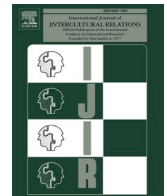




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The role of cultural pressures and group favouritism in shaping Syrian refugees' identity in the Jordanian work environment

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to understand the cultural inclusion/exclusion practices that Syrian refugees encounter in the Jordanian work environment, explore whether an ingroup (Jordanian) over outgroup (Syrian refugees) favouritism exists and how such favouritism reshapes Syrian refugees' social identity in this new environment. Drawing on qualitative-semi structured interviews with 12 Syrian refugees in Jordan, the study highlights different multi-layered cultural exclusion/inclusion practices that Syrian refugees in Jordan face. Through a combined underpinning of social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and the acculturation framework (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2006), the study reports how these practices re-shape Syrian refugees' identity around vocational skills. We go beyond the basic types of discrimination against refugees (e.g., gender, race, religion) to highlight economic and legal restrictions as important promoters of cultural exclusion despite the strong cultural cohesion factors. This highlights the significant role of community and societal practices that can go beyond cultural differences between groups, and extend our understanding of SIT.

Introduction

Social and cultural research considers different pressures and challenges that refugees encounter in host countries (e.g., [Petriglieri, 2011](#)), “yet does not fully explain what such barriers imply for some of the last resources that refugees have left, namely their fundamental understanding of themselves” ([Wehrle, Klehe, Kira, & Zikic, 2018](#), p. 83). The increasing number of people fleeing war or other forms of danger requires further studies and insights on the cultural conditions facing them to better understand their societal integration ([Birman & Simon, 2014](#)). Thus far, there has been a large focus in previous literature and reports on the economic and political consequences of large numbers of refugees in host countries (See for example, [Mencütek, 2018](#); [Schmidt-Catran & Spies, 2016](#); [UNHCR, 2018](#)), however, far less attention has been given to studying refugees' social engagement in host countries and how such engagement influences their social identities in the work environment ([Petriglieri, 2011](#)), with the exception of some recent work; e.g. [Bizri \(2017\)](#) and [Refai, Haloub, and Lever \(2018\)](#). Furthermore, the study of social identity is commonly grounded in Western-based literature and research (e.g., [Greco & Kraimer, 2019](#); [Kourtí, García-Lorenzo, & Yu, 2018](#); [Wang, Le Blanc, Demerouti, Lu, & Jiang, 2019](#)), with a few efforts of integrating analysis on these topics in a non-Western context (e.g. [Refai et al., 2018](#); [Dajani, Hawkins, Wilson, & Darkal, 2018](#)). We build on these gaps in the present study on Syrian refugees in the Jordanian context to explore how

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various cultural exclusion/inclusion practices along with group favouritism (i.e., Jordanians over Syrian refugees) may influence Syrian refugees' identity in the work environment in Jordan, where work environment here refers to refugees' employment/self-employment opportunities.

We underpin our work using [Tajfel and Turner's \(1979\)](#) social identity theory (SIT) combined with the acculturation framework ([Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2006](#)). According to SIT, individuals tend to show intergroup bias, where they favour ingroup members over outgroup members ([Tajfel & Turner, 1979](#)), thus, supporting our understanding of whether and how Jordanians favour Jordanian citizens (i.e., ingroup members) over Syrian refugees. Similarly, we acknowledge the limitations of SIT in exploring multiple systemic barriers and factors (e.g. economic, legal, political, societal, and local) ([Korte, 2007](#)), and therefore combine it with the acculturation framework to provide a conceptually relevant description of changes in identity, attitudes, behaviors, values, and language that individuals experience in their social interactions with other cultural groups ([Birman, Simon, Chan, & Tran, 2014](#)). We view acculturation to involve “cultural change that occurs as a result of a variety of cultural contacts including experiences of immigrant groups and individuals, their descendants, ethnic minorities, and colonized indigenous peoples” ([Birman & Simon, 2014](#), p. 207). This process of acculturation includes either supportive or hindering practices. In this study, we refer to such practices as ‘inclusion’ or ‘exclusion’ cultural practices. Through this conceptualization, we aim to (1) explore how cultural practices (inclusion/exclusion practices) may support (or hinder) Syrian refugees' employment/self-employment in Jordan, (2) identify whether any ingroup (Jordanian) favouritism exists over outgroup (Syrian refugees), and (3) highlight whether and how both the cultural practices along with group favouritism reshape Syrian refugees' identity in the work environment.

We view the value of this exploration in relation to refugees who, similar to migrants, confront several barriers in host countries, which in turn impair their employability and their integration into the host country's work and society ([Wehrle et al., 2018](#)). These barriers exist across multiple levels, including micro (individual skills) level, meso (labour market) level, as well as macro (economic, institutional, societal, and cultural) level ([Iwasaki, Bartlett, MacKay, Mactavish, & Ristock, 2005](#)). For example, personal skills and expertise that do not fit the new context ([Vinokurov, Trickett, & Birman, 2017](#)), poor financial situations and stringent legal restrictions may impair refugees' employability alongside other barriers as poverty, structural discrimination, and limited social networks ([Refai et al., 2018](#)). As such, the combination of SIT with the acculturation framework supports addressing the study's objectives by further supporting our description of the exclusion/inclusion of Syrian refugees' engagement in Jordan, and how this influences their identities in the work environment.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we introduce the context of this study, namely Syrian refugees in Jordan, to highlight the importance and uniqueness of this context for research. Second, we provide an in depth exploration of research on inclusion/exclusion practices. Third, the combined theoretical underpinning of this study is presented. Fourth, the research methodology and analysis techniques are presented. This is followed by a clear presentation and discussion of the results. Finally, the paper concludes by highlighting implications, limitations, and future research recommendations.

Literature review

Syrian refugees in Jordan

The increasing number of people escaping persecution, terror, and war in their home countries has forced millions of refugees to seek shelter and freedom in new host countries including developed economies as USA, Australia, and West European countries, as well as emerging (and developing) countries such as the Middle East and North African countries ([Wehrle et al., 2018](#)). In this study, we define a refugee as a person “...owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees-UNHCR, 2017).

Twenty-six million refugees were reported across the globe at the end of 2019 ([UNHCR, 2019](#)); such large and growing number of refugees pose major challenges on hosting countries with political and social consequences, involving several public debates ([Yitmen & Verkuynen, 2018](#)). In the Middle East, Jordan has received a high number of Syrian refugees alongside Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, and Egypt. According to [UNHCR \(2018\)](#), the number of Syrian refugees arriving in Jordan since the onset of the crisis reached approximately 751,274, with a steady increase between 2014–2016 that followed a sharp rise in 2013; nearly 35 % of these are male refugees and 65 % female and child refugees ([UNHCR, 2017](#)).

The Jordanian government has set up a number of camps to accommodate the large numbers of Syrian refugees arriving in Jordan. Around 22 % of these refugees currently live in major camps including Za'atari, King Abdullah Park, Azraq, and the Emirati-Jordanian Camps, and nearly 78 % reside outside camps. Refugees in Jordan receive various forms of aid, including, for example, water, sanitation and hygiene, child protection, and education.

Despite the support offered to Syrian refugees by the Jordanian people and government, these refugees still face different barriers and challenges that hinder their integration in the work or employment context ([Refai et al., 2018](#)), where apparently “both the Syrian refugees themselves and the host communities in Jordan are paying a high price” ([Achilli, 2015](#), p. 1). As refugees, Syrians residing in Jordan are offered a range of benefits, including security, safety, education, and employment ([Lee, Titzmann, & Jugert, 2019](#)). Still, as a result of their inevitable daily interactions within the host country, they also encounter various social and legal challenges related to their status, culture, values, and perhaps lifestyles. [Refai et al. \(2018\)](#) point out that Syrian refugees in Jordan strive to achieve recognition of their expertise and skills, but find this very difficult due to legal and financial obstacles, as well as social cohesion challenges within the community. They point out that such challenges render Syrian refugees' dispositional practices in Syria largely irrelevant to the new context, which ultimately impacts on their entrepreneurial identities.

Krafft, Sieverding, Salemi, and Keo (2018) note that there are certain problems that may adversely impact Syrian refugees' participation in the labour market as some Jordanians perceive Syrians as competitors for jobs (Achilli, 2015). According to Lockhart and Barker's (2018) study, many Jordanian workers perceive Syrian workers as easy to work with, highlighting the cultural similarities between the two countries. However, they similarly note that some Jordanians fault Syrians as 'less reliable' in comparison to Jordanian workers, describing them prioritizing their rights over and above their duties. Ali and Al Ganideh (2020) examined the extent to which demographic and social psychological variables shape Jordanians' attitudes toward Syrian refugees. Their results indicate that Jordanians with high income and with high levels of patriotism hold the least positive attitudes toward Syrian refugees.

Our discussion here is not to say that challenges facing refugees are confined to the Jordanian context, but rather to highlight that our choice of the Jordanian context offers an interesting case to explore. Considering the significance that refugees play in the Jordanian context, the cultural similarities between Jordanians and Syrians and the constrained economic and legal conditions in Jordan, it becomes appropriate, in the following section, to explore the inclusion/exclusion practices to support our understanding through this study.

Inclusion vs exclusion practices

With the rise in numbers of individuals or groups (e.g. families) moving to live in different countries or geographic locations, either voluntarily or involuntarily, the term 'cultural exclusion/inclusion practices' has attracted recent attention at practical and academic levels (Lee et al., 2019; Shang, O'driscoll, & Roche, 2017). The study of inclusion/exclusion practices helps understand some of the challenges and worldview-conflicts that come from the interaction between dissimilar cultures, including conflicts in values and beliefs, that may in turn lead to specific exclusion/inclusion of certain groups. Prior studies have sought to investigate mechanisms and processes of exclusion/inclusion as an ongoing part of social practice (Hansen, Jensen, Lassen, Molbæk, & Schmidt, 2018). For example, exclusion/inclusion practices can be operationalized as the changes that people experience in their social interactions with other cultures (e.g., Cicognani, Sonn, Albanesi, & Zani, 2018; Colak, Van Praag, & Nicaise, 2019; Graves, 1967), thus, helping us understand the extent to which people are able to interact with new cultures. These social exclusion (or inclusion) practices show that individuals are systematically blocked from (or have access to) several rights and resources that are usually available to members of a different group (Inoi, Nishiwaki, & Doi, 2017).

Iwasaki et al. (2005) view social exclusion practices as dynamics of inequality and disadvantage in relation to the available opportunities and resources at various levels. They note that social exclusion is a multi-dimensional concept including: labour market exclusion (unemployment), economic exclusion (poverty), institutional exclusion (structural discrimination), social isolation (limited social networks), and cultural exclusion (inability to live according to the culturally accepted norms and values). We view this multi-dimensional concept – that spans across micro, meso, and macro levels – relevant to refugees who, similar to migrants, are confronted with many challenges in their new contexts (Wang & Lysenko, 2014).

Painter (2014) note that, at individual level, the educational-occupational mismatch (i.e., over/underqualified) coupled with individuals' race/ethnicity are important factors that impact income (in) equality amongst immigrants. In a more extended approach, Potocky-Tripodi (2001) studied how micro and macro determinants (i.e., demographic, residency, acculturation, and community characteristics) may influence refugees' employment and economic status. Potocky-Tripodi's (2001) study shows that demographic characteristics had the largest effect on economic status. Specifically, education, gender, disability, and household composition, as demographic characteristics, were found as the most important individual determinants of refugees' economic status (see also Potocky-Tripodi, 2003). Wang and Lysenko (2014) also note that metropolitan labour market characteristics (e.g. ethnic diversity, proportion of its foreign-born population, the economic structure, and individual characteristics) are linked with individual labour force's underemployment.

As such, besides being offered support by community members (alongside governments and aid agencies) to support their integration (inclusion) in host countries, refugees are usually still challenged with prejudices and discrimination (Lee et al., 2019). These create barriers to refugees' integration, and act as cultural exclusion practices that restrict them from pursuing opportunities and economic growth. Yet, despite these challenges, refugees demonstrate resilience that may support their integration in host countries (Alqudah, 2013; Krause & Schmidt, 2020; Newbold, Chung, & Hong, 2013; Schweitzer, Greenslade, & Kagee, 2007; Sleijpen, Mooren, Kleber, & Boeijs, 2017).

As noted by Sapienza and Masten (2011) and Rutter (2012), this resilience can be seen as a developmental process to which individuals react differently depending on their individual characteristics (Connor & Davidson, 2003), and their ability to adapt to new environments and cultures in host countries (Bean, Derluyn, & Eurelings-Bontekoe Broekaert, 2007). This notion of resilience is in line with Krause and Schmidt (2020), who highlight the significance of individual factors in enhancing refugees' ability to overcome hardships and become productive contributors to the society. They focus in particular on self-reliance as a characteristic of refugees who are able to support themselves, viewing resilience through "their broader ability to absorb and deal with difficult situations and crises" (Krause & Schmidt, 2020, p. 23). Similarly, Schweitzer et al. (2007), highlight internal factors (e.g. personal attitudes and beliefs, religion, and family support) and external factors (e.g. community support) as important determinants of refugees' resilience and adaptation in the new context. Such resilience can be viewed as a positive outcome indicating a person's ability to adapt successfully to acute stress (Masten, 2014) and provide "good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development" (Masten, 2001, p. 228). Leipold and Greve (2009) consider resilience as an individual's emotional stability for "quick recovery (or even growth) under significant adverse conditions" (p. 41). This is also in line with Alqudah's (2013) study on Iraqi refugees in Jordan which suggests "the more resilient the refugee is, the more psychologically and physically he/she will be well" (p. 57).

With the different inclusion/exclusion practices alongside different levels of adaptation and resilience from refugees, it is likely that

refugees might change their cultural orientation in ways that reshape their identities to become more adaptive to the new context. In Jordan, there are increased debates about the exclusion practices that Syrian refugees face in terms of their right of and accessibility to education, health, employment and other privileges (e.g., Carrion, 2015). Hence, the following section explores our combined SIT with acculturation framework theoretical underpinning, which we employ in the present study to explore the cultural exclusion/ inclusion practices that Syrian refugees in Jordan face, and whether and how these practices reshape their social identity in the work environment.

Conceptual framing: the combined Social Identity Theory (SIT) and acculturation framework underpinning

Individuals “need a situated identity to guide their actions” (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016, p. 128). Social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) is a critical mainstay to understand factors that influence individuals’ behaviors inside groups (Korte, 2007). In this section, we aim to explore this theory in more depth, and present an argument to highlight its significance in relation to this research study. As proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), SIT stresses that a group to which an individual belongs is an important source of pride and self-esteem. The theory classifies people into “them” and “us” through a social categorization process (Korte, 2007). These metaphors are known as ingroups and outgroups. The basic notion of SIT is that ingroup people may discriminate against outgroup people because they do not share similar cultural values, religion, beliefs, and other attributes (Tajfel, 1979).

In social studies, SIT may help explain the complex “nature of identity in social interactions” (Korte, 2007, p. 169). As in the case of other groups of individuals, Syrian refugees in Jordan may define or locate themselves in different social categories, such as social groups, organizational membership, age or gender cohorts (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Still, as proposed by SIT, these refugees are likely to face discrimination from “others” (outgroup members) in such ways that may in turn reshape the way they define themselves (i.e. their social identity). Another critical argument with SIT is that the bias of favoritism for one’s group/ingroups and also the discrimination against others/outgroups are pervasive and implicit (Tajfel, 1979; Yitmen & Verkuyten, 2018).

SIT can highlight whether Syrian refugees become likely to re-question ‘who they are’ and re-think elements that define them in the new work environment, but it does not adequately explore the multidimensional contextual levels involved in inclusion/exclusion practices. As such, we refer to the concept of acculturation to understand these inclusion/exclusion practices. Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, and Szapocznik (2010) define acculturation as a multidimensional process consisting of the convergence between heritage-cultural and receiving-cultural practices, values, and identifications. In the present study, we refer to the concept of acculturation to understand “phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original pattern of either or both groups” (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936, p. 149).

In light of this study’s objectives, we follow Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver’s (2006) acculturation model, which helps us define these multi-dimensional levels by considering three acculturation variables including acculturation conditions, acculturation orientations, and acculturation outcomes. This is presented in our conceptual framework (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 highlights the value of our combined approach in exploring acculturation orientations, where SIT helps us uncover whether an ‘us’ and ‘them’ attitude exists as explained earlier. This orientation is impacted by acculturation conditions – which support us in clearly defining the inclusion/exclusion practices – involving various contextual elements and limitations. These conditions can include migration type (forced/voluntary, temporary/permanent), ‘outside’ group characteristics (cultural and social attachment), ‘in’ group characteristics (cultural homogeneity, cultural tolerance, adaptability, discrimination), and intergroup relations (e.g., social inequality and social distance). Conditions are also related to micro individual factors related to personal characteristics (e.g. adaptability), duration of stay, generational differences, position in the society, and situational support in a context. Acculturation conditions and orientations result in acculturation outcomes that will help us understand how the identity is shaped in the work environment.

Methodology

A qualitative approach is deemed conducive to this study as this approach supports exploring views, perceptions, and feelings,

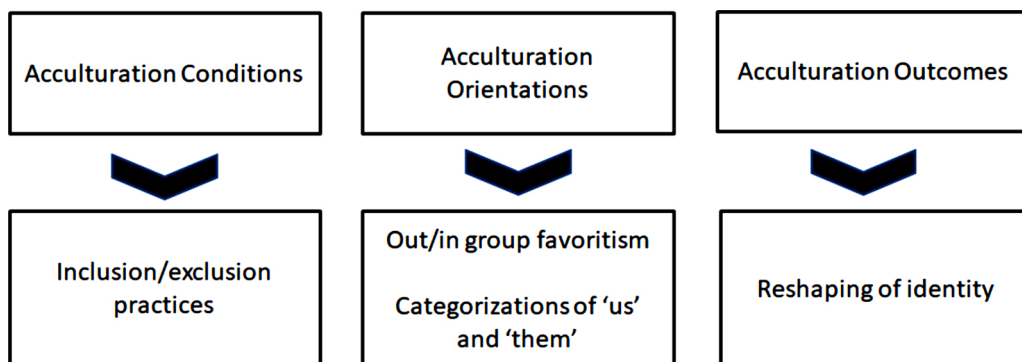


Fig. 1. Conceptual framing combining SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) & acculturation framework (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2006).

which are necessary to fulfil this study's objectives. A qualitative approach is also advocated in research with forced migrants (Rodgers, 2004). Our qualitative approach adopted a phenomenological perspective, since this perspective helps in clarifying the unique experiences of participants and issues related to their daily lives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), thus, supporting the researchers in understanding the daily experiences of Syrian refugees and issues related to their inclusion and/or exclusion in the Jordanian context (Refai et al., 2018; Shane & Venkataraman, 2001). This approach is supported by a recent study conducted by Owino and Weber (2020).

The study draws on one-to-one interviews with 12 Syrian refugees who arrived in Jordan at different time intervals since the onset of the Syrian crisis in 2012. All refugees were selected from amongst those living outside camps, as those living inside camps do not interact with citizens from the host country (i.e. Jordanians) on a daily basis, and thus cannot support our understanding and exploration of the particular objectives of this research.

Given that semi-structured interviews are flexible, the key questions in the interviews were anchored based on the 3 aims of the present study, and participants were also encouraged to express their beliefs and perceptions further. More specifically, the interview guide (see Table 1) aimed at exploring the cultural exclusion (and/or inclusion) pressures they face in Jordan, the extent to which they confront outgroup discrimination from others who do not share similar identity, values, backgrounds and other traits, and finally the way they identify themselves. The interview started with an introductory question "how was the journey to Jordan?". This was followed by a question to stimulate participants' thinking about how they viewed themselves back in Syria: "what did you do in Syria?". Then, more in depth questions were asked to gain insights from participants regarding cultural practices, group discrimination, and identity.

Procedure, sample and ethics

All interviews were conducted over Skype calls by one of the co-authors of this paper and a research assistant who supported the work on the present study. The researcher was located in the UK and the research assistant was in Jordan. The research assistant arranged the times of interviews with the Syrian refugees in Jordan, visited them at their homes, went through the consent forms with them, and monitored the Skype calls. All participants were made aware of the research aims, questions, anonymity, and the duration of the interviews. Interviews were conducted in Arabic, audio recorded, and transcribed verbatim by the researcher who conducted the interviews. The same researcher also translated the interviews into English for later analysis.

The interviews lasted approximately 20–45 min. It is worth mentioning here that the research assistant on the present study is of Syrian origins, and this helped in further empathising and establishing rapport with the participants.

The majority of the sample were males (9). The sample includes diverse age groups ranging between 24–67. All participants were married, and 83 % of the sample had previously worked in Syrian, only 41.6 % of them are working now in Jordan. All other refugees were seeking working opportunities. The majority held primary/high school degrees, whereas one of them held Bachelor degree in Medical science. The sample characteristics are presented in Table 2.

All questions were carefully designed to minimize the probability of causing anxiety and discomfort to participants, who were clearly informed about their right to withdraw from interviews at any time. After explaining the research goals and objectives, the participants were asked for their approval to take part in the interview to ensure the integrity of the research. All participants were inquired for their permission for the interviews to be audio/tape recorded. Also, the participants were then fully anonymized in the study. After conducting the interviews, the data was kept in a secure file/locker on the researcher's laptop/room for records.

Data analysis and findings

Data analysis was undertaken following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis, which has been advocated in

Table 1
Interview guide.

Type of question	Question	Objective of question
Demographic	1. Age 2. Gender 3. Year of entering Jordan 4. Qualification 5. Marital status	Descriptive data
Opening and motivational questions	<i>How was the journey to Jordan?</i> <i>What did you do in Syria?</i>	Stimulate participant's thinking
Key questions	<i>Are Jordanians supportive?</i> <i>How can they support?</i> <i>What about social cohesion between Syrians and Jordanians?</i> <i>How is life in Jordan?</i> <i>What is unique about Syrians?</i> <i>What is unique about Syrians and their skills?</i> <i>How do you describe refugees who start businesses?</i>	Gaining in-depth insights about: Cultural factors and outgroup favouritism Syrian refugees' identity
Closing questions	<i>Thanking the participants</i>	Closing the interviews

Table 2
Participants' demographics.

#	Gender	Arrived in Jordan	Age	Marital status	Education	Employment in Syrian	Employment in Jordan
P1	Male	2014	50	Married	Medical science	Radiology specialist - hospital	Selling detergents & medical equipment
P2	Male	2014	24	Married	Primary school	Poultry business	None
P3	Male	2014	67	Married	None	Labourer	None
P4	Male	2013	31	Married	Primary school	Labourer	None
P5	Male	2012	32	Married	None	Labourer	None
P6	Male	2012	28	Married	High school	Dry cleaning specialist - own business	None
P7	Male	2012	55	Married	High school	-Agriculture/land owner -Van driver -School car park manager	None
P8	Male	2012	24	Married	Primary school	None	None
P9	Male	2013	40	Married	None	None	Grocery shop-Owner
P10	Female	2012	47	Married	Midwifery	Midwife	Selling detergents
P11	Female	2013	38	Married	None	House wife	Selling homemade food
P12	Female	2013	38	Married	High school	Primary school teacher	Selling homemade soap
%	75 % M		25 % (20 s)	100 % Married	50 % Primary/high school degrees	83 %	41.6 %
	25 % F		33.3 % (30 s)				
			16.6 % (40 s)				
			16.6 % (50 s)				
			8.3 % (60 s)				

previous qualitative studies in general (Anderson, 2012; Bowers, Redsell, & Bowers, 2017), and those exploring refugees in particular (Refai et al., 2018). This approach goes in line with the present study as it supports inductive reasoning to develop conspicuous propositions towards constructing an empirical-testable framework. The steps in this approach involved transcribing data, reading transcripts, making notes through another round of reading, generating initial codes in a systematic way across the data set, producing a thematic map through 'back' and 'forth' reading between the transcripts, codes, and categories to allow themes to emerge, and finally selecting compelling extracted examples and direct quotes that help achieve the research aims and validate the findings.

This analysis was carried out jointly by the co-authors of this paper, where regular meetings were arranged to ensure transparency and consistency. Similarities and differences across all interviews were identified, which in turn resulted in a final list of three themes. In a later stage, to ensure credibility of the data, one researcher reviewed the data for significant statements and themes to help maintain objectivity and limit the inherent subjectivity of the data analysis. This process provided an opportunity for data verification similar to inter-rater reliability (IRR) checks (Constas, 1992, as cited in Owino & Weber, 2020).

The emerged themes presented in this section are related to the main aim of exploring various cultural practices and group interactions that influence Syrian refugees in their employment/self-employment in Jordan, and whether and how these practices reshape their identity in the work environment. The first two themes (cultural exclusion/inclusion practices, and outgroup favouritism) emerged from discussions with refugees around understanding the extent of their engagement in the Jordanian culture and whether they felt welcomed in the new host country. The third theme (refugees' vocational identity) emerged from discussions around various cultural practices and personal/group interactions in Jordan, and how these practices influenced refugees' views about themselves and how they are perceived. Following is a presentation of these themes in more detail.

Theme one: cultural exclusion/inclusion practices

Syrian refugees shared a common view, stating that both Jordanian and Syrian have a similar culture. P6 said that "*thesocial cohesion is there; we are two very similar cultures*". This view was supported by P1 who also stressed the significance of the geographical location from which Syrian refugees originated: "*many Syrians, particularly those coming from south Syria, share family routes with the Jordanian families. We are very close two nations. So they use the family ties to connect with Jordanians from same families*".

Alongside common family routes, some respondents elaborated on other reasons that strengthen social cohesion highlighting factors as language, religion, customs, and food. For example, P10 said: "*It's nice and the best thing about it is that it is very close to our culture in terms of language, religion, customs, food...etc. it's never been my ambition to migrate to Europe. Language would be a big barrier; I hear stories from my family who left to Turkey about how difficult the children are finding it at school*".

Additionally, some participants added that social cohesion has been fuelled by the Jordanian traditions of sharing and respect that allow them to share their limited resources despite the difficult economic conditions. For instance, P2 said "*it's a country [Jordan] with very limited resources, but yet Jordanians have shown a great deal of support; they've shared their food, money and accommodation with us despite the difficulties they face*". Another participant stressed these Jordanian traditions, and added that safety and security in the

country have supported more cohesion amongst people. P7 said “so if I had one apple tree in my garden, and my brother came to live with me, I would definitely share my apples with him and his family. Safety, of course, is the biggest blessing. May God always protect this country and bless it with safety and security.”

Participants also mentioned that the longer the time they have spent in Jordan, the better the social cohesion and integration. For example, P1 said “at the beginning of the crisis, there was more social conflict, as I guess. Now, it is more settled and you can see more cohesion”. This view was supported by P4 who said “in terms of social cohesion, I guess that is going well, and you can feel it improving over the years”. P2 also agreed to this and highlighted that Jordanians and Syrians are “becoming more adaptive and understanding of other’s needs... I guess we both had to make sacrifices and compromises, but Jordanians have been very understanding”.

P8 added that social cohesion and ties with Jordanians have been promoted through business relations, which both sides see as significant: “social ties are good and they have to be good. It is important to maintain good relations to start businesses and so that life can go on. Social cohesion is improving with time. At the beginning it was quite bad, but people’s understanding of the crisis and its detrimental consequences is improving; these things take time and that is understandable. Of course it varies from one place to another, it is less obvious in villages, but in general it is improving”.

Despite practices encouraging more cultural cohesion, some participants talked about the negative influence of a growing sense of competition amongst Jordanians and Syrians, and the weak economic situation in Jordan, which have disturbed the social cohesion ties; yet, these ties are still good nevertheless. For example, P7 mentioned that “we share the same culture, we’re all the same. Definitely, there is a sense of competition particularly that the economic situation here is bad. But social cohesion is good and nice amongst us, we’re like brothers and sisters”.

In a similar theme, respondents pointed out that one of the most frequently highlighted barriers for Syrian refugees is attributed to employment and working opportunities. As indicated by the participants, these barriers were described as “unreasonable impediments”, which they are trying to overcome in order to sustain their financial responsibilities. For example, P4 said “I wish job opportunities can be made more flexible; i.e. with wider possibilities for competition. It would be great if we can have more support in getting permanent job contracts that would offer us some sort of stability.” This idea was also supported by P5 who said “I work in painting [decorator], but can’t get a job permit as painter. So I work without any permit. However, legal restrictions are easier to overcome than financial ones, as sometimes legal issues are overlooked by officials, but not always.”

When asked about the possibilities of starting their own businesses, refugees answered that they need the support of a Jordanian sponsor in order to start any business as they cannot register a formal business under their own names. Therefore, many of them turn to informal ways of starting a business in collaboration with a Jordanian citizen. Interestingly, P1 pointed out the superiority of social factors over the power of law when it comes to supporting refugees in starting their own businesses. He said “Jordanians know that they are breaking the law... most of the times family ties and social commitments are stronger. However, an important point to bear in mind is that there are no guarantees for the Syrians who establish the business in this way.”

Implicit in this theme is that refugees were aware that the similarity between both Jordanians and Syrians (e.g., culture, language, religion, and customs) is important for social cohesion and integration. Under this theme, it is also clear that the job competition, especially in a limited resource country, has an adverse impact on social integration and cohesion.

Theme two: outgroup and ingroup favouritism

As explained above, some questions included in the interviews aimed at gaining greater awareness and understanding of how people in Jordan are treating Syrian refugees. Based on the data analysis, a second theme emerged in relation to out/ingroup favouritism. In light of SIT (i.e., ingroup favouritism over outgroup), the participants’ answers indicated that the notion of this theory is partially applicable amongst Jordanians – i.e., some participants are facing outgroup discriminatory treatment, while others are facing fair preferential treatment.

Although some participants highlighted how they have been assisted and welcomed by Jordanians, others stated that they have been the target of negative attitudes. The following quote by P2 shows such negative attitudes that Syrian refugees are facing from “others” (outgroup members) are expected and normal considering that – in any society – it is expected to find more and less tolerant/adaptive people, “Syrians have to engage, network, and place a lot of effort. It is not easy. A lot of people are nice and supportive, but of course we can face some unpleasant experiences, which is rather normal I believe”.

This view was also confirmed by P6, P9 and P10, who added that such behavior is normal from both sides who might show discriminatory treatment, e.g., P9 explained this idea by saying “we’ve heard a lot of bad and racist comments and still do sometimes, but it is always normal to see good and bad people everywhere”. P6 agreed with the statement above and mentioned that “there are negative people from both sides but that is expected. Life has and continues to teach us all”. P10 also mentioned that “of course some people complain of mistreatment, but you will always find good and bad people. I believe it’s getting better in time”.

Despite this occasional negativity, respondents generally elaborated that they are happy with the way they were treated by Jordanians, which is mostly welcoming and supportive. This might be contradictory to SIT perspective on outgroup/ingroup discrimination/favouritism. P2 mentioned that “Jordanians have shown a great deal of support; they’ve shared their food, money, and accommodation with us despite the difficulties they face”, and P11 highlighted that “Jordanians have been great and very welcoming; they supported us through our hardships and that means the world to us”.

Further, and in contrast to SIT, participants consistently stated how they are pleased because their children, inside schools, are treated fairly without any discrimination from others. For example, P9 said that “my children go to evening public schools and do not face racism issues”, and P6 said “the most important thing is that my children are happy at school and do not feel discriminated against, that is really good”. P4 also shares a similar view by stating that his “children in school are happy and have no issues, thank God”. This gave an

indication that parents perceived their children's feelings of inclusion as significant in terms of issues of discrimination and favouritism, and decisions as to whether to stay in the new host country or not. P10 and P11 explained that children's feelings of inclusion have been enhanced by the absence of "language barrier" (P10) and the time spent in Jordan which meant that "Jordanians and Syrians have got used to each other... the children they face no problems at all" (P11).

This theme implies that although refugees faced some uncomfortable reactions from Jordanians at the beginning of the crisis, these outgroup unfair treatments have been minimized through social cohesion and integration. It is also clear that refugees are satisfied since their children are not influenced by discriminatory practices or groups' conflicts.

Theme three: resilience and adaptation of Syrian refugees in new work environment

In light of SIT, being treated as a foreigner or outsider challenges the sense of self-definition and self-identity. The participants repeatedly mentioned that they consider work and other work related aspects (e.g. skills, abilities) as relevant for their self-identity, rendering work necessary not only for financial reasons, but also to define refugees' ability to bounce back and thrive in foreign country and surroundings. This helped refugees adapt the changes in the new work environment.

Here, findings show that the identity is being reshaped around vocational aspects, particularly that many aspects that were relevant to their professional identity and social status in Syria are no longer valid in the new Jordanian context. This has urged refugees to shift their focus towards their vocational skills. Although unemployed and underemployed refugees have lost their original identity which was largely based on their professional and social status, reshaping this identity around vocational skills in the host country has enhanced their ability to fit into available employment niches in ways that promote their employment/self-employment opportunities. For instance, P2 commented:

"A lot of Syrians have skills and qualifications, but at many instances these have no value in Jordan. Many came from wealthy or above average social classes, some have recognisable family names in Syria, but that are not worth much here. So I guess we lose quite a lot of our social status (like our family name) and our qualifications here".

The difficult financial situations facing Syrian refugees in Jordan has forced them to accept any kind of job, where the reshaped identity around vocational skills has become an important part of their identity in the Jordanian work environment. For example, P4 explained that "Syrians accept anything, any job to survive daily lives. We are skilled in crafts, cooking, baking, building, agriculture". This was also supported by P10 who said "Syrians have multi skills and are happy to do anything in order to survive and support their family and beloved ones", and P11 who mentioned that "we work in hardships and earn our living. We're very good in crafts and sewing as well. I guess that is the life we got used to in Syria".

Of course, it is not surprising to see that the lack of networks in Jordan alongside lack of knowledge of the market have hindered the development of Syrian refugees' vocational identities, but have urged them to seek further networks with Jordanians. For example, P1 explained the following: "I tried with my wife to prepare some ready meals and specialty foods (Maqdoos, like pickled aubergines, and jams), we tried to sell them through our networks but unfortunately the culture (or understanding) of trading amongst our networks was lacking".

In this regard, respondents stressed their flexibility, ability to adapt, learn, and develop new vocational skills, thus, making their identity more resilient; this is reflected by the way they view themselves as Syrians and survivors. For example, P8 mentioned that "Syrians are multi skilled and very adaptive, fast learners, and do not fear to take on new and different challenges". A similar point was raised by P11 who claimed that "Syrians are multi skilled in cooking and baking, they are really good in adapting and in utilizing any available resources". The following quotations also show how Syrian refugees perceive their abilities in working, for example, P2 said:

"Syrians distinguished by cooking and baking skills. We have a lot of artisans and craftsmen. Sewing and embroidery skills are also widely available. Baking and cooking in particular! You can notice that in number of restaurants you see that they employ Syrian refugees".

Also, P7 highlighted that:

"Syrians in general are hard workers and very adaptive in nature; both men and women. Syrians in general are multi skilled, so you would usually find them working in different things; e.g. a school manager can have his own land and know how to build.

We are very good labourers, excellent in baking and cooking. The kind of life we led in Syria urged us to become like this".

Participants also reflected a strong self-image of confidence. As said by P1, "Syrians in general are able to defy difficult circumstances. They are able to learn and adapt situations quite flexibly". Another example was pointed out by P12 who said that "we, Syrians, are hard workers by nature. That is the way we've been raised up. We are fighters and survivors". These views were confirmed by P3 who said:

"Syrians are survivors; they have many skills. They are good in everything! Yes, everything! You name it and we can do it! artists, builders, decorators, cooks, bakers... we're even talented in agriculture. If you've been to Syria before the crisis you'd know what I mean. I am sure Syrians will rebuild Syria to become even better than it was".

Participants also highlighted that legal barriers, reflected in restricted work permissions, challenge refugees' professional integration, for example, P7 said:

"Work permits in Jordan, however, are limited to agriculture and labourers only. Other permits are rather impossible for refugees. Even if you're a medic, accountant, barber or a teacher you can't work in these professions here unless you're an investor. The only case is to show a unique demand or need in a particular area; this is sometimes possible with NGOs but it's very hard to get and very confined".

One participant (P12) mentioned how she started to learn different vocations to meet the financial demands. She said that "I

learned how to make soap from Facebook, I found it rather easy and most of all it cost me nothing to learn from FB!... I then created my own FB page and started my own ‘very small’ business... I recently learned how to make deodorant stick bars as well from FB! I expanded my business to sell deodorants as well. I have lot of idea. I am an artist by nature”. The results suggest that the focus on vocational skills that go in line with the work environment promotes a more resilient identity in refugees and enhances their adaptability in the new context.

Discussion

In the present study, we set out to (1) explore how cultural practices (inclusion/exclusion practices) may support (or hinder) Syrian refugees’ employment/self-employment in Jordan, (2) identify whether any ingroup (Jordanian) favouritism exists over outgroup (Syrian refugees), and (3) highlight whether and how both the cultural practices along with group favouritism reshape Syrian refugees’ identity in the work environment. A conceptual framing is proposed in Fig. 1 to uncover these objectives. With reference to the present study’s findings, the conceptual framework has been developed in Fig. 2, specifically in relation to Syrian refugees in Jordan. As indicated in Fig. 2, findings highlight several cultural exclusion/inclusion practices that have been impacted by acculturation conditions in Jordan.

On the one hand, inclusion practices manifest in the satisfaction of Syrian refugees with the safe and secure environment in Jordan and the unique Jordanian customs and traditions, which emphasize hospitality and welcoming of guests. This finding lends support for Lockhart and Barker’s (2018) study indicating that several Jordanian workers perceive Syrian workers as easy to work with, highlighting the cultural similarities between the two countries. Our findings suggest that refugees feel comforted by the fact that both countries share similar food and cultural values, norms, religion, and language, all of which has enhanced and supported their integration in Jordan. This integration has also improved over time and with generations, particularly considering the adaptable personalities of many Syrians, the growing merged families (through marriage from in-between both groups), and the social and

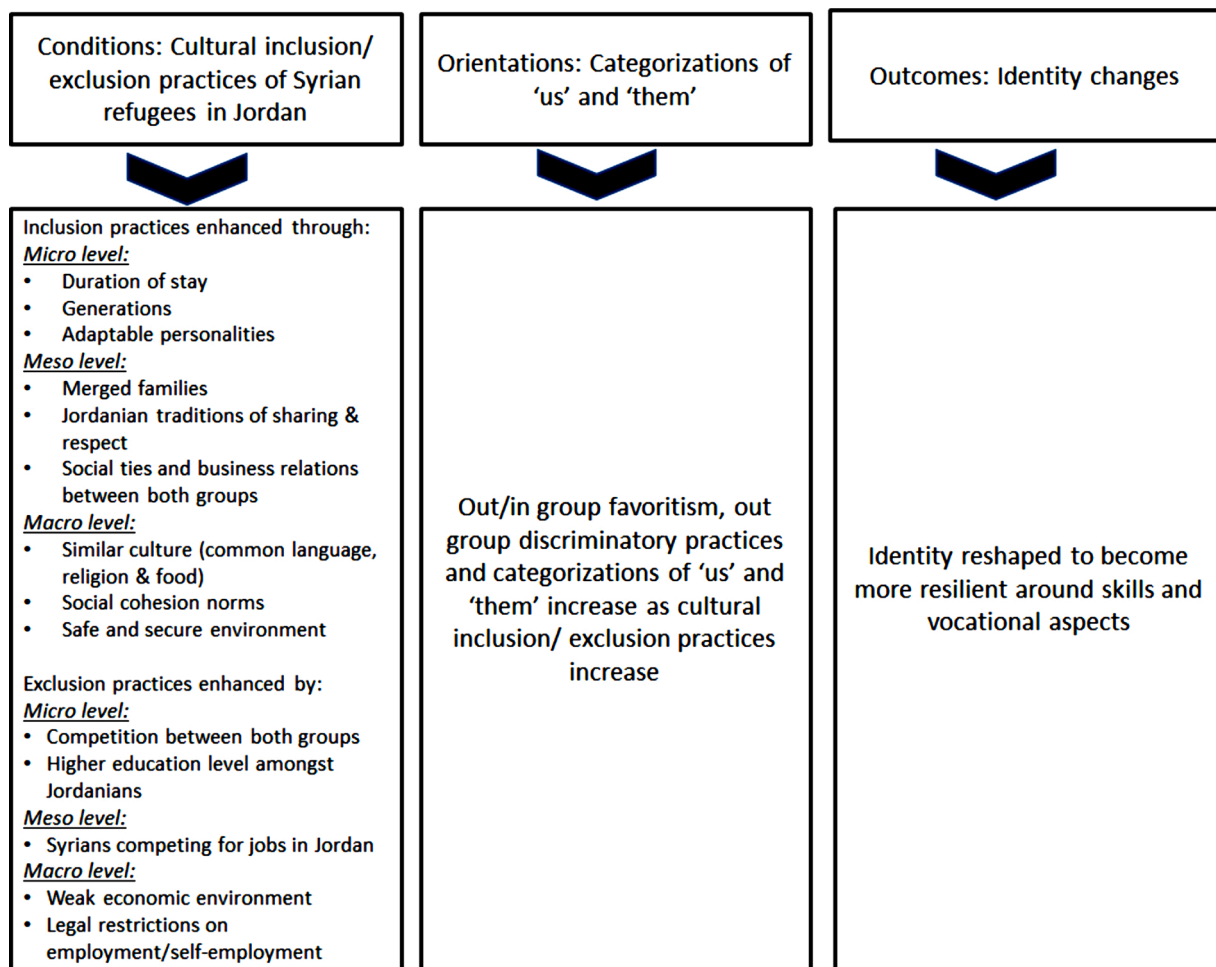


Fig. 2. Developed conceptual framework as applicable to this study’s findings – The impact of inclusion/exclusion practices on the identity of Syrian refugees in Jordan.

business networks that are valued by both groups.

On the other hand, findings indicate that Syrian refugees in Jordan face exclusion that mainly manifests in the form of competition amongst employment opportunities. Here, Syrians find it difficult to compete mainly due to lack of networks and knowledge of the Jordanian market, and the fact that Jordanians are generally better-educated and qualified rendering it difficult for Syrians to compete against them on the basis of qualifications. This has been coupled by the difficult economic conditions facing refugees, but also the wider difficult Jordanian economic conditions alongside legal restrictions on work. This finding is in light of Refai et al.'s (2018) and Achilli's (2015) studies which suggest that Syrian refugees in Jordan are confronting different obstacles that adversely impact their integration in the work or employment context.

Moving to the second objective, findings indicate that Syrian refugees confront both outgroup unfavourable treatment and also outgroup preferable treatment from Jordanians at the same time. Findings indicate that outgroup unfavourable treatment with discriminatory practices seem to increase as cultural exclusion practices increase, and vice versa. What is theoretically interesting here is the notion that the SIT can be partially applicable to Syrian refugees in Jordan – i.e. refugees, who share a largely similar culture as Jordanians – are facing outgroup discriminatory treatment, whilst similarly facing fair preferential treatment. This finding lends support for the experimental study (minimal group experiment) that was conducted by Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, and Flament (1971) by which ingroup favouritism can be supported under several conditions, suggesting that allocating people into different groups leads to discrimination against outgroup members.

In relation to objective 3, we note that due to the need for reestablishing their lives and careers in a new country, employment/self-employment is viewed by Syrian refugees as important not only to satisfy financial needs, but also to define themselves. As indicated in Fig. 2, findings show that inclusion/exclusion practices in Jordan alongside acculturation orientation of favouritism has promoted Syrian refugees to reshape their identity to become resilient by focusing it around vocational aspects. This finding is in light of the prior studies that show that resilience may be improved depending on the individuals' characteristics (Connor & Davidson, 2003), and their ability to integrate with the new environments in host countries (Bean et al., 2007). This idea implies that, although inclusion practices have enhanced refugees' integration and social cohesion, the co-existing exclusion practices fuelled by difficult conditions (including financial, economic, and legal conditions) have contributed to re-shaping refugees' identities to adapt the new work environment and seek alternatives around vocational aspects, rendering those refugees more resilient and accepting to several vocations. Krause and Schmidt (2020) support this view - i.e., refugees' resilience can be viewed in terms of their ability to absorb the difficult situations and deal with crises; in the present study, through reshaping identities.

Despite our agreement with the SIT in the sense that ingroup members may discriminate against outgroup people (others) who do not share similar cultural memberships, religion, beliefs, and other attributes (Tajfel, 1979), we contribute to SIT by offering a contrary perspective showing that outgroup people who share similar culture, language, and religion are likely to always confront outgroup preferable and fair treatment. The similarity between two cultures (here, Jordanian and Syrian) is used to explain the lack of negative favouritism, however, the ingroup favouritism does not necessarily require large cultural differences between groups. This highlights an interesting theoretical notion that the lack of pervasive discrimination reported by the refugees could be due to community and societal practices, rather than just a similarity between two cultures.

Conclusion

Because there is “a dizzying number of potential motives guiding identity construction” (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016, p. 116), our study focuses on a selection of core cultural needs or practices relating to the social identity establishment of Syrian refugees in Jordan. Specifically, because being a ‘refugee’ includes not only a story of loss, but also several difficulties of facing undesirable definitions imposed on oneself such as, foreigner and untrustworthy (Wehrle et al., 2018). The present study is directed towards understanding how Syrian refugees define themselves in Jordan. Seeking to achieve this, we offer empirical evidence and a framework that may be used as a heuristic guideline for employers and policy makers in Jordan and other hosting countries.

Social identity becomes an important lens through which people encounter new cultural exclusion or even inclusion practices. Without studying identity (re)constructions in new cultural contexts, the success of typical social and work integration may fail in terms of improving individual and organizational performance. In the present study, the basis for understanding these identity reconstructions is explored through a combination of Social Identity Theory and the acculturation framework.

The present study contributes to knowledge by exploring how the inclusion/exclusion practices impact on reshaping the identity of Syrian refugees in the Jordanian context. Through this exploration, the study highlights that inclusion/exclusion practices are not necessarily always limited to cultural differences between groups; rather, community and societal practices alongside the legal and economic conditions play a significant role in determining those inclusion/exclusion practices. We view this contribution as a significant extension to our understanding of SIT.

The study also contributes to literature on social identity highlighting how stressful conditions that refugees go through in new contexts can lead to reshaping their identities to become more resilient. In the case of Syrian refugees in Jordan, this resilience is evident through shaping identities around vocations skills to support integration and employment/self-employment in the work environment. The value of this paper is enhanced through the combined theoretical underpinning of SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) with the acculturation framework (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2006). On the one hand, the study highlights the value of SIT in understanding the acculturation orientations in the framework, particularly considering the scarcity of theoretical models available to explain this orientation. On the other hand, the acculturation framework adds to SIT (Korte, 2007) through its multi-level view on acculturation conditions that allows viewing inclusion and exclusion factors at the micro, meso, and macro levels (Iwasaki et al., 2005). As such, the present study not only demonstrates the applicability of social identity theory to the refugee context, but also

extends its current scope by highlighting different identity threats and adversarial group interactions through combining it with the acculturation framework.

The combined theoretical underpinning highlights the contribution of this paper going beyond the basic types of discrimination against refugees (e.g., gender, race, religion), to study how cultural inclusion/exclusion practices impact on refugees' identities and orientations towards ingroup/outgroup favouritism. Here, we suggest that despite practices encouraging cultural cohesion and inclusion (e.g. culture, language, religion, prolonged engagements), the difficult financial and economic conditions alongside legal restrictions in the new context contribute to exclusion of refugees. Financial and legal restrictions can supersede inclusion practices and promote exclusion that is reflected in competition and exclusion from the employment market in such ways that will force refugees to re-think how they view/present themselves in the work environment, where – in our case – this becomes focused around vocational aspects.

From a practical perspective, our results highlight the survivability and resilience of refugees in new contexts; those refugees strive to reestablish their self-image and identity towards turning barriers into opportunities, enhance their integration in the new community, and improve their employment/self-employment in the work environment. These challenges for boosting refugees' resilience call attention to more interventions of legal practices to reform, or at least minimize, stigmas that prevent refugees from recruitment and work integration. Therefore, we encourage the governments to explore the different set of skills that refugees arrive with and support them in implementing those skills in the new context; small ventures might be one option. Managers are also advised to develop sensitive workshops and awareness training programmes for stigma reducing practices in the workplace that lead to an equal treatment and zero tolerance of discrimination against refugees.

Limitations and future research

One limitation of the present study is related to sampling. On the one hand, there is possible over-representation of male participants in comparison to females. On the other hand, the sampling does not follow random selection of participants, but rather convenience sampling which could impact on the generalizability of findings (Rogelberg, 2017). This, of course, has been influenced by the nature of the sample in this study, who have been through crisis and might be reluctant about discussing their journeys, rendering convenience sampling more appropriate in this research. Furthermore, as an inductive-qualitative research, an inherent limitation would be in not allowing a true inference of causal links between constructs. We call for future studies to employ quantitative methods in testing the proposed model in this study, and apply it in different contexts.

In addition, the present study does not include a comprehensive understanding of all domains of refugees' adaptation per se, such as, psychological, behavioral, and emotional adaptation. To address these limitations, future studies are encouraged to explore other domains of adaptation and resilience not covered in the present study. A further limitation is that certain concepts, such as social exclusion and identity, are time and social-specific and can be defined differently. To address this problem, future researchers are advised to examine how people define these concepts, and how they might be influenced by time and social differences.

In summary, the study puts forward propositions for future exploration around differences and similarities between Syrian refugees and other refugee groups, the extent to which work environment factors (e.g. legal and economic) have a stronger influence on cultural inclusion/exclusion practices than cultural factors (e.g. language and religion), the relationship between in/outgroup favouritism, and the level of adaptation and resilience of refugees.

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Declaration of interest

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