Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg (Germany) and University of Stavanger (Norway)

European Master in Migration and Intercultural Relations (EMMIR)

Thesis

Aspirations in the Context of Irregular Migration

The Migratory Trajectories of Syrian Asylum Seekers Arriving in Norway

Student: Sevag Ohanian

Supervisor: Gunhild Odden

Examiner: Anna Maršíková

Date: June 30th, 2016

Acknowledgement:

I would like to express my gratitude to the research team at the Center for Intercultural Communication (SIK) in Stavanger that guided me in the data collection process as I had limited knowledge about the legal process of conducting field research in Norway. I had the privilege of having Gunhild Odden as my supervisor as she had a strong interest and expertise in Norway's asylum policies, and her feedback and guidance were crucial in the course of my research. I would also like to thank Oleksandr Ryndyk from SIK, who showed strong interests in my topic and took part in the data collection. I would like to thank Maria Ghazzaoui, my former at Oxfam and who is now a wonderful friend, for her support and encouragement throughout this journey. I owe gratitude to the heads of the reception centers and schools who put me in contact with the Syrian community. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation and admiration to my respondents for their hospitality that is deeply imbedded in the beautiful Syrian culture. The way some respondents welcomed me in their living space made me feel at home. Also, thank you for the Matte drinks at the reception center!

Abstract

While many public figures and civil society members perceive irregular migration as the source of various problems that modern societies encounter nowadays, this paper argues that this form of migration is rather the output of an outdated international system. The latter tends to protect the modern societies by enforcing the borders of nation states and leaving the most disadvantaged individuals on the wrong side of state frontiers. Thus, irregular migration is a complex phenomenon that one needs to approach critically at both macro and micro levels, in order to understand its origins and find the means to address it. Warsan Shire, a Somali poet who tried to explain the migrant crisis that the Mediterranean region has been witnessing for decades said: "Nobody puts his or her kids on the boat unless the sea is safer than the land" (Van Heelsum, 2016). His quote clearly highlights two realities that are attributed to irregular migration. It first shows the immensity of the hardships in the country of departure that oblige migrants to flee to another place where the living conditions are allegedly better. Second, it largely reflects strong aspirations among migrants to achieve their aim amidst tighter border controls and asylum policies that hosting countries impose to divert the migrant flows. In this research I aim to highlight how the aspirations shape and influence on the trajectories of migrants, by focusing on selected biographies of a diverse group of Syrian migrants who arrived in Norway. I explain how migrants react to various personal as well as other conditions that influence on them while they are experiencing different phases of (im)mobility.

Table of Contents

I. Introduction

Background

According to article 31 of Geneva Convention, any person fleeing war or persecution has the right to cross state borders and seek asylum in other countries without being punished (UN, 1951). The Convention does not provide a geographic limitation on the regions where a given person can apply for asylum, and thus, the affected populations possess the right to seek protection in any country they desire. Also, it does not include economic and social isolation as grounds that could entitle a given person the right to apply for asylum in other countries. During the cold war, asylum seekers from different parts of the globe fleeing dictatorships and communist regimes used to be warmly welcomed by several European countries. Their persistence to reject life under oppressive governments and struggle to cross national borders for a safer life had long been tolerated (Schapendonk, 2012). After the collapse of communism and the exponential rise in the number of asylum seekers escaping from the Balkan wars, the general perception in Europe regarding refugees has shifted and skeptical views about the newcomers have emerged, tending to depict the mass exodus of asylum seekers as waves of "human wastes" that get stronghold in the developed North (Bauman, 2004). Photographs displayed by social media of irregular migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea encourages the viewers to perceive the migrants as "desperate invaders" or merely "the poor victims of smuggling networks" (Bredeloup, 2010). This attitude paves the way for many European policy makers to act against international treaties related to refugee protection, and to unilaterally engage in actions that push asylum seekers away from their borders in order to respond to pressure from voters. It also helps them contribute the deaths of many migrants while they cross the Mediterranean to the actions of the smugglers by ignoring the role of the closed borders of the European Union in it.

In 2015, Europe witnessed the biggest refugee crisis since the end of World War Two, as an increasing number of refugees from the Middle East had been fleeing into Europe amidst the intensifying crisis in Syria. The conflicts have obliged many of them to escape to safer countries and claim protection as per the Geneva Convention's guidelines. Long before the unprecedented influx, several governments had been acting unilaterally against international treaties and making

use of drastic measures such as closure of their borders in order to push the refugees away. Other states have been making use of more proactive methods that turn the given states less attractive to potential asylum seekers while keeping their borders open, notably by using the social media platforms to send out messaging to discourage the arrival of further migrants. For example, the Government of Norway took the initiative of using its official Facebook pages, where it exposed the country's recent restrictive asylum rules to potential newcomers (The Local, 2015). Due to the Refugee Convention's principal of non-refoulement, the countries that receive these migrants do not possess the right to send the migrants to war zones. As an alternative option, some states in Europe take the initiative to deport them back to the countries where they first applied for asylum and where the security conditions are supposedly better under the refugee conventions do not confer people the right to flee economic hardships. They also aim to establish bilateral agreements with countries such as Turkey from where many asylum seekers flee to Europe in order to facilitate their deportation to these countries (Duvell, 2011).

Despite the obstacles, many irregular migrants managed to arrive in specific locations in Europe. The absence of legal channels that would allow people fleeing from war to easily claim protection in European countries as well as tighter border controls by the hosting states – force the migrants to diversify their strategies and multiply the routes that they use to reach their goals (Papastergiadis, 2000). Many scholars argue that the migrant crisis that Europe has been witnessing is not merely the result of the increasing number of migrants, but rather the tight asylum policies of European countries (Czaika & de Haas, 2014). It is also the product of strong migration aspirations that reflect on the migrants' decision-making process before and during the journeys. The term "migrant aspirations" implies all the dreams that a given individual aims to achieve in order to live a pleasant life (Van Heelsum, 2016). While individual aspirations could largely influence on people's migration plans at various levels before, during and even after arriving in what is supposed to be the final destination, they could also be developed and shaped by various types of networks and situations that migrants encounter during their journeys. According to Ma Mung, the conditions that influence on migration projects could be divided into two parts: the internal dispositions of migrants such as their personal initiatives and private knowledge, and the external conditions such as the networks and family ties in their place of residence (Ma Mung in Odden, 2010).

Rationale behind the chosen topic

In order to understand how these conditions influence the migrants' aspirations and shape the trajectories of individuals, empirical research is needed to highlight and explain the conditions that shape migration aspirations, and thus the journeys of migrants. In this research I chose to focus on the case of the Syrian migrants arriving in Norway. The magnitude of the Syrian refugee crisis and the variety of actions taken by several European countries to counter the arrival of refugees could help scholars draw lessons from the influx of Syrians by trying to measure the applicability of the existing research regarding aspirations and irregular migration, on the case of the Syrians. In order to have a coherent and complete understanding of the motivations behind taking the irregular routes to Europe, I chose to analyze the whole migratory trajectories of Syrian refugees arriving in Norway to show the complex relation between migrant aspirations and migratory trajectories. While there is a significant amount of literature on migrants' aspirations and the dynamics of destination country choices before a migrant takes-on a journey, less research is done on what occurs when the migrants are on move. For that purpose, I conducted biographical narrative interviews with a group of Syrian refugees and asylum seekers who reside in Norway.

To limit the scope of my research, I selected Norway as a final destination country. My choice of country was mainly based on the fact that the Nordic state rapidly turned into a popular destination among Syrians, despite the intention of the government to curb the flows of asylum seekers into the country. Norway's case is significant in order to have an alternative view of migrant-networks. Sweden and Germany, which unlike Norway, have long had strong Syrian and Arab presence, have been receiving the highest number of Syrians asylum seekers. In 2013, around two thirds of the refugees who were arriving to the EU were choosing Sweden and Germany as their final destinations (Morris, 2013). On the other hand, the Syrian migrants coming to Norway constituted only a tiny portion of the new arrivals especially in the first years of the crisis (UDI, 2015). Diaspora communities have long been viewed as the core reason that made a given country a favorable and easily accessed destination for different migrant groups (Boyd, 1989). Thus, I was particularly interested in discovering how Syrian migrants were getting exposed to the idea of going to Norway and taking the decision to move there. As the

research aims to provide an all-inclusive understanding of the conditions that shape the destination choices and migrant trajectories, it is vital to examine the conditions that made Norway a final destination, especially in the absence of substantial migrant-networks that usually lead to chain migration. Also, I was particularly interested in the migrants who took the migrant route from Russia to Norway, which only became popular in summer of 2015, in order to understand how the information about new routes had been transmitted to the migrants, and the way they had shaped their aspirations.

Central Research Questions

As my research evolves around migrant aspirations in the context of irregular migration, the main research question that I aim to answer in this master's thesis is as follows:

- How do internal and external conditions shape the aspirations, and thus the migratory trajectories, of Syrian migrants coming to Norway?

The terms "internal" and "external" were used by Ma Mung (see Odden, 2010): By internal, I imply the individual knowledge and abilities of migrants, and by external, I refer to all the non-individual conditions, such as networks and the context in which trajectories take place. In order to answer to my main research question, I also elaborated several sub-questions that will allow me answer my first question, and they are:

1. To which extent are the aspirations and trajectories different between the Syrians who came to Norway directly from Syria, and the Syrians who arrived after having spent a certain amount of time in a neighboring country before moving on?
2. What role do strong and weak networks, including family networks, play on the migration aspirations of the individuals as well as their migratory trajectories?
3. What are the implications of migrants' aspirations on the abilities and plans in periods of (in)voluntary immobility?
4. To what extent is migration individually aspired and driven within a "culture of migration"?
5. What are the implications of the migrants' abilities and plans on the trajectories?

6. How did the new migrant route from Russia to Norway influence on the final destination choices and trajectories?

II.   Research Method and Design

Grounded Theory Method and Research Approach

The purpose of this research is to provide a holistic explanation of a complex topic that is increasingly moving to the center stage on the policy agenda of several states: The irregular migration of migrants from disadvantaged areas in the Global South to specific locations in Europe. For this aim, I make use of the 'grounded theory' approach as the basis to break down current assumptions and generalizations, in order to create a better understanding that explains irregular migration in relation to the migration aspirations and abilities of migrants who irregularly enter Europe and settle in a specific location. The grounded theory was jointly developed by Glaser and Strauss, and seeks to provide a researcher with the choice to develop a functional theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). To achieve that goal, I made use of my expertise in the field of the Syrian refugee crisis, combined with a creative and open-minded approach while collecting and presenting data from interviews, as well as existing literature that discusses the topic. In the initial phases of the research, I refrained from using a fixed research question, as I was mainly interested in identifying the circumstances in which Norway becomes the final destination. In the course of the analysis, I narrowed down my research question. The purpose behind this research approach was to have the flexibility in examining all the aspects of the trajectories in the course of the research, and to become able to identify and discuss the most pertinent issues related to irregular migration.

The findings of this paper are mostly generated from biographical narrative interviews conducted with a group of Syrian asylum seekers and refugees who are relatively new in Norway. Taking into account the conditions under which the exodus of asylum seekers occurs and the complexity of the journeys, conducting quantitative research was not envisaged for this research. Ultimately, this research aims to explain how a variety of external and informal conditions shape migration aspirations and plans at different levels, rather than establishing causalities between strict

variables. As the research seeks to explain the behavior of a group that was living in the same habitat, are trapped in the same situation and refer to comparable strategies of survival to confront similar barriers, the research makes use of an ethnographic approach. The latter is used as tool to explain the life patterns of Syrians in an ever-changing environment during their life trajectories. Ethnography requires the use of mixed observatory and participatory methods and personal experience to formulate a narrative description (Genzuk, 2010). Consequently, I decided to target interviewees in areas where they feel "at home" and where it is easier to create a trustworthy environment, namely in areas where the refugees spend most of their time and interact with other members of the Syrian community, such as reception centers, Norwegian language schools and their private homes.

Moreover, as the ethnographic approach requires a good understanding of the cultures and the environment that the respondents come from, I made use of my cultural background as well as experience to approach the Syrian community in Norway. Being the descendant of Syrian economic migrants from my mother's side and Armenian refugees from my father's side, I had a clear understanding of what it means to be a Syrian and a migrant at the same time, and that helped me better relate to the interviewees. Also, I made use of the knowledge that I had acquired about the Syrian refugee crisis from my previous job in my home country, Lebanon. Before proceeding with my master's studies, I had the opportunity to work at Oxfam Great Britain in the Syria Refugee Crisis Response Team where I witnessed the initial years of the crisis that later extended to Europe.

The Data Collection Process

This research adheres to the Norwegian national guidelines (NSD) in respect to the ethics of conducting, storing and reporting data given from vulnerable individuals. The fieldwork at the reception centers in Norway was done after receiving the approval of the Norwegian directorate of Immigration (UDI). The data collection areas and respondents have been selected in collaboration with the Centre for Intercultural Communication (SIK) in Stavanger, which contributed to the data collection. As a foreign student, I needed to have a liaison in order to establish contacts with the reception centers and integration schools in order to conduct field research. Before proceeding with the interviews, I made field visits to familiarize myself with the

living conditions among the interviewees, and ensure their ability to take part in the research. Also, I introduced myself as a student researcher as well as the SIK team that provided me with support during the data collection process. I clearly explained the purpose of my project to the targeted populations in order to minimize confusion and undesired implications such as expectations of receiving quicker positive answer on lodged asylum applications.

The qualitative research method was deemed to be suitable to reveal and explain the heterogeneity of the migrants from the same ethnic group in terms of livelihoods, aspirations and strategies used during migration. This approach is also considered appropriate for the interviewees who search for adequate channels where they can express what other parties are not telling. Narrative biographical interview guides were prepared as an approach to give the respondents the opportunity to reflect, interpret and share their stories. Various researchers claim that qualitative interviews should not be strictly directed and the respondents should be given the floor to express themselves without interference (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Also, as the ethnographic approach suggests, I refrained from using fixed research questions with a narrow hypothesis during my data collection process. When the respondents were finding difficulties to clearly share their precarious and complex travel experiences, we were continuously probing them to share their experiences chronologically. Narrative biographies are thought to be suitable to this research that aims to outline and explain migrant aspirations that could be exclusively individual and the dynamics that influence on them might be multiple. Before I proceeded with the data collection in Norway, I tested the method of story telling while interning in Nakivale Refugee Camp in Uganda where I conducted an independent field research about irregular migration of Somali youth to Europe. My research there was eye opening for me as it helped me familiarize myself with the topic of irregular migration and the way refugees decide, plan and access smugglers. As the story telling proved to be successful, I was eager to use it for a similar research topic about the Syrians.

In total, 11 Syrian migrants from different religious backgrounds, ages, marital status and residency status were interviewed over a span of four weeks between November and December 2015. The profile of the group I interviewed clearly reflected on the heterogeneity of the Syrian population that is arriving in Norway. I also made sure to target interviewees who had different dates of arrival in Norway in order to see the differences in the aspirations and the trajectories

between the migrants who came in the initial years of the crisis and those who arrived in summer 2015 during the mass influx of Syrians. I also had the chance to interview three respondents who arrived to Norway through Russia and examine the particular experience of those who took the Russian route. Six interviews were conducted with asylum seekers at a reception center close to Stavanger and five others with refugees who were in Norway for a longer period of time and were taking part in the integration program. The latter were interviewed either at the school or the private homes of the interviewees.

I conducted my interviews in Arabic, the mother tongue of the interviewees, as the language plays a crucial role in autobiography telling and expressing particular emotions and views. However, three interviews were conducted in English by a researcher from SIK. All the interviews were recorded and in the following section, I explain the reason behind using recording technologies. After the interviews, I aimed to stay in contact with my respondents after the interview phase, as some were still unsure about staying in Norway and they were planning to continue their journey. One of my respondents decided to leave the reception center in Norway and settle in Munich in Germany where I had the chance to conduct an additional informal interview with him six months after the first meeting.

Dealing with Limitations and Challenges

In order to have a coherent understanding of the migrant aspirations during the journeys, it would have been ideal to follow the journeys of the migrants during their travels, i.e. following the migrants in their journeys from the moment they had planned their trips to Norway until their arrival in the destination countries by interviewing them at various stages of the journeys. The absence of such data could be one limitation of the research, and I have to acknowledge that the data that I got is largely the personal interpretation of the interviewees of their migration experiences. It is argued that refugees reconstruct the way they perceive and share their experiences depending on their legal status in Norway, future plans and expectations in the hosting country during the conduct of the interviews (Valenta, 2010). As the respondents who were waiting to get their refugee status during the interview phase could have shown skeptical view of their travels to Norway, the interviewees were selected depending on the duration of their stay in Norway, and their residency status. I had suspicions that some answers that I was

going to receive on the open-ended biographical questions could largely be biased. As a result, it was crucial to record the interviews so that I will not unintentionally add my personal interpretation on the already subjective data given by the interviewees while taking notes. However, the usage of recordings did not jeopardize the trustworthy environment that I created with my interviewees, who showed good understanding of the reasons behind using recording technologies.

The data collection generally occurred in a safe, trustworthy and very pleasant environment. I guaranteed that I would modify the names and the highly identifiable personal data of the participants such as the age and the religion for the purpose of protecting personal stories. Given the fact that I am a native Arabic speaker, some participants who lack information about the asylum system in Norway were asking for assistance and details from me. Within my scope, I was trying to provide the much-needed information and guidance to the interviewees, especially that some showed signs of confusion and even psychological distress during the meetings. Even though the purpose of the interviews was clearly communicated to the respondents, some of them wanted to take the interview as an opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with various difficulties that they had been encountering in Norway, namely at the reception centers or the schools, such as feelings of discrimination and isolation. While I partly addressed some of the objections that they put forward regarding Norway's asylum system, I am eager to elaborate more on them in a future investigation as I did not want to deviate from the main topic that I am discussing in this research.

Moreover, as the research seeks to underline the diversity of the flows depending on livelihoods and family structures, different individuals from various backgrounds, age and family composition were targeted. I was particularly interested in interviewing refugee women to reveal the particular dynamics that shape the migration aspirations of refugee women who are either single or widows. However, this research highlights mainly men´s perspectives on the studied topic, since the recruitment of female asylum seekers has proved to be challenging mainly due to both their lower numbers in the reception centers in Norway.

Research Outline

After presenting my research topic, central questions and research methodology, in the subsequent chapter, I present the existing literature regarding migrant aspirations and migratory trajectories by thoroughly explaining the terms that I use.

In the fourth chapter, I treat the Syrian refugee crisis at the macro-level. I explain the origins of the crisis by carefully discussing the living conditions among the Syrian refugees in the first asylum countries. I focus on the case of Lebanon that is a very significant one and from where many Syrians including half of my interviewees moved to Europe. This chapter is important to understand why the economic hardships that are pushing migrants away from the first asylum countries should not be underestimated while compared with the war that obliged half of Syria's population to flee their homes. Also, examining the first mobility experiences of the Syrians in the first asylum countries helps us understand better the conditions that triggered the migration aspirations of many Syrians.

After the fourth chapter, I start to present and analyze the data I received from the interviewees. As migration aspirations and plans are generally subject to change even after the decision to migrate and throughout the trajectories, I divided the analysis into two parts: The first part (chapter two) is about the (im)mobility experiences and the migration aspirations until the decision has been made to flee to Europe. The second part (chapter three) is regarding the aspirations during the journeys to specific locations in Europe and which were shaped by various internal and external conditions. While I mainly stress on the external conditions, I treat the internal dispositions of the migrants as crosscutting theme as they overlapped with external conditions throughout the trajectories.

Thus, in the fifth chapter, I show how mobility became part of the everyday lives of the respondents and the ways they became familiar to the idea of Europe. As this research aims to show how migration aspirations could evolve and change independently from the ability and actual travel plans of migrants, I start the second chapter by paying special attention on the migration aspirations of the respondents before the start of the conflict. Then, I discuss how various conditions such as the war in Syria and living experiences in the first asylum seekers shaped the migration aspirations and abilities of the interviewees to migrate to a specific place in Europe.

In the sixth chapter, I first discuss how the respondents accessed the smugglers and then, I thoroughly describe and analyze selected migratory trajectories. As every individual has distinct traits that could stimulate their aspirations throughout the journey such as age, employment status, financial capability and previous migration experience, I stress on the uniqueness of each condition that differently influenced on the aspirations and trajectories of selected respondents. I pay particular attention on the role of the family throughout the paper in the decision making process for married as well as single men given the central role of the family in the Syrian culture. I also stress on other types of networks and other macro-level external conditions that influenced on the decision making process. My aim is to highlight the circumstances in which individual as well as macro-level dynamics make some migrations more aspirations susceptible to change. For that purpose, I make use of comparisons between the trajectories of the respondents to identify the similarities and differences in the way migration aspirations and other conditions interact with the trajectories.

III.   Existing Literature on Aspirations and Irregular Migration

The Discourse on Mixed-Migrants

The difference between forced migrants and economic migrants has increasingly become blurred given the global interconnectedness and the continuous movement of people. Migrants force persecution in one place and economic isolation in another. Many individuals forcefully get deported under despotic regimes, and seek asylum in a country where they get isolated from the local economic and civil lives. Eventually, the security conditions and political fears that drive migrants away from their homes get accumulated with economic and social problems that they face in the countries where they seek asylum. Eventually, a mixture of security as well as economic reasons trigger the aspirations of a mobile population to continue searching for a better place (Haddad, 2008). "Asylum-migration-nexus" refers to the transition from being a forcefully displaced person in an undesired place to a mixed migrant who selects a destination country basing on sets of aspirations and considerations (Van Hear, 2012). Many Syrian migrants had no experience in migrating prior to the war, and the research discusses thoroughly the impact of the first movements on their aspirations and decisions to flee to specific countries.

In countries characterized by good security and economic conditions, many governments use different exclusionary policies to discourage migrants from coming for asylum purposes (Brekke & Brochmann, 2014), and as the state approaches repeatedly change, the strategies of the refugees alter. Despite the intentions of the European Union's policy makers to introduce a robust common European asylum system, many states tend to act unilaterally to divert the flow of people from their countries and stop the "asylum shopping". The latter is a term used to describe the practice of asylum seekers in selecting their destination country in the Schengen Area (Duhaime). Treated as "undesirables", the governments refuse to be in charge of the asylum seekers (Agier, 2011). Several European policy-makers perceive the refugees as objects that exhaust their welfare system instead of referring to strategies that could allow the newcomers to easily settle, integrate and start contributing to the countries that will provide them protection.

Moreover, many refugee-hosting countries largely perceive the newcomers as weak entities that are manipulated by smugglers who have the complete control over their decisions. Consequently, a highly controversial question arises regarding the role of the individual migration aspirations in

the decision making process during the journeys of the Syrian refugees to specific locations in Europe. In other words, who is taking the decision? In my research, I aim to outline the situations in which individual aspirations overtake the hardships that migrants face while witnessing forced dislocation by focusing on the lives of the Syrians in Syria and the first asylum countries before they become able to access the smugglers and flee to Europe.

While the Syrian migrants have reasonable grounds to seek asylum as they escape from war, the ambitions of some to be established in a specific country and achieve economic prosperity has been largely criticized especially in the case of those who were traveling from the first asylum countries. Haddad (2008) argues that economic migrants could also be viewed as forced as long as it is the outcome of national actions that intentionally discriminate against a certain group of people such as forced migrants and the same actions prevent them from taking part of local economic activities. She explains how the international system that blindly respects state sovereignty makes citizenship as a precondition to access civic rights. As a result, many people stay on the wrong side of state frontiers and deprived from their right, and irregular migration becomes the only option for them to achieve their plans given the alternatives (ibid).

Migrant Aspirations in the Contexts of Forced and Irregular Migration

It is important to mention that our understanding of migrant aspirations are largely based on the experiences of voluntary migrants who wish to migrate from less–developed countries for better opportunities abroad. Less interest is given to the aspirations in the context of forced migration (Czaika & Vothknecht, 2014). Focusing on migrant aspirations while discussing irregular migration helps us understand why this form of migration would stay a prominent policy issue in the coming decades in the absence of substantial actions that local and international need to take to address the issue. According to some studies, almost one quarter of the population of the Globe dreams to move to another country and the share in the developing countries is much higher (Torres & Polhom, 2008). The war in Syria and especially the crimes committed by Daesh[1] attracted the attention of the world that sympathized with the victims of the terrorist organization (Van Heelsum, 2016). However, less attention has been paid on the degrading

---

[1] The Arabic name for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, a terrorist organization

economic conditions among the Syrian refugees in Syria's neighboring countries and which generated masses of onward migration into Europe in the subsequent years (ibid).

Aspirations are seen as truly individual characteristics that shape during the very early ages of a given person, but also become susceptible to change due to the social environment (Collier, 1994). Migration aspirations are believed to be more common among youthful populations, as migration becomes harder for elderly people especially the ones who have family responsibilities (Carling, 2002). While this theory is proved to be right at times when individuals decide to migrate in the country of departure, it is crucial to compare the aspirations and behavior of youthful and elderly people during the journeys. Several researchers outlined the dynamics that independently or jointly shape the individual aspirations of people witnessing wars and poverty to migrate irregularly. These dynamics can be divided into two main parts: Individual traits such as age, marital status, etc. and environmental dynamics such as the migrant networks, everyday contacts and social media that play crucial roles in facilitating the movement of people (Ma Mung in Odden, 2010). However, it is important to note that these dynamics largely alter during at various stages during the journey, and in some cases, they influence on the aspirations even after the forced migrants plan their journey to Europe.

As Ralph Grillo states, aspirations constantly move when people are experiencing mobility, and eventually, the migrant journeys are not always the clear results of pre-defined goals (Grillo, 2007). In his turn, Ma Mung argues that aspirations could even be the result of migration projects and they develop after an individual decides to migrate (Odden, 2010). Schapendonk distinguishes between migration aspirations and migration intentions (Schapendonk, 2012). Migration aspirations involve all the life dreams that an individual would like to fulfill elsewhere, but they do not necessarily manifest in the daily activities of a given person (ibid). Whereas migration intentions concern the feasible migration plans that a person intends to achieve (ibid). Schapendonk argues that for many migrants, Europe is perceived as an abstract region where they can easily circulate after stepping on its soil (ibid). After reaching Europe, the differences within the continent start to get clearer, and in effect, the aspirations to settle somewhere specific start to get explicit during the journeys. The various restrictions and receiving countries put forward lead to complex trajectories that effect on the choices and fates of the refugees (Griffiths, Rogers, & Anderson, 2013). Eventually, moving targets turn into final

destinations and vice versa. He also explain how that the easy passage from country A to country B cannot merely reflect on migration aspirations, as arriving in destination might induce the longing to be somewhere else or return to the departure point (Schapendonk, 2012).

The destination country choices do not always reflect on the individual migration aspirations of the migrants, as the abilities of the migrants largely influence on them during the various phases of migration. According to Carling (2002), aspirations are independent from migration abilities and they can persist even in periods of immobility when individual or family migration dreams cannot be implemented. These periods are known as states of involuntarily immobility in which individuals with strong migration aspirations do not have the ability to migrate (Carling, 2002). Rising aspirations and very limited abilities could both encourage some individuals to find the means in order to increase their mobility abilities (Carling, 2002). In some other cases, abilities to travel trigger the migration aspirations of some people who formerly did not concrete traveling dreams (Schapendonk, 2012). For the latter, the aspirations develop and the country destination choices arise during the journeys (ibid).

According to (Kupiszewski, 2002), aspirations explain less the behavior of a given individual who experiences involuntarily immobility. In the general context of migration, De Haas argues that mobility does not always need aspiration, but rather personal abilities to achieve migration dream (de Haas, 2010). However, it is important to see whether this theory applies on forced migrants whose migration aspirations get relatively more triggered amidst sudden life-changing events. The continuous interactions between people from the same group that have a strong interest in migration and are increasingly becoming mobile generate a "culture of migration" within the group (Massey D. , 1993). In the long term, migration turns into a norm and a lifestyle where masses of people with triggered migration aspirations follow the journeys of the people who first took the road (ibid). In such cases, the differences between migrant aspirations and migration abilities become less important (Warnes Kjeoy, 2010). Thus, it is natural to see people expressing interest to travel regardless of their employment status and migration abilities in the countries of departure (Epstein & Gang, 2006).

The Types of Migrant Networks

Refugees largely rely on social networks that have long been viewed as beneficial for migrants to significantly decrease their travel costs and risks, and efficiently plan their journeys to desired destination (Massey, Ajarcon, Durans, & Gonzalez, 1987). Amidst globalization, and the development of communication technologies that highlight the vast inequalities in terms living conditions across the Globe, the aspirations of people in the Global South to be part of that "good" part of the world get stimulated (Appadurai, 1996). On the other hand, those who do not have access to information and means are confined to the camps in the first asylum countries (Van Heelsum, 2016).

The social networks that migrants use could be classified into two main categories according to Granovetter: The strong ties which consist of the close family members and friends of a given individual, and the weak ties consist of entities outside the close circle (Granovetter in Schapendonk, 2012). While the strong ties are generally believed to play the major role in pushing migrants forward, special focus should be put on the role of weak ties in shaping aspirations especially during the journeys (ibid).

Migrant Networks are indispensable to possess in various stages of migration (Massey et al, 1987). According to Poetze, when individuals know friends or family members who migrated to a specific place, their chances of being exposed to the idea of Europe become higher and they get better chances to join them in the new country (Poetze in Warnes Kjeoy, 2010). In the long term, these networks between sending countries and destinations lead to chain migration. In this paper, I also show how this type of networks could also push potential migrants to refrain from going to the same country as the old migrants and move to other destinations.

In his part, Epstein discusses about two prominent types of migrant networks found either in the destination or departing countries and that differently shape migrants' destination choices (Epstein G. , 2008). Network externality, which is about the contact between future migrants and old migrants in destination countries, implies: "I will go where my people are since they will help me". The higher the number of old migrants from the same group gets, the stronger the network externality becomes. On the other hand, the herd model implies: "I will go there, I have observed others go and they cannot be wrong." In the herd model, the migrants decide to follow the "waves" by undermining their personal aspirations and the importance of collecting

information about the situation in the destination country before departure. They pay more attention on the reasons that encouraged the former migrants to flee to a specific country.

Eventually, they could later find out that Herd was a bad option for them after arriving in the destination country and encountering degrading living conditions among increased numbers of migrants (Stark in Epstein, 2008). Thus, many of them opt to continue their journeys to other countries. I will show in my paper the limitations of Herd in the Syrian refugee crisis context amidst the ever-changing asylum policies of hosting countries on one hand and the reliance of some migrants in the knowledge of previous migrants on the other hand. Epstein also explains how the intention of some developed countries to host a specific number of migrants lead to Herd, and eventually, a much higher number of new-arrivals from the same group which lead to pressure on local actors and widespread xenophobia (Epstein, 2008).

In this research, I will reconsider the utility of selected migrant-networks in facilitating journeys through the flow of information amidst the ever-changing asylum policies in destination countries and show how various interviewees react to Herd and the information they receive from networks. It is important to see in which asylum stag the new migrants are sharing information about the new country with their friends and relatives who rely on their experience and views while considering taking the same journey. At the initial phases of arrival for instance, migrants encounter very high living standards and aim to match their abilities with the ones of the locals according to the Aspirations Adaptations Theory (Selten in Czaika & Vothknecht, 2014). Simultaneously, they also seek to adapt their aspirations to the amount of risks and costs that they encountered during the journeys (Ibid). The situation eventually leads to feelings of regret and eventually bias depiction of the destination country to their contacts.

IV.   The War in Syria and the Refugee Crisis in the Near East

In this chapter, I discuss the origins of the influx of Syrians into Europe at the macro-level, namely the economic and legal hardships that the migrants encountered in the first asylum countries close to Syria. I explain how the influx has various dimensions that the escalating conflicts in Syria could not explain alone. The "Syrian refugee crisis", as called by international organizations, is a persistent migration and humanitarian issue. It has legal and economic elements that force many displaced people in various countries to flee to the global west in the absence of tangible actions by local and international actors that address the root problems of refugee crisis.

The conflict in Syria has generated the "biggest refugee crisis" since the establishment of the UN refugee agency (UNHCR, 2016). As per UNHCR statistics, almost half of Syria's pre-war 20 million population has been displaced and more than 4 million individuals have disproportionately fled towards Syria's neighboring countries: Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan (Ibid). For many Syrians who escaped from the war and applied for asylum in these countries, moving to a third country has never been thought about and planned for, due to their earlier perception of the war as a temporary problem, and also due to the fact that the majority of them did not have relatives or other types of networks within foreign countries. In effect, these Syrian refugees opted to settle in Syria's neighboring countries during the first years of the crisis in order to stay close to their homeland, hoping to move back after a ceasefire is reached. Eventually, during the first period of the war and the exodus, migration to a third country that provides better protection for refugees had not been a priority for many Syrian refugees.

In the first asylum countries, the refugee crisis lead to increasingly strained local resources, high levels of unemployment and rising tensions between the refugees and their host communities. In the long term, the local actors have started to respond by imposing tougher measures on the Syrian refugees, such as labor restrictions and border closure. The latter made the aid given by various non-governmental organizations and informal jobs where they are exploited, the sole source of income for many refugees. As a result, with the escalation of the crisis in Syria, the need to move to third countries where living conditions are safer has become prominent among the Syrian refugees. Amidst the escalating tensions in Syria and the protracted situation in the first asylum countries, the refugees became increasingly hostile to the dependence on

humanitarian aid. Discussions started regarding possible resettlement opportunities in third countries where better opportunities for refugees could be provided. Nevertheless, most of the four million Syrian refugees could not be resettled in third countries in the foreseeable future, as most of the states eligible to receive refugees have refused to increase their refugee quotas for Syrians. Furthermore, the vast majority of the current refugees do not satisfy restricted vulnerability criteria set by countries that would entitle a given refugee to be resettled though the organization only if they show extreme forms of vulnerability such as being victims of gender violence and serious health issues.

As time unfolded, the prospects of achieving a ceasefire in Syria proved to be dwindling, and so refugees from Syria started to use an alternative and more costly and precarious route of reaching safer places, namely in selected European countries. Irregular migration to Europe has rapidly become a common solution to escape from the security conditions in Syria and the economic oppression in the first asylum countries.

Amidst this immense humanitarian crisis that the European countries, and especially Syria's neighboring countries have been facing due to the influx of Syrians, the international community has been campaigning to expand the financial contributions to humanitarian activities in Syria's neighboring countries. The ultimate aim has been to keep the crisis regional, outside the fortress of Europe. However, in the subsequent section, I will highlight and explain the real factors that are penalizing the work of humanitarian organization to address the needs of the refugees who are fleeing from the living conditions in these countries in search for better and more secure places, notably in northern Europe which is viewed as close and a favorable option.

1.1. Situation in First Asylum Countries

Registered Syrian Refugees in Syria's Neighboring Countries as of February 2016 (UNHCR Figures)	
Turkey	2,620,000
Lebanon	1,067,000
Jordan	637,000

In order to understand the migratory trajectories of Syrians arriving in Europe, it is first necessary to perceive the "Syrian refugee crisis" as a regional issue that started in Syria with the use of heavy weapons and spread in the neighboring countries by turning into a humanitarian and geopolitical issue. The vast majority of the Syrians have first fled to Syria's neighboring states since the uprisings started in 2011 without foreseeing the legal, social and economic challenges that they were going to encounter in these countries as forced migrants.

Even though the near eastern region has long been witnessing crisis due to human displacement, the Lebanese, Turkish and Jordanian states still lack vigorous refugee response schemes that can protect the basic human rights of refugee populations, mainly due to internal problems and a long history of anti-refugee sentiments among their local population[2]. Even though Turkey has been the only signatory state of the Geneva Convention among Syria's neighbors, until recently, it was refusing to sign on its protocol that asks from the government to confer rights to non-European refugees. Eventually, the Syrian refugees get a temporary protection status that hinders their settlement (Ozden, 2013). In Lebanon, the government does not recognize the Syrians as refugees and uses the term "displaced" while referring them, these "displaced people" are treated as the rest of the foreigners who reside in Lebanon and who are obliged to pay a fee and renew their residency permit constantly (NRC, 2014). As Lebanon is not a signatory to the Geneva Convention but it is largely bound to it, the government does not perceive the Syrians as 'refugees' but rather as 'nazihin', which means people that have moved. This narrative or discourse is in itself a demonstration of the politics of framing the refugees (the 'other') not as people in need of assistance and who enjoy special rights as per international conventions and legal frameworks, but rather just as temporary visitors.

The main hosting countries have repeatedly refused to fulfill their legal responsibilities vis-à-vis the refugees due to them fearing the negative outcomes of the permanent settlement of refugees on the demographic situation as well as on the local resources in these countries. As a reaction to the influx, these states reacted by imposing tougher measures on the Syrians by discouraging them to stay in their countries. Adding to the suffering of the Syrian refugees, the Lebanese government put forward a new legislation in 2015 which forces the refugees coming from Syria

---

[2] Many segments of the Lebanese society blame the Palestinian refugees for the civil war that erupted in 1975 as militia members who had stronghold in Palestinian refugee camps took part of the conflicts and lead to mass killings in the camps by local actors

to sign on a decree pledging that they will refrain from taking up employment, and provide an official proof of having a Lebanese "sponsor" who is responsible for them during their legal stay in Lebanon (Shaheen, 2015). In order to get the latter, many refugees became obliged to bribe local citizens. These legal restrictions isolated the refugee population from the local social and economic lives, and made them dependent on imperfect humanitarian programs. The financial contributions of the international community could no longer help the local actors to secure the humanitarian needs of the refugees as the resources in the main hosting countries have increasingly become strained.

1.2. The Case of Lebanon

By focusing on the delicate case of Lebanon which deals with a relatively huge refugee population that allows the research to draw lessons from, the section focuses on the situation of the Syrians and the challenges that the state, the international aid providers, as well as the refugees and the host communities have been facing in the absence of a legal refugee framework. It gives a clear understanding of the root causes that are pulling hundreds of thousands of refugees to the Mediterranean boats not only from Lebanon, but also from Turkey and Jordan as each of these countries refuses to fully abide by the Geneva Convention and fulfill their duties vis-à-vis the Syrian refugees. The latter has caused counter productive outcomes that will be discussed thoroughly. While the cases of Jordan and Turkey are not discussed in this paper, the refugees had similar problems in all these three countries at various degrees due to absence of robust refugee hosting legislations and relatively higher rates of poverty and unemployment. This section will first provide an overview of the Lebanese government's exclusionary policies towards refugees and their outcome, and then explain how the hesitation of the Lebanese state to abide by international norms and play a more active role in protecting its refugee populations and addressing their needs causes the failure of humanitarian interventions.

Differential exclusion is the policy used vis-à-vis the Syrian refugees by the Lebanese government, as manifested by a general political discourse that considers refugees as temporary "visitors" who should be hosted inside the boundaries of the country until they get repatriated in their home countries once the conflict ends in Syria. Consequently, there is a reluctance to implement radical changes within the government and the society to accommodate the forced

migrants. The implicit aim is to not confer political rights to the majority Sunni Muslim refugee groups who would alter the balanced sectarian structure of the Lebanese society. However, this realist approach has had its repercussions on the Lebanese society, most notably on the civil war which erupted in 1975 and which will not be tackled as it is outside the scope of this particular study.

A critique to the approach of the Lebanese government in not conferring the refugees their basic rights can be Jacobson's Post National Citizenship Theory that argues that the political citizenship is not necessarily a requirement to protect and integrate foreign citizens who reside in a given state in the long run. It considers that human rights that are codified and promoted by international treaties should be universal and respected in every single state regardless of the variety of rights that citizens enjoy in different countries (Schmitter Heisler, 2000). In other words, conferring the citizenship to displaced people in Lebanon should not be viewed as a precondition for the non-citizens to be treated in equal manner as the Lebanese citizens and be part of the mainstream society.

Moreover, to curb the social tensions in Lebanon generated by the exclusionary policies towards refugees, it is necessary to examine and find the ways that aim to include refugees in the migration-development nexus discussion, as forced migrants have repeatedly been excluded from the international discourse on migration and development. The latter tends to consider vulnerable groups such as refugees as exceptional cases of migrants that should exclusively be dealt with through humanitarian means (Koppenberg, 2012). This previous argument needs to be deconstructed, as it will be shown in the following paragraphs, aiming to universalize the rights of all types of migrants. The differentiation between a voluntarily and a forced migrant has proven to be vague in the past few decades and given the irrefutable evidence that their exclusion often leads to counter-productive outcomes.

Nederveen Pieterse (2000) criticizes the dependency on humanitarian and development aid arguing that development is mainly an upside down phenomenon where both the society and the migrants are seen as tools to achieve a long-term goal. The stress is on the role of the government and the NGOs to target the forced migrants with long-term development projects by trusting in their ability to contribute to development instead of enchaining them in traditional refugee settings (ibid). While the international aid agencies are willing to match pre-existing

humanitarian actions to development projects geared at stalling the ever-increasing social segmentation, the differential exclusion approach of the Lebanese government and the legal restrictions that are imposed on the refugee populations are penalizing the NGOs which are trying to address the real needs of the refugees and achieve a long-term aim (NRC Lebanon, 2014)

1.2.1 Background on the "Refugee Crisis" in Lebanon

When the Syrian crisis has started, Lebanon kept its open-border policy towards the Syrians and became the primary hosting country for the refugee populations during the first years of the crisis. However, by remembering its experience with the Palestinian refugees who until now live in a protracted situation in marginalized refugee camps throughout Lebanon, the Lebanese government opted not to provide lands to construct camps for the Syrian refugees by claiming that it does not want to have additional "Sunni blocks" in the country and that the Syrians would likely be temporary (Christophersen, Thorleifsson, & Tiltnes, 2013). Eventually, the Syrian refugees had the freedom to settle themselves in poor neighborhoods where rent was relatively affordable. Also, there was an abundance of low paid manual jobs in these areas that Syrians had access to, regardless of the job restrictions that had been imposed on them. In their parts, some segments of the host communities showed solidarity and sympathy towards the Syrian refugees by remembering the hospitality displayed by Syrians following the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006, during which hundreds of Lebanese families escaped to Syria for a period of around one month. Moreover, the Lebanese government gave the authority to UNHCR and its partner NGOs to distribute humanitarian aid to those who were fleeing the war in Syria. Nevertheless, as the number of Syrian refugees increased drastically in the following years, an anti-refugee sentiment became widespread among the Lebanese people who were increasingly feeling overwhelmed. With the arrival of more than one million refugees, the international aid community also started to find difficulties in handling the refugee crisis by advocating for more financial support due to the restrictions imposed by the government.

The task of providing humanitarian assistance to the refugee populations was largely left to the international organizations and non-governmental organizations. The Lebanese government and the host communities, which supposedly had better knowledge about the real needs of the affected populations, had little authority to guide and direct the provision of the assistance (SFCG, 2014). In their part, the international community had little interest to cooperate with the Lebanese stakeholders as they were refusing to implement legal and administrative changes to handle the refugee crisis. Eventually, the international aid community used its traditional ways of providing humanitarian assistance and unevenly targeting refugees, leading to counter-productive outcomes and exacerbating the social tensions in the neighborhoods characterized by wide-spread poverty and a sense of social isolation among the Lebanese citizens that resided there even before the arrival of Syrian refugees (SFCG, 2014).

1.2.2 Refugee-Host Community Tensions and the Role of the Humanitarian Aid

The Lebanese policy makers repeatedly discussed the idea of opening refugee camps that host the Syrian newcomers, but they never reached a consensus. The latter allowed Syrians to flee to Lebanon and settle in urban areas had its repercussions on both the government and the humanitarian approach of the aid agencies. When UNRWA used to provide humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian refugees, the latter were mostly concentrated inside refugee camps where there were specific schools and hospitals. The latter were not noticed or seen by financially disadvantaged Lebanese who were also in need of assistance, but were not necessarily aware of the humanitarian activities that were targeting the Palestinians. However, as the Syrian refugees live in urban areas heavily populated by Lebanese citizens, the humanitarian assistance that is being provided to Syrian refugees is generating social tensions and feelings of mistrust as poor Lebanese families are constantly witnessing the provision of different types of assistance to the Syrians.

Given the fact that UNHCR is covering the specialized health costs of the Syrian refugees, the Lebanese citizens who cannot access such services for free are seeing that the Syrians are being given preferential treatment by Lebanese health institutions (SFCG, 2014). Also, there is a general opinion among the Lebanese citizens that the Syrian refugees are allegedly lying to get

more assistance from the aid agencies which are unfairly targeting the Syrian refugees and excluding the poor host communities (Christophersen et al., 2013). Effectively, wealthy Lebanese people who used to provide assistance to the refugees when the crisis began are increasingly becoming reluctant in helping the refugee populations and are instead preferring to assist vulnerable Lebanese populations under the pretext that that the NGO aid is generous enough for the Syrians (ibid).

In addition, due to its liberal capitalist economic system, the Lebanese government does not have strong authority to intervene in the private sector and impose its labor laws including the job restrictions on the refugees. Eventually, several Syrians found their way to get informal and low paid jobs that used to be occupied by poor and unskilled Lebanese before the crisis. As the refugee populations have the ability to combine low paid jobs with NGO assistance, they are more willing to accept lower income jobs than the Lebanese; and eventually, several employers express their preference to employ Syrians who would accept working with lower salaries, without job contracts and under harsh working conditions (Christophersen, 2014). Eventually, the arrival of Syrian forced migrants into Lebanon pushed the salaries of the locals down by 60% according to field surveys (ILO, 2013). Consequently, the Lebanese are not only competing for limited opportunities to generate income, but they are also being obliged to accept harsh working conditions that counter all their efforts to get a decent living. After the refugee crisis entered its third year, securing a stable job has become more challenging among the Lebanese and also the Syrians who have constantly reported in field surveys that the NGO aid is not as generous as it is believed to be among the Lebanese. While the fear of spreading the sectarian civil war into Lebanon is used as a discourse by the elites to justify the anti-refugee sentiments among the Lebanese people, field data showed that unemployment among both the Lebanese and the Syrians is the major reason that is causing the tensions (SFCG, 2014).

The Lebanese government's exclusionary policies that aimed to isolate the refugee populations and keep them away from the fragile Lebanese market have had worst repercussions on the Lebanese citizens who are striving to secure a modest job in the informal private market where the government cannot impose minimum employment rules and wages. As a result, the presence of the Syrians and the international aid community is increasingly being blamed by the local population for generating social segregation and inflation on the prices of goods and house rents

due to the generous financial assistance that are being distributed to refugees. Polling data in 2013 showed that 3 out of 5 Lebanese are not willing to have Syrian neighbors under the pretext that they are perceived to be competing with them for scarce resources and limited job opportunities (Christophersen, Thorleifsson, & Tiltnes, 2013). Nevertheless, the Syrian refugee crisis has become an integral part of the lives of most of the Lebanese and there has been an increasing need make concessions and strategic changes in the way both groups perceive each other by learning from past and current mistakes of dealing with refugee issues.

On their part, aid agencies and UNHCR have realized the need to combine existing humanitarian programs with development projects by including the host communities in livelihood projects to alleviate the social tensions (GoL & UN, 2014). The Syrian refugee crisis shows to the international community that traditional approaches of humanitarian aid that treat refugees as vulnerable groups and address their immediate needs by making them dependent to financial aids negatively affects the forced migrants and the people surrounding them (Crisp, 2014).

1.2.3 Challenges to Match Humanitarian Projects with Development Programs

According to the International Labor Organization, "[j]ob creation should be the core of humanitarian and development responses as jobs not only provide income, but also dignity" (Page 43, ILO, 2013). For the Syrians who are residing in Lebanon, accessing the job market is more problematic than securing food for their families (Christophersen, Thorleifsson, & Tiltnes, 2013). Instead of portraying the refugees as passive recipients of humanitarian aid, Lebanon should consider the fact that it has absorbed 50% more labor force since the Syrian forced migrants started to arrive in the country (GoL and UN, 2014). In 2014, both the Lebanese government and UNHCR realized the need to cooperate in order to implement livelihood projects and at the end of 2014, they expressed their willingness to cooperate and invest in development projects, which would target 3 million vulnerable, Lebanese, Palestinians and Syrians, by mainly investing on the Lebanese infrastructure (Ibid). Nevertheless, unless the Lebanese government recognizes the basic rights of the refugees, the development aspirations of the government and UNHCR would fail to have an impact on the living conditions of the forced migrants and the Lebanese host communities.

Treated as any other foreigner, Syrian families who cannot afford paying the high costs of the residency permits[3] are illegally staying in Lebanon. In such circumstances, field research showed that migrant families are more likely to send their children to work instead of the adults by fears of the adults being caught by the police without legal documents (Christophersen, 2013). Moreover, exploitation by Lebanese employers is rarely being reported by the Syrians who are lacking the mechanisms to reach their concerns and daily problems to the Lebanese authorities out of fear of getting caught (SFCG, 2014). Field surveys also showed that the way the Lebanese are treating the refugee populations is making the Syrians more passive towards injustice as the continuous mistreatment has convinced them that they are not welcomed in Lebanon (SFCG, 2014).

Consequently, many Syrians would show little interest in joining the formal Lebanese job market unless they would also be assured that they would be treated as the other citizens and that their labor rights would become fully recognized under universal human rights that treat the Lebanese and the non-Lebanese equally. The Alternative Development Approach suggests that bottom-up development struggles become more successful than traditional forms that unconditionally become imposed on displaced migrants and unevenly benefits the targeted populations (Nederveen Pieterse, 2000). Even though foreign workers in Lebanon are asked to pay taxes to the government, only Lebanese citizens are allowed to access employment benefits and allocations. Likewise, the forced migrants who are successfully securing an informal job in their neighborhood are showing little interest in renewing their residency permits and express the need for better job conditions (ILO, 2013).

By making human rights universal to all its populations inside the country, the Lebanese government needs to fight against the stereotypes about the refugees that it has always promoted in its public discourse to validate its attitude and suppress the huge informal market that is triggering the social segregation and alienation of the most vulnerable refugees as well as Lebanese. Through these drastic changes, the government could successfully impose its power within the aid agencies in order to advocate for the needs of the Lebanese hosting communities to be proportionally represented in combined humanitarian and development programs.

---

[3] 200 USD per year for every foreigner aged 15 and older (NRC)

1.3. Conclusion

The socio-economic hardships of the Syrian refugees that are obliging Syrian migrants to search for asylum in countries far away from Syria as well as the first asylum countries are largely driven by legal restrictions. Their case clearly validates Haddad's argument that mobility due to economic reasons could also be considered forced if it is pushed by exclusionary policies against a segment of a population (Haddad, 2008). The example of Lebanon clearly shows the real legal and social challenges that are pushing the refugees away from the Near Eastern region and which the international community has been trying to alter by promising more financial support to Syria's neighboring countries and undermining the root causes of the influx. The exclusion of the forced migrants from the Lebanese society and the refusal of the government to abide by international humanitarian conventions and fulfill its responsibilities towards the refugee populations proved to be a huge mistake that marginalized not only the refugees but also the Lebanese citizens who are competing with the refugees for scarce resources. The Syrian refugee crisis demonstrates the need to make drastic legislative changes at state level to alleviate the problems that have long been the reasons behind social inequalities, segregation and continuous displacement of people in the whole region.

Since the Syrian crisis started, the global west, which sponsors an important part of the humanitarian and development projects that target the people who were affected from the war in Syria, has increasingly been concerned by the worsening situation of refugees in the Near East. The general fear was that a growing conflict and deterioration of living conditions among Syrians and host communities in urban areas would generate onward or secondary migration from the first asylum countries towards Europe. The latter had been considered a major threat that the European Union states aimed to minimize. Nevertheless, as refugee populations have long been perceived as a highly vulnerable group that can easily be manipulated by powerful state actors, the latter are convinced that their problems could be solved through financial means. In fact, the absence of adequate migration regimes and ethical refugee protection rules are playing more crucial role in aggravating the lives of the refugees in the first countries of asylum. The foreign countries and notably, the international aid providers, should be aware that

humanitarian and development initiatives which go hand-in-hand are unlikely to achieve their objectives in these countries unless the local actors demonstrate their commitment by providing strong legal frameworks for forced migrants. The lack of understanding of real needs between the donor states and the Syrian beneficiaries is making the activities of the donors counterproductive and pushing more refugees away from these countries. In the subsequent sections, I will show how the abovementioned conditions influenced on the aspirations and migration projects of some Syrians who were settled in the first asylum countries, and largely stimulated their interest to flee to specific places in Europe.

"I was tired of Lebanon, tired of the people and my environment, tired of racism and being viewed as a refugee. At least, if I go to a European country and people still discriminate against me there, I will not understand their language." -Amer

V. From Immobility to a Culture of Migration

In this chapter, I discuss the migration aspirations and migration projects among the respondents before they decide to take the irregular route to Europe by focusing on their living conditions and experiences in Syria or the first asylum countries. I explain how both the migration aspirations and migration intentions of the respondents evolved chronologically and interacted with each other depending on various situations. In terms of the migration projects of the respondents, I have divided the data into two main parts: the intentions to flee to Europe and the intentions to flee to a specific country in Europe. The latter is due to the fact that not all the interviewees had concrete intentions to settle in a specific country when they embraced the idea of fleeing to Europe due to various conditions that I will thoroughly discuss.

2.1. Profile of the Respondents[4]

Name	City of Residence in Syria	Citizenship and Affiliation	Marital Status and kids	Date of Exodus from home city	Asylum in Neighbor Countries	Country of Choice Before Departure	Date of Departure to Europe
Amer	Homs	Syrian – Arab Sunni	Married 3 kids	August 2014	Lebanon	Resettled	August 2014
Amin	Homs	Syrian – Arab Christian	Single	January 2015	Lebanon	Germany	August 2015
Ayman	Aleppo	Syrian – Arab	Married 5 kids	February 2013	Egypt	Netherlands	September 2015
Fouad	Aleppo	Syrian - Kurdish	Married 2 kids	October 2013	No	Norway	December 2013
Hadi	Damascus	Palestinian from Syria	Married 1 kid	October 2013	No	Sweden	October 2013
Ibrahim	Aleppo	Syrian – Arab Sunni	Single	June 2012	Turkey	Norway	December 2014
Imad	South Syria	Syrian - Druze	Single	September 2014	Russia (student)	Norway	September 2015
Karim	Aleppo	Syrian - Kurdish	Married 3 kids	January 2013	Turkey	No	October 2013
Mourad	Homs	Syrian – Arab	Single	August 2015	No	Germany /Norway	August 2015
Omar	Aleppo	Syrian – Arab Sunni	Single	September 2011	Lebanon	No	June 2015
Salim	Salamiyye	Syrian – Ismaelit	Single	December 2012	Lebanon	Norway	November 2014

---

[4] Some data are modified to make the respondents more unidentifiable

2.2. The Immobile Period

2.2.1 Migration Aspirations Before the War

According to the respondents, migration has become an integral part of their lives only after the start of the war. However, while discussing about their interests in migrating to a different country before the Syrian uprisings, many interviewees expressed old desires of starting a new life in another country. For many, these desires date back to the period prior to the war when the respondents used to compare their personal dreams with their former abilities and chances to move to a different country where the living conditions are better. For Hadi, a Palestinian refugee from Damascus, moving out of Syria was "bigger than a dream", but the mere absence of Syrian diaspora communities and connections was a huge constraint for him to consider moving out of Syria. He recalls the number of Syrians residing abroad that was relatively less than the number of other groups such as the Lebanese and Turkish that possess much larger diaspora communities across the globe. As the rest of Palestinian refugees in Syria, Hadi was entitled to many rights similar to the rest of the population, but deprived from citizenship which he viewed crucial for the feeling of belonging for him and his family.

It is noteworthy that some respondents were hesitant in expressing their desires about moving out of Syria before the war. The latter is largely due to the fact that the respondents reminisce the pre-war era as rather a stable and beautiful phase in their life when they were still in charge of the life decisions they used to take, as the present and the future still seem uncertain for many of them. When asked about his interests of migrating out of Syria, Salim who is a Syrian refugee from Aleppo first appeared confident stating that he has never thought of changing Syria with another country. After being asked again, Salim acknowledged that he had thoughts of migrating with a sense of relief mentioning the long mistreatment of the government to its citizens as his main cause. Ayman, a Syrian refugee man in his 60s, showed nostalgia while describing his life in Syria before the start of the war and a great compassion while describing his attachment to his native country. Nevertheless, while discussing his job and mentioning the difficulties that he has been encountering with the local authorities to protect his small grocery shop, Ayman acknowledged that his experience in Syria was not as beautiful as he tends to portray.

"Sometimes I prayed to not die in Syria especially since 2007 when the security situation started to get worse and the government started to work only for the upper class, but for me Syria was the most beautiful place regardless of the bad treatment we used to receive". – Ayman, Syrian from Aleppo

The self-imposed voluntary tendency to stay in Syria and be accustomed to the living conditions imposed on the general population prior to the war is largely related to the fact that the interviewees reported having poor knowledge about the rights that they could have been entitled to as migrants in general and as members of a minority group especially in countries that possess adequate migration regimes. Similar to Hadi, Karim also comes from a disadvantaged minority background as he reports. A Syrian Kurdish middle-aged married man; Karim recalls his experience as a Kurd within the Syrian society where the teaching and preservation of the Kurdish language and culture were not encouraged by the state. For decades before the war, the tensions between the minority and the Syrian government have frequently led to mass protests and tensions that Karim and his wife remember. These events left a dark memory in the minds of Karim and several others, who frequently felt alienated in the country they were born and raised in.

"We Kurds were oppressed since we were born. We were used to it. So no, Syria seemed nice, [it had a] nice nature and we never though of migrating"- Karim, Syrian Kurd from Aleppo

It is noteworthy that some interviewees have had relatives who have been residing in European countries with adequate policies for minorities and migrants even before the start of the war. However, there was little interest amongst them in comparing the living conditions between Syria and these countries, as migration was not considered a realistic option. Fouad, another Syrian Kurdish refugee from Aleppo remembers his telephone contacts with his cousin who fled to Norway as an asylum seeker a decade before him. Although Fouad had been passing through a hard economic phase seeking to secure the needs of his family, he recalls that he has never been eager to inquire about the living conditions in Norway and the process of applying for asylum. He reports that he did have interests in moving to Europe before he gets married and gets family responsibilities, as he had been overwhelmed by his familial responsibilities and the house loan that he had to pay. Regardless of having a close relative in Norway, Fouad realized that the

people in Norway do not live in Eskimos only after the war started and he became eager to know about it.

"My salary was not enough for me and in 1997, I was hearing about other Syrian Kurds who were fleeing to Greece for a better life. I was considering it until I got married and applied for a house loan." "My cousin fled to Norway in 2000 and applied for asylum there. We had been in contact with each other, but I never asked him about Norway. I thought it is a very cold country where the people live like…" - Fouad, a Syrian refugee from Aleppo

In the previous paragraphs, I highlighted some of the troubles that the respondents have been facing. Many of them, namely those from minority backgrounds and the lower middle class, reported living in problematic conditions even before the start of the uprisings, and the sole realistic option for them was to adjust to the living conditions imposed on them. Many of these problems have increasingly become explicit after the start of the conflict. This section validates the arguments of many scholars regarding migration aspirations for economic reasons. While migration aspirations could be present in the minds of some individuals dissatisfied with the socio-political situation in their country, the mere absence of strong diaspora communities and networks abroad oblige them to adjust their aspiration to their realities (Carling, 2002). The period that many respondents were living in Syria prior to the war could also be referred to as "involuntarily immobility" in which individual migration aspirations are omnipresent but mostly hard to achieve. While migration aspirations had been omnipresent for a long time in the minds of some refugees, they only turned into intentions after experiencing mobility and changes in living conditions.

While accommodating to the abovementioned struggles seemed the sole option for Karim, Hadi and Fouad rather than searching for better lives outside Syria, I will show in the subsequent sections how the pre-war experience of many of the interviewees prominently influenced on the decisions of some interviewees to flee to Europe and settle in a specific country for pre-defined reasons.

2.2.2 War in Syria and Resistance to the Idea of Migrating

The "Arab Spring", which started in Tunisia and spread to several other Arab countries in the following months and years, reached Syria in March 2011. The Syrian population started demonstrations asking for democracy and better governance. As the demonstrations became increasingly popular across Syria and various anti-governmental actors got militarized, the peaceful revolutions turned violent in several Syrian cities such as Homs and Aleppo. The social, economic and personal lives of many Syrians were paralyzed. In the initial period of the war, many Syrians reacted to the mass destruction and economic turndown by opting to stay in their regions and protect their belongings and properties, as mass lootings have been taking place across the country. It is also noteworthy that many of them were comparing the situation in Syria with those in Libya, Egypt and Tunisia thinking that a ceasefire would be reached in a short period of time. That comparison led to many Syrians such as Hadi to resist the dangers of the war during its initial period, and instead, aim to protect their belongings.

"People first stayed in order to protect their belongings and they were hoping that Syria will be like Libya, Tunisia, etc." – Hadi, Syrian refugee from Damascus

For that purpose, many of the interviewees such as Hadi have first moved within Syria and specifically to safer regions that are near their cities in order to be close to their properties and sources of income. As the situation in Aleppo got worse, Fouad transferred his family to his relatives' village as the bombs were severely traumatizing his kids. However, he opted to stay in Aleppo to not lose his public post, the only source of income for his family. Also as Fouad narrates, those abstaining from their jobs were being considered as traitors.

Even after the escalations of the conflicts in Syria, which have brought mass destruction to public and private properties, many of the respondents reported that they continued their long struggle in adapting to the living conditions imposed on them. Also, as Syria's neighboring countries were the only prominent hosting states for Syrian refugees during the first years of the crisis, migration was still not perceived as a worthy investment due to the poor treatment of the refugees in those countries. The rapidly growing networks between Syrians who were establishing in the first asylum countries and those who were still in Syria was transferring the image of degrading living conditions Syrians were encountering after fleeing from war. Before

migrating, a person usually engages in cost-benefit analysis in order to decide which option leads to optimal results. On one hand, protecting the personal belongings and properties in Syria was crucial and on the other hand, the situation in Syria's neighboring countries was unattractive for many Syrians. As the "idea of Europe" was still not widely spread in the first years of the conflict, staying in Syria was being viewed as the most convenient option for many Syrians.

Given the abovementioned factors that the respondents had been bearing in mind, many of them were not eager to flee to a distant country that provides them the adequate protection and dignity. Consequently, some Syrians such as Amin, were struggling with the very idea of migrating from Syria as news about the mistreatment of several Syrian refugees in Lebanon and other major Syrian refugee hosting countries was spreading among the Syrian population.

"I did not want to leave Syria. I never thought of migrating before the war as no other country could have given me the same protection [as in Syria]. We saw how they treated us in Lebanon [after the war] which was a neighboring country."- Amin, Syrian refugee from Homs

In the following period, however, the personal trauma, inflation and inability to secure resources played decisive roles in obliging many of the respondents to escape from Syria unwillingly and move to countries that they did not wish and plan to settle in. While Karim and his family were constantly seeking to be cautious since the war broke out in Aleppo in summer 2012, the bombing of their residential neighborhood that traumatized his three kids encouraged them to instantly flee to Turkey along with many other residents from Aleppo, as Turkey was the nearest country.

In addition, the mandatory military conscription and the refusal of the men to commit crimes against their compatriots were the prominent reasons that obliged many of the interviewees to instantly flee Syria and settle in the nearest country that allegedly provides protection. Amin, who was studying Social Studies at the university when the uprisings began, reports that he comes from an upper middle-income family. Consequently, the war was not severely affecting on his family and their ability to secure their livelihood during the first period of the war. Nevertheless, when Amin reached the age of 21 and he could no longer postpone his military conscription during the deadliest attacks in Syria, Amin had the sole option to flee from Syria and settle involuntarily in Lebanon, the closest country to Homs.

"I did not want to leave Syria (he repeats). Imagine that I left only 4 days before my extension expires and I become obliged to serve in the military." Amin

2.3. Becoming Mobile

As explained in the previous section, the respondents did not wish to flee to the main refugee hosting countries close to Syria. The main plan was to temporarily escape from the war rather than permanently settling in those countries. As the interviewees were assuming that they would shortly return to their homeland, they did not foresee their life in the prominent hosting countries with unfavorable conditions for foreign populations. In fact, the respondents who fled from Syria did not have previous experience in migrating and living in a strange land. Without strong migration aspirations, they were just "following the waves" of the Syrians who were escaping from conflicts and mandatory military conscription in Syria to the nearest safe countries. I will explain in the subsequent sections how experiencing mobility and tough living conditions as refugees in the first asylum countries triggered the migration aspirations of some interviewees and helped those to better decide, plan and organize their onward migration to a third country.

(In)voluntary Migration to Syria's Neighboring Countries

"It was my first time traveling outside Syria and also alone. I was even afraid of the driver that made us (her and her children) cross the border though nothing happened." – Wafaa, a Syrian refugee from Homs (Amer's wife)

Perceived as a temporary and emergency solution, the choice of the country was principally based on the geographic proximity of the given state to the cities of residence of the respondents, the travel restrictions, in addition to the familial or various forms of networks with these countries. Lebanon has historically been a favorable country of destination for Syrian guest workers taking into account the historical ties, the old visa-free regime as well as the cultural and linguistic similarities between the two countries. However, increasingly people from the north started to flee to Turkey.

"People from Aleppo were generally going to Turkey and people were going to Lebanon in case they had relatives there. " Ibrahim, Syrian refugee who escaped from Aleppo to Turkey

Even though most of the respondents first fled to Lebanon or Turkey by foreseeing a fast return to their homeland, Ayman narrated why he opted to go to Egypt in February 2013. While compared with the rest of the interviewees, he proved having more skeptical views about the future of Syria and the entire region the moment he fled his country. Even though Ayman had relatives in Lebanon and only a few contacts in Egypt prior to his departure, he was convinced that the Arab spring would spillover into Lebanon and the region. For him, Egypt was newly emerging from the revolution, and it was considered the right country for a migrant family to start a new life as stated by Ayman.

Amer is a Syrian refugee who moved from Homs to Lebanon in order to join his wife, Wafaa, and their kids, as the latter fled before him. He first refrained from registering at the UNHCR as he was using his savings and carrying up employment for which he was being hugely underpaid. Although Amer was a professional carpenter, he was earning significantly less than the average salary for his profession. In the following months, when the costs of living skyrocketed and he could no longer secure the adequate healthcare for his kids who were constantly getting ill, Amer registered at UNHCR hoping to receive help. Nevertheless, the organizations could not provide him the assistance that he needed.

"We were still thinking that we will go back to Syria but the situation (in Syria) got worse… I even thought of moving from a rented apartment to an informal tented settlement to get assistance from the organizations (Refugees living in tents were allegedly viewed as more vulnerable by the organizations)" – Amer

In the subsequent sections, I will show how the living conditions in the first asylum countries, coupled with widespread news about the entitlements of the refugee populations in several European states through migrant-networks triggered the aspirations of the interviewees and their interests to investigate more about the rights that refugees enjoy in other regions.

2.4. The Context that Stimulated the European Aspirations

The existing international system enhances the importance of borders and eventually, limits the human rights to the boundaries of a given state. In their turn, the intergovernmental agencies and treaties fail to alter the previous. As a result, many citizens of oppressed regimes tend to have skeptical views vis-a-vis the universality of human rights and opt to adjust their aspirations to the rights that they enjoy within the borders of their countries. However, after acquiring the title of a "refugee", many Syrians became part of the bigger refugee population of the world that extends from Finland to South Africa.

"[Before moving to Turkey] I did not know about migration and asylum [rules] before the war, and I did not know a country hosts someone due to war and provides him protection." – Ibrahim, a Syrian refugee from Aleppo

With the years, the prospects of achieving a ceasefire in Syria have decreased significantly and the number of people fleeing from war has skyrocketed. Despite calls from UNHCR and other international human rights actors, wealthy governments stayed keen in expressing their opposition to the idea of hosting Syrian refugees inside their countries convinced that the massive influx could generate internal security and financial problems. Even the wealthy Arab Gulf countries that had long been magnets for Syrian guest workers tightened their migration routines against the Syrians. On the other hand, a few European countries such as Sweden unilaterally took the lead in encouraging the Syrians to take alternative life-saving journeys in the absence of an international consensus that aims to share the burden of hosting the Syrians. In October 2013, the Government of Sweden announced its willingness to provide permanent residency to the asylum seekers who were arriving to the country (Local, 2013). Sweden's commitment has been one of the factors that inspired a growing number of Syrians to consider the irregular routes to Europe.

The problematic living experiences in the first asylum countries illustrate how Syrians increasingly became exposed to new living realities. The horrors of the war have been coupled with feelings of exclusion and the stigma of manipulations. Many respondents who fled to Syria's neighboring countries experienced the life of a refugee who is stuck in foreign countries with very precarious and fluid migration regimes. Gradually, the affected Syrians realized the

necessity to not solely have physical protection, but also their basic human rights fully recognized in the country that will host them. The gradual transition from forced migration to a situation where Syrians have complex needs that are not only related to protection is widely known as "asylum-migration-nexus" (Van Hear, 2012). The latter refers to the situation in which forced migrants first involuntarily flee their home countries to the nearest convenient area to merely seek asylum. After some time, they plan another journey to a supposedly better place where they can have access to both protection as well as other rights.

One important context that stimulated the movement of the Syrians out of the first asylum countries was the mere absence of the refugee camps. It is noteworthy that what characterizes the "Syrian refugee crisis" is relatively the high number of refugees who reside in urban areas outside refugee settings. In urban areas, it is easier to access information and establish networks that altogether could influence migration aspirations. Given the fact that the Lebanese government refused to offer camps for the refugees, they had the chance to constantly move from one urban setting to another searching for the adequate sources of income instead of being bound to a specific camp. By summer of 2015, around 200 thousand of more than 1.5 million Syrian refugees residing in Turkey were confined to camps solely dedicated to refugees (Bartels & Visser in Van Heelsum, 2016). The rest were residing in urban areas with high levels of income inequality and a tough economic life that a vast number of Syrians could find difficulties to be part of due to the restrictions (Ibid).

In strict refugee camps, Syrians can barely witness huge discrepancies in terms of living standards between the residents. On the other hand, Syrians who fled from rural areas in Syria and found refuge in urban settings in Turkey or Lebanon get exposed to inequalities and new opportunities that trigger their interests to have satisfactory living standards. As mobility has increasingly become part of the every-day lives of the Syrian refugees, many of them viewed migration as a tool to alter a sadden reality after resisting to it in previous years. Carling (2012) argues that the same factors that could influence mobility negatively could also stimulate migration aspirations. This phenomenon should not be undermined while discussing the onward migration of Syrians into Europe.

Aspirations within a Rising Culture of Migration in the First Asylum Countries

The "European Dream" has quickly become a reality, and the Syrians embraced a "culture of migration". Thus, refugees from a variety of socio-economic conditions living in urban areas in the first asylum countries with high levels of mobility decided to follow the journeys of their compatriots to Europe. After being forcefully displaced and becoming mobile, refugees perceived migration as a form of escaping from a variety of issues. Meanwhile states that oppose their movements and seek to keep the refugees in the first asylum countries found themselves unable to reverse the everlasting migration aspirations of the refugees.

Amin, another interviewee who was seeking asylum in Lebanon was struggling to cope with the rising costs of living and increased mistreatment of Syrians by local actors. While the financial contributions of his parents were being exhausted, Amin was refusing to take up employment in Lebanon due to precarious working conditions offered to the Syrians by Lebanese actors coupled by the increased restrictions imposed by the government. With the rise of accommodation prices, Amin started to move from one rented apartment to cheaper ones over time, and finally, when Amin's parents started to sell the family properties for the purpose of securing the livelihoods of the family, he began to view migration to a third country as the most convenient solution. In Amin's case migration aspirations increased at the same time when his mobility abilities were becoming weaker.

Although the case of Turkey is not thoroughly examined in the first chapter, the refugees residing there have encountered similar problems as the ones mentioned in Lebanon due to the lack of robust refugee legislations that promote rights and prevent exploitation. The latter allows the local actors to effortlessly alter the laws and exclude the refugees from the society aiming to prevent their permanent settlement. Karim is a refugee who first fled to Turkey for the purpose of securing the needs of his children and sending them to school. While he first managed to secure a job, the Turkish government imposed residency restrictions on the Syrian refugees. As a result, Karim lost his job in September 2013 and perceived traveling to Europe as the best option for his family.

It could be suggested that some respondents became skeptical about their living conditions in the first asylum countries amidst the transmission of the picture of "good life" in Europe by Syrians

who were massively reaching European countries. As an ethnic group rapidly develops a common "culture of migration", its members become obsessed by the idea of having a better life and profit maximization "elsewhere" regardless of the opportunities that they encounter in the countries of departure (Massey et al, 1993). Consequently, even the refugees who succeed in securing a good income and live in relative peace in the first asylum countries became interested in moving to a third country for better chances and a safer future.

While many interviewees showed that their desire to migrate to Europe was amidst restrictions and tough living conditions that they were experiencing in the first asylum countries, many others who had relatively better living standards also expressed desires to flee to Europe. I will show in the following paragraphs how migration aspirations and plans influence each other within a rapidly growing culture of migration regardless the economic and employment status of the people.

It is noteworthy that not all the interviewees had tough living conditions in the first asylum countries. A few respondents reported having an unalike experience as the others in the first asylum countries. Salim, a Syrian refugee who escaped from Salamiyye to avoid the military conscription, remembers how he fled to Lebanon from Syria with only a few hundred dollars, as he did not have the means to organize his trip. Salim was optimistic about finding a job in Lebanon convinced that he was well educated. He also had an alternative plan of moving to a wealthy Gulf country should the situation get worse. He was convinced that the harsh living conditions in Syria would not have helped him organize a travel to the Gulf countries. Salim reported that he was one of the few fortunate Syrians who managed to find a job in Lebanon regardless of the restrictions on the refugees. Consequently, he had been able to secure his livelihood and save money. In the following year, Salim's financial preparedness and membership to an ethnic group that was quickly developing a culture of migrating to Europe triggered his interests to take the European route instead of going to the Gulf. Salim does not recall being mistreated by his employers at the personal level due to his Syrian identity, but he was a member of the bigger refugee population in Lebanon that was being manipulated. Before becoming able to travel to Europe, Salim did not have European aspirations and he was not facing the same hardships that other Syrian refugees were encountering in Lebanon. However, due to the fact that he was part of the bigger group of alienated people that depicts Lebanon as

the "bad place" and Europe as the "good place", a sense of self-stigmatization and oppression convinced Salim to flee to Europe.

Salim's case shows how in groups with strong cultures of migration, people develop migration aspirations and thus, plans to migrate regardless of their economic situation and employment level, as ambitions to have optimal living standards through migrating becomes prominent. During field research in irregular migration in Uganda, I experienced similar phenomenon among the Somali refugee community with relatively a much stronger culture of migration.

"No matter the situation and opportunities here (in Uganda), these people compare the life standards between here and Europe. These people open the Internet and see the good life elsewhere. Like any other young man, they could also have dreams to have a nice car and a nice apartment..." – Elderly Somali man about the youth who constantly escape the camps in large numbers to move to Europe

2.5. The Dynamics of the Destination Country Choices

2.5.1 Migration Aspirations and Intentions while being in Syria

In the subsequent section, I will also discuss the role of various types of networks in shaping aspirations and decisions. First of all, it is important to note that not all the respondents had a precise final destination in mind the moment they decided to escape to Europe, especially the ones who did not have strong aspirations to leave their place of residence and move to Europe. Also, while the majority acknowledged having a country of preference, they each possessed various degrees of knowledge about these countries before departing depending on their level of aspirations and the context they fled from. Remarkably, both Hadi and Fouad who escaped to Europe directly from war-torn Syria had poor knowledge about the situation in the country they were hoping to arrive to. For the latter, the shock that they witnessed in Syria played a more prominent role in obliging them to escape from Syria rather than the high living standards that were waiting for them in Europe. Achieving a concrete migration aspiration in Europe proved to be more crucial for the respondents who had already experienced mobility in the first asylum

seekers. The latter were being exposed to the idea of migrating to Europe simultaneously when they were facing stigmatization and various other uncertainties as migrants.

For instance, Hadi's aim was to transfer his family to a secure environment where his children could have safe access to their basic needs, as the infrastructure in Syria was severely being damaged. Hadi decided to take-on the irregular route in summer 2013, and arrive to Sweden merely because masses of Syrians were going to the Nordic country where the government had announced its willingness to offer permanent residency to the Syrian asylum seekers (Local, 2013). Thus, Hadi recalls that when he fled from Syria in summer 2013, the Syrian asylum seekers used to have only Sweden in their minds as a final destination. The popularity of Sweden could be largely due to the fact that the Scandinavian country has long been hosting Assyrians and other groups from Syria and Iraq since the beginning of the seventies. Also, due to the long reputation of Sweden as a country with a very good status, Hadi reported that he was not eager to know about the living conditions among the refugees residing in Sweden. Nevertheless, Hadi's migration aspirations became more significant after he took the journey and he increasingly became fascinated by the idea of reaching Europe. Some of his aspirations were also present in his mind even before the start of the conflict. Hadi eventually found out that permanent residency would allow him to have the Swedish citizenship at a faster pace. The latter was very important for Hadi who was born as a stateless Palestinian refugee in Syria. The case of Hadi helps us understand how some aspirations related to migration are omnipresent in the minds of some migrants in periods of immobility, but do not always play a role the moment they take the decision to migrate. Similar to Hadi, Salim is of religious minority background and was hoping to move to a country where he can freely practice his religion without fears. However, unlike Hadi, Salim was also searching for better living conditions after his experience in Lebanon.

The aim of this section is to highlight the influence of the country of residence of each respondent when they were planning to settle in a specific location in Europe. While some interviewees such as Fouad fled to Europe directly from Syria, some others took the journey after residing for a specific period of time in Lebanon, Turkey or Egypt. Thus, the focus will be on the experiences of those who have acquired knowledge about the conditions of living as refugees in the first asylum countries and their implications on the migration aspirations.

2.5.2 The Experience in the First Asylum Countries on the Destination Country Choice

It is noteworthy to compare the answers of the interviewees regarding the country selection process, and the aim behind picking a specific country. Several respondents who fled to Europe after residing for a short or long period of time in Lebanon, Turkey or Egypt stated that they had more aspirations to move to a country where the number of Syrian refugees is relatively less at the time of selecting their country of destination. The latter is largely due to the fact that the increasing number of Syrian refugees in the first asylum countries led to a scarcity of resources, more restrictions by the local actors and widespread racism and stereotyping against the Syrian refugees.

For example, Salim, who was cautious about the treatment of the large number of Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon, opted to travel to Norway bearing in mind that the number of refugees was relatively fewer than in other countries. The latter is viewed as an advantage for Syrians who could easily integrate within the Norwegian society without facing discrimination, as stated by Salim.

In his turn, Ayman remembers how his experience living in Egypt got increasingly worse when the Egyptian government shifted from an open-border policy to stricter rules against the Syrians.

"My son was 8 years old when he left for Egypt. (In Egypt), he used to see things that he didn't see during the war. In Egypt, they did not have friends and they couldn't go out from home because we were living in a precarious neighborhood. At the end, the Egyptian media started to ruin our image and Egyptian kids started to verbally attack the Syrian kids." - Ayman

After residing in Egypt for two years, Ayman, who was unemployed, started to face serious health issues, and did not have access to adequate health care at a time when the government was relentlessly tightening its policies against the rising number of Syrians. Eventually, Ayman decided to flee to a third country that not only has a highly advanced healthcare system. At the same time, he was interested in moving to a place that is not a popular destination for Syrian refugees under the assumption that a higher number of refugees could make the resources extremely scarce and trigger the anti-refugee sentiments among the local actors. At the end,

Ayman decided to flee to the Netherlands where he had a close friend who was also receiving healthcare and constantly giving him a good image of the services provided.

"I was tired of Lebanon, tired of the people and my environment, tired of racism and being viewed as a refugee. At least, if I go to a European country and people still discriminate against me there, I will not understand their language. ". Amer

Another interviewee, Ibrahim, a Syrian refugee who fled from Aleppo to Turkey in order to avoid his military conscription, narrates how his living experience in Turkey helped him to make better comparisons between potential countries of destination and finally opt for Norway. Ibrahim stated that he was hesitant in going to the European countries that were eager in hosting a much larger number of Syrian refugees than the rest by mainly recalling Sweden. He was convinced that larger numbers of refugees oblige the local actors to impose restrictions amidst rising racism and discrimination, as it was the case in Turkey during his stay. Eventually, Ibrahim reported that he was highly cautious about the anti-refugee campaigns that were taking place around Europe by recalling the PEGIDA demonstrations across German states in 2013 that made Germany less attractive to him. An additional reason that encouraged him to pick Norway was the relative easiness of learning the Norwegian language as the difficulty in learning the Turkish language did not allow him to secure a job that suits his career.

"When I started searching about the various European countries, different questions started to come to my mind: Does the refugee stay a refugee there or turns into a focal point in the society? Before moving to Turkey, I did not know what racism is. We never knew about our differences before the war in Syria." - Ibrahim

On the other hand, the respondents who fled to Europe directly from Syria stated to have poorer knowledge about the asylum system in Europe and eventually, less aspiration prior to departure. Fouad, the head of a family from Aleppo, was aiming to join his relative residing in Norway, and he states that he did not know anything about Norway until the day of his arrival. His ultimate aim behind fleeing to Europe was to escape from the war and secure the urgent needs of the family that he was leaving behind. Thus, Fouad's decision to flee to Norway was merely influenced by his familial networks and not as a result of individual plans that he wanted to achieve in Norway.

2.5.3 Norway as a Final Destination

Ever since the Syrians have been fleeing Syria, Germany and Sweden have been receiving the highest share of Syrian asylum seekers who were crossing the Schengen borders. Simultaneously the number of Syrian asylum seekers has steeply increased in countries that were not magnets for Syrians, but have favorable conditions for refugees such as Norway. While around 1,000 Syrian refugees were resettled in Norway through the UNHCR quota system in 2014, around 2,000 applied for asylum after arriving in Norway the same year, and the Syrians currently constitute the biggest group of new asylum seekers (UDI, 2015). With increasingly more social and familial networks that are being established between the Syrians who are stuck in Syria or in the first asylum countries and those who are being established in Norway, the number of the Syrians asylum seekers arriving in Norway has increased at an exponential rate. In 2015, more than 10,000 Syrians applied for asylum in Norway (UDI, 2015).

The respondents provided various arguments that help explain the reason why Norway turned into a favorable destination for Syrian asylum seekers. Each respondent stated personal reasons according to his past living experience whether in Syria or the first asylum countries, as well as their perceptions of life in Norway. For some interviewees such as Fouad, the availability of familial networks with relatives who moved to Norway before them was the sole reason. Most of the interviewees stated that they did not have any knowledge about Norway or they had a stereotypical view of the Norwegian life. The respondents tended to depict Norway as a country that has an "Eskimo life" and "very cold weather" before being interested in migrating there. The poor representation of Norway was largely due to the fact that unlike Sweden, Norway has never been a popular destination country for Syrian migrants (Kakissis, 2014). However, due the close proximity of both Scandinavian countries, the respondents reported having good expectations from Norway.

"I did not know anything about Norway, but I knew the Scandinavian countries perform well. The [good] picture of Scandinavia has been deep-rooted in our minds for a very long time" - Fouad

Interestingly, what has also made Norway a favorite destination was the relative reluctance of the Norwegian government to host a large number of Syrians, and I will show in the subsequent section the reasons behind this migrant behavior. Until recently, the ultimate aim of the conservative government was to make Norway less attractive and less susceptible to Syrian influx (The Local, 2015). As an alternative solution, the Norwegian government deemed necessary to contribute to UNHCR's restricted resettlement programs and send more financial assistance to Syria's neighboring countries that host very high number of refugees. Norway and Great Britain have been among the main financial contributors to the humanitarian programs that are assisting the refugees in Syria's neighboring countries, and at the same time, both countries have strongly been opposing to the idea of hosting larger numbers of Syrian asylum seekers.

Consequently, the Norwegian government's humanitarian aid has more than doubled Sweden's contribution in 2014 according to official statistics (EUROSTAT/ECHO, 2015). For the Norwegian government was this approach seemed to be very effective. However, in summer 2015, the government suddenly had to cope with an unprecedented number of Syrian newcomers proving the past policies of the state to be counter-productive. It should be noted that the increasing popularity of Norway among Syrians could partly be explained by the humanitarian activities of the Norwegian government in Syria's neighboring countries. In future investigations, it would be crucial to examine the influence of the assistance of Norwegian institutions under several slogans such as "Norwegian Church Aid" assuming that there could be a correlation between the distributed assistance of the Norwegian institutions in Lebanon that provide a good first image of Norway to the Syrian population and the rising image of Norway as a good country to migrate to.

"We received a very good treatment in Lebanon before being resettled. Me and my wife we wondered if they are treating us nicely in a foreign country then what should we expect from them even after being in Norway" – Amer about Norway's resettlement program

While Amer and his family got resettled from Lebanon to Norway in summer 2014 due to the family's highly vulnerable situation, it is interesting to discuss the way they gradually

familiarized themselves with a country that they never thought about. Amer acknowledges that during his stay in Lebanon, none of the people found in his close circle knew about Norway. Eventually, he continuously shared with his friends his experience with the Norwegian actors, and Norway increasingly turned into a popular "nice country" among the people in his environment. The individual story of Amer partly explains how the number of migrants fleeing to a specific country could exponentially grow when one individual who acquires a good idea about a strange country shares his information with his circle and eventually with the entire community. In the following chapter, I will show how the unfamiliarity of Norway among Syrians made the Nordic state more attractive to some refugees with largely similar migration aspirations.

"When I knew that I was going to Norway at the end, my friends reacted by saying: "Why would you go to Africa? They thought I am going to Nigeria (Norway and Nigeria have similar sound in Arabic) I explained to them that Norway is in Europe. A year ago no one knew about Norway. Now I tell my friends how nice the country is" – Amer

2.6. Strong and Weak Networks in Shaping Aspirations and Migration Projects

2.6.1 The Role of Migrant-Networks

The various types of networks that get established between different refugees who continuously cross state borders allow them to easily compare their rights and realties with other members of the same group who reside in different countries. By doing so, the respondents gained better knowledge about the civil rights present in the Global West and which are allegedly conferred to all the people regardless of their residency status, background and social class. As a consequence, many interviewees showed how they perceived traveling to Europe a means not only to escape from war and uncertainty, but also from hardships that have long obstructed their lives in Syria. For that purpose, some interviewees made use of the networks that they have either at home or abroad before taking the decision to move to Europe.

For most of the respondents, the social, familial and other forms of migrant-networks played a crucial role at various levels during the decision making process. While some interviewees reported having networks from before, some others had to establish the appropriate contacts in order to achieve their "European dreams". As Fouad narrates, the idea of traveling to Europe "happened suddenly" as a result of the immediate deterioration of the security conditions in Aleppo on one hand, and the strong network that he had abroad on the other hand. Fouad relied on his familial contacts in Norway to flee to Europe without inquiring about the country or referring to other sources of information.

Other interviewees who were stuck in the first asylum countries and were living in relatively a safer and calmer environment had more options and a longer timespan to access a variety of channels, namely social networking, in order to get information about "Tahrib"[5]. With an increasing number of Syrians fleeing to Europe, the process of applying for asylum has increasingly been advertised on the social media and details about the entitlements of the refugees in various European countries became published on YouTube in addition to the process of traveling and applying for asylum in each country. The advertisements generally focus on the benefits that refugees become entitled to in the hosting countries and requirements for permanent residency and naturalization. The latter encouraged Amer, an elderly Syrian man who had never used social networking, to have an account on Facebook in order to read about migration to Europe during his stay in Lebanon. Amin, who was also unemployed in Lebanon, remembers how he used to spend his entire free time on social networking through which he became exposed to the idea of irregularly migrating to Europe.

2.6.2 The Role of Family Ties

For married men like Fouad and Ayman, taking the costly and dangerous route to Europe was merely a sacrifice for the future of their families and especially the kids. As Fouad narrates, his generation was "accustomed to the oppression and injustice", but his kids had the chance to grow up in a comfortable environment without witnessing human miseries. The sudden deterioration of the situation of his family at home played a more decisive role in the decision making process for Fouad rather than his personal aspirations. As he took the journey alone and left his family

---

[5] Tahrib is the Arabic term for irregular migration and it means smuggling (of people or goods). It is largely accepted as a term by Syrians to describe their journey to Europe

behind, he was less interested in knowing about the asylum system in Europe and the opportunities that were awaiting him in the destination. Eventually, Fouad arrived to Norway without information about the country, and he found that there is a lengthy family resettlement process.

"I won't leave [to Europe] if I can't bring my family [later]. Before it (the family reunification) was 6 months, now it is one and a half year. So many people will not come to Norway because of that. Imagine your wife and kids have to wait under the bombs one and a half year before they come here." - Hadi

However, for married men like Ayman, migration plans that would allegedly benefit all the family members could partly be the result of personal aspirations. Moving to a country with good living standards where the heads of the families could ensure their commitment securing all the necessary care to their families becomes essential in protracted refugee situations, where male heads of household start to lose their role as care providers to their kids (Christophersen, 2014). Similarly, Ayman stated feeling helpless in Egypt, as he was not able to secure the needs of his children anymore.

"I was sick and unemployed in Egypt. I felt myself weak. I wanted my kids to be raised in an environment different than ours. I personally am an aged man, so what will I get from Europe? I thought maybe my kids could benefit at least" - Ayman

Despite the marital status, age and social status, the family played a crucial role in encouraging the interviewees to flee to Europe and selecting the country that best suits their interests as well as the needs of their families. Data from the respondents highlighted how the family plays a crucial role for the sense of belonging and strong attachment to a specific geographic area. In some cases, family becomes an obstacle that prevents people including young single men, who do not necessarily have family commitments, to realize their migration aspirations. The latter could be the result of psychological attachment to families in cultures where family ties play a very crucial role. Ibrahim, who escaped from military conscription, was stuck in Turkey for a prolonged period of time without any future prospect or job. Even though he was not bound by family commitments and had plans to move to Europe, he was still hoping to travel back to Syria where his parents were still residing. After a certain period, his family also fled from Syria as the

security conditions became worse in the city of Aleppo. Eventually, Ibrahim lost the feeling of attachment to his motherland, and after that, he started to search for another country where he could achieve his dream of continuing his career in a country distant from home.

Amin was residing in Lebanon away from his parents who were still in Syria. However, Amin had a clear ambition for fleeing to a European country where he could resettle his parents and family members even if he is over the age of 18. After comparing several countries, Amin decided to flee to Germany, which has been a popular destination of Syrian asylum seekers since the start of the conflicts. According to Amin's findings from social networks, Germany had very generous family reunification laws that used to allow a given migrant to resettle various family members. The latter was the most convincing reason for Amin to opt for Germany as a final destination country before taking the journey.

Maintaining close ties between family members is a trait that characterizes the culture of Syria. Thus, not only the heads of households, but also the young men reported placing high importance on the family reunification rules of the countries they opted to travel to. In other words, the migration aspirations were not just individual, but also involved various family members. Many of the respondents expressed desires to reunite with their families at some point after being established in Europe. Single young men such as Amin who were not able to return to Syria and reunite with their parents saw in migration to Europe a means to change that reality.

Even though a growing number of Syrians were fleeing to Europe in 2015, Omar was relatively satisfied with his life in Lebanon, and unlike his friends, he did not have strong aspirations of migrating to a European country. Similar to Salim, Omar reported that he did not face problems in Lebanon such as discrimination. He explained that by arguing that he had been living in Lebanon since the very beginning of the uprisings. During the initial period of the war, it was relatively easier for Syrians to interact with local Lebanese and establish contacts. Omar is a Syrian refugee who traveled from Aleppo to Lebanon in 2011 to pursue his bachelor studies. Even though the living conditions among the Syrians deteriorated in Lebanon in the following years, Omar managed to secure his livelihoods and live "better" than the majority. During the interview, Omar even showed nostalgia to his life in Lebanon and regretfully stated that he could have done many achievements in Lebanon. However, in 2015, Omar lost his right of legally entering Syria in order to visit his parents, as he became obliged to carry a military service.

Moreover, in summer of 2015, Omar's parents fled to Turkey when the security conditions severely intensified in their hometown. As a result, Omar was finally convinced by his friends to take the irregular journey to Europe for the purpose of reuniting with his family through reunification. While Omar was aware that family reunification was allowed by all the European hosting nations, he did not know about the specific rules of each state.

Thus, the decision to flee to a specific country in Europe could mainly be based on events that occur in the departure country such as sudden worsening of security or living conditions or separation from family. When the latter occurs in a strong culture of migration, namely in urban areas where refugees live such as in Syria's neighboring countries, the Herd model of Epstein (2008) could better explain the migration plans of individuals. The individuals care less about the migrant-networks that they have elsewhere, and instead, they focus more on the information and views of the waves that they follow from the departure country. However, individual aspirations of some could arise on the way to the destination countries. In the following sections, I will show how Omar gathered information about the countries that refugees were fleeing to while being on the move as he had poor knowledge before taking the journey.

In addition to the role of the family ties in shaping the aspirations of migrants and the decision making process, the familial consent was viewed as crucial to achieve European aspirations. To various extents, the respondents' choices of fleeing to Europe and establishing in a specific state was shaped and sometimes altered by their family members. For the married men, the approval of the wives was a prerequisite before departure. Mourad was planning to flee to Germany directly from Syria. Nevertheless, as the sea route was not perceived safe, his brothers residing in the Gulf countries rejected this option. Consequently, Mourad removed the idea of fleeing to Europe from his mind until an alternative route to enter Europe through Russia has become an option for the Syrians interested in moving to Europe. The abovementioned examples show how family could play a crucial role in shaping aspirations and migration projects or in making individuals confined to their initial places of residence regardless of having migration aspirations.

2.6.3 Rethinking the Role of Networks in Irregular Migration

No doubt, the migrant-networks both at home and abroad as well as the familial ties played a crucial role in spreading awareness among the interviewees about the rights of refugees in different countries and helped many of them to flee from precarious living conditions. They are indispensable in the absence of legal channels from which potential migrants could gather important information. However, given the fact that these networks are administered and developed by individuals who do not necessarily have expertise in the field of migration and they largely rely on the word of mouth as a source of information, this way of transmitting information has also shown some disadvantages in the long run. In many cases, they triggered the aspirations of the respondents to flee to a specific place in Europe, and they later found out the insignificance of the information that they got through social networks or friends. In the following sections, I will thoroughly examine the shortcomings of these networks. For example, Amin regretfully stated that he should not have relied on the social networks, recalling Facebook pages, when he decided to flee to Europe.

"I don't trust the internet (during the interview). [According to Internet pages], Norway has a set of rules that are favorable for refugees, but in fact, they are not applied by the government".
-Amin

Several European states make family reunification laws more restrictive as a tool to discourage migrants from arriving in their countries. The latter is due to the assumption that the migrants who come from countries and cultures where the family plays a prominent role would refrain from migrating to their countries out of fear of long-term separation from their parents, children or partners. In many cases, these policies come into force after potential refugees take their journeys to specific countries under the assumption that the desired destination country offers speedier family reunification options. I showed in previous sections how the family has played a crucial role in enhancing the feeling of belonging of migrants in their new countries of destination. Almost all the respondents expressed strong desires to reunite with their families at some point in the future. Eventually, the family plays a major role in the integration process of migrants in the new countries.

In this chapter, I showed the personal, social and various other conditions that encouraged the interviewees to take the journeys to Europe, and the dynamics that influenced the final destination choices. The migrants fled to Europe with various degrees of aspirations as well as different levels of resources and preparedness that later had implications on the trajectories. In the following sections, I will show how the modifications of migration rules by some states, and the changes of personal priorities while being exposed to various events during the journey shaped the aspirations of many interviewees.

VI.   Complex Trajectories and Shaping Aspirations

In this chapter, I aim to show the complexity of the various trajectories narrated by the respondents and the circumstances that made every trajectory different. For this purpose, I will focus on individual traits such as family roles, age as well as other forms of networks that shaped the aspirations and destination country choices of the interviewees during their journeys. Additionally, I will discuss how the various levels of financial commitments influenced the journeys of some respondents and obliged many of them to overcome mobility obstacles.

Recalling the Trajectories

While the journeys were mostly exhausting and unbearable for most of the interviewees, the trips marked a big trace in their memories as a life event that will permanently be remembered. Consequently, the interviewees were generally eager to provide details related to their travel experiences before reaching Norway. They did not hesitate to share very personal incidents and situations where they had felt frustrated or irritated. The interviewees were also largely able to recall very detailed information related to the trips such as important dates and the number of people that accompanied them in the boats or the buses while crossing national borders.

It is noteworthy that the respondents generally refrained from using the terms "migrant", "refugee" or "irregular migrant" while referring to themselves or describing their journeys with other people who were accompanying them. They were mostly presenting themselves as Syrians, men and elderly. Only while narrating their experiences with local actors such as the authorities and the police, they would group themselves under the term of "refugees". While the respondents tend to not present themselves as refugees as the term is associated with all the hard experiences that many had been going through, it is thought to be crucial for them to be presented as refugees while interacting with local actors to achieve certain goals such as crossing state borders.

On the other hand, while discussing the intra-refugee group contacts, the respondents tended to distance themselves from other refugees that they had been traveling with by showing the

---

exclusivity of their personal traits and experiences. Various times, the refugees classified themselves as "educated" or "non-educated", "English speaker", "blonde", "European appearance", "Syrian look" to explain the advantages or disadvantages that they had throughout the trip. In the course of their journeys, some respondents built an understanding of what could be an obstacle for a refugee to easily cross borders and what could be an advantage. Having a good knowledge of the English language was seen as a necessity to arrange transportation tickets in Europe, and to build strong contacts with other Syrian travelers who have strong contacts with smugglers and various other networks throughout the journeys. The latter deemed suitable for those who did not speak English and needed someone who could translate for them at various points. Moreover, one interviewees, Hadi, reported that he was less likely to be stopped by the policemen during his trip in Europe because he was traveling alone and not with a "veiled wife" who could have helped the police to "identify the refugees".

3.1. Resources that Gave Migrants Access to the Smugglers

The irregular journeys of people fleeing to Europe are largely managed and facilitated by clandestine and informal entrepreneurs that seek to make profit by benefitting from the aspirations of migrants to reach Europe and imposing high travel costs on them (Lutterbeck, 2013). As narrated by the interviewees, the smugglers are a group of criminal gangs from different nationalities, mainly Arab speakers, who "cannot be trusted" and are careless about the safety and well-being of the vulnerable people they serve as their ultimate aim is financial profit. Given the fact that escaping to Europe became the only long-term solution for many interviewees, they had to offer the smugglers the price they're asking for without questioning their lawfulness considering they had no alternative option to enter the Schengen Area.

"There were smugglers on the borders (between Syria and Turkey) who were taking money out of the Syrians by pretending that there are cluster munitions on the borders and they are the only ones who know where they are. They are all liars and I could tell, but what can I do? Due to the war, the Syrians are fleeing from a small coffin and finding themselves in a big coffin that is the sea. Human beings became numbers." – Fouad

"When I arrived to Greece, I regretted for leaving Turkey. I started to cry and my brother asked me why. I said because we were paying money to be humiliated." -Ayman

Thus, each migrant had to provide different, but remarkably large amounts of money to smugglers who allegedly had expertise in helping people to cross state borders without being caught. For every illegal border crossing, they had to pay between 1000 and 2000 EUR depending on the smuggler. The amount is paid to a third party before the travel and each migrant has the right to get the money refunded in case they get caught on the borders. The latter show that migrants have some room for negotiation with smugglers regardless of their criminal nature.

The idea of migration to Europe among the interviewees did not occur immediately once the conflicts escalated in Syria. It happened as a result of the gradual loss of sources of income and increased feeling of hopelessness and insecurity that obliged the respondents to perceive migration as a necessity rather than an option. Amidst financial constraints, financing the journey was one of the primary obstacles of the European Aspirations for some interviewees. It is noteworthy that the journeys used to cost relatively more before the start of the mass exodus of Syrians to Europe in summer 2015. Before the Balkan route becomes an easy point of entry to Europe in August 2015, the migrants had to pay to various smugglers at different stages to cross multiple closed borders in order to reach from Greece to Hungary or Austria from where the movement to the rest of Europe is unrestricted. As both the number of smuggler and migrant routes got multiplied and the Balkan countries facilitated the passage of the refugees to Europe, the respondents reported that the journeys started to cost less for those who traveled to Europe in mid or late summer 2015 when many states loosened their border controls.

For many interviewees, the family resources were indispensable to access the smugglers. As discussed in the previous sections, migration to Europe was being seen as a family investment that will not only benefit the person who would take the journey, but also the entire family in the long run through family reunification and perhaps remittances. As a result, various family members contributed financially to the journeys according to their capabilities. As Amin was unemployed in Lebanon and was relying on the contributions of his family members in Syria, he asked from his parents to help him flee to Europe by arguing that settling in Europe would be the

only permanent option for him as well as his family. Thus, Amin had a plan to resettle his family in Europe after gaining his residency permit.

"Parents feel obliged to sell everything to save their kids. My parents sold out our place of work so that I'll be able to travel. In this situation, your parents have only two options: they either lose you and you go take part of the war or they sell everything they have to let you travel." -Amin

Similarly, for Mourad, it was very important to take the consent of his siblings who were living in the Gulf countries in order to flee to Europe, as his brothers were the only ones who could have helped him finance his expensive journey. As migration to Europe was believed to be a major life event that will mark the start of a new life, and the respondents were not foreseeing a return to Syria after stepping their foot in Europe, many of them sold out their main belongings and properties in order to have the required sum of money for the trip.

"I thought I could sell the furniture of the house. I had an expensive TV that I bought to watch the football matches months before the war. I took it with me when we moved from our home in Aleppo. I sold out the TV, the washing machine. My siblings living in Turkey contributed." Fouad

As many Syrians were lacking the financial resources, the sudden availability of financial resources played a major push factor for many Syrians such as Hadi and Salim to flee to Europe. Hadi reports that unlike others, he did not have the financial ability to flee to Europe in 2013 when the costs were relatively higher, and thus, traveling to Europe was a distant dream for his family. In summer 2013, Hadi's brother, who was the head of sports division at UN schools in the Palestinian refugee camp in Syria, got kidnapped and killed by criminal gangs. As the sudden death of his brother made him feel himself more endangered and insecure, Karim used the money received from the insurance to flee to Europe.

"The share that (death insurance) I got from that helped me to travel. I told you, for me traveling was a dream because they (smugglers) were asking for a huge amount of money." – Hadi

The eagerness of the Syrians to flee to Europe also obliged many of them to engage in new actions such as borrowing large amounts of money from strangers. Karim narrates that before the war he never used to take loans from his surroundings. In the contrary, Karim used to constantly

support his family members and friends financially. However, when Karim lost all his sources of income and migration to Europe has become the remaining option for him to provide protection and dignity to his family, he became obliged to ask for loans from various relatives and friends in order to pay to smugglers and take the journey. It is important to note that the respondents were taking loans from various members of their community amidst financial uncertainty, huge unemployment and absence of guarantees that they would be able to reach Europe and pay back their loans to the creditors in the future. The latter shows that how the Syrian community that has been developing a strong "culture of migration" increasingly perceives the idea of Europe as a good investment that would benefit the entire community. The loans were mostly envisaged to finance the various modes of the transport during the journey, pay to the smugglers as well as other living and accommodation costs. They were also used to finance other logistics such as buying smartphones that are indispensable for such forms of journeys.

"The journey was clear and well explained on the phone; we just needed a smartphone with a GPS. In each country, we had to buy a SIM card to have Internet and follow the directions on the GPS. Now this explains why most of the Syrians who are coming here have the most luxurious phones. It's for the GPS and maps. Here they wonder why Syrians have more expensive phones than the locals, but in fact, affording to buy these phones prior to the journeys was very hard for many Syrians." - Amin

Most of the respondents had to get assistance from family or community members, and in some cases, sell properties in order to achieve their European dreams. In the general migration discourse, it is believed that individual aspirations do not really matter when a given person does not have the actual capacity to finance migration. However, the abovementioned cases show how personal abilities matter less when the individuals have strong migration aspiration and are part of a community with a strong culture of migration in the context of forced migration. Moreover, Salim, who was one of the fortunate Syrians who managed to find a well-paid job in Lebanon, showed how his income stimulated his interests to travel to Europe. Salim's case shows that the overall Syrian population was increasingly having a skeptical view about their future in the main first asylum countries. Thus, they were increasingly opting to flee to Europe regardless of their employment status and financial conditions which supposedly help a given person to have a sense of belonging to his place of residence.

Being "Irregular" in Europe:

"The Human Beings Became Numbers"- Fouad

Many respondents had generally little understanding of the asylum policies pushed by local governments and the intentions of the European states behind the ever-changing national regimes and their expectations from the refugees. Given the constant changes in the border policies and asylum regimes, many interviewees expressed confusions by recalling their journeys and wondering if the European states "want them or not".

"The hotel we were staying in [in Budapest]; the police does not approach it. I don't know. Sometimes the states avoid catching the migrants. Lets say Germany is stopping all the people, when they notice a surge in the number of asylum seekers they start to stop less people. Sometimes even the police stop you and then let you go." – Omar

"It (the process of receiving asylum seekers in Europe) became like a stock market. A given [European] country comes up with better policies so it starts to get more demands (refugees) until they change their policies so that people will start to go to other places. These countries (governments) are smart. Norway, for example, decides to allow a person to reunite with his family after one and half year. If I am worried about my family who are stuck under the bombs, I would not be able to stay here. The country is not banning you from entering, but it is doing something that is making you think million times (before you move in). The refugee is always the weak one." – Hadi

Many interviewees particularly found interesting the overall friendly approach of the policemen across Europe with some minor exceptions by recalling their previous experiences with the policemen in their country when they were merely Syrians.

"I was caught by the police on my way to Greece then released again. Well in fact, we were used

to live in fear and we had always been scared from seeing the police in our country where it was worse. By just seeing the color of their uniforms, we used to be scared. We hated that colors because of them. Here (in Europe) they catch you and then release you." –Karim

3.2. The Planned and Unplanned Trajectories

In this section, I will compare the journeys of Karim and Fouad who were married and bound by family obligations and Salim and Ibrahim who were single men. The respondents had dissimilar levels of preparedness before taking the journeys to Europe, unalike degrees of aspirations and eventually, different levels of control over their journeys. I will be thoroughly examining the reasons that made Karim less prepared for the journey than Salim who had persisted in reaching Norway.

3.2.1 Different Levels of Preparedness and Different Outcomes

The respondents showed having different levels of preparedness and various degrees of attentiveness on what was occurring around them throughout the journey. The latter largely depended on the familial status and obligations in the country of departure of the interviewees and thus their psychological state. Also, it was the result of different degrees of aspirations the moment they left to Europe. Karim, who was a married mid-aged man, did not even read the name of the country that was stated on his fake identity card. On the other hand, Ibrahim, a single independent traveler was showed being psychologically more stable during the trip to Europe in 2013, was able to fully concentrate and plan his trip. He thus critically approach to what he was encountering throughout the journey:

"I heard about an Egyptian guy who makes good fake Italians IDs. I went to his place and got an ID the same evening. They were checking a lot on those traveling from Athens to there. So I preferred to take a flight to Rome instead. I booked the flight that was at the end of the weekend to give (the passport controllers at the airport) the impression that I was in Greece for the weekend and I was just traveling back "home". In the meantime, I started to learn some Italian sentences through YouTube. At the customs checkpoint, the lady started talking in Italian with

me and I answered in Italian with the words that I know and at the end he thought I am asking for a plastic bag to put my personal items inside. It turned out that neither him nor me speak Italian. I thought I will be caught too but I wasn't." – Ibrahim

In cases of where the decision to flee to Europe was not driven by individual aspirations, but rather by severe security or economic conditions in the country of departure, the migrants relied mostly on their available networks while selecting the country of destination. For instance, Fouad was hoping to escape from Syria to Norway merely to save his children from war. By recalling the experience of his relative who fled to Norway a decade before him, he thought Norway would be a good option without further investigation. However, decisions based on past experiences of migrants could lead to undesired outcomes. After successfully arriving in Norway and applying for asylum, Fouad found out that he needs almost a year to reunite with his family.

"I did not know about the asylum rules [in Norway], but my relative got to Norway and managed to do family reunification after three months. I thought it was going to be the same for me as well." - Fouad

During the decision making process, many respondents gathered information from family members who had previously fled to Europe even though asylum policies constantly change over time. As this discussed form of migration to Europe occurs informally without any regulation by official actors, the migrants gather their information from non-credible sources that affect on their decisions and some eventually create negative outcomes in the long run when they later find themselves in different realties.

3.2.2 Weak Planning: The Uncertain Trajectory of Karim

After losing his job in Istanbul due to the imposed labor restrictions, karim decided to follow the paths of other Syrians to Europe without having a concrete travel plan and a destination country in mind with the conviction that Europe is a better place for his family. Karim believes he was an exceptional case among the Syrians who were taking the journey to Europe as he had very poor knowledge about irregular migration and asylum rules in various European countries. He remembers that the others who were taking the journeys to Europe were doing thorough investigations on the Internet and asking about the opinion of various friends before deciding to

flee to a specific country. As he did not have enough financial resources to flee to Europe together with his family, he decided to leave his wife and kids in Istanbul and travel alone to Greece from where he was going to settle "somewhere". Thus, his ultimate aim was to reach to a country in a short period of time and resettle his family, and he was confident that the life of his family was going to be improved away from Turkey and Syria.

"If we compare all these [European] countries with our countries (in the Middle East), we don't even have laws. They (the laws) are just on papers. I did not have any destination in mind. I just wanted to save myself. For me my priority was to send my children to school. Until now, I care only about my kids." - Karim

Throughout the journey, Karim was barely feeling the troubles that he was encountering during the trip, as he had been constantly thinking about his small children who were going to work with their mother in order to assist her in the income generation for the family. For Karim, overcoming the hardships of the trip was easier than the suffering of his kids who were spending their schooling years at work. Fouad was in a similar situation as Karim: He is a married guy with two kids who sold many of his properties and took loans in order to flee to Norway and resettle his family at a later stage.

"I wasn't thinking about myself, I was just thinking about my kid who was ill. I was wondering what was their mistake to live such a life, as I was the one responsible for bringing them to life. We were so afraid of being caught during the journey. If I was going to fail, be returned, etc, I was ready to commit a suicide. I had a lot of debts already due to the travel." Fouad

Karim left Istanbul without foreseeing the hardships that he could have encountered during the journey and he did now know the brokers who were arranging his travel as his friends had been arranging everything for him and he was only following them in the journey. He got caught four times before finally being able to reach Izmir and take the boat to Greece. Together with his friends, Karim started to search for smugglers in Athens in order to travel to the final destination where they could finally apply for asylum. The living conditions for them were very precarious in Athens and it was merely impossible to find a "trustworthy" broker. Even after leaving Turkey, Karim did not have a country in mind where he could have traveled. He had a brother who has been living in Germany for 12 years and was repeatedly asking him to join them in

Germany in order to keep their children close to each other.

However, Karim did not possess enough financial resources and he had to accept the first affordable offer of the smugglers who were proposing countries where interested Syrians could move to with various modes of transport. Also, Karim had a dispute with one of his friends who borrowed him money and he suddenly contacted him to ask for his money back during Karim's stay in Athens. Consequently, Karim was stuck between the dilemma of continuing the journey or returning to Istanbul to help his family and pay back his loans until he resolved his dispute with his friend. After being trapped in Greece for more than one month, a smuggler offered him to travel to Copenhagen with a direct flight. However, the day of his flight, Karim found out that he was going to travel to Oslo. In order to travel by plane through Athens, the smugglers provide fake identity cards of European countries to the travelers. Interestingly, when I asked Karim the country stated on his fake national identity card, he stated that he did not check the country as he was so stressed thinking about his family and thus, he was not able to focus on what was happening around him.

"I just wanted to get somewhere and do family reunification as soon as possible. So when the smuggler said Copenhagen, I said wherever. I was running out of money in Greece. I did not know where Copenhagen is. The day when I was going to travel, I went to the smuggler's place to see what time is the flight. He said there is no longer a ticket to Copenhagen, but only to Oslo. I said I just want to go even if it is to the Moon. " – Karim

As stated by Karim, the smugglers were providing their offers only to individuals fearing that the policemen at the airport would easily catch a group of travelers. Eventually, Karim and his friends had to be separated in Athens and they traveled to different European countries and each in different days. In total, Karim spent 7,500 Euros from the start of his journey until his arrival in Oslo. Karim reported that he had little knowledge about Norway. He knew that the country was performing well socially as well as economically. However, the latter were not the reasons behind his decision to establish himself in Norway. The fact that he did not have enough financial resources and he was psychologically unstable due to the uncertain situation of his family in Istanbul, he was not eager to examine the option he had been given by the smuggler and he decided to travel to Norway without further investigation about the country and the laws related to asylum and family reunification.

"I was so happy that he was finally in a European country. It (Karim's situation) was very hard in Greece and he was constantly saying he wants to come back [To Istanbul]. I was telling him that if you come back I would not open the door [says by laughing]. He had to wait there for one month." Karim's wife who stayed in Istanbul

3.2.3 Persistent Aspirations and Strong Migration Plans: The Case of Salim

Unlike Karim, Salim had a clear plan in mind when he decided to flee to Europe. His experience throughout the journey proves that he was determined to achieve his dream regardless of some challenges that he encountered during the trip. For Karim, the idea of traveling to Europe occurred suddenly, and he was weakly prepared for the trip. On the other hand, Salim had been interested in establishing himself in Norway, and for that purpose, he had been saving his income from work during his stay in Lebanon in order to pay the requested amount of money to smugglers and travel to Norway. Salim's preparedness and his possession of financial resources helped him throughout the journey to have better control over his trajectory and not be deviated from his main dreams. As Salim was investing the money that he generated from two years of intensive work, spending his saving for the right goal was indispensable.

After living in Lebanon for two years, Salim took the journey to Europe in November 2014. As Salim's Syrian passport was expired and he could not travel back to Syria to renew it, he traveled from the North of Lebanon to Mersin in Turkey with a regular boat for travelers. After that, he took the bus to Izmir where he started to search for smugglers who could help him flee to Greece. While Salim was traveling alone, he encountered old Syrian friends that he knew in the past. As Salim had good English knowledge, he was helping some of them throughout the trip. After arriving in Greece, Salim was examining all the means to travel to Oslo. As the Balkan route was still closed, the only option for Salim was to travel by plane. The smugglers issued him a fake identity card that he can use to travel through the airport. Salim first tried to travel directly to Oslo and then through France and Germany, but the police repeatedly caught him. Given the fact that he "looked Syrian" helped the policemen to recognize him and stop him at the airport. Salim failed to travel by plane after trying three to four times as he recalls. According to the respondents, the police control at the airport in Greece was weaker in the initial years of the

Syrian influx. When Karim traveled from Athens to Oslo by plane in 2013, the number of Syrians fleeing to Europe through Greece was relatively less and eventually, the police control at the airport was less strict. In total, Salim spent nine months in Athens until August 2015 when he found out that on the Internet that some refugees were taking the Balkan route to travel from Greece to the rest of the European countries.

In August, Salim went to the Macedonian borders by bus. After crossing the borders, he took the train to Belgrade along with other people from various nationalities that were taking the same journey as he recalls. In Belgrade, Salim started to ask people who have heard about the process of traveling from the Balkans to Europe through Hungary without being stopped by the Hungarian policemen, as rumors about the mistreatment of refugees in Hungary were being widespread. He finally found a smuggler who suggested taking them directly to Vienna. Salim describes the road trip through Hungary as the most dangerous stage throughout his journey as he was traveling in completely a dark car with covered windows without knowing the roads that the driver was taking. In Vienna, Salim reported that he felt "alive" again as he was not feeling safe from his very first day in Greece and until his arrival in Austria. After staying in Vienna for one night and being able to take shower, he took the train to Malmo by changing his train in Hamburg. The trip to Malmo appeared to him more pleasant than his Balkan journey, and before continuing his ride to Oslo, Salim stayed for one week with his friends who were settled in Malmo to inquire about their situation and living conditions.

Different Emotional States Before Reaching the Final Destination

Both Karim and Salim had a similar way of expressing deep emotions before reaching Norway as they both cried in the plane and the train respectively, and it was mainly a reflection on the different concerns and reasons that obliged both of them to take the long journeys to Europe. While Karim had his family in mind, Salim was fleeing from military rule.

"When I took the plane to Oslo, I started to cry thinking about my family that was staying behind and I was afraid I was never going to see them." - Karim

"Before I reach Norway (by train from Malmo), the policeman asked for my ID. I said I'm Syrian and they asked why am I going to Norway. I said I want to feel safe. (After that) the policeman said he would help me. When he said that, I felt the humanity around me and cried for five minutes. In my country, the policemen wanted to take me to military. In Greece, in Macedonia, etc. for three years, I didn't feel humanity and here, I finally felt it." Salim

In the fourth week of August, Salim arrived to Norway and went to the police station in Oslo. After that, he was put in a transit camp close to Oslo from where he was transferred to a camp close to Stavanger.

While comparing the cases of Karim and Salim, it becomes noteworthy that the familial status of the traveler and their role in the family played a prominent role in shaping the aspirations and thus, the trajectories of the respondents. Salim and Ibrahim were young single persons and relatively independent from their parents. On the other hand, Karim was the head of a household with two dependent children who had to quit school and contribute to the generation of livelihoods in the absence of their father. Salim's plan behind migrating to Europe was mostly to achieve individual goals. Throughout the interview, he did not mention having family reunification plans throughout his journey and after being resettled in Norway.

I showed in the preceding chapter that within a strong culture of migration, the financial capabilities necessarily prevent people with strong aspirations to migrate to a better country. However, abilities could influence on the trajectories and the achievement of some aspirations. Salim was financially more prepared to the journey than Karim who was financing all the costs of his journey by taking loans. Karim was deemed to pay back his loans in a short period of time and it was not convenient for him to stay in Greece in the absence of income sources for a long period of time. Even though Salim did not have large financial resources during his stay in Athens, it was not urgent for him to arrive to a specific location in the shortest period of time and start to generate income as he was making use of his personal savings. Thus, Salim's financial preparedness made him less vulnerable to the consent of the smugglers. There is no evidence that

Karim did not wish to establish himself in Norway and he did not state any hesitation when he was given the option of moving to Norway. However, the comparison shows that for Salim, arriving to Norway was an achievement and a success story, and for Karim and his family, it was rather a family survival.

3.3. The Russian Route to Norway: Shifting Destinations

As I discussed in the previous sections, most of the interviewees stated that they had interests in moving to a specific country. For some respondents, the personal interests changed either during the travels or before taking the journeys. In this section, I will be showing how the introduction of new migrant routes, namely the route between Murmansk and Kirkenes, lead to some respondents such as Amin and Mourad to change their countries of preference and prefer to flee to Norway. Also, in the case of Imad who was residing in Russia and did not have the adequate resources to flee to Italy where he dreamt to settle, the introduction of the new migrant route made him curious about fleeing to Norway.

3.3.1 Transit Country Turns into Final Destination: The Case of Murad and Amin

Amin was increasingly showing interest in moving to Germany after staying in Lebanon for a considered period of time. Together with his cousin Mourad who was still in Syria, Amin was getting ready to take the Greek route in order to arrive in Germany. However, both were increasingly being skeptical about taking the Mediterranean route, as news about its dangers was being transmitted from the news channels and the social networks. Amin and Mourad were constantly checking the Facebook pages where people who had taken the routes to reach Europe were sharing their experiences. In Summer 2015, when the number of smugglers suddenly multiplied and there had been a surge in the number of travelers, Amin came across a Facebook page that describes a recent and relatively new migrant route that helps refugees to flee to Norway through Russia. To both Amin and Mourad, the Russian route appeared relatively faster and less dangerous than the Mediterranean route as well as more affordable.

Eventually, Amin contacted some relatives who were living in Norway to inquire about the country and the laws. His relatives eventually informed Amin that Norway was providing humanitarian asylum to the refugees who were fleeing the war. Unlike political asylum, humanitarian protection would have given Amin the opportunity to travel back to home to see his parents. The latter made him enthusiastic about Norway. However, given the fact that Amin had more relatives who were living in Sweden, he took the decision for him and his cousin to use the Russian route and enter to Sweden via Norway that is a neighboring country.

"Only my uncle was in Germany. I first wanted to go to Germany, but then [after coming up with the idea of using the Russian route] I changed my mind as I saw all my family members are in Sweden. I thought if I will do family reunification, all the family should be together instead of having them scattered in different countries." – Amin

For the trip, Amin and Mourad first had to first apply for a Russian visa that quickly became expensive for Syrian refugees. As there has been a surge in the number of visa applications at the Russian embassy in Beirut and Damascus, and thus, increased corruption among the employees, Amin and Mourad paid 850 and 2500 USD respectively for the visas. After being issued a visa, Mourad joined Amin in Beirut, and they both traveled to Moscow on the first week of September in 2015. After staying in Moscow for two days where they searched for a broker who could arrange the rest of their trip, they traveled to Murmansk by plane. From there, a Russian person drove them to the Norwegian borders where the two men had to buy a bicycle in order to cross the borders with Norway. The journey seemed very comfortable to the respondents and the entire trip from Beirut to Kirkenes in Norway lasted only three days.

In Kirkenes, they were stopped by the police and asked to provide their fingerprints even though their plan was continue their journey to Sweden. After that, the two men were sent to Oslo police station, and from there, they were temporarily placed in small caravans in a camp near Oslo. Finally, they were transferred to a reception center near Stavanger.

It is noteworthy that the Syrians such as Amin and Mourad who took the new migrant route had less knowledge about what was awaiting them after the journey, as they did not have the chance to read about the experiences of other people who took the same route before them. Instead, they relied on the information given by relatives who took other migrant routes. Also, many

respondents like Amin who largely relied on the previous experiences of family members and friends during their decision making process reported feeling disappointed at later stages after discovering the unreliability of the information that they had received about some laws. Generally, migrants constantly change their perceptions of the countries they settle in and the way they depict the laws depending on their personal experiences at various stages throughout their settlement and integration. Thus, if Amin's brother had received information about Norway after Amin witnessed started to experience delays in his application process, he would have possibly refrained from fleeing to Norway.

"Once I arrived here, I saw Norway as a heaven. It still looks like a heaven. So once I was in Oslo, my brother took the journey (after receiving a recommendation). They waited for me to reach Norway and then take the route so that they will know how much it is going to cost and how much money will be needed." – Amin

3.3.2 Changing Routes and Shifting Aspirations: The Case of imad

While the Russian route has been perceived as a safer option for some to achieve initial migration plans, it also influenced on the destination country choices of some others. Although Imad had a dream to travel to Italy, the Russian route exposed him to the idea of Norway. Imad is a young single man originally from the south of Syria. He was studying Economics in the city of Damascus when the war started. In 2014, he received a scholarship to study Russian language in Volgograd. Imad viewed the program as an opportunity for him to postpone his military conscription, and traveled to Russia where he spent a year. As the situation in Syria got deteriorated, Imad started to consider staying in Russia. In order to extend his stay in Russia, Imad had to renew his Syrian passport for which he had to pay a large amount of money in addition to the fees required for his residency permit. On the other hand, applying for asylum in Moscow was not the right solution for him. In order to be able to live in major Russian cities where more job opportunities are offered, an asylum seeker should bribe the local authorities and pay more than one thousand dollars as Imad narrates.

In the meantime, Imad was following the news about the Syrians who were fleeing to Europe. Imad was particularly interested in fleeing to Italy where he had an uncle, and he was considering applying for an Italian visa. He was not considering irregular migration to Italy, as he did not have enough financial resources to pay to the smugglers, and he was away from the "culture of migration" that was pushing many Syrian migrants away from the first asylum countries. In August 2015, Imad saw on the news (Sky News Television Channel) the "safe" route that was helping people to enter in Europe via Russia. Imad found the Russian route to Europe very cheap and convenient for him as he had the means to reach the Norwegian borders. He also got convinced that Norway would be a good option for him even though he did not have aspirations to flee there before. After just two weeks, he arranged his trip and flew to Murmansk from where he had to take a bus to Nikel. In order to cross the borders with Norway, Imad had to buy a bike and cycle a distance of fifty meters.

"(Before hearing about the Russian route, Norway was my last option among the countries that I could have traveled to. I even had a friend who moved there and he once told me that one day I would join him. I never thought I would do It." -Imad

While the journey was remarkably easy, Imad was feeling some anxiety during the trip, as he did not have networks with people who had taken the same route before him. The absence of information available to migrants when a new migrant route becomes an option for them makes them more skeptical about the route regardless of its safe nature.

After arriving in Norway, he recommended a close friend to him who was working in Qatar to take the same journey as him. In the following months, Imad discovered that the Norwegian government is willing to deport the Syrians who have a legal permit in Russia. In December 2015, Imad fled to Germany hoping that the German government will consider his case as the country was not acting in accordance with Dublin criteria. He was scared that if he was going to move to another country, the last was going to send him back to Norway where he could have faced deportation. In Berlin, Imad got his application rejected as he had asked for asylum in Norway he is currently waiting for a decision that could send him back to Norway. Imad's lawyer is trying to negotiate with the Norwegian authorities to ensure Imad will not be deported back to Russia in case he will be sent back to Norway.

Amin and Mourad were hoping to travel to a country that was not Norway, but they were hesitant in crossing the Mediterranean Sea. As a new migrant route through Russia became a convenient option for me, they both decided to make Norway a transit country. However, the Norwegian police stopped them on the borders and Norway became a destination. The new migrant route that was cheaper and less risky at the beginning also triggered the interests of other Syrians such as Imad to flee to Europe. As the Russian route was relatively new and those who were taking that journey had very basic knowledge about it and could not further investigate through the experiences of previous travelers, many found themselves in an uncertain situation after arriving in Norway and finding out about its shortcomings.

3.4. Types of Networks that Change Aspirations and Trajectories

The destination country of Amin and Murad shifted due to the new migrant route. In some other cases, networks played a more prominent role in shaping the decisions during the journeys. Omar and Ayman changed their final destinations in the course of the journeys or after reaching the country where they were planning to establish themselves. By examining their migratory trajectories, I will reveal the role that various types of networks played in shaping their individual priorities and thus, the trajectories.

3.4.1 The Strong-Weak Networks that Shaped Ayman's Destination Choice

Ayman's final destination preference has been modified twice from different types of network during his trajectory. While a stronger network convinced him to flee to Europe and settle in the Netherlands, a much weaker network that he established during his trip made him consider Norway as a final destination.

After staying in Egypt for two years, Ayman decided to travel to Turkey with his family, and then flee alone to the Netherlands where he was aiming to join his friend. As Ayman did not

have enough financial resources, he could not travel together with his wife and kids who finally stayed in Istanbul. In August 2015, Ayman joined his brother and his nephews in Istanbul who escaped from Syria due to the military conscription. Together, they took a bus to Izmir to find a smuggler and travel to Greece.

The boat journey from Izmir to Greece was very precarious as the boat was driving without a driver and got broken in the middle of the journey. After arriving in Athens, the group traveled to Macedonia where the policemen were attacking some people on the borders. Throughout the Balkan route, Ayman mentioned that they were either crossing the borders by walking or taking buses and vans according to the financial capabilities and health situation of the travelers. As he had health issues and could not walk long distances, he was being obliged to pay to drivers. Ayman stated that the travelers were in contact through social networks with those who were ahead of them in the journey and hearing about the problems they were encountering. Even though the news about the detention of the migrants by the Hungarian policemen was scaring Ayman and those who were with him, the latter managed to arrive to Austria safely. In Vienna, Ayman reported that the new arrivals received "the best treatment" at the train station and welcomed by a crowd of volunteers and activists. Afterwards, Ayman had to be separated from his relatives who opted to go to Germany as he was still planning to settle in the Netherlands.

""In Greece, they made us sleep three days under the rain. They made us eat poisoned food in Greece. I said we did not flee the war in our countries to die of food poisoning here. The NGOs were behaving very well with us unlike the government. There were volunteers from all over Europe. My shoe was broken and one German volunteer went to buy new ones.

In Austria, we received the best treatment. I started to cry there and I forgot all the hardships that I went through for 15 days during the journey. (They treated us) as if we are kids who lost their parents: The hugs, the flowers, the kisses, the food, etc. We were surprised by the treatment. When we arrived to Austria, my feet were hurting so much due to the walk and sleeping under the trees. They said that those who want to stay in Austria are welcome to do so. Until then I wasn't thinking of Austria, as I was willing to go to the Netherlands." - Ayman

At the train station in Vienna, Ayman asked for the assistance of a volunteer in order to buy his tickets and continue the journey. As the volunteer was also from Syria, Ayman started to ask him

questions in Arabic about the Netherlands and the other European countries. The volunteer did not recommend the Netherlands to him stating that it is not suitable for families. In the meantime, Ayman expressed interests in moving to a country that is not a major migrant hosting country, and asked the volunteer if he can buy him a ticket "to the furthest country" in Europe where "no people live". The volunteer suggested Norway, and mentioned that family reunification in the Nordic country does not last more than six months. Ayman reported that he did not know anything about Norway except the Oslo Agreement regarding the peace talks between Palestine and Israel. While Ayman trusted the volunteer and decided to move to Norway, he found out that the family reunification process is taking a much longer time for the newcomers who are being granted protection.

It is important to examine the external conditions that played a prominent role in changing Ayman's decision. First of all, he was traveling with large crowds of migrants who were going to settle in specific countries. By recalling the experience of the Syrian refugees in the Near East, Ayman could have assumed that larger numbers of migrants would oblige the local authorities to put more restrictions on refugees in the long run. Ayman also stated that some of his relatives who were planning to settle in Germany changed their mind after arriving in Vienna and encountering the large masses of the people who were planning to reach Germany. Moreover, the warm welcoming of the refugees by the volunteers in Vienna lead Ayman to have a trustworthy attitude towards them and have a positive outlook to their suggestions.

Finally, it could also be assumed that Ayman had knowledge in the English language and was able to buy his tickets without needing assistance. Eventually, he could have moved to the Netherlands instead without having an opportunity to interact with the volunteer who played a major role in shaping his choices. Thus, internal dispositions partially play a role in the way migrants interact and get influenced from other the external conditions such as the networks. Unlike Ayman, Salim who was using his personal skills to organize his trip to Norway needed less interaction with networks during his travel. Also, he way Ayman decided to settle in Norway shows how some people discount personal ambitions and plans during such uncertain journeys through which they encounter several contradictory moments and witness emotional upheavals. Sometimes, they simply get influenced by the factors around them and thus, they change their routes accordingly. Regardless of the information that the refugees gather about the country that

they wish to settle in and all the preparations that they make before the journeys, several unexpected events manipulate their decisions. Even though Ayman was specially interested in arriving to the Netherlands for the purpose of receiving adequate healthcare, he suddenly changed his mind in Vienna and opted to move to Norway without investigating about the Norwegian healthcare system.

"I had a friend who came to Norway two years before and he used to insult and say it is bad. He had a heart operation that went very hard here. He did not recommend me to come here. Thank God I forgot him completely." –Ayman

3.4.2 From "follow the Wave" to Individual Migration Aspirations: The Case of Omar

In the preceding chapter, I explained how the idea of migrating becomes easier within a group that experiences a high level of mobility. While taking the decision, the abilities and networks play less crucial role. However, during the mobility phase when migrants interact with various types of networks that they either possess or establish while being on the move, individual aspirations and plans could become more concrete.

In the preceding chapter, I explained how Omar was influenced by his friends to flee to Europe and decided to follow the waves of Syrians without having an individual destination country in mind. In May 2015, Omar and his friends left Turkey. After being stopped by the Turkish police for three consecutive times and spending a few days in a prison, the group finally reached Greece. After that, Omar and his friends took the Balkan route that was full of adventures for them, as they had to walk for 18 hours in Serbia by passing through wild animals during the journey. In Hungary, a smuggler visited Omar and his friends in the hotel that was hosting a large number of travelers and offered to help them travel to Munich. Even though Omar did not have a specific final destination in mind during the journey, he was mainly hearing about people who were planning to reach to Germany where he had many Syrian friends. Omar did not have enough knowledge about the system in Germany, but he was aware that the family reunification process, which was crucial for Omar, was relatively easier in Germany.

"Back then (May 2015), people were talking about Germany, they were saying that as a young guy, I could have my diplomas recognized in Germany and continue my studies there and work. Even when I was in Lebanon, we were hearing people saying, "I'm going to Germany". Norway was not that common."- Omar

Thus, Germany was supposed to be Omar's final destination. Nevertheless, after he had arrived in Munich, Omar was not fully convinced about his destination choice, and he eventually refused to provide his fingerprints at the police. Instead, he chose to visit his friends in Berlin and after that, a refugee camp in Hamburg. In the latter, Omar had the opportunity to be exposed to the stories and to different point of views of refugees who had different levels of knowledge about the asylum situation in various European countries. In total, Omar stayed in Germany for ten days, and at last, he concluded that Norway was the best option for him as the Nordic country was hosting relatively less Syrians than the rest of the countries. Omar's arrival to Germany coincided with the surge in the number of new arrivals that was putting pressure on the local resources and delaying the processing of the asylum application of many new comers. Also, Omar's friend who hosted him in Berlin had arrived nine months before him and was still waiting a decision for his asylum application. It is also noteworthy that Omar fled to Europe after residing in Lebanon for a few years and experiencing the restrictions that have been imposed on the Syrians due to the increase in the number of refugees.

"It (having fewer number of refugees in a given country) helps maybe in getting your residency permit faster. As it became easier for people to come to Germany, many started to go there and it started to take longer for people to get their documents. This thing (of opening borders) is definitely not wrong but I thought it would affect negatively. So I was confused between Norway and Finland. Even Sweden was not an option for me." -Omar

Thus, Omar continued his journey to Norway aiming to get his asylum application quickly processed. On the other hand, Omar did not have enough knowledge about the family reunification system in Norway and during the interview, he expressed regretful thoughts of the decision that he took as he was still waiting to be granted a refugee status.

Similar to Omar, Hadi who left Syria in 2013 did not have a clear destination country in mind, and he was merely following the path of the people who were going to Sweden. During his

journey, he established networks with various other migrants who helped him have a clear vision of what he wants to achieve after migration. While transiting in Italy, he was told by other Syrian migrants who had contacts in Sweden that the conditions were deteriorating in Sweden due to high numbers of Syrian newcomers. In the meantime, Hadi met another family who told him that there are good job opportunities in Norway for engineers. The examples of Hadi and Omar shows that some migrants with lower levels of preparedness and aspirations are more likely to be influenced by the information that they get from their networks during their trajectories. Others like Ibrahim and Salim, who had higher degrees of preparedness and more personal information about their desired destination country before taking the trip were less influenced by the networks that they had during their trajectories.

"On the way, I met people who told me the Netherlands is the best country so I decided to go there… I did not want to go to Sweden [anymore] because the numbers were already high there. I was hearing that family reunification was taking a year. This was very problematic for me as my only aim was to take my family away from there. [Then,] I met a family who told me that the weather in Norway is so bad and depressing, but because I am an engineer, there are many job opportunities there for me."- Hadi

In the previous paragraphs, I showed how some journeys had been altered regardless of the pre-departure preparations and the personal preferences regarding destination choices that some respondents put forward. Both Omar and Ayman's aspirations and trajectories had been shaped by what they had witnessed during their journeys and chose to settle in a country different from the one they previously considered. Omar was initially aiming to arrive in Germany largely because the masses of Syrians who were traveling with him at that time had Germany in mind. However, the increasing number of new arrivals that were putting pressure on local reception centers in Germany, and the discontent of the people that he interacted with while being there convinced him to continue his journey to Norway.

3.5. Living in Norway: The End of the Trajectories and Aspirations?

In the preceding sections, I discussed the migratory trajectories of some Syrian interviewees by carefully examining the internal and external conditions that convinced them to flee to Europe and drove them to Norway. Some respondents such as Salim had destination Norway in mind before taking the journeys. For Amin and Murad, transit Norway became a final destination after taking the Russian route. For others like Ayman and Omar, destination Norway became an option after they left for Europe and during the journey. Overall, the interviewees had various levels of knowledge and aspirations before arriving in Norway depending on various conditions. Thus, it would be crucial to examine the extent to which the past aspirations of the migrants and perceptions of Norway hinder or facilitate the integration process of new migrants in Norway, and see whether the trajectories and migration aspirations have ended. For the latter, a follow-up investigation with the Syrian migrants would be crucial.

The different perceptions that the migrants showed vis-à-vis Norway could largely be explained by the levels of Norwegian aspirations that the migrants had before finding themselves "settled" in the Nordic country. After being stopped in Norway, Amin stated that he first had a positive outlook about Norway, and he even immediately recommended his brother in Lebanon to follow his journey. In the following weeks, the delays in his application process made him change his attitude. During the interviews, both Amin and Mourad were still waiting to have their refugee application interviews with the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI). Given the fear related to their application status, Amin constantly showed a skeptical view about Norway and his future. Also, he felt trapped in the new country, as he was obliged by the policemen to provide his fingerprints on the Russian borders. He also reported fearing deportation in the future along with all those who entered Norway through Russia. He also stated that he became disappointment after arriving in Norway and finding out that the government no longer provides humanitarian asylum to the Syrian refugees, as Norway was one of the countries that he considered before migrating. Given the fact that Amin had high levels of aspiration and plans when he decided to flee to Europe, his migration aspirations were still evolving, as he was still not feeling himself in the final destination.

Ayman arrived in Norway in September 2015. However, he had to wait until Spring 2016 to be granted a refugee status. In the meantime, Ayman experienced long psychological distress at the reception center waiting for to be granted protection in order to start with the family reunification

process. He was also remembering how costly the journey was for him and questioning its rightfulness. As per the "aspiration adaptation theory" migrants, who take several risks such as investing huge resources to reach a desired destination, arrive to the destination places with high expectations as they seek to match their aspirations in the new country with the risks that they took during the journey (Selten, 1998). Before arriving, the respondents did not question the rightfulness of paying money to smugglers in order to cross state borders, as they were aware of their intentions. After arriving in the destination countries, Ayman noticed a huge dilemma in the European asylum system stands as a proud system committed to provide protection to people fleeing war on one hand, and indirectly expects from the refugees to pay money to criminal groups in order to access those rights on the other hand.

"Is there a European Union? Are there human rights? I am selling my house properties to pay to smugglers and what is Norway giving me in return? I am so thankful that they are hosting us, but they are paying me 300 EUR per month. The money that I paid to the smugglers will take me more than 1 year here to earn it back. This is first, second, why don't they (the Norwegian government) just go and pick the refugees? Why should we wait for two years in Egypt? The money that the *smugglers benefitted from, the European governments could have taken them (from us) instead and spent on the refugees from the pockets of the refugees. We could have applied personally for asylum in European countries and spent that money on ourselves without being a burden on the economy of Europe and the European citizens." - Ayman*

On the other hand, traveling to a strange country with weak aspirations helped Karim to easily settle in the new country, as he did not have high expectations when he migrated. Karim arrived in Norway in October 2013, and he got his positive answer in November when he was staying in a transit camp. After that, he was transferred to Bergen where he started the process of family reunification. For that purpose, he needed 5400 Norwegian Krons for which he had to take additional loans from friends. In the meantime, he started learning Norwegian and work voluntarily to learn a new profession. Karim was first informed from informal sources that the family reunification was going to last 9 months, and in September 2014, he traveled to Istanbul in order to accompany his wife and kids in their trip to Norway. However, he had to travel back alone, and instead the process of family reunification lasted one year and a half. After the reunification, Karim and his family were resettled around Stavanger although Karim had a strong

interest in staying in Bergen. Currently, the couple is attending Norwegian language classes and the kids are going to school. For Karim, having a luxurious Norwegian life is not a priority. His ultimate goal is to secure a comfortable life to his kids and help them relive their childhood years that they lost in Syria and Turkey.

Enchained in the Reception Center: an Obstacle to the Aspirations?

It is important to mention that the respondents who were still waiting to get their residency permits in Norway, were having more skeptical views about the country than those who had legal residency. For the asylum seekers waiting to get refugee status, their Norwegian aspirations will be achieved only after leaving the centers. During the interview, Salim was still awaiting to have his interview regarding his asylum application. After getting a refugee status, Salim is confident that he will succeed in Norway given his educational as well as professional background. He hopes that he will be placed in a good city where he will have more interaction with Norwegian people, which he lacks in the camp that he is placed in and which is isolated from the rest of Norway according to him.

"Everything will be okay once I leave this place. Once I leave this place, I will be in Norway. Now I'm still not in Norway." – Salim

The migrants also expressed dissatisfaction about the location of the asylum reception centers where they have been placed and which were isolated from the rest of Norway. They recalled the living conditions in their home country where it was crucial for people to live close to urban and overcrowded areas. Some respondents mentioned segregation in the reception centers in terms of the marital status of the asylum seekers and the absence of interaction across the groups has sometimes generated fights.

"As a single man, I only meet men here. There is no interaction. They don't care about us. They just give us food and don't make us do anything. Also, no one cares about single men. They care about families and under aged children." -Salim

"It (life at the reception center) was good in the sense that it was for someone who is seeking

asylum, but it was very isolated. We had to walk one hour to get to the supermarket. The buses were very expensive and not every day. There used to be problems between different groups: Afghans vs Arabs, Kurds vs Arabs, etc. for vague sectarian and political reasons. I used to stay away from them because I fled from such problems." -Ibrahim

---

The Heterogeneity of the Syrians in Norway

It is important for the Norwegian government to distinguish the heterogeneity of the Syrian new comers in terms of age and marital status as well as the cultural origins that create tensions within the group. First of all, many interviewees from minority religions expressed feelings of discontent and disappointment for being placed with the people from the religious sect that many refugees "are fleeing from". One respondents stated that he was badly treated at one of the transit camps because the center manager was an Arab speaking individual who "did not like the Non-Muslims" as he narrates. In fact, the Syrian refugees are largely escaping from the war that is badly affecting on all the population of Syria regardless of their religious affiliations. However, the tensions between the different groups should be perceived and better addressed by the local authorities in order to avoid the spillover of the conflict in Syria on the Syrian community in the areas where the Syrian refugees live and avoid their repolarization. In order to make a reception center more transparent, employees from the same culture as the asylum seekers should be appointed to foster the communication and maintain strong relations between the asylum seekers and those who represent the state authorities. Nevertheless, the authorities should ensure the minorities are well represented and have the adequate channels to speak about the concerns of their particular groups among the bigger groups of the asylum seekers.

"The person who we were supposed to complain to [at a transit reception center] was an Arab. We run away from the Arabs because we know they won't help us. Once they know we are from a minority group in Syria, they make us live in hell. I came here because I need help from Norwegians and not Arabs." – A respondent

---

VII.   Conclusion

Irregular migration is not only the mere crossing of the Mediterranean region from a coastline to another. It is a complex phenomenon that encompasses many elements at the macro and micro levels. The conditions that shape the migrant's aspirations before and after crossing the Mediterranean region and their influence on the trajectories should be outlined to understand the arrival of particular people in specific locations in Europe. In this research, I discuss the origins of the Syrian influx at both macro and micro levels which together provide a holistic understanding of what drives a person to take the irregular route and to settle in a specific location far away from home. I chose to discuss the example of Norway as the country quickly turned into a popular destination among Syrians regardless of the absence of a significant Syrian community in the country. The data I collected from a diverse group of Syrian migrants in Norway highly reflects the diversity of their trajectories.

Over the past few years, Europe has been witnessing the biggest influx of migrants since the end of World War Two. An increasing number of Syrian asylum seekers, who constituted the highest number among the new arrivals, originally arrived to countries that historically absorbed a large number of Syrians and Arab migrants such as Sweden and Germany. Later, Syrians started reaching countries that did not have a substantial Syrian presence, but are characterized by highly advanced economies and welfare schemes such as Norway. The latter raised a very prominent issue regarding the rightfulness of granting protection to people who are fleeing war and also seeking economic prosperity. Moreover, amidst rising terrorist attacks associated with radical Islam, the Syrian refugee discourse of many political parties and civil society members in Europe has shifted to public safety over empathy by tending to perceive the newcomers as a security threat to Europe. They depicted the great wave of migrants arriving in various European countries has been as an invasion of a group of homogenous people who cover their hidden plans under protection claims. Many policy makers also argued that asylum seekers are the mere victims of human cartels who smuggle vulnerable people by disregarding the actual migration aspirations of people. All these contradictory explanations demonstrate the overall lack and biased understanding of the migratory trajectories of Syrian migrants and underestimate the

macro-economic, legal conditions, and specific individual aspirations that shape the journeys of the migrants.

The contexts that shape migration aspirations and the decisions of the migrants are highly underestimated by many policy makers. Many countries engage in actions that hinder the movement of people in order to make them immobile without understanding the rationale behind the choices they make. During the initial years of the Syrian refugee crisis in the near East, many European policy makers had first advocated to increase financial contributions to the humanitarian activities in Syria's neighboring countries which host the highest share of Syrian migrants. The aim was mainly to keep migrants away from the fortress of Europe. However, the lack of rigorous refugee legal frameworks in the first asylum countries coupled with exclusionary policies against Syrian refugees hindered the activities of the international relief agencies. The case of Lebanon clearly demonstrated how the Syrian population increasingly became frustrated with the living conditions imposed on them in a protracted refugee situation. Amidst tighter border controls and lack of resettlement opportunities for Syrian refugees, the migrants increasingly viewed irregular migration as the last resort to alter their realities.

In order to understand why people migrate to Europe, it is also important to examine the individual experiences. Even though some interviewees have long had migration aspirations, they have continuously opposed to the idea of leaving Syria and feared mobility. As the fighting intensified across Syria, the affected people gradually lost all things that used to define the homeland they have long been attached to, most notably the familial environment. Thus, the interviewees started to perceive migration as the sole life-saving option given the alternatives. Also, after being displaced within Syria or to its neighboring countries, they increasingly became more acquainted with the idea of migration, and viewed it not only as a temporary solution to escape from persecutions, but also a means to solve economic and legal issues. In the first asylum countries, migrants largely living in urban areas slowly gained knowledge about their rights as refugees and became exposed to the challenges and opportunities that a migrant could encounter in the absence of legal protection and economic uncertainty. Eventually, they developed a "culture of migration" that encourages the movement of more people with various degrees of migration aspirations and financial capabilities.

In the absence of a "culture of migration" during the first years of the crisis, the migrants' abilities and the networks were crucial to take the decision of migrating to Europe and planning the journeys given the high costs and risks that irregular migration necessitates. On the other hand, those abilities as well as the personal knowledge of individuals proved to have lesser role in encouraging people to leave when the group was surrounded by a culture of migration. However, in the course of the journeys, the individual traits as well as the networks shaped the decisions of the migrants at various levels, especially on the destination country choices. While some migrants were eager to overcome various barriers and arrive to a pre-selected country of destination, some others did not have a fixed destination in mind and were influenced by several external conditions that they met throughout their journey and which affected on their decisions at various levels.

Those who had relatively stronger aspirations, good knowledge about the destination country, and had the financial ability to finance themselves while being stuck in transit achieved their aim of arriving to the countries that they wanted. For others, the destination country choices have been shaped, diverted and enforced by different personal and non-personal dynamics throughout their journeys. Many respondents reported not having a destination in mind, especially when migration was driven by sudden degrading of living conditions and not by European aspirations. The elderly men for instance, who are bound by family responsibilities, fled to Europe having their families in mind, and eventually, they had less control over their journeys. Due to the need to arrive to the destination country and do family reunification, some of them had to change plans during the journey. Eventually, strong networks as well as the weak networks that they established during their journeys largely influenced their individual decisions.

Amidst a massive influx of people, the research showed how weaker networks play a more prominent role in shaping the final decisions of migrants than the stronger networks during the journeys. Diaspora networks have long explained migrants' aspirations and behavior. Even though Norway did not have a significant Syrian presence, some migrants, who had networks in the Nordic country from before, the latter validates the old migrant network theory that explains how diaspora networks influence the destination choices of migrants and lead to chain migration. However, some cases that I discussed highlight how those networks that first transmit the image of good life in Europe and encourage many individuals to take the journeys, the people on move

do not necessarily end up in the same countries of their networks where strong diaspora communities exist.

In the course of the journeys, many networks transmit information about the degrading conditions in the countries due to increasing numbers of new arrivals. Eventually, they start to establish relation with individuals who have information about other hosting countries. This phenomenon largely explains why several interviewees ended up in Norway. Even though their initial plans were to settle in "more popular countries" such as Sweden and Germany, they were later driven to Norway due to information that was transmitted to them from networks found in those countries. The examples given clearly highlight the complex role that migrant networks play that shape aspirations and migratory trajectories before and after departure amidst a high number of influxes and lead to multi-level chain migrations in the long run.

On the other hand, reliance on information received from weak networks especially when migrants arrived to their final destination and find out another reality leads to undesired outcomes. In the context of irregular migration, people do not have access to expertise and legal channels to get information about the countries that they aim to migrate to. Many of them rely on informal networks while taking a certain decision. In their turn, hosting states turn that reality even more complicated by continuously changing asylum policies that eventually affect on the lives of many migrants in the long run. It should also be mentioned that Norway was supposed to be a transit country for many who are now settled in Norway especially those who took the "unknown" Russian route to enter the Schengen Area, and later were stopped by the Norwegian police. The respondents explained that by recalling the lack of information from previous networks about the Russian route. Therefore, as Syrians are arriving in Norway for different reasons and various levels of aspirations and knowledge about the country, further research with the Syrian community in Norway is crucial to understand the extent to which past aspirations and motivations to settle in Norway influence their integration in the new country.

This research provides solid counter arguments to state actors that have biased understanding of irregular migration. These actors largely argue that the absence of a significant community in their country will not make them attractive to people fleeing war and marginalization. Within the context of forced migration, migrants are largely depicted as desperate people who follow the waves of people who move to a specific direction. However, I showed how some respondents

depicted the mere absence of Syrians in Norway as a convincing reason for them to flee to the Nordic state. The lack of a significant Syrian diaspora in Norway was rather seen advantageous for the refugees arriving in Norway with the assumption that having fewer asylum seekers in a given country increases their chances of getting asylum and allows them to have access to more resources. Their aspirations are largely based on their experiences in the first asylum countries as well as the situation in major refugee hosting European states where far-right parties gain popularity as a result of relaxed migration regimes and mass-exodus. Many Syrians arrived to Norway having very little knowledge about the asylum system in Norway, but were skeptical about following the masses of migrants to other more popular hosting countries such as Germany.

In 2016, the European Union achieved its aim of mitigating the influx of Syrians through a bilateral agreement with Turkey. Nevertheless, as the agreement does not address the root causes of the irregular migration, Syrian migrants will continue to find the means to overcome the individual and external obstacles in order to arrive to places where they envision a better life. As Napoleon Bonaparte said "Imagination rules the world", and the migration trends of the Syrians will increasingly become irreversible. As the culture of migration continues to be increasingly widespread among Syrians, the idea of seeking a "better life" elsewhere will persist.

<div align="center">***END***</div>

Bibliography

Agier, M. (2011). *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee camps and Humanitarian Government* .

Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization.* University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN, USA.

Bauman, Z. (2004). *Wasted lives: modernity and its outcasts.* Oxford: Polity.

Boyd, M. (1989). Family and Personal Networks in International Migration. *International Migration Review , 22* (3), 638-671.

Bredeloup, S. (2010). Sahara Transit: Times, Spaces, People. *Popular. Space Place* .

Brekke, J. P., & Brochmann, G. (2014). Stuck in Transit. The Dublin Regulations, National Discrepancies and Secondary Migration of Asylum Seekers in Europe. *Journal of Refugee Studies , 28*, 145-162.

Carling, J. (2002). Migration in the age of involuntary immobility: theoretical reflections and Cape Verdean experiences. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies , 28* (1), 5-42.

Christophersen, M. (2014). *Absence of Syrian Refugee Camps in Lebanon Heats Up Labor Competition and Local Tensions.* The Global Observatory.

Christophersen, M., Thorleifsson, C., & Tiltnes, A. A. (2013). *Coping Strategies and Local Responses to Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.* Oslo: Fafo report.

Collier, G. (1994). *Social origins of mental ability.* New York: Willey.

Crisp, J. (2014). *The Syrian Refugee Crisis: A Plan of Action for the United States. Refugees International.* Retrieved from http://refugeesinternational.org/policy/testimony/syrian-refugee-crisis-plan-action-united-states

Czaika, M., & de Haas, H. (2014). The Globalization of Migration: Has the World Become More Migratory? *International Migration Review , 48*, 283-323.

Czaika, M., & Vothknecht, M. (2014). Migration and aspirations - are migrants trapped on a hedonic treadmill. *IZA Journal of Migration , 3* (1).

de Haas, H. (2010). The internal dynamics of migration processes: a theoretical inquiry. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies , 36* (10), 1587-1617.

Duhaime, L. (n.d.). *Duhaime's Law Dictoionary*. Retrieved from duhaime.org: http://www.duhaime.org/LegalDictionary.aspx

Duvell, F. (2011). Irregular Migration. In Betts A (ed). *Global Migration Governance* , 78-108.

Epstein, G. (2008). Herd and Network Effects in Migration Decision-Making. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies , 34* (4), 567-583.

Epstein, G. S., & Gang, I. N. (2006). The Influence of Others on Migration Plans. *Review of Development Economics , 10* (4), 652-665.

EUROSTAT/ECHO. (2015). *Aid and Asylum Map*. Retrieved 2016, from http://syrianrefugees.eu/?page_id=199

Genzuk, M. (2010). *A Synthesis of Ethnographic Research.* Retrieved from http://www-bcf.usc.edu/~genzuk/Ethnographic_Research.pdf

GoL & UN. (2014). *Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2015-2016.* Retrieved from UNHCR: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php

Griffiths, M. R., Rogers, A., & Anderson, B. (2013). *Migration, Time and Temporalities: Review and Prospect.* Oxford: COMPAS.

Grillo, R. (2007). Betwixt and Between: Trajectories and Projects of Transmigration. *Ethnic Migration Studies , 33*, 199-217.

Haddad, E. (2008). *The Refugee in International Society: Between Sovereigns.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

ILO. (2013). *Assessment of the Impact of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Their Employment Profile.* Retrieved from http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_240134.pdf

Kakissis, J. (2014). *Sweden's Tolerance Is Tested By Tide Of Syrian Immigrants.* Retrieved from npr: http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2014/12/05/368640533/swedens-tolerance-is-tested-by-tide-of-syrian-immigrants

Koppenberg, S. (2012). Where Do Forced Migrants Stand in the Migration and Development Debate? *Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration , 2* (1), 77-90.

Kupiszewski, M. (2002). How trustworthy are forecasts of international migration between Poland and the European Union? *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies , 28* (4), 627-645.

Local. (2013). *Sweden Offers Residency to All Syrian Refugees*. Retrieved from The Local Sweden: http://www.thelocal.se/20130903/50030

Lutterbeck. (2013). Across the desert, across the sea: Migrant smuggling into and from Libya. In S. P. Z (Ed.), *Migration, security, and citizenship in the Middle East: new perspectives.* (pp. 137-166). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Massey, D. (1993). Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal. *Population and Development Review , 19* (3), 431-466.

Massey, D., Ajarcon, R., Durans, J., & Gonzalez, H. (1987). Return to Aztlan: The Social Process of Internnational Migration from Western Mexico. *Berkeley: University of California Press* .

Morris, K. (2013). *Sweden's Asylum Offer to Refugees from Syria. BBC News. Retrieved from: Sweden's asylum offer to refugees from Syria.* Retrieved from BBC News: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-24635791

Nederveen Pieterse, J. (2000). My Paradigm or Yours? Alternative Development, Post-Development, Reflexive Development. *Development and Change , 29* (2), 343-373.

NRC Lebanon. (2014). *The Consequences of Limited Legal Status for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.* Retrieved from https://www.nrc.no/resources/reports/the-consequences-of-limited-legal-status-for-syrian-refugees-in-lebanon/

Odden, G. (2010). *Migrants dans la ville : une étude socio-anthropologique des mobilités migrantes `a Salamanque.* Poitiers: Sociologie. Universite de Poitiers.

Ozden, S. (2013). *Syrian Refugees in Turkey.* Fiesole: European University Institute. MPC Research Report 2013-05.

Papastergiadis, N. (2000). *The Turbulence of Migration. Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity.* Polity Press: Cambridge, UK.

Schapendonk, J. (2012). Turbulent Trajectories: African Migrants on Their Way to the European Union. *Societies , 2* (2), 27-41.

Schmitter Heisler, B. (2000). From Assimilation to Segmented Integration, from the American Experience to the Global Arena. *Migration Theory* , 77-95.

Selten, R. (1998). Aspiration adaptation theory. *ournal of Mathematical Psychology , 42* (2-3), 191-214.

SFCG. (2014). Dialogue and Local Response Mechanisms to Conflict Between Host Communities and Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.

Shaheen, K. (2015). *Life Goes from bad tp worse for Syrians after Lebanon tightens border.* Retrieved from The Guardian: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/12/syrians-lebanon-border-controls-un- refugee

Strauss, & Corbin. (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research. Grounded Theory, Procedures and Techniques.* Sage Publication.

The Local. (2015). *Norway Launches Anti-refugee Facebook Page*. Retrieved from http://www.thelocal.no/20151108/norway-launches-anti-refugee-facebook-page

Torres, G., & Polhom, B. (2008). *One-Quarter of World's Population May Wish to Migrate.* Gallup World.

UDI. (2015). *Statistics on Immigration*. Retrieved from UDI: https://www.udi.no/en/statistics-and-analysis/statistics/

UN. (1951). *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.* Retrieved from UNHCR: http://swigecms001.unhcr.local/protection/refprotbasic/3b66c2aa10/convention-protocol-relating-status-refugees.html

UNHCR. (2016). *Syria conflict at 5 years: the biggest refugee and displacement crisis of our time demands a huge surge in solidarity*. Retrieved from UNHCR: http://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2016/3/56e6e3249/syria-conflict-5-years-biggest-refugee-displacement-crisis-time-demands.html

Valenta, M. (2010). *Refugees' Social Trajectories and Trajectories of the Self.* Retrieved from Qualitative Research: http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1390/2979

Van Hear, N. (2012). Mixed Migration: Policy Challenges,. *Oxford: COMPAS Policy Primer.*

Van Heelsum, A. (2016). Why migration will continue: aspirations and capabilities of Syrians and Ethiopians with different educational backgrounds. *Ethnic and Racial Studies , 39* (8), 1301-1309.

Warnes Kjeoy, I. J. (2010). *Dreaming of Europe: Migrant Networks and Migration Aspirations in Four Areas of Senegal.* Retrieved from https://www.duo.uio.no/bitstream/handle/10852/36344/KJEOY.pdf?sequence=3

Appendix: Interview Guide

I. **Personal Data (to be filled by the end of the interview):**

Country and city of birth:

Hometown in Syria:

Citizenship: Syrian / Palestinian Refugee from Syria / other (specify)

Age:

Date of departure from the city of residence in Syria:

Date of departure from Syria:

If applied for asylum in a neighboring country, date of arrival in the first asylum country

Year and month of arrival to Norway:

Education:

Profession:

Marital status:

Number of kids:

Age of the kids:

Place of residence of family:

II. Interview QUESTIONS

For the interviews, I opted to give the floor to the respondents to tell their stories and I tried to not interrupt them as much as I could. However, I made sure I have answers for the following questions:

Can you tell me about how your life was back in Syria before the war? (Professional, personal life)

Have you had plans to migrate and settle abroad before the war? If yes, was it hard?

What happened after the start of the conflict? (Stayed home, moved to another city or another country? If yes, ask about the journey)

If moved to another city or country, how were the living conditions there? How did you secure your needs?

So when did you start to think about migrating and fleeing from Syria or the first asylum country?

Did you have a specific country in mind?

If yes, what made you interested in that specific country?

If not, what were you searching for in a new destination? (rights, opportunities…)

How did you gather information about the trip and your desired destination?

If the person did not mention Norway, did you know about Norway before you travel? What did you know and how?

Which means gave you access to the smugglers? (Financial mean, personal contacts, social networking)

What are the things that made you worried the most before you take the journey? (Family left behind? Changing asylum rules? Dangerous journey?)

Which route did you take? Can you tell me about your journey?

What **challenges** and **opportunities** did you encounter during your trip that influenced on your plans and travel journeys?

Did you know about asylum policy changes during your trip? How did you react to these changes?

What happened after you arrived in Norway?

Did it match your expectations and was it the way it was described to you by others (notably on social networks and by friends)? If not, explain.

Are you happy with the choice that you made?

Would you recommend Norway to other Syrians? What do you tell them about your journey and Norway?

What are your plans for the future? (Going back, reuniting with the family, job…)

END

Declaration of Authenticity

I hereby declare that the dissertation submitted is my own and that all passages and ideas that are not mine have been fully and properly acknowledged. I am aware that I will fail the entire dissertation should I include passages and ideas from other sources and present them as if they were my own.

Name: Sevag Ohanian

Place and Date: Berlin, June 30th, 2016

Signature:

Sevag Ohanian