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'YES, *SECURITY*, THERE IS SECURITY. BUT OTHER THAN THAT, NOTHING.': AN EMPIRICAL INQUIRY INTO THE 'EVERYDAY (IN)SECURITY' OF SYRIAN AND IRAQI URBAN REFUGEES IN JORDAN

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Scholarship on security has recently seen a shift from traditionally state-centric, elitist and objectivist conceptions of 'security' towards human-centred perspectives, which put emphasis on forms of 'vernacular' and 'everyday' security, and promote bottom-up empirical inquiries to further our understand of what security looks like 'from below'. There remains, however, a dearth of empirical material exploring 'everyday security'. In this paper, we are studying the 'everyday security' of a particularly securitized group, namely refugees. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted between 2016 and 2017 with 23 Syrian and Iraqi urban refugees living in the Jordanian cities of Amman and Mafraq. We analyse how they understand and perceive their own (in)security: we do so by focusing, retrospectively, on the factors and events that led up to their flight from their home country ('pre-flight period') on the one hand and those shaping their present life in exile in Jordanian urban areas ('post-flight period') on the other. Our findings indicate that, while pre-flight insecurity is mostly defined around existential threats to physical integrity, post-flight insecurity is shaped by a more diffuse form of insecurity, resulting from the legal, economic, social and political limbo they are stuck in.

Key Words: 'everyday (in)security', forced migration, Jordan, conflict, urban refugees

Introduction

Topics related to forced migration have been discussed in various disciplines, yet 'refugees and asylum seekers are never far from international and domestic security discussions' (Edwards 2008: 774). 'What security threats do refugees pose?' (Türk 2003; Barmaki 2009; Turner 2015) is the oft-asked question, which constructs refugees primarily as 'risky subjects' and someone or something else (e.g. domestic population, the host country and regional stability) as the referent and *beneficiary* of security. The consequence has been an increasing 'crimmigration' (i.e. the blurring of boundaries between immigration enforcement and criminal justice; see e.g. Van der Woude *et al.* 2017) and, similarly, a 'securitization of migration', which has led to transnational migrants being confronted with measures intended to protect national security, and facilitated their incrimination, detention and exclusion (Bigo 2002; Melossi 2003; Barmaki 2009; Bosworth and Kaufman 2011; Mountz 2011; Aas 2012). Within the post-9/11 counterterrorism discourse—and owing to the widespread perception that groups and individuals intent on committing large-scale attacks in European countries are

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infiltrating migration flows—the figure of the refugee has become the *threatening other par excellence*.

In this paper, our intention is to interrogate how refugees themselves, who are often talked about yet rarely listened to, perceive their (in)security: how they define it, engage with it or ensure it. This endeavour is inscribed in the shift towards examining the meaning of security 'from below' by taking a 'human-centred' perspective and looking at what has been termed 'vernacular' or 'everyday' 'security' (Crawford and Hutchinson 2016b; Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2016). Our aim is further to broaden the scope of criminological inquiry as suggested by Aas (2012) and to 'engage with the wide variety of inequalities, injustices, and harms that inform contemporary insecurities and the experiences of people in diverse cultural and social settings around the globe' (Crawford and Hutchinson 2016a: 1064). To do so, we conduct an empirical analysis outside the rather conflict-free settings on which the criminological gaze tends to rest (Aas 2012; Bigo 2002; Green and Ward 2009; Mythen and Walklate 2016) by looking at how Syrian and Iraqi urban refugees in Jordan describe their insecurity before and after they left their respective home countries. Although some nuances exist, we find that their definitions of (in)security are, generally speaking, aligned with traditionally 'narrow' understandings of 'security' that focus on protection from threats to life and physical integrity. While their decision to flee ('pre-flight') crystallized out of precisely that form of physical and existential insecurity, combined with events that suddenly transform them into subjects of the conflict (what we refer to as 'tipping points'), the situation in exile is much more diffuse and complex. The post-flight period seems to be overshadowed by a pervasive ontological insecurity resulting from the economic, legal, social and political limbo that urban refugees find themselves in.

The Notion of Security: Contested and Confusing

Security has been called 'promiscuous' (Zedner 2009) and an 'essentially contested concept' (Buzan 1984; Smith 2005), i.e. a concept for which no universal definition can be found. No consensus seems to exist, for instance, on whether individuals or nation-states are the 'referent object of security' (Baldwin 1997; Türk 2003). Rothschild (1995) traces the meaning of 'security' back to the Latin origin of 'securitas', which referred to a condition of *individuals*, i.e. security as a 'small noun' (Walklate *et al.* 2019). According to Rothschild (1995: 61), it signified the 'absence of anxiety upon which the happy life depends [...] a feeling of being secure' ('*Sicherheitsgefühl*'). Rothschild found that it was the French Revolution that subsumed the security of individuals under the security of the *nation* (i.e. security as a 'big noun' as Walklate *et al.* (2019) call it) through the institution of the social contract. National security has since gained prominence and importance in security theory and practice in the 20th century, especially in the field of international relations (Bigo 2002; Mythen and Walklate 2016), lending the notion of security a primarily 'state-centred' orientation (Colak and Peirce 2009).

There are also diverging views on what should be considered a 'threat' to security (Baldwin 1997; Loader and Walker 2006). Through the 'speech act' (Wæver 1995: 55) of *naming* something a 'security issue', also known as the process of 'securitization', 'an issue is presented as posing an existential threat to a designated referent object' (Buzan *et al.* 1998: 21), attributed 'urgency, priority and gravity' (Tadjbakhsh

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2013: 46) and moved from the realm of normal politics to the realm of ‘extraordinary’ politics, justifying extraordinary resources and measures (Floyd 2011). Whereas ‘traditionalists’ understand security as freedom from objective military threats only, ‘wideners’ see security as also encompassing economic, societal and environmental factors (Šulović 2010: 2).

Finally, Tadjbakhsh (2013: 45) argues that security is ‘as much an objective notion that can be measured against quantitative indicators (i.e., crime, violence, employment, freedoms etc.) as it is a *subjective* factor that requires qualitative assessment of whether and how people “feel” secure’. Bauman (1999) suggests that the German term ‘*Unsicherheit*’ conflates three experiences that can be translated differently into English, namely as uncertainty, insecurity (subjective) or unsafety (objective). He argues, however, that national security agendas place disproportionate emphasis on ensuring ‘safety, the only field in which something can be done and seen to be done’ (Bauman 1999: 5). Tackling ‘unsafety’ by making people more ‘secure’ through enhanced ‘security measures’ can be seen, measured and evaluated. Reducing ‘insecurity’ and ‘uncertainty’ of people, on the other hand, has less political appeal, since it tends to be complicated and its results hard to evaluate, let alone demonstrate. This may resonate with the debate between ‘rationalist’ and ‘symbolic’ perspectives in criminology: whereas the former argue that feelings of insecurity are mainly the result of criminal victimization (insecurity being ‘unsafety’ in Bauman’s words) and should, therefore, be tackled via the situational prevention, the latter suggest that ‘fear of crime’ is merely part of a general feeling of malaise (what Giddens (1984) refers to as ‘ontological insecurity’). That feeling may well result from vulnerabilities as understood by ‘rationalists’ but more often from difficulties, such as ‘illness, financial insecurity, general urban unease, social exclusion, etc’ (De Donder *et al.* 2009: 5).

Hence, the notion of security remains confusing and contested. There are diverging views on what ‘security’ may or may not mean, who or what it is meant to benefit, who or what may jeopardize it and whether it is an inherently subjective notion or a an objectively measurable phenomenon. The debate on the meaning of security may, as Valverde (2014) argues, not be a fruitful debate to engage in in the first place. However, since what is associated with ‘security’ tends to have tangible real-life ramifications for many human beings, it may be worthwhile including perspectives that have thus far remained on the side-lines of conventional debating and theorizing on security.

Shifts in Conception and Inquiry: ‘Security’ as ‘Human-centred’, ‘Everyday’ and ‘From Below’

Recent years have witnessed the emergence of perspectives that suggest moving away from traditionally state-centric and objectivist towards ‘human-centred’ conceptions of security. The idea of ‘human security’, for instance, which appeared in the mid 1990s (Human Security Research Group 2014), has recently penetrated discussions in criminology (Newman 2016). Essentially, human security is concerned with both military and non-military threats to societies, groups and individuals (Paris 2001) and, therefore, ‘consistent with the broadening and deepening of security discourse’ (Wibben 2008: 458) in the sense proposed by ‘wideners’ in security studies (Šulović 2010; Gasper and Gómez 2015). The *deepening* is performed by the shifting of the referent object from states to individuals and the *broadening* by acknowledging that threats to

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security may emanate from non-military sources, such as economic or environmental ones (Paris 2001; Kaldor, Martin and Selchow, 2007; Tadjbakhsh 2013). On the other hand, scholars have called for the shifting of 'analysis of security away from states and public institutions, towards individuals and communities' (Crawford and Hutchinson 2016a: 1064) by studying 'security from below', i.e. how ordinary individuals define, receive, perceive, engage with and resist security and security practices in the realm of the 'everyday' (Crawford and Hutchinson 2016a). This is in line with Newman's suggestion that 'any idea of security that disregards ordinary people is conceptually, empirically and ethically inadequate' (Newman 2010: 80) and Tadjbakhsh's argument that 'security needs to be defined as a subjective experience at the micro level to gain meaning' (Tadjbakhsh 2013: 44).

Collecting Stories on the 'Everyday Security' of Urban Refugees: On Methods

Within the scholarship on '(in)security', the dearth of empirical inquiry has been criticized (Colak and Pearce 2009; Shearing and Johnston 2010; Ranasinghe 2013). In order to make sense of the subjective experience of security, researchers are encouraged to 'drill down to the lived experience of (in)security' and gather data from the 'periphery' as Mythen and Walklate (2016: 1111) propose. In terms of methods, the present study is inspired by what Vaughan-Williams and Stevens (2016) call the 'vernacular' turn, namely increased reliance on ethnographic and qualitative work with individuals whose voices are unlikely to be included in conventional discussions on security. It further corresponds to an epistemological perspective insisting on the 'emancipatory and cosmopolitan potential' (Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2016: 44) of such 'bottom-up' approaches. As mentioned, refugees are often talked *about* rather than *with* when it comes to discussions about security, although they are disproportionately impacted by harsh and incisive security measures. For this paper, we will, therefore, collect and analyse the narratives of Syrian and Iraqi urban refugees, who recently fled a conflict zone and continue to live in a state of legal, economic and political uncertainty in two Jordanian cities.

The displacement of Syrians and Iraqis

The conflicts in Syria and Iraq have significantly contributed to the rise in displacement levels worldwide (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] 2017a). The US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, intended to topple Saddam Hussein, soon morphed into a conflict between armed forces and insurgents and later into a full-blown sectarian civil war (Lafta and Al-Nuaimi 2019). The number of casualties[1] was estimated at more than 7,000 during the initial phase of the invasion (March–April 2003), over 50,000 during the post-invasion period until July 2006 and almost 90,000 in the civil war between July 2006 and May 2014. In June 2014, so-called Islamic State militants entered and captured the northern city of Mosul. Since then, the fighting has led to another 60,000 civilian deaths (Lafta and Al-Nuaimi 2019). Throughout the different phases, many Iraqis fled to neighbouring Jordan. In 2007, their number in Jordan was estimated to range between 400,000 and 500,000 (Fafo 2007). Statistics

[1]Based on numbers provided by Iraq Body Count (n.d.).

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provided by UNHCR at the time the fieldwork was concluded indicate that 63,417 Iraqis were registered with UNHCR in Jordan[2] (UNHCR 2017b). It can be said that Iraqi refugees in Jordan live exclusively in urban centres (Sassoon 2009; UNHCR 2017a). In 2011, the so-called Arab Spring broke out. In Syria, the protests were quickly met with repressive action by the state, and a civil war ensued. Various actors—foreign and domestic, state and non-state—gradually joined the fighting, which has cost more than 250,000 civilian lives, created more than 4.5 million refugees and led to the internal displacement of more than 6.5 million Syrians (UNHCR 2017a). As of 30 June 2017, 660,836 Syrians were registered with UNHCR in Jordan[3], of which the majority (78.7 per cent) were living outside camps (UNHCR 2017b).

Jordan: a safe haven

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, located in the heart of the Arab Mashreq, has been a safe haven for Arab refugees[4] long before the millennial turn. Since the occupation of Palestine in 1948, migration flows and populations have shaped the country's politics, economy and society (Chatelard 2010). The Kingdom is not signatory to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees but has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UNHCR in 1998, guaranteeing the principle of *non-refoulement* (Chatelard 2010). Jordan has been among the ten major refugee-hosting countries for years and ranks second in terms of refugees per capita (UNHCR 2017a: 20). While the Jordanian case is suitable for an inquiry into urban refugees, the findings may be less relevant to so-called South–North migrations, which dominate research on forced migration (Bank and Fröhlich 2018). With regards to so-called ‘South–South’ displacement, which actually represents the majority of forced migration flows worldwide (Bank and Fröhlich 2018), however, one may reasonably assume that Jordan presents a typical case in many respects, not least because of its proximity to several theatres of conflict, of which it has remained miraculously shielded in terms of spillover (Nesser and Gråtrud 2019).

Some (Achilli 2015; Turner 2015) argue that Jordan has effectively adopted an ‘encampment policy’, a complex landscape of rules and legislations, which complicates legally leaving the five official refugee camps. Despite that, the majority of refugees live in urban spheres (UNHCR 2017b). They are motivated by greater opportunities for economic activity, the availability of services, such as banks and hospitals, more autonomy and freedom of movement (Kobia and Cranfield 2009). Also, some may prefer the urban habitat simply because they are accustomed to it (Crisp *et al.* 2012). Over recent years, awareness of urban refugees has grown. The publication of the *2009 UNHCR policy on refugee protection and solutions in urban areas* embodied a paradigm shift (Long 2010: 22): it formalized the desire of the international community to devote more attention and resources to refugees outside camps. However, most existing literature on

[2]Since not all refugees register with UNHCR, this number underestimates the actual number of refugees in Jordan.

[3]*Idem.*

[4]The term ‘refugee’ remains vague, is frequently used to describe people who do not neatly fit the criteria of the UN Refugee Convention 1951 (art. 1) and has been amended several times by the UN itself (Barmaki 2009). For this study, we consider as ‘urban refugees’ those refugees who establish themselves in the urban area, defined as a ‘built-up area that accommodates large numbers of people living in close proximity to each other, and where the majority of people sustain themselves by means of formal and informal employment and the provision of goods and services’ (UNHCR 2009: 2).

refugees still focuses on camps and little is known about the living conditions of refugees in urban areas, let alone their understandings of '(in)security'.

Data collection and analysis

During fieldwork in July 2016 and April 2017, the first author conducted a total of 17 in-depth semi-structured interviews, 9 of them in the capital Amman and 8 in the northern city of Mafraq, close to the Syrian border. Fourteen interviews were conducted with one interviewee at a time. Three interviews were conducted with two, three and four people, respectively. In total, 23 individuals (20 male and 3 female) were interviewed. On average, the interviewees were 32 years old. Sixteen of them were married and had 3 children on average. Twelve had left school during or after primary school, 7 finished secondary school and 4 had a tertiary education degree. They arrived in Jordan between 2009 and 2016, most of them (19) between 2012 and 2014. Seven came from Iraq (6 from Baghdad and 1 from the southern city of Al-Amarah) and 16 from Syria (8 from Aleppo, 3 from Homs, 2 from Damascus, 2 from Daraa and 1 from Al-Salamiyah, northeast of Homs). Most of the interviews (13) were conducted at interviewees' homes[5], three in public places (coffee place and public park) and one at the interviewee's workplace. On average, an interview took 1.5 hours.

Interviewees were recruited with the help of an NGO working in Mafraq, personal connections the first author had from his time working in Jordan and through 'snowballing', i.e. referrals by interviewees themselves. The initial choice was to interview males[6], but the final sample also includes three women. Despite efforts to diversify the sample, there were similarities between some of our interviewees regarding their socio-economic background. Also, the weather in Jordan during both interview rounds was warm. It is likely that conducting these interviews in the winter would have influenced our results (e.g. more frequent mention of shelter-related issues or overcrowding).

The interview questions were structured using a mind map.[7] Follow-up questions were formulated spontaneously based on respondents' accounts. In line with recommendations of Luna Reyes and Anderson (2003), interviewees were given space to speak freely, tell stories and anecdotes in order to facilitate the discovery of novel or counterintuitive aspects. The kick-off question 'What made you leave your home country?' prompted respondents to talk about the general and more specific circumstances that led to their flight from Syria or Iraq. From there, the interview transitioned to their situation in Jordan. Interviews were conducted in vernacular Arabic (as opposed to literary or standard Arabic, which is used in newspapers, on television and in formal contexts). This created a familiar and informal setting, which enabled the interviewer to gain conversational depth and also touch upon more sensitive issues.

The interviews were transcribed and simultaneously translated into English by the interviewer. The transcripts were then read and analysed by the three authors individually, first horizontally (each transcript) and then transversally (across transcripts). For the transversal analysis, we used the open-source application *RQDA*. Using *RQDA*, we coded each interview and created outputs that provided an overview of the coded

[5]Often, other family members, like children, were around during the interview.

[6]The interviewer being male, it is, in the context of inquiry, generally speaking, easier to create an interview setting with men.

[7]See Appendix.

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passages across the interviews. This process allowed for the identification of patterns and themes, i.e. 'statement[s] of meaning that [run] through all or most of the pertinent data' (Ely *et al.* 1991: 150).

Findings: Living (In)Security

In what follows, the findings will be presented in relation to two periods, namely 'pre-flight', i.e. the period of time leading up to the point when interviewees chose to leave their home country, and 'post-flight', i.e. the period of time starting with their arrival in Jordan. These two dimensions allow for comparisons between a conflict context and a somewhat peaceful context and capture some nuances in how '(in)security' is understood and described by the interviewees.

'I would become one of those numbers': insecurity pre-flight

Across the narratives, a variety of factors can be identified, which, in individually intricate ways, led the interviewees to conclude that staying in their country was no longer an option. These factors included mainly threats to their physical integrity, but also to their livelihood. Personal threats, however, were rare. In fact, 'only' 9 out of 22[8] interviewees report that they were personally attacked or received death threats, and 5 out of 22 say they fled to evade military draft. Other more specific circumstances included needing medical treatment or surgery that was no longer available or accessible (2/22) or being unable to ensure their livelihood because of price inflation, a job loss or a physical impossibility to leave the house to go to work or buy food (12/22). There were differences in terms of specific threats between the Syrian and Iraqi contexts. Syrians were more often targeted by state actors because of their political views or their attempt to evade military draft. Iraqis, given the strong sectarian dimension of the civil war, were usually targeted by militias because of their religious or ethnic background.

More frequently, however, interviewees describe a heterogeneous and general state of insecurity. For instance, 14 out of 22 felt discriminated or threatened based on their religion or ethnicity because their reference group was being targeted during the conflict. Fifteen out of 22 mention that the general conflict situation, i.e. the bombings and the fighting, started to impact their city or their neighbourhood, while 19 out of 22 report being increasingly afraid of the presence and activities of criminal gangs or militias. Finally, all 22 interviewees describe a profound loss of faith in the rule of law and the ability of the state to protect them. Interestingly, interviewees report first hearing and reading that the conflict had broken out but not immediately noticing the impact in their everyday life. It continues to feel 'unreal', first, and even after it starts to impact their lives and the creeping realization of the untenability or futility of staying in the conflict zone sets in, they report staying as long as they could. Hence, while this general sense of physical and economic insecurity is described as destabilizing and exhausting, in itself, it does not seem to suffice as a motivation to flee the country. Usually, it is only when an event occurs that brings the conflict *to* them in a very sudden and abrupt way,

[8]One interviewee was not included in the analysis of the pre-flight period because he left Syria for personal motives unrelated to the conflict (which had not yet started). He was also planning to return but then decided to stay when the conflict started.

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leading them to realize that they could easily have lost their lives or disappeared, that their decision to flee crystallises. These events transform them from mere bystanders to the conflict to actual subjects and seem to function as a sort of 'tipping point'. Layla describes this unexpectedness as follows:

> We were in Damascus, in safety. The revolution started in Daraa, but it was calm in Damascus. For a year maybe. We had friends and family coming over, and then all of a sudden, the bombing and fighting started. […] we had to leave – they got us a car and we fled from our neighbourhood. (Layla[9], Syria)

Confrontations with armed individuals and groups were frequently mentioned as such 'tipping points'. An Iraqi mother describes a situation where the family's car was stopped and controlled by unknown armed men in a market in Baghdad:

> In a situation like that, if they took one of my sons for example, they could kill him in front of you. What would be your position? Your blood goes for nothing, in a country where you have spent your entire life? Why should I give my blood and my son? To people who don't deserve it. After this situation, we got back home and I said, I won't be staying in Iraq anymore. (Suhayla, Iraq)

A Syrian woman, living in Mafraq with her family, describes a situation where a bus that she and her parents were travelling on was kidnapped by unknown armed men:

> Suddenly, a group of armed men appeared [...] I was afraid they would shoot my father and my mother in front of me. […]. And my parents were afraid for me as well. [...] They took the guys out first. Whether they kidnapped them, killed them, I don't know [...] As soon as we got home, I told my parents that I wanted to leave and never come back to Syria. (Maryam, Syria)

While the experiences of the conflict situation are different for Syrians and Iraqis given the nature of the conflict at the time of their flight, there seems to be a convergence around terrifying experiences with militias and criminal gangs. Interviewees report that they were unable to distinguish between the activities of militias and those of criminal gangs. Another theme common to all interviewees is a profound loss of faith in the ability of the state (or other entities) to protect them from being harmed. This feeling is exacerbated by the realization that there is no objective reason for being targeted, as Habeeb states:

> Even, if you are neutral, anyone can come and attack you. There is no safety. (Habeeb, Syria).

This sense of utter unpredictability makes the distinction between a generalized and a personal threat somewhat obsolete. Also, more often than not, it was a combination of a generalized and a specific threat that corroborated interviewees' decision to flee. As Adel explains:

> Look, if I left the house…after two minutes, my mother would call me and ask where I was. Anything could happen, bombings, kidnappings, a car stops, and they arrest you. [...] They threatened Bakr [his brother] ... the gangs. They threatened him with killing him. Then we said, that's it. (Adel, Iraq)

In a way, as a result of the loss of faith in state authority and the rule of law and the unpredictability of an attack on one's life, the most pervasive element and the greatest source of ontological insecurity seems to be the striking realization of the obvious

[9]Interviewees' original names were changed.

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worthlessness of one's life. One may disappear and simply become 'a number'. Burhan summarizes this well by explaining what he thought when he was stopped by a group of armed men:

> [...] I was going to a place, outside of Baghdad, in a military vehicle. [...] I mean, I was with people who were supposed to be imposing the rule of law on others. But then, four or five people stopped us, armed, with long beards, wearing military pants and asking for our identity! You are asking for my identity? Who are you to do that? Of course, those were all militias! So, in that second, I remembered those videos that they show on youtube. I asked myself who they were, Sunna, Shi'a, Daesh, Al-Qaida? You don't know who they are! […] In that situation, I felt threatened to death. And I thought of my son, who was a year and a half. I would become **one of those numbers** that would be forgotten. (Burhan, Iraq)

In sum, the theme that seems to dominate the pre-flight period is the generalized (and not necessarily personal) insecurity produced by the conflict situation. The sense of insecurity is closely related to the crumbling authority of the state and the emergence of militias and violent gang activity. Although there is a general fear and insecurity, there seem to be decisive 'tipping points', often personal encounters with danger in the form of gunmen and militias, that lead to the realization that one may simply be killed or kidnapped and 'become one of those numbers'.

'I am not ibn al balad*'*[10]*: insecurity post-flight*

Most interviewees, upon arriving in Jordan, settled immediately in Amman or Mafraq. Only a few Syrians were first brought to the camps by border patrols. We will, however, focus on aspects relevant to the urban context, which all interviewees ended up living in sooner or later. An important observation is that all interviewees were either hoping to return to their home country (especially the Syrians) or waiting for possibilities to be resettled by UNCHR to a third country (usually European or North American). This fact *per se* creates a sort of limbo, a constant state of uncertainty about their future, which discourages them from investing too much in their lives in Jordan. Yasser describes this as follows:

> I switch on the TV and watch, hoping that something happened in Syria. That the situation improved, even if just a bit, that there be hope, so we could go back in a month or two. […] We are living day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute. (Yasser, Syria)

Interviewees mentioned difficulties related to humanitarian assistance (insufficient or inexistent, perceived corruption and unequal aid distribution; mentioned by 22 out of 23 interviewees), related to housing (high rental prices, eviction and threat thereof, breach of contract, frequent displacement, insufficient protection from bad weather, overcrowding and hostile neighbours; 21/23) and concerning work (no right to work, difficult working conditions and exploitation including non-payment of salary; 19/23[11]). Also mentioned were health-related problems, such as lack of access to medication and

[10]This can be translated as 'I am not a *son of this country*'.

[11]It should be noted that, of the three females in the sample, one talked about work issues that affected her husband. Two male respondents said that they cannot work due to health issues. Hence, *all* respondents who were either working or looking for work expressed work-related concerns.

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treatment and unsuccessful surgeries (15/23), discrimination (in the form of verbal harassment, social exclusion and rejection and unequal and hostile treatment; 14/23) and food-related issues (low quality, having to trade food coupons for cash and so forth; 14/23). Issues related to authorities and the criminal justice system were mentioned by 12 of 23 interviewees. These included a lack of faith in the impartiality of the justice system, hesitation to report incidents to the police, fear of imprisonment and of deportation. The fragility of their legal status, which manifests itself in difficulties to regularize their situation or obtain residency permits and fear of authorities because of overstayed visas or because they left the camps illegally or because they don't have a work contract or are not registered with a humanitarian organization, was mentioned by 11 interviewees. Less frequently, issues were related to the environment (lack of access to clean water, no protection from extreme conditions; 4/23) and to experiences of violence and abuse (threats, violent attacks and arbitrary arrest; 3/23).

The mere enumeration of the panoply of difficulties faced by the interviewees in exile is testimony to the all-pervasiveness of the insecurity they were facing. Each of these aspects would deserve an empirical investigation in its own right. For the purpose of this analysis, we will focus on the most dominant issues, namely those related to livelihood (work and humanitarian aid), housing and experiences of discrimination and victimization.

'They make you feel like you're doing something illegal': work and humanitarian aid

The majority of respondents clearly expressed their willingness and ability to work. In fact, the impossibility of finding work often leads to a feeling of social stasis and a heavy reliance on humanitarian aid. These feelings are extremely difficult to handle, especially for the male interviewees, whose sense of dignity tends to depend heavily on their ability to provide for themselves and their families. The following quotes illustrate that:

> I was never looking for a place where I could sit down and be fed by others. I want to live in a society where I can get tired and work and sweat and do things.' (Burhan, Iraq)
>
> 'We don't want anything. Just let us work, so we can provide for ourselves. Just allow us to do that. (Abdelrahman, Syria)
>
> All I want is to work in dignity. I don't want anyone to take care of me. I can work in anything. I don't want to take from anyone. (Samer, Syria)
>
> The idea that I cannot work, just because I am Iraqi, is difficult to accept. That's something that hurts. You are a young man, 28 years old, you want to work. I mean, also not to lose the medical skills that I have acquired. (Muneer, Iraq)

Iraqis require a residence permit to work, while Syrians need a work permit—both are difficult to obtain. Besides the residence permit, Iraqis need to provide a significant amount of money as guarantee in order to obtain a work permit:

> For the work permit, you need 15,000 dollars. And you have to freeze them. If I had that much, I would flee from this country! (Maher, Iraq)

To complicate matters further, there are specific work permits for some professions:

> A work permit, specific to each profession! I am a builder for example, you want to go work on the field, you need another specific permit! (Omar, Syria)

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In this context, some respondents say that they are working on a voluntary basis to stay active or practice their skills, get in touch with society and feel useful or because they hope to be remunerated after some time working for free. Some choose to work illegally, which means they have to be constantly vigilant not be caught by security forces for that would lead to their detention and probable deportation. Ameen, for instance, had to escape several times, when the police showed up at his workplace. He comments that:

The problem is that this makes you feel like you are doing something **really wrong**. Like you are here illegally. But the real problem is that you can't get a work permit. (Ameen, Syria, text in bold reflects the narrator's emphasis)

He goes on to say that his illegal condition also prevents him from complaining about unequal treatment in terms of workload and salary:

The salary I get is less, but the pressure and the workload are higher. [...] I mean, I work the same, but my salary is less. Much less. It's about 275. They get at least 350! Some get 500, 600... (Ameen, Syria)

Nevertheless, interviewees accept working for very little money under difficult conditions because they still prefer stressful and humiliating conditions rather than having no work at all:

We would work in the fields. We would leave at 6 AM and come back at 1 PM. They would give us 6 JD[12] per day. But at least we had work, during two or three months in the summer. (Usama, Syria)

Given their legal vulnerability, they are exposed to various forms of exploitation, such as non-payment of salaries, salary dumping and excessively long working hours. Among the ten interviewees who were working, eight had experienced some form of labour exploitation. They all agree that they find it difficult to report incidents to the police. As two interviewees explain:

When you're done with the work, you tell him to give you the money, they say they can't. What can you do? You can't report him. (Omar, Syria)
That time, he didn't pay me. He took the salary I was entitled to. But I can't say anything, because I don't have a work permit. (Ayman, Iraq)

For Iraqi refugees, humanitarian aid is very difficult to obtain. All Iraqi respondents are living on their savings or engage in informal work. Former beneficiaries reported that their support from UNHCR was suddenly removed without justification. Twelve respondents, all Syrians, reported receiving monthly assistance from UNHCR (between 40 and 190 JD for their whole family) but, recently, the amount had been reduced. Syrians in Mafraq also receive food coupons, which they depend upon heavily. Fourteen respondents think that the UN and other aid organizations are either corrupt (misuse of funds, discrimination and so forth)—'The charity organizations are thieves! […] There is fraud and cheating and theft' (Yassin, Syria)—or not sufficiently competent to distinguish between refugees providing accurate information about their possessions and financial means and those who do not:

[12] 1 Jordanian Dinar (JD) corresponds to approximately 1.40 USD.

They are Syrians, but not refugees, they were employed to work there, because the one who is building is a Syrian from Saudi Arabia. What annoys me is that they all get support and assistance. […]. And they get way more than me. Although they have enough. (Laith, Syria)

'Around the 27th, he'll be knocking on your door': fragile and unstable housing conditions

Housing-related issues are very common. The most frequently mentioned problems were expensive and increasing rents, which range between 100 and 250 JD, often exceeding the amount of the monthly assistance. Related thereto, all interviewees mention that there is a constant pressure to ensure having the rent ready by the end of the month:

But here, around the 27th of the month, the landlord will be knocking on your door. [...] you tell him you can't pay, and he says, 'I don't care'. (Usama, Syria)

Seven respondents were forced to leave their homes either for being unable to pay the rent in due time or because the landlord breached the contract or increased the rent. Respondents also reported that their homes were in a bad state and that landlords refused to do anything about it and pressured them to stay and pay the rent. Usama points to the high ceiling while he explains that '[…] this was a big hall. Not made to be lived in anyway. The height is 5 meters. There are insects and big rats' (Usama, Syria). Several interviewees report that they were forced to pay three (or more) rents in advance and quickly noticed that the condition of the flat started deteriorating. These issues related to housing mean that refugees have to move frequently, which adds stress to the difficulties of not having a stable home:

It's annoying to change a lot. Because there is nowhere you can relax really and feel home. And you are not in your country. Back home, I could go out and laugh with everyone. Here, I cannot do this. (Hayat, Syria)

'Nobody likes you here': discrimination and helplessness

Fourteen respondents said that they experienced discrimination: 13 because of their nationality (apart from 1 Iraqi and 1 Syrian-Palestinian, all Syrians) and 1 because of his religion (Christian Iraqi). Interviewees report verbal harassment on the street or in the neighbourhood, being discriminated against when asking for housing or stopping a taxi. Physical abuse or attacks were reported in three cases. Two respondents reported arbitrary and unjustified detention. Layla, a Syrian woman, said that her husband was detained for a dispute with his employer. At the time of the interview, he was still imprisoned. Omar was detained for 12 days because of a dispute with a Jordanian and reported harsh conditions:

Inside the prison, there is a lot of racism. They made me work in the toilets […]. Because I am Syrian. […] The Jordanian prisoner doesn't work. He would get razor blades, the Syrians wouldn't. Nothing. Most of the food they get it for free and we have to pay for it. Twelve days felt like twelve years. (Omar, Syria)

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Only 8 of 23 respondents said that they would report a violent incident and seemed, generally speaking, very sceptical of authorities and the criminal justice system. Many assume that Jordanians would be treated more favourably by the law anyway and that legal entanglements could jeopardize their eligibility for resettlement. Nasser, for instance, mentions a case where the mere mention in a police file (although the refugee was the victim) precluded a family's options of being granted asylum in a third country:

> The UN told them that their name was registered with the police. That was the problem. I mean, ok, she was the one who was harmed! But because she reported, she was registered with the police. So, from hearing this, we started to be afraid [to report to the police]. (Nasser, Iraq)

Others are afraid that reporting to the police may lead to their deportation, as Layla explains:

> No, we can't [report them]. I think they will send us away, deport us immediately. And my husband, if he goes back to Syria, he will be arrested as well. They are looking for him there.' (Layla, Syria)

Abdelrahman was tricked by a member of the landlord's family who offered him a ride to the mall just to take advantage of his food coupon:

> He took bags of sugar, [...] bags of rice [...] He said, 'one more or less doesn't change much, right, brother?'. [...] We left and he had used about 16 JDs! [Then] he asked me to offer him that amount, in return for him driving me to the mall. The taxi to the mall and back is 1 JD! [...] I said, in my whole lifetime, I will not repeat this mistake! […] This is humiliation. […] I couldn't say anything. But I was furious.' (Abdelrahman, Syria)

Their belief that they 'can't say anything' leads to a feeling of helplessness and extreme vulnerability. At the same time, there seems to be an acceptance of the fact that authorities and the system work in favour of Jordanians. Ragheed e.g. explains why he did not choose to contact the police when his family was thrown out of their home:

> The weather was cold, it was snowing. Then he said he wanted the house back. I said, our contract was one year. […] The neighbours were saying 'don't leave, he doesn't have the right to throw you out'. I said, **'I am not a son of this country'**. I mean, I can't report him, if I report him, maybe he'll send some people for me. I mean, what should I do? It's better to leave in dignity.' (Ragheed, Syria)

This feeling of not being 'a son of this country' (*ibn al balad*) and, therefore, not being entitled to claiming basic rights that have been violated, combined with fears of potentially exposing oneself to violence, deter interviewees from seeking help from authorities. They tolerate and endure unjust treatment by employers, other individuals and the criminal justice system. There seems to be a helplessness in the face of this complex landscape of laws, policies, organizations and entities, which is exacerbated by a constant fear of getting into any form of dispute with Jordanians. Therefore, they isolate themselves and refuse to involve authorities when they are attacked, threatened or exploited.

From pre- to post-flight: 'relative security'

In the pre-flight period, insecurity can be described as an existential fear for one's life and the lives of family members, especially children. This insecurity is literally centred

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around fear of death related to the bombings or fighting or the threats posed by armed groups. It also appears that this fear does not need to be associated with a specific threat to one's life or physical integrity. The (at the very least perceived) total unpredictability and randomness of the targeting leads to a blurring of the distinction between a generalized and a specific threat. This type of direct existential threat to one's life and physical integrity appears to be less relevant for the post-flight context: Syrians and Iraqis who leave their countries seeking security from the conflicts and their repercussions seem to find *that kind of security* in Jordan. They are glad to benefit from the rule of law and a functioning state as the following quotes express:

Here, the situation is much better. Here, we are safe. (Hayat, Syria)
It's nice, better than Iraq! They have order, they have security. Something we have been missing for over 10, 11, 12 years! […]. Here there is security, rule of law that protects you. If you are a citizen of this country, the law protects you. (Ayman, Iraq)
Yes, security there is. More than there. (Ragheed, Syria)

Muneer, for instance, expresses particular appreciation for the absence of sectarianism in Jordan, alongside an acknowledgement of his vulnerability as a refugee:

I heard of people who were robbed here. Christians. And the police didn't care much. Maybe if they were Jordanians, it would be different. But I don't know, thank God, nothing has happened to us. I mean, the way people live together here, it's way better than in Iraq. You know, there is no sectarianism. You feel like there is security, rule of law. (Muneer, Iraq)

However, beyond that 'narrow' definition of security, there is a panoply of destabilizing aspects to life as an urban refugee, which, taken together, create a very pervasive and diffuse type of insecurity. Struggles related to livelihood, work and housing and feeling unwelcome among the host community impact negatively on their feelings of security. As Khalid puts it: 'Yes, security, there is security. But other than that, nothing' (Khalid, Syria). It is interesting to note that, for the interviewees, 'security' mainly refers to protection from threats to one's physical integrity. Although the Arabic term *'Amaan'* (أمان) is used to talk about 'security' and 'safety' and tends to have an affective component to it (feeling 'safe' or being in 'safety'), it remains rather closely aligned with conventionally narrow definitions of 'security'. Ameen is one of the few to (though shyly) challenge this meaning by describing the sort of 'relative' security in Jordan:

Thank God, there are not too many pressures in the sense that someone would attack me. But at the same time, you don't feel safe, because the people here don't accept you. The mere fact that they call you out for being Syrian all the time... [...] clients and the employer as well, is very painful […] When I see someone, I greet them warmly. But they respond coldly, they treat you in a bad way. […] Nobody likes you here. So, you feel unsafe in a way. (Ameen, Syria)

Hence, living in a relatively 'safe' place, i.e. generally protected from the immediacy of physical harm, does not mean that individuals living there *are* (let alone *feel*), themselves, safe. Also, a comparison between pre- and post-flight insecurity reveals that the perception of 'security' is both context specific and relative. Different aspects that may provide some kind of security (physical, economic, social and so forth) are weighed differently depending on the situation and the threats one may be exposed to.

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Concluding Remarks: 'Everyday Security' in Fragile Contexts

In this paper, our aim was to drill down to the lived experience of insecurity of forcibly displaced Syrians and Iraqis before and after they chose to seek refuge in Jordan. The findings indicate that the security refugees find in exile can be described as 'relative', as Sirkeci (2004) suggested: 'Even though they are objectively protected from the repercussions of the conflict, they tend to find themselves in a less favourable position than people in the host community, often struggling with socio-economic deprivation' (Sirkeci 2004). Their experience in exile can be described as an economic, social, legal and political limbo: they are hoping to go either back to their home country or be resettled to a third country, are unable to work legally, cannot ensure a sustainable livelihood for themselves and their children and live in constant fear of being imprisoned or deported.

This post-flight insecurity comprises elements reminiscent of Bauman's (1999) definition of 'insecurity': 'The loss of trust in one's own ability and other people's intentions' (Bauman 1999: 17) shows in respondents' mistrust towards authorities and humanitarian organizations; and 'anxiety' and 'cageyness' manifest themselves, e.g. in respondents' tendency to isolate themselves. While 'unsafety' was the reason why respondents fled, they consider their situation in Jordan to be relatively 'safe'. However, their narratives reveal that, despite being safe from existential threats to their physical integrity, they suffer from *insecurity* 'of position, entitlements, and livelihood' and from *uncertainty* 'as to their continuation and future stability' (Jacobsen 2016: 105). Thus, the insecurity of urban refugees in Jordan may be better understood as 'uncertainty' and 'insecurity'.

These findings invite us to conceive 'fear of crime' as not merely 'fear' of 'crime' (De Donder *et al.* 2009: 14) in the context of inquiry. These refugees feel insecure even though they, generally speaking, feel protected from crime. This corresponds to 'securitising' the way 'wideners' suggest rather than 'traditionalists' (Šulović 2010): insecurity is the result of a combination of issues related to economic, legal and social aspects of life rather than threats to physical integrity and a fear for survival. It is a sort of 'ontological insecurity' (Giddens 1984) that casts a shadow over the 'vernacular' and 'everyday' of these individuals, which is difficult to grasp if the analytical gaze remains focused on objectivist conceptions of security. One may be tempted to do so, however, because interviewees themselves reiterate the dominant framework that defines security in narrow terms in a way similar to what Vaughan-Williams and Stevens (2016) have found to be the reverberation of 'police logics' at the level of the vernacular. If one goes beyond the mere semantics of it, however, and pays close attention to some of the more nuanced views (e.g. Ameen's description on p. 16) on the notion of 'security' or 'safety', it becomes clear that the difficulties associated with work and humanitarian aid, housing and what may be called 'legal cynicism' (Sampson and Bartusch 1998) towards Jordanian authorities co-constitute a state of all-pervasive *lack* of 'security' or 'safety'.

Crawford and Hutchinson (2016b: 1186) invite us to analyse 'security from below' by looking at individual and collective 'everyday' engagement with policies and rules set up in the name of providing security: how these security projects are 'felt, lived through, sensed and borne'. A sincere analysis in this sense would require a more comprehensive engagement with the political and legal infrastructure governing the situation of urban refugees in Jordan. What may be said at this stage, however, is that the aspects of

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life in exile that contribute to the insecurity of urban refugees emanate from rules and policies that are intended to provide 'security' *to the host population* (restrictions on opportunities for work and housing, difficulty of normalizing legal status, a justice system working in the favour of host population and so forth). This has certainly to do with the very nature of being a host country to many refugees: they tend to be merely *tolerated* on humanitarian grounds, as long as they have no option of returning or seeking asylum elsewhere. To deal with the massive influx, Jordan has chosen to set up refugee camps in order to provide humanitarian assistance and a safe haven to refugees. Urban refugees, however, by their very choice to move to the urban sphere (though for very legitimate reasons), defy this 'encampment policy' (Achilli 2015; Turner 2015), thereby giving up the protection that the state would be officially offering them, exposing themselves to the plethora of vulnerabilities of the urban context.

We would like to conclude with a final thought: If one pictures a sort of continuum between 'complete chaos', e.g. in a context of armed conflict, and 'complete peace', an idealized state that humanity may be assumed to be striving towards, the present inquiry analysed 'everyday' (in)security closer to the end of 'complete chaos'. Now, if in the passage from 'complete chaos' (Syria or Iraq) to 'some peace' (i.e. in Jordan), we can already observe narrow or objectivist definitions of security lose much of their pertinence at the 'vernacular' level, one may continue this train of thought to reasonably conclude that they are probably even less appropriate for the predominantly peaceful European and North American contexts. In practical terms, this suggests that, in order to 'make people safe', authorities outside contexts of 'chronic violence' (Colak and Peirce 2009) may be better served by focusing on the more diffuse and ontological insecurity that dominates people's lives, instead of investing disproportionately into what may objectively look like 'security' but actually corresponds to 'security' as a 'big noun' (security as defined by national security agendas) rather than 'security' as a 'small noun', defined by the everyday lived experience of (in)security.

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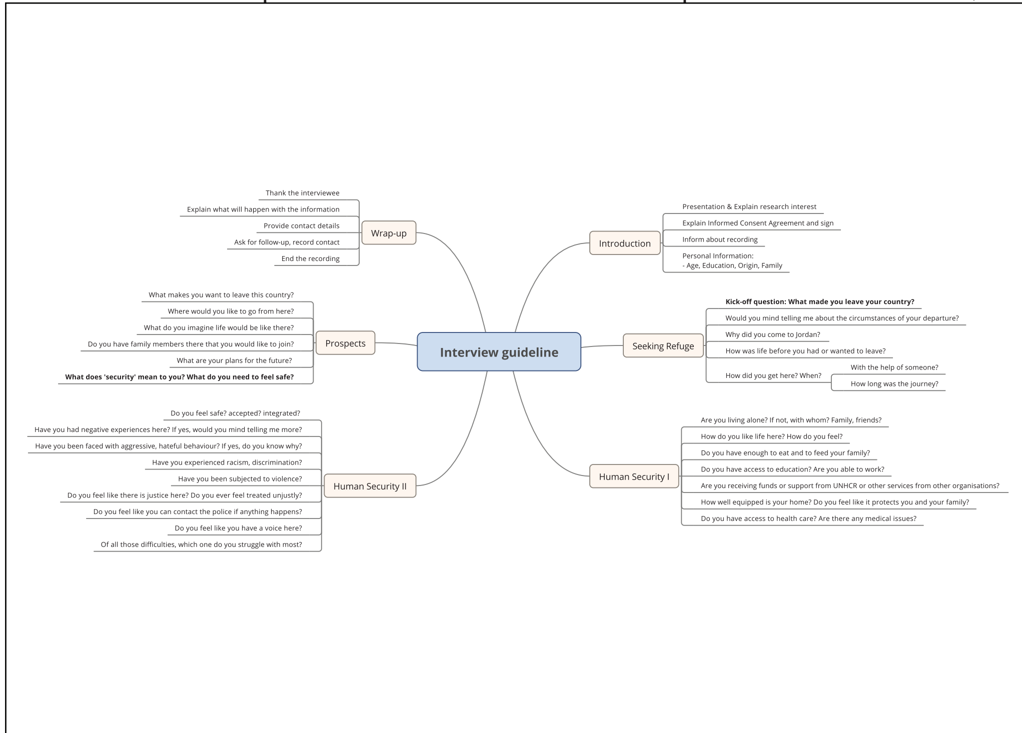

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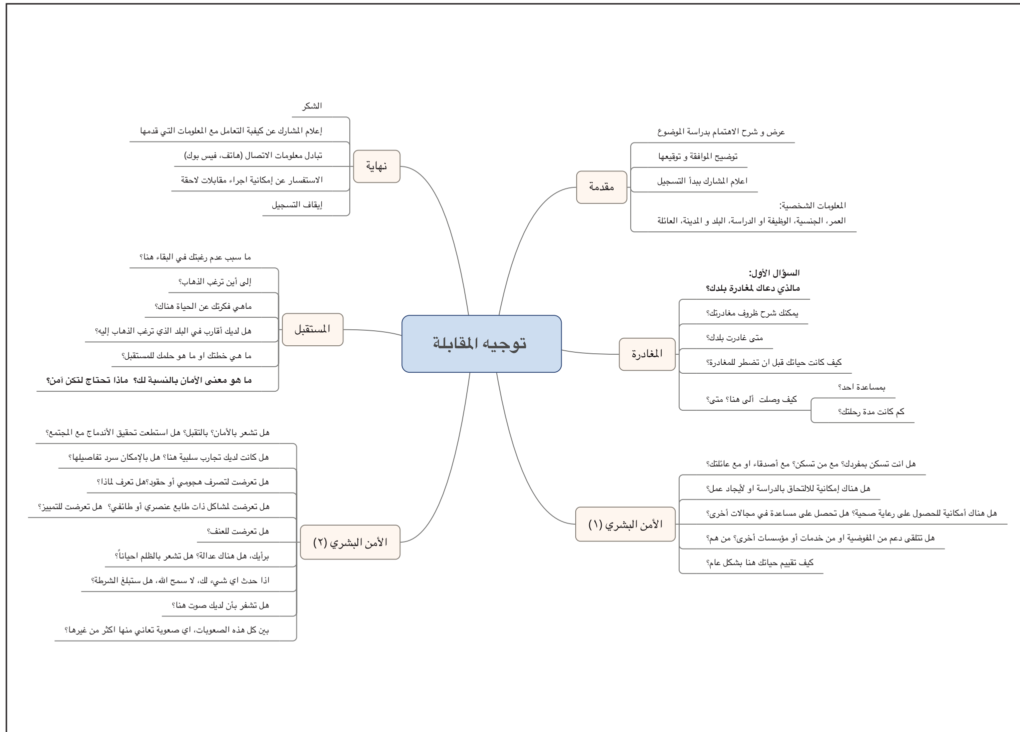

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Appendix

[Question mind map English]
[Question mind map Arabic]

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