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M.Sc. Thesis Sociology of Development and Change

**Understanding the Role of Information and
Communication Technology during Forced Migration**
- ICTs as Social Navigation Tools for Syrian Refugees Displaced to Jordan -

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ABSTRACT

In an increasingly digital world, information and communication technology (ICT) gains significant importance in our everyday life as well as in research. With a steady presence of ICT, the Syrian refugee crisis is one of the most visible disasters of our times. ICTs play a major role in shaping the situation in Syria, and of Syrian refugees around the globe. This analysis explores the role ICT plays in helping Syrians navigate their often-challenging displacement situation in Jordan. The social navigation theory by Vigh functions as a framework to see these refugees as active agents, who shape their environment and tactically manoeuvre in changing and challenging circumstances. To understand the role of ICTs in these navigation efforts, the study utilizes the concept of resources developed by Ryan and colleagues, according to which refugees utilize a range of different resources to get along in their new surroundings. The analysis reveals that Syrian refugees in Jordan employ a variety of tactics and strategies to deal with the numerous challenges and uncertainties they face. ICTs as part of their resources pool play a crucial role, facilitating and even enabling their social navigation efforts. The results call for a refinement of our notion of refugees' agency: in a world shaped by smartphones and social media, we must see ICTs as a basic resource and perhaps even as a characteristic of refugees. Research as well as governmental and humanitarian programmes have to consider the essentiality of ICTs in the lives of forced migrants of today.

Keywords: Social Navigation, Information and Communication Technology, ICT, Refugees, Jordan, Resources, Adaptation, Smartphones, Syrian Refugee Crisis.

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1. Introduction

The Syrian Civil War – which started in 2011 – and the subsequent refugee crisis has been labelled as the ‘worst humanitarian crisis of our time’¹. Over the last six years, more than 11 million Syrians have been killed or displaced, many within Syria, but even more have left the country to find refuge in neighbouring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon or Turkey, or kept moving to reach the European Union. More than 650,000 Syrians have migrated to Jordan alone.

Syrian refugees on the move, as well as those who have settled in neighbouring countries or in Europe, face many difficulties, especially regarding employment, education, shelter, food, health services, integration and adaptation, or concerning psychosocial distress, such as trauma. Many live in cramped and unsanitary refugee camps, are homeless, have no access to education and employment, or reside in often hostile host communities. What we see in the media are terrible images of desperate, vulnerable, often exhausted people walking hundreds of kilometres with their personal belongings. They take the risky journey across borders by boat, truck, car, train, or foot and reside in makeshift shelter anywhere on their route.

What we also see throughout the media, is smartphones. Most of the impoverished looking refugees seem to have a smartphone, holding tight to it, charging it in every plug they can make use of, tapping and texting, calling and taking pictures wherever they are. Technology seems to be an essential part of refugees’ lives today. But why? What is the role of technology for forced migrants, what meaning do they attach to it – especially before, during, and after their flight? How does it help them survive – in a physical, but also in a mental sense, surrounded by hostility, despair, hopelessness, and exhaustion? Why is it particularly important for this generation of refugees, whereas many refugees and migrants before them have lived without digital devices? These are only some of the highly interesting questions the Syrian refugee crisis has raised in media and in the research world. This thesis wants to contribute by shedding light on some of them.

Despite the obvious problems and difficulties Syrians face during forced displacement, this paper takes the view that they are not merely helpless and dependent victims. As shown in a myriad of previous studies, migrants and refugees are by no means completely passive; rather, they show patterns of agency and tactical ‘muddling through’, constantly adapting to the given circumstances. However, in-depth investigations into the agency of Syrian refugees are rather rare. Based on the social navigation theory developed by Henrik Vigh, which demands to look

¹ See for instance Mercy Corps (2016).

at the interplay between agents, social forces and change, I want to investigate the tactics and manoeuvres Syrian refugees employ to navigate the at times difficult relocation in Jordan. To better understand how they do so, I use the adaptation theory from Ryan, Dooley and Benson as a framework. The theory allows us to explore the different resources (personal, material, social and cultural) refugees can utilise to navigate their settlement in Jordan, and understand their use of smartphones and other technical devices in that context.

Since information and communication technologies (ICTs) seem to be essential for refugees during forced migration, I want to investigate to what extent these technologies can function as social navigation tools for refugees, as part of the resources pool they can resort to. Therefore, the main research question of this study is: What is the role of information and communication technology as tools to facilitate social navigation for Syrian refugees displaced to Jordan? Interviews, observations, and questionnaires conducted during a 10-week field stay in Jordan in 2016 formed the main data source for this research.

Understanding the use of ICT in an increasingly digital and globalized world is as interesting as it is relevant. Given that the Syrian crisis is one of the first in the age of modern information and communication technology, it seems particularly interesting to look at this specific case. The study will significantly contribute to the research on social navigation of Syrian refugees, as well as on their use of ICT and its role as a daily social navigation tool. Getting an insight into this could help improve humanitarian as well as governmental assistance for refugees being displaced in the digital age.

Set-up of the Thesis

Chapter 2 gives an overview of previous literature on the topic of agency amongst migrants and refugees, as well as on ICT and its relevance for (forced) migrants. From this literature review, I develop the theoretical framework for this study, introducing the concepts of social navigation, and adaptation during relocation. *Chapter 3* describes the research methodology of my research, followed by a brief overview of the Syrian crisis and the situation of Syrian refugees in Jordan in *Chapter 4*. The main body of this thesis is introduced by discussing the problems and uncertainties Syrian refugees in Jordan face based on my analysis. The next chapter analyses the social navigation and adaptation of refugees during forced displacement in Jordan, before I turn to the importance of ICT in the life of Syrians and its role as social navigation and adaptation tools in the last section. I finish off with the conclusion in *Chapter 9*, answering the research questions and recapturing the main findings, as well as a discussion on the validity and limitations of this study, also pointing to ideas for future research.

2. Toward a Multidimensional Theoretical Framework: Looking Back and Moving Forward

Besides aiming to investigate how Syrian refugees deal with the uncertainties and difficulties they face in their current life in Jordan, I want to understand the role information and communication technology plays in refugees' everyday life, including its capacity to help overcome the numerous problems refugees encounter after relocating to Jordan. The topic of interest applies two theoretical lenses: the idea of agency amongst migrants and refugees when trying to understand how they deal with uncertainties and difficulties, as well as the notion that ICT seems to play an essential role in the lives of refugees. It seems relevant to take a closer look at the research around it. I want to give insights into the debate on agency in conflict settings and amongst refugees, as well as discussions on the role of information and communication technology during migration. Based on the literature review, I will develop the theoretical framework for this study by making use of the social navigation theory in the sense of Vigh (2003; 2006; 2009; 2010), and the theory of post-migration adaptation developed by Ryan, Dooley and Benson (2008).

2.1. Agency amongst Refugee Communities and in Conflict Settings

In the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees from 1951 and the additional 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines a refugee as a person who,

“owing to 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 or, [...] is unwilling to return to it”.

(UNHCR, 2010, 14)

A refugee is thus anyone who is forced to flee their home country – people fleeing within their own country are considered internally displaced persons (IDP) – due to violence, war, persecution or the danger thereof, and cannot or is afraid to return home. The fact that refugees are forcibly displaced and often must leave everything behind, and that they are ‘unable to return’ thus are restricted in their free movement and freedom of choice, motivated a lot of research on the vulnerability and helplessness of refugees.

For decades, research has taken a classical victimhood-approach, assuming refugees and disaster-impacted communities are bereft, helpless and dependent on external assistance (cf. Denov and Bryan, 2014). This image is also displayed throughout the media, with pictures predominantly depicting only suffering, poverty and hardship. The other extreme image, which is often used by politicians to justify strict immigration policies, or by right-wing extremists to

propagate xenophobic opinions, is that of refugees and migrants as dangerous, troublesome, and a burden. When analysing the discourses around refugees and asylum-seekers in UK newspapers and texts from the UNHCR for the year 2003, Baker and McEnery (2005) find largely negative representations of the two groups. Refugees are dehumanized yet depicted as threatening throughout the media, underlined by the use of phrases such as ‘invading’, ‘burden’, ‘heavy load’, or even ‘pests’. Gabrielatos and Baker (2008) take the analysis a step further with a longitudinal study, analysing UK press articles published between 1996 and 2005. They similarly show that the UK media largely reinforces the negative image of refugees and asylum-seekers by repeatedly using terms such as ‘flood’ or ‘swarm’ when referring to their relocation to the UK, as well as ‘homeless’, ‘bogus’ or ‘illegal’ when describing their current status. When looking at current media publications ten years later, the discourse has not changed much: refugees are still often depicted as either threatening or burdensome, or as helpless victims who require our sympathy and assistance (cf. Denov and Bryan, 2014)².

On the other hand, criticism around the victimhood approach has evolved more and more, particularly in the last 15 years. Starting from the notion that crisis does not destroy and disrupt everything, but that there is plenty of continuity, normality and productivity during and in the aftermath of crisis (Hilhorst, 2013), the opinion has spread that the depiction of refugees as victims does not display the full picture. The classical victimhood approach can also not explain the patterns of agency we observe amongst refugee and war-torn communities. A few examples shall illustrate this shift in research and provide relevant insights for the study at hand.

Lamba (2003) is one of the first in the new millennium to research the efforts of refugees aiming towards agency. Investigating the employment experiences of refugees in Canada, the research reveals numerous difficulties and obstacles they face during forced migration. The author goes into detail on the social and human capital which is available to refugees, but which they cannot utilise because of structural obstacles in the Canadian system. The subjects of study cannot overcome these barriers by using their capital, which means they are not able to become active agents. The study shows that difficulties do exist and can significantly hinder migrants in their agency, but that they are willing to become active. Similarly, although Peisker and Tilbury (2003) find patterns of passivity in the resettlement process of African and Balkan refugees in Australia, most refugees actively shape, and wish to shape their integration into the new society. They engage with their new social environments as social actors and try to find ways to overcome the marginalization and structural discrimination they face.

² See for instance: BBC (2016b); CNN (2015); CNN (2016); CNN (2017), amongst many others.

In a continuation of this idea, Grabska (2006) shows that these very obstacles, including economic, social, cultural and political marginalization, motivates refugees to become active and overcome victimhood. Researching the integration of Sudanese refugees in urban Egypt, the author reveals patterns of creative and innovative ways amongst the refugees to work around or overcome the various obstacles and difficulties they experience. The refugees actively shape their relocation process by using an array of different tactics to earn an income and manage their day-to-day life in the absence of support from host communities or refugee agencies. This includes setting up their own schools, establishing refugee-led associations for mutual support as well as employing tactics of victimization and self-marginalization to seek international aid.

For similar creative income-generating tactics, Jansen (2016) introduces the term ‘digging aid’ or ‘harvesting humanitarian resources’. In his analysis of how refugees relate to the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya, he reveals that refugees – and increasingly Kenyan nationals as well – negotiate access to humanitarian assistance by employing different tactics to be eligible for aid by the humanitarian community, including changing identities to fit the criteria for help. Assistance in the camp is one of many options they choose to make a living, and they opt for and out of this possibility, depending on the constantly changing circumstances. The findings of Grabska and Jansen help us develop a more diversified image of forced migrants, and contribute to understanding that the classical victimhood approach does not accurately display the realities refugees construct. The authors also hint towards the range of tactics refugees can resort to, which might seem contradictory at times – such as self-marginalization versus trying to overcome common victimization images.

Particularly for overtly marginalized groups, research suggests taking a closer look at patterns of agency and looking beyond the obvious. Women and youth refugees in particular are often stigmatized and displayed as helpless and dependent. They face even greater obstacles to independency and social inclusion, but, against the common image, there are also patterns of social agency. Women actively use their social and human capital to shape their resettlement, and partly even that of others. Through active navigation, they reduce structural obstacles the system poses upon them, for themselves and future refugee generations. They often influence and actively shape the host setting according to their own needs and aspirations, instead of passively accepting the given (Hunt, 2008; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2009). Similarly, a study on Palestinian refugee youth in urban as well as camp settings shows clear aspirations amongst these youths to not become the stereotypical image of young, aggressive, frustrated and poor Palestinians. Rather, they use their capacities to do better, which translates into positive attitudes and behaviours. Many try to actively counteract and reverse the negative behaviours

and images they are surrounded by and take an active approach to improve their living conditions (Chatty, 2009).

In many countries, refugees and migrants are marginalized, exploited, and face a number of serious difficulties regarding economic and social participation. However, research in the last decade has revealed that in urban settings as well as in camps, refugees and migrants, be it men, women, or youth, often seem to wish for a specific degree of autonomy and try their best to survive and ensure their wellbeing. Particularly in difficult contexts, such as lacking any assistance or being confronted with hostility, discrimination and marginalization, refugees seem to be highly creative in ‘muddling through’ and setting up a livelihood in their new environments.

A whole range of authors show that by no means are refugees simply victims, but rather active agents who tactically navigate the fluid environments they are confronted with – which is a welcome development for the research world. At the same time, I argue that researchers need to be careful to not employ a lens of ‘hyper-activity’: it should not be forgotten that migrants and refugees, as well as conflict-impacted communities, *do* suffer from conflict and the consequences it entails, including relocation or resettlement in third countries. There is agency, but there are also many difficulties, and substantial limits agents cannot overcome or avoid. Powerlessness and victimhood are often as present as creativity and agency. I want to take this as a starting point to investigate the attempts and patterns of agency amongst Syrian refugees who have been displaced to Jordan, also taking into account the suffering and difficulties they face.

We see that there exists a considerable number of studies on the agency of human beings under circumstances of turmoil, which reveal important insights and help to better understand the complex interactions and behaviours of refugees and migrants. However, much of the above-presented research is focused on showing that there *is* agency and some kind of navigation, without investigating how it comes to the fore, and what this agency tells us. Although there is no doubt the concept of agency is highly useful and allows us to look beyond the victimhood of disaster-impacted communities, it does not go far enough in my opinion. Conflict and post-conflict settings are often characterized by change and instability, adding another layer to the framework within which actors move and manage their life. How can we understand the behaviour of actors in environments, which are not only shaped by other agents but also constantly changing, by employing a one-dimensional concept? To analyse the case of Syrian refugees in Jordan, I need to develop a theoretical framework which goes beyond the

idea of agency in its simplest form, and allows consideration for the agency of actors in relation to other actors *and* their changing environments.

2.2. The Theory of Social Navigation

The anthropologist Henrik Vigh (2003; 2006; 2009; 2010) has significantly shaped the research around the notion that refugees and migrants are neither dependent, helpless victims, nor threatening or a bothersome burden, but rather active agents. He was the first to develop and properly theorize the notion of *social navigation*, referring to the strategic movement of people in difficult, uncertain and challenging circumstances – “motion within motion” as he calls it (2006, 52; 2006, 131). According to Vigh, the concept allows us to look at how agents manage unstable settings, social environments characterized by volatility, fluidity, and rapid social change, thus considering for the agency of actors in relation to other actors *and* their environment. These environments are neither stable nor solid, he argues, but constantly develop, also in relation and reaction to the actors which move within it. Vigh notes that social science research often fails to consider this movement of the environment, thus depicting only part of the picture and not appropriately displaying reality. The concept of social navigation, as a multidimensional analytical optic, would allow for adequate analysis of these relationships.

Vigh developed the concept of social navigation during his fieldwork in Guinea-Bissau, when trying to understand the struggles of young urban men managing a life shaped by poverty, lawlessness, crime and violence. They face difficulties and hardship regarding accessing food and earning an income, accompanied by constant uncertainty, as well as struggles to find their place in society. Vigh saw a number of different strategies and tactics the youth employ to improve their current living conditions, and increase their life chances and prospects for the future. They try to make the best out of what life in Guinea-Bissau offers, taking on new opportunities and overcoming uncertainties and difficulties. When talking to these youth, Vigh encountered the idea of *Dubria* (translated from Creole as ‘to see your life’). It describes these very attempts of flexibly managing changing circumstances and arising difficulties, by responding to social forces and possibilities, yet also directing one’s efforts towards a more positive future. The author translates the term as ‘social navigation’.

The Third Dimension

To explain the concept, Vigh points to the original meaning of ‘navigation’ which is “to sail, sail over and go by sea”, thus to “move in a moving environment” (2009, 420) – in contrast to our physical movements on hard and firm ground, such as walking on the streets. He points to

similar expressions in other languages, such as *se débrouiller* in French, or *muddling through* in English, which imply coping with a difficult or uncertain situation and making the most out of it. All terms stress the importance of tactics and flexibility, which is what social navigation is all about. Everyone is an agent in the sense of interacting with other social agents, moving physically, as well as metaphorically within social formations, and shaping these as well as the other agents. We constantly react to the pulls and pushes our social environment imposes on us, moving within a moving environment, at the same time influencing it and the social actors around us. As Vigh summarizes: “we move in social environments of actors and actants, individuals and institutions, that engage and move us as we move along” (ibid.) and further, “we organize ourselves and act in relation to the interplay of social forces and pressures that surround us” (2009, 425). Social navigation as a concept would add:

“a third dimension to our understanding of movement and mobility. Where we normally look either at the way social formations move and change over time, or the way agents move within social formations, navigation allows us to see the intersection – or rather interactivity [...] – between the two.”

(Vigh, 2009, 420)

It thus combines navigation in its original sense with a social aspect. This theoretical lens allows us to not only see interactions, or social constellations, but gives us a way to observe and analyse both at the same time. Social navigation implies that agents do not act independently, but within given social circumstances and constraints and in interactions with others, and that these actions in turn affect these very formations and other agents. All this leads to a state of constant motion, which requires ongoing interpretation of the situation and flexibility to adapt accordingly. This also means we cannot understand actors as agents in the sense of fully free, unconditioned and independent, autonomous individuals, but we must view them in relation to and dependent on their environment and other agents and forces. Social navigation allows us to look at this social environment in its entirety, including the subjective and objective components and actors. The concept thus directs our attention to “the intersection between agency, social forces and change” (Vigh, 2009, 420).

At the same time, social navigation is not only about meeting immediate needs – which can decide life or death in environments of dire poverty and hardship – or responding to current changes and forces. Rather, it also entails ‘seeing one’s future’, which refers to hopes and dreams, as well as aspirations for the non-immediate future. Vigh explains that social navigation “relates to movement through both the socially *immediate* (present) and the socially *imagined* (future), [...] enabling one to survive in the here and now as well as *to see one’s life*, i.e. to gain an idea of the possible course of one’s life trajectory” (2010, 151).

Navigation Under Extreme Circumstances

Everyone navigates themselves to some extent in everyday life. People constantly face changes, difficulties and are offered opportunities, and are flexible to them, in close interaction with other people and the structures and social pressures that frame our life. However, the concept of social navigation is particularly valid for researching human beings moving in changing, unstable, volatile and fluid social contexts, such as (post-)conflict situations or natural disasters, as they have to manage rapid change and strong social forces in a short period of time. The volatility and speed of social change, as well as the capacity to manage this change affects the visibility and necessity of navigation: lower social capital and standing offers a lower ability to react to movement, so actors *have* to move. Vigh sees that these people are great navigators in the sense of moving in and around the changing surroundings they face. They actively manoeuvre around and try to mitigate upcoming difficulties as much as possible, and make the most of potential opportunities, by constantly adapting and applying different tactical and thoughtful methods or strategies to respond to their changing surroundings. Vigh argues that the concept is therefore particularly useful when looking at people's behaviour in situations of difficulty, social volatility, or constraining structures, which are the circumstances many refugees find themselves in.

Strategies, Tactics and Practice

Social navigation comes to the fore in the form of tactics, strategies, and practice. Strategic agency refers to the overall goal of agents, whereas tactics include the individual acts agents employ to reach the overall strategic goal. Practice is what actually happens, as this could often deviate from the agent's plans, strategies, and tactics. As Vigh puts forward, "strategy is the process of demarcating and constituting space and tactics the process of navigating them" (2003, 136) or in other words, strategy and tactics means "either trying to establish a space in which we seek to impose and institutionalize our understanding or structuration of the world, [...], or by navigating the spaces of others to our advantage" (2009, 432) and thereby establishing trajectories for the future. The author explains that these are ideal types, which would often overlap or blur in practice, and each agent employs both, depending on the circumstances, or sometimes neither. The kind of agency actors can maintain depends on the specific social setting and context. Accordingly, *Dubria* and actions of social navigation amongst refugees, migrants or conflict-impacted communities are often tactical, which is of particular relevance for this analysis.

Amendments to Vigh's Social Navigation Theory

Vigh's theory adds the needed layer missing in the presented analyses of agency, and will be used as the basis for this study. Since Vigh published his PhD thesis in 2003, and the according book on social navigation in 2006, his concept has been taken up by many researchers.³ I want to present three examples in use which seem particularly relevant and which, in my opinion, apply the theory as intended by Vigh.⁴ They introduce additional notions which can be used for my analysis, as they partly go beyond Vigh's work.

Utas (2005) applies the concept of social navigation to investigate the methods young women in the Liberian war zone employ to ensure their immediate survival, and to improve their social and economic standing. He finds an array of different agency tactics these women resort to, which they constantly adapt according to the circumstances and in regard to other agents. Opportunities as well as constraints are constantly monitored, and relationships with stakeholders from different sides are established and maintained. Depending on their evaluation of the situation, women would employ tactics of victimcy, taking humanitarian aid, 'girlfriending' – a term Utas introduces to describe for developing romantic relationships out of tactical considerations – or even taking up arms. They are thus neither merely victims, nor hyperactive fighters, but social agents who tactically navigate the war zone characterized by change and uncertainty. Thereby, they try to fulfil their immediate needs and ensure their survival, as well as improve their economic and social situation for the long run.

The example shows the wide range of tactics is available to social actors, even under extreme pressure. Sometimes, completely contradictory acts may occur at the same time: Displaying themselves as a victim, yet taking up arms can both be highly useful and legitimate, depending on the circumstances, and given the often-rapid change in conflict zones, these tactics may even appear one after the other, or both at the same time. This is important to keep in mind when researching the actions of conflict-impacted communities. Utas (2005) also hints at an interesting theoretical consideration: according to him, tactical agency refers to the short-

³ There are myriads of studies who tested the theory, including cases of refugees and migrants: Abebe (2007) to investigate livelihoods of orphans and child workers in Ethiopia; Langevang (2008) and Langevang and Gough (2009) to understand the everyday mobility and aspirations of adolescents in Ghana; Huang and Yeoh (2011) to research the behaviour of Chinese migrants during overseas migration; Baines and Paddon (2012) to explain civilian self-protection strategies and modes of survival in northern Uganda; Jeffrey (2012) to get an insight into the agency and resistance of youth around the world; and Archambault (2013) to comprehend cell phones as tools to manage (in)visibility amongst youth in Mozambique, amongst others, all support the theory of social navigation. It can thus be seen as a tried and tested theory, no experimental approach.

⁴ In an article from 2009 ("Motion Squared. A Second Look at the Concept of Social Navigation"), Vigh expresses frustrations on the misuse of the notion of social navigation. He explains that he feels it has been used a lot in social sciences without the authors carefully thinking about it and theorizing the concept. He thus felt the need to publish this article to clarify his idea of the theory, and how it can and should be used.

term actions of rather weak actors, who react to their social environment and structure, whereas strategic agency is mostly reserved for those actors who have the capacities and standing to look into the future and make use of other actors' agency. Without employing a victimhood approach, from this perspective it can be assumed that most refugee communities do not have access to the resources needed to exercise strategic agency, but rather react to their environment and move within the available framework as tactical agents.

In a continuation of these ideas, Utas and Jörgel (2008) investigate the military navigation of an armed group called the West Side Boys (WSB), an active agent in the Sierra Leone civil war. The authors look at how these young men employ different tactics and strategies in a war zone characterized by extreme danger and change. The WSB are found to use networking, extreme violence, as well as acts of madness to forward their aims and increase their influence in the war. Utas and Jörgel conclude that the theoretical lens of social navigation allows us to understand these different tactics, including what might look like "illogical acts" to the outsider. The acts of madness and extreme violence observed for instance can only be understood by considering the idea that agents want to satisfy their immediate needs, yet work towards a better future in the long-run. This last notion is a highly relevant addition to Vigh's reasoning, I think, as I can imagine finding some of these supposedly illogical tactics amongst Syrian refugees who were displaced to Jordan.

In a more recent study, Denov and Bryan (2014) investigate the social navigation and resettlement experience of refugee children in Canada, who relocated without their parents or family – so-called "separated" children. Many of them are without any support network, and face regular discrimination, in education, as well as socially and politically. Psychological problems, social isolation, as well as economic difficulties are often the consequence, further deteriorating their overall situation. Nonetheless, these separated children are social navigators, making calculated decisions to ensure their physical and mental well-being in a context of hostility and isolation. Tactics may include disclosure, cultivating new support networks, or pooling of resources amongst the children, as well as utilizing religious beliefs, maintaining the native language and culture, and seeking support from those who stayed behind. Similar to Utas and Jörgel, the authors point to the fact that the social navigation theory allows us to understand behaviours which might seem problematic without taking into account the specific context, such as the altering of their flight stories, or lying. Denov and Bryan explain that the tactics used by separated children in Canada are both "multifaceted (remedying immediate conflict while establishing longer-term solutions) and multipurposed (resolving a number of obstacles or challenges simultaneously)" (2014, 29). I argue that this notion can be viewed alongside

Vigh's ideas, as it allows us to better explain confusing or unjustified choices of actors, and helps us understand these in the larger context of social navigation. Together, the examples help us take the ideas of Vigh to yet another level, as the ideas specify the ground for analysis.

Social Navigation of Syrian Refugees in Jordan

If we want to investigate the agency of Syrian refugees in Jordan and how it comes to the fore, Vigh's theory, supplemented by these additional remarks, will be highly useful. Syrian refugees in Jordan, and throughout the world, often find themselves in fluid and constantly changing, often hostile environments, being constrained by external structures, as well as counteractive forces pushing and pulling them in different directions. The background analysis revealed that Jordan's economy as well as social system are under change and increasingly unstable due to the large influx of refugees, which social navigation allows us to consider. At the same time, taking the theoretical framework of social navigation enables us to see patterns of victimhood, problems and difficulties, *and* agency and positive action amongst refugees in Jordan. It also helps us in analysing refugees' immediate tactics as well as future-related strategies. As explained in *Chapter 5*, when investigating the uncertainties and difficulties refugees face, Syrians most often face problems meeting immediate and basic needs, and uncertainties related to an unknown or insecure future – which corresponds with the two components Vigh identifies as central to social navigation. The differentiation between strategies and tactics is thus relevant to me, as it correlates with the uncertainties and problems I investigate.

However, I feel Vigh does not account for how agency comes into being, and how social navigation can work in reality. Social navigation as a theoretical lens can help explain that agency exists, but not what conditions it, and what capacities or skills agents need to make their navigation effective. This also means that the concept cannot aid us in investigating the role of information and communication technology during forced migration, and especially as a tool for facilitating social navigation. To be able to understand the settlement and navigation efforts of Syrian refugees in Jordan, as well as the role ICTs play in this process, an additional theoretical lens is needed.

2.4. The Theory of Post-Migration Adaptation

By referring to previous theories on psychological well-being of refugees and accounting for their limitations and flaws, Ryan, Dooley and Benson (2008) develop an innovative resource-based model to understand migrant adaptation. They define post-migration adaptation as “the process through which persons reorganize or rebuild their lives after relocating to a new

sociocultural context” (2). I find the term ‘adaptation’ somewhat confusing in this context, as it could also be understood in the sense of adjustment to the new circumstances. Their explanation however implies a broad meaning of the term, by pointing to the general process of relocating after migration, which could mean to accept the context and related circumstances, or to alter the setting, or to navigate it. When looking at the settlement of refugees and migrants in their new culture, I assume all three behaviours can be identified. Referring to the conceptual framework of Vigh, it is likely that strategic agency and altering conditions is not often possible for refugees, but we can see attempts of migrants taking some control of their life and navigate. In other situations, they might have to accept the circumstances and conditions, and especially when they have limited or no room to manoeuvre. It is my understanding that all three belong to the post-migration stage, the process which Ryan et. al summarize as migrant adaptation.

I will not use the word post-migration adaptation in this context, as I find that the term does not appropriately describe the process they are describing, which could rather be named ‘settlement experience’, ‘integration’, or ‘post-relocation phase’. Again, the process of people reorganizing their lives when settling in a new social environment, can involve patterns of adaptation/adjustment, navigation, and/or alteration. What interests me most in this research, is the investigation as to how Syrian refugees deal with the difficult conditions they face in the post-relocation phase, which could include all, some, or none, of the above three behaviours. At first glance, social navigation and adaptation point to different things, as the former would involve exploiting the possibilities and circumstances the new context offers, whereas adaptation would mean accepting the given situation and adapting accordingly. I will further elaborate on the connection between the two below.

The conceptual framework of Ryan and colleagues begins with the concept of resources, defined as “the means by which individuals satisfy needs, pursue goals and manage demands” (2008, 7) that every migrant or refugee can utilise. The authors distinguish between four different categories of resources: 1) personal resources, divided into physical (mobility, physical attractiveness, energy, health) and psychological (skills, such as problem-solving or social skills, and traits, such as self-efficacy, hope, self-esteem, optimism); 2) material resources, including personal possessions in general, money, means of transport, property, paid employment; 3) social resources, referring to support networks, social relationships, a sense of belonging and identity; and 4) cultural resources, that build a toolkit to navigate in a particular cultural context, including language skills, education, digital literacy, knowledge about the characteristics of a specific culture (such as climate, physical surroundings, services and systems). Ryan et al. argue that these resources are crucial for migrants to adapt to the new

culture they live in, but also during the migration/flight phase and its organization beforehand (pre-migration stage). Resources are constantly reshaped and developed, according to the specific needs and circumstances in the various environments migrants face.

The authors show that migration – be it forced or not – has a significant impact on the pool of resources available: either the migration and post-migration experience directly influences resources (level-based changes), or the relevance of specific resources changes (relevance-based changes). Level-based changes imply the loss or gain of specific resources through migration, such as savings, paid employment, psychological resources, or social support networks; relevance-based change refers to the fact that although the actual amount of resources may stay the same, migrants might value them more or less depending on their new social environment.

As resources are strongly interconnected, the loss of one resource often initiates a resource loss spiral. Those who are at the bottom of society, which often includes refugees and migrants, are likely to be considerably low on resources, and are thus more prone to resource loss which promotes further loss. These groups are most vulnerable to economic hardship, as well as psychological and social deprivation, and therefore more likely to be caught in a vicious cycle. Ryan et al. argue that material deprivation often goes hand in hand with loss in other resource areas.

The ability of refugees and migrants to set up a new life after relocating highly depends on their capacity to compensate for lost resources, and gain new resources which are useful and relevant in their new environment. Gaining new resources can be significantly hindered by not only personal constraints (for example illness preventing employment, social connections, cultural integration, etc.), but also by environmental ones, such as barriers set up by the host community or by authorities (such as refusal to give out work permits or discrimination towards migrants). Returning to the definition of resources above: it is clear that the more resources are available, the better individuals can satisfy their needs, pursue their goals, and manage demands, which in turn improves their psychological well-being. Their migration experience will therefore be significantly more successful, the more resources they have, substitute, and gain. As the authors argue, particularly young people are more resilient when it comes to resource loss, and better able to gain resources in their new living environment.

Although the terminology is rather problematic, using the resource-based model of Ryan, Dooley and Benson adds a relevant and important layer to the analysis at hand.⁵ Whereas the social navigation concept helps us better understand the intersection between Syrian refugees, their social environment, and the forces that influence their behaviours in a context characterized by uncertainty and change, the post-migration adaptation model helps to investigate how this social navigation evolves. Thereby, I argue there are various ways refugees and migrants can react to the changes they encounter during relocation, including alteration of the circumstances if possible, or tactic navigation in an attempt to make the best out of the situation and ‘muddle through’. There might also be situations in which we see patterns of resignation and acceptance, when the circumstances do not allow for navigation. The analysis must reveal which of these apply to the specific case of Syrian refugees in Jordan and which show strongest.

Furthermore, taking the different kinds of resources as a basis for explaining the capacity of migrants to get along in their new context, also allows us to take a more specific look at information and communication technology and its role during and after migration, which is the second subject of interest. I understand ICTs as one of the resources refugees can resort to: they are part of the material resource pool, as they are considered possessions and valuables, at the same time facilitating a gain of resources in other areas, such as social or psychological – which could involve setting up networks, accessing emotional support and thus increasing their psychosocial well-being. The study will take a closer look at the meaning of ICT, as well as its role as facilitators of social navigation and/or adaptation patterns amongst refugees.

2.5. Understanding the Role of Information and Communication Technology

For this study, I take *ICT* as an umbrella term for different communication and information devices or applications. There are different definitions of ICT, most of them agreeing however that the term describes some kind of technical devices and applications which are used for the purpose of communication and information. As it best describes my focus of research, I will

⁵ The theory of post-migration adaptation has been employed and tested by several researchers: Worland and Darlington (2010) use it as a basis to research on the experiences of Karen refugees during resettlement in Australia; Guribye (2011) to investigate the resources of Sri Lankan refugees living in exile in Norway; Hutchinson and Dorsett (2012) to demonstrate the resilience refugees show during resettlement in Australia; Fazel et al. (2012) to show the factors for promotion of mental wellbeing amongst young refugees in high-income countries; Bakker and colleagues (2014) to explore the importance of resources during forced migration to the Netherlands; Roubeni et al. (2015) to comprehend the influence of resources on West African migrants’ aspirations for themselves and their children; Kim (2016) to get an insight into the sociocultural and structural factors influencing the resettlement of Latino and Asian refugees in the US, amongst others. All show the rigour and usefulness of the theory for the study of refugee resettlement and relocation.

use the definition by Weigel and Waldburger, who define information and communication technology (ICT) as

“technologies designed to access, process and transmit information. ICT encompass a full range of technologies – from traditional, widely used devices, such as radios, telephones, or TV, to more sophisticated tools like computers or the internet.”

(Weigel and Waldburger, 2004, 19)

With the continuous and explosive rise of information and communication technology and the ‘new digital age’, research around issues of new technologies have mushroomed. The use of ICTs within economics and the impact of this use on local and global economies has been as extensively researched as the relationship between ICTs and (rural) development. Cultural studies show the impact of ICT on culture and cultural diversity; health experts research the effects of ICT use on physical and mental wellbeing. Also issues around ethical concerns in technology, and the risks of ICT are being dealt with more and more. The Arab Spring in particular has prompted additional research attention into ICTs and social media.⁶

The Use and Importance of Technology Amongst Migrants and Refugees

Much research focuses on the use and importance of technology, specifically for displaced peoples and migrants across the globe. For these groups, ICTs, and mobile phones or smartphones in particular, function as important tools during and after migration. During the migration phase, phones are essential to contact support to facilitate the journey, as well as to stay in touch with families and friends (Schaub, 2012). During the first stages of relocation or resettlement, ICTs are crucial to stay in touch with loved ones at home and around the world, and to maintain family relationships and friendships. Migrants want to stay informed about what is happening back home, and want to regularly hear from their family and friends who live far away (Green and Lockley, 2012; Vancea and Olivera, 2013).

⁶ See for instance:

Antonelli, Cristiano. (2003). The digital divide: understanding the economics of new information and communication technology in the global economy. *Information Economics and Policy*, 15(2), 173-199.

Axford, Barrie. (2011). Talk about a Revolution: Social Media and the MENA Uprisings. *Globalizations*, 8(5), 681-686.

Bhatnagar, S., R. Schwere. (2000). *Information and communication technology in rural development*. Case Studies from India, World Bank Institute.

Bilbao-Osorio, Beñat, Soumitra Dutta, Bruno Lanvin. (2014). *The Global Information Technology Report 2014*. Rewards and Risks of Big Data. Geneva: World Economic Forum.

Tavani, Herman T. (2003). Ethics and technology: Ethical issues in an age of information and communication technology. *Ac, Sigcas Computers and Society*, 33(3:1), 1-20.

Unwin, Tim. (2009). *ICT4D. Information and Communication Technology for Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Staying in touch with the 'old' culture also seems to help maintain an identity, stay connected with the home country, and feel part of a wider network, sometimes a global diaspora. The very contact with family and friends back home can significantly facilitate integration and make it easier for migrants to feel at home and comfortable in their new surroundings. The internet in particular plays an important role for migrants to facilitate their integration and inclusion into society, as it allows them to stay connected across borders (Gifford and Wilding, 2013; Green and Lockley, 2012).

At the same time, technology also seems to facilitate the adaptation process in the new culture: technologies help many refugees or migrants to be able to better deal with the legal, social, and cultural discrimination they face in their new homes. Migrants would often use technology as "a coping mechanism, for self-expression, to fortify relationships of support with family and friends and to strengthen networks of community solidarity and activism" (Brown, 2016, 237). ICTs are often used to seek assistance and support for their new lives, and to deal with the often-challenging living conditions. This support-seeking is not restricted to acquaintances, but expands to whole communities or strangers through online forums or migrant platforms to meet others in similar situations and exchange support. For many, online counselling replaces physical social contacts and helps mitigate or resolve problems, as well as reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation (Mikal and Woodfield, 2015; Hechanova et al., 2013; Harney, 2013; Lee, 2013).

In general, the internet appears to have an overall positive effect on the work and social life of migrants. The availability of entertainment via the internet gives them the possibility of relieving stress and frustrations, to access emotional support and feel part of a community (Peng, 2008). At the same time, work-related use of the internet helps them find employment and improve performance in their job duties (Peng, 2008; Janta and Ladkin, 2013). O'Mara and Harris (2016) investigate the use of ICTs by young refugees, and stress their relevance for education. In times of increased digital learning, the use of ICTs gains relevance for the younger generations, particularly in the absence of formal education systems, such as in refugee settings. Lacking other sources of income, some refugees use the internet to not only send and receive remittances, but also to access potential new supporters/sponsors from abroad. Omata (2011), as well as David and colleagues (2013) in a more recent study, find that refugees are highly creative when they do not have support from family or friends, and need to seek remittances elsewhere. The internet helps them navigate and facilitate these attempts in ways that offline technology could not.

Overall, ICT seems to play an important, if not essential role in the lives of today's migrants and refugees, in the migration as well as the post-migration phases. Most migrants and refugees are well aware of the technical options available to them, including the costs entailed (Thompson, 2009). Vancea and Olivera (2013) introduce the term 'e-migrant', indicating how technologically connected and online the migrants of today are. Taking into consideration the importance of ICT for refugees, I argue that we can apply the term e-migrant to refugees: "e-refugee" entails that refugees are online and highly connected, sometimes even more so than the average consumer.

However, not all migrants have the same access to technology and the knowledge of how to use it. The discussion in the above section details that the level of resources significantly determines the success of the post-migration phase, which also holds for ICT. We see a clear digital divide between different refugee groups: they do not have the same access to ICTs, digital literacy and skills, or the same financial means to afford ICT and its use, and therefore do not have the same opportunities for integration (Imran, 2015). This is important to keep in mind when analysing the role of ICTs for refugees in Jordan.

The Case: Syrian Refugees Settling in Jordan

Overall, although there is plenty of literature on the use and importance of technologies for migrants, research on the relevance of ICTs for refugees seems to be rather rare. This might partly be explained by the fact that the majority of refugee crises have of course taken place before the 'new digital age'. For the Syrian refugee crisis however, we have seen a steady rise in the presence of ICTs, which are playing a major role in shaping the situation in Syria (e.g. the use of technology for propaganda by the Syrian regime, rebel groups, or IS), as well as that of Syrian refugees around the globe. However, it appears the research world has not yet reacted to these recent developments.

The only recent study comes from a research group around Gillespie who published some preliminary findings from the first research phase (Gillespie et al., 2016). The authors investigate the use of communication and information technologies among Syrian and Iraqi refugees living in France. First findings indicate that the smartphone is the most essential technology for refugees: it is a crucial tool for navigation, translation, access of legal and medical support and other services, and for networking and staying in touch with family. It can also continue to aid the user throughout the journey and after arrival at their destination. At the same time, this essential resource could pose a threat due to potential surveillance by the Syrian regime. The research by Gillespie and colleagues will only cover the ICT use of Syrians during

resettlement, not during relocation to neighbouring countries such as Jordan. As will be further explained later in this paper, this is a special case since many refugees feel stuck in Jordan, in an ‘in-between’ stage of not being able to return to Syria, nor to move on to another country offering better opportunities. Research on this is missing. Also, the study group analyses the role of ICT from a media and communications standpoint, not sociological or ethnographic.

What also surprises me is that there are few studies covering the aspirations and difficulties of Syrian refugees in Jordan. Chatty, Professor and former Director of the Refugees Studies Centre at Oxford University, is one of the very few to identify this research gap. She set up a research project to better understand the aspirations, perceptions and behaviour of Syrian refugees in Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon. As the research group explains on their website, “preliminary findings suggest there is a significant lack of understanding of both needs and aspirations between Western practitioners and displaced Syrians and host communities” (RSC, 2017). From an extensive literature review, I assume this lack of understanding also extends to the academic arena, since not much research has been conducted on the struggles of Syrians to adapt, integrate or navigate their new surroundings, nor on occurrence of agency. Interestingly, in their study on political security in Za’atari camp, one of the two biggest refugee camps for Syrians in Jordan, Sullivan and Tobin (2014, no page) conclude that “Syrian refugees [...] are highly resilient and entrepreneurial as they navigate the complexities of their inherently insecure environment”. Interestingly, the authors were focusing on political security and did not intend to research the agency of refugees in Jordan, therefore it was fortunate for this study that they, accidentally, discovered such tendencies. We lack a properly theorised understanding of the adaptation processes of refugees in Jordan, and of their interaction with surrounding forces and circumstances. At the same time, we can also not understand how information and communication technology may facilitate this adaptation for Syrian refugees in Jordan, as research is missing on the role of ICTs for Syrians.

2.6. Research Aim

I want to investigate the attempts of agency and navigation amongst Syrians in Jordan, especially given their often precarious legal and economic situation as indicated by other authors. This requires me to first gather research about these ‘difficult circumstances’ present, and in the specific context of Jordan. Most studies have been conducted in other settings which entails different circumstances and context, and those regarding Jordan were published over two years ago. Taking into account the several waves of refugee influx to Jordan throughout 2015 and 2016, I assume the situations has changed for Syrians in Jordan, and perhaps

deteriorated. Also, most of the studies were conducted predominantly in refugee camps, and to a lesser extent in host communities, which draws only part of the picture. For this study, I need to understand the day-to-day uncertainties and problems of refugees, who reside amongst host communities, to then explore their adaptation and navigation tactics. Furthermore, if ICTs are such a crucial part of the lives of migrants and refugees, does it not also play a major role in their attempts to navigate the everyday difficulties during forced migration? Given the multi-purposeness of ICTs, I suppose the devices and applications increase refugees' possibilities for active agency.

My research questions thus formulate as follows:

Main research question:

What is the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) as tools to facilitate social navigation for Syrian refugees displaced to Jordan?

Sub-questions:

What uncertainties and difficulties do Syrian refugees face during relocation in Jordan and how do they deal with these?

What does ICT mean for Syrian refugees, and what role does it play in their everyday life in Jordan?

I take it for granted that ICTs are crucial tools in the lives of refugees, and one of the essential resources they utilise. I seek to prove this assumption by investigating the role of ICT in refugees' lives, in particular what meaning and importance they attach to it, by utilizing the concept of resources suggested by Ryan and colleagues. I go on to suggest that Syrian refugees are neither pure victims, nor threatening or troublesome. Rather, we should take a careful look at their agency and their attempts to tactically navigate through the at times difficult, precarious or even hostile circumstances of their life in conflict-stricken Syria, during their flight, and of their current life in Jordan. The social navigation theory by Vigh will provide the theoretical framework for this analysis, allowing us as researchers to look at the interplay between Syrian refugees, and the social environment and forces surrounding them. I want to investigate the agency of Syrian refugees and how they employ different tactics to navigate their situation of displacement. As explained before, during relocation, refugees can either alter their conditions, navigate the circumstances, or accept and go with them. Considering that refugees are rather low on resources, I do not expect to find much strategic agency amongst them, as they do not have the resources to change their surroundings or use the tactic agency of other actors. Rather,

I suppose that there is more tactical agency, and whenever this is not possible, acceptance and resignation⁷.

I expect Syrians to navigate their environment by resorting to a pool of resources, such as ICT and the skills to use them. Furthermore, I want to explore whether refugees develop and expand their resources, and whether they do so with the help of technologies. The post-migration adaptation theory from Ryan et al. allows us to take a look at the resources available to refugees, including information and communication technology as the most significant.

Overall, my hypothesis is that technology as a material as well as personal resource is being used by refugees to tactically navigate through difficulties, uncertainties and obstacles they faced and face, especially during the relocation in Jordan. Through the use of ICTs, refugees can develop and foster their overall resource pools, such as problem-solving skills, health, hope, self-esteem (personal resources), informational and emotional support networks (social resources), knowledge of how to get along in Jordan and language skills (cultural resources) as well as employment, money, or other personal possessions (material resources). I assume that the complexity and multi-facetedness of technology makes it such a powerful and relevant tool for Syrians who have been forcibly displaced to Jordan.

Understanding the use of ICT in an increasingly digital and globalized world is as interesting as relevant. In the specific case of refugees, a number of questions come up, that this thesis wants to shed first light on. Technology seems to be an essential part of refugees' lives – why is that? It seems interesting and relevant to understand their use of technology, how it helps and hinders them in their life as refugees, before, during and after their flight. Existing literature on migrants' and refugees' use of ICTs is limited and although there is a good understanding of why and how migrants use technologies, it is limited with regards to refugees, and more specifically, when it comes to how refugees use ICTs to adapt and navigate in their new surroundings. In general, the navigation and adaptation of Syrians in Jordan is highly under-explored. My thesis will significantly contribute to the research on ICT use among refugees, and to the overall understanding of Syrian refugees living in Jordan and their everyday navigation. A solid knowledge base can help improve the technology provision for refugees, non-governmental or governmental interventions and programmes for refugees, the set-up of refugee accommodation, and can give us a better understanding of what help refugees find adequate and what support they actually need and value.

⁷ At the same time, the analysis will reveal that patterns of 'giving up' can be a navigation tactic in itself.

3. Research Methodology

The goal of this research is to find out about the role of information and communication technology as tools to facilitate social navigation for Syrian refugees in Jordan. This includes finding out what difficulties and uncertainties Syrians in Jordan face, and how they deal with them, as well as getting an insight into their use of ICTs and the role technology plays in their life. The chosen methodology and methods for this study are tailored to these specific research questions, and are inspired by studies on similar topics. The data used for this research is derived from qualitative fieldwork in Jordan, including from observations, interviews, and questionnaires. As mentioned before, I collected data on 19 specific cases, plus additional information gained through observations outside of the official interview settings. The following gives a detailed idea of my methodological approach, the methods employed, and the proceeding of the field stay in Jordan.

3.1. Research Design

3.1.1. Methodological Approach

Taking into account the research topic and questions I want to shed light on with my thesis, I decided to take a qualitative approach, with a few quantitative elements. According to Flick (2007) and Rosenthal (2015), qualitative research investigates the knowledge and behaviour of human beings towards a specific subject/object in their everyday life, including their interactions with each other and the subject or object of interest. Qualitative research, in contrast to quantitative, allows a more open and interactive research of a specific topic, which is especially useful when not much is known about the field of interest. A qualitative investigation serves to explore a subject or object openly, without much previous knowledge or expectations (such as clear hypotheses) regarding the results. Taking these ideas into account, it made sense for me to opt for a qualitative approach. There is not much known about the use of ICTs as social navigation tools by (Syrian) refugees and I had not anticipated any specific results. A quantitative analysis would have allowed me to obtain a detailed overview of how many Syrians use a specific type of ICT, what they use it for and so on, but not *why* they do so, and how this connects to their overall situation in Jordan.

To triangulate and quantify the information I would collect through the qualitative measures used, I decided to take in a quantitative component. Flick (2007) points to the relevance of triangulation with different methodological approaches to account for the blinkers and flaws of each. I took this as a starting point, and followed Kelle and Erzberger (2000) in their reasoning for combining quantitative and qualitative results. According to them, this

combination is always useful as the results either converge, meaning they potentially show the same information, or are complementary, meaning one adds to the other. Either way, supplementing my qualitative study with quantitative elements made sense to me to add to the rigour of my study and potentially improve the quality of the results.

The approach fits my overall research design perfectly because it allows me to not only get an idea of what ICT refugee use, how often, and what they use it for, but lets me understand why they do so, what meaning they attach to ICT, and how it works as social navigation tools for them. It also allows me to better understand the difficulties and uncertainties they face in Jordan than a pure quantitative approach would. A pure quantitative approach would not give me the necessary background information on their situation and feelings. Bringing in a quantitative component lets me get comparable data regarding their economic/social background and allows me to quantify their ICT use.

3.1.2. Research Methods

After consulting other studies on the use of ICTs, social navigation of refugees, and in general migrant and refugee studies, I decided on interviews and observations as my main methods to answer my research questions, complemented by a short questionnaire. I thus opted for a ‘tried and tested’ approach, which can be shown to give valid and reliable results. Participatory methods, such as focus groups, were considered, too, but I decided against it. Mainly because previous studies have shown that researchers can get high quality and relevant data through personal interviews and achieved great saturation. Group discussions take a lot of extra time and effort and it was felt that there was not a clear need for it, nor would it have added value compared to one to one interviews. Also, on a less important notice, Norman (2009) points to the potential risks of large gatherings, for instance for focus groups in conflict-impacted regions. Though I think the direct risk for participants would be rather low in Jordan, I was worried about their standing in the community. Being seen with a white, young foreign female in a conservative culture can give reason for a lot of gossiping and negative talk. I wanted to avoid this risk for my respondents, and opted instead to meet them in private spaces in one-to-one situations. Norman suggests that in settings where potential risks exist for respondents through participatory methods or participant observation, it is advisable to conduct narrative research (semi-structured interviews), complemented with participant observation. I followed this advice.

Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured, following interview guidelines I developed and then reviewed together with my research assistants⁸. However, in practice, the openness and rigidity of the interviews were dependent on the interviewer and the respective respondent, and their interaction. Some interviews were very structured and guided, such as when the interviewer was not able to break the ice and the respondent waited for concrete questions. These conversations followed a question-answer style, and the interviewers mostly stuck to the guidelines. Other interviews turned into very open, natural ‘chit-chat’ style conversations, during which the respondents talked a lot without being asked and just needed to be guided at times. These different proceedings naturally influenced the length of the interviews and the data gathered. The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes.

The interview guidelines were developed according to advice and examples by Kruse (2015), Flick (2007), Rosenthal (2015), as well as Rubin and Rubin (2005). I took into account their recommendations on question content, sequence, phrasing and layout, as well as regarding the pre-test and revision of the guidelines. This includes considerations such as the importance of the first interview questions and how to formulate them in a specific way to ‘break the ice’, finding a balance between open and closed questions, amongst many others. Because of the Arabic language barrier, the initial English version was modified and improved in close cooperation with locals familiar with the Jordanian/Syrian culture and language, as well as with professionals who work with refugees. The intention was to account for cultural differences regarding phrasing and sensitive/taboo topics in particular.

Questionnaires

To complement the data gained through the semi-structured, partly very open interviews, I decided to end each interview with a 10-minute questionnaire. In contrast to the open questions during the interviews asking for qualitative data, the structured questionnaire included mostly closed-ended questions, aiming for quantitative data in a structured and standardized manner. According to Rosenthal (2015), it is advisable to put questionnaires at the end of an interview, to first open up a comfortable channel of communication with the respondent and start a fluent conversation before getting to the rigid and structured questions of the questionnaire. I made sure the questions were comparatively short and easy, to not overtax the respondents’ patience

⁸ For the specific role of my research assistants/translators, please see a separate section below.

and attention. Interviewees' answers were written down as well as electronically recorded to allow for a more detailed analysis.

The questionnaire was developed following Dillman's (2007) recommendations regarding questionnaire construction, including the sequence, phrasing and content of questions, again revised and modified in cooperation with my local translators and research assistants. The questionnaire, originally planned as paper-and-pencil for the respondent to complete, was meant to supplement the interviews to record more quantitative data gathered anonymously. However, because nearly all the first respondents could neither read nor write, were too impatient or had no reading glasses with them, they often asked the interviewer to fill in the questionnaire for them, and so the interviewer was finally the one to read out the questions and write down the answers. No respondent seemed to have issues regarding anonymity and felt comfortable to answer the questions openly.

Observations

To a minor extent, I also collected data through observations. Many studies on refugees and migrants' behaviour recommend using observations as a valid and fruitful data gathering method. After consulting guidelines on different types of observations and how to proceed (Lofland and Lofland, 2006; Martin and Bateson, 2007; Bryman, 2004), I decided to opt for unstructured observations, which involves capturing events as they occur and recording anything of interest, taking qualitative notes. Although people were aware of my presence during the interviews, I was covert as an observer because they did not know I was observing them and their behaviour. The method was clearly a focal sampling, as I observed one individual or a group for a specific period of time – the length of the interview, including introductions and finishing off – and recorded their behaviour and other characteristics.⁹

As the interviews were in Arabic, it gave me the time and chance to covertly observe the respondents, their gesturing, facial expression, behaviour as well as interaction with me and the interviewer. As I did not understand what was said, I could observe objectively, without being influenced by the content of the conversation. Also, as I was in the background and not directly involved in the conversations, I could take notes during the conversation without disrupting the flow of the interview or making respondents feel uncomfortable. I took handwritten notes of anything of interest, especially (interpreted) emotions of the respondents during the interview, such as tears showing sadness or disappointment, aggressive tone or

⁹ For more detailed explanations on how to differentiate between overt/covert observers, structured/ unstructured observations, and the kind of sampling, see for instance: Lofland and Lofland, 2006; Martin and Bateson, 2007; Bryman, 2004.

gesturing showing anger or frustration, or lowered voice and looking down, which might point to shyness or insecurity. I did this to account for the importance of analysing meta-data, such as silences, as suggested by Fujii (2009). I also took notes on the surroundings and the circumstances the interview took place in, as this can significantly influence the content of an interview. Field notes are thus relevant for the analysis of the interview later on.

The interviews taking place at homes of respondents were particularly interesting, as I could observe the participants in their natural surroundings and watch the open and natural interactions between men and women, their behaviour towards the children, towards me as a Western woman, and towards the different interviewers – an American woman, a young Jordanian male student, and a male Jordanian worker. Also, observing and recording the way we were greeted in the homes of interviewees and the surrounding areas, including the neighbourhood, was highly interesting and fruitful, as it gave me a better idea of how people live. I got insights into their style of living, their financial means, their housing situation, amongst others, which allowed me to triangulate this with the data obtained through the interviews and questionnaires. The interviews taking place in a community centre were just as interesting, as I could witness the participants' interactions with the workers in the community centre, with the manager, and other visitors. The workers at the community centre also gave valid information on some of the respondents as they work with them on a daily basis, which was mostly background information that we would not have had access to otherwise.

After having conducted the interviews, I created a chronological log of all my handwritten observations to have an overview of all field notes. This log included a factual part (pure observations), a speculative part (assumptions, interpretations, analysis), and personal part (possible biases in observation, for instance through my own emotions in the situation), following Lofland and Lofland (2006).

The goal of combining interviews with a short questionnaire and observations was to create a solid overview of my research topic and have a good saturation to be able to answer the research questions. Therefore, each element of my fieldwork had an added value and contributed data that I would not have had access to with only the other measures. This shows for instance when verbal comments of respondents clearly contradicted or were not in line with nonverbal behaviour I could observe, such as talking about how good life in Jordan is, at the same time having tears in their eyes. Before starting the research, I was assuming saturation could be reached with around 20 interviews and questionnaires and according observations.

3.1.3. Sampling Procedure

Kruse (2015) explains that if the researcher does not have much knowledge about the research topic before starting the fieldwork, a successive sampling is the best option. This includes analysing the first cases and formulate relevant criteria for selecting further cases from there. I decided to first do a few ‘random’ interviews (interviewing respondents who were easily accessible and fitted the main characteristic to be a Syrian refugee), and then identify helpful characteristics, as I felt I could not decide what criteria might be relevant for selecting respondents from the beginning. I then consciously chose respondents according to age group, gender, economic standing, and origin in Syria, to get cases for my sample that “represent the heterogeneity of the study field” (Kruse, 2015, 241). For each characteristic, I also tried to account for extreme cases, for instance in terms of financial situation or age. However, as explained below, access played a significant role in identifying potential respondents and having them participate.¹⁰

For the specific case of research with conflict-affected communities, I also accounted for Norman’s (2009) suggestion to follow a snowball sampling system in not only one, but several networks. This increases the rigour of the study because I faced a lower risk of being exposed to just one network (with very similar patterns of thinking, behaving, and demographic characteristics), and could at the same time reduce the risk for respondents and myself by not drawing too much attention to the study and the participants.

3.2. Data Collection

The data gathering for my study took place in Irbid and Amman, two of the largest cities of Jordan. Amman seemed interesting as the capital of Jordan (I assumed it would draw many refugees to the capital in search for jobs), Irbid seemed a good choice because it is the closest town to the Syrian border. The interviews, questionnaires and observations were conducted either in the homes of respondents, or in a separate office of a community centre in Irbid. The observations used for this analysis were also taken outside of the interview settings, before or after the official conversations, as well as during everyday life in Jordan.

¹⁰ Also, it needs to be said that there is a general bias in the sample population of Syrian refugees in Jordan. Those Syrians who are financially well off mostly fled to Europe or the United States, only very few stayed in Jordan. Most Syrians staying in Jordan do so because they do not have the financial means to leave, although they want to. Many of them came to Jordan being quite well off financially, but since they could not find employment in the pressured economic system, their financial situation has deteriorated. This means that most of the Syrians I interviewed were at the time of the interview in rather bad financial standing.

3.2.1. Access to Respondents

The easiest way to access Syrian refugees who fled to Jordan is making contact with them in refugee camps. Jordan has set up several camps which are accessible for Syrian refugees only and are thus little ‘Syrian cities’. Logistically and given my time and money constraints, I initially thought it might be most convenient to collect data in one of these the camps. By wandering around within the camp, I imagined one would easily meet potential respondents and could ensure they are Syrian nationals. That way, one could easily conduct several interviews on one day and would not have to move back and forth between locations.

However, through a previous stay in Jordan and getting in touch with other researchers in the country, I had learnt before that it would be highly difficult to conduct interviews in refugee camps. The government, as well as the UNHCR, highly restrict entrance, and researchers and journalists are not welcome guests. The easiest way to gain access is through an NGO working in the camps. However, these get so many enquiries from researchers and journalists, that many are not willing to ‘host’ externals for camp stays. Another option is to obtain a letter of permission from the Jordanian Ministry of Interior, and going to the camps with an official driver and an additional translator from the government or the UNHCR. This involves not only time in gaining permission, but also money, as one needs to pay the driver and translator.

Other researchers informed me there was not much value in spending this significant amount of money and time on one day in the camp, so due to time as well as financial constraints, I did not go there but tried to access Syrian refugees in host communities. Given the fact that only 20% of Syrian refugees in Jordan live in refugee camps, the rest residing in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas (UNHCR 2016), I think I did not risk a ‘spatial bias’, influencing my research results (Barakat and Ellis, 1996). Rather, one could argue I did better in giving up my initial idea to conduct interviews in the camps, given the bias this would have entailed by having a sample that would not have been representative of the population – life in the camps significantly differs from living amongst host communities where the majority of refugees live.

However, outside of the camps, it was also difficult for me to access potential respondents. Not speaking more than a few phrases of Arabic and living in the capital of Amman in a rather wealthy and international area, made it difficult to utilise an ethnographic approach and mingle with Syrians¹¹. Most Syrians live in rather poor areas outside of the city

¹¹ Only one interview was arranged through my landlord who knew a Syrian family living in the neighbourhood.

centre, areas that are often considered unsafe for foreigners, especially women. Nonetheless, one of my research assistants and I tried it a few times to walk around the city, talk to random people on the streets or in shops, and thereby gain access to Syrians who would be interested in participating in my research. Given that my sample should consist only of Syrian nationals who fled because of the war, we had to make sure that potentially interested respondents would really be Syrians. It turned out to be very difficult to ask for the nationality without sounding rude or impolite. This procedure took us a lot of time, as especially in the Arabic culture, it is impolite to immediately present your intention, and leave once you achieved what you wanted to. Thus, we ended up having a row of interesting conversations with Palestinians and Jordanians, but which did not help us in my research.

In the end, I managed to recruit participants through personal contacts and my work network¹². Because most of them live and work in Irbid, not in Amman, I ended up conducting most of my interviews there.¹³ The employees of a community centre in Irbid which works with Syrians in a poorer neighbourhood, were particularly helpful as one of my research assistants had worked there previously. They have many contacts and asked around for people who would be interested to take part in my research. These people came from completely different backgrounds and of different age groups, which made most of them eligible to join. Another starting point was the Mosque community of a friend of mine. At some point, after a few weeks of start-up difficulties, the snowballing and word-to-mouth system started to work and accessing interviewees became easier.

The limited time of my research assistants, as well as the initial difficulties of accessing respondents limited the number of interviews we could conduct. We had a lot more contacts and could have done more, but time-wise it was not possible. Also, I consciously decided against bringing in another translator, not wanting a situation of “too many cooks”. In the end, I think I did not only get good and high-quality data, but also a good mixture of respondents

¹² After my internship with a British NGO in Jordan, I was employed as a Fundraising Officer. This work entails a lot of networking, and working together with other NGOs in the field. When talking about my personal and work network I thus refer to friends and acquaintances I knew through work in Jordan at the time of the interviews, including locals and internationals, workers at other international NGOs as well as people outside of the humanitarian world. Most of them are in Jordan to work with Syrian refugees, and thus have an extensive network, too, which was useful for my research. I used the snowballing system through these networks to access Syrian refugees. At no times did I mention my work or the organization I work for, but always presented myself as a student at university, to avoid being affiliated (positively or negatively) with the NGO. The same way, my contacts who approached Syrians to ask whether they would be interested in joining the research, always made clear this would be an independent research project, not related to any NGO.

¹³ As argued elsewhere, this could potentially bias my research as I collected most of my data from Syrians living in Irbid. Results might potentially differ for other locations in Jordan. However, given the diversity of my group of respondents, I think the risk of this bias is relatively low.

representing the sample population. We conducted a total of 19 interviews and questionnaires, which resulted in a good saturation. There were clear patterns to be identified and thoughts and ideas were repeated throughout the interviews at some point.

3.2.2. The Role of Translators/Research Assistants

Initially planned as translators only, the ones conducting the interviews turned into research assistants, as further explained below. They not only helped me translate the interview guidelines and questionnaire, as well as the interviews, but also actively shaped the research with their recommendations on modifications for the interviews or field visits, and helped in accessing potential respondents. Finally, because of the difficulties with the live translations in the beginning, I decided to involve my translators more and leave the interviews to them, according to my briefing, and in consultation with me. Their role was to be my representatives, in the sense of saying what I would have said if I had spoken Arabic.

My assistants were all friends or people I knew. I had tried to find professional translators at a payable rate but found that either their level of English was not sufficient to give them a proper briefing, that they did not want to or have the time to go with me to the field, or that I could not afford their translation rates. In the end, the core team consisted of three main assistants. One American woman in her mid-twenties: a friend of mine who speaks good Arabic and has worked in the region for a few years already, helped me to translate and later modify the interview guidelines and questionnaire after a pre-test and piloting phase. She did the very first interviews, and helped me out whenever the others were not available. Similar to my own experiences, respondents were either very open with her because she is a foreign woman, or it was difficult for her to encourage people – especially men – to talk. Also, quite naturally, her Arabic is not at the level of a local, so there were phrases she did not understand, as well as misunderstandings due to the language barrier.

My second assistant was a Jordanian friend, a student at university, in his early twenties, fluent in English and Arabic. He was very interested in the research topic and personally interested in the results and in helping me out, so I felt comfortable in leaving him to lead many of the interviews. After I gave him an extensive briefing, he performed well in the interviews and was able to collect high quality data, at the same time keeping to the ethics we had agreed on. Because he is so young, and especially because he is a local, he was able to set up nice, fluent conversations with respondents, that resembled the natural ‘chit-chat’ conversations of a group of friends. Respondents all felt comfortable talking to him. However, sometimes this also lead to a lot of extra information and side-track conversations, which made the interviews

longer than others. However, this information was often useful in the end, as it allowed me to better understand the interviewees and their general situation and life, although this was not directly useful for this specific study and its research questions.

Lastly, through a friend of mine, I got in touch with a Jordanian in his early 30s, who works for an international NGO in Jordan. His English is not as proficient as that of the other two, which made it partly more difficult to brief him on my research, so I could not always be sure he fully understood. However, his age, network, and particularly his year-long experience in working with refugees was invaluable for me and my research. He arranged many of the interviews through his contacts, and he felt comfortable in interviewing refugees, even if they started talking about their life in Syria or other emotional memories. Despite his network, none of the respondents had known or met him before, which could have influenced the interviews. Because of this, I feel they saw a young Jordanian who speaks their language and understands their culture, and at the same time felt comfortable in talking about the suffering in Syria and dealing with it in a way that nobody felt uncomfortable. Him working for an organization which helps Syrian refugees often also made people relax much faster and be more open. At the same time, I cannot exclude that knowing about his work for the NGO influenced some respondents' behaviour or answers during the interview. They might have hoped for his help, particularly when it came to their difficult financial situation, so that exaggerations might have occurred which we were not aware of. However, we made sure to diminish this as much as possible: he introduced himself as a friend of mine, and only mentioned his work when respondents explicitly asked him. If this was the case, he always stressed this research would be completely independent and in no way affiliated to the NGO's work and that he was doing these interviews in his free time.

All three research assistants made a great team to work with, and I am highly thankful they spent so much time and effort working with me. Because they all have a main occupation and are not always available, I was lucky to have a small pool of people to contact whenever an interview opportunity came up. Also, their contacts and networks in Jordan are completely different, so I could conduct interviews with different respondents from different backgrounds. In the end, each of the three conducted around one third of the interviews each.

3.2.3. Proceeding of the Interviews

The interviews started with a bit of informal, light conversation, giving everyone some time to warm up and make the respondents feel comfortable. The research topic and intention was explained, as well as who I am and what the data is being used for. Before switching on the

recording device, the interviewer made sure to get informed consent of the respondents for recording and using the data, explaining in detail issues of anonymity and confidentiality. All respondents agreed to having the conversation recorded, though some wanted more details on the how and why of my research. Depending on the interviewer and the respective respondent, the interviews were either fluent conversations, with only a few guided questions, or rather structured with a high level of guidance. When the interviewer had the feeling they had covered everything, they asked me if there was anything specific I wanted to know more about. If not, they moved on to the questionnaire and finished the official part of the conversation. What often followed was another half an hour of light conversation, sitting together and having a cup of tea, a typical Arabic sign of hospitality which should be accepted out of politeness.

For the first few interviews, the interviewers carried out live translations, meaning they interrupted the conversation every few sentences to translate for me. However, we quickly realized that this would not work. It took too long and the interviewees often got impatient. Additionally, due to the continuous interruptions, no real flow or open conversation could develop. I thus decided to change the process and after another careful briefing on the guidelines and research objectives, I let the translators be research assistants who led the interviews on their own. I joined the conversation only when the respondents directly approached me, as well as during the introduction and when finishing off. During the interview itself, I was in the background, either playing with the children, nodding when respondents were looking at me from time to time, or completely invisible sitting a bit aside. Though I still support this approach and am glad we modified the procedure, I also have to admit this made it more difficult for me. I could not follow the conversations and did not know what they were talking about, which also meant I could not intervene or ask follow-up questions. I had to solely rely on and trust my research assistants. I could partly diminish this problem by having brief follow-up conversations with my research assistants after the interviews. They gave me an overview of the conversation and mentioned striking, interesting, or relevant information or situations that happened during the interviews. Nonetheless, I only saw the data once it was translated, which made me feel that I lost some control over my own project. However, I would not have done so if I had not trusted my translators and had not thought they would do a great job. Now that I do have the data, I can also see they did well, but at times the procedure was difficult and uncomfortable for me.

3.2.4. Issues of Self-presentation

Many researchers have pointed to the importance of self-presentation in the field and the effect this will have on the data collected (see for instance Barakat and Ellis, 1996). From the literature, I understood that how respondents and others in the field perceive and judge me depends not only on my 'fixed' characteristics, such as gender, nationality and skin colour, but also on the way I dress, my body language and way of speaking, and how I arrive in the field and with whom. In the specific context of working in Jordan, I want to particularly point to the fact that I was a young Western woman with an academic background in a Muslim country. Westerners in general are perceived as wealthy and powerful amongst Arabs, which became even more important because I talked to people in rather poor areas. I could imagine and experienced that this necessarily raises expectations, that people have a specific picture of me and sometimes even prejudices. Sometimes this image made it easier for me to talk to people, at other times it made it more difficult. I experienced more than one situation when respondents asked me for money or – half jokingly – to take them with me to Germany. After having encountered this for the first time, I tried to avoid these situations by making clear that I am a student on low budget, not related to any international organization, who needs their help for her research. Making this clear beforehand when agreeing on appointments with people on the phone, significantly helped. In the end, only people agreed to join the research without any expectations, just to get to know me and to help me with my studies.

Being not only Western, but a Christian female in a Muslim country reinforced the fact that people had specific prejudices and images of me. I encountered situations when people did not take me and my research assistants seriously and were thus willing to talk very openly – I assume as we were considered 'innocent'. At other times, I could see and sense respondents were sceptical, even negative or judgemental regarding me being alone on the streets as a woman, and particularly, talking to males. Because of this special situation due to my nationality and gender, I knew it would be even more crucial to think about my self-presentation in the field before the fieldtrip, and even more whilst being there.

Due to these considerations, I tried my best to behave in a culturally appropriate way and not raise any unrealistic expectations amongst interested respondents. I made sure to dress appropriately and cover as much as possible, but still looking Western, as I had experienced locals becoming indignant or even angry when seeing Westerners dress in the local way, for instance women wearing the hijab – it was considered disrespectful of the culture and religious belief. Also, I was friendly and thankful at all times, as well as interested, but not too enthusiastic, trying to be neutral and partly invisible so as to not draw too much attention to

myself, but rather allowing the respondent to focus on the interview topic and the interviewer. However, although this approach diminishes the risk of a bias due to my presence and appearance, I could of course not completely control the impact the presence of my research assistants might have had on the interview situation¹⁴.

3.2.5. Ethical Considerations

In general, I tried to follow the ethics and rules for good research, taken from relevant literature on research in (post-) conflict zones¹⁵. Nearly all researchers agree that solid and extensive preparation is essential before going to the field. This includes taking care of flights, accommodation, insurance, health care, contacting a host organization, as well as understanding the context and culture one is working within, including acquiring a basic level of the local language (Hilhorst and Jansen, 2005; Barakat and Ellis, 1996; Norman, 2009). As Brown (2009) and Goodhand (2000) point out, when coming from a different culture than your research participants, preparing is even more important, and should include considering ethical issues before leaving to the field, as well as being particularly sensitive about the needs and fears of the respective community. I followed these recommendations, and conducted a risk and vulnerability assessment for myself as well as for my potential respondents, summarized in a personal security plan (according to Mertus, 2009).

One of the most important paradigms I followed in the field was to do no harm to the respondents and their community, be it their dignity, safety or anonymity. It has often been mentioned that research should not harm the population of study, nor the researcher (Mertus, 2009; Goodhand, 2000; Kovats-Bernat, 2002), but only when being in the field myself and learning about respondents' personal stories, getting to know their families and homes, at the same time having to deal with poverty and stories of hardship as a researcher, I realized how crucial this actually is.

During my time in Jordan, I tried my best to not do any harm to my interviewees. I did so by following a few basic rules, including a) keeping a low profile and not attracting unwelcome attention to myself or my respondents, b) clearly and openly explaining my research topic and objectives to all interested participants to not raise any false expectations, c) obtaining

¹⁴ Van der Haar, Heijmans and Hilhorst (2013) point to the crucial role of the research assistants and translators and their influence on the data gathered and the process of knowledge construction.

¹⁵ Jordan is not an open conflict zone, but according to Norman (2009), there are different kinds of conflict zones, including humanitarian situations such as due to refugee flows. Also, I interviewed and researched communities impacted by conflict, so that recommendations on how to treat them is highly valid. Taking this as a starting point, I took advice on research in (post-) conflict zones into specific consideration.

informed consent of all interviewees for using and recording their stories, at the same time protecting their anonymity, privacy, and the confidentiality of the data at all times, d) carefully selecting my research assistants to make sure they follow the same ethical standards as me, e) taking care of the physical safety and mental wellbeing of my research assistants, so they in turn were able to keep up our research ethics. During all conversations and visits to the field, me and my research assistants made sure to be polite, patient, respectful, flexible and reflexive, as well as punctual, appropriately dressed, and humble. For the interviews in particular, I also briefed my research assistants on how to deal with (and respect) silences, on being sensitive about taboo topics or issues respondents feel uncomfortable talking about. Though I cannot judge any cultural or language-related insensitivities, I can at least tell from the translations that the interviewers respected silences and topics respondents did not want to talk about, by changing topics or moving on to another question. Also, more than once did an interviewer tell me after an interview that he could feel the respondent did not want to talk about specific topics, such as the situation in Syria, and that after a few follow-up questions they did not really reply to, he changed topics and made sure not to make them feel uncomfortable.

The book “Surviving field research: Working in violent and difficult situations” by Sriram and colleagues (2009) and the “Guide for fieldwork in hazardous areas” by Hilhorst and Jansen (2005) were my everyday guides during the field stay with many practical tips drawn from life. It especially helped me in doing no harm to myself and dealing with difficult situations or decisions to be made. Taking care of myself included avoiding risks to my physical safety, such as through traffic, travel, or criminality; paying attention to my mind and body, creating a good balance and allowing room for breaks from the field; ensuring steady and healthy home front communication; preparing myself for stories of hardship, poverty, and potential issues around me being a Western woman (see below). Relating to the latter, I followed Brown’s (2009) advice to avoid answering specific personal questions, such as my marital status or my religious beliefs, especially in the context of rather conservative Muslim communities.

At times, I could also observe myself getting too cautious and oversensitive, which reminded me of Lee (1994) who takes up the position that it is always better to be safe than sorry, but that being overcautious can also be used as an excuse for under-involvement. Not going to the camps or specific areas in cities due to logistical or safety reasons, or doing without detailed information on some topics I considered sensitive, such as the details of fleeing to Jordan or the respondents’ positioning regarding the Syrian war are some examples that could be seen as such a form of under-involvement. However, these were conscious decisions made

to prevent putting the respondents at risk. I tried my best to be reflexive on my approach and constantly reconsider whether specific decisions were necessary, or if they would hinder the proceeding of my research. Overall, I tried to balance my desire for good and high-quality data with the urge to not do any harm to research participants, assistants, and myself. The last section of this chapter reflects in more detail on some of the mentioned problems occurring throughout the research.

3.3. Data Analysis

The recorded interviews were shared with my research assistants so they could translate them into English. The translations were audio files (the translation was recorded, which was faster than transcribing), which I transcribed myself. I used InqScribe, a free software for transcribing audio and video. Although it took me some time to get used to the tool, it is easy to handle and very intuitive, so it was of great help. The data from the handwritten questionnaires was transferred into an excel sheet and used for descriptive statistics and to give some quantitative background data for the study.

As some of the interviews were as long as 20 pages, I used a software to make the analysis easier and faster. I decided for MaxQDA, a programme designed for the analysis of qualitative data. Again, it took me some time to understand the tool, but it turned out very helpful and intuitive to use. The programme allows the user to assign a code to each paragraph of an interview, as well as several codes for one. You can sort the data by respondents, or by codes, so that one can see all answers from respondents regarding a specific code. This made the analysis of my data a lot easier and more structured, which in turn facilitated the writing stage.

For each of the different topics of interest, including problems and uncertainties refugees face, strategies to deal with these, and the role of ICT, I manually developed a coding tree. I used previous knowledge and first impressions from the data to develop a tree starting from the broad topic down to more detailed information. For some topics, this was quite straightforward, for others, I found it more difficult and had to adapt and change along the way. During the coding process, I employed different tactics depending on the respective topic. After setting a list of different codes, I started deductive coding, by labelling each interview and some of the questionnaires according to the previously set codes. At the same time, I did in vivo coding, taking particularly interesting or striking terms in interviews as a new code and adding them to the coding tree. The last step was to employ selective coding, taking a specific code as a starting point and scanning all interviews for the appearance of this label. The whole process was

circular, moving back and forth in between the different stages and returning to previous stages whenever necessary. Overall, the strategic and technology-supported coding of the data was time-consuming, but helped prepare for the analysis and writing.

3.4. Problems, Hard Choices and Dilemmas

As explained by Barakat and Ellis (1996), it is essential to stay flexible, independent and aware of any alternatives throughout all stages of research. I found the preparation, analysis and write-up stage rather straightforward and did not encounter any major difficulties. However, I have already addressed some of the problems which arose during the field stay. I could navigate or solve a couple through adapting my approach and staying flexible. Some of these problems I faced were already mentioned above, which I briefly want to sum up. I encountered some difficulties related to accessing respondents inside and outside of camps, translations, and my presentation in the field, and others regarding the construction of the questionnaire or guidelines as well as financial and time constraints. I could not access Syrian refugees living in camps, but did not consider this a major hurdle for my research. With time and extensive use of my contacts and private and professional network in Jordan, I could also overcome the initial difficulties to find Syrian refugees willing to participate in my research. To not overtax the translators' concentration and the respondents' patience, I decided to do without live translations, and only received the final data afterwards. Although this significantly limited my ability to actively shape the interviews and intervene whenever necessary, it also gave me the unique opportunity to fully focus on observing the respondents. I would have fewer decent and valid observations if I had been involved in the conversations. During the first few interviews, some flaws became apparent, that we could erase by changing the sequence, content and phrasing of some questions. The guidelines and questionnaire was modified and improved a few times throughout the fieldwork.

The above-mentioned problems were rather minor issues I could mostly overcome through flexibility and adaptation. However, despite the solid preparation of my field stay and my best intentions, I also encountered some serious dilemmas and hard choices. One concerned the length of my field stay. The time and money I had available for my fieldwork in Jordan were limited, so I could not extend the 10 weeks I had initially planned. I found myself in a difficult situation when realizing that my assistants and I had finally found some routine in accessing respondents and conducting the interviews well when I had to leave. Confronted with the possibility of gathering more data with less effort needed, I considered extending my stay, and found it very hard to decide against it due to personal and financial reasons. Another reason

for me not to expand my field work was due to my personality trait of never feeling completely satisfied. I realized that meeting interviewees and getting insights into their everyday life in Jordan and their stories and memories fascinated me and I personally enjoyed mingling with diverse families. I think if not being constrained by external factors, I might have found it difficult to stop at some point and declare the data collection phase finished.

Particularly because I enjoyed meeting Syrian refugees from different age groups, genders and backgrounds, I found it highly challenging and problematic that I could not speak Arabic. Not being able to communicate with the respondents was hard because I would have liked to join the conversations my research assistants had with the respondents and also show my respect for their culture and language. This way, I did not have the possibility to set up a personal relationship with the interviewees, and kept being 'the foreigner'. I felt bad about not being able to exchange more than a few polite phrases, also because I could sense some participants saw me as the typical white Westerner who would expect everyone to speak English and thus not learn the local language. This language barrier posed a significant and recurring dilemma for me which also made me think about future research conducted in foreign languages – I would consider very carefully whether to do it this way again.

One of the hardest things I faced during the field stay was to hear so many stories of hardship and suffering of interviewees. Even when not understanding the language, the poverty, helplessness and sadness of many refugees became clear during the interviews, especially when interviews took place in respondents' homes. For me personally, it was a psychological burden to see these welcoming and friendly people suffer, and especially to see the obvious gap between their lives and mine. Some respondents asked me to take them with me to Germany, which was difficult to deal with as I really wished I could have helped them. I had decided beforehand to not give away money to participants (following considerations by Hilhorst & Jansen, 2005), also to not get the reputation within the community of paying for the interviews and raising false expectations or influencing the responses. Also, in conversation with a few local workers for NGOs, I found out that Syrians/Arabs often find it insulting to receive money from foreigners and would take it as an affront. However, at times, I was doubting and reconsidering this decision, and found myself in the dilemma of wanting to help, without influencing the research and respecting the pride and dignity of respondents, at the same time also having to accept that I simply could not help everyone. In the end, I stuck to my decision not to give money, but brought small presents for the children and some traditional sweets as a sign of appreciation. Even several months after coming back from my field stay, I am still

thinking about some of the respondents and am wondering whether a small financial contribution would have made life easier for them and whether I made the wrong decision.

Along the same line, thoughts about the importance and relevance of my research project continued to be an important and difficult issue for me. Given the financial distress of many refugees, I wondered whether I should rather spend my time, money, and energy on directly helping them improve their situation, instead of investing it in the research. Even though throughout the interviews I had the feeling respondents were glad to have someone listen to their stories and get the feeling that these are important and heard, I still find it hard to see the added value of this study in direct comparison with what I could have achieved in the meantime and with the same financial efforts. Overall, the dilemmas and hard choices I faced helped me develop as a researcher and person, and I try to learn from it and see it in a positive way.

4. Background Information

Before getting to the core of this analysis, I will give a brief overview of why and how the Syrian refugee crisis evolved, and what consequences it has had for the country and region. The following presents some background information on the Syrian Civil War, and the subsequent refugee crisis, as well as the situation of forced migrants in Jordan. In section 5.3. I will also briefly introduce the cases on which my study is based. The information displayed here is by no means exhaustive, but shall offer a basis for better understanding the following analysis.

4.1. The Syrian Civil War

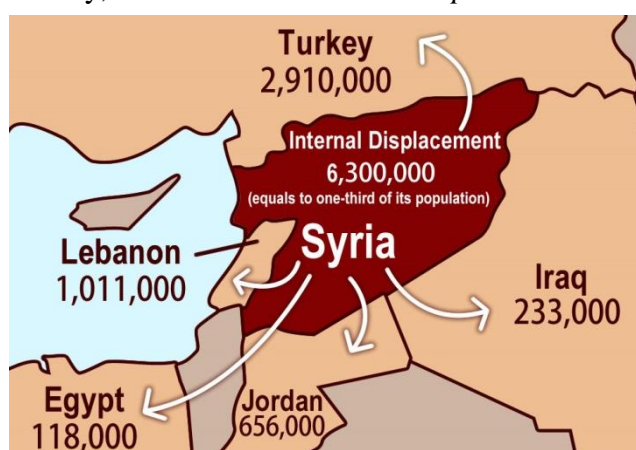
Now known as “the Syrian Civil War”, the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic began in March 2011 with demonstrations of civilians demanding economic, social and political reforms. Inspired by the “Arab Spring” uprisings in neighbouring countries in the Middle East, Syrians were hoping for similar radical changes leading to democracy, justice, equality and greater respect of human rights. The demonstrators initially held peaceful protests on the streets of Dara’a, a city in the Southwest of Syria bordering Jordan, but the protestors were fired on by governmental forces. Hundreds of civilians were killed, many more were imprisoned and presumably tortured. This motivated hundreds of thousands to go into the streets across Syria, protesting against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. In the summer of 2011, after several months of uprisings and public demonstrations, the Syrian people had slowly divided into pro-regime groups and those opposing it, which also triggered the formation of different rebel groups amongst the Assad opposition. The situation eventually escalated when Assad refused to resign and various rebel groups took up arms to fight governmental security forces. (Alhayek, 2016; Al Jazeera, 2017; BBC, 2016a; Chatty, 2017; Jabbar and Zaza, 2014).

When the fighting reached Aleppo in the North and the capital Damascus in 2012, media and humanitarian agencies first spoke of a “war” situation. Over time, world powers such as the United States and Russia, as well as Iran, Turkey, and Israel, became directly involved in the war, each giving assistance to different parties and running airstrikes and bombings in support. Other countries and sub-groups, such as Qatar, Jordan, Saudi-Arabia, France, the UK, Al Qaeda, as well as the Hezbollah in Lebanon, continue to influence the conflict at the time of writing by supporting opposing sides. Peace talks throughout the years have all failed due to insurmountable obstacles between the Syrian government and the various rebel groups (Al Jazeera, 2017; BBC, 2016a).

The UN Human Rights Council accuses all parties involved in the conflict of having committed war crimes, “including murder, torture, rape and enforced disappearances” (BBC,

2016a). The government's use of chemical weapons in Damascus in August 2013, as well as using barrel bombs, killings thousands, have been some of the most inhumane moves in the war so far. Also, rebel groups and the radical jihadist group Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, now known as the Islamic State, IS) use the suffering of civilians as a bargaining chip with the government and the international arena by cutting off whole regions from food, water, and health care supply. By the end of 2013, more than 120,000 Syrians had been killed, climbing up to 250,000 in the summer of 2015. The latest figures in 2017 assume that around 470,000 Syrians, most of them civilians, have been killed over the last six years of conflict, with over a million being injured. In 2016, the BBC estimated that more than half of the Syrians remaining in the country were without adequate access to drinking water and food, huge numbers without access to education or employment opportunities, and even more living in hard-to-reach regions of the country, often under tight control of rebels. Nearly all of them are cut off from humanitarian assistance and live in dire poverty. Experts assume that, overall, nearly a quarter of the country's pre-war population has been killed through direct military attacks or indirect consequences of the fighting (Al Jazeera, 2017; BBC, 2016a; Chatty, 2017).

On top of the incredibly high numbers of Syrians that have been killed through the war, many more have been pushed into displacement and forced migration. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2017) estimates that more than 5 million Syrians have fled the country since the beginning of the war in 2011, another 6.3 million being internally displaced, often repeatedly changing locations due to new fighting arising. This means that half of Syria's population from before the war has been displaced. Children and youth below the age of 17 make up 70% of all Syrian refugees, an alarming number given the impact this will have on their physical and psychological wellbeing and their future (Doocy et al., 2016a). Only 10 percent of the Syrian refugees found refuge in the EU, and a lot less in the US, most of them fleeing to neighbouring countries, such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. *Map 1* shows that Turkey has absorbed nearly 3 million Syrians, Lebanon around 1 million, and in Jordan, around 650,000 registered with the UNHCR (World Vision, 2017). Many more have crossed borders without being registered by governments or the UN. With no end in sight, the Syrian Civil War will most probably force further Syrians to leave the country.



Map 1. Syrian Refugees in the Middle East (those registered with the UNHCR only). Source: World Vision, 2017.

4.2. Syrian Refugees in Jordan

One of the very few stable countries in the region, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has remained in good political and economic standing and has continued to be an important partner for Western countries (Carrion, 2015). However, Jordan suffered from the global financial crisis in 2008, as well as from the disorder following the Arab Spring (Fakih and Ibrahim, 2016), and has significant problems regarding unemployment and state debt. Nonetheless, Jordan has been for decades and still is a refugee-welcoming country, despite the difficulties involved in coping with a massive rise in population (Carrion, 2015).

Surprisingly, legal provisions to regulate the status and rights of the many refugees in Jordan are mostly absent. In 1994, various states in the Middle East developed the Convention on Regulating Status of Refugees in the Arab Countries, but it was never implemented and the countries, including Jordan, failed to adopt a similar legal document which would regulate the rights and status of forced migrants. Also, Jordan did not sign the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees developed by the UN, nor the 1967 additional Protocol. Only in 1998 did Jordan implement a Memorandum of Understanding which defines the obligations of the government and the rights of refugees, and which is the only legal basis for the treatment of refugees in Jordan today. In general, refugees are treated as any other foreigner, who can stay in the country for six months without visa or residency status. During this time, the UNHCR is responsible for resettling them to another country, but in reality, most stay longer by extending their initial visa, or avoiding any registration and living under the radar. Jordan has taken in millions of refugees from Palestine and Iraq over the last few decades, and now hundreds of thousands fleeing from the Syrian war (Carrion, 2015; Chatty, 2017; Riach and James, 2016).

In 2016, King Abdullah highlighted that around 1.5 million Syrian refugees have entered Jordan since 2011, increasing the local population by 20 percent. He also pointed to the significant security risk this poses on the country (CBS News, 2016). At peak times, 2,500 to 3,000 Syrians were crossing the borders each day, significantly overwhelming the security forces at the border as well as the humanitarian agencies within the country. A terrorist attack in mid-2016, killing several members of the Jordanian security forces, led the government to completely close its borders for Syrians (Economist, 2016).

As stated earlier, only 20 percent of the refugees reside in refugee camps set up by the government and run by UNHCR, while the clear majority live in urban or peri-urban areas, often with relatives or friends (Chatty, 2017; Carrion, 2015). 32 percent of Syrian refugees live in the capital Amman, 29 percent in Irbid, and quite a significant proportion in Mafraq (14%),

and Zarqa (10%), the latter three being border towns to Syria in the North (Al Qdah and Lacroix, 2017; Fakihi and Ibrahim, 2016). Similar to Amman, Irbid has the highest density of refugees, and has seen the highest proportion of Syrians moving in, in relation to the original population (Carrion, 2015). Most Syrians now live on the edge of these cities, often in the poorest and most neglected areas, or in unsanitary, isolated and cramped refugee camps (Doocy et al., 2016b). However, all refugees have free or subsidized access to public health care and education for their children, and are eligible for food vouchers and financial assistance (Fakihi and Ibrahim, 2016).

The large influx of refugees, especially to urban areas, puts a significant burden on Jordan's economy as well as social systems and public services. The rapid increase in population has led to a number of problematic developments, including: less jobs available, especially in the informal and low wage sector; increased fiscal costs; overcrowded schools and health care facilities; increased strain on governmental services, such as waste collection; higher rents due to the increased competition over housing (up to 300% higher than in pre-war times); higher prices of goods and services, including food, electricity, and fuel; increased water shortages, amongst others. As Al Qdah and Lacroix put it: "the number of refugees is simply too great for Jordan to deal with" (2017, 615). The most vulnerable and marginalized amongst Jordanians feel the negative impacts most as they compete with refugees over jobs and resources. They do not receive much support to manage these problems which makes their precarious situation even worse. Because of refugees living amongst their host populations and being highly visible to them, Jordanians increasingly blame Syrians for the upcoming problems and feel they are worse off than before the crisis, reinforced by the (perceived) focus of aid agencies for refugees instead of locals. Resentment, tensions, and alienation between the communities are on the rise, in turn increasing the stress for both groups (Carrion, 2015; Chatty, 2017; Riach and James, 2016).

Even those Syrians legally residing in the country as registered refugees are by law not allowed to work and cannot obtain a work permit, as the Jordanian government wants to prevent any kind of settlement or residence¹⁶. Also, they are not allowed to obtain vocational training or join income-generating measures, and face obstacles in accessing the formal economy¹⁷. This

¹⁶ Although many studies show, that for nearly all Syrian refugees, staying in Jordan is just an inevitable solution because of the security situation in Syria. As soon as possible, they want to return, and do not intend to stay in Jordan and settle permanently (see for instance Carrion, 2015).

¹⁷ Several researchers and experts have pointed to the danger and negative long-term effects of this approach: once the war in Syria ends, the country needs a workforce of highly skilled workers to rebuild and develop the economic, political and social system. The current young generation of refugees often lack access to education, and academics and skilled labourers are not allowed to enter the formal economy, which leads to brain loss and puts many Syrians

makes it particularly hard for refugees to make a living, because the aid received from UNHCR is often not enough to feed a whole family. In combination with the loss of social networks that could offer support financially, illegal and informal labour, as well as child labour or early marriages of young daughters to Jordanians are for many the only way to earn an income and make a living. Experts assume that several ten thousand children (girls as well as boys) work in the informal sector, mainly in agriculture, domestic work, food services or construction work. Instead of going to school, many are responsible for feeding their families. More than 65% of all Syrians in Jordan live below the poverty line and suffer from shortages of basic goods and services (Carrion, 2015). Though children and youth can access schools for free, the sheer number of child refugees raises significant difficulties in offering high-quality education for all. The government tried to solve this by dividing school into shifts, where Jordanian children attend the morning shifts, and Syrians go to school in the afternoon/evening, but with “inferior curriculum and reduced hours” (Chatty, 2017, 29)¹⁸. Since 2014, when the UNHCR cut the free access to health services for Syrian refugees in all public facilities, many have also stopped seeking health care because they consider the costs of the co-payments too high (Doocy et al., 2016a; 2016b).

Health-wise, many Syrian refugees suffer from the direct and indirect consequences of war and displacement, including injuries and severe psychological distress. Many witnessed bombings, killing, and incredible violence and experienced torture, as well as the stresses of fearing for their lives, fleeing and displacement. Fearfulness, trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, anger, depression, as well as panic attacks, nightmares, headaches, sleep disorders or anxiety are commonly reported symptoms amongst Syrians who fled the war. Moreover, the illegal employment of young boys and men in the construction or agricultural sector is a common source of injuries and other health problems due to precarious working conditions. In addition, most of them live in overcrowded and unsanitary houses and lack the proper treatment for their health problems which further worsens their health situation. Feelings of helplessness, dependency on external aid, and having an unknown future further promotes depression and frustrations amongst refugees. Children and youth are especially concerned by these problems, as they are less resilient and often do not understand the state of war and forced displacement. Also, they in particular face discrimination and bullying by Jordanian children and youth

in a precarious situation which does not allow them to collect savings or skills for rebuilding Syria at a later stage. This also makes them more vulnerable to extremist ideas and groups who offer an income and other ways out of poverty (see for instance Carrion, 2015).

¹⁸ The afternoon/evening shifts are especially problematic for young girls: in winter times when it gets dark early, they can often not attend class because they are not allowed to be outside in the dark. Also, afternoon schooling makes it more difficult for mothers to find employment, as part-time jobs are mostly offered in the mornings.

(Almontaser and Baumann, 2017; Basheti et al., 2015; Chatty, 2017; Doocy et al., 2016a; 2016b; Jabbar and Zaza, 2014). In his study on Syrian refugees in Irbid, Stevens (2016) shows that many social networks have broken down during the last years, which leaves less support for many of those in difficult situations. Given that social networks can be an important source for psychosocial wellbeing as well as social and financial support, this development further deteriorates the situation of Syrians in Jordan.

As a side note, it is important to briefly illustrate the situation in the refugee camps to better understand the situation of Syrian refugees in Jordan. With the rapid influx of refugees into the country, the government together with the UNHCR decided to set up a refugee camp in 2012, Za'atari, close to the town of Za'atari. Many problems rapidly arose regarding sanitation, food and water supply, infrastructure, as well as security and management. At peak times, more than 100,000 live in the camp, making it the second biggest in the world, and one of the biggest 'cities' in Jordan, with its own infrastructure and economy. When Za'atari became overcrowded, the government decided to set up another camp, this time in a more structured and organized manner: Azraq was opened in 2013, in a remote area in the desert north of Amman. Both camps, as well as other smaller ones, are completely isolated, with access being highly restricted. Many of the refugees live in harsh and inhuman conditions in the camp and face a daily struggle for basic goods and services. Refugees cannot move freely and cannot leave the fenced camps, nor get in touch with the outside world for trade or business for example. Also, in Azraq camp for instance, cars are not allowed. The camps are surrounded by a barbed wire fence and armed security guards control all entrances and exits and manage and order within the camp. The only way to leave is through 'Kafala', a system that allows Jordanian citizens to take refugees out of the camps by acting as a guarantee for them. In general, the Jordanian government tries to push as many refugees from urban areas into the camps as possible, to exercise control and reduce pressure on the host communities. Refugees in urban areas caught in illegal labour as well as new refugees arriving at the border from Syria are sent directly to Azraq (Hoffmann, 2017; Jabbar and Zaza, 2014; Sullivan and Tobin, 2014).

Because of the often-harsh conditions, many refugees wish to leave Jordan, and some manage to send or smuggle at least their children to Western countries. They wish for better educational possibilities and a more promising future for the younger generation, preventing a 'lost generation' and radicalization. Others eventually decide to return to the insecurity and violence in Syria because they face such great difficulties in Jordan (Chatty, 2017).

4.3. The Participants of this Study

Given that this study will investigate the everyday life of Syrian refugees who have been displaced to Jordan, it seems relevant to briefly introduce the specific cases which I take as basis for my research. In general, the picture drawn here reflects the overall impression of the situation of Syrians in Jordan, as presented in the previous section. Most interviews took place with individuals, some however joined as a couple, so that one case involved two interviewees, with different answers and opinions of the individual respondents. My analysis is based on a total of 15 such cases with 19 different interviewees, plus 19 questionnaires and a range of observations taken during the interviews, as well as outside of the interview settings. I want to briefly sketch the overall situation of these respondents, giving insights into their financial, social, and health situation in Jordan, as well as basic demographic information. Throughout the paper, I use the terms *interviewee*, *participant*, *informant* and *respondent* interchangeably.

As I was interested in different age groups, and different gender, I tried to get a balanced group of respondents, capturing the diversity of the population sample. The average age of respondents was 36.6 (age range from 17 to 61 years), and 57.8% were females (11 versus 8 male interviewees). More than 75% of the respondents are married and have children, of which two women are widowed. Only four interviewees were not married at the time of the interviews. 17 of the 19 respondents lived in Irbid at the time of the interview, the third largest city in Jordan located in the North, less than 30 kilometres away from the Syrian border. I could only interview two respondents from Amman, the capital of Jordan as explained before. Eight of the interviewees originally come from Homs, a 6-million-residents' city in the West of Syria, five are from Damascus, the capital of Syria, one from Aleppo in the North, and another five interviewees are originally from Dara'a, located right at the Syrian-Jordanian border, of which two lived in Damascus at the time of fleeing from Syria. Please see *Table 1* for a summary of the demographic information.

	Sex		Age group				Living in		Coming from				Married /kids	
Value	M	F	17-20	25-30	36-46	52-61	Irbid	Amman	Aleppo	Damascus	Dara'a	Homs	Y	N
#	8	11	4	4	7	4	17	2	1	5	5	8	15	4

Table 1. Demographic information on interviewees.

For all respondents, the main reason to leave Syria was the war and its consequences for their lives. They all came to Jordan together with their families (husband/wife, children, parents), partly also with relatives, friends, or neighbours. Half of them left Syria in 2012, pretty much at the beginning of the war, the other half in 2013. Only one respondent left in 2015, when the pressure and living conditions became too difficult. Half of the interviewees even know the exact date of leaving Syria/coming to Jordan, showing the importance of this day, and how life-changing this decision was for most of them. As one of the main research foci was to find out about respondents' means and ways of communication, they were also asked whether they still have family or friends in Syria, and if so, whether they keep in touch with them. 18 of the interviewees gave an affirmative answer to both questions, and only one respondent says he does not have any family or friends and does thus not communicate with anyone in Syria.

Around two thirds of the participants entered Jordan legally, meaning they used their passports to cross the border into Jordan. Five respondents entered illegally, mostly with a specialist who guided them throughout the route; one interviewee mentioned a guide from the Free Syrian Army who brought them out of the country. The Arabic term for this translates to "through the fence" in English, and means to come into the country without using the official borders, and avoiding the checkpoints. Not all interviewees mentioned the means of transportation they used. I learnt that four came in a car, three in a shared bus or taxi, one described that they came on foot, walking from Dara'a in Syria to the Jordanian border; only one informant came by plane, taking a flight from Damascus (Syria) to Beirut (Lebanon), and from Beirut to Amman (Jordan). 14 informants came directly to the place where they live at the time of the interview, five went to other places first, including a camp in Syria, the Za'atari and Beshabsheh refugee camp in Jordan, and two other border towns in Jordan.

Respondents were also asked about why they came to Jordan, and why to that specific city they lived in at the time of interviewing, which was either Irbid or Amman. Nearly half of them explain they had family members or relatives living in Jordan/the respective city they moved to, another two mention that they came to that particular place because they knew many Syrians would live there. Three respondents explicitly say they came to Irbid in specific because it is closest to Syria, another three say because it is safe, and one mentions the cultural similarities and the same language. It was clear from the conversations and context though, that all of them came to Jordan as they consider it safe, because it was the easiest and closest to get to from Syria, and because the culture and language are very similar to Syria. Three respondents also mention they came to Irbid specifically looking for work, as they expected chances to be higher than in other places. The husband of one participating woman works as a bus driver on

the route Damascus – Saudi (now Amman – Saudi), so it was convenient for them to move to Amman. Another interviewee mentions it was the simplest and easiest option for them to go to Irbid, at the same time being cheaper than Amman or other places further South.

Some interviewees explain how they left in a rush and were surprised by the encroaching violence which threatened their safety, whereas others hesitated and tried to stay as long as they could, planning the trip and their upcoming life in Jordan for a long time. The only respondent leaving after 2013 explains that they stayed in Damascus for a few years after the war had started and were determined not to leave, but when reading on the internet that they should evacuate, she and her family eventually left Syria for Jordan in 2015.

Most of the respondents are very open when talking about the crisis, and their experiences before fleeing from Syria. All of them mention explosions, blasts, violence, as well as the deteriorating living conditions, such as rising prices or shortage of basic goods (gas, food, electricity, health care). The final decision to leave was made mostly because respondents feared for their safety and for their children, and did not see or find any safe places in Syria. Three respondents explain that they could not get medications for themselves or their children anymore and thus left; one man's grandson was hit by a missile and needed medical treatment not offered in Syria. Another respondent describes that in the area where they lived, nothing was happening, but they were afraid that the situation would become as bad as in other areas of Syria, so they left. Another woman lost her husband due to the war, and was forced to leave Syria and join her family in Jordan after his death.

Talking about their life back in Syria, and the decision to flee provokes very emotional reactions amongst all the interviewees. It is clear that all of them are sad about being forced to leave their country, and many share their memories and stories about living in Syria. Nearly half of them say Syria was “heaven on earth” when being asked to describe their life in Syria in one sentence/word.¹⁹ Six respondents use similar positive terms, such as “beautiful”, “excellent”, “happy”, “relaxed”, “good life”, “amazing”; one even calls the time in Syria the “best days of my life” (#9, interview, November 19, 2016). Also, six respondents state that they had everything they wanted and needed, and that everything was good. The term “better” is being used twice, to refer to the fact that life in Jordan now is worse than what they had in Syria before. One respondent says “normal”, another one uses the word “safe” – clearly referring to

19 There was no guidance given by the interviewer on how to interpret “your life in Syria”, whether this would be referring to life before or after the war broke out. All respondents assume the former and describe their life *before* the war, which is why they all use positive wording.

their life before the war started. All of them express their sadness and despair about the crisis and the impact it had on the country and people. As one informant concludes:

“in Syria, we were very happy, very satisfied and we didn't need anything. We had everything we wanted. But they have ruined the country with this crisis. Back in the days, everything that you wanted, would happen. [...], there was good order in the country. But they've ruined the country.”

(#7, interview, November 6, 2016)

On the other hand, nearly all respondents describe their current life in Jordan with negative terms. All of them implicitly or explicitly express their gratitude for Jordan to be safe and for Jordanians hosting them, despite the social and economic system being under enormous pressure due to the large influx of refugees, but the respondents are clearly not content with their current situation. More than half describe their life in Jordan as being difficult or hard, five explicitly say it is “worse than Syria”, another two leave it more open by saying “different”. Another six use words such as “normal”, “okay”, “calm”, “simple”, “routine”. Three interviewees describe their life in Jordan as disastrous (“below zero”, “ruin”), and another three mention they still cannot fully adapt and do not feel a sense of belonging. Only one participant says his life in Jordan is “very good”. This points to the fact that many Syrian refugees in Jordan face difficulties and have not adapted to the Jordanian culture and their new life as easily.

Along the same line, nine out of the 19 respondents explicitly express their hope to be able to leave Jordan in the near future, either for the European Union, the United States, or Canada. At least half of them keep up with news about possibilities to migrate, and all express a strong wish for the war to end so they can leave Jordan and go back to Syria. One interviewee says that if there should be a possibility to leave Jordan, he would “run after the chance barefoot” (#5, interview, November 6, 2016). Similarly, a young woman explains: “if the war ended in Syria, we would go [back] to Syria on the spot” (#15, interview, November 29, 2016). When realizing that I am from Germany, a couple in a very difficult financial and health situation asks me to take them with me in my suitcase: “why don't you take us with you? Take us with you!” (#8, interview, November 6, 2016). More than one respondent expresses their frustrations about being stuck in Jordan, mostly because they do not have the financial means to move on.

Although not explicitly asked in the interviews or questionnaires, I also want to give a brief overview of the respondents' financial situation, their level of education, and their health situation. From context, I would consider seven respondents to have a basic level of education, which means they can read and write and attended school, of which one was about to, but could

not finish high school due to the crisis. Another seven interviewees finished high school, of which two had a university degree and worked as a lawyer and accountant back in Syria; they are both unemployed in Jordan, however. Three of the respondents are still studying, and two are illiterate and have never been to school. Ten out of the 19 interviewees say their current financial situation is difficult, one family says it is disastrous. Six respondents can be considered as in an okay financial situation, just one seems to be in a good one.

Only four respondents work at the time of the interview, plus one takes on temporary jobs whenever available. However, it must be taken into account that many of the interviewees are women, who culturally do not or are not allowed to work, and some are elderly or sick, who cannot work either. Most have some (younger) men in their families who do work. Also, most of the respondents receive financial aid from the UNHCR, or other charity organizations in Jordan. Nearly all the participants express their frustrations about the labour situation in Jordan, the lack of jobs, and that employers would often only offer temporary jobs, no permanent positions. Also, many point to the fact that refugees do not get work permits in Jordan, so they cannot access legal labour. From what could be interpreted from the interviews and interview situations, only three respondents are in a difficult health situation – in the sense of being severely sick – all others seem relatively healthy. However, many more express that they struggle with the high costs of medical treatment or medications in Jordan.

5. Uncertainties and Difficulties Syrian Refugees in Jordan Face

Before investigating the agency of Syrian refugees, it is important to picture the environment and circumstances they find themselves in. Constraints and difficulties in particular condition their agency and the room for social navigation, so they should be reflected on first. Syrian refugees displaced to Jordan face numerous uncertainties and difficulties in their everyday life in Jordan, some of which have been briefly mentioned in the previous chapter. I understand ‘difficulties’, as well as ‘uncertainties’ in the literal meaning of the word. Per dictionary, the term *uncertainty* is used to describe “a situation in which something is not known; or something that is not known or certain” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2017) or “the state of uncertain. Something that is uncertain or that causes one to feel uncertain” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017a). Words used synonymously are, for instance, unpredictability, precariousness, unsureness, lack of certainty, indecision, hesitancy, doubt, vagueness, scepticism, lack of confidence. The term *difficulty* comes from the Latin words *dis* (expressing reversal) and *facultas* (meaning opportunity or ability), and refers to “the state or condition of being difficult. A thing that is hard to accomplish, deal with, or understand”. Synonyms are: problem, complication, issue, disadvantage, drawback, pitfall, handicap, obstacle, hindrance, hurdle, amongst others (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017b). These rather broad definitions allow me to account for the numerous and very individual issues Syrian refugees in Jordan face and raise in the interviews.

I understand difficulties as concrete problems faced, as in situations, experiences, or objects which are hard to do or achieve. These are mostly immediate needs, and often day-to-day problems. Uncertainties, on the other hand, refer more to the emotional level, to issues or situations that respondents *feel* in a certain way about, for instance anxiety about the future or their current living situation. The following gives an insight into the stories of respondents regarding the difficulties and uncertainties they face in Jordan.

5.1. Financial Hardship and Educational Stagnation

The fact that Syrians are in Jordan indicates that they had at least some resources available to finance the trip and the set-up of a new life in Jordan. Within the group of respondents, one can observe patterns of financial deterioration from their life back in Syria to the current life in Jordan. As one interviewee says: “the living conditions have changed by about 180 degrees”; an Arabic phrase to express that something has turned into the complete opposite of what it had been before (#4, interview, November 6, 2016). For some, the situation has been difficult from the beginning. Interviewee #4, a single young man from Homs, explains that – similarly to many other Syrians – they were not able to bring anything with them on their way to Jordan,

and thus urgently needed a source of income when they arrived. When they came to Jordan in 2012, they first lived in a small place together with 12 other Syrians, and the young men amongst them went out to find work to make a living for the rest of them. These financial difficulties are even more relevant for women. A young widow, with two small children, who fled Syria with nothing more than the clothes on their backs when they were surprised by the violence, had to sleep on the streets immediately behind the Syrian-Jordanian border. Their situation only improved when they could register with the UNHCR, and someone offered them a place to live for free until she could organise an income. Many Syrians face similar situations when arriving in Jordan, as they had to leave Syria in a rush, or did not prepare to stay for long, so that they left most of their belongings behind and had to start from scratch in Jordan.

Others start their life in Jordan with savings and personal belongings, but quickly see their financial situation deteriorate. Respondent #19, a 60-year-old man working as the Imam for a Muslim community in Amman, openly describes the sharp contrast between his life of wealth and security in Syria and the financial hardship his family faces in Jordan. Bribery of government and military officials on the way from Syria, medical treatment for his grandson and himself, as well as the high living costs in Jordan significantly diminished his savings and without a steady income, he quickly found himself in a difficult financial situation. Many Syrians and other migrants in Jordan tell similar stories.

Because Syrians do not receive a work permit, it is hard to enter the formal labour market and access permanent employment. Respondents repeatedly point to the precarious labour situation due to the pressure on the Jordanian economy, and the problems evolving from not having work permits. Syrians compete with other low-skilled workers and migrants for temporary labour, such as in construction work or agriculture, jobs which are physically straining yet underpaid. At the same time, the living costs in Jordan have been constantly rising due to the large influx of refugees and the increasing pressure on the economy and social system: rents have risen up to 300%, as well as costs for electricity, water, food and medical care. Particularly for widows, elderly, and the sick it is incredibly hard to survive and meet their basic needs. Women in general also find it difficult to go to work and take care of the children and household at the same time.

The only way to make a living for many Syrian refugees is to seek financial aid from the UNHCR and other local charity groups, who offer support with food vouchers, medical care and other supplies, at the same time taking on temporary jobs. However, the governmental constraints discourage many to seek employment in the first place, although they want to work.

One respondent explains the precarious situation most of them are in: if they are granted a work permit, they will lose their financial aid from the UNHCR. However, as most jobs are not permanent and just involve a few days of work, it would not be sufficient to be independent from financial aid. Therefore, most refugees depend on the UNHCR money even though they do work.

From the overall precarious financial situation of Syrians in Jordan, there are only a few exceptions. In the group of respondents, only two families are in a normal or good financial situation, because the head of the families have a job, and their sons and sons-in-law work, too. There is a clear connection between precarious living conditions and financial hardship and the lack of stable jobs, as there is no other income in Jordan, and the social services often do not offer support to refugees.

Another problem many Syrian refugees face, which could lead to significant trouble for the Syrian and Jordanian society in the long run, is educational stagnation. Unemployment does not only have negative psychological and social effects on many Syrians, but also decreases their exposure to new things and learning, which could help them find a job and develop. Several respondents also describe their unsuccessful attempts to access vocational trainings or retraining to increase their chances in the job market. The educational situation for children is particularly difficult in areas with high population density, as the public schools cannot cope with the number of additional students. Many Syrian refugees had to take their children out of school in Syria, and have to keep them at home for several months or even years because there is no space for them in Jordanian schools.

At the same time, the quality of education significantly diminishes given the high number of students in classes, the lack of appropriate teaching spaces, and the different knowledge level of students. The analysis also reveals that the shift-system – which involves Jordanians getting morning classes, Syrians going to school in the afternoon or evening – disadvantages the Syrian children: they have classes late in the day and get taught by teachers who are tired and exhausted from whole days at school. Also, especially for girls it is often problematic to be outside after sunset, which is a reason for many parents to keep their daughters at home. Several respondents also explain that their children were put in a class according to age and not skills; because they had missed several years of school due to the war, they now face difficulties and cannot keep up with the other students. Some refugees decide to keep their children at home, which hinders them in their educational development. Others continue with

schooling, but these children often face difficulties and are afraid to fail the year. Both situations cause significant frustrations and dissatisfaction.

5.2. Health Problems

In line with the overall difficult financial situation of Syrians in Jordan, the analysis reveals a similarly negative image regarding the health of refugees. Nearly all respondents mention health problems in their family, including serious illnesses such as leukaemia, cancer, kidney failure, or cardiovascular diseases, like high blood pressure and heart failure. Some children are also reported to have mental illnesses, often traced back to the traumatic experiences due to the war in Syria. At first glance, it seems that the number of sick people in my research group is disproportionally high. Considering the background information on the situation of Syrian refugees displaced to Jordan, one might assume that especially poor refugees, and thus the elderly and sick, are overrepresented in the study sample. As will be shown below, those refugees who stay in Jordan – and those who live in the areas we accessed when recruiting respondents – often lack the skills required for formal employment and thus lack the financial means to resettle in third countries, such as in Europe. I would assume that in Middle-European countries, the above-mentioned diseases occur with a similar frequency, but the solid social services and better overall financial opportunities allow for better treatment, so that the illnesses do not affect the persons concerned as much as they impact the lives of burdened refugees. At the same time, cardiovascular diseases and mental illnesses are less visible in Western societies, so it might simply appear like there is a higher proportion of sickness represented in this study. However, these are just hypotheses; a careful analysis would be needed to investigate the statistics and reasons behind it.

What is clear however, is that for refugees who settle in Jordan, appropriate medical care is closely connected to financial means. In the beginning of the refugee crisis, Syrians could access hospitals and doctors without payment, but when the number became too high, the UNHCR stopped supplying this free health care for refugees. Now, Syrians have to pay the same fees for treatment and drugs as uninsured Jordanians, which is, for many, more than they can cope with. One interviewee, who had an open-heart surgery and suffers from high blood pressure, explains: “I survive on medications [only]. This medication costs me 49JDs per purchase. On some days when I buy it, I barely have something to buy food for the kids” (#7, interview, November 6, 2016). However, the problem is not only compensating for treatments and medication, but also the indirect effects a bad health status has on the overall living situation. It seems that a bad health situation often forces refugees into a vicious cycle of not

being able to work, not having the financial means to cover expenses for necessary medical treatments, and thus not being able to properly recover and eventually returning to the labour market. Difficulties around the lack of work available, lack of income, and poor health status also often pair with social isolation, despair and uncertainty regarding the future.

5.3. Mobilization of Support and Social Isolation

Many Syrians seem to lack a social network and support in Jordan. This is especially the case for refugees who do not work and do not go out much due to sickness or household duties, and spend most of their time at home with their family. Neither do they meet friends or acquaintances, make social visits or go on trips, or get to know new people and network. Although this is by no means generalizable, the analysis reveals a significant proportion of refugees who do not have an active social network. Many have lived in the same neighbourhood for several years, but still do not know any neighbours or people in the area. One respondent, who had open-heart surgery and cannot leave the house anymore, explains that they spend most of their time, including the weekends²⁰, at home with their kids. He also repeatedly points to the lack of support in Jordan and mentions they do not have any friends around or know any people in the neighbourhood:

"[...] no one is helping me, okay? My brother used to help me when I go to the hospital and so on, but not anymore. He's not here anymore, he left. And now I'm left here alone, and I'm the only one with kids in here, and I'm 52 years old. And I'm ill, I really needed the help that I could have gotten from my brothers."

(#7, interview, November 6, 2016)

Women seem to be as vulnerable to social isolation as sick refugees, as they often spend their days at home taking care of the children and household. This limits their interactions with other people, and some are even restricted in their freedom of movement by their husbands or fathers who do not want them to go out and meet other people. They often feel isolated and lonely, and do not talk to people outside their family, or leave the house much. Thus, they miss their family and friends abroad or back in Syria, and do struggle with boredom in their everyday life. As respondent #10 puts it:

²⁰ In Arabic cultures, a lot more than in Western societies, the weekends are 'family time'/'social time', the only days of the week that nearly all family members and relatives living close by come together and spend time eating, talking, socializing. It is common to also invite friends or neighbours over for a meal or tea, sit outside on the streets and mingle with neighbours, as well as make trips, go to the countryside for a picnic or barbeque, or visit places outside of the cities. People not being able to join these activities, for instance because they cannot go out, miss the chance to fully participate in society and follow its traditions, which does not only stress and frustrate the persons concerned, but also makes it more difficult for them to become full members of the respective community.

“It is not like my life in Syria. I’m not going to lie to you but my life in Syria was amazing. Here my life is different, I keep to myself and I’m isolated. I sit with my disabled daughter and do nothing most of the time.”

(#10, interview, November 19, 2016)

Another Syrian woman describes how she brought pictures from her old neighbourhood with her and says she starts crying when looking at them. Nowadays, she does not go out much anymore, and her life is not enjoyable; she just lives through the day. Many women also express feelings of not belonging and alienation in Jordan, and how much they miss Syria and their old life. Most of their friends and family members fled the war and are now scattered throughout the world, which makes communicating and supporting each other more difficult. Several respondents seem to be so frustrated by their current living situation, that they become emotional when talking about it and start crying during the interview.

Boredom, loneliness, feelings of isolation and alienation and not having an active social life as in Syria are serious concerns for many Syrian refugees, females in particular. The lack of support and a social network within Jordan and the inability to have regular emotional support from family and friends abroad, seems to make many refugees feel even more abandoned, frustrated and sad. These insecurities they face clearly add to the difficulties regarding finances and health and make their overall situations even more problematic.

5.4. Communication with Family and Friends Staying Abroad

A first data analysis reveals that staying in touch with family and friends who do not live close by is crucial for Syrian refugees who were displaced to Jordan. However, financial difficulties as well as limited digital literacy and other technical difficulties often makes it difficult for them to fulfil the urge for communication. Many respondents express a strong wish to contact their loved ones more often, and show frustrations about the lack of regular communication. For many refugees, this is particularly stressing given that they lack a stable support network in Jordan and do not have many other social contacts they can turn to. At the same time, they often find it difficult and irksome to have only distant relationships. One family describes that two of their children were born in Jordan, so they had to introduce them to their family in Syria and abroad via video call, which they describe as sad and absurd. However, given that online communication is often the only way to stay in touch and update each other, as well as seek emotional support, refugees are willing to use the various applications available to them.

Communications with Syria through the internet, such as through video calls or messaging on Facebook or WhatsApp, is often limited due to the bad coverage in Syria, as

many of the network towers are being bombed and the internet shuts down. One respondent describes that he cannot freely communicate with his son in Syria, as he is young and would be forcibly conscripted to the military to fight for the Syrian regime, which is why he hides and keeps a low profile. When calling him, they have to be very discrete and careful, as phone and internet usage is said to be monitored. This is also a reason for some refugees to not communicate at all, as they suspect the regime is surveilling their social media use, and being affiliated with each other might put them in danger. Another common problem arising amongst Syrian refugees which limits their ability to communicate has to do with their limited financial abilities: although smartphones are relatively cheap in Jordan, many refugees lack the financial means to afford a phone and, more often, cannot afford the subscription for credit for calls or internet. Some even lack the money to buy a smartphone at all, which means they cannot use the internet and applications such as IMO or WhatsApp. As phone calls to Syria are highly expensive, they are not able to communicate, causing frustrations and increasing social isolation.²¹

5.5. Feelings of Being Stuck and Aspirations for a Better Future

Although Syrian refugees have mixed feelings regarding living in Jordan, some more positive, others highly negative, and despite their differing living situations, nearly all of them show a strong wish to leave the country. Many would prefer to go back to Syria – one respondent phrases it as “May God end this all and just give us a chance to be back in our homeland” (#7, interview, November 6, 2016) – but they are all very realistic that even if it would be possible to go back, there would be nothing to return to as most parts of the country have been completely destroyed. The often difficult financial and work situation and the social isolation they face, makes many refugees wish to migrate to the EU or the US. They aspire better living conditions, want their children to access good education and learn a foreign language, and have a better future than in Jordan. Nearly all refugees regularly keep up with news about possibilities to migrate, and some of them have already applied several times for migration. Given that they are still in Jordan shows that so far, their attempts have been unsuccessful. Several respondents tell about month- or even year-long application procedures, which either resulted in rejection or not hearing back at all. This is a significant problem for many, that also affects them psychologically.

²¹ These findings briefly touch upon the role of ICTs for refugees, but they shall only show that issues around communications are amongst the numerous problems they face. A thorough analysis of the meaning of ICT for Syrians will follow below.

“This is what I am most disappointed about, that I couldn’t leave here. [...] What can I do? I’ll just have to wait here.”

(#7, interview, November 6, 2016)

This sentence, by a 60-year-old who has serious health problems and thus was rejected for immigration to the US, reflects the overall feeling amongst Syrians when it comes to migration and the inability to leave Jordan. Many express their frustrations about being stuck in Jordan, in an ‘in-between’ stage of not knowing what the future will bring, their life being dependent on other people’s decisions. They feel they cannot go back to Syria nor have the financial means to move on to another country, and thus have to stay in Jordan – in a life which does not offer them much, but even takes from them, materially as well as psychologically. I would argue that Jordan is a classical transit state, with many Syrians resettling to third countries after a short stay in Jordan. However, the informants for this research are amongst the unlucky ones who do not have the capacity or ability to move on, despite their strong wish to do so. They have all been in Jordan for several years, and whilst their living conditions have slowly declined, their chances for resettlement might have diminished accordingly. The lack of certainty, of not knowing whether they can ever leave Jordan and start a new life, as well as the doubts about the deteriorating living conditions in Jordan seems to strongly stress many of the refugees and puts pressure on them. Psychologically, this situation is highly dangerous as it can lead to depression and other mental disorders. However, from the analysis I personally get the feeling that people are still full of hope, and determined to improve their current situation. Only one family shows signs of resignation and hopelessness, and does not express any plans for the near future. Given the man’s worrying health situation, they might not feel comfortable making arrangements at present.

5.6. Frustration and Psychological Distress

Uncertainties about the future go hand in hand with disappointment and anger about the current situation in Syria. Refugees are highly frustrated about the war, as well as having to leave their country which suffers from destruction and turmoil. A father from Homs who fled together with his family when the violence encroached upon the area they were living in, says: “there is nothing but killing. Killing, slaughtering and destruction. [...] It’s just blood, body parts separated all around. What would I look about that? I wouldn’t watch it anymore [on TV]” (#13, interview, November 23, 2016). Some refugees openly admit having suffered from the fighting and bombings, others do not openly talk about it, but seem to be clearly traumatized. Many Syrians did not only lose their home and livelihood as well as the luxury of feeling safe

and secure, but also saw family members, neighbours or friends being killed or hurt. A young mother explains that her children were traumatized by the war, and now suffer from mental disabilities. A supposedly terror-related attack in Jordan²² provoked bad memories and scared her children:

“my kids were so terrified because they remembered those black days they witnessed while we were in Al-Sham [Damascus]. I have two kids with disabilities, so they don’t comprehend as we do. So, they’ll say things like ‘Bashar [the president of Syria] is coming to kill us’”.

(#9, interview, November 19, 2016)

I assume that many Syrians who are now in Jordan suffer from similar flashbacks and fears, as well as frustrations about the war and having been forced to flee. These frustrations are reinforced through the problems many face to adapt to their new life in Jordan, as well as feelings of alienation and not belonging. As forced migrants, most did not have a choice, but had to leave fearing for their safety and life – thus, Syrians naturally feel a lot more negative about their migration and new life compared to economic migrants for instance. This is especially the case for refugees who face particularly difficult living conditions and also lack social networks which could offer support.

Families suffering from financial hardship and health problems, at the same time having a limited network available in Jordan, often describe their life as “ruin”. The story of a young mother especially struck me. Married at an early age and having children, she lost her husband a few years into the marriage when he died in the war. Her family, who lived in Jordan at that time, forced her to join them, so she had to leave everything behind and now lives with her sister in Jordan. She seems to be okay finances wise, but shows signs of trauma and deep frustration. Whenever talking about her old life in Syria, her current situation in Jordan, or her husband during the interview, she gets impatient and even a bit aggressive. Through some background research in the community centre I met her in, I found out that her situation in Jordan is disastrous: her family has full control over her life, she is not allowed to go out on her own, is pressured a lot by her family, and is not allowed to decide anything on her own. The trauma and grievance from the experiences she made in war and from losing her husband and her life in Syria adds to her overall difficult situation, and clearly increases her psychological distress. She herself describes her situation in Jordan as “below zero” (#12, interview,

²² The interviewer assumed she was referring to an incidence in Jordan, when police patrols were attacked by a group of fighters supposedly affiliated with IS. The military and security forces quickly controlled the situation and avoided casualties, but for many Syrians, it was a shock that Jordan was not as safe as they thought it would be. See for example Al Jazeera (2016).

November 19, 2016), and indicates that her life is boring, frustrating and depressing. She is clearly unsatisfied with her current situation, and faces many difficulties and uncertainties in her day-to-day life in Jordan.

In conversations about the war and refugee crisis, it is clear that besides frustration and sadness, confusion is another common issue amongst Syrians. A young woman, who was interviewed together with her mother-in-law, compares their situation to that of Palestinians who were forced to leave their homeland, but identifies a crucial difference:

“You are Palestinian [pointing to the translator]. Now the same happens to us Syrians. The difference is, you have an enemy, you know whom you have to fight. We don’t. We are all Syrians, we fight each other”.

(#15, interview, November 29, 2016)

This situation and the war in general highly frustrates her, she finds it confusing and does not understand how this could happen to her country. She explains they are a proud people, productive and active, and were forced into this situation due to the war and now feel stuck and as though they have lost control over parts of their life. More than once she says, “this is not fair” (ibid.) when talking about the war and refugee crisis, expressing her frustrations about this happening to them specifically. She and her family are very strict on not wanting to be put in the box of dependent, helpless, refugees, but often feel exactly that this is the case, which increases her frustration.

More hidden, but nonetheless highly relevant when aiming to understand the uncertainties and difficulties refugees face, are gender-specific issues, such as domestic abuse. Given that this is a taboo topic in most societies, and that we did not explicitly ask about this kind of problems, it is surprising that we heard stories of abuse at all. For some women, we could only assume or suppose cases of abuse, but one woman was very open and talked about having trouble with her current husband. He is violently abusive towards her and her son from her first marriage, even to such an extent that the boy had to go to the hospital. Her husband also forbade to use a phone and blocked TV channels back in Syria. Although the situation improved in Jordan after she demanded that he signed a pledge that stated if he hit her son again, he would be sent back to Syria, his behaviour clearly bothers and worries her and she shows sign of psychological distress and depression. In discussion with the local research assistants and the community centre we interviewed in, I assume there are many more unreported cases of domestic abuse against women, which poses a significant burden on their mental well-being and increases their frustrations.

5.7. Gender-related Differences

Difficulties related to financial hardship and making a living are most common amongst Syrian refugees in Jordan, as well as frustration, sadness and dissatisfaction with the war in Syria and being forced to leave and having to live in Jordan. Other important issues relate to health, education, communications, integration and psychological distress. There seems to be a clear distinction between men and women: men mostly worry about and describe problems around the family's financial situation and the hard labour market in Jordan. They express their frustrations or disappointment of not being able to make a living for their wife and children, and of having an unknown future. Many male Syrians also relate to problems around migration, as they could not yet manage to migrate to another country. The female refugees on the other hand more frequently discuss topics such as homesickness, sadness about leaving everything behind and being separated from family or friends, frustrations about the living conditions in Jordan as well as the unpredictability of their future, especially for their children. Loneliness, boredom, trauma, depression and the lack of emotional support further add to their frustrations. At first glance, it appears that difficulties, in the sense of problems faced around immediate needs, such as housing, food, health care, labour and education, are more relevant to men, whereas women rather describe uncertainties as their most pressing challenges. Overall, we see that Syrians face a great number of challenges and constraints during their displacement in Jordan. This builds the framework within which we can explore their agency and social navigation attempts.

6. Social Navigation and Adaptation of Syrian Refugees in Jordan

My observations alongside the interviews and questionnaires, confirmed for me my hypothesis that Syrian refugees in Jordan are by no means merely victims, yet also face a number of uncertainties and difficulties. In the following chapter, I display the different tactics and strategies refugees employ to deal with upcoming problems and constraints, as well as the resources they use to do so.

6.1. Strategies and Tactics to Deal with Uncertainties and Difficulties

“You find a way to solve these problems or difficulties, and make them less difficult”

(#1, interview, November 5, 2016)

This young respondent was asked about his way of dealing with difficulties and problems in his current life in Jordan, and at first glance this answer seems obvious. However, with our knowledge of the kinds of problems Syrian refugees face, we are aware that it is not so simple. They struggle with problems around finances, health, and social support, but they are by no means passive to these challenges. As presumably active agents, refugees employ different tactics to counter everyday life challenges.

6.1.1. Financial Hardship and Dreams of Immigration

As the previous chapter shows, the most pressing problem for Syrian refugees is their difficult financial situation, and the lack of an income. After the first couple of interviews – although not generalizable of course – I already had the impression that Syrian refugees are adaptive and flexible, as well as resistant and strong-minded. They are highly creative in finding different solutions to improve their financial situation despite the constraints by the government in terms of work permits and allowing for vocational training for refugees. The most obvious answer for many refugees is to gain employment in the informal labour market or do illegal work. Also, particularly for low-skilled workers, there is no option to work in the same profession as before: Only one of the respondents interviewed works in his former profession, all others had to switch, and also switch between different tasks and jobs. This in itself is an adaptation or navigation tactic, as it shows their flexibility in response to the lack of formal labour available to them, and the absence of stable jobs.

Combining different jobs and, for instance, taking on day- and nightshifts, is another way to increase income. We met one young man, who works during the day and does nightshifts for a charity as volunteer, to polish his CV and increase his chances to get a permanent job at a later stage. This is one example for seemingly ‘crazy acts’ as explained by Utas and Jörgel

(2008). For me as an outsider, it did not make much sense for a young man to work nearly 24 hours per day although he does not get paid for it. However, as suggested by the authors, we can understand these actions by taking into account that agents want to satisfy their immediate needs, but also always work towards the long-term future – which is clearly the case here. Whereas the man's behaviour might not help him in the short term, he is hoping that it will pay off in the long run – he is 'seeing his life'. It is also very common amongst refugees to take on temporary or intermittent work, which entails working for a few days according to need, and then moving on or waiting for the next task. This is particularly the case in mandate-dependent jobs, such as construction work or seasonal labour in agriculture. The son of a respondent also makes money through buying phones at the market and selling them in shops for higher prices, which does not bring a stable, steady income, but gives the family some extra money.

When families are in a particularly tight financial situation, another way to increase income is for women to take on one-time tasks, such as sewing or tailoring, cooking traditional Syrian dishes for celebrations or foreigners, or babysitting. Taking the cultural context into account, in which women's employment is highly uncommon, and partly considered 'immoral', the severity of their situation becomes clear. Very few respondents also admit sending their adolescent children to work²³, for instance when the fathers are not able to work due to age or health status and the mothers must stay at home to take care of young children and the household. Finally, in the absence of choice, some refugees also sell personal belongings, including jewellery, although these often hold valued memories of their life in Syria.

Another tactic to overcome financial difficulties is to seek assistance, mostly from the UNHCR or other local or international organizations and charities. We have encountered more than one case of 'digging aid' as defined by Jansen (2016), with refugees employing creative and varied tactics to seek aid from humanitarian organizations. Working illegally to avoid losing financial aid from the UNHCR is one commonly reported tactic. According to the interviewees, especially since the UN health care cuts, refugees have also been exploiting their networks to seek financial aid for health care. It is hard enough to meet their basic needs such as shelter or food, let alone expensive medical treatments such as X-ray images or surgeries. Several Syrians described lengthy attempts of trying to obtain assistance for health care expenses, which included a lot of calling, walking into people's offices, trying different clinics and doctors, negotiating, begging, arguing, and chasing. Some have spent weeks or months

²³ It needs to be stressed that there was no case of child labour reported, all children are aged 16 or older.

trying to get a good price for medical treatment, or finding financial assistance. One mother tells us:

“I’m going to tell you something. I have a girl who was one year and two months old that needed a surgery of the throat infection. I went to the hospital and signed up for a turn. I went to the UN and they told me that she was not covered and that they need to do the papers over again. [...] And I signed up for health aid without effect. Another time, I signed up with Islamic relief [an Islamic philanthropic organization] and after a week they communicated with me and did the operation for my girl and praise God. God took care of her. It was them who helped her and did the operation for my girl. I had no money for the surgery. They said it would cost 300 Dinar and I said: ‘I don’t have it’. I mean, the organization helped me. [...] They paid for us to be covered. [...] I have spent a year not being able to do anything for my daughter, since I didn’t have the money for it.”

(#9, interview, November 19, 2016)

This is just one of many stories, and demonstrates the flexibility and patience of Syrian refugees, as well as their persistence and resistance. Particularly when encountering a problem regarding their children, most Syrians do everything they can to solve it. This includes chasing people, begging, trying different channels, and overall not giving up until they find someone who can help. During the field visits, I was also confronted with refugees asking me for assistance, be it financially or through contacts. Some very openly ask, others hint at their bad financial situation and how grateful they would be to get external help. I had decided beforehand that I would not give money to respondents, but I can imagine that other Westerners or locals they ask for help react to their requests. Taking into consideration that Syrians self-identify as proud people, asking strangers for help might be an indicator of the severity of their situation as they would not do so otherwise. Further analysis would need to investigate this behaviour in more detail.

A less common, more difficult way for Syrians in Jordan to obtain financial assistance, is to get money from Syria, or from relatives or friends living abroad. Governmental constraints on receiving money from Syria make it difficult for Syrians to seek financial support from those who stayed behind. With the deteriorating living situation in Syria, many do not have enough money to sustain themselves, not to mention to be able to send money to relatives in Jordan. At the same time, sending money to Syria is strictly monitored and restricted to limit the risk of supporting terrorist groups. Nonetheless, some Syrians would, for example, obtain a mortgage on their property in Syria and have relatives send them the money through middlemen, others ask their acquaintances in wealthier countries for financial aid. Either way, the tight support networks that Syrians in Syria and the diaspora build, are essential to providing mutual support.

I find it fascinating how they can maintain these networks despite being scattered all over the world, and in often difficult situations.

These attempts to increase income are often combined with tactics to decrease expenses. To save money, many Syrian refugee families stay in or move to cheaper areas of a city, or to a different city altogether – often at the expense of safety, comfort, and mobility. In general, we could observe very conscious decisions amongst refugees regarding their expenses. In situation of financial hardship, they must prioritize what to spend their limited financial resources on. The most extreme case was a family who told us that the family father, who is dependent on medication, often has to decide between food for his children and his lifesaving drugs. Their priority is to feed the children and meet their basic needs, and with whatever is left, buy his medication, at the same time trying to access the drugs otherwise (through philanthropies or clinics). At the same time, they mention that they had to sell their smartphone to buy food, which shows how important the device is for them – they use all their income on food, medication and subscriptions for their phone and only as a last resort sell the phone. This is another good example of seemingly ‘illogical acts’, which we can only understand when looking at the greater picture as suggested by Utas and Jörgel (2008): it only makes sense that this family father prioritizes phone subscriptions over other goods when taking into account that their phone is a psychologically lifesaving tool for them to stay in touch with family and friends and seek important information. Their seemingly unreasonable behaviour is in fact part of their larger social navigation efforts. Many families have to make similar decisions on a daily basis, not being able to choose the best option but rather the least terrible, such as working more or not sending the children to school, and thereby having the financial ability to purchase food and meet other basic needs.

Because of their difficult situation in Jordan, many Syrian families show a strong desire to migrate to the West, and are very creative in achieving this goal. They keep their eyes open for possibilities to migrate, be it via the UNHCR or a specific country’s Facebook pages, official announcements, or word-of-mouth by other Syrians. Many sign up for various newsletters to be immediately informed about new opportunities, and also regularly call the UN or walk by their office to get news. Some also try to apply for family reunions with relatives already abroad. They all hope for better living conditions, employment possibilities, and high-quality education for their children.

Syrian refugees employ a wide array of tactics to meet their basic needs and overcome financial difficulties. However, particularly those who have problems in more than one ‘area’

of resources, often have no other choice than to accept their situations. This could include not being able to finance a lifesaving surgery or sending children to school because they do not have a work permit and cannot receive money from abroad due to the governmental restrictions. Looking back to Vigh's main argument, we clearly see the interplay between social actors, social forces, and the environment here. It seems that despite them trying their best, sometimes it is just not sufficient, refugees' lives being determined by external forces. Yet, Syrians also have an effect on their environment, particularly in the economic and social areas. Their involvement in the informal employment sector has largely increased competition for jobs, and has partly driven away other low-skilled worker groups. At the same time, their presence influences the rents, prices of food and basic goods, as well as the availability of goods and services, including garbage removal and adequate education for all children. Those who pushed the local government and school's principals to set up extra classes for Syrian children – counteracting the argument that the schools are overcrowded and cannot cope with more students – also shaped the educational landscape in Jordan, with the development of a new schooling system including Syrian refugee children.

6.1.2. Culture and Education

Because of the cultural proximity of Syria and Jordan, most Syrians do not feel any cultural differences or difficulties in Jordan. Nearly all report that it is easy to adapt, and quickly become accustomed to the specific Jordanian customs and traditions. Accordingly, there was not much need for social navigation, but more adaptation to the slight changes and differences in the Jordanian culture. At the same time, the presence of thousands of Syrians has shaped – I would argue enriched – the Jordanian cultural landscape, including the hotel and restaurant industry, as well as the art scene. Syria is widely known for its great arts and food, and many refugees brought this know-how with them and introduced it to the Jordanian culture, which stresses the argument that Syrians as social actors shape their environment and surrounding actors.

Regarding their financial situation, many refugees face significant problems regarding education of their children. Several adolescents/young adults we met had to interrupt their studies at high school or university, and could not continue in Jordan, as they have to contribute to the family income and start working. For younger children, problems around transportation, school fees, and no separate classes for Syrians commonly evolve. Particularly during the last few years, with more and more Syrians coming to Jordan, the situation has deteriorated and the educational opportunities for refugees have been limited. The government argues that the number of Syrians is simply too high to deal with, and public services suffer. When confronted

with these kinds of constraints, many parents take the calculated decision to keep their children at home. Another tactic is to arrange and pay extra for private transportation, such as minibuses to pick them up and bring them back after school. Several fathers also explain how they went to different schools, talking repeatedly to the principals for either reduced school fees, or to convince them to set up an extra class for Syrian children. As one man explains: “I told him [the principal]: ‘I beg you, [...], this is a young boy. [...] He is so young, he is just a kid, why don’t you just let them go to classes with the others?’” (#7, interview, November 6, 2016). Most tactics are successful at some point and children are returned to formal education. Again, many Syrians show their strong will and persistence, as well as flexibility in approaches, to achieve their goal. What we see here is a good example of the multi-facetedness of tactics as explained by Denov and Bryan (2014): refugees seek to solve immediate problems while also ‘seeing their future’, which in this case involves creating a more promising future for their children by sending them to school.

Those who do not manage to enrol their children in government schools often find other ways to offer at least some kind of education. Several respondents explain that their tactic is to send their children to private schools and arrange special agreements for the school fees. Others can join classes in UN-led schools or community centres, or educational programmes from the Muslim community, such as Quran schools in mosques. The children as well as parents often take a long and rocky road and need to try many different options before they manage to access education. The last option for many is to teach their children at home, have them do self-study, or get tutoring from neighbours or relatives. All in all, because they want their children to have a good future, Syrian refugees seem to spend a lot of time, energy, and money on organizing learning spaces for them.

6.1.3. The Secrets of Technology

Particularly the older generations are often not familiar with information and communication technology. In Syria, most did not see the necessity of learning how to use new technology, as communication was more personal, and free time was used for social visits, gatherings, or trips, less for entertainment through TV, phone, or computers. Now that ICTs are more easily accessible in Jordan, and family and friends often live abroad, the urge to learn to communicate and access information online rises. As one mother puts it:

“I even didn’t know anything about the internet to be honest, but since most of my relatives now live in several places and countries and I wanted to connect with them, I had to learn about what is Facebook and Messenger and Viber.”

One respondent also explains that the UNHCR encouraged him to start using Facebook: “I didn’t use Facebook, but later on, I started using it, when I would go to the UNHCR and [...] they would tell me: ‘follow up on the news via Facebook’” (#5, interview, November 6, 2016). Syrians are very creative in learning how to use ICT, and we see a variety of different tactics. One married couple, both illiterate, makes their neighbours – who can read and write and know how to use a smartphone and the different applications – send them voice records on WhatsApp with explanations on how to solve problems or do specific things with the phone. They were taught the basics of how to use the phone, including where to click to open voice messages in WhatsApp, and continuously learn through these oral instructions. Another tactic of many Syrians is to go to phone shops to be taught digital literacy. It is also very common for children to teach their parents about ICT, or to arrange the use for them, including turning on the TV/computer, writing messages, or setting up calls for their parents. One man in his 60s explains: “They [his sons] would just tell me: ‘here you go, talk with the phone’ and I would see her picture [his sister in Lebanon] on the screen.” (#13, interview, November 23, 2016).

For some refugees, another successful tactic of learning is through trial and error. One father explains that his illiterate son is the one in his family who can deal best with smartphones; he would keep on trying and clicking, and whenever he gets stuck, asks someone to read things out for him. This learning by doing seems to be a common tactic to improve digital literacy, especially for those who lack the support networks which offer external assistance. It is clear that different tactics to overcome digital illiteracy are employed by Syrian refugees, and most are highly successful.

The restrictions due to power outages in Syria are a significant problem for many Syrians in Jordan especially regarding communication. They try to manoeuvre around these constraints by talking at different times, such as at night or in the early mornings when the network is below its capacity limit. Another tactic includes repeatedly trying, for instance resending short messages or messages on social media channels multiple times, as some would eventually get through. Also, one respondent explains: “I have basically every application possible, so if this doesn’t work, then the other application will work” (#15, interview, November 29, 2016). The kind of applications Syrians use for communication is also determined by the possibilities and means of their communication partners: those who only have a computer, but no phone number, would be contacted via Facebook, others who have a phone, would get in touch via WhatsApp or calling. Having the full range of applications

installed on their phones allows refugees to increase their chances to reach people, as everyone has at least one of them.

Respondent #9, a 38-year-old woman from Damascus, faces a particularly difficult problem with regards to ICT: “My husband is so strict, he never wanted me to use ICTs or to know anything about it. I knew that there were computers, but my husband forbade that I use it. He would often get mad” (#9, interview, November 19, 2016). When coming to Jordan, she was determined to stay in touch with family and friends in other countries, so she found ways to access devices, such as using them in secret or borrowing them from friends. Finally, she got angry at her husband and forced him to allow the use of the phone and TV, also for the children. Again, it shows that refugees are willing to spend a lot of time and energy to communicate with loved ones, despite difficult and restraining circumstances.

6.1.4. Social Networks and ‘Digging Aid’

Syrians employ a variety of tactics to expand their social resources, by using these very assets. Most of them are determined to make new friends in Jordan, and to widen their support networks. They create bonds with neighbours, other Syrians living in the neighbourhood, or with Palestinians, who are particularly welcoming to refugees given their own situation.²⁴ Arranging marriages between Jordanians and Syrians is another tactic, as it would bond the two families together, and in Arabic cultures in particular, family comes first. If members are in difficulty or hardship, the others would step in to help and support each other. Marriage with Jordanians is particularly useful for Syrians as it increases their chances to access jobs or apartments, and it would often increase their social standing – from ‘refugee’ to ‘acquainted with locals’. The same goes for friendships with locals, though to a lesser extent. Given that many houses and apartments as well as companies are owned by Jordanians, being friends with them can bring significant advantages. As jobs in the informal sector are mostly distributed through word of mouth, staying in touch with employers ensures you hear first about employment possibilities and increasing your chances of getting the job. At the same time, Syrians can seek relevant information from locals, learning about the Jordanian customs, conditions and rules, which can help in integrating and moving around the country. Several Syrian families we talked to also explain how friendships with Jordanians helped them out of the refugee camps because the locals acted as a guarantee for them. These tactics are clearly

²⁴ Most Palestinians came to Jordan as refugees during the Civil War in Palestine and the war with Israel (1947 to 1949). They got a warm welcome and could find perpetual refuge in Jordan, many even got permanent residency (Translator #1, personal communication, December 12, 2016).

multi-faceted and multi-purposed in the sense of Denov and Bryan (2014): marriages and friendships to Jordanians help Syrians meet immediate needs and at the same time allow them to achieve long-term goals, including having an overall stable future in Jordan. These behaviours thus aim to resolve a range of difficulties and uncertainties at the same time. The lack and uncertainty of official support structures from the government forces refugees to use these alternative paths to seek assistance. At the same time, their behaviours – including banding together in groups of Syrians – shapes and changes life in Jordan and their social environment in the sense of Vigh: There are whole city quarters which are purely Syrian. Inter-cultural marriages and friendships change the cultural and social landscape, which in turn changes Syrian refugees as actors.

Because of the importance of social networks in Jordan, many Syrians would even move to other areas, just to be close to other Syrians or relatives and friends. Lacking the right contacts often decides survival and hardship. The greater and deeper the social networks, the better refugees can deal with external shocks or uncertainties. This includes networking with family and friends from Syria, as well as with Jordanians and other Syrians in Jordan and abroad. As has been shown for other migrant and refugee groups, the very linking with their ‘old lives’, such as staying in touch with friends and family, often helps to better deal with their new life. Many refugees seek strength and energy from talks with other Syrians, and from sharing their memories of life in Syria.

We found that Syrian refugees actively use networks to the best of their abilities, particularly to seek support and assistance in times of hardship. They are great at ‘digging aid’, using the different contacts they have to seek help and financial assistance. In turn, this positively impacts other areas of their life, including their psychological well-being and their ability to invest in education and literacy. In a case of domestic abuse, one respondent, whose husband injured her son, went to the Family Protection Department, to the Norwegian Refugee Council (an international NGO), as well as to the UNHCR for support. In the end, they solved the problem, which is an impressive example of how valuable networks and social skills are for refugees. In another case at the opposite end of the scale, involving a disagreement concerning a shared electricity bill, the family first unsuccessfully tried to solve the problem, and later just accepted it and did not talk to the neighbours anymore. In the end, they saw no other option than to move and leave the neighbourhood. It seems refugees use the social resources available to them to overcome difficulties as much as they can, at the same time increasing their social, psychological, and cultural capital. In other situations, when a solution cannot be found, a common tactic is not to overcome the problem, but to manoeuvre around it.

What becomes clear throughout this analysis is that it is highly difficult for Syrians to employ strategic agency, as they are limited in their capacities and standing to create their own spaces and make use of other actors' agency. This goes hand in hand with Utas' (2005) suggestion that strategic agency is mostly reserved to strong actors, whereas he counts refugees as rather weak agents. However, it also becomes more and more obvious that it is highly difficult to differentiate between strategic and tactic agency. I would even argue that the two are not as clearly distinguishable as Vigh suggests, but should rather be seen as ideal types which can help us group agents' behaviour into rough categories. In practice, the two concepts clearly overlap and blur, which makes it difficult to classify specific behaviours into one of the two. Often enough, acts of Syrians would involve both tactics meeting immediate needs and very strategic choices orientated towards the future.

6.1.5. Hope, Navigation and Adaptation, and God

The capacity to adapt and navigate is significantly influenced and restricted by different factors, such as health status or psychosocial wellbeing. For many Syrian refugees, all their dreams and hopes have been destroyed by the war, and they suffer from trauma and other psychological problems. At least to some extent, the participants of this study manage to overcome the disappointment and frustration of what the war has taken from them. To a varying degree, they plan for or dream of the future, and find new things to hope for or aim at. However, it is also clear that despite their resources and strength, some, if not all refugees have lost part of their optimism and enthusiasm due to trauma and other difficulties. There seem to be different tactics in place to deal with traumatic experiences: some refugees were hesitant to talk about their life in Syria, and obviously became very emotional when thinking about it. A common tactic seems to involve ignoring and suppressing the memories and emotions, whereas others seemed glad to have us listening to their stories, using the talks as a kind of therapeutic tool.

Throughout the interviews, we have heard an incredible number of different sayings or philosophies that Syrians seem to follow. These reflect their general attitude, and are part of their tactics in dealing with uncertainties and difficulties. Many refugees mention that they try to stay positive and be grateful for what they have. Despite the difficulties and trouble they face, nearly all explicitly state how grateful they are to be alive and live in safety and security in Jordan, and praise the hospitality of the Jordanian people. They also try to do their best and push themselves harder whenever things do not work out the way they want to. These tactics are part of a general optimistic attitude that reflects their everyday behaviours and ways of dealing with upcoming problems. The above presented tactics, for instance to enrol children in

school or to access financial aid or health care, are part of this overall philosophy to make the best out of what is given and fight to improve the conditions. At the same time, Syrians shape the social environments they move in, and influence Jordanians as social actors around them, as well as the structures surrounding them.

Many refugees thus stress the importance of patience and flexibility, and being willing to endure things or getting used to them. I was particularly impressed with a family who applied for immigration to the US, were rejected, and the very next minute asked the UNHCR staff whether they could perhaps go to Canada instead – ‘we are flexible’. Despair combined with endurance makes for a significant resource, it seems. This very example offers a good opportunity to engage in the debate on how social navigation and patterns of ‘giving up’ are connected in practice: deciding to opt for another country when being confronted with the negative decision of the UNHCR for the US, seems to point to resignation, as the family has to simply accept their refusal. However, the fact that they quickly move from one preference to the next rather argues for a tactical decision as part of their wider social navigation efforts. It includes accepting the choice which has been taken for them and which destroys their dream of going to the US, the very next second adapting their goals and navigating towards another. Giving up and navigation here do not contradict but rather complement each other, and might be used at the same time.

However, in specific situations, neither effort nor strong will are sufficient to change the circumstances. Decisions taken by the government, such as prohibiting formal labour of Syrian refugees or deciding on what refugee camps they are sent to, as well as similar decisions by the UNHCR, such as where refugees can migrate to, are fixed and can rarely be circumnavigated. As some respondents say: “we have to be flexible and accept” (#9, interview, November 19, 2016), and “there’s nothing we can do about it” (#2/#3, interview, November 5, 2016). Sometimes it seems, social navigation is not an option, but refugees have to ‘give up’ in the sense that they have to accept the given conditions and cannot change or move around them. These are the cases of victimhood and helplessness which should not be denied and forgotten, as I stressed in the beginning. There is a lot of suffering and hardship, and agency is often restricted and limited.

For some Syrians in Jordan, all tactics and possibilities have been exploited without success. My research alone includes two families with a sick man, no breadwinner, health issues, and an overall disastrous financial situation. Given that they are hopeless and desperate and feel that improving their situation is out of their control, it is not surprising that many turn

to God. The belief in God and God's mercy is a significant source of strength and optimism for many. Trust in God is often the 'last option': "what can we do? Our only hope is God now, and that's all we depend upon" (#8, interview, November 6, 2016). Particularly when all efforts are not sufficient and they see no way out of their difficult situation, refugees seem to turn to God, and literally pray for help. In turn, this very belief in God is a renewed source of energy and hope. I argue that what might look like resignation and giving up to the outsider, thus accepting the circumstances and living with it, can be a social navigation tactic in itself. In situations where there is little room for manoeuvring, opting for acceptance as a tactic to save one's resources for other more promising situations is part of the very navigation of a difficult terrain. Nonetheless, as called for in the theoretical framework, we should not adopt a lens of hyper-activity and interpret all actions of refugees as signs of agency. Again, in some situations there is no room for either strategic or tactical agency and we see patterns of resignation instead, as refugees have to accept the given circumstances and go with the situation.

The overall picture is that a variety of different tactics are employed to address the difficulties and problems a refugee life in Jordan entails. As expected, there is no significant degree of strategic agency to be observed amongst Syrian refugees in Jordan. They mostly navigate the social spaces of other social actors to their advantage, and very seldom manage to constitute their own space and structure their surroundings. When describing that his daughter had her schooling interrupted for several years due to the war, and then was re-enrolled into a higher class according to age and not knowledge, a Syrian father explains that he always tells her: "whatever you understand, answer; whatever you can't, just leave it out" (#13, interview, November 23, 2016). For me, this reflects a general philosophy that many Syrians follow. They are confronted with difficulties, restrictions, hardship, but always try hard to make the best out of the situation – they fight whenever possible, they endure, but also know when to accept their circumstances and adapt accordingly, or, as a last resort, know when to give up. In line with the idea of Denov and Bryan (2014), refugees' tactics are multi-faceted in the sense that they seek to solve immediate problems while also 'seeing their future' and aiming towards long-term solutions, and at the same time are multi-purposed as they resolve a range of difficulties and uncertainties simultaneously.

6.2. Resources Facilitating Agency

Inspired by Ryan, Dooley and Benson (2008), I want to take the analysis one step further by investigating the resources that allow Syrian refugees to take up agency and become social navigators. Especially when revealing refugees' pool of resources, it becomes clear that the loss

or lack of resources closely corresponds with the problems and uncertainties presented in *Chapter 5*. For example, the lack of material resources, such as paid employment, is a difficulty in itself, at the same time influencing other resources and causing further problems and uncertainties. The above-presented tactics to navigate these difficult circumstances are facilitated by utilizing resources which I explore in the following.

6.2.1. Material Resources

According to Ryan et al., material resources include cash, property, possessions, as well as means of transportation and employment. As indicated before, most of the respondents for this study have limited material resources. Only a few have a permanent job, the majority of them not being employed at all, or are in temporary or intermittent employment in the informal sector. As no work permits are given to Syrian refugees and because the Jordanian economy is under huge pressure, refugees' ability to do formal labour and access fair wages is limited, so that many do several jobs at the same time, some even day- and nightshifts. Syrians compete for these jobs with other refugees, migrants, and low-skilled workers, and are highly vulnerable to exploitation. Most families therefore suffer from financial distress and face difficulties in satisfying their basic needs, including food and health care. In some families, the women are forced to work to make a living, and some also indicate they are or have been involved in illegal, or even criminal activities in order to feed their family.

The majority of refugees were not able to bring anything from Syria, because they crossed the border by foot, in small taxis or buses, or because they left in a rush. Some came with personal possessions, such as jewellery or cash, but soon all resources were exploited with no new money coming in. These resources were mostly used to start a new life, purchase furniture or other basic goods. A couple of interviewees also mention they possess/possessed land or property in Syria, but either had to sell it or take out a mortgage on it to cover expenses in Jordan, or it has been destroyed in the war. Also, due to strict anti-terrorism policies, it is incredibly hard to receive money from Syria. Nearly all respondents report living from financial aid from the UNHCR, which is for many the only stable income, thus a significant resource. However, with the UNHCR cutting its expenses on free health care for refugees (which can also be seen as a material resource), Syrian refugees are now in an even more difficult financial situation, having to cover all costs themselves.

It seems that none of the participating refugees own a car – all use public transportation, including shared taxis ('services') or mini-buses. Due to the poor public transportation system in Jordan, refugees' mobility is often highly restricted, which further deteriorates their capital.

However, despite the disastrous general financial situation of most refugees, many do possess some kind of information and communication technology. Every household owns at least a TV or a mobile phone and many have smartphones or other devices. Several interviewees also mention that despite their bad financial situation, they have better opportunities to purchase things than before, such as ICTs or cars, because it is cheaper and procedures are easier in Jordan than in Syria. Nonetheless, overall, material resources available to Syrians in Jordan are highly restricted. As the following sections shows, the lack of material resources also significantly limits other resources, such as education, mobility, digital literacy, as well as psychological resources.

6.2.2. Cultural Resources

According to Ryan and colleagues, cultural resources include not only knowledge of the particular cultural context and the toolkit required to navigate it, but also language skills, education and digital literacy. Regarding the first two, Syrian refugees in Jordan have a significant advantage due to the geographic proximity of Jordan and Syria: respondents stress that all Levant countries are like one, with the same language, traditions, culture, and norms. This implies a greater range of opportunities for Syrians in Jordan, as they find it relatively easy to adapt to everyday life in terms of language and behaviours. Only a few mention differences with regards to culture, and even less report having problems with these. Special cases are those families who have lived in the countryside in Syria before, and now reside in a city: they partly lack the resources to navigate their new living environment, simply because living in an urban area is new to them.

Regarding education, the previous chapters show that the level of education amongst the respondents for this study varies highly, which reflects the diversity in the target population: some are illiterate and have no education, others went to university and hold an academic degree, although they cannot continue their profession in Jordan. The majority have basic education, can read and write, and have basic knowledge of the natural sciences. Some younger refugees also had their studies in high school or university interrupted due to the war, and could not continue their higher education in Jordan. The diversity regarding educational level amongst the respondents is also reflected in the content as well as language of the interviews: whereas some speak in a formal way and show good general knowledge, others use very simple wording and sentence structures, are unfamiliar with specific terms (for instance using “Especially those things X and Y etc.” to refer to mathematics; #13, interview, November 23, 2016) and partly

seem to lack ‘everyday cleverness’ (for example, some are obviously exploited by their landlords by paying a lot higher rents than is usual, without being aware of it).

Similar conclusions can be drawn regarding the digital literacy of Syrian refugees in Jordan. It varies highly, with a clear connection to age, the younger generation being much more literate and familiar with technological devices than the older. However, the older generations are all willing to learn and clearly see the necessity to use ICTs now that family and friends live in other areas or countries. Overall, Syrian refugees seem to be very well informed about what is happening in Syria, by regularly accessing news through TV or online news channels, including Facebook. Also, the majority of them, regardless of the level of education, literacy and digital literacy skills, know a lot about the different possibilities for migration, including the requirements, prospects, and living conditions in other countries.

6.2.3. Personal Resources

Personal resources refer to physical (mobility, health, energy), as well as psychological aspects (social skills, self-efficacy, self-esteem, hope, optimism). Apart from the three men who suffer from bad health and are significantly restricted in their mobility, energy level and positive attitude, all participants of this study seem to be healthy. They feel safe and secure in Jordan, which is an important resource. On the other hand, many Syrians feel constrained in their mobility. In its most direct sense, a proportion of refugees reside in refugee camps, fenced-off areas in deserted regions, which they cannot leave. Their freedom of movement is restricted by the government, as well as the UNHCR running the camp. Others are restricted in their mobility in the sense that they do not have legal documents with them, and are thus ‘stateless’, which also means not being able to marry, apply for residency, or to migrate to other countries. The government not allowing Syrian refugees to apply for work permits further diminishes their mobility, as they are not free to work in the formal labour market and have full rights, and so are forced to work informally or illegally. In a more abstract sense, feelings of being stuck and restricted by financial constraints also decreases the freedom of many refugees. We met a few women who are restricted by their husbands or families. They are not permitted to do what they want, but have to follow the rules and wishes of their guardians. The curb on mobility in turn affects refugees’ social and personal resources, with limited means to set up support networks and social relationships, and higher chances of psychological distress.

Throughout the interviews, it becomes clear that the psychological resources of many Syrians in Jordan are limited, too. The majority has been affected by the war, showing symptoms of trauma, depression, and psychological distress. Several respondents also mention

having children with mental or physical disabilities, which in turn decreases their mobility and physical resources. They are distressed because of their bad financial, social, or health situation, which often leaves them hopeless and with little self-esteem. Many were or are afraid of the violence in Syria, they feared for their safety and lives, and now fear for friends and family still living in the war zone. Confusion and anger about what is happening in Syria are commonly reported by interviewees – they describe a life that consisted of harmony and living peacefully together, and cannot understand how the civil war could evolve and why it happened to them in particular. Also, for many it is unclear who the enemy is, whether it is the regime, or the rebels, and where the bombings and blasts come from. This often leads to very low levels of self-efficacy; more than once we heard phrases such as “what can we do?” and “how could I ever afford that?”.

Many respondents do not seem to realize the great pool of social skills available to them. From an outsider’s perspective, I feel that the hospitable, welcoming and friendly attitude many Arabs have, is an incredible resource. All respondents show an open attitude towards the research project and me as a Western woman, welcoming us with open arms (“you are very welcome. All people are like our brothers and sisters”; #5, interview, November 6, 2016) and offering tea or sweets, despite their difficult financial situation. Most thanked us for being there and listening to their stories. Regardless of the education level, we could have informative and enjoyable conversations and discussions, pointing to skills such as active listening, effective communication, openness and understanding other’s point of view, amongst others.

Overall, the personal resources Syrian refugees in Jordan can resort to are restricted and limited to some extent, whereas other skill sets are clearly still available and used. Having been stuck in Jordan for several years and facing deteriorating living conditions has caused many Syrians to lose part of their psychological resources, such as optimism, self-esteem, or hope, but most still show good physical resources and solid social skills.

6.2.4. Social Resources

The aforementioned social skills and cultural resources also significantly influence Syrians’ social resource pool, which includes social relationships, support networks, a sense of belonging and identity. Most Syrians live close to family members or friends they know from Syria. They visit each other, help each other out, and spend time together in times of boredom or difficulties. Some of the respondents mention that when they arrived in Jordan, they knew not a single person and had to start from scratch without assistance. However, and this I trace back to their personal resources, nearly all of them managed to build new social relationships

and set up a support network in Jordan. This also includes marriages between Jordanians and Syrians, which created new bonds between different groups and expanded their network. Most Syrian refugees do not seem to have problems socializing with neighbours or other people, and especially in areas where many Syrians live, bonds are easily created.

These social networks, with family and relatives, as well as with new friends or neighbours, are a substantial resource for refugees. In times of uncertainty or difficulty, they can seek support from their networks, be it material or emotional. Especially given the fact that many Syrians cannot access assistance from acquaintances in Syria, but rather need to support them, the newly created networks in Jordan are essential. These connections helped many Syrians to come to Jordan in the first place: Jordanians or other Syrians living in Jordan were contacted to find out about living conditions and ways to get to Jordan, and also helped them to settle. Other Syrians in Jordan saw family migrating to third countries, such as the US or EU, and now use these connections to apply for a family reunion. Several cases of Syrians leaving refugee camps via a Jordanian guarantor also show their resources and social skills that help them deal with difficult situations.

Despite the overall positive impression regarding social resources of Syrian refugees in Jordan, there are also some cases drawing another picture. Those who are short of some kinds of resource, especially material (unemployed, broke) and physical (bad health status, low self-esteem), also seem to have less social resources at their disposal. One can identify a vicious cycle here: health problems prevent going out and meeting new people, so a support network is missing. In cases of emergency or when help is needed, for instance regarding medical treatment, there is no assistance network to resort to, which further deteriorates the health situation, especially when adequate treatment cannot be afforded, or due to increased psychological distress, including feelings of loneliness, despair, depression. Further isolation and alienation is often the consequence, and the downward spiral continues. The same process takes place for many widows: their financial abilities are highly limited when they have no male breadwinner, and in addition to this, it is difficult for them to expand their support network because it is not socially acceptable – for conservatives at least – for a woman to go out on her own and meet new people.

6.2.5. Metaphysical Resources

The adaptation model of Ryan and colleagues is of great use to analyse the resources that help Syrian refugees deal with uncertainties and difficulties in Jordan. However, after careful analysis of the interviews and observations executed for this study, I feel that time is another

important resource, which I term ‘metaphysical resource’.²⁵ Time turns out to be an essential resource refugees highly value. The lack thereof can significantly diminish the ability to adapt and deal with difficulties and uncertainties. From Syrians in Jordan, we heard several reasons for the lack of time, including having to work all day long and being busy with the household and taking care of the children. Refugees feel they lack time to spend with their family and children and to do enjoyable activities or trips, even on weekends. Moreover, many Syrians also explain that time constraints diminish their ability to get to know new people and network, for education or studying, or for the use of information and communication technology. From a psychological standpoint, time is an essential resource, to recharge batteries, relax, spend moments of happiness and joy together, think, and dream. Not having time or feeling that time is scarce, has a negative effect on psychosocial wellbeing, as well as on social resources. Again, the different kinds of resources are closely interconnected, and call for as well as restrain each other.

6.2.6. The Interplay of Resources for Social Navigation

This section has given a brief overview of the resources that Syrian refugees can apply to deal with the difficulties and uncertainties they face in their daily life in Jordan. This specific group of respondents, which might not be fully representative as explained before, can access a variety of resources, whereas material and personal ones are less developed. As the different kinds of resources appear strongly interconnected, respondents who lack one or more kinds, often also have a smaller pool of resources at their disposal. Conversely, those who have more material and personal resources, are more likely to have strengths in the other categories. The resources help refugees to adapt in the new culture they live in, and the lack thereof seems to significantly diminish their ability to deal with upcoming difficulties.

Because of the partly disastrous living conditions they face in Jordan, some Syrians think about returning to Syria despite the war, and they do not see any future in Jordan. This reflects a general pattern: nearly all Syrians we talked to show symptoms of psychological distress, including depression, anxiety, anger, hopelessness, and discouragement. Despite being grateful for finding mercy and safety in Jordan, many Syrians report feelings of alienation and isolation, as well as loneliness. They suffer from boredom and the lack of joyful experiences in their life in Jordan and desperately miss their old lives in Syria. Hopes and dreams from before

²⁵ See DeSerpa (1971), Leclerc et al. (1995) and Strazdins and Loughrey (2007) on the discussion of time as a resource. They do not only argue that time *is* a resource, but also show it to be as relevant and valued as money and other material assets.

the war have all been destroyed, which further increases feelings of disappointment and hopelessness. For men especially, it seems difficult to be unable to improve their situation, but instead dependent on others, such as the UN or the Jordanian government. They must wait for things to be changed by others, such as gaining permission to migrate to another country.

Whereas a large proportion of refugees seem to live in and for the past and reminiscing, others look towards the future in another country and put significant effort into being accepted for migration to Western countries. Either way, it is clear that for nearly all Syrians, Jordan is just a stop-over, an 'in-between' stage of transition, but not a long-term solution. The ability to endure this stage by either looking towards the past, or the future, is a significant resource that helps Syrians deal with the difficulties and uncertainties they face. From this research data, I understand that they are all very flexible and adaptive, accepting a range of constraints and restrictions in their everyday life. Patience and endurance seems to be a common and highly valuable resource refugees can resort to. Lastly, religion and the belief in God and God's mercy is a source of renewed hope and strength for most refugees we talked to: on the one hand, they stress their trust in God's plans, and often mention there is nothing else they can do than to rely on God, as they have exploited all other possibilities. The section on their tactical manoeuvring of the Jordanian environment shows that Syrians deal with uncertainties and problems by resorting to these resources, and constantly develop and expand on them.

7. ICTs and Syrian Refugees

“Praise God, that there is technology.”

(#18, interview, December 3, 2016)

Given the fact that I mostly interviewed refugees who are in a rather difficult or at least below average financial situation, I was surprised at how present ICTs are amongst refugees and how technology has become an essential and irreplaceable part of their everyday life. As a reminder: I understand ICTs as technical devices as well as applications which allow individuals to communicate and seek information. Based on the interviews, questionnaires and observations I conducted in Jordan, the following shall give an overview of what meaning Syrian refugees attach to ICTs, what role electronic devices played in Syria, during the flight, and now in their life in Jordan, and how important these are for them. Also, I want to give insights into the purposes of ICT use and communication partners, as well as potential risks or downsides refugees identify in ICT use.

7.1. Access to ICTs in Syria

Although nowadays ICT use seems to be common amongst Syrian refugees, most modern ICTs, such as computers, laptops, tablets and mobile phones, were not widely available in Syria before the war. All the respondents grew up during or before the dawn of internet and smartphones, with the newest devices only slowly arriving in the Arab world. Syrians used landlines to communicate with each other, and only a few had a mobile phone – mostly basic Nokias – or a computer. Most respondents describe that they had never heard of the internet before and clarify that inventions and new developments in Syria often seemed inaccessible for much longer than in neighbouring countries. TV and radio though were an essential part of every household, and were used on a daily basis, especially when satellite receivers allowed for receiving international channels.

With the start of the uprisings in Syria, mobile phones and smartphones as well as the internet became more widely available, though access was expensive and devices were hard to access in the beginning. Respondents point to the fact that although the crisis led to a significant rise of internet and smartphone use in Syria – especially for social media –, the war itself prevented its spread and did not allow the country to reach a similar level of pervasiveness of digital media as other Arab countries. One respondent explains the internet being under strict control of the Syrian government prevented its spread: “there was considerable scrutiny by the intelligence services on anyone using internet or social media. Most people, even companies, had to get a permission from the intelligence services, if they wanted to get an internet access.

[...] There was no personal freedom about that” (#4, interview, November 5, 2016). Along the same line, another respondent mentions that internet was only available in internet cafes for high prices, because the government would not allow mobile phones with internet access. Both respondents assume that the government consciously made the internet and devices hard and expensive to access, at the same time closely monitoring its use, so that Syrians would be less interested in using them.

Two female respondents in their 50s point to another possible reason: because families often lived close to each other before the war, there was simply no need for communication devices. They would meet on a regular basis, and could walk over or make cheap phone calls via landline whenever needed. It is only now that families are separated and scattered all over the world, that the interest and urge to communicate becomes stronger and stronger. Another respondent points to the very natural spread of ICTs, as can be seen in any other developing or developed country: in the beginning, internet and devices would only be available in cities, and to a much lesser extent in rural areas. She herself lived in a small village, where they did not have any networks towers nearby which would allow them to use the internet on smartphones or computers.

Since the beginning of the war, internet and mobile phone use in particular have also been highly restricted by power outages and the loss of connection due to bombed network towers. Weak internet connection or the loss thereof during calls or chats with family or friends still living in Syria is a substantial and recurring issue throughout the interviews. Similarly, worries about safety influenced and still influence the use of ICT in war-torn Syria. As respondent #3, a mother of four kids from Dara’a, describes:

“We were afraid because of the bombings, we were told if we turn on our mobile phones, they will catch the radiation from the phone and they will bomb us, so we were definitely scared to use them. So, no one used their mobile phones even if they had them.”

(#3, interview, November 5, 2016)

I could not identify any reliable data or publications on the availability of ICT during the war in Syria, but as Rohde and colleagues (2016) indicate, two-thirds of the country were not connected to the internet back in 2013, with an increased likelihood of reduced coverage now in the sixth year of the crisis. Especially in areas controlled by rebels, electricity and connection outages widely restrict communication, encouraged by the fear of surveillance by the government. These difficulties around the availability of ICT and its safe use seem to significantly hinder the spread and use of ICT in Syria, both before and during the war.

However, more thorough data would be needed to obtain a better understanding of the ICT use in Syria, which should be dealt with in future research.

7.2. The Use of ICTs in Preparation for or during the Migration to Jordan

A number of refugees were able to use ICTs to organize their migration or during the trip from Syria to Jordan. If so, they mostly resorted to mobile phones to call friends or relatives already in Jordan, who helped to decide whether to come to Jordan at all, how to travel, and where to go and what to do after crossing the border; “because when one arrives here, you know no one” (#14, interview, November 23, 2016). In some cases, the men had travelled to Jordan on their own first, looking for jobs and housing, and calling their families to join once everything was arranged. Some respondents explain that they would not have left Syria if there had not been adequate communication technology. The possibility to talk to people in Jordan on the phone and gain an insight of what life looks like, was crucial in their decision to leave. Learning that others had successfully moved before them, could perhaps set up a new life in Jordan, organize a job and shelter, and receiving advice on how to proceed, gave many some urgently needed security and safety in a life affected by conflict and insecurity, and an idea of what to expect. For most refugees, there was no possibility to communicate with anyone or access information during the flight itself, due to the lack of mobile internet and network coverage. Especially close to the Syrian-Jordanian border, a zone controlled heavily by the military, all communications were jammed, and the fear of being detected prevented the refugees from using any ICTs.

It seems that technology plays a significant role for refugees before fleeing, to help make a decision and organize the flight and life afterwards, but to a lesser extent during the flight itself. The geographic and cultural proximity of Jordan and Syria makes it relatively easy for Syrians to cross the border and find their way, not needing technology for navigation, translation, information, or communication purposes. I assume that results would differ slightly for refugees fleeing from Syria to Europe or other countries outside of the Arab world, as they would need devices and applications more to translate, communicate, navigate, or seek information.

7.3. Access to ICTs in Jordan

For the participants of this study, ICTs are much more available and accessible in their new life in Jordan. Though they seem rather expensive, all devices are widely available. Especially in comparison to Syria, it is easier as well as cheaper to purchase devices, as any flea market or small phone shop would offer smartphones, laptops and tablets at reasonable prices. As one

respondent puts it: “although it’s hard to get a job here, it is still possible to buy a mobile phone” (#5, interview, November 6, 2016). Respondents repeatedly mention that ICTs are more wide spread in Jordan, that they use the devices more, and that their situation has changed for the better compared to Syria. Only a young widow who has been forced to come to Jordan and now lives under strict control of her family, describes her situation in terms of technology as “almost primitive [...] compared to Syria” (#10, interview, November 6, 2016). This reflects her general negative attitude towards her life in Jordan though, and can be viewed as an exceptional case amongst those interviewed. All Syrian refugees interviewed for this study have a phone, though some share it with their partner. More than 60% of these are smartphones with internet access. Half of the respondents also own or have access to a computer or laptop, though many did not have any back in Syria. 16 of the 19 interviewees have access to the internet, at home with a router or through their mobile phones. Only very few do not have access, or do not use the internet at all. Similar to the situation in Syria, all respondents own or have access to a TV in Jordan.

However, although ICT is easily accessible in Jordan, most Syrian refugees are restricted in its purchase and use by their own financial abilities and time. Especially women who take care of the children and household explain they do not have much time to use their mobile phones or TV, as well as men who work a lot. Also, not being able to buy a new, more modern, or additional device due to financial restrictions seems to be an important issue for refugees in Jordan.

7.4. The Importance of ICTs in the Lives of Syrian Refugees in Jordan

“Without internet, it’s impossible to live. [...] If there is no mobile, there is no life. [...] What do you think, my kids without YouTube? No.”

(#15, interview, November 29, 2016)

This quote of a young female refugee, and many other similar ones show that Syrians in Jordan seem to attach great meaning to ICTs and feel the various devices and applications play a significant role in their life. Nearly all see the positive sides and advantages of having access to and using phones, laptops, TVs, the internet and other technology for communication, entertainment or information. For them, ICTs represent advancement, development, and a crucially needed connection to the world outside of Jordan. It makes life easier for refugees in particular, allowing them to stay connected, express themselves and their thoughts, stay informed about what is happening in Syria and in the world, and combat boredom, loneliness and other frustrations: “It made life easier, you can’t live without it” (#2/#3, interview,

November 5, 2016). Many feel ICT is a blessing, as well as a basic and crucial necessity: “For me information and communication technology is something substantial in every person’s life nowadays” (#4, interview, November 5, 2016. Only very few express some concerns and point to the negative sides of ICTs.

Through the semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and observations, I developed an idea of how important, even essential, modern technology is for Syrian refugees in Jordan. I could observe a partly excessive use of the TV and particularly mobile phones – even during the interviews. Staying up-to-date with the news in Syria and the world, as well as being available at all times seems to be crucial especially for those Syrians staying at home, such as housewives, the sick, or the unemployed. Phrases such as “without communication/the internet/my phone, I cannot live, it is impossible” were very common throughout the interviews. Respondent #4, a young man, specifies: “[we] nowadays are dependent on it. [...] For us Syrians, in our current situation, we have no other way to communicate but to use social media” (#4, November 5, 2016), pointing to their difficult situation because of their refugee status. Syrians appreciate ICTs for making their life easier, and helping them find their way in their new environment in Jordan. When asked about how her life would look like without ICTs, a 36-year-old housewife and mother, who suffers from loneliness and alienation in Jordan, says:

“it would be like living in the Stone Age. [...] [I would feel] isolated and it would affect us psychologically, and our whole life. [...] It would be different for the worse. [...] It would harm me psychologically, because it means to be isolated from family and relatives. [...] [ICT] makes alienation a little bit easier, there are audio and video applications that make you feel like you are sitting with the person you talk to”.

(#9, interview, November 19, 2016)

Syrians especially value the ability to communicate with friends and family members in other countries and thus stay connected, at the same time overcoming the frustrations and uncertainties they face in their life in Jordan. As mentioned before, information and communication devices are the only way to make this happen and they repeatedly point to their frustrations whenever this communication is not possible.

The importance of technology in the lives of Syrians becomes clear in the conversations, when refugees repeatedly mention how crucial and irreplaceable electronic devices are for them in times of their forced migration, and when analysing their behaviour and the questionnaire. A Syrian family from Homs for example – the man being in bad health and his family struggling with financial distress – had to sell their smartphone the day before the interview and bought

food with the money. It is clear that they prioritize their phone to such an extent, that only when no money was left to buy food for their children, did they sell it. The question asking for three items to bring to a deserted island leaves room for similar interpretations: ICTs, especially the mobile phone (or any other device to communicate and talk to people) has highest priority, on a similar or even higher level than basic goods such as food, clothes, or water, and family, friends, or the Quran. As respondent #14 says when thinking out loud: "Mobile phone, food, and clothing. [...] Yes, those are the most important items. Could anything be more important?" (#14, interview, November 23, 2016). See *Table 2* for all responses to this question.

Items to bring to a deserted island	# of respondents
1. Mobile phone	12
2. Food	4
3. Another ICT (TV, tablet, laptop)	3
4. Children	3
5. Quran	3
6. Clothes	3
7. Family	2
8. Friends	2
9. Husband/Wife	2
10. Water	2
11. Plane	1
12. Memories	1
13. Identification papers	1

Table 2. Answers to the question "What three items would you bring to a deserted island?". No further explanation was given on the circumstances of this stay or the island. Some respondents assumed there would be some basics available, such as water and food, and responded accordingly, others did not. N = 13.

The importance of ICTs for Syrian refugees in Jordan is also reflected in their expenses. Syrians spend around JOD7.5 to 10 (equals €10 to 13) on average on phone subscriptions, internet, and other ICT use per month. Given the average GDP per capita in Jordan of JOD3400 (UNdata 2017), which equates to an average income of around €375 per month, and taking into account that most refugees are unemployed and live on financial aid, €10 is a large amount. Also, subjectively, refugees feel that the costs of electronic devices and subscriptions are high, and often enough they cannot afford a recharge at the end of the month. Not having a regular income makes it more difficult to put aside the money and might require cutting back on other expenses. Syrians are willing to do so, and the example of the family who sold their smartphone to buy food shows that technical devices are nearly as highly valued as basic goods for survival. These findings clearly reflect other studies (cf. Thompson, 2009) which have shown that refugees and migrants are willing to spend a significant part of their income on ICTs and often prioritize these over other goods.

7.4.1. *Communication is Key*

That Syrian refugees in Jordan have access to information and communication technology and use it frequently supports other studies showing ICT use for migrants and refugees (cf. Brown, 2016; Schaub, 2012; Vancea and Olivera, 2013). The central question is: why do refugees have this urge to use electronic devices and what for? My study gives a very clear and definite answer: for communication first and foremost, for entertainment, following the news, and to a lesser extent for work, education or information seeking purposes.

Communication for Syrians in Jordan seems to be essential and they spend a lot of time on getting in touch with family or friends and keeping up with each other's lives. These include other Syrians who remain in Syria, or in other neighbouring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, Kuwait, Saudi, as well as in Europe, Australia or North America. Since the beginning of the crisis, more than 5 million Syrians have migrated to other countries, so many families have been separated and are now scattered all over the world. Younger respondents tend to find contacts with friends more important, whereas the elderly predominantly mention family members living in other countries, like parents, brothers and sisters, relatives, or their children. Also, communicating with or being available for the UNHCR is a crucial purpose of ICT use: "If the UNHCR wants to reach me, how would they do that if I had no mobile phone. Or you, for example, how would you have reached me, if I had no mobile phone?" (#14, interview, November 23, 2016). A young woman explains that she uses the internet even for calls within Jordan, because it is cheaper than landline or phone calls via mobile phone. To a lesser extent ICTs are used to communicate with others within Jordan or for work purposes, though it has been mentioned a few times.

In communication with people in Syria, respondents point again to the lack of stable connections so they cannot communicate on a daily basis, only when the network allows. Given the importance of staying in touch and maintaining relationships, not being able to communicate whenever they want is a source of considerable frustration amongst Syrians. The previous chapter has shown the various tactics refugees employ to deal with these problems.

When being asked to choose the five most important purposes of ICTs in their life from a list of 13, nearly all respondents prioritize the categories *staying in touch/communicating with family* and *staying in touch/communicating with friends* highest, followed by *getting news about what is happening in Syria*. Being informed about *what is happening in Jordan* is important, too, but less urgent, on a similar level of interest as *entertainment* (such as music, movies, games) and *getting (emotional) support or help*. Particularly the last aspect is of vital

importance to Syrians. Given the often-difficult surroundings they encounter which includes social isolation and loneliness, seeking emotional support from family, friends, or even strangers online is essential. Over time I have realized that for many Syrians, it also works the other way around: they use ICT to provide emotional support, especially to their children or other family members living abroad or back in Syria. Especially the mobile phone/smartphone, and computer/laptop seems to be essential for this type of communication.

Not surprisingly, *digital learning/education* is only mentioned by young respondents. However, one older woman and her daughter explain that they use the TV “for educational programmes, cultural programmes. Even if we did not get education, we can still read and get cultured. We listen to news, culture and cooking programmes. We benefit from all of them, not just series” (#16/#17, interview, December 3, 2016). It seems that the TV substitutes or at least contributes to the family’s overall education, and although they did not receive much formal education, they feel these shows on TV are highly useful for them. The majority of Syrians mention the TV as a means of entertainment and checking the news, as well as a way to keep their children busy and to relax in the evenings.

Some older informants add another category to the ones already mentioned: keeping up with news about migration possibilities. This category was not included in the initial questionnaire, but turned out to be important for many Syrian refugees in Jordan who feel stuck and would like to leave the country. One male respondent in his 30s for instance explains:

“my main use of the phone nowadays is to research for immigration. [...] Nowadays some countries are using these modern technologies, so when they are offering to accept people, they’d announce via Facebook, and when you see it, you would just go to the website and enter the required information, and you have sent them an application. So, it’s becoming easier and more direct.”

(#5, interview, November 6, 2016)

The internet in particular enables refugees to seek information on migration possibilities and submit applications. Before, enquiries would often go through the UNHCR who would forward the documents, which takes a lot of time and often involves a lot of paperwork for all parties involved. ICTs facilitate this process and also allow refugees to contact the host countries directly, which many find preferable over having to go through the UN.

Interestingly, the data gives some indication of a slight gender difference: using ICTs for *job search* is mostly named by men, whereas primarily women choose *getting (emotional) support or help*. This might support my hypothesis that male refugees are more concerned with immediate needs and less about insecurities or emotions than female refugees, or at least

pretend to do so. Respondent #10, a 61-year-old widow who has two disabled children and spends most of her time at home, summarizes: “[I use technology] to relieve some stress, be entertained and forget my worries” (#10, interview, November 19, 2016). For those in a difficult situation in Jordan, ICTs seem to be crucial for distraction and to lift their spirits. Using ICTs for navigation, sharing information about one’s life as well as sending or receiving money seems to have a very low priority for refugees. Only one respondent mentions using ICTs for work, namely the phone to organize her private business for babysitting. *Table 1* gives a detailed overview of the study’s results for the purpose of ICT use, separated by gender of respondents. These are the results from the questionnaire only, much more information on what ICTs are used for was given during the semi-structured interviews.

Purpose of ICT use	# Female respondents	# Male respondents	Total
1. Staying in touch/communicating with family	8	7	15
2. Staying in touch/communicating with friends	10	5	15
3. Getting news about what is happening in Syria	6	7	13
4. Getting news about what is happening in Jordan	3	5	8
5. Navigation (such as using Google Maps)	2	0	2
6. Digital learning/education (including translations)	4	1	5
7. Entertainment (music, movies, games, ...)	6	2	8
8. Sending/receiving money	2	0	2
9. Job search	1	3	4
10. Work	1	0	1
11. Sharing information about your life	0	1	1
12. Getting (emotional) support or help	5	2	7
13. Other, please specify: - Keeping up with news about migration possibilities [4] - Getting any type of information (Google) [3]	4	3	7

Table 3. Purpose of ICT use amongst Syrian refugees in Jordan. N = 17. 7 male, 10 female respondents.

7.4.2. Facebook, WhatsApp and Co

As the mobile phone/smartphone seems to be an essential device for Syrian refugees in Jordan, it seems interesting to zero in on their phone use. I wanted to find out what applications Syrians use, and what role social media plays in their life in Jordan. Older interviewees list making standard phone calls as the main application they use on their mobile phones: in emergencies to call the police, ambulance or family, and in everyday life to contact people. As mentioned before, being available for family or friends, as well as for the UNHCR is more relevant for some than social media or other applications: “the necessary one is just the normal phone calls, while WhatsApp and the other things are not”, respondent #14 says (interview, November 23, 2016).

For the majority though, WhatsApp, Facebook and Facebook Messenger, as well as IMO are most vital and most widely used as these applications offer the possibility to communicate cheaply with family and friends abroad:

“Calling is the only way with which we can get in touch with them nowadays. It’s not possible to go visit people, so phone calls are one of the main ways for getting in touch with people [in the United States, Lebanon, Australia]. We keep in touch with them using the tools we have, like WhatsApp.”

(#13, interview, November 23, 2016)

Over two thirds of the respondents in this study use WhatsApp, Facebook or IMO as their main communication tool. Each programme has a slightly different purpose, as three female respondents explain: “WhatsApp [...] only for typing message or to send voice records, because it doesn’t make video calls” (#9, interview, November 19, 2016); “WhatsApp for sending texts and pictures, IMO is for audio and video” (#2, interview, November 5, 2016); “I use Facebook because you can communicate with people who do not have a phone number. And WhatsApp to communicate with people who have phone numbers” (#18, interview, December 3, 2016). Others explain that Facebook offers a unique combination of news, entertainment, and communication and thus consider it the best application. One respondent was even introduced to Facebook through the UNHCR office who recommended that he follows their news and updates via Facebook. More and more international organizations, as well as governments use their websites or social media sites to spread news and information about their work. Refugees also use other applications and social media programmes, such as Instagram, Viber, Western Union and, most importantly, Google. The latter is an essential tool for researching anything that refugees are insecure about, and more than once did I hear about medical advice being taken from Google for those who are sick. As a young mother puts it: “I love Google Chrome. I ask him so many questions” (#15, interview, November 29, 2016).

7.4.3. The Special Role of the Mobile Phone and the TV

Taking into account the previous information about the purpose of ICT use, communication partners, and applications Syrian refugees in Jordan use the most, it becomes clear that one device has a very special role: the mobile phone or smartphone. As explained before, phones are the most visible type of ICT used during this refugee crisis, and are taken around the world by refugees, in contrast to TVs or computers. For my research, I asked Syrian refugees what device is most important to them, and why. Nearly all mentioned the mobile phone as their favourite device, with only a few prioritizing computer, laptop, or tablet. The cell phone is seen as a basic, crucial and highly important necessity to be able to communicate. Given that

communication is the most relevant reason for refugees to use ICTs, it makes sense that the phone is the most important tool.

Some specific characteristics make the mobile popular: “the cell phone is a lightweight device, you can take it wherever you go. [...] wherever you are, you can use it, a small device helps you to communicate wherever you are in any country” (#9, interview, November 19, 2016). Its size and universal use makes it easy for refugees to travel with them, and its multi-purposeness easily replaces and combines other devices. Respondent #15, a self-appointed ICT-addict, explains that the smartphone is her favourite device, because “[it] can be a TV, can be a radio, can be everything” (interview, November 29, 2016), which reflects the general thinking that the phone fulfils nearly all the purposes Syrian refugees wish to have in their everyday life in Jordan, including accessing news and information, communicating, being entertained and distracted, and learning. Again, especially older refugees seem to appreciate the call function in particular, as it allows them to contact loved ones and to be reached in cases of emergency or when not at home. For those families or couples without many other contacts in Jordan and feeling socially isolated, being able to reach each other and friends and family abroad, is crucial.

Especially for older respondents, but including for all generations, the TV also seems to play an essential role in the lives of refugees, though to a lesser extent than the phone. The TV is mainly used for seeking information and watching news, and entertainment for the children or the whole family. The popularity of TVs reflects a general pattern that I could observe in Arab cultures, supported by an explanation of one of my Jordanian translators, who says that Arabs do not only watch a lot of TV, but are even “obsessed” with it. My translator says about Arabs: “I would say, before the internet, they used to get most of their news from TV channels, and not as often from newspapers. [...] There [are] several news channels that [are] very popular and very well-known for people in Jordan” (Translator #1, personal communication, January 9, 2017).

The same holds true for Syrian refugees in Jordan, attaching similar importance to having a TV and watching it regularly, first and foremost news about the political, social and economic situation in the Levant, specifically in Syria. As one respondent puts it, when talking about her husband: “he never switches to anything different than that on TV” (#8, interview, November 6, 2016). Throughout the interviews, as well as in everyday life in Jordan, I experienced first-hand that life for most Syrians takes place in the living room, with the TV always being on. This included during the interviews, so when visitors are present, the TV is on, showing some cartoons for the children or some news channels. From these observations, I would argue that the TV is on the one hand a vital tool to seek information and watch news,

but on the other hand and even more so, it is meant to entertain and is often on for some sort of background noise.

The popularity of the TV in particular and ICTs in general for Syrian refugees in Jordan is also reflected in the patterns and frequency of use. ICTs, particularly the phone and TV, are used on a daily basis, some even say hourly. Those who work or are busy with for instance childcare, do mention that they cannot use their devices as often as they wish, just in the evenings or in their free time. Whereas mobile phones and computers are more used when there is a specific need for it – for instance when someone is calling or to look something up, the TV seems to be on all day long for most of them, especially for the children.

7.4.4. “This Thing with the Picture” – Generational Differences in ICT Use

There is a clear generational gap concerning the knowledge about and use of ICTs amongst Syrian refugees in Jordan. Younger generations do not only know more about ICTs, about the different options available, and how to use them, but also use them more and for a wider variety of purposes. Although all refugees 18+ do use information and communication technologies, the younger generation know their way around technology much more than the older ones do. They are more curious, and also learn about the use of computers in school and other settings. This generational gap is also reflected in the fact that older refugees use the very basic functions of ICTs, such as calling on the phone, watching news on TV, listening to the radio, whereas youth and young adults exploit the possibilities technologies offer them to a greater extent, using many different applications on the phone, utilizing computers, tablets and laptops, and their individual functions.

More than once Syrians explain that back in Syria, they had no access to the internet or computers and had never heard of it, whereas their children grow up being exposed to the full range of technologies and thus naturally know more about it. This is also reflected in the language they resort to when describing their ICT use. Quite often, older respondents do not know what applications they use or cannot name the exact term for it: “[we] communicate with her [his sister]. And sometimes it’s even with a picture!” (#13, interview, November 23, 2016); “[back in Syria] in the village, there was no internet connection. Or information, or any of what you are talking about” (#16/#17, interview, December 3, 2016). One respondent also describes that when he first got a smartphone, he was completely confused and felt like looking at a computer due to the size of the device and its complex user interface.

Younger refugees teach older generations how to use the different ICTs and the numerous applications on smartphones in particular, such as WhatsApp or IMO. Often, children would set up video calls for their parents to talk to someone, or tell them repeatedly how to navigate the devices. As respondent #13, a father in his early 50s, explains: “they would just tell me ‘here you go, talk with the phone’ and I would see her [his sister in Lebanon] picture on the screen. So, she can see me and I can see her. So, she must be using the same tool” (interview, November 23, 2016). One respondent even describes that even though his son is illiterate, he uses his smartphone a lot more and knows how to navigate the phone more than his father does.

However, the older generations are curious and determined to learn how to handle ICT and its various functions, because they want to use it to overcome distances and stay in touch with people staying abroad. They start to gain an understanding of how to use it and are highly creative in learning, and ask for help whenever they encounter issues, be it their children, neighbours, or other people they know. Overall, Syrian refugees in Jordan have a solid knowledge of ICTs and how to use them, as well as the different options available to them, including the costs, which is in line with studies on migrants’ use of electronic devices.

7.4.5. The Other Side of the Coin: Downsides and Risks of ICT Use

Despite the undeniable importance of ICTs in the lives of Syrian refugees in Jordan, they do also identify negatives and potential risks. Being used for propaganda or to spread false news is one potential downside of ICTs Syrians are conscious about, be it on TV or on the internet. Syrians are aware of the fact that especially on Facebook or other social media, information and news can be published by anyone and could be false. They try to triangulate information they get as much as possible, and only consult official sources, such as sites and profiles of governmental entities, news agencies, or institutions such as the UNHCR. Participants of this study also state that they regularly receive strange emails asking to click on specific links, or go to other websites which are clearly spam emails which might be potentially dangerous for the users’ device. Also the aforementioned risk of being detected by aerial bombs because of the radiation from mobile phones, points to a downside of using ICTs.

A recurring issue throughout the interviews concerns the changing communications landscape through the invention and spread of mobile devices, especially the mobile phone and computer. As respondent #4 puts it: “previously, people could only communicate directly, but nowadays, via a SMS, someone could end a relationship” (#4, interview, November 5, 2016). Another interviewee, female, 61, even dismisses the internet as a whole and modern forms of communication; she explains her life has been better and more organized without it, and that

the modern forms of communication cannot even be considered communication as they are unnatural. The elderly especially worry about the effects of ICT use on children. It is considered a huge source of distraction, stopping children from focusing on school and studying, at the same time having a negative impact on their health situation. Weaker eyesight, insufficient movement, lack of concentration and distraction from more important issues and activities, and a form of ‘addiction’ are some of the symptoms commonly reported.

The Syrian government is suspected to be closely monitoring their citizens, especially their use of internet and mobile phones. The fear of surveillance by the regime affects the ICT use of many Syrians, particularly to not put any acquaintances in Syria in danger.²⁶ From a young, highly educated respondent being politically interested and active, we learn in an informal talk after the interview that many Syrians have fake profiles on Facebook. They try to hide and be as invisible as possible, using pseudonyms and putting pictures of flowers or landscapes instead of profile pictures which show their faces. Back in Syria, many families did not dare to use their mobile phones because they were told the lines would be monitored and they would attract bombings once they turn them on. The story of interviewee #19’s son in Syria, afraid of being enrolled in the military, draws a similar picture: he tries to hide, keeps a low profile on social media, does not go out much, and only uses ICTs through his wife. However, from this study, a generalization or broader pattern could not be identified because of a weak data base. Questions on surveillance were not included in the interview guidelines nor in the questionnaire, as this was considered to be sensitive²⁷. From the natural flow of conversations, only a few respondents brought up the topic of surveillance, which could potentially be a sign of fear, but could also suggest that it is not a pressing issue.

7.4.6. Satisfaction and Frustrations around ICTs

In general, Syrian refugees seem satisfied with the devices and services for information and communication available to them. Especially in comparison to Syria, devices are much more available, cheaper and easier to purchase, and network coverage is more stable and more widely accessible, even in rural areas. Respondents #16 and #17, mother and daughter who had lived in a village in Syria, are particularly positively surprised about the situation regarding ICTs in

²⁶ As Opas and McMurray (2015) describe in their study on Eritrean refugees in Italy under surveillance by their government, the urge to use communication devices and contact loved ones often conflicts with the fear of being monitored and putting family or friends in significant danger. Some Syrian refugees in Jordan definitively have similar worries.

²⁷ The Jordanian government/Ministry of Interior closely monitors foreign research in their country, especially on refugees. I was warned by other researchers and locals not to cover any ‘sensitive’ topics, such as anything that could be taken as questioning the government, negative coverage on the refugees’ situation in Jordan, or criticism of the Syrian regime.

Jordan: “Here there is everything. They have internet, mobiles, Viber, WhatsApp, Facebook. Someone who has a smartphone can communicate with the whole world. There are laptops... there are a lot of services here” (#16/#17, interview, December 3, 2016). Also the fair prices for phone subscriptions increases the level of satisfaction.

On the other hand, the financial distress many Syrians in Jordan face significantly constrains the purchase and use of ICTs, which leaves them partly unsatisfied and frustrated. Many repeatedly mention that devices and internet subscriptions in particular are too expensive, or are at least beyond their current financial means. They want to reduce their spending, but at the same time continue the regular use of technological devices for communication, information and entertainment purposes. Being forced to prioritize ICTs over other goods or services frustrates especially those Syrians in a difficult financial situation.

Refugees want to decrease their spending and at the same time wish for additional, better, or more modern devices, as well as faster internet (especially 4G). An older woman who uses her phone mainly for video calls and WhatsApp, expresses her desire to have free public Wi-Fi, as in other countries or cities, because “if the internet would be free here, the money we pay for that service, we could use to spend on other [more] important things, especially that we are refugees [in this specific phrase she is referring to having no money]” (#9, interview, November 19, 2016). Respondents also mention old phones which keep freezing, difficulties with having video calls because of weak internet connection, mobiles which cannot run modern applications, amongst other problems, which is why they want better devices and internet connection. Especially for children who cannot go to school or pre-school, parents wish for a laptop or tablet to be better able to teach them or help them study. This again shows how much of a necessity ICT is to refugees, and the meaning they attach to it.

8. ICTs as Social Navigation Tools?

Information and communication technology is clearly an essential part of refugees' life today. During forced migration, it is crucial for refugees to stay in touch with family and friends, and to be able to use technology for job search, education and entertainment, amongst other purposes. Devices such as the phone or TV are often considered as important as other basic needs, and Syrian refugees spend a lot of time and money on ICTs and learning to use them.

The previous chapter also shows that Syrians, who have been forcibly displaced to Jordan, employ a variety of different tactics to deal with and overcome the various problems and uncertainties they face, including regarding finances, health, or psychological distress. Syrian refugees can be considered active agents and social navigators in the sense of Vigh, as they tactically manoeuvre the changing circumstances and restrictions they encounter. A pool of resources, though significantly limited due to the displacement experience in some cases, helps refugees adapting and socially navigating. Syrians in Jordan are well aware of the different options available to them, and strategically resort to these depending on what the specific situation asks for. In this chapter, I go a step further and investigate to what extent ICTs can be seen as facilitators of social navigation. I understand technology is an essential tool for refugees in everyday life, and thus suggest it also helps with navigation.

8.1. Getting to Jordan

As noted before, Syrians employ different tactics to get into Jordan, especially now that the borders are closed and under tight control of the military and security forces. Syrians flee on foot, taking unknown refugee routes through desert areas, take minibuses or taxis, or use guarantees by Jordanian citizens to enter the country. Information and communication technology plays a vital role in planning and preparing the flight to Jordan: the phone especially is often used to talk to Jordanians or friends/family in Jordan. Questions of interest concern whether to go or not, how to cross the border, where to go to once in Jordan, and the arrangements for a new life in Jordan. Respondent #9 explains: "We communicated with my husband's friend, we asked him if he thought coming to Jordan is better. He said yes; he advised us to come" (interview, November 19, 2016). Many Syrians have been considering for months about whether to leave or not, closely monitoring the security and living situation in Syria. Based on changing circumstances, such as bombings and fighting close to their living area, being evacuated by the government, or scarce resources including medication, all participants we met had decided at some point to move to Jordan. I argue, this adaptation to the context and the navigation of the unstable conditions which led to the final decision to leave, is in most

cases significantly influenced and shaped by information and communication technology. Syrians use the radio, TV and internet to get information about the situation, and to communicate about the different options available to them. Several respondents mention that without ICT, they would have not decided to leave Syria in the first place, and secondly, to come to Jordan in particular.

During the flight to Jordan, although the usage is restricted due to network outages close to the militarized border zones, some refugees use their smartphones to navigate, or to contact acquaintances in Syria or Jordan, including potential assistance. Technology is also vital for those families who decide to send only part of the family to Jordan – mostly the father, and young men – who then look for jobs and arrange for the rest of the family to follow after a few weeks or months. They stay in touch through phone calls or communication applications. Information and communication technologies are clearly useful, and often essential for refugees in preparation of moving to Jordan, and partly during the trip.

8.2. Pressing Everyday Life Problems and Planning for the Future

During forced migration in Jordan, many Syrian refugees resort to technical devices for information and communication purposes, including to overcome everyday life hurdles and problems. Lack of income, unstable labour, and increasing prices are only some of the financial difficulties and forces refugees must and do respond to. ICTs are frequently used to overcome financial difficulties and to research employment possibilities. Especially in the informal sector, it is common for employers to look for temporary labourers through informal channels and word of mouth, for instance by telling some of their workers, who would spread the word via messaging or calling others. The phone in particular is thus an essential tool for refugees to learn of work opportunities as soon as they appear, given that the sector is highly competitive. Similarly, women who are able to gain some extra money through cooking or babysitting, use the phone or computer to get in touch with their ‘customers’ and arrange job details. Several respondents mention that without their phone or computer, they would not be able to access job opportunities, which means the devices are essential to help navigate the financial distress many refugees face.

ICTs are also useful tools to respond to other pressing problems, such as finding new accommodation. Syrians speak of high rent prices or problems with neighbours as common reasons which may require moving to a new area. After spending some time in Jordan, one quickly realizes that one has the highest chance of finding an apartment either through personal connections, rental advertisements or signs on the lawn/outside the property, or through the

internet, including Facebook groups. All of these approaches require the use of ICT to call or message the owners or landlords. According to several interviewees, which underlines my personal impression from observations, the only way to find an apartment nowadays than to go through ICTs – rental advertisements would mostly only give a title and a phone number, and younger landlords especially would advertise only online.

The majority of respondents also explicitly point to the importance of ICT in emergency situations, such as when someone is injured, or needs immediate assistance: “When you're in an emergency and you have to call the police or the paramedics, the phone is of great use. It's a very practical thing (#5/6, interview, November 6, 2016). To be able to talk to each other on the phone, or research how to react in emergency settings, allows Syrians to navigate the situation and deal with the changing circumstances. This is particularly the case for those respondents who do not have a large support network. Respondent #7 and #8 for instance, a married couple who rely solely on each other, as their family moved to other countries and they were not able to socialise with new people in Jordan, tell us about the day when their son was injured by some neighbours who threw a rock at him:

“For example, if I'm in the market to buy something, and some problem happens or something comes up and she [his wife] wants to get in touch with me, she would simply give me a phone call. The mobile phone is very very important to my life in Jordan. Especially that we don't know that many people in Jordan, we haven't been living here all the time, so we do need to get in touch with each other. Whenever something happens, I'd give her a call, she'd give me a call, and if you have kids as well. For example, I was on the market the day the kid was hurt by the neighbour's boy. And I just rushed to the house to take him to the medical centre nearby [...]. Hadn't I had a phone, I wouldn't have been able to do that.”

(#7/#8, interview, November 6, 2016)

The internet and the TV also help refugees access news about what is happening in Syria and the world, which is not only psychologically relevant for them, but also helps them assess the situations in different places, to decide where to go (or whether to stay). More and more countries also announce possibilities for immigration through the internet, and several respondents explain that even the application itself can often be filled in and returned online. It seems that immigration, in an increasingly digitalized world, can be significantly hindered by not having the technical tools and literacy to use them. Given that many Syrians are determined to leave Jordan and the unstable living conditions and insecurities life in Jordan brings, ICTs are essential in this sense. In general, technical devices are helpful for refugees to plan the future: they use the internet in particular to do research, as well as talk to refugees in other

countries, or family members to discuss the different options and decide for the best under the given conditions.

Many interviewees also point to the importance of the internet, TV, and radio for educational purposes, for children as well as older generations. As respondent #14 summarizes: “Facebook is good sometimes for doing a bit of reading [...]. I can know about new things, unknown to me” (interview, November 23, 2016). Watching TV, as well as utilising the online presence of news channels, governments, or other institutions, is a significant resource for refugees to educate themselves and improve on their circumstances, at the same time getting up-to-date information on what is happening around them. Especially for Syrians who do not have access to formal education due to financial, logistical, or systemic restrictions, learning online or through the TV or radio can be important and highly useful. The aforementioned 38-year-old mother who explains that they watch cultural programmes on TV to educate themselves is only one example here. With the increase in online opportunities for digital learning, even high school or university students have the possibility of continuing their studies. These practices can be seen as actions of navigation, prudent tactics to manoeuvre around social forces and changes such as the mentioned restrictions on education. This navigation is facilitated, often even enabled through ICTs.

8.3. Networking and Social Relationships

When being asked about the most important purpose of ICT use, the majority of Syrians name communication. This implies that technical devices are essential tools for social navigation and adaptation in the area of networking, and to ensure psychosocial wellbeing. Syrian refugees use the different communication devices and applications to stay in touch with family and friends outside of Jordan, and exchange information as well as news. Because of the geographic distance, for many refugees, ICTs are the only connection to their loved ones, and the phone especially is a crucial tool to ensure this connection. With their relatives and friends literally spread all over the world, Syrians must find ways to communicate, despite not being able to visit each other. In situations of financial hardship in particular, calls and messages often offer the only chance to do so. A young woman for instance explains: “[living without ICTs,] I would be mad because I want to check on people who are far away” (#9, interview, November 19, 2016). Previous studies have stressed the importance of keeping up communication with friends and family during (forced) migration as a source of social capital. Communication devices are thus incredibly crucial tools which ensure and facilitate navigation for refugees, whereas using these tools is in itself a navigation tactic.

ICTs are also helpful in meeting new people inside Jordan, as well as to establish new connections to people, for instance other Syrians or refugees, outside of Jordan. Social media channels allow more shy or reserved people to share their thoughts, and express themselves and their ideas in ways that offline communication does not. At the same time, Facebook groups or other online gatherings open a range of opportunities to create contacts with like-minded people, either in the same area, or abroad. Particularly for Syrians who are not able or allowed to go out and mingle with others, online tools offer the chance to at least virtually meet and talk. This group in particular, including women who are not allowed to go out and the sick who are not able to, feels an even stronger urge to get in touch with family and friends via calls or messages to fight boredom and loneliness. In situations of despair or hopelessness, seeking the support of others can help reduce these feelings and give refugees renewed energy, perhaps also practical advice on how to proceed. In contrast to many generations before them, they have the unique opportunity to maintain social relationships despite geographic distance.

A Brief Excursus: The Idea of Network Societies

These patterns of networking online reminded me of Castells and his ideas regarding the changes that digitalization in combination with globalization brings to our societies. I want to only briefly touch upon these, as the concept was not part of my theoretical and conceptual framework, and would require a whole different data set and analysis. In simple terms: Castells (2000; 2005) introduced the term '*network society*', to describe the fact that with the rise of information and communication technologies, especially the internet, our societies and our ways of communication have been transformed towards 'network societies', where nearly all social actions are shaped by information and communication networks. These networks are enabled and maintained through modern technology.

At first glance, it seems that Syrian refugees partly live in network societies constructed through social media and other online applications. In the absence of physical contacts and feelings of loneliness and isolation in the Jordanian environment shaped by hostility and marginalization, online networks can mean the world to refugees. As mentioned before, these can be contacts to relatives or friends, but also to perfect strangers, who might share common interests or might be experiencing a similar situation. Many respondents mention that talking to others and sharing experiences and thoughts helps them to better deal with their everyday life struggles. Connecting with others and feeling part of a wider community, a 'network society', seems to be a source of renewed energy and hope for many Syrian refugees. At the same time, these online communities and activities allow them to forget about the struggles in

their offline life – online, refugees can feel the same as other users and can shed their refugee label and the accompanying negative associations. The wish to do so is closely interconnected with psychosocial wellbeing as explained below. The difficult circumstances and restrictions, which hinder Syrian refugees in their agency, can be reduced to some extent with the help of communication technology and their engagement in online communities. However, these early ideas are based on very rough findings, which need to be further investigated if it is to be used as reliable data.

8.4. Psychosocial Well-being

In general, it seems that technology works as an important and positive tool for psychological and related problems and uncertainties. Most respondents talk about how essential the phone and TV are for them to provide entertainment and joy in times of boredom and depression. As respondent #12 phrases it: “no phone or TV makes life boring or depressing” (interview, November 19, 2016). Often enough ICTs are used to pass some time and alleviate boredom. They uniquely allow users to forget difficulties and worries and to be distracted, which is “necessary especially in our case [as refugees]” (#9, interview, November 19, 2016). At the same time, stress and anxiety can be relieved, and getting involved in positive activities, such as watching comedy on TV, playing online games, or talking to friends, can lift people’s spirits. When facing a bad day or difficulties, many Syrians employ ICTs to be better able to cope – in the sense of finding a solution, at the same time being offered the opportunity to be distracted and entertained. This includes watching videos or TV, listening to music, browsing Facebook, or speaking to family and friends through messages or video calls.

Respondent #15, a young woman who only knows her family in Jordan and does not have any other social contacts, explains: “when I feel a bit tired or have like a bad day, I will do some sport, or watch on YouTube, check WhatsApp, speak to my family through [Facebook] messenger. [...] And I watch a lot of Turkish drama on TV” (interview, November 29, 2016). Several respondents reveal that they feel ICT helps reduce hopelessness and loneliness, and makes it more bearable to be separated from loved ones: “It makes alienation a little bit easier, there are audio and video applications that make you feel like you are sitting with the person you talk to” (#9, interview, November 19, 2016).

Many Syrian refugees, regardless of age or gender, feel that without information and communication technologies, their life would be more difficult, and less enjoyable. Though this would supposedly hold true for many people worldwide, Syrians repeatedly stress that in their special situations of being refugees – which entails being bereft of their home, livelihood and

often their dignity, as well as living far away from relatives and friends – ICTs play a *particularly* essential role. Several participants clearly state that they cannot imagine a life without ICT, as it would harm them psychologically, and significantly increase feelings of isolation and loneliness. Watching TV, browsing the internet or making calls can have direct as well as indirect positive effects on refugees' ability to adapt and socially navigate upcoming challenges and changing circumstances: the positive feelings arising from using these devices improve their psychological well-being and other social and personal resources, which does not only directly increase their abilities to navigate and manoeuvre, but also indirectly by positively impacting other resources. This again points to the interconnectedness of resources, and that the gain in one area often leads to an upward spiral with improvement in other areas. To clarify with an example: the access to information through the TV or internet, for instance about possibilities for migration, reduces the uncertainty many Syrians feel regarding their future. Exploring the different options for migration through ICTs, and realizing that there are options available to them, often lifts up their spirits and thus increases their overall well-being. In turn, improved well-being and the gain in knowledge can help them better deal with other situations. In this sense, technologies are used as tools to facilitate or enable social navigation. At the same time, this very usage of ICTs is a tactic in itself, as it helps Syrians to deal with their immediate challenges, such as not being able to improve their situation in Jordan – exploring and applying for migration to other countries is a tactic to work around the challenging situation in Jordan.

It becomes clear that ICT use, by facilitating social manoeuvring or in itself being a navigation tactic, is crucial for Syrian refugees in Jordan. They try to make use of its positive effects as much as possible. However, some external factors restrict the application of ICTs, such as the lack of financial means or time, as well as the previously-mentioned weak and unstable network coverage in Syria. Although refugees are creative in manoeuvring around these difficulties, they cannot always completely avoid them, which significantly diminishes their ability to use ICTs as navigation and adaptation tools. The following conversation shows an example of such limitations due to the lack of ICT:

[00:07:28.28] Interviewer: And, do you still get in touch with the family back in Syria via mobile phone or what?

[00:07:39.07] Respondent 2: Yes, I do. I used to do so with WhatsApp and IMO.

[00:07:51.19] Respondent 1: But nowadays we have no phone anymore, it's hard to get in touch with them.

(#7/8, interview, November 6, 2016)

Throughout the conversation, the respondents repeatedly point to the added difficulties they face now that they lack a smartphone and its various applications for communication and

information. It restricts them in their ability to deal with problems in everyday life, and at the same time increases social isolation and psychological distress as they lack the positive effects of phone use, including networking and receiving emotional support.

Deliberately avoiding the use of ICTs on the other hand can be a social navigation tactic in itself. A number of respondents point to their very conscious decision not to employ technical devices – the phone in particular – despite the obvious opportunities and advantages they offer. Considerations include not endangering family or friends who are still in Syria, as well as not attracting bombings through radiation emissions. Outside of the official interview settings, several interviewees also express their fears of being monitored by the Syrian government, so they try to keep their online presence to a minimum, not wanting to reveal personal or precarious information which could do harm. On the other hand, some respondents decide to limit their use of devices out of psychological considerations:

“I used to watch the news, but I don't do so anymore. [...] There is nothing but killing. Killing, slaughtering, and destruction. Sights that affect one's mood. And therefore, not anymore. [...] So, you could see some things, and they would be just stressful to you.”

(#13, interview, November 23, 2016)

As watching TV in this case means being exposed to things they do not want to see, many consciously decide not to use it or switch to another programme. The same goes for any other device, especially the smartphone and computer. Again, using ICT or not using it works as a tool to facilitate social navigation, at the same time being a navigation tactic in itself.

8.5. ICTs and Refugees in Limbo: Summing Up

8.5.1. ICTs as Tools to Facilitate Adaptation and Social Navigation

Throughout the previous chapters, the idea has been developed that information and communication technology fulfils an important function in refugees' everyday life in Jordan. As numerous examples and patterns reveal, ICTs can be considered both adaptation and social navigation tools. The analysis shows that Syrian refugees displaced to Jordan are active agents, making conscious decisions and employing a variety of different tactics to manoeuvre the difficulties and challenges they face. They move and act in a constantly changing environment, with ICTs supporting them in doing so and making the best out of uncertain situations. As expected, I could not identify major patterns of strategic agency, in which agents would try to constitute their own space and significantly alter their environment. Rather, in line with previous studies on refugees and conflict-impacted communities, the analysis reveals patterns of tactical agency. Adaptation as one of the employed tactics, as well as social navigation, are

significantly facilitated by the use of ICT and its numerous functions. Problems and challenges can often be overcome with the help of technical devices. Technology is also highly useful in diminishing uncertainties, as it allows users to access up-to-date information on the previously unknown. This helps make informed decisions, and in turn better address restrictions or problems. Also, the positive psychological effects of ICT use obviously enable the adaptation and social navigation tactics Syrians utilise. One can argue that information and communication technology helps Syrian refugees to adapt in some situations and socially navigate in other, in a context characterized by challenge and uncertainty.

8.5.2. Between Dreams of Syria and Ideals of the West

Whereas the previous sections portray ICT use as instrumental to Syrians, I want to zoom out of these specific uses of technology, and investigate the overall meaning of the possibilities ICTs offer. Let me briefly recap the main findings on the situation of Syrians in Jordan. We see that Syrian refugees who were displaced to Jordan are in limbo: they are dissatisfied with their current living situation, suffer from hardship and psychological distress, as well as systemic discrimination and hostility. However, they cannot improve their situation as they lack the resources and are restricted by external forces and constraints. They dream of returning to Syria one day to resume their old lives and end their dependence on Jordanian hospitality, international aid, and governmental decisions. Many Syrians clearly feel bereft of their agency and dignity, and despite the patterns of tactical agency we can still observe, one cannot deny that their situation is often devastating. Reminiscing about their old life, including looking at pictures and talking about their memories, can be frequently observed amongst the refugees. Yet, they are well aware that their dream of returning to their old lives is unrealistic: even when the war ends, Syria will be in a stage of post-conflict reconstruction for a long time, and the country and people will never be the same again. Instead, many refugees indulge in dreams and ideals of the West. They hope for migration to the US or countries in Europe, which they imagine to be paradise. Recurring rejection by the UN or immigration departments of these countries often quickly destroy these dreams and leave Syrians hopeless and desperate, stuck in Jordan in a life of constant struggling and hardship.

I argue that this situation can be neatly applied to Vigh's threefold idea of navigation accounting for strategy, tactic, and practice: Syrians' strategy and wish is to go back to Syria and decide their own lives again, thus create their own space and try to alter the conditions which surround them. Due to the lack of resources and external restrictions, they can only employ tactical agency, which implies navigating the spaces created by others and trying to

make the best of it. This also includes trying to resettle to another country which would presumably offer better possibilities and living conditions. In practice however, they are stuck in Jordan, left with little more than the everyday navigation of their environment to improve their situation, and with a lot of necessary adaptation due to the lack of alternatives.

Given their situation, one might be surprised that there is any agency at all. This is, I argue, where ICT comes in. The tactics above show that the use of ICTs is significant for refugees in various situations. Moreover, I claim that dreams of both the old life and an imagined glorious future keep Syrians alive, mentally but also physically, and ICTs enable them to do so. ICT allows refugees to watch news and documentaries on Syria, to look at pictures, to stay in touch with friends and family who still live in Syria, and thus stay attached to the country and people. On the other hand, social media channels in particular offer endless possibilities to access pictures, movies and news from the West which mostly increases refugees' wishes to go there. For many Syrians, making it to a Western country seems to be the ultimate goal, and is a significant reason to continue. The dream of the West and the idealistic perception of receiving better education for their children, employment, and other social advantages, help them better deal with their everyday struggles in Jordan. A number of respondents in this study also mention relatives who migrated to European countries or Northern America, and obviously receive highly positive feedback on life there in regular conversations through online communication channels. It seems that talking to other Syrians who 'made it', further increases the respondents' hope and motivation to keep trying. These online networks are made possible through technical devices and the internet, and can only be maintained through regular communication with the help of messaging and video call applications. It becomes clear that ICTs offer platforms for the exchange of knowledge and experience in ways which offline communication cannot.

At the same time, internet-connected devices such as the computer and smartphone make it possible for Syrian refugees to research migration possibilities to make their dreams more concrete. Whereas former generations would have to go through the UN, 'e-refugees' can access information on their own, which means receiving knowledge on time and to be able to immediately react to it – including submitting an application when the opportunity arises. Thereby, refugees can regain at least a share of their independence, and carry out some agency. This positively affects their psychological resources, which in turn impacts the other resource areas and thus the capacity to act and navigate in the present and immediate future. This is part of the upward spiral resource gain can initiate.

It shows that ICTs help Syrians in three different but interconnected ways: a) to navigate immediate constraints and challenges and try to overcome the daily struggles in Jordan, b) to imagine and dream of a future – in Syria or in Western countries – which will bring improvement to their living conditions, and c) to facilitate attempts to bring that future closer, including to facilitate migration applications. What we see here reflects what Vigh explains as navigation through the immediate and the imagined – which allows Syrians to survive in the present as well as *to see their life*, i.e. to gain insights into their future life trajectories. This navigation facilitated through ICTs makes it easier for refugees to deal with the disappointment of being stuck in Jordan and being confronted with an often-precarious living situation.

9. Conclusion and Discussion

This thesis started with the notion that technology appears to be an essential part in the lives of many refugees today. In an increasingly digital and connected world, this is not surprising, but refugees seem to attach a special meaning to their technical devices, and use it for a number of different purposes during the refugee experience. The Syrian refugee crisis is one of the most recent and largest taking place in the new digital age, which calls for an investigation into the role of ICTs during the forced displacement of Syrians. Considering the well-researched notion of tactical agency amongst refugees in contrast to the image of helpless victims, I was particularly interested in the role of ICTs as tools to facilitate this agency. Many Syrians flee to neighbouring countries, such as Jordan, often hoping to be able to return to Syria soon and thus not putting much effort into integration. This ‘in-between’ stage in combination with often harsh living conditions in Jordan makes a particularly interesting case to look at.

The social navigation theory developed by Vigh, and the post-migration adaptation theory by Ryan and colleagues build the theoretical framework for this research, which allows us to gain insights into the everyday life of Syrian refugees in Jordan. The idea of social navigation makes it possible to analyse the intersection between Syrian refugees (agents), their strategies and actions (agency), and the constantly changing circumstances and difficulties that surround and affect them (social forces and change). In other words, the tactics refugees employ to manoeuvre around challenging and changing circumstances during forced migration in Jordan. With their notion of resources as a basis for adaptation during the migration experience, Ryan et al. offer a framework to consider the resources refugees can utilise in order to overcome difficulties and uncertainties and socially navigate. Investigating ICT and digital literacy as one of these resources, including the use and meaning of ICTs for Syrian refugees, was one of the major goals of this research. Finally, the paper tried to shed first light on the question in what ways ICTs can be seen as tools to facilitate social navigation during forced migration. The study is the first of its kind to combine the concepts of social navigation and resources. Vigh’s social navigation theory can help explain that there is agency amongst refugees and why, but not how agency takes shape, how it is conditioned and what capacities and resources make it effective. Combining the two theories allows us to take a look at both the tactics of active agents, and how these come to the fore and evolve.

Tactics to Counter Challenges and Uncertainties

The analysis based on personal interviews, questionnaires and observations reveals a number of interesting and relevant findings regarding the everyday life of Syrian refugees in Jordan.

Syrians mostly want to resettle in Europe or North America and view Jordan as a transit country which does not offer much. Many do not try to integrate or settle permanently, as they do not see any long-term future in Jordan. This negative attitude is enhanced by the fact that they face a number of difficulties in Jordan, particularly around issues of financial hardship, health and education, as well as the lack of social networks and feeling stuck due to the impossibility of migrating to another country. Similarly relevant are uncertainties, including feelings of loneliness and hopelessness, boredom, trauma, frustration, depression, and an overall sadness regarding the situation in Syria, and the unknown future for the country and its people. This is combined with frustrations of being confined to Jordan.

However, the analysis also reveals that, in line with Vigh, Syrian refugees are active agents, who do not simply accept these difficulties and problems, but try to overcome them as much as possible and make the best out of the situation. It cannot be denied that refugees are victims of terror, violence, and forced displacement, and are partly helpless and dependent on the help of others. This also shows in the fact that Syrians struggle to employ strategic agency, but are mostly limited to tactical actions – navigating the social spaces of others instead of constructing their own. However, here it needs to be stressed again that there is no clear distinction between tactic and strategic agency possible. The two categories overlap and merge, which makes it difficult to sharply distinguish one or the other in the behaviours of refugees. Rather, actions often show signs of both kinds of agency. Although Syrians are clearly limited in their abilities to employ strategic agency, it becomes obvious that they can exercise a high degree of tactic agency, by resorting to a range of resources.

I analysed these resources according to Ryan et al. and found differing results for the four categories. Syrian refugees displaced to Jordan have a good general knowledge of the cultural context they live in and can navigate the culture easily due to its proximity to Syria, whereas the level of education and digital literacy varies considerably. The material resources of most Syrians in Jordan such as possessions, property and cash are limited, which appears to also have a negative effect on other resources, including physical and psychological. Mobility, energy level, and health status are often restricted due to weak financial abilities preventing access to adequate health care. Due to the insecurities and difficulties they face, the degree of hope, self-esteem, optimism, and self-efficacy are often limited. On the other hand, refugees can clearly resort to a large pool of social skills and have a solid level of social resources, including support networks and social relationships, though this depends on the situation and abilities to go out and meet people, as well as on the level of social skills. In addition to the model from the research group around Ryan, I added time as a metaphysical resource. Severely

limited for many Syrians, this in turn has a negative effect on other areas of resources, and thus the ability to respond to external shocks.

The degree of resources refugees can utilise goes hand in hand with the problems and uncertainties they face, with fewer resources relating to more difficulties and vice versa. There seems to be a reciprocal relationship in place, even a vicious cycle: the less resources, the more difficulties evolve, the lower the ability to solve these, and in turn fewer resources and limited means to expand them. However, though the resources available to Syrians are often restricted, they actively use what they have to the best of their ability to manage their life in Jordan. Also, they constantly develop and expand them to be better able to deal with changing and challenging circumstances. They employ a variety of tactics to deal with upcoming problems and uncertainties, and thereby increase their pool of resources. I understand these actions as tactics for post-migration adaptation and social navigation. The concept of social navigation and looking at the forces and changes which influence Syrian refugees as agents allows to see that, depending on the circumstances and resources available to them, refugees employ different strategies to socially navigate, partly several at the same time. I also argue that resignation can be a tactic or strategy of social navigation: when their capacity does not allow for manoeuvring, refugees accept the conditions to not waste resources and save them for situations which are more promising. These calculated choices are a very facet of social navigation. The different ways of overcoming problems are highly creative, such as digging aid or taking on illegal labour to counter financial distress, intercultural marriages to overcome social and cultural difficulties, or immigration as a possibility to improve the living conditions. In the process, refugees resort to resources and at the same time expand them by employing these tactics and strategies.

The analysis is the first of its kind offering data on the agency of Syrian refugees, and in particular on refugees in the special situation of being stuck and in an ‘in-between’ stage. Therefore, the study contributes to the idea of agency amongst refugees and counter persistent victimization in literature and media. Also, combining social navigation and adaptation instead of contrasting them with each other is unique and encourages future research.

The Role of ICTs

Taking into account the importance of information and communication technology for forced migrants, I aimed to take the analysis to the next level, and took a closer look at the role of ICTs. In the first step, I presented a detailed analysis of the use and meaning of technology for Syrian refugees displaced to Jordan. There is plenty of research on the meaning of ICT for migrants, and to a minor extent for refugees in foreign/alien cultures, but none on the specific

case of Syrian refugees in Jordan. The cultural and geographic proximity of Jordan and Syria, and the reported situations and feelings of being stuck, make an interesting case and it seems worth investigating the role of ICTs in this special situation. The analysis reveals that ICTs have a crucial role in the lives of refugees, and are considered essential and basic. Technology is primarily used for communications, entertainment, and knowledge seeking. In the specific situation of refugees, and of being stuck in Jordan, ICTs also fulfil a role as tools to facilitate and enable social navigation and adaptation during forced migration in Jordan. Devices such as the mobile phone and TV fulfil important needs, such as in emergencies or for educational advancement, and function as psychological support and social network tools countering negative feelings and moods.

The findings indicate that, similar to other resources, the lack of technology significantly diminishes other areas of resources, and thus the ability to adapt and navigate. In times of limited face-to-face interactions and support networks, ICTs are essential: without them, it is nearly impossible for Syrian refugees in Jordan to maintain their social relationships with family and friends living abroad, and to access their support networks, which are essential for social navigation and adaptation. I also pointed to the connection to network societies as introduced by Castells, briefly investigating how Syrian refugees around the world connect with each other and build online societies of support and exchange. For some refugees, ICTs even seem to replace social contacts with humans: in the absence of personal social contacts in Jordan, many try to fight their loneliness by watching TV, videos online or browsing social media channels. Communication with friends or with perfect strangers in particular help them find distraction, at the same time feeling as part of a community and being connected to other human beings.

The different kinds of resources are influenced and shaped by information and communication technology, including the possession thereof and knowledge of how to use them. It shows that ICTs are resources which are used for adaptation and navigation during relocation, and at the same time essential tools to expand other areas of resources. What is relevant to keep in mind here is that many Syrian refugees, particularly the older generations, had not been familiar with ICTs in their life in Syria before. Only when they came to Jordan, many started discovering and developing the various devices and their skills how to use them when they saw the necessity for it. They actively made the decision – though some might have felt forced – to invest time, effort and money in developing ICT as a resource. This in itself is part of their social navigation efforts in Jordan, trying to make the best out of the situation

within their means. For all of them, this investment pays off as it opens up new possibilities and chances in economic as well as social regards.

Overall, this study shows that Syrian refugees who are forcibly displaced to Jordan are by no means merely victims, but active agents who employ a variety of tactics and constantly make calculated choices according to the social forces and changes they encounter. This can mean adaptation, social navigation, or both, depending on the best option for the specific situation. To use Vigh's words: refugees 'move within motion', and 'sail' the at times difficult and hard everyday realities they face during forced migration in Jordan. They do so by resorting to their cultural, material, social, and psychological resources, which they constantly expand and adapt in reaction to evolving conditions. One of these resources, information and communication technology and the knowledge of how to use it, plays an increasingly important and invaluable role in refugees' lives. ICT is an essential resource, at the same time helps expand other resources or make up for the lack thereof. ICTs clearly help and facilitate social navigation and adaptation, and refugees in the digital age cannot be imagined without them.

With these results, the analysis makes an important contribution to the existing literature on agency and adaptation as well as social navigation of refugees, and to our understanding of the role of information and communication technology for forced migrants, and in particular during times of hardship and uncertainty. Previous research has not explored the connection between ICTs and adaptation/social navigation, which turns out to be an important link, and will continue to be for upcoming generations of refugees who grow up in a digital world. From a theoretical standpoint, connecting the notions of social navigation and adaptation and seeing them as complementary rather than contrasting, adds an interesting and relevant layer to the analysis of agency and could significantly enrich future studies. Gaining a better idea of the most pressing difficulties and uncertainties Syrians face, as well as comprehending the strategies and tools they employ to resolve difficulties, can help to improve the planning and implementation of refugee programmes and better tailor them to refugees' needs and priorities. Particularly knowing about refugees' flaws regarding resources will make it easier for policy-makers and humanitarian agencies to better foster their attempts to help refugees during relocation.

Theoretical Considerations: Refining our Notion of Refugees' Agency

The analysis reveals that ICT is an essential resource in refugees' pool of assets. The various devices and applications help refugees muddle through their life in Jordan, and overcome obstacles and challenges. The attempts of Syrians to gain some control over their lives are

clearly facilitated and often even enabled through ICTs. As the first of its kind, this study should inspire modifications in research and practice on how to deal with refugees and their agency. It changes our notion of agency, because it considers that tactic agency and navigation is possible even in the absence of other essential resources, such as material or social. Considering for ICTs as resources enables us to explain agency where we do not expect it, such as in situations of material poverty and psychological distress. It was shown that refugees would do without vital medication in order to finance their phone, which reflects the importance of ICTs.

In a digitalized world, research must take into account the role of ICT when analysing the agency of refugees; we have to see it as a basic resource and perhaps even as a characteristic of refugees, less as an additional ‘luxury’ good that can be obtained or not. Particularly when investigating strategic and tactical navigation in circumstances of rapid change and uncertainty, researchers should consider for ICTs. At the same time, when employing a resource-based approach to refugees’ well-being and capacity for adaptation and integration, electronic devices and digital literacy must be investigated in detail. Last, policy and humanitarian interventions and programmes have to respond to the clear need for ICT and should take into account that phones or TVs are often prioritized over other basic goods.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite the reasonable claims and conclusions which can be taken from this analysis, it should also be noted that its validity and significance is limited. First, the sample size and its constitution could lead to a bias in analysis. It displayed a high level of health problems and financial hardship amongst respondents, which might not be representative of the sample population. Furthermore, limits in time and money did not allow for a study of longitudinal effects, nor to conduct several interviews with the same respondents. Particularly given the numerous taboos and sensitivities regarding the topics of research, including life back in Syria and uncertainties and difficulties in Jordan, building a relationship of trust with respondents and returning for follow-up interviews would be advisable. Similarly, the information given by interviewees might lack reliability. Particularly regarding sensitive topics, such as the war in Syria, data could be biased by selective memory and descriptions of hardship and grievances might be exaggerated.

A clear limitation of this study also lies in my own role as a researcher. It is obvious that as the sole interpreter of the data, the analysis is biased by my cultural, social and personal characteristics and views. During data collection, as a Western woman in a predominantly Muslim country, I raised specific expectations and respondents have likely reacted to my

appearance during the interviews. Also, my limited Arabic skills did not allow me to conduct the interviews myself, so that I had to rely on research assistants and translators. This bore the risk of not obtaining the relevant data, inaccurate translation and thus wrong interpretation of results. All these are potential biases and limitations which are impossible to erase, but it is important to take them into account when analysing the data and drawing conclusions.

The research around the agency of Syrian refugees in Jordan is by no means exhausted in this study. There are numerous interesting directions to take for future research, including gaining a better understanding of the difference between adaptation and social navigation, and exploring what tactics and resources are relevant for each. Also, looking at the interplay of Syrian refugees with Jordanians and other actors in addition to external forces might be interesting, to better understand how agency is shaped by internal and external factors. Future studies should also investigate the networks built amongst refugees around the world and the role of ICT in constructing these ‘network societies’. It would have gone beyond the scope of this paper to go into detail on Castell’s concept, but it is a highly relevant lens which deserves further research attention. Exploring these online communities can help us better understand the role of ICTs as social resources and the importance of social networks as a success factor for post-migration settlement. The theoretical implications developed in the course of this research should be further investigated and employed to other cases to test its rigour and significance. This includes seeing adaptation and social navigation as complementary rather than contrasting, and combining the theory of social navigation with the idea of resources. The vicious cycle of resource loss and difficulties was displayed to some extent here, but we need to expand our understanding to how governments or the international aid community can counteract these developments. Similarly, the idea that ICTs fulfil an important role to facilitate adaptation during forced migration would need to be further developed and researched, as well as the general importance of technology for refugees in the digital age. A proper understanding of the role of ICT to help overcome and manoeuvre around situations of hardship and uncertainty is essential to evaluate the situation of refugees and migrants and develop helpful humanitarian programmes and integration measures tailored to their individual needs.

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Appendix

Appendix A – Interview Guidelines

Number of respondent (#)/if needed, contact details of respondent:

Date of the interview, location:

Introduction: what is the research about, who am I *[keep it simple!]*

I am from Germany, and study Peace and Conflict Studies at a university in the Netherlands. Currently, I am writing my Master thesis/the final paper I need to obtain my degree.

I am highly interested in the use of communication and information devices, such as phones, computers, radio, TV, etc. amongst Syrian refugees living in Jordan. I would be very grateful if you would participate in my research and answer some questions on the role of information and communication technologies in your life.

Confidentiality, anonymity, safety

All information will be kept confidential and anonymous, no names, contact details or any other information that could lead to you, will be published or saved, I will simply save your answers, and your demographic information (age, gender, where you are from). I want you to feel 100% comfortable with this interview, if this is not the case, please let me know at any time. If there are any questions you do not want to or cannot answer, please do not hesitate to tell so, or just say ‘next question please’.

Proceeding of the interview

This will be a semi-structured interview, which means I will ask some questions to guide the interview, but in general feel free to talk freely and openly about anything that comes to your mind, and that you find relevant. There is no right or wrong answer, any information you can share is good. If you do not have an answer, please do not hesitate to say so! Also, feel free to ask questions if something is unclear.

I will first ask some questions about your life in Syria, then about your current life in Jordan, and in the end on the role of ICTs in your life. Depending on how much you want to tell, the interview might take around 30 to 50 minutes. In the end, I will ask you some specific questions, which will take up to 10 minutes.

Informed consent on recording

To make the analysis of what you said easier, and to be sure that I get everything you need, it would be very important for me to record our conversation. This recording will not be published, nor shown to anyone else, it is just for me personally, to be able to go back to what you said. Would that be okay for you?

Then let's get started.

Semi-structured interview, guiding questions

A) Tell me about your **life in Syria** (10 min)

1. Where are you from?
 2. What did you do there?
 3. Why did you leave?
 4. What did you experience?
 5. When you left Syria, what did you bring with you?
 6. Do you still have family/friends in Syria, and if so, are you still in contact with them?
 7. Describe your life in Syria in one word/sentence.
-

B) Tell me about your **life in Jordan** (15 min)

1. When did you arrive in Jordan, how long have you been here?
 2. Why did you come to Jordan/this specific city?
 3. How did you come to Jordan?
 4. What is your life like here?
 5. What does your typical day look like?
 6. What about Fridays/weekends?
 7. How would you describe your life here in Jordan?
 8. How do you feel about living here?
 9. Did you notice any cultural differences, differences in life, everyday life, etc.?
 10. If so, do these bother you? How do you deal with them?
 11. Do you face any difficulties/insecurities here?
 12. If you have a bad day, or face any problems/difficulties, how do you deal with it?
 13. Do you ask for help, and if so, how?
 14. Describe your life in Jordan in one word/sentence.
-

C) The **role of Information and Communication Technologys** (15 min)

** [show Sheet 1: definition and pictures]*

[Let the respondent read the definition of ICTs:]

Technologies designed to access, process and transmit **information** and to **communicate**. ICTs are, for example: radios, telephones, TV, computers, phones, ...

Do you understand this?

[make sure the respondent understands what is meant by ICTs!!!]

1. What role did ICTs play in your life in Syria
2. What role do ICTs play in your life here in Jordan?
3. What do you use ICTs for?

4. How do you use ICTs in your everyday life here in Jordan?
5. To what extent do ICTs make your life easier/more complicated?
6. To what extent did ICTs play a role for your decision to leave Syria?
7. To what extent were ICTs important during your departure from Syria?
8. Imagine if you did not have ICTs, what would your life look like today?
Would you still be here in Jordan, would you do the same things..?
9. How did you organize your move to Jordan? How did ICTs help you in doing so?
10. Has one device a special role for you? Why?
11. *Did all this change from back home?*

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B – Questionnaire

Demographic information

Gender: Male / Female

Age: _____

Where are you from: Syria, _____

Where do you live now: Jordan, _____

With whom do you currently live together: _____

Are you married: yes / no

Do you have kids: yes / no

When did you leave Syria: _____

Do you still have family/friends in Syria: _____

If you could bring 3 items with you to a deserted island, what would they be?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The role of information and communication technologies in your life

I would now like to ask a few questions on the role of ICTs in your life

**** [show Sheet 2, and leave it with the respondent until the end of the interview]***

1. Do you own or have access to ...
 1. a radio: yes / no
 2. a TV: yes / no
 3. a phone: yes / no
 4. a cellphone: yes / no
 5. a smartphone: yes / no
 6. a computer/laptop: yes / no
 7. a tablet: yes / no
2. Do you use ...
 1. Radio: yes / no
 2. TV: yes / no
 3. Phone: yes / no

4. Cellphone: yes / no
5. Smartphone: yes / no
6. Computer/laptop: yes / no
7. Tablet: yes / no
3. Do you have access to the internet? Yes / no
 - a. If yes, where? _____
4. Of this list, what is the most important device for you? _____
 - a. And why? _____

5. What do you use ICTs/these devices for?

6. What are the 5 most important purposes of ICTs in your life?
**[show Sheet 3 - respondent shall choose max. 5 out of list; they can also give you the numbers of the answers]*
 1. Staying in touch/communicating with family
 2. Staying in touch/communicating with friends
 3. Getting news about what is happening in Syria
 4. Getting news about what is happening in Jordan
 5. Navigation
 6. Digital learning/education, incl. translations
 7. Entertainment (music, movies, games, ...)
 8. Sending/receiving money
 9. Job search
 10. Work
 11. Sharing information about your life
 12. Getting (emotional) support or help
 13. Other, please specify: _____
7. How often do you use ICTs?
 Daily / few times per week / once a week / few times per month / once per month / less
 / never / OTHER, please specify: _____
8. What is/are the most important programme(s)/app(s) for you?

9. With whom do you mainly communicate through ICTs?

10. Social media: what social media channels do you use and why these specific ones?

11. Would you like to change your current way of using ICTs? (do less/different things/...): _____

12. Are you content with the devices and services available to you? Yes / No

a. If not, why: _____

13. How much do you spend on ICTs (money-wise; either a specific number per week/month, or in words: too much/okay/a lot/...)?

14. Do you feel there is a difference between generations in the use of ICTs? (if you are a kid/youth, to your parents; if you are a parent, to your kids/grandchildren)

15. ICTs – blessing OR curse?

16. Please complete this sentence:

ICTs are for me _____

Is there anything else you would like to add?

This is the end of the interview. I am grateful and **appreciate** your help so much! I will have more interviews during the next few weeks, and in the end, I will put all responses together and analyze the data. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or want to add information. Also, feel free to forward my number to other Syrians who might be interested in being interviewed, I would be highly grateful. Again, **thank you** so much, this is so helpful!

After the interview:

Summarize in a few bullet points what interviewee said; what was most interesting / striking:

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Impressions/meta data (surrounding, location, facial expressions, emotions, hesitation, talking openly, were other people present; other observations,...):

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Self-reflection / feedback on interview process:
