Life on hold:

Technology, displacement and war in the 21st century

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

This thesis is concerned with two prominent phenomena in our contemporary world; the mass displacement of people across the globe and the increasing interconnectedness of people brought on by the internet and represented by the ubiquitous smartphone. Drawing from the vocabulary of liminality, this thesis offers a comprehensive account of what life in displacement is like for Syrian refugees residing in Izmir, Turkey. After the advent of the EU-Turkey deal, Syrians are prevented from travelling to Europe and are still unable to return to Syria owing to the ongoing complex political emergency. In Izmir and across Turkey, Syrians contend with an increasingly wary host community as well as a lack of legal protection and support services. Nonetheless, as will be illustrated through the course of this thesis, Syrians have adopted multiple strategies for navigating this liminal situation through their smartphones. The smartphone allows Syrians to organise life in Izmir, reflect on past homes as well as dream of a future home beyond the liminality. By applying Appadurai's production of locality framework as well as Brun and Fabos' constellations of home framework, we can see how context affects locality on the one hand as well as how refugees engage in the agential practice of making home on the other. In addition, the concept of the *warscape* will be deployed and developed to highlight how the crisis in Syria is experienced through the smartphone. I hope through this thesis to bring out the often overlooked human tales which showcase the injustice of the EU-Turkey deal specifically as well as what it means to live in a situation of protracted displacement in the 21st century.

Introduction

The tears streamed down Amina's face as she recounted the story of how she came to be separated from her sons.

Amina lost her ten year old son, Rador in the summer of 2015. He had accompanied his dad for a wedding in the Turkish coastal city of Izmir. Though Amina had been reluctant to let her young son leave their home in Istanbul, she eventually relented after he pleaded that he desperately needed a holiday as in the four years he had been in Turkey he had been working non-stop.

After three days of no contact with neither her husband nor her son, eventually Amina picked up the phone to her husband in a distraught state. He told her that whilst in Izmir he had lost Rador at a petrol station and he had been searching the city up and down since but to no avail.

And so, the hunt for Rador began.

Amina's husband headed back to Syria fearing that Rador had been found by someone and taken back to their homeland. Amina, meanwhile, left Istanbul with her other two sons Jan and Haida and moved to Izmir to devote her time to searching for her youngest child.

For four months, Rador was nowhere to be found in Izmir or Syria. Then one day, Amina received a call from her brother, he told her:

"I have good news for you. I know where Rador is – he's in Germany."

It transpired that on that fateful day when Rador had become momentarily separated from his dad in the petrol station, he had been found by a Syrian man who saw he was crying and asked him why to which Rador replied:

"I have lost my dad."

The man feeling a pang of sympathy for the young Syrian boy vowed to help him. Yet he had misunderstood Rador and thought the boy meant his dad had been killed and that he was completely alone.

Fearing for the young boy's ability to fend for himself in Turkey, in a gesture of kindness the man said that he would get Rador to Europe where he would be looked after.

It was the summer of 2015 and the city of Izmir was rife with smugglers and people desperate to cross to Europe; the streets of Basmane were full of people sleeping rough while they waited to be picked up and taken to their new lives across the water. Accosting a smuggler was easy, you could find them outside the Basmane train station or on one of many Facebook groups. Arranging Rador's trip to

Germany took a matter of hours: the man paid the smuggling fee and entrusted the young boy to another Syrian family who were making the journey.

All the while Rador's father was searching for his son.

In one of the camps in Greece, Rador crossed paths with a man who knew his uncle and offered to let the boy accompany him and his family the rest of the way to Germany. So Rador went with the man, a friend of his uncle's from Aleppo.

Rador successfully made it to Germany and was taken in at a centre for young asylum seekers and refugees. It was there where he eventually received a call from his mother after she was informed of his whereabouts by her brother.

Rador's 16-year old brother Jan was shocked when he found out his youngest brother was alone in Germany and in December 2015 found a way to be smuggled to Europe to join his brother.

Amina, her husband and her remaining son Haida then decided to head to Germany. Their lives in Turkey so far had been punctuated by tragedy and hardship thus it was time for a new start. They paid a smuggler 300 dollars for each of them and packed their bags.

But again, neither fate nor circumstance were on the side of Amina and her family. Whilst making the crossing on the treacherous Aegean sea to Greece, the engine for their flimsy boat broke and they were stranded. They weren't even in Greek waters yet and the Turkish coastguard who spotted them told the passengers to turn the boat around and come back. Of course, the people on board refused; most had sold possessions and abandoned their homes in search of a new life in Europe. They couldn't turn back now.

The coastguards began to fire some warning shots to scare them.

For five hours, the family waited at sea in the overcrowded boat. The waves were getting bigger and the panic was setting in. People were frantically on their smartphones, messaging friends on Whatsapp to notify the Turkish or Greek authorities. They posted messages on Facebook groups to draw attention to their situation. The Turkish coastguard refused to help them.

It was only when someone on board called a person they knew in the Turkish police that the boat was eventually rescued by the coastguard. Amina in vain begged the coastguards to drop them in Greece.

And thus, the plan to be reunited with her sons failed.

Despite the family's best efforts, they couldn't arrange to leave again. It was March 2016 by now. The EU-Turkey deal been formalized, the border was now insurmountable.

To this day, Amina remains separated from Jan and Rador. For now, her only relationship with her sons is via Whatsapp chats with Jan and a weekly phone call with Rador. At the end of our interview, she says to me:

"Had I known that my family were going to be separated in Turkey, I would rather have stayed in Syria and if we had died at least we would have been together."

The tragic story of Amina and her family exemplifies the suffering endured by millions of people at the hands of a violent and unending conflict in Syria and an increasingly militarized border regime which takes no prisoners. Amina and her family lost their home in Aleppo at the beginning of the Syrian crisis and fled to Turkey in 2011. Yet in Turkey they found neither safety nor sanctuary. However, the story of how Amina came to lose her youngest son Rador is telling in many ways. Firstly, it harrowingly highlights the human suffering brought on by the separation of families as a result of Fortress Europe. Amina's story is emblematic of the situation for many, who through the pain of separation can only maintain contact via their smartphones. Without this small tool, Amina would never be able to hear her sons' voices or maintain a relationship with them. Moreover, we can see how porous the border between Greece and Turkey was back in 2015; in a fraction of time Rador was whisked away and put on a boat to Greece with ease. Yet not even a year later, such an act was impossible for Rador's mother who was unable to make the journey for the family to be reunited. Amina's tale demonstrates the changing spatiality of Izmir which was almost overnight transformed from a zone of transit to a zone of liminality.

This thesis will make a contribution to the debate on forced displacement today and the role technology plays in affecting the experience of people like Amina living in situations of protracted displacement. The focal point of this thesis will be how the smartphone influences the refugees' relationship with space – in a virtual and material sense. The overarching question which will thus guide this thesis is:

What role do smartphones play in the production of both spatial and virtual locality for Syrian refugees residing in Izmir as they navigate the situation of liminality wrought by the implementation of the EU-Turkey deal in March 2016 and the ongoing complex political emergency in Syria?

This thesis aims to interrogate the relationship between two significant social phenomena that is the mass displacement of people across the globe and the pervasive use of internet technology. Writing towards the close of the 20th century, Malkki observed that, "there has emerged a new awareness of the global social fact that, now more than perhaps ever before, people are chronically mobile and routinely displaced" (1992: 24). Although Malkki made such an observation over 25 years ago, it is apparent that this notion of chronic mobility has become ever more severe. Today, according to the UNHCR, 65.3 million people across the globe are displaced - 21.3 million of whom are refugees residing outside their country of origin (2017). The issue of displacement is now more salient than ever. Turkey is now the largest refugee hosting country in the world (UNHCR, 2017).

Concomitantly, people are more connected now than ever before with the smartphone giving access to friends, family and information from across the globe at their fingertips. The smartphone, a small hand-held device with access to the internet, GPS services and a digital camera has been noted as an indispensable tool for refugees. Access to the internet allows people to stay in contact with family via applications such as Whatsapp, Viber or Facebook. These communication apps are generally more reliable and cheaper than a normal phone line. The camera too allows people in displacement to share updates on their former and current localities and lives with family members. Whilst GPS serves a practical use; helping people cross borders as well as navigate life in new localities. Smartphones are cheap and are thus more accessible than other forms of technology such as the laptop or tablet.

Much has been written in the media about the critical importance of smartphones for refugees. In an article for *Time* magazine Patrick Witty describes the smartphone as a "lifeline for refugees" (2015). In addition, an article in *The Economist* cites a figure from the UNHCR which states that refugees can easily spend a third of their income on phone credit (2017). International agencies have been keen to better understand how new technology can be used

to support refugees too; a report from the *Migration Policy Institute* outlines the various apps which have sprung up to support refugees in the current turn to digital humanitarianism (Benton and Glennie, 2016). Yet in this growing discussion on how the smartphone can practically aid refugees as they journey to Europe, the question remains, how does this increased connectivity affect the experience of displacement? and how do refugees who can no longer travel because of the EU-Turkey deal use their phones to negotiate the space around them?

This thesis aims to bridge this gap in three parts; in chapter one, we will look at how Syrian refugees in Izmir use their smartphones to organize life in Izmir. This chapter will conclude with an overview of Mark Duffield's important critique on the perils of overstating the power of digital technology. In chapter two, I will look at how people continue to live the Syrian conflict in the virtual space through their smartphones by tracking updates on the conflict as well as through maintaining relationships with relatives and friends still in the warzone. Finally, in chapter three, I will examine how people both practically plan for as well as dream of a future beyond the liminal space in Izmir. However, first it is necessary to define the term liminality and outline how Izmir came to be a liminal space for Syrian refugees.

i.   'Betwixt' and 'between,' a discussion on liminality

The notion of liminality will be a central theme to this thesis which aims to interrogate the experience of displacement today. Liminality is a word which is often deployed in discussions on forced displacement as it connotes the 'ultimate temporariness of exile' (Malkki, 2002: 35). Brun and Fabos moreover call for a vocabulary of liminality rather than limbo in discussions on forced displacement as this encapsulates the transformative process of living in exile where there is the overarching promise of another state of being or belonging (2015: 10). The concept of liminality which often appears in contemporary accounts on experiences of displacement is a term borrowed from Victor Turner's (1987) anthropological account of *rites de passages* in small-scale societies.

Turner forwarded the concept of liminality in relation to *rites de passage* as connoting the "betwixt" and "between" stage between recognized fixed points in space-time of structural

classification (1969: 234). Turner's discussion on *rites de passage* in small-scale societies borrows from Van Gennep's contention that all rites of transition are marked by three stages; separation, margin (or limen) and aggregation (1969: 235). It is in this second stage, the intervening liminal period, that 'the state of 'the passenger' is ambiguous as he passes through a realm which has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state' (ibid: 235). The situation for Syrian refugees in Izmir is liminal in that it resembles neither the past in Syria nor the future in Syria or Europe which many hope to attain. Moreover, the experience of liminality for people in displacement is brought on by separation as in stage one of Van Gennep's description though this separation is forced.

Liminality, moreover, is a period of structural invisibility, ambiguity and neutrality as one passes from one state of being to another (Turner, 1969: 236). The liminal personae is no longer classified and not yet classified (ibid: 236). In Cecilia Menjivar's (2006) discussion on the uncertainty produced by living in between documented and undocumented status for Central American migrants residing in the United States, she too adopts a vocabulary of liminality. Menjivar describes the experience of El Salvadorian and Guatemalan migrants as one of "liminal legality." The Central American immigrants in Menjivar's study are quite literally no longer classified and not yet classified in terms of legal citizenship. Menjivar posits that 'the immigrants' uncertain legality transforms them into 'transitional beings' (ibid: 1007) akin to Turner's liminal personae. Nonetheless, whilst Turner emphasizes the empowering and transformative capacity of periods of liminality, Menjivar stresses that when they are extended indefinitely, as is the case with immigrants in her discussion, they can breed uncertainty and lose their empowering potential (ibid: 1007). Whilst, Menjivar discusses the liminality induced by uncertain and in-between legal status for Central American immigrants, this present paper bears relevance to Menjivar's discussion even though Syrian refugees have official legal status. Syrians in Izmir *still* live in a situation of liminality and resultant uncertainty as the status accorded to them is only 'temporary' and falls short of full citizenship or full refugee status as will be highlighted in due course.

Sutton et al (2011) capture the aspect of waiting which is so familiar to many in situations of protracted displacement and which is intrinsically linked to liminality. They emphasise that 'liminality always comes with some sort of waiting; waiting is inherent in liminality' (ibid: 36).

Sutton et al give an account of the experience of migrants in South Africa who are forced to repeatedly wait in queues for their status determination (2011: 33). They posit that in forcing migrants to wait over extended periods of time the state expresses its monopoly not only on violence but over control over time (ibid: 22). The state of liminality brought on by the complex bureaucratic maneuvering and stalling is in essence a conscious act of inducing liminality and making the home affairs office in South Africa a 'liminal space' (ibid: 30). Waiting is synonymous with liminality in that waiting is consistently viewed as an ambivalent time and space, 'in between' (ibid: 32). In waiting there is inevitably a 'before' and 'after' (ibid: 32). The experience of displacement necessitates an element of waiting as people await to return to either the natal land or as is the case for many refugees in Izmir to build a new life in Europe. Yet waiting in Izmir for an extended and uncertain period of time is something that most must do, thus the whole city is a liminal space.

This paper will contribute to the burgeoning literature on liminality and migration by outlining how Izmir came to be a liminal space as well as how people find ways to negotiate it through their smartphones. However, in order to visualize the lived reality or spatial locality for Syrian refugees in Izmir, it is vital to first contextualize the situation for Syrians in Turkey to gain a clearer image of what the term liminality means for this present case study. What follows therefore is a short chronology of Turkey's approach to the Syrian crisis which climaxes with the implementation of the EU-Turkey deal transforming Izmir from a zone of transit to a zone of liminality**.**

ii.   Izmir, the liminal space

Since the start of the Syrian crisis, Turkey has been by far the largest host country to Syrian refugees since the start of the conflict in 2011 and today, is the largest refugee-hosting country in the world (UNHCR, 2017). In the beginning, Turkey's approach to Syrian refugees was described as "humane and welcoming," [1] particularly in the country's southern cities on the Syrian border. Ankara, however, delayed implementing a long-term integration policy

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[1] These words were used by a Syrian activist who had lived in Turkey since 2011 presenting at a talk organised by the local civil society group *Halkların Köprüsü Derneği* on 29 April 2017

under the assumption that the crisis was temporary and Syrians would be able to return home promptly. Nevertheless, as the war intensified and the number of Syrians fleeing the conflict began to increase dramatically, the cracks in Turkey's asylum system began to show. As it stands there are 2.7 million Syrian refugees residing in Turkey representing 3.5 per cent of Turkey's total population (*International Crisis Group,* 2016: i).

During the summer of 2015, the issue of displaced persons across the globe and in particular Turkey gained international attention as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) recorded over one million irregular sea arrivals to Europe[2], 850,000 of which were via the Aegean sea via the Greek islands from Turkey (*Amnesty International,* 2016: 4). In this period, Turkey's third largest city, Izmir, already hosting a large number of refugees became a zone of transit as refugees accosted smugglers in the city's Basmane district to make the crossing. Nevertheless, the spatiality of Izmir changed dramatically in March 2016 as the European Union and Turkey formalized a migration deal to stem the flow of refugees entering Europe (Collett, 2016). The deal stipulates that Greece can deport "all new irregular arrivals" arriving after the implementation of the deal on 20 March back to Turkey (Collett, 2016). For every migrant deported back to Turkey, EU member states have agreed to send one Syrian refugee to Europe for permanent resettlement, with Europe willing to accept up to 72,000 Syrians under this scheme (Hakura, 2016). Turkey under the deal essentially became an international liminal space hosting millions of Syrians who can neither return home nor journey to Europe if they wish to.

In exchange for Turkey's acquiescence to receiving all of Europe's new arrivals and increasing policing and surveillance of its borders to stem migration flows; Europe agreed to grant Turkey €6 billion in aid, accelerate procedures for visa-liberalisation for Turkish nationals in the Schengen Area and, most crucially, to step up Turkey's EU ascension negotiations (Hakura, 2016).

Turkey for its part stepped up the policing of its coastal borders to prevent illegal crossings;

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[2] That same year, IOM also recorded the deaths of 3,771 migrants and refugees who died attempting to cross the Mediterranean route including 805 on the Eastern Mediterranean route from Turkey highlighting the perils of transgressing borders (*Amnesty International,* 2016: 4).

Syrians taking the bus to departure points in the coastal towns of Cesme and Kusadesi would be driven back to Izmir. Meanwhile, those caught making the crossing would be deported to cities in Turkey's eastern provinces. The continued detention of refugees in Greece also put many Syrians off attempting the crossing anyway[3]. And thus, with the formalization of the deal, Izmir, formerly a zone of transit where people could leave Turkey to seek refuge in Europe suddenly became a zone of liminality as those immobilized by the deal await the opportunity to journey on to Europe or go back to Syria.

The EU-Turkey deal has been condemned by numerous human rights groups; according to *Human Rights Watch,* it is a violation of international law to deport people back to Turkey as it is not a "safe third country" or "first country of asylum" owing to its insufficient legal protection for refugees (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Turkey has been known to violate the international principal of *non-refoulement* which prohibits the forced return of refugees as well as forbids governments from rejecting asylum seekers at the border (Frelick, 2016). Regarding the latter, at the time of the implementation of the deal, Turkey had in fact sealed its border to tens of thousands of Syrian civilians fleeing the violence taking place in Aleppo at that time (ibid). Moreover, many of my informants told me in informal conversations of the difficulties they faced when they crossed the Turkish-Syrian border[4] with one informant detailing how one of his friends was critically wounded when they were shot at by Turkish border police[5].

Syrians who had hoped to make it to Europe now find themselves in a double-bind; unable to leave Turkey to go to Europe or Syria but similarly unable to integrate and subsist in Turkey as they face limited access to basic services namely employment, healthcare, housing and education. The limits to integration for Syrians in Turkey stem from three main issues; the lack of a legal framework to allow Syrians to integrate; an overstretched asylum system which is struggling to cope with the sheer number of new arrivals; and thirdly, tensions within

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[3] This will be elaborated on further in chapter three but this fact is corroborated by statements made during interviews 15, 20, 21, 22, 23

[4] These discussions occurred off the record and are recorded in field notes. As such, I do not have the express permission to record the names of who shared this information.

[5] This information was relayed to me in an informal and non-recorded conversation by Mautesym

Turkish society which give rise to both discrimination and exploitation.

With regards to the legal framework, it is significant that Syrians in Turkey are denied full refugee status as Turkey maintains a geographical limitation on the 1951 Geneva Convention (*Amnesty International*, 2016: 6). In addition, the Settlement Law of 2006 reserves the right to permanent settlement only to persons of Turkish descent and culture (İçduygu, 2016: 6). Both these legal reservations officially limit the prospect of long-term integration for Syrian refugees. Indeed, despite the rights afforded Syrians through the acquisition of *Temporary Protection Status,* the word 'temporary' rings here as it implies the short-termedness of Ankara's view towards Syrians. The ambiguity of the wording temporary also instils a fear in Syrians that at any moment Erdogan's administration will rescind the policy and deport people back to Syria[6]. This prevents Syrians themselves from feeling that their stay in Turkey is long-term and that they can integrate. This uncertain and ambiguous legal framework contributes to the development of Turkey as a liminal space.

Tensions within Turkish society toward Syrians prevent them from being both willing and able to integrate. These tensions have become more and more pronounced as Turkish society has become more polarized since the attempted coup to depose Erdogan in 2016. The economic decline brought about by political instability has increased pressure for jobs creating a wariness towards the huge Syrian labour workforce willing to work for low wages and with no job security. Syrians are open to exploitation; despite being allowed access to work permits, in 2016 only 2,000 Syrians had applied for permits (Kingsley, 2016). There is no incentive for employers to grant Syrians work permits as in doing so they would have to pay national insurance and employ ten Turkish people for every Syrian employed (Cetingulec, 2016). As a result, Syrians are forced to work informally often below minimum wage without national insurance protection and crucially without a strong case to seek legal redress in the case of unfair dismissal or withholding of salaries.

Discrimination too is a gaping issue; many children complain of bullying at school, there are numerous reports of discrimination in the hospital and landlords are often reluctant to rent

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[6] Again, this will be elaborated on in chapter three but this information is corroborated by interviews 20, 22, 23 and statements made off the record and noted in fieldnotes.

to Syrians aware of the precariousness of their situation. This has meant that Syrians in Izmir and across Turkey struggle to find adequate and affordable housing. Houses are therefore often overcrowded with extended families living together. The majority of Turkey's Syrian refugees live as 'urban refugees' in Turkey's main cities rather than in refugee camps. In the latest government report compiled in 2013, it was found that 62 per cent of Syrian refugees lived in housing units of eight or more people, resulting in severe overcrowding, as the average number of rooms per housing unit was 2.1 rooms (AFAD, 2O13 cited in *Amnesty International,* 2016: 24).

It is evident therefore that life in Izmir and across Turkey is uncertain for Syrian refugees who contend with an increasingly wary host population and a severe lack of support services. Nonetheless, as will be brought out subsequently there are a plethora of ways in which Syrian refugees use their smartphone to negotiate the uncertainty wrought by the liminal spatiality of Izmir.

iii.   Methodology

The epistemological foundation of this research is interpretative. An interpretive epistemology is centred upon 'understanding' rather than 'explaining' human behavior (Demmers, 2017: 17). Instead of looking for causes of behavior, an interpretive epistemology is premised on the idea that through analysis we can understand the meaning of action and that actions derive their meaning from shared ideas and rules of social life (ibid: 17). In conducting this research, I was thus confronted with 'the double hermeneutic.' The double hermeneutic relates to how researchers aim to acquire knowledge by interpreting how actors understand their social world (ibid: 17). The evidence presented throughout this paper is based on my own interpretation of my informant community's interpretation of and construction of their reality and how this understanding in turn shapes practice. The double hermeneutic therefore requires a level of self-reflection from me as a researcher as I reflect on how I come to conclusions, and how my relationships with my informants and indeed the relationship between my interpreters and my informants might affect these. The claims made through the course of this research are therefore tentative and I do not and cannot claim to speak for the experience of all Syrian refugees in Izmir and the ideas presented in the following pages are wholly my own - albeit informed - interpretation.

Carolyn Nordstrom sums up how in conducting ethnographic research and interpreting data, we can build only one small part of a much larger picture as she states; 'understanding is cast in the mold of the speaker, and it is only by comparing the versions of many that a more comprehensive understanding can be achieved' (1997: 31). The importance of this statement for this research is twofold. Firstly, throughout this paper, I as an author, am also the speaker – offering my interpretation of evidence. At the same time, my conclusions are drawn from the accounts of a diverse range of speakers and I have myself entered into the process of comparing versions and analyzing data to form a more comprehensive understanding. Yet, owing to the fact I still am only one speaker, this paper calls for more research on this topic in order to develop an even more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between technology and displacement today.

The research strategy undertaken through the course of this project was necessarily qualitative deploying "classical ethnographic methods" (Whitehead, 2005: 2) including; secondary data analysis, fieldwork, recording fieldnotes and observations, participating in activities during observations (participant observation), and carrying out various forms of informal and semi-structured ethnographic interviewing. Prior to arriving in Izmir, I conducted secondary data analysis to better understand the context for refugees in Turkey and to be able to ask informed questions about how people contended with the difficulties they faced in Turkey. I read media reports on the situation for refugees in Turkey and reports by NGOs such as *Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch* and *International Crisis Group.*

I spent a total of two months in Izmir, Turkey conducting fieldwork during which time I conducted 25 in-depth interviews with Syrian households as well as two interviews with NGO workers. The interviews with NGO workers do not form part of my data analysis but helped me contextualise the situation for Syrians in Izmir. For two weeks, I participated in aid distribution with the NGO *IMECE* which provides aid to the informal and makeshift camps in the Izmir region where primarily agricultural workers live. My experience with *IMECE* helped me understand how grassroots organisations supported refugees in Izmir. Many of the volunteers shared extremely useful anecdotal information regarding the changing nature of Izmir and in particular the coastal town Cesme. These volunteers had been present during the summer of 2015 and could relay how migration into Europe was facilitated and the changing needs of refugees as a result of the EU-Turkey deal. Much of this information helped me develop my context section. Nonetheless, as the people whom *IMECE* supported generally belonged to Syria's Bedouin communities and hailed from the al-Hasakeh region, their experience was extremely different from those urban refugees residing in Izmir who mostly came from Syria's large urban centres. These Bedouin or Bedouin-descended communities worked in agriculture in Turkey and had also done so in Syria. Their experience totally differed therefore from Turkey's urban refugees. As such, though I conducted interviews and recorded fieldnotes throughout my time with *IMECE,* I made the decision to not include the experience of these refugees in my data analysis in order to not have a sample which is too diverse and incoherent. Nonetheless, the experience of communities living these camps is a point for further research and highlights the diversity of Syria's population.

I was extremely privileged, moreover, to have the opportunity to conduct bona-fide ethnographic research by living with Faisal and his family. I was introduced to Faisal and Fatima who are brother and sister via their brother Ali who is my classmate in Utrecht. Ali too had hoped to conduct his research in Turkey and spend time with his family in Turkey but was prevented from doing so as the EU-Turkey deal stipulates that Syrians cannot travel to Turkey from Europe. From the outset thus, I was immersed in the very real constraints that the deal creates for families preventing mobility and inducing separation. Likewise, many of the conclusions drawn through the course of this paper stem from observing the experiences of the family as they contended with the European border regime, the crisis in Syria and a lack of support services in Turkey. At the beginning and end of my trip I also stayed with Ali's relatives in Istanbul allowing me to form an understanding of the provision for refugees in Istanbul and how this compared to Izmir.

Living with Faisal and Fatima enabled me to gain an insight into the experience of life in displacement and observe the everyday practices that Faisal and his family engaged in. I was able to see the 'behind closed door' scenes which were often harrowing yet enabled me to understand the difficulties that many Syrian refugees faced. I could, for example, see how Faisal liked to 'switch off' in the evenings through his smartphone. Many of the phenomena and practices I observed living with Faisal and his family gave me inspiration for questions to ask other interviewees too as I developed an understanding of what life in displacement was like as well as a better understanding of some of the cultural rituals and nuances of Syrians. Throughout my time in Turkey, I recorded fieldnotes, observed the practices of the family and took notes of phenomena I observed in Izmir. An element of my analysis is also derived from researching various social media groups and activity among Syrians. All the social media groups which I cite through the course of this paper, I was led to by members of my informant community.

I developed a personal relationship with the family despite the fact that between us was a big language barrier in that I do not speak Arabic nor they English. Nonetheless, we communicated often via google translate and fumbled through picking up phrases in each other's languages. Moreover, I eventually interviewed Faisal and Fatima and questioned them on phenomena and practices I had observed during my time living with them. The language

barrier I faced with Faisal and his family and indeed with others in Turkey also led me as a researcher to experience one of the primary difficulties faced by my informant community. Indeed, it is significant for this research that I was able to communicate with my Syrian hosts by virtue of our smartphones. I, myself, also ventured into trying to learn Arabic and indeed I used the internet and videos on YouTube as the primary way to do so. Thus I did to some extent 'go native' and found myself becoming both researcher and subject in that I was forced to reflect on how I dealt with life in a new locality. This experience rather than limiting my research certainly strengthened my ability to interpret and understand the different ways in which life in liminality was negotiated.

The sampling method for the in-depth interview component of my research was non-probability and snowball sampling. The pre-requisites for inclusion in my study were being a Syrian refugee residing in the urban-centre Izmir. I am fully aware that my sample size is no way indicative of the general experience of Syrian refugees in Turkey but demonstrates a small portion of the experience of immobility and how new technology can affect this.

As my informant community did not live in one single confined area such as a refugee camp, it was necessary to find people to introduce me to potential interviewees. I therefore used multiple interpreters who simultaneously performed the role of translator and gatekeeper; introducing me to friends and relatives willing to speak to me about their experience. The fact that my interviewees were in most instances familiar with my translator helped develop an element of trust which I believe led people to open up and share in some cases quite personal information with me. I was also able to get informed consent for inclusion in my study as a result. Furthermore, using a range of interpreters allowed me to meet a range of Syrians – living in different parts of Izmir and hailing from different parts of Syria. Nonetheless, the fact that I was beholden to my interpreters for both translation and introductions also undoubtedly does change the nature of my research as I am aware that occasionally my interpreters were perhaps forwarding their own interpretation of events. This is something that I have taken into account in drawing my conclusions.

Initially my research was centred on the constellations of home framework and my original interview research sub-questions and subsequent topic guides were based on this

framework. Nonetheless, as I became more familiar with the experience of Syrians in Izmir, I tweaked my analytic framework and sub-questions to also include Appadurai's production of locality and scapes theses to incorporate the impact of the conflict in Syria and the global dynamics influencing homemaking processes. The nature of this research is therefore inductive in that the theories in question here were developed through the process of gathering and analysing data. The inductive approach allows "research findings to *emerge* from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies" (Thomas, 2006: 238 – emphasis added). The inductive method therefore effectively allows your 'data to speak' through this natural process of emergence.

The frameworks and their sensitising concepts used to guide this research will be elucidated as and when they are relevant in this thesis. As this thesis is eclectic in its use of concepts, to enter into an in-depth discussion of the concepts and questions which guided this research would be a little confusing for the reader. In writing this thesis, I have therefore opted for an integrated approach whereby theoretical discussions are conducted alongside data analysis.

Part one: Navigating life in Izmir

In this first chapter, we will explore the practical ways in which Syrians organize life in Izmir using their smartphones. The overarching sub-question for this chapter is: *how do smartphones help Syrians navigate the spatial locality of Izmir?* Firstly, a discussion on Appadurai's production of locality and virtual communities will be undertaken before exploring how these virtual communities manifest themselves in Izmir, namely through Facebook groups. Finally, we will take a brief look at the process of identity-building at play in Izmir and how the smartphone can play a role in helping people maintain their social identity in the present situation of displacement. The sub-question for this discussion on identity will be: *what role does the smartphone play in identity-construction for Syrian refugees in Izmir?* This chapter will conclude, however, by highlighting the broader social and economic conditions which have brought on the situation of liminality for Syrians in Izmir in order to emphasise the limits to digital technology and 'smart solutions.'

i.   Finding a home in the virtual community

We have thus far painted a picture of how Izmir became a liminal space for Syrian refugees; now let us explore the myriad ways in which given the precariousness and uncertainty of their situation, Syrians use their smartphones to work around the lack of access to basic services and in doing so produce both spatial and virtual locality. Firstly, however, a discussion of the concept of locality which will guide this discussion is necessary. Appadurai contends that locality is relational and contextual rather than scalar and spatial (1996: 178); as such, subjects both produce and are driven by locality. Locality is thus simultaneously context-driven and context-producing (Demmers, 2002: 91).

Appadurai adds, moreover, that locality is; "a phenomological property of social life, a structure of feeling that is produced by particular forms of intentional activity and that yields particular sorts of material effects" (1996: 182). McKay and Brady note that for geographers, locality is the process by which space becomes place (2005: 91). Transforming space into place is the process by which space is given meaning. Nonetheless, Appadurai emphasizes that the phenomological qualities of locality cannot be detached from the particular settings through which social life is reproduced (ibid: 182). In other words, the process of locality production

is deeply contextual. Dirlik, for example, notes locality production can be limited by the economic situation of the actor (cited in McKay & Brady, 2005: 90). At its core, it is evident that in our case, Syrians navigate life within the constraints of the liminal space which can be seen as a spatial locality yet at the same time, the actions which Syrians themselves undertake produce locality. Nonetheless, the process of locality production is shaped and contained by the context in which the subjects, in our case Syrians in Izmir, are situated.

Ferguson and Gupta (1999) add that in analysing the process by which a space achieves its identity as a place, we must foreground the spatial distribution of power relations (8). As regards the significance of power relations, we should keep in mind that in viewing locality we must be aware of who is excluded from and included in the process of producing locality and how power shapes the local subject's and subsequently the community's capacity to produce locality. Ferguson and Gupta add that the identity of a place thus "emerges from the intersection of its specific involvement in a system of hierarchically organized spaces with its cultural construction as a community or locality" (1999: 8). The emphasis on the hierarchizing of space brings out the importance of wider systems of power which provide the context for locality production.

The preceding discussion on the production of locality now allows us to form concrete definitions of what the terms *spatial* and *virtual locality* as cited in the research question are for the present study. Firstly, spatial locality will refer to the aspect of locality which is primarily place-based and thus refers to actual physical space. Nonetheless, in the subsequent discussion on notions of homemaking in displacement, we will also see how spatial locality is also attached to abstract conceptions of locality linked to feelings and cultural attachments. Virtual locality, on the other hand, will evidently refer to the construction and imagination of places through and by virtue of the virtual space. A virtual locality can be an actual representation of a place-based locality i.e. a photo of a former home stored on a phone or an imagined locality constructed through conversations and information shared in the virtual space. The dialectical relationship between spatial and virtual locality should be clear at this point. For example, the virtual locality represented in a photograph is still a depiction of a spatial locality yet the fact that the subject is not located there makes it a virtual one. Furthermore, if a home was destroyed and pictures of it are now stored on the phone, then

the home now only exists in the virtual locality. Locality is thus highly fluid and requires deep spatio-temporal reflection.

Appadurai proposes the concept of neighbourhoods defined as "situated communities characterized by their actuality, whether spatial or virtual and their potential for social reproduction" (ibid: 179). Neighbourhoods represent actually existing social forms in which locality is realized (ibid: 179). It is neighbourhoods and moreover, the local subjects situated within them which produce locality. Writing at the dawn of the new millennium, Appadurai was primarily concerned with the ways in which both mass migration and mass media, namely electronic media would influence locality in an increasingly delocalized and deterritorialised world. He forwards, thus, the concept of virtual neighbourhoods to capture the ways in which increased communication facilitates debate, dialogue, and relationship-building among various territorially divided individuals (ibid: 195). Locality can thus be a property of a 'virtual' internet-based community as well as 'traditional' or 'place'-based community or a combination of both such as a place-based primary site with a virtual aspect to its neighbourhood (McKay and Brady, 2005: 91). Place and virtual neighbourhoods, are not, moreover, opposites as both must "generate and receive flows of information and value and be produced from, against and in relation to extralocal contexts" (ibid: 91).

The present case study, undertaken some twenty years after Appadurai's original contention, is an extreme example of the disjunctures in today's globalized world bringing as it does the present issues of mass migration on a scale unseen since the Second World War and the consumption *en-masse* of social media via the smartphone. Demmers, however, shuns the term neighbourhoods arguing that it is inadequate for describing such large and dispersed groups of diaspora (2002: 90). Instead she opts for the term communities still defined as "*social forms in which locality is realized*" (ibid: 90). Henceforth, I too will use Demmers' concept of communities as it more accurately reflects the dispersed nature of today's deterritorialised yet connected individuals.

Virtual communities can be seen in Izmir in a very literal form and indeed we can see how the virtual locality produced by these virtual communities in turn affects the spatial locality of Izmir. As discussed heretofore, one of the primary issues faced by Syrians is discrimination, particularly in the realms of employment and housing. The difficulties which Syrians face vis-

à-vis finding housing represent the context-driven locality in which the Syrian community of Izmir - both virtual and actual - is situated. Nevertheless, Syrians use smartphones as a means to sidestep the issue of discrimination through the production of virtual communities. These virtual communities take the form of Facebook groups where Syrians can share information on 'Syrian-friendly' landlords and employers. One such group 'Jobs in Izmir'[7] has 11,630 members and features posts relating to both job offers and job searches. In addition, people post requests for housing and buy and sell products such as furniture, phones, chargers and Arabic television satellites. The virtual communities which exist in Izmir represent a combination of 'place'-based and virtual communities as the Syrians in Izmir are a place-based community yet the Facebook groups represent a virtual aspect to their neighbourhood.

Many participants cited using Facebook to help them navigate life in Izmir; be it assisting them in the hunt for housing or employment. Indeed, one interviewee, Fatima[8] highlights why these virtual communities can be so crucial for Syrians in search of housing as she recounts her own experience:

> At first I lived with my brother Faisal. But the owner of the home refused to let us all live there.…. Then we searched a lot to find a house. Finally, we found a house on Facebook. At first, we searched by walking around the city. We then put an ad on Facebook saying we needed a house and we got this house.

On a Facebook group?

Yes – Syrians in Izmir

Fatima's story demonstrates the very real constraints faced by Syrians in Izmir and indeed across Turkey as they contend with a host community which is increasingly discriminatory. The housing issue was only solved by Fatima and her family by calling on the support of the virtual community. Returning to Appadurai's aforementioned definition of locality as *a structure of feeling, that is produced by particular forms of intentional activity and that yields particular sorts of material effects;* we can see that exploring the virtual community is a f*orm of intentional activity* and the *particular sort of material effect* produced was finding a home

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[7] 'أزمير في عمل فرص' *Jobs in Izmir* available at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/454917781346227/
[8] Interview 21 conducted via an interpreter, 25 May 2017, *Bozyaka, Izmir*

to live in. The smartphone and the virtual community which it granted Fatima access to played a leading role in producing spatial locality for Fatima and her family.

ii.   Making home within the virtual community

Brun and Fabos' (2015) constellations of home framework is insightful here too. In describing the experience of forced displacement, Brun and Fabos propose that home should be considered as a triadic construct described in the notations home, Home and HOME. The notion of home is intricately linked to the production of locality as the process of making home represents a wilful act of producing locality on the part of the subject. Moreover, the concept of home is central to any discussion on forced displacement as the overarching issue is that people living in situations of forced displacement are emphatically homeless such is the age-old refugee dilemma. Home like Appadurai's locality consists of both an imaginary and a physical dimension. Brun and Fabos cite Blunt and Dowling's eloquent conceptualisation of home defined as; "a spatial imaginary, a set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which are related to context, and which construct places, extend across spaces and scales, and connect places" (2006: 2 in 2015: 6 – 7). The similarities between notions of home and locality are evident.

The constellations of home framework draws together both the imagined and actual dimensions of home. Firstly, the notation 'home' refers to; "…the day-to-day practices that help to create the place of displacement as a particularly significant kind of place. Such practices involve both material and imaginative notions of home and may be improvements or even investments to temporary dwellings" (Brun & Fabos, 2015: 12). In this paper the process of making 'home' will be considered within and constituting the production of locality as home is a very personal and subjective form of locality which is central to any discussion on forced displacement.

The concept of home has been varyingly conceptualized and discussed within the realm of mass migration and forced displacement. Kabachnik et al (2010) discuss the refugee experience of Abkhazian refugees in Georgia and develop the notion of 'home as a journey' to embody the ways in which displaced persons imagine home in the past and the future

(2010: 315). The concept of 'home as a journey' is defined by Mallett (2004) "as the continuous process of transition between one's original or previous home to one's ideal or future home" (cited in Kabachnik et al, 2010: 323). Moreover, Kabachnik et al emphasise that the lack of integration policy on the part of the Georgian government and the insistence by the host community that IDP-hosting will be temporary places limits to the degrees to which Abkhazians in Georgia can begin to imagine and physically construct home in the present (2010: 316). The situation for Abkhazian IDPs bears parallels to the situation of Syrian refugees in Izmir as Syrians struggle to imagine and make home in the present tense owing to Ankara's decision to define the Syrian refugees' stay in Turkey as *temporary*. Furthermore, Kabachnik et al forward that Abkhazian IDPs; "construct and reproduce the past and future senses of home through various home-making practices that occur within the context of the current places where they reside" (2010: 315). The notion of context is reflective of the limits to locality production. Moreover, this temporal reflection on the meaning of home will also come through in this paper as refugees produce and construct former and future localities in the process of making home.

For clarity, rather than referring to the first constellation of home as 'home,' henceforth it will be referred to as *home in actuality.* Indeed the notations home, Home and HOME do not resonate within the mind and will therefore be re-worked in this paper. The term *home in actuality* fits with Brun and Fabos' definition cited heretofore as the concept refers to any practices and rituals undertaken to make home or produce locality in the current situation. In Aristotelian philosophy actuality connotes motion, change or action in fulfilment of a possibility (Durrant, 1993: 206) and is therefore attuned to the idea of process and rituals – imaginative and material - which help form the actual home in the present tense.

Brun and Fabos' second constellation of home, 'Home' encapsulates the subjectivity and meaning imbued in the concept of home, as Papastergiadis highlights; "the ideal home is not just a house which offers shelter… a home is a place where personal and social meaning are grounded" (1998:2). For Brun and Fabos 'Home' represents the notion of home linked to values, traditions, memories and subjective feelings of home (2015: 13). These are conjured up by the experience displaced people have of past homes as well as dreams and hopes for the future (ibid: 13). I propose therefore renaming the notation 'Home' to *the ideal home.* In its adjectival form, ideal is defined as "Satisfying one's conception of what is perfect; most

suitable," and; "Existing only in the imagination; desirable or perfect but not likely to become a reality" (*Oxford English Dictionary,* 2017). The term ideal therefore encapsulates the imagination process which people in forced displacement experience as they dream and hope for a better future and reflect on the past. Indeed, in the liminal spatial locality of Izmir, the notion of looking back and looking forward is critical as will be explored later in this paper.

The final modality in the constellations of home framework, 'HOME' is an all-encompassing term relating to the intersection between the experience of displaced people and their understanding of home as a homeland. On one hand, Brun and Fabos note that "the notion of 'homeland' is highly politicized for forced migrants idealizing their Home" (2015: 13). On the other hand, they forward that the concept of HOME also refers to; "the geopolitics of nation and homeland that contribute to situations of protracted displacement and the ways in which politics of home are necessarily implicated in the causes of displacement" (ibid: 13).

Dona (2015) further elaborates on the tensions between state-centred approaches to HOME revolving around nation state boundaries and citizenship rights and the experience of UN-HOME which stateless people are confronted with (69). She summarises the dilemma for people living in situations of protracted displacement who find themselves "being 'in' but not being 'of' the countries in which they are located" (ibid: 69). Rather than using the term HOME, drawing from Brun and Fabos and Dona's descriptions of HOME, I forward simply referring to HOME as *homeland.* This definition captures the idea of Syrians wishing to return home yet can also capture the politics of exclusion necessarily implicated in the politics of *homeland.* The politics of *homeland* is manifested in Turkey's legal framework as the right to citizenship is explicitly reserved only to migrants of Turkish descent and culture (İçduygu, 2016: 6).

Returning to the virtual communities created by Syrians in Izmir, we can also see how Syrians produce locality within the process of making home – in all three constellations. Evidently, Fatima could literally make *home in the actuality* finding as she did a material home and dwelling by virtue of her smartphone and the virtual community. Nevertheless, as stated previously, within the group 'Jobs in Izmir' and its various counterparts people not only search for jobs and housing but these virtual communities also provide a forum for people to buy

and sell goods. Ghogho[9] explains why virtual communities are useful for Syrians in Izmir when buying items: 'they (Syrians) are looking for the cheapest thing and most of them don't speak Turkish so they need someone to speak Arabic.'

The virtual communities therefore are a means for Syrians to buy items without having to confront the language barrier in Turkey. Moreover, as Syrians are on low incomes, they cannot afford to buy brand new products in Turkish shops. The virtual community, as a forum for buying items, has therefore sprung up to circumvent the fact that Syrians do not have a large amount of disposable income. Both the language barrier and the low-salaries afforded Syrians not only contribute to the construction of Izmir as a liminal space but also produce spatial locality and are context-driving phenomena. The virtual community exists in its current form because of this context.

The items for sale on the previously cited group 'Jobs in Izmir' also indicate the process of making *home in the actuality* at play in Izmir. One user posts an advert for an installation service for Arabic-language television satellites (henceforth Arabic satellites)[10]. Arabic satellites represent an act of making *home in the actuality* in that the TV helps *to create the place of displacement as a particularly significant kind of place.* Thus the virtual community, accessed via the smartphone, again produces spatial locality as Syrians can make home through the products which they can purchase on the Facebook groups.

The Arabic satellite, moreover, can also be considered part and parcel of the process of making home in the constellations *the ideal home* and *homeland.* It is not insignificant to stress that every single Syrian household I visited during my stay in Turkey had a television with Arabic channels. Further, on a visit to one interviewee, Valodia's house, I observed the television was on in the background with beautiful images of Damascus and Syrian landscapes appearing on the screen through the duration of my interview. At one point, my translator, Mautesym[11] turned to the television and back to me saying; 'you see that – that's Damascus. But it's an old picture, it doesn't look like that anymore.'

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[9] Interview 23 conducted in English, 27 May, *Tepecik, Izmir*
[10] *See appendix I – figure I*
[11] Non recorded anecdote, 26 April 2017, *Kadifekale, Izmir*

Images such as that of Damascus on the television cause reflection on the past or *ideal home* as well as a sentimental longing for the *homeland.* The spatial locality of Damascus, however, is unattainable and such images conveying an image of the city in the past only contribute to the sense of liminality as Syrians are reminded that the Syria portrayed in such a picture exists only in the past or virtual locality and in reality is a space of war and destruction. The virtual locality of Damascus thus heightens the reality of the spatial locality of Izmir being a liminal space as Syrians cannot return to the *ideal home* nor the *homeland.*

The interviewee Valodia explains via Mautesym's interpretation that she uses the television to listen to her favourite music namely Feyrouz[12] – a Lebanese singer hugely popular across Syria and the rest of the Levant. The television satellites, available to buy from the virtual community, therefore allow Syrians to reflect on their culture and maintain an attachment to *the homeland.* Indeed, Sahar[13] confirms why Syrians like to watch Arabic channels; 'Everyone here only watches Arabic series and Arabic films to feel like we are still in Syria.'

The virtual locality imbued in images, songs and representations on the TV therefore is a means for Syrians to reflect and feel like they are in the spatial locality of Syria. The TV, likewise, acts a resource for Syrians to construct imagined selves and imagined worlds (Appadurai, 1996: 3)*.* In addition, Appadurai emphasizes, that people in refugee settings such as the Syrian community in Izmir "move and drag their imagination for new ways of living along with them" (ibid: 6). The TV, therefore, is also a channel through which Syrians build virtual locality in the sense of constructing an image of the *homeland* or *ideal home* of the past through the process of imagination which it engenders. The significance of the imagination process as well as the media in stimulating such a process will be further elaborated on in chapter three. First, let us explore in more detail the practical ways in which Syrians use their smartphones to produce locality.

The role played by the virtual community in allowing Syrians to generate income primarily through finding jobs but also through selling items within the community is significant. Income generation is crucial in the process of making home within the production of locality as it is with income that people can take agential action to change the material dwelling or

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[12] Interview 16 conducted via an interpreter, 26 April 2017, *Kadifekale, Izmir*
[13] Stated during interview 4, 14 April 2017, *Gidiz, Izmir*

spatial locality in which they reside. Ghogho's husband, Awad generates income via buying and regenerating used phones for sale on Facebook groups. Nonetheless, the majority of Syrians cite using the virtual community in the form of Facebook groups merely to find jobs as was noted by a number of interviewees[14].

The virtual community manifests itself not only on Facebook but also through other forms of digital media such as Whatsapp. Whatsapp groups too are mentioned by a number of Syrians who also use this form of media for finding a job. Aziapropo[15], for example, mentions how her husband finds work through Whatsapp; 'My husband is now working in building, if there are any job opportunities, he is notified via Whatsapp.'

As discussed before, many Syrians work informal and insecure jobs and indeed although it is positive that Aziapropo's husband can find short-term work to support his eleven-person household, it is no doubt a precarious situation to be in in which he is beholden to Whatsapp notifications to know if there is building work for him. Indeed, a phrase that was oft repeated during interviews and in informal conversations with Syrians in Izmir was "*we work like donkeys"[16]* encapsulating the hard labour which Syrians are forced to do and the lack of respect they feel they get from their Turkish employers. The smartphone although a helpful tool in that it helps Syrians in finding is essentially only a work-around to the broader issues of structural exclusions which they face in the realm of employment.

iii.   Maintaining a social identity in displacement

Syrians not only use their phones to work-around structural exclusion but to also maintain a sense of identity. Social identity is intrinsically tied to the concept of homemaking. The experience of being forced to leave home throws into question people's sense of self,

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[14] In interviews 2, 6, 22 Facebook groups were cited as means by which the interviewees found employment.
[15] Interview 13 conducted via an interpreter, 20 April 2017, *Gidiz, Izmir*
[16] Stated during interview 10 and during informal conversations with Faisal and Mautesym. This Arabic idiom refers to the labour which is less desirable and the back-breaking and ongoing nature of the work in question.

particularly considering the historical alignment made between identity and territory (Malkki, 2002: 25).

The term identity is one of those ubiquitously deployed terms which despite its everyday use is seldom defined. Identity put simply is the answer to the question "who or what are you?" (Demmers, 2017: 21). Social psychologist Erikson, moreover, gets to the heart of the two-pronged meaning of identity as he defines it as: "Something which can be experienced as 'identical' *in the core of the individual* and yet also identical *in the core of a communal culture, and which is, in fact, the identity of those two identities*" (1966: 149). Identity, in other words, implies both "*sameness"* and "*uniqueness*" (Demmers, 2017: 22). In social psychology, this translates to a distinction between the self-concept a.k.a individual identity and social identity (ibid: 22). This paper will look at both sides of the identity coin and explore the intersection between identity and homemaking.

On the one hand, virtual communities can help people maintain the *core of a communal culture.* Social identity for Syrian refugees is of utmost importance as the crisis has escalated into an increasingly sectarian conflict cementing ethnic identities and group boundaries.[17]For Syrians leaving the warzone, such demarcated group boundaries remain – particularly for those individuals who find themselves in minority groups. Two of the households whom I interviewed hailed from the city of Salamiah and identified as Ismaili Muslims.[18] Given the sectarian divide within the unravelling political crisis in Syria, the Ismailis whom I met in Izmir stressed the wariness they felt towards other Syrians in Izmir. Ghogho explains her overarching fear of living in Izmir and being mistaken for an Alawite:

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[17] I do not wish to fall into what Demmers calls the 'unitary trap' (2017: 24) by implying that the Syrian conflict is merely the result of century-old sectarian antagonisms as the many commentators in the media would have us believe. Unfortunately, a complex analysis of the conflict in Syria is beyond the scope of this paper but I would like to stress that although there is a sectarian dimension to the conflict, it is not merely a sectarian conflict brought about by primodialist-bound inter-group hostilities.
[18] Ismail'ism is a Shia sect of Islam following the spiritual leadership of Aga Khan, believed to be a direct descendant of Hazrat Ali, the prophet Muhammed's cousin (*The Ismaili,* 2017).

In Syria we have Alawite who are with Assad and Sunni who are against Assad and Alawite don't wear hijab so when people see me especially Syrians they think I'm Alawite and I'm with Assad so they hate me.

But I'm not Alawite and I'm not with Assad.

Ghogho had made the decision to come to Izmir rather than any other city in Turkey when she left Syria because she was introduced to Awad (who later became her husband) via a friend also from Salamiah. Mautesym, similarly, who is also an Ismaili from Salamiah was introduced to friends who later became his housemates via Facebook prior to leaving Syria as he states:

"We are a minority so we have to stick together"[19]

We can see therefore that the smartphone facilitates the creation of small communities of minority Syrians within Izmir which thus defines the spatial locality for these individuals. The need for the creation of these communities is wholly context-driven in that these individuals do not feel safe among the community of other predominantly Sunni Muslims in Izmir as a direct result of the conflict. It was Facebook and the smartphone which allowed the individuals involved here to be introduced.

In addition, for the case of Muhaned and Rama[20] both from Salamiah, the introduction via Facebook meant more than just creating a community within Izmir. The couple were introduced to each other via Facebook as she was planning to come to Turkey. After months of chatting, the pair fell in love. However, as the security situation remained tense and the possibility of being smuggled out of Salamiah was a distant one, the two made the decision to marry via skype in 2015. Both parties threw wedding celebrations in their respective locations. Thus increased connectivity allowed the couple to make home in displacement if we consider marriage as a homemaking process in the *ideal home* as it represents a form of imagining a future home and planning for the future. Moreover, weddings in and of themselves represent a cultural practice and therefore can be seen as a manifestation of an

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[19] Non-recorded conversation
[20] Interview 3 conducted via an interpreter, 8 April 2017, *Kadifekale, Izmir*

attachment to the *homeland* or a *homeland*-making practice. The case of Muhaned and Rama's skype wedding also showcases the fact that life and in this case love can go on despite war and despite the separation that this induces. Four months after the wedding, Rama was finally able to get smuggled out of Salamiah and now lives with Muhaned and their newly-born child.

Similarly, we can see processes of identity-making in Izmir within the definition of identity as within *the core of the individual*. Mautesym who had previously been a devoted English teacher back in Syria regularly lamented the fact that he could not return to his profession. On one occasion, he even told me that he had dreamt the night before that he was writing on a whiteboard as if we needed clearer evidence of how much he missed teaching. Faisal too, had been a teacher in Aleppo and spoke to me many times about how he missed his true profession. Mautesym for his part, found a small way to feel like he is still maintaining his professional identity as a teacher. He created a Facebook group 'English with Mautesym.'[21] The Facebook group, which has over 1,000 members including many of his former pupils, allows Mautesym to carry on with his profession even though in displacement he cannot teach English as a paid profession. Thus within the virtual space, Mautesym can build his own virtual community and in doing so maintain his individual identity as a teacher despite being constrained from doing so in the spatial locality of Izmir.

Valodia too uses her smartphone to stay abreast of developments in her field of professional make-up art. Valodia recounts how she cannot run her own salon owing to discrimination from the Turkish community:

> I am a specialist in massage, make–up, hair and eyebrow tattoos. But I don't do anything now because my beauty salon was closed by Turkish people. They closed it because they said I was foreign and that I took all the clients. I was also fined after I had to close my shop.[22]

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[21] Available at: https://www.facebook.com/English-with-MrMautesym-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%83%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B0-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B5%D9%85-366658670131060/

[22] Interview 16 conducted via an interpreter, 26 April 2017, *Kadifekale, Izmir*

Despite not being able to run her salon, Valodia goes on to describe how she uses her phone to maintain her identity as a make-up artist. When I ask how she uses her phone, she responds; 'The most important thing is to stay in touch with my parents in Syria and to keep up with the new fashion trends in my career.'

Faced with the limits to creating a career in the spatial locality of Izmir, Valodia in the meantime tries to stay abreast of developments in her career with a view to one day being able to run her own salon again. Thus, the process of career-building in the virtual community can be considered a practice of making the *ideal home* as it represents a form of planning for the imagined future and coping with the constraints of the present situation.

iv.   The resilience of the ruins

Whilst the phenomena of virtual communities created and accessed via the smartphone is interesting and highlights the creative ways in which people in displacement navigate the situation of uncertainty it incurs; at this point it is crucial to discuss the wider political and economic context of the situation of liminality. The aforementioned case of Aziapropo's husband who is in informal and insecure work and awaits Whatsapp updates to know if he can work is emblematic of the situation for many Syrians in the liminal space of Izmir working insecure and exploitative jobs. Most Syrians work well below the Turkish national minimum wage and as Faisal elucidates, many Syrians are exploited by employers aware of the desperate situation Syrians are in:

> They (Turkish people) know we really need work. Often I will have an agreement with my employer about something but when I start work I find it is something else. They don't help Syrians at all.

Faisal here expresses the view held by many Syrians whom I met during my time in Izmir which is that the host community deliberately takes advantage of the fact that Syrians do not feel like they have any redress to legal help if they have an issue with their employer and are in

constant fear of deportation. Living with Faisal and conversing with him daily,[23] I found that this view that Turks are out to exploit and use Syrians was a recurring refrain.

Given the fact that work is often underpaid and exploitative, it does not help Syrians greatly that they can find such jobs online. Although it is helpful that Syrians can find work by virtue of the virtual community, the virtual community can merely point people to work but in no way makes up for the fact that there is a lack of legal protection for Syrian workers. Thus here we are presented with the limits of virtual communities in truly reshaping spatial locality which in the case of Izmir is characterized by exploitation and discrimination against Syrians.

The same process rings true here with regards to housing. Despite the fact that it was helpful for Fatima and others like her to be able to find a home through the virtual community, we cannot overlook the fact that houses are overcrowded, overpriced and inadequate in most instances. Fatima, for example, lives in a house of eight persons with one living room, one bedroom, a kitchen and a bathroom. Indeed, all Syrian households which I encountered had members of the extended family living under one roof at least at one point during their stay in Turkey to save money. The issue of the housing available being inadequate is corroborated by official government findings too. In the most recent government analysis into housing for asylum seekers and refugees conducted in 2013, it was found that 25 per cent of refugees residing outside of camps lived in "ruins or make-shift arrangements" (AFAD, 2O13 cited in *Amnesty International,* 2016: 24). 62 per cent of refugees lived in housing units of eight or more people, resulting in severe overcrowding, as the average number of rooms per housing unit was 2.1 rooms (AFAD, 2O13 cited in *Amnesty International,* 2016: 24).

It is evident therefore that whilst the smartphone enables Syrians to in some ways sidestep the issues of discrimination and exploitation presented by the liminal space of Izmir, they can in no way overcome the broader issues of structural exclusion with the smartphone. Duffield contends that the aesthetic of smart is not to confront problems but instead to endlessly sidestep them (2016: 148). Duffield presents a damning critique of the current turn to digital humanitarianism and the emphasis on smart solutions. He postulates that rather than

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[23] Our conversations were primarily held via google translate

representing progress, this constant adaptation is more akin to survivalism "through encouraging improvisation, making do and inventive bricolage with existing communications' infrastructure, architecture and social capital" (Duffield, 2016: 148). He dubs the turn to data informatics and smart solutions to solve humanitarian crises 'the resilience of the ruins' to capture how new technology locks-in the negativities of actually existing capitalism harnessed as it is to the neoliberal project (ibid: 147).

The premise of Duffield's argument is that smart solutions provide mere stopgaps or workarounds to broader issues of structural exclusion. Although it is helpful in the short-term that Syrians in Izmir can find housing and jobs via Facebook, such processes while representing agential process of locality production and homemaking do not confront the real political and economic conditions which have brought on this situation. The difficulties that Syrians face in Izmir are also reflective of the spatial distribution of power and how inter-subjective spatiality is. Syrians are limited in their capacity to produce locality and make home as a result of wider political and economic structures. It is important therefore to not overemphasise nor romanticise the empowering capacity of smartphones to facilitate the creation of virtual communities; doing so would be to downplay the role played by national governments, policy-makers and the international community who have done little to confront the structures and systems which have created a liminal space for Syrians in Izmir.

Firstly, at its core, the liminal space in Izmir has been brought on by a complex political emergency in Syria which has seen little affirmative action from the international community. Duffield condemns the remote and distance management of the Syrian conflict which has seen little on-the-ground operations from aid agencies (ibid: 150). Meanwhile half of Syria's pre-war population has been uprooted meaning an estimated 11 million Syrians have had to flee their homes since the outbreak of the crisis in 2011 (*Mercy Corps,* 2017). Today, Syria's refugee population represents 25 per cent of the world total (Duffield, 2016: 149). The peace and security capabilities of the UN have been truly tested in the face of the unravelling political crisis in Syria as resolution after resolution tabled by the UN has been vetoed by Russia in the Security Council (*Al Jazeera,* 2017). Whilst Western governments have displayed a real lack of political will to intervene in Syria save from conducting air strikes in the fight against ISIS and giving lacklustre support to opposition groups, Russia and Iran have used the

Syrian civil war to flex their political muscle and support the Assad regime at the expense of civilian lives (Jenkins, 2016).

Yet, as the situation in Syria deteriorates and the international community has collectively thrown its hands in the air, refugees fleeing the Syrian war have found themselves up against an increasingly securitized border regime with states unwilling to accommodate them. Though the summer of 2015 was marked by Angela Merkel's decision to open Germany's borders and allow those people crossing from Turkey – including Syrians - to seek asylum in Germany (Nardelli, 2015) by Spring 2016 the halcyon days were over with the advent of the EU-Turkey deal.

The EU-Turkey deal epitomises Europe's increasingly hostile approach to refugees representing as it does a Faustian pact trading refugee rights for political credence at home from the growing populist far-right across Europe. The EU, an association which bills itself as a bastion for human rights and democracy has shown that put to the test, pressing human rights issues like supporting Syrian refugees fleeing deplorable political violence at home can be cast aside for political points. Moreover, as was elaborated on previously, the deal represents a flagrant violation of international law – particularly considering as this paper demonstrates - the very real lack of access to basic services which Syrians are faced with in Turkey. Never mind the fact that Turkey too is an increasingly unstable country with growing human rights abuses as Erdogan aims to silence dissent following the July 2016 coup.

Returning to Duffield's resilience of the ruins argument which forwards that smart solutions maintain existing structures of inequality wrought by neoliberalism, we can see the process at play in Europe's response to the refugee crisis and the situation for refugees in Turkey. Indeed, not everyone has everything to lose as a result of the crisis in Syria. The border surveillance sector is booming with an estimated value of 15 billion euros in 2015 and estimated to rise to 29 billion euros annually in 2022 (Akkermann, 2016: 1). Global arms sales too are thriving; exports to the Middle East increased by 61 per cent between 2006-2010 and 2011-15 (ibid: 1). The EU, in addition, granted arms exports licences to the Middle East and North Africa to the tune of 82 billion euro between 2005 and 2014 (ibid: 1). Thus in all this death and destruction it is clear that there are people making big bucks. Furthermore, it is no

coincidence that the same companies profiting from selling arms to the Middle East are the same companies profiting from the increased militarisation of Europe's borders. Finmecannica, Thales and Airbus, prominent players in the EU security business are also three of the top four European arms traders (ibid: 2).

Where we see chaos and suffering in Syria and a resulting situation of seemingly unending liminality in Turkey, Europe's arms companies see money to be made. My point is that while this paper seeks to describe and explore the ways in which new technology has changed the experience of refugees in the 21st century, I forward that this process cannot be detached from the neoliberal system which has made such a crisis of profound human suffering a moneymaking endeavour. Though it is laudatory that Syrians can create their own virtual communities to work-around structural exclusion and produce locality in the liminal space, it is vital to stay aware that such acts and practices do not confront the primary economic and political conditions which have created this crisis in the first place and shaped the spatial locality which Syrians are forced to contend with and reshape as best they can.

Part two: Living war on the outside

In the previous chapter, we explored the role which the smartphone plays in organizing life in Izmir and the subsequent effect this has on the production of locality through the lens of homemaking processes. This chapter will conversely focus on both the positive and negative role played by the smartphone in the way that it gives Syrians who have left the warzone 24/7 updates on the situation in Syria via social media. The sub-question to guide this section of the research is: *how do Syrian refugees produce and reproduce the locality of Syria?* Syrians unsurprisingly find themselves chained to their phones for updates on the situation at home where their loved ones remain. The concept of the *warscape* will be forwarded in this chapter to capture the ways in which Syrians live and breathe the conflict despite being away from the spatial locality of the warzone.

i.   *Warscapes*

After my two months of living and researching in Izmir, I headed back to Istanbul to spend a few days with the family whom had welcomed me with open arms when I first arrived in Turkey. The weather now was warmer and in the evening I took a stroll with fifteen year old Sedra from Aleppo. During our walk she relayed to me:

"Sometimes the buildings here remind me of the buildings in Aleppo."

"Oh yeah? What are the buildings in Aleppo like?" I replied.

"I will show you when we get back to the flat, there are some things I want to show you."

We returned, we had Iftar as it was the Holy Month and then Sedra sat next to me with her tablet. She googled some things in Arabic and opened a link to a video.

The video was raw smartphone footage of a rocket attack. The attack, Sedra explained to me, was the first time she experienced a rocket strike and it was the moment that everything changed for her and for the citizens of Aleppo. The video was a climactic moment in the unravelling political crisis in Syria as the targets of the attack were indisputably civilian - students who were sitting their final year exams.

Sedra then presented to me a series of 'before' and 'afters' of the university and surrounding area. Her father had been a lecturer at the university and she spent much of her time there. She pointed out the green where she used to sit with Ali,

my friend and a student of the university who was teaching her English. She also showed me a small stall where she had bought falafel. She showed me pictures of her neighbourhood, all the while repeating the phrase:

"It was perfect."

The perfection of those past years to young Sedra is now overshadowed by the rocket attack which she relives and presents to me via her tablet. She says that after that attack bombings became commonplace and they even got used to it before they decided to flee. Yet, somehow I could still observe the teenage Sedra flinch as she showed me that video of the attack that destroyed Aleppo University and destroyed her perfect past.

The war in Syria has been the most socially mediated conflict in history (Lynch et al, 2014: 5). Writing in the *Wall Street Journal,* journalist Melik Kaylan dubs the Syrian conflict the 'YouTube war' which has "furnished global audiences with a sofa-side view of what it feels like to be there, almost in real time" (2013). This notion of social media giving the effect of being in the warzone is critical; for audiences detached from the conflict, images of violence might be considered disturbing, harrowing and perhaps even exciting – attached as we are to performances of acts of violence in our video games and Hollywood films. Stephen Graham dubs the consumption of dramatic scenes of war as sitting within a 'militarized visual culture' in which wars are performed and consumed overwhelmingly as visual, discursive and urban spectacles through the spaces of electronic imagery (2012: 43).

Yet what is the impact on people who have left the scenes of deplorable violence who see their former localities in the backdrop of these videos depicting rocket strikes in Aleppo or IS beheadings outside Salamiah? What does it mean that people such as young Sedra can revisit and relive the catastrophic moments when their lives were upturned by war? How does the internet which has become a virtual depository of memories affect your experience of displacement?

In order to capture how social media has broadened the warzone to no longer being confined to the spatial locality Syria but extending to the virtual locality, I propose returning to Carolyn Nordstrom's (1997) conceptualisation of the *warscape.* Borrowing Appadurai's concept of scapes, Nordstrom posited that the term *warscape* captures the interplay between the local

and national in contemporary conflict. Appadurai's framework of scapes consists of five scapes; *ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes* and *ideoscapes* to capture the global flows and disjunctures in our globalized world (1996: 31). The suffix *–scape* was chosen by Appadurai to encapsulate the fluid and irregular shapes of these flows and to indicate that they are not objectively given relations but are instead deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors (ibid: 31).

Nordstrom conducted ethnographic research in Mozambique during the height of the country's brutal conflict in the early 1990s. Nordstrom observed that the war in Mozambique, though essentially an intrastate conflict, was in fact shaped in powerful ways by an international culture of violence, militarization, and politico-economic power (1997: 24). Nordstrom cited how such a culture of violence moved across borders with a frightening fluidity transported by a range of actors and processes; from military advisors to arms merchants to the media and its violence-glorifying movies and even academia or every 'terror-based counterinsurgency theory' (Nordstrom, 1997: 24-25). She elaborates by stressing that "even the most circumscribed of locales is set within a larger context of international influences, indelibly changing the character of the local and the translocal" (ibid: 37).

Nordstrom argues that Appadurai's concept of *ethnoscapes* is particularly useful in analysis of war (ibid: 37). *Ethnoscapes,* according to Appaduarai connote the movement of people across the globe, the ethnoscape is the landscapes of persons who constitute our shifting world be they tourists, immigrants or most notably refugees (Appadurai, 1996: 33). These groups are forced to deal with the realities of having to move as is the case with refugees leaving Syria today or the fantasises of wanting to move such as is also the case with Syrian refugees in Izmir who either dream of a future in Europe or a peaceful Syria (Appadurai, 1996: 33).

The concept *warscape* thus refers to this broader international context in which war is situated and captures how the *ethnoscape* i.e. the movement of international actors such as foreign strategists, mercenaries and development and interest groups move into a country

with the onset of violent conflict (Nordstrom, 1997: 37). The *ethnoscape* evidently also represents the movement of displaced people within and across borders (ibid: 37). Building on Nordstrom's theorising of the *warscape,* Korf et al note that that the *warscape* highlights the temporal and territorial fluidity of governable spaces in conflict (2010: 385). Korf et al, moreover, offer a further elaboration on the term *warscape,* defined in geographical terms as; "landscapes characterised by brutal violence, political volatility, physical insecurity and the disruptions and instabilities that exist in many civil war zones that different social actors navigate through" (2010: 385).

Nonetheless, Nordstrom focusses predominantly on Appaduarai's *ethnoscape* and how this affects the dynamics of conflict. Furthermore, while she adopts the term scape to capture the fluidity and movement across borders of cultures and people which shape conflict; she disagrees with Appadurai's contention that the world today is fundamentally different as a result of globalization and increased international flows and exchanges. Conversely, Nordstrom warns against falling into the trap of the "arrogance of the present" which assumes that our problems and our world are fundamentally different from preceding eras (Nordstrom, 2010: 38). She notes that transnational processes and local responses have always interacted in conflict. Nordstrom points out that villages in remote parts of the Zambezi province in Mozambique, as far back as four hundred years ago, developed marked cultural responses to invasions and incursions from African Kingdoms, Portuguese colonists, Muslim traders, Indian and Goan settlers, British adventurers and rapacious slavers (ibid: 38). Then just as now transnational processes informed local responses in an interpenetrated and cosmopolitanized world (ibid: 38).

However, I disagree with Nordstrom's contention that conflict today is no different from yesteryear in the way that transnational processes have always influenced local responses. I argue, instead, that the advent of mass media and electronic communication which has facilitated communication and to some extent movement across borders has changed the dynamic of conflict as well as the realms of possibility and imagination processes of individuals as Appadurai contends (1996: 31). Indeed, the Syrian conflict has largely been shaped and driven by social media consumed as well as created by a range of actors situated in the *warscape.* Stephen Graham too describes how war today differs from those before and labels

the contemporary processes of militarization the 'new military urbanism' (2010: 136). Graham's new military urbanism consists of five interrelated foundations; the urbanization of military and security doctrine; the links between militarized control technologies and digitized urban life; the cultural performances of militarized media consumption; the emerging political economies of the 'state' security industries; and the new state spaces of violence (ibid: 136).

Graham's new military urbanism bears parallels to Appadurai's framework of scapes and is therefore useful for helping us better conceptualise what the term *warscape* means today. We can see the links between Appadurai's forwarding of the concept of scapes and how today's world is marked by fluid cultural and informational flows. Graham contends that "above all militarization and war involve attempts to forge powerful new links between cultures, states, technologies and citizenship" (ibid: 137).

Graham's links can be considered synonymous to Appadurai's transnational flows in the role they play in constituting the *warscape.* For example, Graham discusses 'the urbanization of military and security doctrine,' which is premised on the idea that western society is existentially threatened by a wide spectrum of global insurgencies operating across social, technical, political, cultural and financial networks, straddling transnational scales (2010: 138). As such, urban life itself is now the target of military and security policy as threats are considered to be lurking within cities (ibid: 138). Consequently, military thinking and practice has shifted from a focus on the 'battlefield' to the 'battlespace' (ibid: 138). The battlespace is, according to Phil Agre (2001) "a conception of military matters that includes absolutely everything" (cited in ibid: 138). The battlespace as a concept links in with the *warscape* in that it encapsulates the unlimited spatiality of war owing to increasing transnational flows. As Graham describes it, "nothing lies outside the multidimensional and multiscale concept of battlespace, temporally or geographically" (ibid: 138). Graham's battlespace fits in with the *warscape* and allows us to view how war today is no longer confined to a single geographical nor temporal locality.

To further outline this point about the difference between today's world and how conflict is played out on it, let us explore Appadurai's concept of scapes in a little more detail before

entering into a discussion on the background of the Syrian conflict and how the scapes can be seen in this conflict known as the 'YouTube War.' In doing so, we can moreover see the linkages between Graham's 'new military urbanism' and Appadurai's *scapes.*

Just as *ethnoscapes* refers to the movement of cultures and people, *Technoscapes* represent the ever fluid global configuration of technology where information now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries (Appadurai, 1996: 33). Likewise, *financescapes* refers to the movement of capital across borders which is increasingly complex and unpredictable (ibid: 34). These three scapes are, as Appadurai highlights, intertwined yet their relationship is disjunctive as each landscape is subject to its own constraints and incentives – but indeed each scape acts both a constraint and paremeter for movement in the other (ibid: 34).

Mediascapes are the vast repertoires of images, narratives and ethnoscapes available to viewers throughout the world brought on by the advent of electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (ibid: 34). Within these mediascapes, the lines between the realistic and fictional landscapes which audiences see are blurred to the extent that the further people are away from the life in which they see via these mediascapes, the more likely they are to construct imagined worlds that are chimerical, aesthetic and even fantastic objects (ibid: 34). The vast selection of images depicting the crisis in Syria evidently constitute the *mediascape*. *Ideoscapes,* like *mediascapes* are also congeries of images but are often directly political and have to do with the ideologies of states as well as the counterideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it (ibid: 36).

Central to Appadurai's scapes thesis is the triadic construct of *images, imagined communities* and *the imaginaire/imaginary* which play a constitutive role in constructing scapes and in turn producing locality (1996: 31). Images in this instance refer to mechanically produced images in the Frankfurt sense whilst the imagined community is of course a nod to Benedict Anderson's proposition that the nation state is an imagined community (ibid:31). Finally, the imaginary is defined as "a constructed landscape of collective aspirations, which is no more or less real than the collective representations of Emile Durkheim, now mediated through the complex prism of modern media" (ibid: 31). Drawing from these three concepts, Appadurai

goes on to posit that the imagination has become an organized field of social practices; both a form of work and a form of negotiation between sites of agency i.e. individuals and globally defined fields of possibility (ibid: 31). And, indeed it is through the lens of Appadurai's scapes that we see the interplay between agency and globally defined fields of possibility, we can see how globalization affects the decision-making processes and practices of the individual as well as how these practices in turn contribute to globalization. Appadurai forwards that the five scapes can be seen as building blocks for what he dubs imagined worlds – that is multiple worlds constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe in our increasingly deterritorialised and globalised world (ibid: 33).

The Syrian conflict, I argue, demonstrates the increasing connectedness of our globalized world as it is an extreme example of an intrastate conflict influenced by a plethora of international actors and processes. The advent of social media indeed has been crucial in the development of the seven-year conflict as we will explore presently. James Harkin (2013) describes how it was social media which was both to make and break the Syrian revolution. He recounts how at the beginning of the Syrian revolution, opposition activists used Facebook as a tool to organize protests on the hoof (Harkin, 2013: 10). In addition, activists used their smartphones to film and disseminate videos of human rights abuses to shore up support for the revolution both at home and abroad (ibid: 17). External actors such as America, Europe and the Gulf States were keen to harness the power of new media to support the Syrian revolution and funneled vast amounts of computer and internet equipment to young Syrian opposition activists (ibid: 15).

Nonetheless, despite the empowering capacity of social media to allow people to organize and rally around the revolution, Harkin forwards that it was also social media that was to eventually lead to the revolution's undoing. As the fight in Syria became increasingly sectarian and hyperviolent so too did the images doing the rounds on social media. Those states who had originally channeled vast sums of cash into training opposition activists into using new media to depose Assad were in some ways hoisted by their own petard. As the Free Syrian Army disintegrated into a mish-mash of extremist factions notably Jabhat-Al-Nusra and Islamic State (IS), these armed groups too were tech-savvy and aware of the power of new media. Indeed, most memorable in the psyche of western audiences is the beheading of

American journalist James Foley in 2014 by IS. But visceral images of acts of violence perpetrated by all sides abound. Harkin contends that such hyperviolent images may have undermined the Syrian revolution, he states; "the daily drumbeat of death and dismemberment available on activist media…might have depressed and terrified many Syrians away from politics rather than galvanized them into action" (2013: 21). Syrian journalist Riham Alkouassa (2016) is similarly pessimistic about the role of social media in supporting the Syrian revolution and others stating that "social media is helping dictators, while giving the masses an illusion of empowerment and political worthiness."

At this point, it is clear that social media provides round-the-clock updates on the conflict in Syria with updates available from all parties in the conflict. Harkin notes, furthermore, that social media may have had the effect of driving Syrians further apart as many Syrians take refuge in their own side's echo chamber of propaganda which he describes as "a feedback loop of dead babies and tales of indecipherable evil perpetrated by the other side" (2013: 20). Rather than allowing Syrians out of the conflict to move on from the war and reconcile, these videos and feedback loops serve to solidify group boundaries drawn through the course of the conflict.

Demmers forwards that diasporas influence conflict and as such are engaged in a form of 'virtual conflict' in which they live through the conflict in their homeland via the internet, email, television, and telephone without direct risks or accountability (2002: 94). Whilst I no doubt concur with Demmers that diaspora communities can influence conflict dynamics and increasingly so with the advent of the smartphone and social media, this paper is concerned with the inverse effect. Namely, how does living the virtual conflict influence the process of making home for Syrians living in displacement? Thus, whilst Demmers is interested in how diasporas affect conflict dynamics by virtue of technologies of mass communication, I am concerned with how these conflict dynamics are brought to people by the same means and the effect of this on people's relationship with spatial and virtual locality.

The case of Syrian refugees in Izmir and their tracking of the Syrian conflict is a prime example of the interplay between Appadurai's scapes and the crucial role played by the smartphone and social media in this relationship. The vast sums of cash transported across Syria's borders

which fund armed groups, provide remittances to families and pay smuggling networks constitute the *financescape* in the Syrian conflict. In addition, evidently, the Syrian refugee community constitute the *ethnoscape* in that they have transgressed borders *en-masse* and currently live in a liminal state of exile in Izmir. The *technoscape* has given the means to follow, share and disseminate information and images forming part of both the *mediascape* and the *ideoscape* – as the images tied to the conflict are highly ideological and partisan. Likewise these images and representations of conflict which fall within Appadurai's *mediascapes* and *ideoscapes* simultaneously constitute Graham's aforementioned 'militarized visual culture' (2010: 143). The images and narratives constituting the *mediascapes* and *ideoscapes* on the Syrian conflict in and of themselves produce what Demmers dubs a 'virtual conflict' (ibid: 94). The *warscape* encapsulates this round-the-clock coverage of violence and updates of the war which are intricately tied to the ebbs and flows of the other five scapes as proposed by Appadurai.

In discussions on virtual conflict and the *warscape*, it is insightful to glance at the work of French philosopher and post-structuralist Jean Baudrillard. In 1991, Baudrillard infamously declared that the 'the Gulf War did not take place' in a series of essays under the same name. Baudrillard's work was published as a coalition of 35 states, led by the US, invaded Iraq in response to Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait. Baudrillard's claim was more an incendiary comment and polemical title; in stating that the war was not taking place, Baudrillard was not suggesting that there were not real and actual acts of violence being committed in Iraq under the guise of war but that the Gulf War as it was understood by western audiences did not take place. Baudrillard was critiquing the round-the-clock media coverage of the war and the media fanfare which led to a dramatic misrepresentation of reality. He described the coalition's invasion of Iraq as not a war but a simulacrum of a war, a virtual event to serve a variety of political and strategic purposes (Baudrillard, 1993: 10). The late Baudrillard would be reeling in his grave if he were to know just how far his predictions about the transcendence from the real to the virtual in war had come (1993: 27).

In a similar vein to Baudrillard, Graham is also concerned with the way in which the divisions between military simulation, information warfare, news and entertainment are becoming increasingly blurred to the extent that they are meaningless (2010: 143). Graham cites the

9/11 attacks as evidence of how violence is now organised to be extraordinary media spectacles (ibid: 143). He quotes Mike Davis who writes "organised as epic horror cinema with meticulous attention to the mise-en-scene…. the hijacked planes were aimed precisely at the vulnerable border between fantasy and reality"(2002: 5 in ibid: 143).

The extreme virtuality where simulacrums stand in for the real can be seen in the narrative and representations which we see on social media on the Syrian conflict. Harkin recounts how he was shown on a number of occasions a renowned video apparently depicting a gruesome execution in Syria (2013: 14). Yet only a little research on Harkin's part revealed the video to be a fake – a dubbed import from Mexico portraying the actions of the Sinaloa drug cartel (ibid: 14). Nonetheless, as Harkin observes, this didn't stop the video from being reported as fact in the media and evidently making the rounds across the Syrian population.

Forwarding the concept of the *warscape* is to emphasise that the warzone is no longer confined to the spatial locality of the geographical Syria as we understand it nor are acts of violence confined to a temporal locality. As Sedra's vignette demonstrates, images of disturbing violence of the past can be revisited at any point. War is thus to quote Graham now "permanent and boundless" (2010: 136). Further, I do not want to suppose as Baudrillard does that the war in Syria is *not* taking place for I would argue that such an over-intellectualisation of the situation would undermine the very real suffering endured by the Syrian people. Even if the boundary between the real and virtual is blurred, that is not to deny that the effects of war are still very pronounced and if anything the actual violence in Syria has intensified partly because it is extreme images of violence which get airtime and are circulated across the globe. The old journalism adage 'if it bleeds it leads' is relevant today more than ever. In addition, the concept of the *warscape* captures the very notion that the images and representations – the *mediascapes* and *ideoscapes* – constitute the warscape and as such are in and of themselves the conflict being played out in the virtual space.

ii.   The *warscape* in Izmir

The effects that the *warscape* has on the production of locality for our Syrian population in Izmir are twofold. On the one hand, the images and representations of the conflict reproduce

the virtual locality of the warzone, this is through watching and sharing videos of the conflict via their Facebook news feeds. This is an insight which I gathered from my time spent living with Faisal and his family. Faisal would often show me videos and images depicting events in Syria with the phrase 'Syria today.' Images were often visceral and gruesome ranging from pictures of victims from the Khan-Sheikoun chemical weapons attack to IS beheadings to what was the most recurring video – rocket strikes in Aleppo. In addition, just a cursory glance at the Facebook news feeds and posts seen and shared by the Syrians whom I befriended on Facebook revealed the extent to which the warzone is being reproduced as a virtual locality. Statuses and posts about loved ones who have been lost in the war and highly politicised posts about the crimes committed by parties in the war were common.

Faisal sums up why social media is the preferred means of accessing news for many Syrians:

> I trust Facebook news more than TV. Every channel has its own agenda and purpose – its own propaganda. Facebook is therefore more reliable.

Social media news is therefore actively consumed by Syrians who trust it more to gain a picture of what is happening on the ground.

The effect of these posts I would argue is an exacerbation of the state of liminality which Syrians in Izmir currently find themselves in. The *warscape* serves as constant reminder of the complex political emergency which is taking place on Syrian soil. Whether or not all the images are factually correct and unbiased matters not so much here because this virtual locality also shapes the spatial locality of Syria which is the home which people cannot return to. In turn people are reminded that the spatial locality, Izmir in which they currently reside is where they must wait.

Moreover, Faisal poignantly highlights the intersection between the physical and virtual world of the *warscape* which indeed has both a virtual and physical dimension. He recounts how he found out about the death of his brother:

> Well I found out that my brother died via Facebook. I was on Facebook and I read the news about a plane dropping a bomb on a group of aid workers and one of the names was my brother's.

Faisal's harrowing story about the loss of his brother and the way in which he found out shows us that within the *warscape* and the images and stories of horror and death are the real lives of individuals affected by the conflict in both its virtual and physical dimensions.

Likewise, on another evening spent with the family, Faisal's sister Fatima and her husband Ahmed received a picture via Whatsapp of their former home in Aleppo which had been razed by an air strike. This attack had happened before they left yet served as a reminder that their home and neighbourhood were currently unattainable. Their *ideal home* of the past lay in ruins and thus just as the smartphone can play a role in producing locality in the form of allowing people to make home – so too can it remind people that they cannot make the *ideal home.* The *warscape* thus creeps into people's relationships via digital media such as Whatsapp and serves to remind people of the complex political emergency take placing at home. Just as Sedra reflected on the wreck and ruins of her former home via google, Fatima did so via Whatsapp. The smartphone also acts as a depository of virtual memories of past homes destroyed through the course of war.

i.   Hope, fear, and longing

Syrians don't only use their smartphones to follow updates on the war via social media, it is also a means for them to maintain social and familial relationships despite the physical distance. Contact between family members in the war and those who have left also constitute the *warscape* as they influence the production of virtual locality by building a clearer picture of the war and causing people to live the war by proxy through family members still in the warzone. This is a phenomenon that would have been absent from the wars of previous centuries and thus lays to waste Nordstrom's claim that wars today are no different from others in their transnational nature. The *warscape* today is very much constituted by phone calls and contact between displaced communities across borders in a way that would not have been possible before the advent of the internet and the tools for mass communication such as the smartphone. Connected individuals thus constitute virtual communities within the

warscape. Every single Syrian whom I interviewed stated that they primarily used their phones to stay in contact with family members still in Syria. Most respondents stated that they spoke to family members in Syria daily, indeed some interviewees stressed how important it was to them:

> The smartphone is so important so I can hear my daughter's voice, my granddaughter's voice and my husband's voice. It is important for me to speak with my family.
>
> Mouna[24]

> My phone now is my life because I talk to my sons through the phone, I talk to my mother in Syria through the phone. I talk to my sick sister in Lebanon through the phone. All my life is on the phone.
>
> Amina[25]

Contact with family simultaneously contributes to the *warscape* as well as constitutes a homemaking practice. If we consider familial relationships within the modality of *the ideal home* in the constellations of home framework, we can see that through contact with family members via the smartphone, Syrians in Izmir can make home in the virtual space. The link between the warscape and the process of making home will brought out in this section under the sub-question *how does the smartphone allow Syrians to make the ideal home?* Contact with family members constitutes an *ideal home-making practicing* because *the ideal home* is imbued in the familial relationships and the sentimentality associated with these relationships and concomitantly the desire to be reunited. Parents and grandparents stress the importance of using their phones to help them watch their children and grandchildren grow:

> I speak to my daughter on video calls so I can see her. We talk almost everyday but it depends on my mood…. if I was in a bad mood, I will feel worse and if I am in a good mood I will feel better. I have a hope to meet them again but I think it is difficult now just because I don't have a job here, I don't have anything.

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[24] Interview 10 conducted via an interpreter, 20 April 2017, *Cigli, Izmir*
[25] Interview 15 conducted via an interpreter, 25 April 2017, *Basmane, Izmir*

> Every day I speak to my daughters and my husband – each for an hour. My daughter has a baby girl and I want to see her on video calls every day. She regularly shares baby pictures."

Although the maintenance of familial relationships constitutes a virtual homemaking practice and therefore produces virtual locality in the sense of making the *ideal home,* it should be noted too that conversations with family can also highlight the state of liminality. As Mautesym suggests, conversations with his family instill a sense of longing as well as a forlorn hope that they will be reunited again. Yet, owing to the liminal space and spatial locality of Izmir, it is difficult for Mautesym to make *home in the actuality* and bring his family to him as he cannot find a job. Moreover, his family who remain in Salamiah are constrained by the complex political emergency in Syria as for the journey for them to leave is extremely dangerous – never mind expensive. Thus, we can see the mutually constitutive relationship between the spatial and virtual locality; the spatial locality of Syria has created the need for the virtual locality which in turn highlights the liminality of the spatial locality Izmir.

The feelings which contact with family members instil are diverse and highlight the complexity of living in a situation of protracted displacement. Ghogho[28], for example, emphasises the guilt she feels at leaving her elderly mother in Salamiah who like Mautesym's wife and baby daughter cannot make the perilous journey across regime and opposition territory to Turkey:

> I feel I abandoned my family, that I left them in the war. It's a strange feeling. That's why I keep talking to my mum, I want her to feel that I am with her even if am not with her – I am with her.

The smartphone therefore allows Ghogho to some degree overcome the guilt of having left her mother in the warzone. In addition, Ghogho notes how she regularly sends pictures of her baby boy Talal so that his grandmother can stay a part of his life. Fatima similarly, shows me

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[26] Interview 17, 4 May 2017, *Alsancak, Izmir*

[27] Interview 10 conducted via an interpreter, 20 April 2017, *Cigli, Izmir*

[28] Interview 26, 27 May 2017, *Tepecik, Izmir*

many pictures on her phone of her young nephews in Syria and Holland whom she hasn't seen in years so she can maintain an attachment to her family and her *ideal home*.

Ghogho goes on to describe the feelings of fear she feels when she cannot contact her mother owing to bad internet, highlighting how this isn't any normal long-distance relationship but one situated in the *warscape:*

> I think without technology we would go mad.
>
> Because imagine if you left your family in a place which is so dangerous, sometimes they cut the internet because of the bills and I look at my phone thinking "I want internet I want internet." Sometimes they cut the internet in Salamiah and I get very scared like what has happened. So it's very very important to use*.*

Ghogho simultaneously talks about the fear she has for her family in Salamiah as well as the comfort which the smartphone brings in that it allows her to maintain contact with her family and know that they are safe. Both the mother-daughter relationship and Ghogho's feelings are totally dictated by the spatial locality Syria and it is in the virtual space that she feels comfort when she can talk to her family – provoking her to state that without technology she would go mad with fear. The exchanges and feelings provoked via the smartphone constitute and are driven by the *warscape.*

Faisal, similarly talks about the relief he feels when he talks with his family and how he compares this to the days when the situation in Aleppo was so bad he could not talk to them:

> It (talking to my family) gives me relief. It is better than the days when I couldn't talk with them. When I call them I feel a bit of relief.

The smartphone gives Faisal reprieve in that he can talk with his family in Syria and know that they are alive. Nonetheless, just as contact with family can instil comfort and relief, the lack of communication with family evidently has the inverse effect provoking feelings of fear and worry. Okba[29] from the ISIS-held city of Deir-Ezzor responds with the following when asked if he talks to his family back at home:

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[29] Interview 20 conducted via an interpreter, 25 May 2017, *Yamanlar, Izmir*

> No because of ISIS. There is no internet, no phone network and no food. I don't even know if they are alive or dead

The *warscape* manifests itself here in the very fact that it prevents Okba from having contact with his family and the feelings of unknowing that this leads to. Evidently, we can see why Faisal whose family hail from Aleppo and the surrounding area now feels relief that he can talk to his family.

Fatima also brings home the harsh realities of war as she too has family members who remain totally unaccounted for:

> I don't know what happened to my aunts – to my family. I don't know anything about them. I want any news of them but I don't know anything.

Again, we are presented here with how the spatial locality of Syria dictates the feelings and the fears of people in displacement. These feelings of unknowing are themselves part and parcel of the *warscape;* as it is the conflict which has led to these feelings even though it is being waged far from the spatial locality in which the subjects are currently physically situated. Despite technological advancements and internet connectivity, the above cases show that in war people still remain in the dark as to the whereabouts and safety of loved ones. The virtual community clearly has its limits in that it is dependent on all community members to have functioning internet and a tool to communicate which many in the *warscape* are deprived.

The *warscape* is a helpful concept for allowing us to understand the many ways in which the war is lived and experienced by people even if they have left the spatial locality of Syria. It allows us moreover to understand the complex processes that interact to influence the conflict dynamics in Syria and the experience of displacement for those no longer there.

This chapter is focussed on how Syrians live war on the outside through their smartphones and the effect this has on their relationship with both virtual and spatial locality. Up until this point we have used the concept of *warscapes* as well as the constellations of home framework to explore how Syrians live and breathe the conflict through social media and contact with family. However, another way in which Syrians use their smartphones is to reflect on the past. Reflection on the past home represents a form of homemaking in the sense of *the ideal home* modality as well as *the homeland* in that often reflection on the past also compels people to miss their cultural home, Syria. The sub-question which guided this section was; *how do Syrians use their smartphones to reflect on past localities?* Subsequently, this section will look how this reflection on former localities affects the refugees' relationship with the spatial locality Izmir.

Many of my interviewees described how they regularly looked at pictures of their former homes and neighbourhoods on their phones. When asked if he has pictures of his old home in Aleppo, Faisal responds:

Yeah – I look at them almost every day.

Nora[30] too elaborates on how much she misses her home in Syria. She first offers a verbal description of the house she left which certainly emphasises how much she loved her former home and how much better she feels it was than her current home in Izmir. Next, she recounts how she looks at the pictures which her husband has of the house everyday:

How many of you lived in the house in Syria?

It was very big. There were 12 children living there; six fathers, six mothers and one mother-in-law. My husband had five brothers and they all had wives. But the house was very, very big, every family had their own building as part of the same house. Each building was bigger than this house; four very big rooms, big kitchen, corridor, big balcony.

Is anyone still living in the house now?

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[30] Interview 9 conducted via an interpreter, 20 April 2017, *Cigli, Izmir*

No and we left everything there, all the furniture when we left.

Do you have pictures of the house?

Yes, my husband has many pictures on his phone.

Do you look at the pictures regularly?

Always! I am always crying because of leaving that house. I wish I could go back to my home now – not tomorrow – now.

Through Nora's detailed verbal description of her home in Syria, we can feel a sense of nostalgia and longing. In Syria, Nora lived with her huge extended family and now lives in a much smaller house in Izmir where she constantly reflects on the past and *ideal home* which she was forced to leave. The fact that she was forced to leave her furniture as she left also indicates the urgency with which her family had to leave their home which was situated in the Northern Aleppo region. The pictures on her husband's phone are a way for her to memorialise and reflect on the home which she had to abandon and the sadness that this causes her to feel. The pictures now represent no more than a virtual locality as to be present in the spatial locality of her former home is now out of the question for Nora and her family. Moreover, again we are reminded of the feelings of liminality felt by many Syrians in Izmir, Nora does not see or want her stay in Turkey to be long as she stresses that she wants to go back to her former home *now.*

It is not just through pictures of their former houses that Syrians reflect on the homes and localities which they were forced to leave and long to return to. Amira[31] recounted to me how despite the fact she felt safe in Turkey, she missed Syria because it was her home. When I asked how she remembered her home back in Aleppo, she shared with me a photo of a grassland near her neighbourhood where she used to take walks[32]. This picture she had found via google and to you or I, the locality portrayed in the picture somewhat resembles a wasteland with a power station in the background. Yet, to Amira this is a picture of where she

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[31] Interview 26 conducted via an interpreter and not recorded, 23 May 2017, *Basmane, Izmir.* This name has been changed as express consent was not given to share this name.
[32] *See Appendix ii Fig I*

used to have picnics and the picture conjures up memories of a former time when she was living in her *ideal home.* Like Nora, Amira can only experience and remember her former home as a virtual locality as the spatial locality is unattainable and still ravaged by war.

Hanan[33] from Afrin shared with me photos that she liked to look at to reflect on her *ideal home.* However, unlike Amira who used the internet to google the photos on her smartphone, Hanan shared with me pictures which she had received from family members still in Syria via Whatsapp. Three of the photos portray picturesque landscapes in Afrin. In figures ii and iii, we see rolling hills and quaint lakes surrounded by lush fields. Whilst in figure vi, we can see a dusty track leading to a small farmhouse. For Hanan, these pictures conjure up feelings of longing for *the ideal home* and she too emphasises that as soon as she can, she will return to Afrin.

The final picture which Hanan shares with me is the most poignant; it depicts Hanan's family members picking olives at the beginning of the season. The picture serves as a reminder that it is not just the spatial locality of Afrin that Hanan wishes to return to but it is all the familial and cultural rituals and traditions which she misses. Indeed, the *ideal home* as discussed in the previous chapter is not just a space but it is also the familial and sentimental attachments which we have, thus Hanan does not only long to return to the rolling hills of Afrin but she also wishes to return to her family and engage once more in the traditions which they share such as olive picking. It is telling, moreover, that Hanan stresses to me that she does not share pictures of her life in Izmir with her family as she does not want to share the reality of her life of liminality with them.

The importance of practices in helping people to maintain a cultural identity cannot be overlooked. Reflecting on cultural traditions allows Syrians to in turn both make home in the sense of the *homeland* and *the ideal home* as a reflection on Syrian culture inevitably incurs a reflection on the past home which has been lost and the future Syria which people hope to return to. During my time living with Faisal, I observed that he played dabke music every

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[33] Interview 27 conducted via an interpreter and not recorded, 23 May 2017, *Basmane, Izmir*

evening. Indeed, Faisal playing dabke music whilst his four-year-old son danced along with traditional Aleppian dance moves became an evening ritual with me for my part joining in with clicks and claps to encourage Mulham. When I eventually questioned Faisal on why he chose to listen to this music and watch these YouTube videos of dabke parties on his phone every night, he replied:

> I forget my sorrows for a while, the videos give me joy. I remember beautiful days back in Syria.[34]

Faisal sums up exactly why a reflection on cultural traditions is important for people living in liminal states in protracted displacement. On the one hand, it acts as a form of escapism which momentarily allows Faisal to forget the spatial locality Izmir in which he resides and in which he is unhappy. On the other hand, watching dabke not only constitutes a form of escapism but also a reflection on the *ideal home* and an attachment to the cultural *homeland.* The music and the dancing conjure up memories of beautiful days gone by and allow Faisal to cope with the uncertainty and precariousness of his current situation.

Dabke is a particularly significant cultural practice. The music which is accompanied by traditional Syrian dancing is also emblematic of Syrian identity as well as the feeling of community which goes alongside the form of dancing which involves large groups dancing in unison. In watching videos of dabke dancing at weddings and other large social gatherings, Faisal is also reflecting on memories of a time when the community could gather and partake in this archetypally Syrian cultural practice. However, once more, the dabke gatherings are confined only to the virtual locality. In the current situation with families and communities separated, small and overcrowded homes and a host society wary of large gatherings of Syrians, the dabke parties of former years are not possible.

Another interviewee Hadija Ali discusses an upcoming wedding celebration which will be happening at her mother-in-law's house where everyone will be dancing dabke. Nonetheless, when I ask her how many people will be attending, she replies:

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[34] Interview 22 conducted via an interpreter, 25 May 2017, *Tepecik, Izmir*

No more than 50 people because the house is small so we can't invite more. Also we cannot invite more because here in Turkey, people mind this. We, Syrians cannot have big wedding celebrations. They (Turkish people) don't like us to annoy them with the loud music.

Hadija Ali's quote demonstrates the constraints in the spatial locality Izmir which is preventing Syrians from hosting the grand dabke gatherings which they are so attached to. Hadija Ali highlights the issue of small and overcrowded homes and the very literal spatial limits to holding such parties. At the same time, discrimination and wariness from the host community also prevent Syrians from holding such parties. The significance of power relations in defining how subjects can produce locality comes through here; the large dabke parties represent an exercise in claiming space or transforming *a space* into a *place* with a distinct cultural identity. Nonetheless, this exercise is not possible because of the very literal spatial constraints i.e. the lack of venue to hold these parties as well as the wariness of the host community. Although, Hadija's family will be holding their wedding celebration despite the constraints in the spatial locality Izmir, they nonetheless lament that the party will not be as they wish it to be with more people and loud music. Faisal, conversely, cannot even partake in the dabke parties of former years and is forced to live this particular cultural tradition solely in the virtual locality.

iii.   Virtual war, real lives

This chapter has aimed to describe the significance of social media and most importantly the smartphone in war today and the prominent effect this has on the experience and lives of the individuals who have left the war. By developing the concept of the *warscape* I intended to capture the different influences and drivers in both conflict and mass migration today. In delineating the role social media played in driving the Syrian conflict and the subsequent way in which Syrians consumed these forms of new media, I demonstrated how this virtual locality of the warzone influences the spatial locality of Izmir as it builds on the sense of Izmir as a liminal space.

However, for fear of coming across technophobic, it is indeed worth noting that as the case of Ghogho's relationship with her mother and Mautesym's with his baby daughter show, the phone plays a crucial role in building virtual communities and in turn maintaining social and familial relationships despite the pain of separation. In highlighting the different feelings

people experienced through contact or lack thereof with family, this paper aimed to show that the experience of war goes beyond the death and destruction which we so often associate it with. War and the *warscape* refers to the fathers separated from their children; it refers to finding out about the death of your brother via social media; it refers to all the destroyed homes, neighbourhoods and lives. People do not leave these memories and feelings by leaving the spatial locality of the warzone but instead relive them in the virtual locality which in turn affects their relationship with their current physical dwelling and their own perception of what home now means to them. The phone allows people to reflect on past localities and acts in turn as a sort of depository for virtual memories. Again, as highlighted, reflecting on past homes too, heightens feelings of longing for the *ideal home* and the *homeland.* In the next section, we will examine how these desires and hopes for the future are brought to the fore by the smartphone and how people begin to construct an imagined life beyond the liminal space.

Part three: Looking to the future

Kabachnkik et al point out that people in displacement dream of both the past and future home in order to cope with the lack of prospect of making home in the present situation (2010: 315). In chapter one, we examined how Syrian refugees produce virtual and spatial locality in the present spatial locality of Izmir and in chapter two we explored how Syrians reflected on the past and how they lived in the virtual locality of the warzone. In this final chapter, we now turn to explore how Syrians begin to plan and imagine for the future through their smartphones. The processes which Syrians undergo to imagine the future are context-driven in that it is the liminal space of Izmir which compels Syrians to dream and plan for a future beyond the liminal space. The sub-question for this section of this thesis is; *how do Syrians use their smartphone to either dream or plan for a future locality?*

i. Planning for a future beyond the borders

For those wishing to journey on to Europe and build a life beyond the liminal space, the EU-Turkey deal is the primary barrier standing in people's way. It is the EU-Turkey deal which has transformed Izmir into a liminal space as it prevents people who wish to do so from travelling to Europe. A number of interviewees relayed to me how the deal ruined their plans of seeking sanctuary in Europe:

> I arrived in Greece on the day that the EU-Turkey deal was implemented. We stayed there for four months before we were told to apply for asylum in Greece. Myself and many other Syrian people started our asylum applications. My application was rejected and I was given two options: apply again or go back to Turkey. The situation there (in Chios) was so bad, really bad that I decided to go back to Turkey because I thought it was better.

Okba[35]

> We didn't apply immediately for it (temporary protection status) because after we got married we decided to try and go to Europe. We almost reached the beach to get the boat to Greece but then we heard about the decision that they wouldn't let people leave Greece.

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[35] Interview 20 conducted via an interpreter, 25 May 2017, *Yamanlar, Izmir*

> I would like to go (to Europe) but I know that I can't because of the EU-Turkey deal. If someone offered me the chance to go I would.

Ghogho's anecdote of how her and her husband were all set to start their journey to Europe only to find that the deal had been implemented demonstrates the moment that Izmir was transformed from a zone of transit to a zone of liminality. Ghogho's story allows us to visualize the very moment the situation changed as in a cruel twist of fate, they had planned to make their journey on the eve of 19 March 2017 to catch their boat just after midnight; meaning that they would find themselves on the cut-off point and be among the first group to be detained on the Greek islands as Okba and his family unfortunately were.

Okba and his family experienced first-hand the real on-the-ground effects of the EU-Turkey deal. His face seemed pained as he relayed to me the experience that he, his wife and his two young daughters endured on the Greek island of Chios. The experience of being detained in Chios and subsequently deported back to Turkey has dissuaded Okba from making the perilous journey across the Aegean Sea again. That is not to say that Okba feels safe and content to stay in Turkey, indeed he stresses the uncertainty he feels regarding the future for him and his family:

> I have no idea what will happen with my daughters' future. I have no idea what will happen in Turkey. I think that I should go back again to Europe or try but I know now what is happening in Greece for people who stay there. So I am hesitating more. Should I try again or go back to Syria? I am feeling that it is not safe here in Turkey for his daughters' future.
>
> He is working his own job and can barely make ends meet.

Okba's quote highlights the feelings of liminality experienced by many Syrians in Izmir. When he states; '*I have no idea what will happen in Turkey',* I believe he is referring to the deteriorating political situation in Turkey which following the referendum in April has got

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[36] Interview 26, 27 May 2017, *Tepecik, Izmir*
[37] Interview 22 conducted via an interpreter, 25 May 2017, *Tepecik, Izmir*

increasingly totalitarian with the detention of a hundreds of human rights activists and journalists[38]. Moreover, regarding the uncertainty of what will happen in Turkey, this most likely also refers to Syrians not knowing how permanent Erdogan's Administration's offer of refuge is. As Ghogho notes:

Where you feel safe, you feel home and we don't feel safe here now.

What are the main things that make you not feel safe?

For example, we don't know if the Turkish government will one day issue a decision that they don't want Syrians.

Given the constraints to transgressing the spatial locality of Izmir and heading to Europe, how do Syrians imagine and plan for a future beyond the liminal space? Okba, for his part, describes how he uses virtual communities via his smartphone to stay abreast of updates on Europe's borders:

Are you part of any facebook groups for Syrians?

Yes but groups in Greece not in Turkey.

What kind of information do you get from these groups?

About what is happening in Greece for Syrians; about the boats and smugglers.

Just as Syrians form virtual communities within Izmir to share advice and information on housing as discussed in chapter one, so too do Syrians form virtual communities across the globe to share information on where the best places for Syrians to seek asylum are. In addition, it is a widely-known fact that Facebook groups are one of the primary ways in which refugees find smugglers (Adamson & Akbiek, 2015) this was a fact which was corroborated

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[38] At a talk organised by the local civil society group *Halkların Köprüsü Derneği* on 29 April*,* a Syrian activist expressed his solidarity for the people of Turkey as they face increasing repression from Erdogan's regime stating: "Coming from one of the most totalitarian states in the world, I can only stand in solidarity with the people of Turkey." Such a quote summarises the tense political climate in Turkey and the fear it instills in Syrians who have fled and been the victims of such state-led repression.

by sources in Izmir[39]. The smartphone therefore plays a key role in facilitating escape by allowing people to plan their trips to Europe and escape the spatial locality of Izmir in search of the *ideal home* of the future.

Okba uses a Facebook group for Syrians in Greece to understand the situation there but Layla[40] who now intends on going to Europe or Canada uses google and news sites accessed via her smartphone to understand the situation for Syrians in other places. When I asked what she used her phone, she gave me the following answer:

> I try to always know more about Syrian refugees and understand about their lives and to better understand the situation between Europe and Syrian refugees.
>
> **Is this to know whether you can go to Europe or just to understand the situation?**
>
> I have decided to go to Europe and this is why I use the internet to know more about the country.

Layla trawls the internet for information on where the best place for Syrian refugees is. Ghogho and her husband also use news on the internet as their first port of call for getting information on which country they should go to. The case of the young couple from Salamiah is unique in that at the time of interview Awad and Ghogho have a meeting with the Turkish government to discuss seeking asylum legally elsewhere coming up one month in the future. In the interview, they must state which country they would like to seek asylum in and were therefore doing their research. Here is how our discussion on where they would like to go went:

> **Which country would you like to go to?**
>
> To be honest we don't have any specific country, anywhere is good. He likes Canada, he thinks Canada is nice from the news we hear. I don't care, I find them all the same.

[39] This point was highlighted to me on a number of occasions by refugees and people working in refugee support in Izmir and recorded in fieldnotes.
[40] Interview 1 conducted via an interpreter, 7April 2017, *Basmane, Izmir*

The news you hear, do you hear from other Syrians?

No, we don't know anyone in Canada. We read the news on the internet. Canada did this, Canada is welcoming refugees; you have more rights and less discrimination.

To add to the picture of just how in the dark many people are about the decision of where to go, I might add that after our interview, I was suddenly in the hotseat as Ghogho and Awad asked me my opinion on which country in Europe is best for Syrians. Unsurpisingly, they began by questioning me on my own country, the UK and its policies and attitudes towards Syrian refugees before asking my opinion on other countries in Europe. The exchange highlighted how hard it is for people to really gain a clear idea of where the best place for them to go is and as a European myself I was seen to be a window of knowledge on this other world beyond the liminal space. Yet, despite my deep interest in refugee issues in the UK and across Europe, I still felt wholly unqualified to give people information that could potentially dictate where they end up spending the rest of their lives. Our exchange demonstrates that despite the plethora of information available for people on the internet and through virtual communities, people will still seek out insights from people in real life and indeed the lack of information they had on the various countries which became clear as our conversation went on also showed the limits to the smartphone in really allowing people to be able to effectively plan their future.

ii.   Dreaming of the future

Appadurai contends that refugees have to drag their imaginations for new ways of living along with them (1996: 6). Whilst refugees can to some extent use their smartphones to make very practical arrangements for the future through researching countries' asylum policies and attitudes towards Syrian refugees so too can they use their phones to *dream* of the future and construct an imagined world. It is in dreams after all that individuals can refigure their social lives (ibid: 5). Furthermore, Appadurai attests that in people's consumption of the *mediascape,* they can build proto-narratives of possible lives and fantasies that could become prolegomena to the desire for movement (ibid: 36). In this section, we will look at how people construct an imagined future of a life in Europe through conversations with family members

and through following news and updates on the internet and social media via their smartphones.

Okba tells me he has family in the UK and Austria and recounts how well their lives are going in their new localities. Here Okba implies the imagined locality that he constructs of life in the UK:

> I have a brother in the UK and one in Austria. My brother in the UK went there from Lebanon via the UN resettlement scheme. He has been there nine months, his children now go to school and his daughter recently received an award for a short story. His son is also first in his school for most of his subjects. His wife is learning English and is the first in her class. They are good now.

As well as relaying to me in detail how well his brother and his family in the UK are doing, after our interview, Okba shows me the Facebook profile of his brother to demonstrate how good his life in the UK is. His brother's Facebook newsfeed features a status describing how proud he is of his daughter who received a certificate for a short story which she wrote at school along with a picture of the certificate. It is clear thus that Okba uses his brother's Facebook profile to get updates on his brother's life and to paint a picture of what life in the UK is like. Okba's statement *'they are good now'* as well as his description of their achievements in the UK force him to draw comparison with what his life of liminality in Turkey is like. My interview with Okba was punctuated with statements about how hard life in Turkey is and how it can never be home for him. First, he describes the discrimination which he has faced in the hospital:

> My wife was sick for twenty days and we went to Tepecik hospital but the doctor behaved very badly with my wife. She said 'you Syrian people are not welcome here. I am too busy now for you.' My wife came out of the hospital crying and told me that she didn't want to go back there again.

Then he goes on to describe how, whilst he can never feel at home in Turkey, he could perhaps feel at home elsewhere in Europe:

> Turkey is impossible, it's not possible to feel at home here. If I moved to Germany or another country, I would respect their way of life and then I would call it my home or second home.

Both Okba's description about his brother's life in the UK as well as his statement about how he could feel at home in Germany or another country suggest that he is constructing an imagined future of what life in Europe will be like. This imagined future locality is driven by the context of the liminal spatiality of Izmir where Okba faces discrimination and an overarching uncertainty regarding his daughters' future. Through following updates on his brother who is benefitting from English lessons and policies of integration in the UK, Okba's feelings about the lack of provision for Syrians are heightened and he thus simultaneously uses his brother's updates to construct an imagined future of what life for him and his family could be like. Okba is essentially building Appadurai's aforementioned, "*protonarrative of possible lives"* in his consumption of social media updates of his brother's life as well through exchanges and conversations with his brother. In addition, in constructing an imagined future Okba is simultaneously building *the ideal home* as he dreams of the home of the future for him and his family. Moreover, such an *ideal home* is constructed because he struggles to make *home in the actuality.*

Similarly, Faisal and I would chat extensively about life in Turkey and life in Europe and what both could offer Syrians. Faisal who has a brother in Germany and a brother in Holland regularly told me that Europeans are good to Syrians. He discussed how his brother Ali's wife received Dutch lessons and how the government would provide Syrians with housing and an income as well as various other ways in which Syrians are given the opportunity to integrate into Dutch society. Nevertheless, such descriptions were always followed by the sentiment 'nothing like here.' Again, highlighting how conversations with family members who have left the liminal space can heighten the sense of liminality for those still in Turkey and wanting to move on.

It is worth pointing out here, moreover, that despite Faisal's desires to go to Europe, the EU-Turkey deal had truly laid to rest Faisal's plans to go to Europe with his family. Instead, Faisal's plans for the future revolved around returning to Syria and teaching again. This decision was made during my stay in Izmir as just prior to my arrival, IS was forced to withdraw from the

town of Al-Bab in Northern Syria by Turkish and Free Syrian Army forces (Al-Khatieb i, 2017). Subsequently, the Cilvegozu/Bab al-Hawa border crossing was opened allowing Syrians to return home for the holiday of Eid al-Fitr or to resettle permanently (Al-Khatieb ii, 2017). Faisal explains below why he made the decision to go to Al-Bab which is now under Turkish control:

> I don't like it here in Turkey. I am going back to the areas under Turkish control – it is Syrian land but controlled by Turkey. I am going there, there is a good life there.

> **Have you found a house there already?**

> My brother and my mother already live there – I will live with them.

> **Are you excited to go back to Syria?**

> It's not my real home but at least it will be better than here.

Since the expulsion of IS from Al-Bab, Faisal has begun to construct an imagined future of life back in Syria. In Al-Bab he will live with his family and importantly will be able to return to his profession as a teacher which he misses. His statement 'there is a good life there,' showcases how he believes that life will be much better for him in Syria. Faisal's case demonstrates how the imagined future is subject to change depending on the context and spatial locality of the future localities. Firstly, his imagined future in Europe was put to bed by the advent of the EU-Turkey deal but he is now able to construct an imagined future in Syria owing to the changing spatiality in Syria namely the fact that Al-Bab is now a safe place to live.

Ghogho and Awad who also have family in Europe describe in an overwhelmingly positive manner what their relatives' lives are like and in doing so also construct Europe in the virtual locality:

> Yes, they (relatives in Austria and Germany) are very happy. His brother is more happy in Austria, he says it is very beautiful. He is a single guy so he is free, all the time he is getting German lessons, playing music. He does everything so he is very happy. He doesn't have any commitments.

Austria comes across here as the land of milk and honey, where one can enjoy freedom, an absence of commitments and a place where you can devote yourself to learning a language or music. For Ghogho and Awad reflecting on their relatives' lives in Europe, they can build a picture of what their future lives could be like. Moreover, conversations with family members about their lives in Europe no doubt do give the couple an inkling into where would be a good place for them to choose to go to.

Nonetheless, interestingly Ghogho caveats her description of her relatives' lives in Europe by stressing that the conversations that take place in the virtual space are not necessarily a true reflection of reality. When I ask her if her exchanges with family members allow her to paint a good picture of what life in Europe is like, she responds:

> Yes but I'm sure it is not the same as if you live there. For example, when you are far away and you talk to your sister, she won't tell us that she is uncomfortable so she doesn't make us feel bad for her. She tries to show us that she is happy. Unless for example if I called her now and all of a sudden she is crying and I asked her why she would tell me but not always. Most of the time they try to show us that they are comfortable.
>
> We do the same; how's Turkey? We are fine we are very happy even if we are not.
>
> **Why do you think people do this?**
>
> I think because they care about each other, like if I love you I won't show you that I'm not happy so you can be happy for me.

Ghogho's quote here highlights the disjuncture between virtual and spatial locality. The localities which people construct through conversations and social media updates are as Ghogho attests never a truthful and honest representation of reality. On the contrary, the image that people construct of their relatives' lives is just an *imagined* one inflected by the relatives' jazzing up of reality as well as the individual in the state of liminality's own feelings towards their current situation. It is telling too that Ghogho states that she often offers an incomplete picture of her own life in Turkey to save the feelings of worry that an honest account of life may provoke in her family members. It is no wonder thus that the pair asked a seemingly impartial guest like me for a more truthful rendition of what life in various European countries might be like for them.

Syrians with family members in Europe are also able to literally visualise life in Europe through the photographs which family members share. So just as we saw how Syrians can reflect on past home through images on the smartphone, so too can people reflect on future homes. Kurdistan has a husband in Sweden whom she will eventually be reunited with and who shares pictures of Sweden:

Does he share pictures of what Sweden is like?

Yes! It snows there.

The area where he lives is near Denmark and it is so cold there. The weather is nice, it is near the sea.

When he sends you these pictures, how does it make you feel?

I miss him so much, they have been apart for two years. I wish I was there with him now and the children. I wish we were all together.

Kurdistan recounts how she visualises her future locality with its wintery climate and which is near the sea. However, she emphasises that the pictures and further exchanges with her husband also heighten the pain of separation. For Kurdistan, the future is not so imagined in the respect that she knows with 100 per cent certainty that she will be reunited with her husband in Sweden but in her case it is just a matter of time as she waits for the reunification process to be finalised. At the same time, she can only construct an image of this *ideal home* of the future through conversations with her husband as well as the pictures which he shares.

Mautesym also has a brother in Sweden and although he explains that they do not have such a good relationship and therefore do not talk regularly, he does mention that his brother did send him pictures of his new locality when he first arrived:

When he first arrived did he share pictures of Sweden?

Pictures of nature because we miss pictures of nature. In Syria, we live in a desert so green forests are new for us.

How did those pictures make you feel?

Jealous.

The pictures of Sweden to Mautesym contrast greatly with the spatial localities which he is familiar with. The pictures which his brother shares cause Mautesym to feel jealous as he cannot enjoy such landscapes and is struggling to get by in the liminal spatiality of Izmir. Mautesym is an informant who I spent a lot of time with during my time in Turkey and revealed to me that he was somewhat an anglophile and in his years of honing his skills in English language had developed a desire to go to the UK. I told Mautesym which town in the UK I was from and weeks later, he told me how green and beautiful where I lived was. He had found my town on google maps, thus the internet had given Mautesym the opportunity to find and visualise the locality of his dreams.

iii.   Choices, choices, choices

The construction of the imagined future or *ideal home* directly impacts people's navigation of and relationship with the spatial locality of Izmir. The community of Syrians in Izmir can be divided into three groups depending on where they see themselves constructing home. In *Group One,* we find the group of Syrians that want to stay in Turkey and see their stay there as long-term. This group mainly consists of those Syrians who arrived in Syria before 2013, which is widely hailed as the year when the huge influx of Syrians began to settle in Turkey and Turkey's attitude towards refugees as well as its ability to cope with the growing number of new arrivals took a turn for the worse. In *Group Two,* we have those Syrians who only see a future in Syria and as such see their stay in Turkey as temporary. The aim of individuals within this group is to go back to Syria as soon as possible. Finally, in *Group Three* are Syrians who do not see a future in Turkey nor Syria and who instead aim to go to Europe despite the odds against them. However, also in this group are those Syrians who know that they will go to Europe via legal means such as Kurdistan who will be legally reunited with her husband in Sweden in due time.

The starkest way in which we can see how people's decision vis-à-vis their future home manifests itself is in people's decision to learn Turkish or English. Evidently, Syrians within *Group One* would like to learn Turkish. Aside from a small number of classes made available to Syrian women by the NGO WAHA; in general, in Izmir there is a total lack of Turkish classes for Syrian refugees and Syrians who would like to learn Turkish have to find other ways to develop their language skills. One way that people in *Group One* learn Turkish is with the help of their smartphones as numerous interviewees relayed to me

(R) We are learning Turkish

How?

(R) We use lessons on YouTube

(M) And Facebook groups which teach Turkish.

Muhaned and Rama[41]

I like watching Turkish series. I use my phone to watch Turkish programs in order to learn Turkish*.*

Maner[42]

I want to stay in Turkey because it is close to Syria and I want to eventually go back, I also have many Syrian friends and relatives here. I like it here because there is a similar culture and similar weather.

I am trying to learn Turkish on my phone.

Amira[43]

All the informants above outline various ways in which the smartphone can help Syrians learn Turkish. I argue that a commitment to learning Turkish represents a wilful attempt to

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[41] Interview 3 conducted via an interpreter, 8 April 2017, *Kadifekale, Izmir*
[42] Interview 6 conducted via an interpreter, 14 April 2017, *Gidiz, Izmir*
[43] Interview 26 conducted via an interpreter and not recorded, 23 May 2017, *Basmane, Izmir*

transcend the liminal space through trying to integrate into Turkish society. Evidently, learning Turkish can also be considered a way of navigating life in Izmir in the present as it helps people function in their daily lives and therefore also changes the spatial locality of Izmir. Nonetheless, I consider the attempt to learn a language a more forward-thinking endeavour and driven by whether or not people want to stay in Turkey and as such is more a practice of imagining and constructing a future home.

Conversely, the majority of Syrians I spoke to unsurprisingly had a very strong desire to return to Syria and thus many were consciously not attempting to learn Turkish as they did not see their stay as long. Sahar, a translator whom I spent a lot of time with, regularly told me how much she didn't like Turkey nor Turkish people. She didn't want to learn Turkish because of this dislike for Turkey as well as because she wants to return to Aleppo as soon as she can. Likewise, Zeynab[44] who lives in a Syrian neighbourhood explains why she neither wants to nor needs to learn Turkish:

> I do not speak Turkish as I do not communicate with them, I live in a Syrian neighbourhood and I have my family here so I do not need to.

Nevertheless, the issue which remains for Syrians in *Group Two* and for many in *Group One* too is how to make sure that children attending Turkish school do not forget how to speak Arabic. The need for parents and children to learn Arabic in their own time is driven by the lack of Arab schools for Syrian children. At the time of research, there were five Temporary Education Centres (TECs) run by UNICEF for Syrian children to learn both Arabic and Turkish.[45] The TECs are staffed on a voluntary basis by Syrian teachers and follow a modified Syrian Arabic curriculum (*Human Rights Watch,* 2017: 4). However, according to local NGO which works on legal protection for refugees, these TECs are due to be closed and even whilst functioning did not offer nearly enough school places considering the huge number of Syrian children needing education in Izmir. The onus is therefore on Syrian families to make sure their children develop their Arabic language skills. Teaching children Arabic is an undertaking

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[44] Interview 5 conducted via an interpreter, 14 April 2017, *Gidiz, Izmir*
[45] This information was gathered on 11 April 2017 at a presentation evening by a said NGO. However, consent could not be gathered to include the NGO name.

that again showcases that Syrians imagine their future back in Syria but most importantly it is also a practice that demonstrates an attachment to the *homeland* and is therefore a *homeland-making* practice.

Nora[46] is a key example of a Syrian in *Group Two* who has no intention of learning Turkish yet she finds herself in a position where her children are in Turkish school and are not learning Arabic:

Are you learning Turkish?

No! I don't want to learn Turkish, she wants to be back in Syria. Her children though are learning Turkish.

Are your children at school?

Yes.

Are they at an Arab or Turkish school?

Turkish – my children are forgetting Arabic! My son tried to write Allah-Akhbar and he wrote it from left to right! I cried when this happened.

The fact that Nora cried at her son's Arabic deteriorating exemplifies the hardship of displacement where children are torn between two identities and it is increasingly difficult for parents to help them maintain an attachment to their former home. Whilst Nora can shun learning Turkish while she waits to return to her *homeland,* her children who must get an education are forced to learn Turkish at school. Nora goes on to suggest that the phone can in some way play a role in helping her children learn Arabic:

We are always using our phones to watch Arabic series and this helps with the language.

---

[46] Interview 9 conducted via an interpreter, 20 April 2017, *Cigli, Izmir*

Aziapropo[47] who has been in Turkey for four years and likes living there has children in Turkish school who speak fluent Turkish. However, she too showcases her cultural attachment to Syria as she states:

> I want them (her children) to speak Arabic because they are Arabs first and foremost. I am happy that they are speaking another language but I don't want them to lose their 'original language.'

During our interview, Aziapropo's 14-year-old daughter sits down with us and begins flicking through a tablet[48]. I ask what she uses the tablet for and she replies:

> Listening to the Koran, watching Turkish series and she tries to learn Arabic on YouTube.

Digital technology can therefore be used as a means for Syrian children to learn Arabic. This commitment to maintaining a level of Arabic via digital technology again represents a wilful acceptance that they will return to Syria soon as well as most significantly allowing Syrians in displacement to maintain their Arab identity.

Likewise, Ghogho who is in *Group Three* has also put off learning Turkish until she has completed her (at the time of our meeting) upcoming interview with the Turkish government regarding resettlement. Our conversation on the subject of learning Turkish went as follows:

Are you learning Turkish?

No.

I don't like it, maybe I will learn tomorrow.

Why do you not want to learn it?

---

[47] Interview 13 conducted via an interpreter, 20 April 2017, *Cigli, Izmir*

[48] Although this thesis is primarily about the smartphone, in some ways the uses of the smartphone and tablet are interchangeable. The tablet can helpful in language learning but in many ways is not such an accessible tool for refugees and is therefore not the focal point of this.

Well because until now we don't know if we are going to stay or if we are going to leave so we don't feel like we have to. If I have to go to hospital or pharmacy or anywhere, they speak English –not all of them but most of them.

Maybe if I didn't speak English I would have to learn.

The notion of not knowing whether they are staying or leaving epitomises the state of liminality that Ghogho and many other Syrians are in. Ghogho's plans to go to Europe were put on hold one year ago with the EU-Turkey deal, yet in this time she still has not committed to learning Turkish as she still feels that she will not stay in Turkey. Undoubtedly, Ghogho's case is particular as she can navigate life in Izmir as she speaks English and her husband Awad also speaks Turkish. Moreover, Ghogho's reluctance to learn Turkish is context-driven stemming from the fact that she feels Turkey is not a safe space for her to raise her family as stated heretofore.

Okba, meanwhile, notes that his young daughters primarily use his iPad to learn English. Although Okba has picked up Turkish through working at his local bazar, he has no intentions of teaching his daughters Turkish or encouraging them to learn the language:

What do you use your iPad for?

It's just for the kids. She is learning English on it.

How does she use the iPad to learn English?

She is learning it on the tablet.

Does she speak Turkish?

No.

I don't want to teach them Turkish because it won't help them as we don't plan to stay here. It is hard to live here. The Turkish government doesn't help Syrians at all.

Just as the Syrians falling in *Group Two* use digital technology to learn Arabic and those within *Group One* use it to learn Turkish, Okba's case highlights how people in *Group Three* also harness technology to learn English. The different experiences and use of the virtual space

shows how deeply intersubjective locality is in that all the Syrians here had different imagined futures and different ways of negotiating with and coping with the liminal space through their smartphones and tablets.

iv.   Dreams of hope vs the reality of the border

It is evident that dreaming of the future and imagining a future locality beyond the present liminal space is important to Syrians in Izmir who see no future in Turkey. Psychotherapist and former concentration camp inmate Viktor Frankl wrote of his experiences in Auschwitz and forwarded in his seminal text *Man's Search for Meaning* (1959), that in a situation of such profound suffering and horror, hope is what sustains people. The construction of imagined future localities via the smartphone is not just a pass-time but is also a lifeline for people struggling to cope in the situation of liminality. These dreams for the future, moreover, don't just consist of the construction of future spatial localities constructed with the help of the smartphone but also through the hope to be reunited with the family members whom people maintain contact with as discussed in chapter two. Whilst imprisoned in Auschwitz, Frankl's musings on his wife and the future they would have together was what sustained him – it was what gave his life meaning (1959: 56-57). The same can be said for our Syrians in Izmir who despite having suffered in Syria and despite suffering in Turkey with a lack of security and prospects for integration, dream of a better future in a better place with the people whom they love.

Nonetheless, again it is time to add nuance to the discussion on the significant role played by smartphones in supporting the imagination process for Syrian refugees and allowing them to plan for the future. It must not be forgotten that whilst people can dream and imagine new realities in new localities, this process is situated within a broader global context in which mobility for Syrian refugees is severely hindered. The EU-Turkey deal as discussed previously in this chapter represents a major constraint to people's capability to go to Europe and make a new life there. Thus, in one respect, it could be said that perhaps the increased availability of social media and information creates a false illusion that the border can be transgressed and a new life in Europe can be created. Indeed, whilst social media has opened up new

realms of possibilities and ways of understanding and seeing the world, the severe constraints to mobility remain in place.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have aimed to make a small contribution to one of the most complex issues of our time - that is the current mass displacement of people across the globe. Through exploring the relationship between digital technology and spatiality, this thesis has brought out; on the one hand, the agential process of locality production and homemaking which people in displacement undergo as well as the broader context in which these practices and the subjects whom perform them are situated on the other. As the complex political emergency in Syria shows no sign of abating and Europe's border policies become increasingly draconian and militarized, it is essential to better understand the impact of these policies and practices on the lives of those whom they affect the most. Despite the wide condemnation from rights groups, the EU-Turkey deal remains in place and was even used as a blueprint for a deal between the EU and Libya to stem the flow of migrants arriving in Europe via the central Mediterranean route (Asiedu, 2017). Such a deal with Libya represents how far the EU has fallen in terms of its moral leadership in that it can barter a deal with a such a fragile state where human rights abuses are rife and there is no central government. Yet such a deal was tabled and agreed upon for the express result of keeping those fleeing violence and persecution out of Europe as anti-migrant rhetoric and the populist far-right gain in popularity across the continent (Asiedu, 2017).

Thus, liminality rather than being a temporary state confined to Syrian refugees in Turkey is becoming more and more the global norm. The three chapters of this thesis focused on the relationship between time and space in the imaginations of those in living in situations of protracted displacement to better understand the experience of displacement and the role that the smartphone plays in affecting this experience. In chapter one, we explored the practical ways in which people navigate their lives in the present tense with a primary focus on locality production in the sense of building *home in the actuality.* At the same time, the discussion on the positive effect of the smartphone in helping people organize life was nuanced with a critique on smart solutions inspired by Duffield's *resilience of the ruins* thesis. Through closing chapter one with a discussion of Duffield's damning diatribe against the turn to smart solutions, we could better contextualize the use of smartphones within a broader

socio-political context and avoid romanticizing the agential practices of locality production at play in Izmir.

Chapter two showcased the ways in which the present spatial locality of Syria currently a warzone is brought home to people who have fled the violence; and concomitantly, how people reflect on their past homes in which the spatial locality is defined by the ongoing complex political emergency. Through applying and developing the concept of the *warscape,* I aimed to demonstrate how far the tentacles of violent conflict now extend as a result of increased connectivity. The case of the Syrian crisis is somewhat seminal defined as it is as the first 'YouTube War.' The insights gained from living with a Syrian family and spending my whole time in Turkey among Syrians enabled me to gain a perspective into how people choose to track and follow the conflict at home. Though my conclusions are only tentative, as I evidently cannot speak for the experience of all Syrians and moreover can only draw my own interpretations from the insights gained during my time in Turkey, through developing the framework of the *warscape,* I believe I can contribute to a burgeoning and soon to be significant debate on the role of social media in war and displacement.

Furthermore, in chapter two, we were able to explore the diverse array of emotions experienced by Syrians in Izmir as they maintained contact with family still in the spatial locality of the warzone. By highlighting these emotions, I aimed to emphasize that war is about more than the destruction and violence which we see and so often associate it with but is most prominently felt by people through the separation it induces.

In the final chapter, we saw the critical role of the imagination process and how people can use their smartphones as they both make practical plans for the future as well as imagine or dream of a future life beyond the liminal space. Imagining a new future is also a mechanism to cope with the present situation of liminality and the difficulties incurred in living in the spatial locality of Izmir. Yet again, we have to remind ourselves that for most people the constructed future locality will most likely remain forever in the virtual locality as the border regime prevents people from actually creating this sought-after new life be it in Europe or in Syria.

This thesis has illustrated one small part of the experience of displacement today and brought out the human impact of the EU-Turkey deal. Though this thesis was analytically about technology and space, on a deeper level, through the evidence gathered I hoped to demonstrate how policies and ideas implemented in Brussels and beyond affect people on the ground. As our globalized world becomes increasingly interconnected and complex, we need to develop more creative ways to understand how technology affects the experience of war and displacement. When our governments and policy-makers build walls instead of bridges and turn away families fleeing abhorrent violence, it is up to us to develop nuanced critique and effective resistance.

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Interview list

Interview Number	Name	Date
Syrian refugees		
1	Layla	7 April 2017
2	Ahmed	7 April 2017
3	Muhaned and Rama	8 April 2017
4	Hadija Ali	14 April 2017
5	Zeynab	14 April 2017
6	Maner	14 April 2017
7	Omar	14 April 2017
8	Alaf	14 April 2017
9	Nora	20 April 2017
10	Mouna	20 April 2017
11	Maroush	20 April 2017
12	Maya	20 April 2017
13	Aziapropo	20 April 2017
14	Almazay	20 April 2017
15	Amina	25 April 2017
16	Valodia	26 April 2017
17	Mautesym	4 May 2017
18	Jasmim*	12 May 2017
19	Kurdistan	24 May 2017
20	Okba	25 May 2017
21	Fatima	25 May 2017
22	Faisal	25 May 2017
23	Ghogho	27 May 2017
24	Hanan*	23 May 2017
25	Amira *	23 May 2017
NGO Workers		
1	*Anonymous*	5 May 2017
2	*Anonymous*	22 May 2017

*refers to interviews which were not recorded.

I have taken the decision to anonymise NGO workers here owing to the tense situation in Turkey today. The information shared with me by NGOs helped me in contextualising the situation for Syrian refugees in Izmir and did not form part of the data analysis process.

Appendix i

i.   Figure i: *Arab satellites installation service posted in 'Jobs in Izmir'*

Text reads: Abo Samar - For installing and setting up the Nilesat arabsat turkysat europesat channels
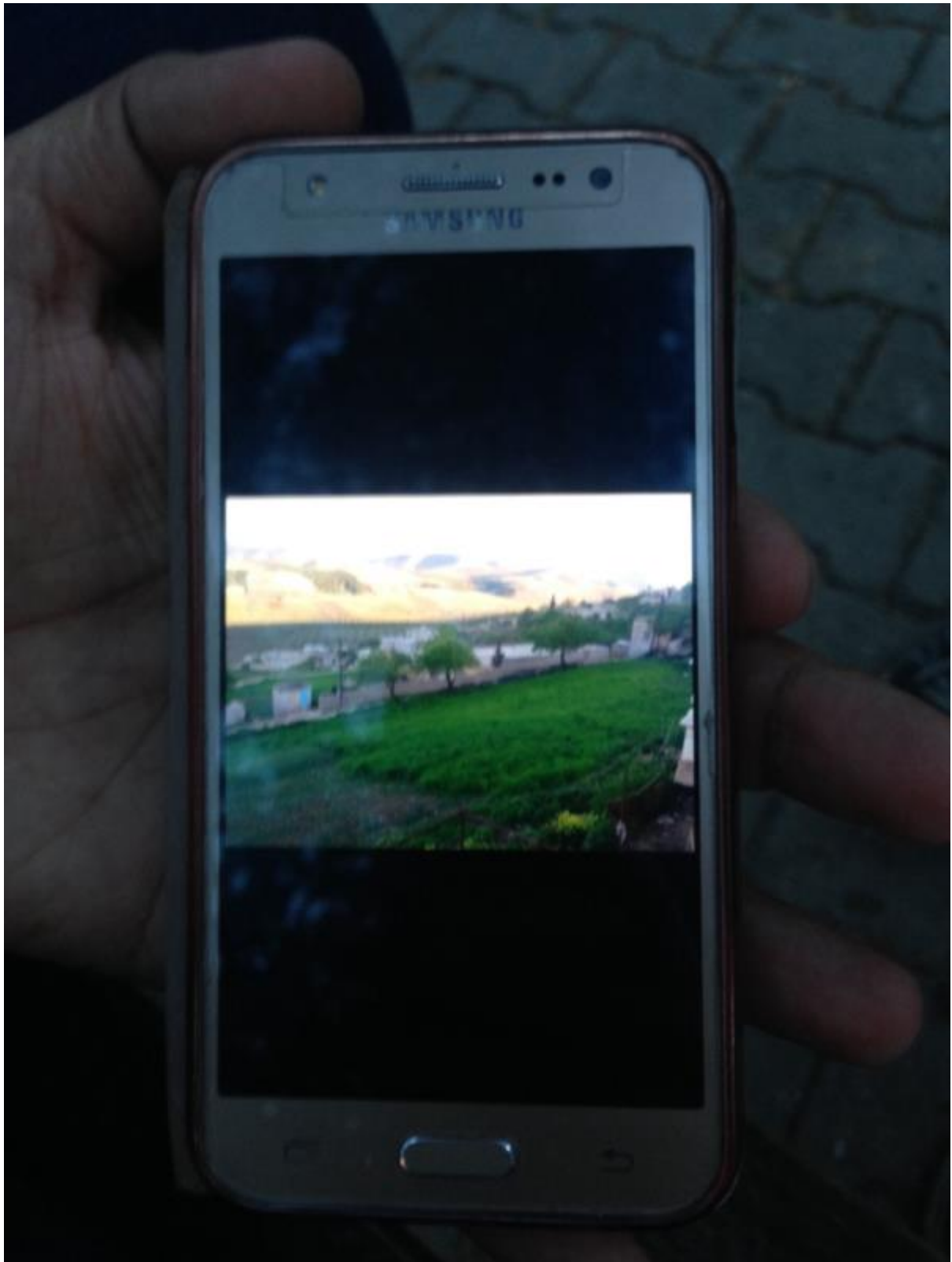
Appendix ii

i.   Fig i : *Amira's favourite picnic spot in Aleppo*
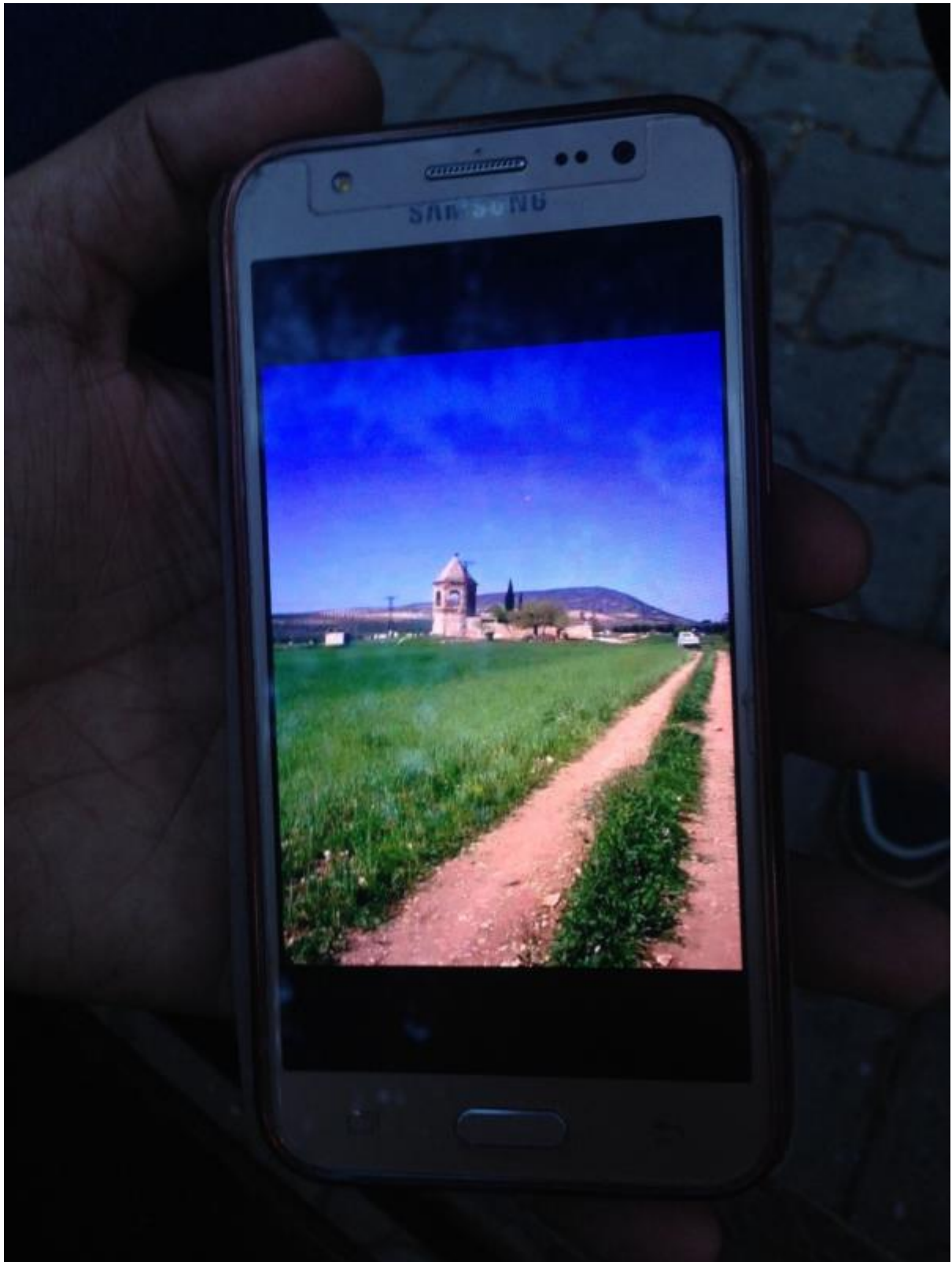
ii.   *Fig ii: Hanan's photo of the landscape in Afrin*

iii.   *Fig iii: Afrin*

iv.   *Fig iv : village in Afrin*

v.   *Fig v: Hanan's family picking olives in Afrin*