

Citizen identity formation of domestic students and Syrian refugee youth in Jordan: Centering student voice and Arab Islamic ontologies

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Education research and policy do not feature the voices of students often enough. This is particularly true when it comes to the topic of citizenship education and the geographic region made up of the 22 Arab States. In *Citizen Identity Formation of Domestic Students and Syrian Refugee Youth in Jordan: Centering Student Voice and Arab-Islamic Ontologies*, Patricia Kubow has made an important contribution to filling this gap by producing a thoroughly researched, accessibly written, and locally grounded piece of research drawing on the voices of Jordanian and Syrian students in Amman to investigate their citizen identity formation. Hearing students' own nuanced understandings of national belonging that link to their "Arab", "Islamic", and "Jordanian/Syrian" citizenship identities is fascinating and shows the rich insights that can be gained by centering students' voices. I hope this book inspires more such work in the region and in the field of comparative and international education.

The book begins with an introduction to the philosophical orientation of the study (of centering the ontologies among students and across Arab-Islamic worldviews) and an introduction to the context of Jordan, the Syrian diaspora since 2011, and Jordan's approach to citizenship education. Kubow draws from a range of Jordanian, Islamic, and Arab scholars to develop this background chapter, providing the readers with a solid grounding in "local" ontologies and contextual realities.

In Chapter 2, Kubow grounds the study's qualitative methodology and use of focus groups in process philosophy, the centering of students' voices, and a concern with the social dynamics that manifest in groups to document aspects of citizenship identity among students. The methodology illustrates the insights that can be generated through the use of focus groups to investigate social dynamics rather than treating focus groups as a multi-person interview.

The third chapter explores the citizenship identities of Syrian schoolboys in Jordan as they navigate social and educational experiences of integration and exclusion. The chapter is valuable as it provides data on experiences in three double-shift schools (in which Syrians primarily attend the shorter afternoon shift while Jordanians primarily attend the morning) along with one single-shift school that had an explicit “preference for Syrian and Jordanian students to be mixed” (p. 53). The chapter illustrates how these 12- to 16-year-old Syrian boys express a pan-Arab and pan-Islamic identity more often than a sense of citizenship based on a nation-state. The chapter also shows how the boys frame their experience in Jordan in terms of hospitality that is rooted in cultural and religious traditions.

The fourth chapter explores the views of 79 female students, including Jordanians and Syrians. As was the case with male learners, the female students spoke about the importance of Arab unity, particularly with respect to support for Palestine. Their civic identities also recognised the role of the Jordanian government, especially King Abdullah II, in fostering an inclusive and secure country. The value of this security was particularly salient when contrasted with the instability in Syria. The chapter also illustrates the mix of opinions and experiences of the double-shift school system, with some learners having positive (or neutral) experiences and others experiencing discrimination through the double-shift system. Finally, the chapter shows how these young women were navigating their social identities through a gendered lens and wrestling with experiences of gender equality—and its limits—in Jordan.

Chapter 5 focuses on the perspectives and experiences of Jordanian boys in grades six to nine. As in other chapters, the boys express a pan-Arab identity rooted in a shared language, history, culture, and religion. However, their exposure to current political topics through the formal curriculum is limited, with the curriculum focusing on the past. The chapter also discusses some of the male students’ negative experiences at school, including abuse from teachers. The male students also discuss the economic challenges facing Jordan and the need for greater international burden sharing to support displaced Syrians.

Chapter 6 returns to the perspectives of the Jordanian and Syrian girls. Once more, they focus on the concept of a unified, transnational Arab identity. However, this unified identity is challenged by the different experiences of the Jordanian and Syrian students, especially when it comes to the double-shift school system and different senses of being included or excluded from Jordanian society.

Chapter 7 concludes the book with the key themes of the study, including students’ civic identities demonstrating a strong Pan-Arab Islamic identity. For Jordanian students, this pan-Arab, pan-Islamic identity co-exists with a Jordanian identity that prioritises historical events and security over addressing contemporary social cleavages. For Syrian students, respect and gratitude for the Jordanian government are balanced by experiences of marginalisation in school and society. Finally, the book shows how these civic identities are experienced differently by female and male learners.

This book makes an important contribution to the field of education-in-emergencies by representing one of the few research projects that includes substantial engagement and

analysis involving both refugee learners (e.g., Syrian students) and “host-community” learners (e.g., Jordanian students). Too often, research focuses on either (forced) migrants or local populations. Such narrowing is particularly problematic in contexts such as Jordan, where first- and second-generation migrants constitute a majority of the residing population.

By dedicating chapters to Jordanian students’ perspectives, Syrian students’ perspectives, and to both together in the same chapter—this book shows how we cannot understand the education of students who are forcibly displaced if we don’t simultaneously explore the experiences of the domestic “host” community students with whom they share their schools, teachers, and neighbourhoods. However, some chapters that focused on only Jordanian or Syrian male students could have benefited from being treated jointly, as was done in other chapters. One critique of the book’s handling of the two populations is that it does sometimes suggest the erroneous inference that the second shift *only* contains refugees and that the morning shift does not contain *any*—neither of which is true in Jordan, even if it was true in this study’s sample.

The gender analysis built into the structure of the study and the writing of the book generates interesting comparisons and contrasts when read as a whole. Both male and female students express pan-Arab and pan-Islamic identities that focus on commonalities rather than national differences, while also reflecting the dominant national narratives around the benevolence of the monarchy and a preference for safety over surfacing social tensions. However, male students highlight more negative experiences with teachers and more concerns about the economy, while female learners incorporate gender into their civic identities more readily.

This brings me to the boundaries of the current book, which open avenues for future research: (1) The book’s primary focus on double-shift schools raises questions about whether the findings would also arise in single-shift or camp-based schools. (2) The focus on an urban, cosmopolitan capital city raises questions about the application of the findings to more rural or less cosmopolitan areas in Jordan. This is especially true when looking at the findings related to students’ attitudes towards the monarchy, migrants, and the relative place of tribalism and pan-Arabism. (3) Finally, the book’s orientation towards social science opens up opportunities for historical scholars to connect Kubow’s findings with historical literature on conceptions of civic identity and political philosophy in Islam.

I want to end by congratulating Patricia Kubow on an excellent study and a thought-provoking book. I encourage anyone working on topics related to citizenship education, belonging, education-in-emergencies, and the intersection of education and migration to read this book.

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