I thank Dr. Paolo Novak for supervising an earlier version of this article as my master’s thesis and other faculty and peers at SOAS who shared their insights. Finally, the article would not be what it is without the thoughtful reviews of the editors of *Migration and Society*.

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