

# The Civil War in Syria and International Relations in the Middle East

Year: 2014

Place of fieldwork: Jordan

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Key words: civil war, refugees, basis of livelihood

- Research background

The civil war that has raged in Syria since 2011 is currently one of the most serious situations in the Middle East. This war originated from the people's uprisings called the Arab Spring, which began in Tunisia and then spread out across the Arab world. The numbers of casualties and displaced persons continue to rise, and neighboring countries have received many refugees. Moreover, the problem is spreading, as refugees spill out of the Asian continent and flood European countries. Though international communities have sought to respond, there is no sign of a letup.

- Research purpose and aim

The purpose of this study is to understand why and how the civil war in Syria began and to show what kind of crisis the people there are facing. For this purpose, we need comprehensive analysis of the structural contradictions in Syrian society, considering the interrelationship with the transformation of politics inside and outside the Middle East. In addition, I want to find out how the Syrian people try to cope with the crisis, with an eye toward revealing what a postwar Syrian society may look like.

- Results and achievements by fieldwork

For the second year in a row, I conducted fieldwork in Jordan. Jordan hosts more than 600,000 Syrian refugees who have crossed the border; most of these refugees are living outside the camps. Accordingly, I broadened my inquiry, visiting refugee families outside the camps and surveying Syrian workers in the capital, Amman. Among the places I visited were Syrian-run businesses, like the ones in Figures 1 through 3.

The fieldwork showed that it is difficult to build new relationships in the different social environment of Jordan, and that the Syrians need the support of their communities to make the adjustment. Examining how Syrians live in their new environment gave me a glimpse of their livelihood strategies.

- Implications and impacts on future research

From this fieldwork, I realized that I need additional research on Syrian workers and entrepreneurs in the Jordanian labor force. For further research, I want to do comparable fieldwork in other countries that border Syria to see what strategies Syrian refugees and the workers and families use to survive in those various environments.



(Figure 1: A street near Jordan University)



(Figure 2: A Syrian sweet shop)



(Figure 3: Inside the sweet shop)