Wendy Pearlman, "Online Appendix for 'Narratives of Fear in Syria' *Perspectives on Politics* Vol. 14, No. 1 (March 2016), pp. 1-17."

Twenty years of experience of living in and studying the Arab world has convinced me of the value of ordinary people's stories as a unique source of insight into the functioning of the region's power and politics, broadly understood. Open-ended interviews offer a way of collecting and documenting those stories. They are valuable because they create space for people to provide information that researchers might not think to elicit in questionnaires, and thus can offer perspectives and local knowledge that go missing in official histories and universal theories.[1] Furthermore, they allow people to express and elaborate upon issues in ways that convey what is meaningful to them. The interviews that I conducted for this work ranged from 20-minute one-on-one conversations to group discussions involving several individuals over hours, to oral histories recorded over days. I conducted them for the purposes of a larger book project exploring Syrians' stories and have written this and other stand-alone articles to probe more specific topics that have emerged in that body of material. This online appendix explains and describes my research methods with the goal of transparency and of facilitating others interested in the production and interpretive analysis of qualitative data of this sort.

General discussion on sampling

[1] See Molly Patterson and Kristen Renwick Monroe, "Narrative in Political Science," *Annual Review of Political Science* Vol. 1 (1998), pp. 315-331.

Given danger inside Syria, the most safe and feasible way for me to gather the stories of Syrian citizens was to interview those who had left the country. While displaced persons and refugees are not representative of the Syrian population as a whole, they are no small niche. Of Syria's pre-war population of 22 million, an estimated 6.4 million are currently internal refuges and 4 million external refugees.[2] Forced migration experts with whom I have consulted believe that most displaced persons move multiple times within Syria before ultimately fleeing its borders,[3] as was the case for many of my interviewees. The people with whom I spoke thus share the status of a very sizable, and continuously growing, percentage of all Syrians. The experiences that they recount are not peripheral.

Syria's refugee population is on the move and increasing daily. The overwhelming majority live in Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon, and the overwhelming majority of them are spread out in urban and rural neighborhoods outside official refugee camps.[4] Hundreds of thousands are not registered with the host state or the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. This flux and dispersion renders refugees a "hard to reach" population for which snowball sampling is an arguably appropriate approach.[5] Using snowball sampling, I used multiple entry points into different social networks, which gave me an interviewee pool that varied by age, class, region, and

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[2] As of February 2016. Ian Black, "Report on Syria conflict finds 11.5% of population killed or injured," *Guardian*, February 11, 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/11/report-on-syria-conflict-finds-115-of-population-killed-or-injured

[3] Email correspondence with Elizabeth Ferris, Co-Director, Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement, April 25, 2014.

[4] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Syria Regional Refugee Response."

[5] Leo A. Goodman, "Comment: On Respondent-Driven Sampling and Snowball Sampling in Hard-to-Reach Population and Snowball Sampling Not in Hard-to-Reach Populations," *Sociological Methodology* Vol. 41, No. (August 2011): 350.

rural/urban background, among other characteristics. In addition, I carried out research in multiple towns in both Jordan and Turkey, two countries that have together absorbed more than two-thirds of UN-registered Syrian refugees.[6] Most of Syria's forced migrants cross the borders nearest their homes. Fieldwork in the countries respectively on its southern and northern frontiers thus gave me access to individuals from different parts of Syrian that had had different experiences in the conflict. Beyond this, a measure of fluidity across borders allowed me to interview some people who were passing through neighboring countries but continued to reside primarily inside Syria. The result is that I managed to obtain a sample that, while no exact mirror of the Syrian population, is rich and varied. The fact that I was able to contact people and conduct interviews in Arabic was essential to that end; I never would have been able to gain access to the range of interviewees and the kinds of stories I did, were I not able to speak directly with people in their language.

Identifying interviewees

The first challenge in carrying out this research was to determine how to make contact with displaced Syrians, and do so in such a way that I could both gather as varied a sample as possible, and ensure that human subjects were safe, comfortable, and unpressured in candidly sharing their stories. Prior field research, and especially on sensitive topics related to protest, violence, and personal suffering in conflict, convinced me of the value of being introduced to potential interviewees through someone whom

[6] As of February 13, 2016. See United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Syria Regional Refugee Response," http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php

they knew and trusted. This was particularly the case in settings where people had fears of informants or undercover intelligence agents, or other suspicions about the motives of foreigners asking them questions related to politics.

In planning my first field research for this project, in Jordan in August-September 2012, I therefore began by reaching out to people who might act as trusted connectors to Syrians there. I did a thorough review of press articles about refugees in Jordan and contacted some of their authors to ask if they would help me with initial contacts. Two journalists generously agreed, giving me contact information for a few Syrians whom had they met in the course of their work. I contacted and interviewed those Syrian individuals, and they in turn introduced me to other Syrian acquaintances, who introduced me to still others in cities throughout Jordan. I repeated this process of snowball sampling using nearly every possible inroad to Syrian communities that I could brainstorm. Pulling upon decades of experience in Middle East studies, I contacted colleagues, friends, acquaintances, and students -- in the US or elsewhere -- who had connections in Jordan or Syria who might be able to lead me to potential interviewees. I asked the same of others with whom I came into contact -- from staff at the academic research center where I was living to acquaintances I met in the course of my everyday life. I followed up on their suggestions to the greatest extent possible, each of which opened into a different pocket of Syrian life in Jordan. I usually ended interviews asking for suggestions of others whom I could interview, or followed-up interviews with thank-you messages or phone calls repeating that request.

I found it easiest to access professionals, such as artists, journalists, medical care professionals, and people working in nongovernmental organizations, who already

worked publicly on issues related to Syria. Such individuals and their contact information were often identifiable via online resources, such as websites for the institutions or organizations with which they were affiliated, and thus I did not need an intermediary to contact with them. A different approach was useful for interviewing people in more disadvantaged socio-economic situations. To that end, on several occasions, I accompanied individuals or groups making house visits to poor refugee families as a part of their charitable or relief work. This facilitated my ability to meet and interview people in marginalized areas. I also made visits to hospitals, clinics, and rehabilitation homes, where I was often able to interview a mix of patients, family members accompanying patients, and staff members. Finally, I made five interviewing trips to the Zaatari refugee camp. Entrance to Zaatari was possible only with permission or as a guest of an authorized group. I entered on different occasions with an Amman-based medical NGO, with UNICEF, with a Syrian individual engaged in relief work, or with a Jordanian employee in camp operations.

Apart from one-on-one interviews, I was able to record a few gatherings akin to informal focus groups. On a few occasions, I was introduced to a group of Syrian friends or family members who were gathered together, and they consented to allow me to audio record several hours of their free-flowing conversation and reminiscing. These situations, in which individuals triggered each other's memories and asked each other questions, were especially fruitful. Different speakers faded in and out of the recording, sometimes engaging in dialogue and sometimes giving space for a single individual to tell a personal story in an extended monologue.

During the course of five weeks, I carried out interviews in Amman, Irbid, Mafraq, Ramtha, Zarqa, and the Zaatari camp. I returned to Jordan in late August 2013 to do follow-up interviews with people whom I had met previously, as well as interview people who had arrived in Jordan since my previous visit. Knowing that most refugees fled the borders closest to their homes, I then traveled to Turkey where I spent September-November 2013 interviewing people hailing from different regions in Syria. Staying in Istanbul, Antakya, Reyhanlı, and Gaziantep, I began with a handful of initial contacts and used snowball methods to reach an abundance of interviewees, as I had previously. My March 2016 article in *Perspectives* is based on data collected during those trips. Since then, I have carried out more field research in Turkey from November 2015-January 2016 (in Istanbul, Reyhanlı, and Gaziantep), as well as in Lebanon in January-February 2016 (in Beirut, Tripoli, the Bekka Valley, and northern Akkar). The more time I have spent in the field, the more contacts and credibility I have accumulated in Syrian communities, and thus the more I have obtained access to different entryways into varied social networks.

I conclude with two observations about my experience identifying interviewees. First, the social and family-networked character of Syrian society greatly aided my access to ever-wider circles of interviewees. For example, when I met interviewees in their homes, there was a strong likelihood that I would also end up interviewing other family members who were there or extended relatives who stopped by at some point. As frequently, someone in the household would take me to interview other friends or relatives in the same building or neighborhood. Similarly, when I arranged to interview someone at his or her place of work, it was not unusual for me to find myself with the

opportunity to interview other staff employees in the office, as well. The same was the case when I scheduled interviews at cafés that were popular among Syrians in the area; on many occasions, the interviewee would introduce me to another acquaintance who happened to be at the café, who then agreed to be interviewed or connected me to others to interview.

Second, as is usually the case with fieldwork, some great research opportunities were unplanned and even random. To name one of many examples, two Syrian friends once invited me to tag along as they visited different health care providers in the hope of selling dental equipment on commission. This led to an impromptu interview with the business manager in a medical NGO. In many occasions, the choice to go with the flow and follow unforeseen opportunities -- within the bounds of safety and sound judgment -- proved an invaluable way of meeting research subjects and observing social spaces that I otherwise would not have been able to access.

Third, my field research carried an ethnographic component. During the months in which I recorded formal interviews, I also immersed myself in Syrian refugee communities. In the course of fieldwork, I spent countless hours sharing meals, hanging out in kitchens, living rooms, and coffee shops, watching television with families, playing with children, etc. I developed enduring, meaningful friendships with some families, in the context of which I accepted invitations (or, in some cases, consented to insistence) to spend the night at their homes or room with them for longer periods. After this article was written, I also served as a volunteer teacher at a weeklong educational program for Syrian refugee children on the Turkish-Syrian border. In these different spaces, I listened, asked questions, and absorbed as much as I could about as many different facets of

Syrian society as possible. While the core of the data for this research is recorded life histories, this ethnographic dimension was invaluable in deepening a broader understanding with which to contextualize narratives and interpret their layers of meaning. It has allowed me to compare what people said to me in interview settings to what they said in less formalized life circumstances and to what they said when they were addressing each other, not me. The value of this kind of ethnographic knowledge, obtained only through participant-observation in the field, cannot be underestimated.

Conducting interviews

My interviews were open-ended. My aim was to obtain narratives in which interviewees described, in as much illustrative detail as possible, their personal experiences of authoritarian rule, protest, war, and displacement. These included their views of and encounters with the Syrian state before 2011, their expectations upon learning about early protests in other Arab countries and in Syria, the evolution of their experiences in the Syrian uprising and conflict thereafter, how and why they left their homes, and their lives in exile. Along the way, I encouraged interviewees to elaborate on events or issues of particular import to them and share their general reflections on what is unfolding in Syria. In addition, given my own academic study of social movements, I was particularly interested in understanding how people came to participate in dissent, if they did. Accordingly, I sought to gain the thickest possible descriptions of the early phase of the uprising, including the thoughts, feelings, conditions, and calculations involved in individuals' first instance of participation and the personal, social, and organizational dynamics affecting their participation thereafter.

Sometimes interviewees did not need an initial question in order to jump-start their narrative. For those who required more prompting, I asked a first question designed to provide a temporal starting point and anchor. During my first months of interviewing, when the start of the uprising was still relatively fresh, I often began by asking: "When you first heard about protests in Tunisia or Egypt, did you think that there would be protests in Syria, as well?" I found that this question provided a useful entry point into the 2011 rebellion while also inviting reflections on life before it, insofar as individuals' beliefs about whether or not protest would occur were necessarily based on their understanding of politics and society before that time. Later, as the start of protests became a more distant past, I began by asking, "What was your life like in Syria before 2011?" I found that this opener served the same function in that it likewise encouraged narratives that contained a balance of lived events and general reflections over a long time span.

I was struck by a few patterns that emerged about the process of conducting of interviews. First, at the conclusion of interviews, many people told me that they had never before told their life story to anyone. Second, and remarkable in that context, most interviewees were able to speak for an hour or more, fluidly narrating one lived event after another, without any need for specific questions or prompts on my end. When I asked questions, they were most often short and clarifying in nature (such as: *How? Why? What do you mean by that? What happened then?*), and posed for the purpose of encouraging the interviewee to elaborate on dimensions that he or she had not thought important to articulate in detail. I also interjected questions to redirect the flow of a person's narrative from speculative or abstract commentary, such as about geopolitics,

back to his or her own lived experience. Otherwise, I usually allowed an individual's testimonial to flow naturally. If, in the course of the interview, the interviewee did not freely offer the basic demographic information listed in the article's Table 1, I attempted to acquire it by the interview's end.

In accord with my IRB protocol, I assured interviewees that I would not use their names in my academic research (instead, I later assigned each a two-initial identifier). I asked interviewees for their permission to audio record and the overwhelming majority consented. In a few cases, people were not comfortable with being recorded or I met them in circumstances in which I was uncomfortable asking to record. In those instances, I handwrote field notes and typed them up as soon as possible.

Transcription and translation

The work of transcribing and translating audio-recorded interviews is tedious and tremendously time-consuming. I thus recruited and trained bilingual research assistants to assist me with this task, providing a translation glossary of key terms as useful. In the interests of time, assistants listened to the Arabic-language recording and wrote its translation in English; this typically takes them 5-12 minutes to transcribe each minute of recorded speech. During the first years of the project, I personally reviewed the accuracy of all translation-transcriptions. Later, I trained one of my most highly skilled translators to perform this role on my behalf. She did this by simultaneously listening to the audio recording and reading the transcript, making edits she found appropriate. Edits were subsequently shared with the original translators in order to help them better their translation skills.

Interpretive analysis

I used the "Scrivener" software program to organize qualitative analysis of my empirical material. Upon reading the first dozen or so transcripts, I began inductively identifying themes and patterns that emerged across them. These had a chronological dimension, in terms of relating to a particular era of Syrian history, and a substantive dimension, in terms of relating to issues, ideas, experiences, relationships, or kinds of event. In "Scrivener" I created a project that consisted of a dozen main folders, each reflecting a temporal phase of lived experience (i.e. life under Hafez al-Assad, Bashar's first decade in power, the start of the Syrian uprising, the initial regime response to protests, the opposition's militarization, the entrenchment of war, refugee flight, refugee life, etc.). Within them, I created dozens of subfolders and sub-subfolders that were more specified by time and place (i.e. the period from March 18-25, 2011 in Daraa) or by substantive content (i.e.. stories of imprisonment, mechanics of organizing protest, responses to regime actions, feelings of indignation, etc.). Within these folders, I created a series of documents in which I directly copied excerpts of interviews that illustrated, related to, or commented upon the respective temporal or substantive theme. These were referenced to identify the interviewee and annotated with other relevant information, if necessary. As I read a new transcript, I copied excerpts from them in an appropriate existing document or created a new document that more exactly reflected what I understood to be the essential point conveyed in the speaker's words. I did this until every comment or story of an interview transcript was integrated into the Scrivener project. That project, currently 490,000 words in length, is still under construction as I

continually do new interviews and acquire new transcriptions, and have not yet had a chance to consolidate documents or folders that overlap analytically.

This system of folders and documents gave me a framework of qualitative categories, expandable to greater detail and nuance or collapsible into over-arching topics. It has allowed me to identify themes emerging across narratives and across time within narratives, and also to organize empirical illustrations of those themes. One drawback of this method is that it divides individual narratives into pieces that illustrate analytical categories, and thus removes then from the context in which the individual articulated that thought or story. I have thus typically gone back-and-forth between the Scrivener file, organized by analytical categories, and the unbroken transcripts, organized by speaker.

It was through this interpretive analytical work that I identified fear, evolving over time, as a particularly salient way of making sense of Syrians' stories and reflections. Of course, reliance on individuals' self-reporting can be problematic. People might represent themselves in ways that claim lofty values and motives rather than admit to base ones.[7] Their memories can carry deliberate or inadvertent misrepresentations, or harden into social scripts. While noting that these potential distortions, also exist in written documents,[8] I attempted to mitigate them by cross-referencing interviews with each other and also to other forms of written, audio, and visual self-expressive data, which I mention in the article. Such triangulation helped me to assess how my interviewees' reflections compare with those of a much larger number of Syrians,

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[7] Wallace Martin. *Recent Theories of Narrative* (Ithaca and London: Cornel University Press, 1986), 75; Mark Beissinger, "Mechanisms of Maidan: The Structure of Contingency in the Making of the Orange Revolution," *Mobilization* Vol. 16, No. 1 (March 2011): 40

[8] Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*. 2nd ed (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005), 5-6, 19.

including those who are not refugees. I also compared what I recorded in the context of interviews to what I heard and saw in my general participant-observation with Syrian communities. As another tool to probe the overall soundness of my interpretations, I have given several presentations of this research in the United States, Turkey and Lebanon to audiences that include (or feature) Syrian citizens. Their responses to my work have helped me gauge how my interpretations resonate with their own life experiences and self-understandings.

Data and confidentiality

I am uncomfortable making available transcripts of my interviews for several reasons. First, I am continuing to organize, analyze, and use this data for the larger book project for which it was collected. Second, I did not obtain prior consent from my interviewees to make their words accessible online in that form and format. Nor was such usage authorized by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Northwestern University, which approved my research protocol in 2012 and has renewed that approval to cover the duration of my work with these data.

Third, my first obligation is to protect the security of my research's human subjects. The nature of the ongoing Syrian conflict -- in which civilians have been and continue to be targeted, tortured, killed, and displaced -- renders the safety of my interviewees a very real and grave concern. Most of my interviewees had at least some family remaining in Syria; given armed forces' retribution against relatives as a tactic, some reasonably worried that something they said might put those relatives' lives or welfare at risk, should it be known that they were the ones who said it. Beyond this, the

externally displaced themselves live in situations of varying levels of legal, financial, and physical vulnerability. Host states' deportations, or threats of deportation, continually remind refugees of the precariousness of their situations.[9] Recent assassinations of Syrian media activists in Turkey, believed at the hands of ISIS, further demonstrate that they can be located and punished for their free expression, even in countries assumed to be places of refuge.[10]

The dangerous and highly uncertain circumstances of ongoing war obligate me to treat field data and personal testimonials with extreme caution. Even published without names, interview transcripts, and sometimes even transcript segments, can contain sufficient identifying detail to render the speaker recognizable to those with local knowledge. Without a doubt, many Syrians (including some of my own interviewees) write, speak, or appear before cameras in ways that make public their identities. My instructions under the IRB, however, are to minimize risk to human subjects as much as possible and to ensure that any risks are reasonable in relation to anticipated benefits. I

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[9] Human Rights Watch, "Jordan: Vulnerable Refugees Forcibly Returned to Syria," November 23, 2014, https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/11/23/jordan-vulnerable-refugees-forcibly-returned-syria; Amnesty International, *Europe's Gatekeeper: Unlawful Detention and Deportation of Refugees from Turkey*, Report Index number: EUR 44/3022/2015, December 16 2015, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur44/3022/2015/en/; Olivia Alabaster, "Syrian refugees in Lebanon live in fear of deportation," *Al-Jazeera*, January 22, 2016, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/01/syrian-refugees-lebanon-live-fear-deportation-160117102350730.html

[10] Michael Pizzi, "Syrian anti-ISIL activist beheaded in Turkey," *Al-Jazeera America*, October 30, 2015, http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/10/30/syrian-anti-isil-activist-beheaded-in-turkey.html; Karam Shoumali, "Syrian Journalist Who Documented ISIS Atrocities Is Killed in Turkey," *New York Times*, December 28, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/29/world/europe/naji-jerf-documented-isis-killed-in-turkey.html?_r=1.

cannot release my interview data unless I am fully confident that doing so meets these criteria.