Exploring the role of Information and Communications Technology in the experience of refugees and their service providers in the city of Montréal

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Abstract

Since January 2017, the increased number of asylum claims made in Canada has resulted in a significantly backlogged immigration system. In Montréal, refugee claimants awaiting court hearings for months on end often face isolation and exclusion. Research has shown that refugees increasingly rely on Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to curb the effects of living in legal, cultural and social limbo. What remains unknown, however, is how service providers (community organizations, social workers, volunteers) perceive ICT and adapt their work to the omnipresence of these tools. Drawing from ethnographic data including ten in-depth interviews conducted with refugees and service providers, this thesis explores the role of ICT in refugee support networks of Montréal. Refugee participants reported using ICT to stay connected with their family abroad while developing a locally-situated network. Similarly, ICT facilitated service providers' work and increased the engagement of the local community. However, ICT use did not only yield positive outcomes: participants expressed concern about the problematic spread of misinformation online, and about privacy and traceability issues. Results therefore indicate that ICT can be exploited to promote social inclusion in a context of forced displacement, but also exacerbates refugees' exposure to certain threats.

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Chapter One: Introduction

"This? You want to talk about this?" said Youssef, a 32-year-old refugee

claimant from Egypt, pointing at the iPhone 6 resting on the table of the coffee

shop. "This is my whole life", he laughed.

The role of digital technology in relation to diverse social issues—including those

associated with forced displacement—is a central question in contemporary social sciences.

Research has shown that Information and Communications Technology (ICT, or all devices,

networking components, applications and systems that combined allow people and

organizations to interact in the digital world) is undeniably present in migratory processes. It

is reshaping the experience of displacement and resettlement, not in a way that drastically

modifies the structures of trusted support networks, but in a way that reorganizes and

diversifies the actors involved. The increasing complexity in migration and mobility calls for

research that can make sense of its broader implications for refugees and those working to

facilitate their social inclusion.

Immigration flows depend on a number of factors and are difficult to predict, but

Canada will likely remain a privileged destination for those who must leave everything

behind and seek a safer life. In 2017, the number of asylum claims in Canada reached

50,390—more than twice the amount of applications in 2016 (Immigration, Refugees and

Citizenship Canada, 2018[1]). The trend continued into 2018, with over 55,000 claims

registered, and half of these claims were made in the province of Québec. Unable to process

such a large number of claims, the outdated system is said to have reached its limit

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[1] https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/asylum-claims/asylum-claims-2018.html While all reports cited in Chapter One are available in the bibliography, I chose to include the direct links in footnotes to encourage readers to consult them freely while reading in order to create their own interpretation of these numbers and their evolution over time.

(according to the 2019 Spring Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Parliament of Canada). Refugee claimants awaiting court hearings for months on end find themselves stuck in political, cultural and social limbo. This can have a range of effects at the individual and collective levels, including physical and mental health issues, isolation, discrimination and an overall difficult integration.

Refugees and other migrant groups have long understood the potential of ICT in facilitating communication, accessing information, and enabling access to social or emotional support. At the same time, service providers (e.g. governmental and non-governmental organisations, volunteers, social workers) both contribute to and compete with the information ICT makes available to refugees. In Montréal, organizations have started relying more on technology to broaden their field of action. What remains uncertain is how refugees and the community surrounding them experience and make sense of ICT in the context of forced displacement.

In this thesis, I explore the place of ICT amidst refugees and their support networks in Montréal, examining the way both refugees and service providers engage with these tools. I argue that digital tools are essential in promoting the social inclusion of refugees but also represent spaces of risk and control. This diverse portrait of ICT is rooted in the lived experience of refugees and service providers interviewed for the purpose of this thesis. While the findings presented here are contextual, they offer a glimpse into our increasingly complex engagement with digital technology and its critically central role in modern social life.

In what follows I first provide an overview of key concepts and the context surrounding the contemporary refugee process in Canada. Second, I discuss current trends in Canadian immigration, including the consequences of increasing applications in the face of limited state resources. Third, I present a summary of the literature on refugee digital

practices, identifying present gaps. Finally, I propose research questions and formulate a theoretical framework that guides the rest of this thesis.

Escaping: Becoming a Refugee in Canada

As part of its humanitarian commitments, Canada is engaged in the resettlement of several thousands of refugees each year (Elgersma, 2015). In order to be eligible for resettlement, applicants must meet the criteria stipulated in the 1951 United Nations Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees, which defines a refugee as:

> … any person who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owning to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself to the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence […] is unwilling to return to it.

Throughout this thesis, I use the word "refugee" in line with the Convention definition, although I acknowledge its limiting scope and the implied exclusion of other forms of forced displacement (e.g. natural disaster related) this term generates. As Liisa Malkki (1995) points out, the term refugee "has analytical usefulness not as a label for a special, generalizable "kind" or "type" of person or situation, but only as a broad legal or descriptive rubric that includes within it a world of socio-economic statuses, personal histories and psychological or spiritual situations" (p. 496). I refer to persons residing in Canada while awaiting a court decision on their asylum claim as "refugee *claimants*"[2]. I use

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[2] In the media, in research and in legal proceedings, this term is often used interchangeably with "asylum seekers" or "asylum claimants".

the term "forcibly displaced persons" to refer to all persons who are experiencing forced displacement, regardless of their legal immigration status in Canada.

It is important to note that although Canada has experienced as spike in refugee claims in the past couple of years, the country is in no way experiencing a "refugee crisis." At the time of writing, the UNHCR (2017)[3] estimates around 65.1 million persons to be forcibly displaced worldwide (including 25.5 million refugees, 40 million internally displaced people, 3.1 million refugee claimants). Currently, around 85 per cent of refugees are hosted in developing countries (3.5 million persons in Turkey, 1,5 million persons in Pakistan and Uganda, 1 million persons in Lebanon). With 55, 000 refugee claims, Canada is not in a comparable situation. Moreover, this is not the first time the country experiences a spike in asylum claims, with 44, 640 claims registered in 2001 and 36, 856 in 2008. While the increased number of claims does not constitute a "crisis", the overloaded immigration system has proved unable to process each claim in a reasonable amount of time, putting strain on individuals and organisations involved. In the next paragraphs, I give an overview of the different ways in which one "becomes a refugee" in Canada, before situating the increase of refugee claims within the modern geopolitical context.

Sponsored Refugees

Persons seeking international protection can apply overseas and eventually arrive in Canada as sponsored refugees. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) officers stationed overseas are responsible for determining whether a person is eligible for resettlement and admission to Canada as a refugee. These individuals are generally referred to the CIC by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or by a private sponsor. If a person is deemed eligible by the CIC, they may be resettled in Canada through three different

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[3] UNHCR Global Trends report, available at: https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2017/

forms of sponsorship: as a government-assisted refugee (funded by the CIC), as a privately sponsored refugee (privately funded), or a mix of both programs. Sponsored refugees are provided with initial settlement support, including basic income and healthcare.

The process for sponsored refugees is particularly lengthy, and it may take several years before an eligible refugee makes it to Canada. In recent years, the number of applications for privately sponsored refugees submitted to the CIC has increased significantly, which caused a suspension of the program over several months in 2017-2018. For the year 2019, the Government of Canada capped the number of privately sponsored refugee applications at 19,000. As of September 2018, there were 44,200 persons waiting for their application to be processed[4] (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2019).

Refugee Claimants

Alternatively, one may claim asylum upon arrival in Canada at a port of entry (land, air or marine). After being assessed by the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) officers, applicants are released and allowed to reside temporarily in Canada as refugee claimants. If they cannot prove their identity, or if they are perceived as posing a potential threat, they may be detained at the Laval immigration holding centre. Claims are not always made at the border; persons can apply directly from Canada at an Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRBC) office if, for example, they have arrived on a Visa and find themselves unable to return to their country and in need of international protection.

When applying for asylum, refugee claimants must provide a compelling narrative and prove that they face a tangible threat to their life back home. Once the formal documentation is submitted, a court hearing is scheduled to determine refugee status. In a

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[4]https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/help-outside-canada/private-sponsorship-program/how-we-process-applications.html

2019 report on the processing of refugee claimants[5], the Auditor General of Canada concluded that expected wait times for protection decision had reached two years. In the report, it is estimated that this backlog will more than double in five years, "meaning that families and individuals seeking asylum can expect to wait five years to find out whether they will be granted protection."

Safe Third Country Agreement: Legal and Geographical Loopholes

When I started fieldwork in 2017, the immigration system had just experienced an important increase in asylum claims. The province of Québec processed 4,655 claims in 2016, rising to 24,715 in 2017 (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2018). This spike followed the American Presidential election of Donald Trump and a subsequent tightening of immigration politics south of the border, sparking fear amongst persons living in the United States, mostly under temporary protection statuses (see CBC's 2019 article: "*The U.S. is no longer a safe country for asylum seekers, experts warn*")

A majority of the claims made in Québec since 2017 came from persons who crossed the USA-Canada border at an unofficial point of entry, in order to avoid the effects of a USA-Canada treaty known as the Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA). Effective since 2004, the STCA was part of a strategy to control and regulate asylum claims made on either side of the border, and ensure refugees would seek protection from only one country. Similar to the Dublin Regulation in Europe, the agreement stipulates that asylum claims can only be made in the first "safe" country a person reaches. For example, if someone has already entered the United States and appears at a Canadian port of entry to claim asylum, they are to be denied entry and sent back to the United States to make their claim. The STCA, however, does not apply to unofficial points of entry—which are numerous in the world's longest unprotected

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[5] http://www1.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_201905_02_e_43339.html

border. By entering Canada at undesignated border crossings, there is no paper document proving a person came in through the United States, and therefore no basis to deny their eligibility as a refugee claimant.

According to refugees and service providers I spoke to, the United States no longer represents a safe country for refugees. They feel persons living in the USA under temporary statuses or hoping to find protection in the US face an uncertain future. With the Trump administration threatening to remove their status and deport them, unable to return to their country, or apply for asylum in Canada "traditionally" (at designated ports of entry), many have limited options. Roxham Road, near Lacolle, Québec, is one of the most frequently used unofficial entry points. In 2018 the RCMP registered 18,518 irregular border crossings at Roxham, representing around 66% of the total asylum claims made that year (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2018).

Consequences of an Overloaded System

The current immigration system is not capable of processing such a high number of claims. The increased number of claims, compounded by individuals arriving directly at the border or who enter Canada irregularly, has stretched the outdated system's resources thin. The Canadian immigration system was not built to process high numbers of claims at the border or within Canada. Indeed, despite its pro-immigration discourse, the reality of the country's immigration politics is far from its polished "safe haven" reputation (Dawson 2014). Historically, Canada has selectively welcomed thousands of refugees but usually maintains them at arm's length, preferring to process claims overseas—refugees may only enter Canada once they are accepted as Convention refugees.

Whether persons arrive as sponsored refugees or refugee claimants, resettling is an incredibly complex and strenuous process. Displaced persons can arrive in a new country

with significant disadvantages, as they often suffer from mental and physical stress caused by dislocation (Lloyd, Kennan, Thompson & Qayyum, 2014). Some have lived through physical or psychological abuse suffered in unsettled countries of origin, in camps, during transit or in host communities. Moreover, those belonging to visible minority groups often endure discrimination and racism based on their ethnicity or immigrant status (Lloyd et al., 2014; Raphael, 2016). For all these reasons (and more), forcibly displaced persons are at a higher risk for typical social exclusion dynamics such as unemployment (Jupp 2003), lack of access to education or healthcare (Raphael, 2016), isolation, and mental health issues (Beiser & Hou, 2016).

Refugee claimants are even more vulnerable to social exclusion dynamics due to the uncertain nature of their situation. While they can obtain a work permit, have access to basic healthcare, and are allowed to send their children to school, their rights in Canada are conditional and precarious. They live in waiting, knowing their claim could be rejected, which means once again leaving everything behind. They are made to feel neither permanent nor temporary (Jackson & Bauder, 2014)—people who, by definition, have limited social value because a society's investment in them may not "pay off" in the future.

The extended period of time during which refugee claimants remain in limbo keeps them in a state where they "face significant barriers to social services and the labour market, as well as a postponement in potentially acquiring rights such as sponsorship of family members and eventually citizenship" (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003). They cannot get a bank loan, vote or work in certain professions (e.g. education and healthcare), they cannot travel internationally or get loans for post-secondary education. These detrimental conditions occur within the first five years—the years most important for successful resettlement. Reciprocally, in these first years, Canada is losing the opportunity to benefit from the skills

and education refugee claimants have brought from their countries (Omvidar & Richmond, 2003).

The incapacity of the system to process asylum claims in an efficient and timely manner has also had a drastic impact on service providers working to facilitate the resettlement of forcibly displaced persons and their overall inclusion in Montreal. Generally, the term "service provider" refers mainly to front-line workers and professionals employed by governmental and non-governmental organisations supporting refugees. They are crucial actors in the resettlement process as they are often an important source of information and offer various forms of support (emotional, social, financial, legal…) to newcomers.

Within the current context, one could argue that the term "service provider" is growing to encompass other actors who have become heavily involved in refugee support, as professional service providers are increasingly overwhelmed. Volunteers, members of civil society and displaced persons themselves can be implicated as informal service providers, despite lacking specific training or financial compensation. One of the main strengths and contribution of this thesis is to explore the role of ICT as a space to acknowledge and examine various informal forms of service provision. In this sense ICT become an integral (and undertheorized) part of service provision and the broader processes of displacement and resettlement. In the next section, we will see that although the use of ICT by refugees has drawn increasing attention from academics, there is still very little research which focuses on the use of ICT by service providers working with refugees.

"Digital Refugees": ICT and Forced Displacement in Recent Literature

The place of ICT [6] amidst forced displacement has received increasing attention from researchers in the past few years. In the following paragraphs, I provide a review of this

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[6] Several authors reported below use the term "digital technology". Throughout my thesis, I choose to retain the term Information and Communications Technology, or ICT. While "digital technology" is increasingly used in

relatively recent literature. The research addressed below is contextual, and often anchored in particular legal and political situations. I begin by addressing how ICT use allows migrants (including refugees) to build informal digital networks and develop common social capital. Next, I discuss literature concerned with ICT as a means of communication and enhanced sociality for displaced persons. I then give an overview of literature concerned with ICT-based programs designed to facilitate the social inclusion of refugees in various communities. The next section pinpoints literature concerned with surveillance and privacy issues relating to refugees' digital practices. Finally, I identify gaps in the existent literature, and explain how my research will address them.

Establishing Informal Networks

Even before emigration, ICT helps to establish informal social networks. Dekker and Engbersen (2013) explore how social media transform migrant networks and facilitate migration by opening up new digital paths. They argue the use of social media lowers the threshold for international migration by bringing discrete, unofficial and yet crucial information otherwise difficult to obtain. By forming established, informal networks on social media, updated information and experience circulate among potential migrants, rendering it easier to initiate movement. Information obtained online can sometimes become the sole motivation for relocation (Dekker and Engbersen, 2013). This information

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social sciences to refer to modern communication tools, the context of this research calls for more specificity, which the term ICT offers by allowing a focus on communication technologies. In a broad sense, ICT refers to technologies that provide access to information through telecommunications (Zuppo, 2012). ICT can therefore be used to reflect on convergence between computer and communications technologies, or as a fast-evolving union of Information Technology (IT) and telecommunications. Moreover, while the term ICT is more specific in this context than "digital technology", it is still a broad, inclusive category which refers to diverse, rapidly converging technologies. My research interests lie in understanding how persons in a situation of forced displacement and their service providers make use of these technologies to gather information, communicate and create new networks. While most of these technologies are indeed digital, the focus here is on the ability to *communicate* information, which the term ICT conveys strongly.

accumulation represents crucial social capital, with technology being able to inform and shape people's experience of mobility in significant ways.

Social capital can be defined as "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 1995) By harvesting an important number of social connections through forums, blogs, applications and social media accounts, refugees can build and maximize common social capital. Dekker and Engbersen (2013) conclude that social media have created a "deterritorialized social space that facilitates communication among geographically dispersed people in migrant networks." Therefore, the formation of social capital is also dependent on hardware such as smartphones, tablets and computers. These objects have become important factors in migratory processes, including forced displacement. The mobility of these objects is thus simultaneously passive and active: they are moved across borders by people, but also condition their owners' mobility (Urry, 2007).

Communication and Sociality

Smartphones especially have been portrayed as an essential survival tool amidst forced displacement (Narli, 2018; Alencar, Kondova & Ribbens 2018; Gillepsie, Osseiran & Cheesman, 2018; see also *The New York Time*'s 2015 article: "*A 21st Century Migrant's Essentails: Food, Shelter, Smartphone*"). As little as a decade back, having a phone, let alone a smartphone was a luxury seldom observed among refugees. Today, smartphones are so common among refugees that it has even sparked criticism in European countries (see the *The Independent*'s 2015 article "*Surprised that Syrian refugees have smartphones? Sorry to break this to you, but you're an idiot*").

Timothy Loh (2017) argues that smartphones are a top priority for someone who is displaced. They are especially valuable in that they allow displaced persons to communicate

effectively with their family and friends, no matter where they are. Displacement has classically implied a complete uprooting from the home community, until the refugee claimant settles and could re-establish slower forms of contact (e.g. through letters, packages, or landline phones). While long distance communication has been possible for a long time, smartphones provide near instantaneous communication, unimaginable even a decade ago. Messaging applications, social media platforms, e-mails, SMS, VoIP services, and video calling services like Skype or Facetime can be used to keep in touch with loved ones. Not only have these services become readily available, they also have become more accessible and affordable in recent years (Loh, 2017; Wilding, 2008; Witteborn, 2014).

ICTs can also positively impact physical and material safety by facilitating financial exchange. Online banking and mobile banking applications render the circulation of cash between displaced individuals and their families easier and sometimes safer (Loh, 2017). This contributes to restore agency to displaced persons who have lost autonomy in many other aspects of their lives. On the other hand, increased communication flows can increase pressure and stress on resettled individuals, as it makes it harder for them to escape family (including financial) expectations (Witteborn, 2014). While being connected facilitates family intimacy, it can also create challenges, as refugees may be held accountable for meeting these expectations in virtual interactions.

Beyond sending money, communicating with family, and finding information, ICTs also facilitate the ability to manage and therefore redefine identities. The importance of labels and how one can make use of them in relation to identity and digital practice is a major point of discussion in Saskia Witteborn's work. During three years of field work (2011-2013), Witteborn (2015) encountered people resettled in Germany "who used new technologies to learn languages, create and maintain local and international friendship networks, or entertain themselves to pass the monotonous days in the shelters" (p. 2, see also

Witteborn 2012, 2015). Her research highlights the importance of virtual practices as a way to negotiate the universe of expectations and imposed roles that come with the realities of living in "legal, social and cultural limbo" (Witteborn, 2015, p. 5).

Witteborn (2015) further argues that through ICT, displaced persons regain agency over how they perform their identities beyond the "refugee" label. On social media platforms, her interviewees were able to present themselves as something else instead of a migrant, an asylum seeker and/or a refugee, having internalized the negative connotation of these terms. They could emphasize their hobbies, post attractive pictures of themselves, chat and make friends, link, comment, like, et cetera, without having to reveal their controversial legal status. On the other hand, the same virtual practices allowed them to reclaim the "asylum seeker" or "refugee" labels when the use of these terms gained political momentum during protests against German and European asylum policy in 2012.

ICT Use and Social Inclusion in Host Communities

The potential represented by ICT to negotiate identity has significant implications for long-term social inclusion. In the face of the possibilities offered by modern digital tools for the social inclusion of refugees, several ICT-based programs and initiatives have emerged across the world. For example, Gifford and Wilding (2013) explore the possibilities offered by such programs through the analysis of a digital media project called *Home Lands*. The project involved some 30 Karen Burmese youth who entered Australia as refugees. Their main argument is that ICT can open up possibilities for becoming at home in a new country and as a citizen of a more global, deterritorialized world. More specifically, they play on the emphasis of the importance for refugee youth to include connections to friends and families in countries of origins, camps or resettled other countries in the development of their identity. The maintenance of these transnational relationships proved to have a positive impact on the

social inclusion of refugee youths at a local level: "a key hypothesis of Home Lands was that opportunities to create a digital multimedia products for exchange with peers overseas would assist resettled youth to develop positive social and cultural identities and achieve successful settlement outcomes" (p. 559).

Similarly, Andrade and Doolin (2016) examine the extent to which ICT can promote social inclusion for refugees relocated in New Zealand. The participants in their research were recipients of a government-funded initiative, *Computers in Homes*, which provides members of low socioeconomic communities with ICT hardware and training. These authors base their analysis on Sen's (1999) conception of social inclusion, which emphasizes the right to capacities that persons value in constructing meaningful lives. "This approach recognizes the agency of individuals in deciding on courses of action for their betterment within the constraints of existing social arrangements (Andrade and Doolin, 2016, p. 405). The authors identify five particular capabilities ICT offered to refugees. These capabilities are: 1) to participate in an information society, 2) to communicate effectively, 3) to understand a new society, 4) to be socially connected, and 5) to express cultural identity. They conclude that through ICT use, "the achievement of these capabilities reinforces refugees' agency and enhances their well-being in ways that contribute to their participation in society and control over their lives." (p. 413).

While I support Andrade and Doolin's understanding of social inclusion, their approach remains idealized and requires more nuance. The results presented in this thesis will show that the enthusiasm surrounding digital solutions in a context of forced displacement can be mitigated by several shortcomings.

Surveillance and Control

The role of ICT in refugees' lives is complex and diverse. ICT use always depends on the position of refugees within a political context. While ICT presents an undeniable aspect of empowerment, as outlined above, it can also potentially harm refugees' freedom and safety by increasing threats of surveillance. Access to ICT can represent a significant advantage for those seeking a safer life, but it can also mean that their location, activities and personal information are easily traceable and collectable. Saskia Witteborn (2014b), for instance, mentions that some of her participants refrain from ever mentioning their status as refugees on social media from fear of being tracked by governments.

Within the post-9/11 climate of fear, incredibly sophisticated methods of cyber-surveillance have been developed to counteract "illegal" migration flows and reduce to a bare minimum the acceptance of certain "categories" of migrants, including refugees. For Dimitris Papadopoulos (Papadopoulos, Stephenson & Tsianos, 2008), control over the movement of bodies has become deterritorialized and continuous, instead of being deployed at a specific point in time and space (e.g. traditional border control). He claims the denaturalisation of border control has the double function of politics at a distance and virtual data collection: "It deploys a logic of an extraterritorial net of control which denaturalises not only forms of surveillance but also forms of punishment by extending the risk of deportability within and beyond state boundaries" (176). Such threats represent a major factor of instability and fear for refugees (Chouliaraki & Musarò, 2017), thus potentially limiting the beneficial use of ICT while simultaneously undermining their feeling of inclusion in host communities (Zavratnik & Krilic, 2018). As we will see, threats continue to emerge in new ways in Montréal, in particular in the experience of refugee claimants at the border, when border agents are accessing their electronic devices.

Service Providers and ICT: A Gap in the Literature.

The previous sections give an overview of recent research concerned with the digital practices of refugees in various contexts. It is clear from this literature that ICT is deeply embedded in the experience of forced displacement. What remains largely unexplored however, are the digital practices of service providers working in community organizations in the host society. Service providers play a critical role in resettlement, as they are at the frontline of social support networks (Omivdar & Richmond, 2003; Simich et al., 2005). What is their perspective on the place of ICT in forced displacement? What do their own digital practices look like? How do they adapt to the various benefits and risks associated with ICT use by refugees?

Little research has (to my knowledge) addressed this question, leaving a gap in the literature that calls for deeper inquiry. Some research looks at the use of ICT by international NGOs, such as the UNHCR, for data collection and storage (Johns, 2017; Papadopoulos, 2008). Research reports can be found on the use of mobile phones by NGOs working on humanitarian crisis sites, or in remote locations (e.g. Kinkade and Verclas, 2008). In surveillance studies, the topic of (biometric) technology and the management of migration flows is extensively researched, but with a focus on government and border agencies in Europe (Ajana, 2013, Hintjens, 2013) and Canada (Lyon, 2006). In refugee studies, some research has taken interest in addressing the difficulty of information sharing practices between service providers and refugees, including discussions around ICT (Lloyd, 2013; Qayyum et al, 2014; Simich et al., 2005). To date, however, little extant research has focused on use of ICT by organizations at a local level, how they develop their action around and with ICT, or how they take into account the virtual practices and online resources developed by displaced persons themselves.

Looking at the intersection of ICT, refugees, and service providers is crucial and underlines the importance of this research. Local service providers often are the very first

individuals that refugees interact with upon arriving in a host country. As such, they significantly influence initial feelings of inclusion. In many cases, they represent the main source of social, financial and emotional support for newcomers. If, as the literature presented above suggests, ICT holds a critical place in the experience of refugees, then there is value in understanding how service providers react and adapt to the omnipresence of digital tools among the group they serve, refugees.

Beyond the Digital Divide

Before moving on to the research questions driving this research, I would like to address the question of access. Inequality of access to ICT based on socio-economic factors and its impact is often referred to as the "digital divide" (Norris, 2001, Van Dik & Hacker, 2003, Warschauer, 2004). Although the term is commonly encountered in literature concerned with migrant or refugee digital practices (e.g. Alam & Imran, 2015), research is increasingly striving to surpass the idea of the digital divide. Mark Warschauer (2003), for instance, argues the concept can be reduced to inequality between have and have-nots based on dichotomous measures of access. He argues the term blatantly disregards the skills, ingenuity and participation capacities that people from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds can offer regarding material access to ICT. While questions of access should not be disregarded, and they remain an important subject of inquiry, this research is less concerned with a *full-on divide* as a 'gradient' of different degrees of access. For this reason, it is important to briefly discuss how 'access' will be contemplated in the context of this thesis.

Access Within the Sample

The analysis presented in this work does not pertain to how refugee access ICT, but how they use these tools. This decision was in part informed by preliminary findings. All participants agreed on the fact that ICT was overly prevalent amongst refugees in Montreal. Roads to access were diverse: some came equipped with electronics, others acquired hardware once they got in Montreal. The devices were not always "high tech" but permitted access to the Internet and various applications. For those who did not have access to personal devices, participants reported the use of public access computers (in schools or libraries). Others shared devices (amongst families, for example). In other words, of my participants, no one absolutely lacked access to ICT

It is important to note that access was more complicated for some than others: the main problem reported by participants was usually of a financial nature. Hardware was seldom the issue, but "paying the bill" (i.e. paying for in-house wi-fi, phone and data plans in order to have a steady Internet connection) was a strain on some people's finances. Service providers that I interviewed emphasized the strain this cost represented for some refugees, with some people putting themselves in precarious situations in order to stay "online". One service provider even reported knowing newcomers who would favour paying for Internet bills over food. This reveals extremes some persons are willing to go to in order to stay connected. When "paying the bill" was not an option, especially in the first few weeks following arrival, participants reported relying on public access wi-fi to "stay connected", although this temporary solution was not optimal.

Of course, there are always exceptions. Some refugees do not have any access to ICT. This can be due to a range of reasons: financial or literacy issues, or complete lack of ICT skills are a few examples. Persons who lack access to ICT are therefore usually the most marginalized. This is important to acknowledge, and will be mentioned again throughout this thesis, though it will not be necessarily addressed. While access may be more complicated for

some than others, the general conclusion was that ICT was accessible and prevalent amongst the refugee community and service providers. The rest of this work will be dedicated to understanding *how* ICT is used in the context of resettlement for forcibly displaced persons, and how these tools may contribute to shaping this experience at a collective level.

Research Questions

Given the identified gaps in the literature, and in order to test or corroborate previous findings of digital practices of refugees in other contexts, I propose the following research questions:

1. What is the use of ICT by refugees in Montreal? How do they perceive these tools in the context of their displacement and resettlement?

2. What is the use of ICT by service providers working for governmental and non-governmental organizations in Montreal? How do they adapt their work to the omnipresence of digital tools?

3. In what ways does ICT use impact the process of social inclusion for refugees and service providers particularly in re-structuring social support networks?

Theoretical Framework

Making sense of the role of ICT in the experience of forced displacement and resettlement requires a theoretical framework capable of accounting for multiple levels of social activity. I take as a starting point the work of Manuel Castells (2010) and his conceptualization of the global social organization of our world as a "network society." He defines the network society as "a society whose social structure is made around networks

activated by microelectronics-based, digitally-processed information and communication technology" (2009, p. 24). Castells defines power as the ability to participate in and influence networks, relying on the inclusion/exclusion dynamic inherent to networks: what is valued by the network is included and therefore empowered, while what is devalued is left out and disempowered.

Understanding the lives of refugees, and refugee claimants in particular, as cast out of the traditional dominant networks is particularly important in this analysis. Canada, though famous for its liberal immigration politics, is not immune to the increasing criminalization of migration and the consequent marginalization of refugees. Atak & Simeon (2018) describe this process, which involves "the increasing use of criminal law in immigration matters, the criminalizing of public discourse and other policies and practices that stigmatize migrants and refugees, and/or diminish their rights in Canada and abroad" (p.5). Within this context, refugees are often marginalized and disempowered, in particular if they have entered the country irregularly. Displaced persons exist in a system that is not built to represent them and which limits their rights (Atak & Simeon, 2018). Therefore, their ability to participate in the network society is uncertain and difficult.

Following Castells (2009), the increasing availability of ICT should enhance social actors' capacities to create and participate in alternative networks. While they may be temporarily unable to participate in dominant networks, ICT allows refugees to communicate, share information and support each other, thus creating new forms of social life through digital mediums. These alternative networks, powered by ICT, include a wide range of actors, including refugees and their families in other countries, service providers, volunteers, activists or members of the public. ICT enables participation in these alternative networks, which can allow refugees to resist exclusion and reclaim a certain level of power.

Castell's theories provide an interesting macro-level framework of analysis: through ICT refugees can increasingly rely on alternative networks to navigate the criminalizing migration framework and the marginalization it implies. The work of sociologist Saskia Sassen completes this theoretical framework by adopting an approach that allows us to examine *how* ICT use facilitates the development of alternative networks within a particular political context. I propose to look at the role of ICT within the experience of resettlement in Montréal by keeping two specific points of her work in mind.

First, Sassen takes interest in ICT's capacity to provoke a drastic rescaling of the local and the global (Sassen, 2002, 2006, 2012). In her work, ICT emerges as a powerful medium for non-elites to communicate, support each other's struggles, and create insider groups at scales going from the local to the global. In the case of refugees, this includes staying connected with friends and family dispersed across different countries. In chapter three, we will see that these informal transnational networks can facilitate mobility the circulation of economic, cultural and social capital amongst displaced persons. At the same time these technologies can be used for strengthening local networks inside a city, serving local initiatives and alliances across neighborhoods. This is important to understand how ICT can widen local networks of refugee support by connecting various organizations and service providers, refugees, and the local community, which I will discuss in chapter four.

Second, in Sassen's work, the technological is inevitably embedded in the social. Considering ICT's potential from a purely technological point of view will inevitably render invisible "the material conditions and practices, place boundedness and thick social environments" in which ICT evolves (Sassen , 2002, p. 366). In other words, Sassen encourages social scientists to consider the social and political context in which ICT is used. While it is compelling to consider ICT as a convincing alternative to social issues linked to forced displacement, it can also reproduce conditions of oppression over refugees. The

context of criminalized migration conditions ICT use for refugees, which can become problematic and even harmful. In chapter five, we will see that digital tools are not independent nor autonomous from state power, and can exacerbate certain risks and forms of control over refugees. This dimension of Sassen's work is particularly significant in my analysis: it implies that simple access to ICT does not automatically mean inclusion in the system. ICT's embeddedness within a social and political context must be taken into consideration.

Chapter Two: Data and Methodology

This chapter is dedicated to the methodology employed for this research. In what follows, I begin by discussing how I entered the field and recruited participants. In a second section, I address the ethnographic dimension of this research by commenting on observations I made both online and offline. A third section is dedicated to data collection itself, my experience with interviewing, and the important ethical considerations for this work. Finally, a last section gives an overview of the analysis applied to the data.

Entering the Field and Recruiting Participants

The main sources of data were semi-structured interviews conducted with ten participants in the Greater Montréal area. All participants were recruited through snowball sampling. Six of these participants were service providers in governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) geared towards assisting newcomers settle in the City of Montréal. Four participants were forcibly displaced persons living in Montréal. At the time of the interviews, two of them were refugee claimants and two had refugee status in Canada. One of these participants has since moved to another province, and another has received a positive decision towards their asylum application. Among refugee participants, there were one woman and three men aged 22 to 34 years old. Service provider participants were four women and two men, aged 25 to 60 years old.

It is important to acknowledge the two "groups" of participants are in no way homogeneous categories. There is no uniform, monolithic "refugee" group or "service provider" group. In fact, the experiences of these individuals often intersect. Some service providers for instance, arrived in Canada as refugees, had close family members who were refugees, or came from countries with a history of forced displacement. Likewise, some refugees I met were heavily involved as volunteers alongside service providers, or used to

work as service providers back home or in transit camps. While these two "groups" are not in tension and often overlap, several methodological reasons pushed me to address them distinctly in this work.

Looking at the role of ICT within the process of resettlement implies capturing a particular moment of transition within the lives of forcibly displaced persons. This transitional period is defined by the actors involved, namely refugees themselves and their service providers. The reality of this moment, and the place of ICT within it, is shaped by the practices of refugees and those who support and accompany them daily. While describing refugees and service providers as two completely distinct "categories" would be incorrect, blurring the lines complicates our understanding of the process which brings them together and the place of ICT at this specific point in time. In this sense, the focus on ICT offers insight into the complex relationship between refugees and service providers through an object which crystallizes the flow(s) of information between them. Finally, addressing participants independently serves the purpose of acknowledging the potential power imbalances which may exist between refugees and service providers These are non-negligible and need to be factored in methodologically speaking, as they imply different ethical considerations. This last point will be further developed later in this chapter.

Service Provider Participants

In December 2017, before starting recruitment and while awaiting ethics approval from the Concordia Office of Research, I got in touch with two community organizations whose mandate is the welcoming of refugees and new immigrants. I explained who I was and presented the subject of this thesis. These organizations connected me with five employees who might be interested in participating. Once I received the ethics certificate, I sent a formal email to these five service providers, asking them if they were interested in being

interviewed. Two of them gave a positive answer and became my point of entry into the field. They gave me precious advice and insight into the network of the main refugee organizations of the city, and put me in contact with several other service providers who might be interested in participating.

Following this track, I continued to meet and interview service providers from January to August 2018. Simultaneously, I began attending a number of events organised by the refugee support community across the city. These events included a celebration of Refugee Rights Day, a general assembly meeting, a conference co-organised by the UNHCR and the YMCA on refugee integration in Montréal, and a hackathon organised by the Refugee Centre at Concordia University, as well as a handful of smaller events. Additionally, I started volunteering with an organization (geared towards refugee claimant support) in the last month of my field work. Many of these events, as well as the opportunity to volunteer, were suggested by participants. Increasing my presence in the field added to snowball sampling by broadening my reach into the community and putting me in touch with service providers from varied backgrounds and organizations.

Refugee Participants

In line with the snowball sampling method, I first considered asking my service provider participants to connect me with refugee participants, but I quickly turned away from this method. Scholars engaged in research with forcibly displaced persons must keep in mind the potential inconvenience and harm the research process could cause to participants (Clark & Kazak, 2017). This applies during interviews, but also when recruiting participants and asking for their informed consent. Asking service providers to approach displaced persons with my research would imply disregarding the significant power dynamics that can exist between them. It would also engender a risk for failed recruitment, as it is my opinion that a

majority of service providers are conscious of these power imbalances and would refuse putting any pressure on the persons they accompany during resettlement.

Instead, being present at events and volunteering facilitated contact with potential participants. I proceeded by first exposing my research interests to a wide range of persons (both refugees and service providers) without asking them to partake—sometimes without even knowing they were potential participants. Two refugees who I met during events contacted me later, saying they would be interested in participating. One of them introduced me to an acquaintance who also agreed to be interviewed. Finally, I met a fourth participant while volunteering. This method ensured participants agreed to be interviewed not because they felt pressured to, but because they wanted to. It allowed potential participants to get a glimpse of both my research as well as my character before deciding whether they would be interested in hearing more and eventually participating.

I am conscious that this recruitment technique implied other types of biases. Refugees who participated were persons with whom I got along in the first place on a personal level. They were persons who spoke English or French, and who were not severely isolated. Two of them were involved in the refugee support community as volunteers, and one was working on an application designed specifically for refugees. All four of them had a personal interest in my research topic that prompted them to participate, maybe more so than someone else. These biases, though difficult to avoid, set up important questions for future research concerning ICT and resettlement. For instance, what role does language play in ICT access and use for social inclusion?

Ethnographic influences

Although I did not set out to do ethnographic work *per se*, the time I spent volunteering and participating in community events informed my knowledge of the field, and

to some extent configured my interpretation of the findings. I systematically journaled about these experiences in order to keep track of every moment spent in the field and to be able to incorporate my observations into the analysis. Attending events and volunteering not only facilitated recruitment, as explained in the previous section, it also helped me understand the realities of the persons I interviewed, whether they were refugees or service providers. This added tremendously to my interview data by casting it in a particular context and shared experiences.

I also conducted observations online, mostly examining Facebook groups dedicated to refugee support. Here, I was able to observe interactions in the forms of posts, likes, comments and discussion threads. This offered a valuable opportunity to witness firsthand how the use of ICT by refugees and service providers alike complemented refugee support "IRL" (*in real life*).

Attending Events

Over the course of my fieldwork, I attended eight main events which helped me understand : 1) the situation of forced displacement and resettlement in Canada at this point in time, 2) the configuration of the refugee support network in Montréal and the interactions between the main organizations in that field, and 3) the experience expressed by actors involved in these networks, whether they were service providers, volunteers or refugees. These events were put together by local organizations, international NGOs, governmental agencies, and universities. They differed in nature, and attracted a wide range of people. Some events were celebratory, such as a Refugee Rights Day, and a picnic for refugees and volunteers they were paired with. Others encouraged members of the community to reflect on ways to solve issues linked to forced displacement, such as the conference co-organised by UNHCR Canada and hosted at the YMCA. I also attended logistics-oriented meetings, which

offered a chance to get a glimpse into some organizations' structures, such as general assemblies or volunteer meetings.

Overall, during these events I took the opportunity to discuss the subject of my thesis informally with a wide range of individuals – service providers, international NGO employees (such as UNHCR officials), volunteers who were refugees or members of the public, newcomers or long-established members of the community – all of which allowed me to shape an analysis that went beyond formally recorded interviews. Many of these events offered an opportunity for refugees to speak about their experience in Canada – the challenges they faced, the things they were grateful for, what they were still trying to achieve. Persons at different stages of "the process" (i.e. making an asylum claim) expressed how they felt – frustrated, relieved, anxious, thankful. These experiences and stories helped me get a glimpse into the refugee support networks, and the way people expressed and enacted solidarity in "the big refugee family," as one of my participants called it.

Besides informal conversations and public presentations, these events also offered an opportunity to observe the world of refugee support and connect these observations to my research questions. I tried to pay attention to the way spaces, interactions and connections were digitalized (or not), and whether ICT was ever a central tool in the action. For instance, one participant pointed me towards an event that was dedicated to using digital tools in order to address the issue of privacy with data collection in refugee camps around the world. Based out of Concordia University, this organization operates on the premise that technology can strengthen refugee integration in Montréal. Other events, though not as tech-oriented as this one, made it possible to catch a glimpse of the way ICT fit in the network. For instance, during a presentation given at Dawson College, the director of a long-standing community organization encouraged the audience to join refugee support groups on Facebook and come in contact with displaced persons directly.

Volunteering

I began volunteering for a local organization during the summer of 2018. In the first contact I had with the organization, I disclosed my research interests and the fact that I was a student, and they introduced me to the team as such. Volunteering offered the same opportunity to anchor my reflection in the field, but from more of an "insider" perspective. Amongst other things, this organization handled a significant amount of material household donations, including picking up large items, sorting through them and dropping them off to refugee claimant families. I mainly worked at their storage space and helped with some furniture deliveries. I was also in charge of building a resource list for refugee claimant families.

Volunteering allowed me to gain invaluable insight relating to the experience of service providers, volunteers and refugees I met during my time there. Many of the persons I volunteered with were refugee claimants. We often had the occasion to discuss how they experienced resettlement, how they perceived ICT, and how they thought digital tools fit in their journey. On other occasions, I discussed with various employees of the organization about their experience: the long hours, the interesting work, the difficulty of coordinating, et cetera. In this sense, I also had the opportunity to understand the structure of the organization from the inside. This was particularly significant regarding their use of ICT. As a volunteer, for instance, I observed how we digitally coordinated our action by using Slack and Facebook to communicate amongst ourselves, or WhatsApp with the displaced persons we delivered furniture to. Most volunteers, including myself, were recruited through social media, which proved to be a crucial tool in the outreach of this organization and many others.

Online Observations

Interestingly, the more I advanced in the "offline" field and interviewed various actors, the more I moved some of my observations online and learned more about refugee support networks through social media. I did not intend (at least at first) to do any kind of online ethnography – it simply occurred as a consequence of my "real-life" fieldwork. The more people I met and the more events I attended, the more I realised that a significant part of the network was based online. At community events I would ask "How did you hear about tonight?" and more often than not, my interlocutor would answer "I saw the event page on Facebook." People I volunteered with learned about the organization on Instagram or through "random" Facebook posts. I started paying more attention to the online dynamics at play in the way refugees, service providers, volunteers and locals connected and interacted.

In order to integrate these online dynamics into my analysis, I focused on two areas of interaction. First off, I spent a considerable amount of time monitoring an online refugee support group on Facebook. The group was created by YMCA social workers and is run mostly by volunteers. It currently has just under 7000 members. There are several other support groups available to refugees, but they are usually neighbourhood specific. I chose to focus on the YMCA group as it was the most active, had the most members, and covered the Greater Montréal area. This group allowed locals to offer material donations such as clothes, furniture or kitchen items. Persons who identify as refugees could respond to the post (in comments or private messages) and arrange to pick them up. Beyond donations, posts on the group included advice, resources, job or housing offers, and messages of support, amongst other things. The second online area I observed – to a slightly lesser extent – were several refugee support organizations' social media accounts (e.g. Instagram, Facebook).

In order to document what I observed online, I relied on taking screen shots of posts, without the poster or the group/page name. I collected about 120 screenshots in total, which were stored on a password protected hard drive. I categorized all posts into main themes (e.g.

"material donation," "housing," "healthcare," "education," "employment," "immigration"),
which were then incorporated in my coding scheme. When I refer to this data collected online
throughout the thesis, I do not directly use direct quote from the posts. Instead, I use
paraphrasing (e.g. restating the text, changing structure of sentences but delivering the same
meaning) so that posts would not be traceable if copied into a search engine.

Online ethnography offers several advantages, which are now well-documented. First,
it represents a relatively unobtrusive way to be present and observe, and it gives the
opportunity to record "naturally" occurring behaviours and interactions that are difficult to
achieve in "real life" fieldwork (Beaulieu, 2004; Hine, 2011; Sade-Beck, 2004). Second, it
makes it possible to see how offline and online support networks have started to intertwine
and mutually influence each other. Service providers, for instance, could alleviate their
workload by directing people to their online support groups. I believe that being present in
both online and offline fields was necessary to get a full understanding of the place of ICT
resettlement, because it acknowledges the commingling of technological and social, instead
of considering them as independent, autonomous fields.

While conducting only an online ethnography would not produce a convincing
analysis of this topic, it is reasonable to argue that confining this research to individual
interviews and offline observations would be equally limiting. Mieke Schrooten (2012), in
his PhD project on Brazilian migrant's online togetherness, reviews the importance of
adopting a dialectical research praxis and trying to understand how online and offline
research sites are interrelated. In fact, I found the interplay of online and offline fields was
echoed during interviews with respondents, who would describe their personal ICT use as
conditioned by the wider context of forced displacement and resettlement. I believe that
being able to partly observe both of these fields allowed me to shape a deeper understanding
and analysis of this narrative.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted face to face or over the phone, in English or French. I decided to make use of semi-structured interviews in order to leave more space for each respondent's personal narrative. Although I had two interview guides of about 25 questions, I tailored these to each participant, and often just let the conversation follow its natural flow. Ultimately, I wanted to provide a fuller understanding of the experiences of respondents and an accurate account of the contextual use of ICT by these two groups. Generally, I began by asking respondents broad, open-ended questions. This laid the groundwork for the heart of the discussion, namely their use and perceptions of ICT. Both service providers and forcibly displaced persons addressed multiple facets of ICT's place in resettlement: their daily use of it, their personal perception of these tools, and how they fit in their experience.

Table 1. Interviews

Participant pseudonym	Language	Place	Duration
Service providers			
Anabelle	French	Participant's office	40 mins
Jamal	English	Participant's office	25 mins
John	English	Participant's office	35 mins
Emma *	English	Co-worker's home	40 mins
Marianne *	English	Participant's home	40 mins
Agnes	French	Café	50 mins
Refugee participants			
Sami	English	Café	145 mins
Youssef	English	Café	70 mins
Bilal	English	Phone conversation	31 mins
Danielle	English	Participant's home	20 minutes

These participants were interviewed together.

Refugee participants

Interviews with refugee participants took place in their homes or at a site of their choosing (usually a café). With three out of four displaced participants, we had taken the time to get to know each other and discuss aspects of immigration, "refugeeness," integration,

inclusion and technology on at least two occasions before the actual recorded interview took place. This allowed me to tailor the interview guides to each participant and keep in mind some aspects of their experiences before starting data collection. Additionally, it took pressure off the recorded interviews, allowing participants to refer to past events we had discussed "off the record" without going back into too much detail. All in all, getting to know participants allowed to build trust and familiarity, which in turn facilitated the conversation, particularly around sensitive topics.

During interviews with refugees, the interaction sometimes became emotionally charged. Unlike with service providers, who presented themselves as professionals, a lot of what was discussed in these interviews had to do with refugees' personal lives. It sometimes proved difficult for me to steer the conversation in a way that made data collection relevant to the research topic, while respectfully navigating participants' rich and complex life stories and experiences. Moreover, my interpretation of their narrative pushed me to constantly reflect on the ethical complications of conducting research with persons who have gone through forced displacement.

Ethical considerations

Indeed, research concerned with the topic of forced displacement is representative of particular power dynamics. Researchers in this field need to remain conscious of these power dynamics at all times by giving particular attention to the methods employed and their ethical implications (Milner, 2015). I adhered to this principle by remaining cognisant that the very framing of this research topic was always informed by my position as a white graduate student with no previous experience of violence, expulsion or forced displacement. Nevertheless, I tried my best understand and, to some extent, relate to the experiences

discussed with participants by repeatedly reassessing my methodology, both in the field and during data analysis.

Drawing from ethnographic literature, I tried to adopt what Spradley (1979) calls a "conscious attitude of almost complete ignorance" (p. 4) in order to mitigate and balance the subjectivity of my approach. For instance, I tried to leave as much space as possible during interviews to discuss topics that were not covered by my initial research questions. During and after interviews, I re-evaluated my interview guides and often asked participants to give me their opinions on the questions I had asked and the way I framed the topic.

Beyond these theoretical considerations, practical steps were taken to ensure privacy for participants and give them the possibility to retain some control over their own narrative. All interviews were completely anonymized; pseudonyms were given to participants and all potentially identifying details were removed. Each participant signed a written consent form either in English or in French, depending on their preference.

The form offered the option to review their interview transcript before it was used in the final analysis. This option was offered in an attempt to uphold research ethics while simultaneously empowering participants and giving them a sense of propriety over the printed words (Mero-Jaffe, 2011). I wanted participants to have an opportunity to consider their words beyond the single moment of the interview, and approve of or eventually correct the way I transcribed their story. This option was also another step towards ensuring privacy by allowing participants to highlight potentially identifiable details I may have overlooked. Of those who have chosen the option to review their transcripts, none of them have requested to edit, add or remove anything.

Even though consent was obtained from each participant, there were instances where I was worried about unanticipated language barrier or potential cultural/situational nuances that could deform participants' discourse or my interpretation of it. I tried to mitigate this as

much as possible by encouraging participants to confirm their ideas, put them in other words, and review their transcripts. Although I believe it is important to note the subjectivity of interpretation in relation to cultural, social, political and spiritual backgrounds, I sincerely hope my reading of each respondent's experience is as adequate as possible.

Service Providers

Interviews with service providers yielded dense, valuable data. Their professional knowledge and expertise complemented refugee participants' experiences. Some service providers in the sample had over a decade of professional experience and were able to offer a chronological account on the emergence of ICT, both in their work and in the lives of the forcibly displaced persons they work with. Others, who worked in relatively new organizations, provided an account which balanced the perspective of their more seasoned colleagues. All in all, their narrative is central in understanding the place of digital tools in resettlement.

Interviews with service providers were conducted in a professional environment, which usually gave a formal tone to the conversation. It quickly became clear that most service providers were accustomed to being interviewed. Some revealed their organizations received multiple requests from researchers every week, particularly since the increase in asylum claims in Canada has become a major topic of interest in the media.

Because of this experience, some participants had a tendency to try and "take the lead" during the interview – anticipating questions, cutting me off or going on about a side topic unrelated to the question. This seemed to be done in an attempt to promote their organization's work. Moreover, their busy schedule put constraints on the interview length, which sometimes made it difficult to delve deeper into certain important topics. This also

made it challenging to focus on the conversation, which was sometimes interrupted by colleagues or phone calls.

In order to mitigate some of these issues and maximize the data quality, I stayed as close as possible to my interview guide questions, while still allowing participants to go on tangents. This allowed me to cover all the topics related to my research questions while still leaving space for unanticipated conversation and information. Before each interview, I conducted research on their organization and their role within the community in order to maximize my knowledge of their work and facilitate the exchange. This presented the advantage of saving time (which was often of the essence) and allowed me to stay focused on the topic of ICT specifically.

Finally, although confidentiality was a lesser concern with service providers than with refugee participants, the same steps were taken to ensure their privacy. All participants signed a consent form either in French or English (depending on their preference). For reasons mentioned above, the consent form offered the option to review and edit the transcript up to six months after the completion of the interview. Interviews remained anonymous; all service providers were given a pseudonym in an effort to keep their identity private.

Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. It is considered to be a particularly accessible approach to qualitative analysis, especially for those early in their research career (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While thematic analysis is seldom depicted as its own method, it is often considered as an inherent part of other analytical frameworks (e.g. grounded theory) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is an effective and rigorous method to make sense of rich data corpuses in qualitative research. After transcribing all field notes and interviews and ensuring

there were no modifications requested from participants, I coded all material using NVivo 11 and 12, a qualitative data analysis computer software.

The first categories of codes that emerged were: 1) Codes pertaining to each group's (forcibly displaced persons and service providers) lived experience of the refugee support system in Montréal, and 2) Each group's use and perception of ICT within this context. The reasoning behind this coding logic is rooted in Saskia Sassen's (2002) take on a sociology of information technology, which emphasizes the importance of considering the embeddedness of ICT within social reality: "Digital networks are embedded in both the technical features and standards of the hardware and software, and in actual societal structures and power dynamics" (p.368). She therefore encourages social scientists to keep the social embeddedness of digital tools and spaces in mind in order to go beyond the common duality of utopian versus dystopian understandings of ICT. During a second coding phase, I identified three overarching, recurrent themes. These three final themes, containing each around ten subthemes, represent an organization of the patterns I observed in participants' descriptions of their ICT use, while also taking into account their experience of the wider social spheres in which they interact.
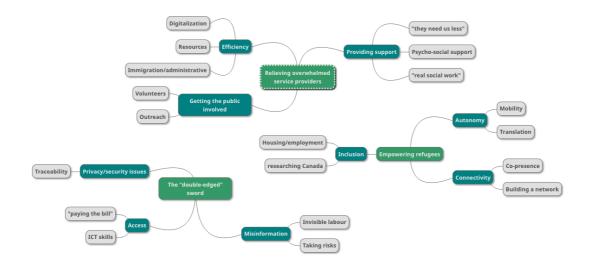
Figure 2: Coding Rubric.

Conclusion

This chapter is an overview of the methodological considerations underpinning the results and analysis of this thesis. In a first section, I discussed participant recruitment and my own progression through fieldwork, from first coming into contact with participants, mainly through snowball sampling, to conducting interviews. In a second section, I delved deeper into the ethnographic dimension of my work, which allowed me to diversify my sources of data and gain a broader understanding of my research topic. I gave an account of the ethnographic work I developed in "real-life" by attending community events organised by the refugee support community, and, later on, volunteering in one of those organizations. I also explained why I decided to extend this ethnographic work to online spaces by observing and recording interactions on social media. In a third section, I described my experience of interviewing both refugees and service providers, and I discussed the careful ethical considerations on which I based my approach. Finally, in a fourth and last section, I outlined the analysis applied to the data described above and presented my final coding rubric, which should help the reader make sense of the results presented in the upcoming chapters.

Chapter Three: Bridging the Gap

The UNHCR, a few years ago, had a campaign for World Refugee Day and
it was like "What's the one thing a refugee would walk away with?" […].
Well the one thing people need is a phone, because that's going to keep them
connected to the world. (John, service provider)

Forced displacement has strong connotations in terms of uprootedness. In the
collective imaginary, the refugee is someone who has left everything behind, who comes with
nothing, whose life has been discontinued. Their life is in transition, between "here" (the host
country) and "there" (the home country). Abdelmalek Sayad (1985) argues the great plight of
the immigrant is that they face a situation of "double-absence." They are physically absent
from their homes and away from the ones they love, spiritually and emotionally absent from
their "host" community, where they can face exclusion and isolation. They are neither "here"
nor "there."

This chapter addresses the breach between "here" and "there," between "now" and
"then." Through forced displacement, refugees experience a rupture in almost all aspects of
their lives. This rupture may take many forms: physical and chronological, but also
emotional, professional and cultural. Separated from friends and family, refugees lose their
social network and immediate support system. The (temporary) inability to pursue their
careers or job can mean a loss of social status. Thrown in an unfamiliar country, they face
isolation and an uncertain future. This rupture in refugees' life trajectories has heavy
implications in terms of identity, inclusion and well-being. What is the place of digital
technology in this experience? How can ICT contribute to "bridging the gap" and negotiating
the "double absence" described by Sayad?

I argue that ICT can enable refugees to find a sense of continuity in their lives by
simultaneously facilitating the connection to their homeland and the creation of locally-

situated ties. These experiences will be presented through the subjective lens of both refugees and service providers. I first discuss how the centrality of ICT in refugees' lives allows them to remain connected to the country and "co-present" with their loved ones despite physical separation (being "there"). Then, I examine how the same set of tools can be used by refugees to curb isolation by engaging with the local community in Montréal and developing informal support networks (being "here"). Finally, I reflect on the significance of ICT reported by participants for remaining autonomous and transcending the stigma associated to the "refugee" label.

Being There: Digital Ties to the Homeland

In his classic theorization of the "network society," Castells (1996, 2010) examines how communication technologies support more frequent and diverse connections across time and space. More recently, emerging scholarship (Baldassar, Nedelcu, Merla & Wilding, 2016) reveals that the use of internet-based communication, mobile phones and social media can contribute to strengthening the ties and intensifying the circulation of various (e.g. cultural, emotional, economic and social) resources within transnational families (Madianou and Miller 2013; Baldassar et al., 2016). ICT-based co-presence is a useful concept to examine these digital practices and understand how transnational families can maintain a sense of "being there" for each other through ICT.

This has important implications for refugee families. The unpredictable and involuntary nature of their relocation emphasizes the need to stay connected. Forced displacement entails reduced mobility and legal situations which may take months or sometimes years to resolve. Refugees' families, whether back home, in transit or displaced in another country, may be equally immobilized and difficult to reach through traditional communication means (e.g. landline telephones, mail). Most of the time, for a plethora of

reasons, visits are unlikely. Refugees and their families often face prolonged separation. Digital spaces become their primary alternative for co-presence.

One service provider participant described the smartphone as "a lifeline" for refugees. A lifeline is defined as "a line (such as a rope) used for saving or preserving life; a line used to keep contact with a person (such as a diver or an astronaut) in a dangerous or potentially dangerous situation" (Merriam-Webster, 2018). The figure of the diver or the astronaut is particularly fitting here, as they are, by definition, thrown in unfamiliar, sometimes hostile surroundings (deep sea or outer space). Their survival depends on their ability to stay connected to the safety of familiar, habitable environments. The line, or the rope, is what connects them to this familiar world, and allows them to survive, to keep going. In the following paragraphs, I draw on the experiences provided by refugees and service providers to identify different ways of staying co-present through ICT. These include verbal and written communication, performing "family-like" activities on various digital platforms, and sharing media content (e.g. photos, images, music) with high emotional and cultural value.

Staying in Touch: Communication and Support at a Distance

Jamal left Palestine as a refugee when he was a child. After several years of displacement, his family landed in Canada, where he is now a service provider at a local non-profit organization for refugees and new immigrants. He contrasted the possibilities offered by ICT today to his own experience with displacement, over twenty years ago: "Leaving everything you know behind is very tough. And to do it and to not be able to at least communicate with people back home, your friends, the people you left behind is even tougher."

For him and all other participants, communicating with loved ones was the obvious primary reason of ICT use by refugees. "Staying connected" was almost exclusively used in

opposition to "leaving everything behind." The use of digital tools to communicate, "stay in touch" with family, and stay updated about news back home, was presented by participants as opposed to being isolated, detached – disconnected. The vocabulary they used to describe phones and other types of ICT was that of continuity, of connection. The underlying idea was the importance of staying "linked" to the persons they loved and missed.

Bilal is a Syrian refugee I met in the early stages of my fieldwork. He was resettled in Montréal through private refugee-sponsorship three years prior to our encounter. Throughout the years, virtual communication with friends and family had become a habit, an integral part of their relationship:

> C'est surtout parce que ça fait 5 ans qu'il y a la guerre en Syrie, ok ? ce monde, des réfugiés – y'en a partout dans le monde. Les gens qui sont là, leur famille peut être réfugiée en Allemagne. Par exemple, mon frère est parti se réfugier en Suède. Donc ça fait 5 ans qu'on communique ensemble, plus ou moins, à travers les réseaux sociaux et un smartphone ou un laptop.

ICT-based co-presence allows for quasi-constant, multidirectional connectivity despite prolonged absence. Through ICT, people can develop new ways of "being together" in spite of physical separation: they can simultaneously be "here" and "there." With instant online communication, it is possible to know where family members are, ask if they are safe or how they are doing (on the condition, of course, that they may have connection as well). It allows for mutual support despite physical separation and time differences.

Danielle, who left her abusive husband in Barbados, claimed asylum in Canada with five of her six children. Like Bilal, she mentioned virtual communication as her primary use of ICT:

> I left my oldest son, my sixteen-year-old, back in Barbados, with somebody. And for me having WhatsApp—you get unlimited calls and there is video calls. That

in itself is a great use of just staying connected. Although far away, he knows that I am trying my best to see what can be done and how soon I could get him here with us, reunited.

Although Danielle is "here" with her younger children, ICT allows her to be "there" for her son; it enables care-giving at a distance by keeping him informed of her efforts to reunite the family. The immediate possibility for communication reduces feelings of anxiety caused by separation and enables refugees and their families to look ahead together. Discussing the possibility for reunification brightens the future and soothes the difficult absence of loved ones.

Being a Family Despite Displacement

ICT-based co-presence allows refugees not only to "stay in touch" and provide emotional support, but also to perform family-like activities. Modern day ICT offers an "environment of communicative opportunities that function as 'an integrated structure'" that Madianou and Miller (2012) call *polymedia* (as in "several" or "many" media). Polymedia essentially refers to the proliferation of a variety of new forms of communicative media, which restructures how people can communicate at a distance. In addition to verbal communication, it is possible to share videos, images, voice recordings and much more through a variety of interconnected platforms. This contrasts starkly with the previous modes of communication available to transnational families (e.g. letters, cassettes or expensive international phone calls).

When I first met Youssef, a 32-year old refugee claimant from Egypt, he lived in limbo. Stuck in bureaucratic procedures because of an unusual legal situation, and unable to work or travel, he reluctantly put his life on hold while awaiting an uncertain decision from the court. Back in Egypt, he worked in media as a documentary film-maker and activist. In

his work, he often collaborated with his brothers. Their temporary separation was obviously difficult for Youssef (his brothers were resettled in the United-States). To deal with their absence, and to pass the time while waiting for a court hearing, they worked together virtually on media projects—mostly short videos. They had defined roles, like they did in the past: Youssef was in charge of montage and editing, while his brothers acted and directed. He told me about their collaboration, which sometimes provoked arguments and fights: "everyone in my family has a strong personality." They shared the short videos on social media, with friends and family in Egypt and other countries.

Access to polymedia environments allow the emergence of what Nedelcu and Wyss (2016) call "ordinary co-presence": routines that nourish a sense of continuously "doing family" despite being dispersed across borders (p. 203). This form of co-presence is not only formed by actively talking or "chatting," but also by *doing* things together through various platforms. Here, we see how digitally mediated relationships, although not capable of entirely replacing physical proximity, enabled Youssef and his family to find an in-between, a digital space between "here" and "there" where they could be together by creating and sharing meaningful content. Co-creating videos is an integral part of Youssef's relationship with his brothers, and this process contributes to negotiating the rupture they experience as a family going through forced displacement.

Co-presence by (Digital) Proxy

Similarly, Lorretta Baldassar (2008) discusses the importance of co-presence beyond verbal communication, and explores other types of transnational togetherness, including "co-presence by proxy." She discusses the importance, for instance, of physical objects that one can hold or touch as an integral part of co-presence for transnational families (e.g. photos, cassettes, letters). The displaced persons I met seldom had an opportunity to pack valuables

or bring along sentimental memorabilia when they left. Nevertheless, ICT can offer other ways to "be together" and feel an unspoken proximity with people, places, and objects that are dearly missed. On several occasions, Youssef showed me pictures on his phone. There were some of him as a child in Egypt, others of his favourite soccer players, or of a typical dish he missed. During an interview, he showed me a music video made by one of his friends, who plays the aoud, a traditional instrument. With visible emotion, he explained the video pertained to the Egyptian revolution: "[Youssef sings along to the lyrics] This is revolution—this is true. When I hear him speak this, it's like… [mimics explosion noise] You know?" This video connected Youssef to a period of political unrest that shook his country, and to the people and places he associated to it.

Although these pictures and video are not concrete objects one can physically hold (as opposed to printed photographs, CDs or cassettes), the smartphone containing them is. In this sense, I believe smartphones (or tablets/computers) can be proxies for intimacy and co-presence in families affected by forced displacement. Although the piece of hardware in itself is devoid of meaning, it becomes a channel for emotional and cultural connectivity. Even when the device is offline, downloaded pictures, music, videos and other forms of media are a way to (temporarily) break isolation, simply by pushing a button or tapping a screen.

Sami, who arrived in Montréal through the United States border when he was 18, told me about his first month in the unfamiliar city by himself:

> My phone was my only friend at the time that I came here, right? I was being, like, pushed to my limits and then I'd go home and find nobody? Who do I have other than my phone? It's the only person, like… sorry [laughs], it's the only thing that can give you relief.

Sami's accidental personification of his phone in this quote is representative of the emotional significance that can be attached to ICT. But while Sami's experience reflects the relief that

can be found through ICT for refugees, it also speaks to the level of isolation they face on a daily basis. "Who do I have other than my phone?" implies that although his phone allowed him to stay connected to past, it does not provide actual "togetherness" with loved ones, or physical presence in places he left. These interactions, though comforting, remain virtual, and the desire to develop local "real life" personal relationships can be felt in Sami's words.

In her article, *The Connected Migrant: An Epistemological Manifesto* (2008), Dana Diminescu concludes Sayad's "double absence" is no longer relevant for modern transnational families, as virtual co-presence offers the possibility for constant togetherness. I wish to nuance this conclusion, as I do not believe that ICT-based co-presence is comparable to physical proximity and the emotional intimacy it implies. Nevertheless, for the participants in this study it represented the next best thing, and "staying connected," being "there" for their family, was crucial. Their experiences reflect the central role ICT plays in their life: the break between "here" and "there" is perhaps not as brutal as it may have been 15 years ago. "Staying connected" smooths the transition. It eases the feeling of rupture, but only partially. While participants emphasized the importance of these international ties, they also emphasized the significance of creating local ties in Montréal. The section that follows will examine how ICT can be a catalyst for forming a new social network and developing social capital, thus enabling forcibly displaced persons to "be here" and minimize feelings of exclusion.

Being Here: Developing Digitally Mediated Support Networks

Participants often expressed the frustration they felt while applying for asylum, with an emphasis on the long hours waiting in administrative offices, the multiple appointments to attend, and the lengthy forms to fill out—again and again. Once the claim is submitted, an even more frustrating wait begins: the wait for news from the Immigration and Refugee

Board of Canada, for a hearing, for acceptance. The time spent waiting, added to the uncertainty of seeing their claim accepted, seemed to exert additional pressure on participants and induce significant anxiety. This feeling of being "in-between" adds to the sensation of being socially excluded for refugee claimants.

Moreover, many forcibly displaced persons must cope with the trauma (physical and psychological) of past events and displacement itself. They may have lost loved ones, survived abuse, or been on the run for a prolonged period. Mostly, they have had to put their lives on hold. Studies, careers, projects and life plans are halted and may never be picked up. In the first months of resettlement, they have to face unemployment, language barriers, and/or discrimination. For all these reasons—and more—newly arrived refugees have lower levels of personal well-being than other migrant groups (ASRG 2011). They often face social isolation and exclusion (Ferris 1987), which are associated with poorer health, such as risks of premature mortality, mental illness, and disability due to chronic illness (Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003).

Informal Networks

In this context, promoting social inclusion and social support for forcibly displaced persons is crucial (Walker et al. 2014). This is achieved primarily through building a new network and enabling participation in mutual emotional and social support. These networks can positively impact physical, psychological and social health by enhancing self-esteem, as well as feelings of belonging and security (Richmond & Ross, 2008). Participants emphasized the importance of promptly establishing a network in order to combat social exclusion, and all of them seemed to perceive ICT as a crucial part of the process.

Agnès, a social worker, discussed how persons staying at the YMCA shelter during their first weeks in Montréal used social media such as Facebook or WhatsApp to create and

maintain new friendships. For newly arrived refugees, ICT (and in particular social media and messaging apps) is an easy way to remain in contact with one another, and therefore secure a new relationship in their network. Volunteers told me about WhatsApp groups formed by refugees living in the same neighbourhood, or even in the same building. This enabled them to form localized support networks, share information or tips, and exchange favours. This ability to solidify social bonds and keep in contact with new acquaintances is particularly important for those in vulnerable situations, such as single parent refugee claimants, who no longer have access to subsidised daycare[7].

The relevance of social media in this context resides in its ability to transcend traditional institutional support systems:

C'est un peu comme une nouvelle façon de répondre à des besoins alternatifs, ce que l'institution ne peut pas faire. Parce que moi je crois pas du tout que l'institution peut répondre à tous les besoins. Au contraire. (Agnès).

The word "alternative" used by Agnès here is key. ICT provides alternative solutions to the overwhelmed social system and the limited resources available to refugees. Informal support networks have always existed; newcomers help each other settle in and share resources. Moreover, the emergence of ICT renders the formation of such alternative networks faster and easier.

Even on a small scale, such as neighbourhood- or building-based WhatsApp groups mentioned above, these digital networks can prove more efficient for sharing information than conventional support systems operated by organizations and government agencies. In

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[7] On April 10, 2018, the Ministère de la Famille revoked asylum claimant's access to subsidized day-care. Single parents with young children who cannot afford private day-care suffer the consequences of having to stay at home to watch their children. They often are unable to find or keep a job, go to school or attend French classes. This has had harmful effect for refugee claimants, halting their integration and limiting their capacity to contribute to Québec society. Service providers and refugee rights advocate have been very vocal about the negative effects of this policy: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfEomoUz1-qlKHClEk6uFfVLvXJ40pFoHA400r6t98GJTYuKw/viewform?vc=0&c=0&w=1&fbclid=IwAR3Dzp-NVy1ttH6cnFv5p6Wh0wb54EMOXS6Fh469d7ogAmNnPgcRLXXdUkw

the next paragraphs, the experiences of refugee and service provider participants sheds light on the different forms of support.

Making Friends: Emotional Support and Cultural Engagement

In the first section of this chapter I discussed the importance of maintaining ties with family back home for emotional support, which could be facilitated through ICT. Similarly, ICT was presented by participants as an important channel to generate friendships in Montréal, thus finding a *locally* situated source of emotional support. Bilal, for example, who arrived in Montréal when he was about 25, mentioned the use of meeting applications by some refugees to make new friends, which can prove challenging for a young person who arrives alone in a new city. Although he did not personally use them, he talked about acquaintances who found it easier to go through the applications to find friends of the same age with the same interests. According to Bilal, apps such as Meetup can facilitate the creation of links with other persons in the same city—whether they are refugees or not—and create new bonds by doing activities together or simply getting to know each other.

ICT can also enable refugees to feel closer to their cultural community by facilitating the creation of links among people of the same cultural background. His mother, who arrived with his father three years after Bilal, uses a well-known Facebook group created by women of the Syrian community in Montréal. With the other members, Bilal's mother chats and posts, exchanging tips and information about events, shops and common centres of interests. Bilal told me,

> Donc chaque jour il y aura des gens qui post des trucs comme « ah, j'ai trouvé ce
> type d'ingrédient qu'on utilise chez nous, en Syrie ». Quelque chose que tu
> trouves pas chez IGA, par exemple—des produits Arabes,

Like Bilal's mother, being able to find a sense of cultural community is a necessary step towards feeling included. It allows refugees to feel more "at home," to mend the emotional and cultural rupture they have experienced through forced displacement.

In the long run, friends become the most important form of support. These friendships can be developed on social media. This is especially for newcomers who do not yet work or study, and therefore have limited daily interactions and opportunities to extend their social network. Social media therefore offer the invaluable possibility of meeting people and building friendships, and these friendships prove to be critical for long term emotional support and inclusion: "Un ami ça remplace beaucoup—ça va remplacer la travailleuse sociale, souvent. Moi j'aimerai bien mieux que les gens aient des amis qu'ils viennent nous voir" (Agnès).

Building Social Capital

ICT can also be pivotal in the formation of social capital. Social media in particular, have been proven to facilitate the development of social capital (Ellison, Steingfield and Lampe, 2007). Putnam (2000) distinguishes "bonding" social capital from "bridging" social capital. The former exists between individuals in closely-knit relationships (which, as we have seen, can also be enhanced through ICT). In contrast, bridging social capital refers to what network researchers define as weak ties (Granovetter 1973) which are loose connections between individuals who may provide useful information or new perspectives for one another. Bridging social capital builds on the exploitation of weak and latent ties, which reach farther into the network, therefore facilitating the accumulation of information on employment (Granovetter 1973), housing, and other resources available. The ability to develop bridging capital through social media use means refugees can choose to rely on this extended network as an alternative to institutional forms of social support.

The potential to develop bridging social capital through social media is well illustrated by the YMCA refugee support group (name changed). During an historical peak of asylum claims in Québec, the group was set up in April 2017 to deal with the unmanageable amount of material donations received by the YMCA shelter. Unable to deal with the hundreds of items donated every week, the social workers decided to create a Facebook group where both refugees and members of the community could share information about potential donations, without having to go through the YMCA. A person with items to donate could simply create a post and interact directly with those interested. Similarly, a newly arrived refugee in need of a particular item could create a post indicating what they were still missing, and people with corresponding donations could answer.

Ultimately, this group represents an extended, virtual network of community members and fellow refugees. It allows forcibly displaced persons increase the number of weak ties available, increases potential social capital considerably, and provides access to particular resources. In the case of donations these resources are material: winter clothing, diverse furniture items, cooking utensils, toys, books, and more. Unsurprisingly, the group is intensely active, and very effective. The level of connection it creates between locals and newcomers is invaluable, since community organizations, which usually deal with material donations, can be entirely bypassed. Donations are not simply dropped off at a local church to disappear forever, they are given, from person to person. It creates an opportunity for members of the public and refugees to engage directly with each other.

Collective Social Capital

Online support groups such as the YMCA Facebook group do not only create social capital at the individual level, it also creates social capital at the collective level. Service providers, locals, and refugees work together to create the group's content, thus illustrating

the intersectionality in building social capital through ICT. All members of the group can benefit from the cultivation of weak links by engaging with individuals far-removed from their usual network. As Agnès put it, "Ça met en lien des gens qui auraient pas nécesssairement été en lien. Autant entre les demandeurs d'asiles qu'entre les gens d'ici et les demandeurs d'asile."

Greater social capital has been linked to a variety of positive social outcomes (Adler & Kwon, 20002), and it increases commitment to both community and the ability to mobilize collective action (Putnam, 2000, Helliwell & Putnam, 2004). The YMCA Facebook group transformed from a platform for offering material donations to a hub for sharing a myriad of information: legal advice, employment and housing opportunities, healthcare resources, culturally specific events, scams to avoid, and more. Initiatives such as food banks or toy drives bud and grow, crafted by members, locals, and refugees alike. The development of collective social capital through ICT has positive effects on the community as a whole. The inclusion of traditionally marginalized members (such as refugees) contributes to the growth of the community.

Regularly, messages of gratitude or solidarity appear on the group. Persons identifying as refugees post messages thanking social workers, volunteers, the group administrators and others for their help and support. A local posted,

> I don't have anything to offer right now. I just want to say to the migrants in this
>
> group that I'm glad you're here. I hope the system is treating you well […] and
>
> that people are making you feel welcome" [paraphrase].

In seven hours, 89 people had 'liked' the publication, and over 20 comments were posted, either thanking the original poster, or echoing their message. Beyond material support and resource information, the group has become a hub for social support and a dedicated space for people to reach out. The development of collective social capital through the use of

ICT by diverse members of the community can foster feelings of inclusion and belonging, therefore strengthening social cohesion within the group.

Beyond the Refugee Label: Autonomy and Identity

> [La technologie], ça gère aussi l'autosuffisance ou l'auto-dépendance, ne pas être dépendant de tout et n'importe quoi et psychologiquement ça a un impact considérable. Puisque la personne se sent vraiment valorisée, puisque la personne n'a pas besoin de demander n'importe quoi à n'importe qui. (Anabelle, social worker)

There is something noteworthy about the distinction participants sometimes made between who they were before and after "becoming a refugee," or in other words, who they used to be "there" and who they were "here." Forced displacement represents a break, a cut-off point in their life, or, in this sense, a rupture in refugees' very identity.

For Sami, there was distress in realising this break, and the risks displacement involved:

> It was the first time I was like that. At that moment, I was like "Yeah, now you have to calm down, you have to relax, life is different than you expected". Because to me, life is like—I go to the university, finishing my major, I even know the country I was supposed to go to, go there, study and that's it. (Sami)

For Sami, applying for asylum—"the process", as he called it—was a degrading, dehumanizing experience. Being a refugee implied being someone who has nothing, someone who has nowhere else to go, and mostly, someone "who needs help." He referred to this on multiple occasions during our interview, and justified his aversion of "needing help" by his past life, his upbringing in a good, wealthy family, and the pride he took in where he came from.

Sami's words speak to the loss of social status forcibly displaced persons can experience, and the questions of identity that come with it. Youssef, the Egyptian filmmaker, also spoke of the difficulty of working in restaurants and factories in Montréal—jobs he did not enjoy and did not match his expertise. There was constraint and anguish in the way he spoke of his life as a refugee claimant in Canada. Yet, through ICT, he kept a constant connection to his past and to who he had been professionally and personally. The very first night I met him, he spent 15 minutes looking for the venue's wi-fi password in order to access the online movies he made in Egypt. ICT was immediately a part of defining who he was to me, a complete stranger. Together, we scrolled through the videos as he explained the political context in which they were made, what they meant, and why he made them. The preservation of this content online kept Youssef connected to his identity beyond the refugee label and allowed for a sense of continuity in his identity and life trajectory.

Refugees are often stigmatized as powerless victims with limited agency (Ludwig, 2016). When their resilience is underestimated by others, it perpetuates "social dependence and economic marginalization," which in turn hinders their social integration (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001, p. 85). While participants were conscious of and grateful for the support they had received upon arriving in Canada, there was a appreciable rejection of the concept of "needing help," especially for small, simple tasks. In this context, ICT use was often portrayed by participants as a way to avoid depending on others for assistance and instead rely on online resources.

Autonomy Through Information and Mobility

In the same way that ICT allowed refugees to create links and build relationships, it also allowed refugees avoid engaging with others (e.g. service providers, locals, other refugees or even family abroad) and find their own sources of support. With ICT, access to

information is accelerated and centralized (Castells, 2010). Some participants reported extensively researching the city and its system, what it had to offer, and how they could extract the most from it in order to adapt their life to this new environment. Bilal, for example, began researching information about practical life in Montréal even before leaving Syria to estimate what his life here would look like:

> Pour les processus d'immigration et tout, ainsi que pour la vie en général. Genre, "C'est quoi, ça ressemble à quoi Montréal? Je vais où? La ville, comment elle fonctionne? Comment la vie de tous les jours fonctionne? C'est quoi les communautés présentes là-bas?" Tout. Donc ça aide la communauté des réfugiés même avant d'arriver ici.

Ten or fifteen years ago, information about available resources, employment, housing or immigration procedures was only accessible through word of mouth or from service providers. With access to the Internet, Agnès reports that her clients regularly find resources she has not even heard of yet

> Puis, ils sont vraiment débrouillards, ils trouvent souvent des ressources que nous on connaît pas du tout. Ils arrivent et ils nous disent ce qu'ils ont trouvé— on leur réponds d'y aller et de nous dire si ça marche!

This contrasts with the image of the refugee discussed above, a passive victim, who must be held and supported every step of the way. The displaced persons I met were not "helpless" or "clueless." They were resilient, determined people, who found creative ways to face the challenges of forced displacement. ICT was not a miracle solution that solved all of their problems, but a new, faster and more effective way to access crucial information. For a group whose rights are ill-defined and change with a new bill or a new administration, having access to that information allows them to reclaim some power, and have the knowledge necessary to secure their place in the system. Sami, for instance, discussed how ICT could be

mobilized to research laws after his landlord insisted on obtaining a copy of his keys—a situation he had never faced before. In the refugee community, it is not uncommon to face discrimination based on status when it comes to housing (Murdie, 2010). For Sami, this quick Google search was empowering, because it allowed him to anticipate and avoid a potentially problematic situation: "These are the type of very small things that can have a big use. What if I give him my keys and then something happens? What if it is my right to say no?"

Finally, facilitated mobility was mentioned by participants several times as one of the significant features of ICT. Google Maps in particular was regarded as a necessary tool upon arrival in the city:

Si la personne a accès à Internet, il y a Google Maps, la personne peut savoir— si je veux aller à tel endroit—comment je peux faire? Quelles sont les directions à prendre? Et cetera… donc ça facilite la personne dans ses démarches à tout point de vue. (Anabelle)

The ability to be mobile is often linked in social science literature to independence and wellbeing, especially in groups who are traditionally at risk of social exclusion (Schwanen & Ziegler, 2011; Worth, 2013). Of course, mobility is not entirely conditioned by, or even fully allowed by ICT or applications such as Google Maps, but it undeniably facilitates movement for a person who is unfamiliar with the city and its public transit system. The service is free and available in more than 50 languages. Being mobile in the city is especially important within the first weeks following arrival. People need to visit a number of places as requirements for the asylum claim application: a medical exam, legal appointments, welfare, and a number of administrative offices. Beyond these requirements, ICT offers a means to appropriate and explore the city independently, which was perceived as overwhelmingly positive by participants.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued ICT can enable refugees to find a sense of continuity in their lives by simultaneously facilitating the connection to their homeland and the creation of locally-situated ties. First, results showed that ICT can reduce isolation by enabling co-presence and family intimacy despite prolonged absence. Separation from family and friends was portrayed as one of the main sources of anxiety and concern by participants. Beyond keeping existing links alive, ICT was also perceived as a means to generate and secure new relationships in Montréal. This was a crucial part of finding social support and thus limiting social exclusion. Social media in particular was cited as an important element, in that it allowed for the development of bridging social capital. This form of social capital furthers refugees' access to critical information and resources such as employment and housing opportunities, locally specific advice, and material support from members of the community. Finally, ICT was associated with increased levels of autonomy for refugees, thus challenging the usual stigmatization associated to the "refugee" label, and its naïve association to passivity or helplessness.

The results examined in Chapter Three offer a strong conclusion: ICT is pervasive in refugees' lives. As the main method of modern communication, ICT conditions the connection with their family, country and culture. It is at the heart of their interaction with the local community and offers unprecedented ways to solicit support and break the exclusion cycle. As we saw, ICT affects the way displaced persons perceive their place and identity as refugees. With these considerations in mind, it is understandable that most participants considered the smartphone, for example, as a must-have survival tool, a lifeline for the "modern refugee." ICT is no longer a privilege, an advantage for forcibly displaced persons. It has become indispensable.

ICT shapes the experience of forced displacement and resettlement. This has implications for both refugees and others involved in the asylum process. Service providers in particular see their work as affected by the omnipresence of ICT among the refugees they work with. Considering the significance of ICT in many aspects of refugees' lives, how do service providers adapt their work to the omnipresence of digital tools? The next chapter will be dedicated to exploring the diverse ways service provider participants perceived and engaged with ICT.

Chapter Four: Diversifying Refugee Support Networks

Last summer, I answered a call out from doctors to help asylum seekers because they couldn't keep up and they were sending new mothers home with nothing and no diapers and no baby clothes. Usually they had enough resources to help them out—or at least there was a network of people. But they had so many people that the networks couldn't manage what was going on. (Marianne)

 Marianne, Emma and I sat in Marianne's living room as they told me the story of their organization, which they had started almost a year previously. "It was Facebook—a doctor who I didn't even know posted 'we can't handle this,' and then someone tagged me and said 'Marianne, maybe you could help'." Marianne rented a truck and helped families move out of the shelter and into their new homes. Along with two other locals, she put together a pilot project—on Facebook—with the goal of reaching into their networks, recruiting volunteers, and pairing them with a family of newcomers to help them settle in. By the time the pilot project ran out, they knew they had been filling a major gap—a gap existing organizations were not able to fill at the moment. Organization E was incorporated as a non-profit organization a few months later.

In chapter three, results showed that ICT was omnipresent in refugee participants' lives, and a major part of their experience with resettlement. Service providers, on their end, displayed a rather disparate use and knowledge of ICT. Emerging organizations, such as Organization E, placed ICT at the core of their action, while other more established organizations reported a more restricted use of technology. Yet, all of the service providers I interviewed recognized the importance of ICT for displaced persons and the role it plays in connecting refugees with the community—and with their services. How does the emergence of ICT affect the work of service providers? How do they adapt their work to this context of

omnipresent connectivity? How do modern ICT-oriented organizations fit within the traditional networks of support?

In this chapter, I argue that ICT can alleviate service providers' work by opening up refugee support networks to a diverse range of actors. I begin by examining the role of ICT within the five governmental and non-governmental organizations geared towards accompanying refugees. In the second part, I reflect on the emergence of new organizational forms, which heavily rely on ICT as a way to participate in refugee support in a context of significant increases in asylum claims. In a third section, I explore how service providers reported using ICT to facilitate their work and increasingly involve members of the public in their actions.

Organizational and Technological Context

Before delving into how organizations can mobilise ICT to facilitate and enhance social support for refugees, let us look at the position ICT occupies within these structures. I take as a starting point what Bimber et al. (2012) call the *technological context*. These authors conceive digital technologies as the backdrop for modern collective action. They argue ICT provides an atmosphere of connectivity nearly ubiquitous for all organizations, which they call the technological context. The focus on ICT as a context implies that any type of collective action today (such as refugee support and integration) is "powerfully shaped by the digital-media environment" (p.17). In other words, the technological context impacts social providers' work regardless of each organization's capacity to use ICT.

Reported ICT use amongst service providers varied greatly. Some reported using ICT on a daily basis as an integral part of their work, while others less so. The perception and use of ICT within an organization usually depended on the organization's age. Out of the six service providers interviewed, three of them worked in emerging organizations, created

between 2016 and 2018. The other three participants worked in long-established institutions created in the 1970s and the 1980s. The latter group evolved in an analog world and had to integrate these tools over the last ten years, while the former emerged in a context of ICT omnipresence. These five organizations, though offering services geared towards the same population, display a diverse knowledge and use of ICT.

Table 2: Organizations Historical Context

Organization	Started in	Participant pseudonym
Organization A	1970s	Agnès
Organization B	1979	Anabelle
Organization C	Late 1980s	John
Organization D	2016	Jamal
Organization E	2018	Emma and Marianne

Established Organizations

Organizations A, B and C are all part of a long-established network of support for displaced persons. Organization A, a government program designed to oversee the arrival and integration of refugee claimants in the province of Québec, offers psychosocial, legal and medical services. They often are the first service providers displaced persons come in contact with upon arriving in Montréal. Organization B, partly funded by the government, is a community organization that provides a wide range of services, mostly pertaining to social inclusion and employment. Organization C is a small-scale community organization with religious background and no government funding. They are the only association permitted by the Canadian Border Services Agency to visit the immigration holding centre in Laval. These three entities have existed for over two decades, and they rely on established operational strategies.

Service providers working in these established organizations reported using ICT for a range of mostly accessory activities: sending emails to communicate with colleagues or clients, taking notes, and researching resources. Like many other professionals, ICT has

improved their ability to perform some parts of their work more efficiently. Anabelle, for instance, discussed the time saved and the higher level of productivity due to the digitalization of files:

> Avant, à mon arrivée ici, on utilisait les dossiers physiques. Maintenant, on a uniquement des dossiers digitaux. Donc quand tu en as besoin, tu n'as qu'à aller directement sur l'ordi, et tu trouves toutes les informations dont tu as besoin. Donc ça facilite le travail de tout un chacun, ça nous prend moins de temps, et c'est vraiment important pour nous.

For service providers working in long-established organizations, ICT was perceived as a valuable addition, but it was never portrayed as a central piece of their action. In fact, these participants often joked about their unsophisticated knowledge of digital technology. They usually had a lot to say about the importance of ICT for refugees they worked with, but seemed quite surprised when I asked questions about their own ICT use. John, for instance, made it clear that ICT was not a major preoccupation for him: "I have to admit I don't sit and think about the technology too much." Talking about their own technological skills was discussed with humor or irony by these participants, implying their lack of knowledge in the matter. They were rather explicit about the lack of ICT in their work environment, which is not uncommon in the world of non-profit organizations (Le Dantec & Edwards, 2008). Agnès, who works for Organization A, repeatedly emphasized the prevalence of paper documents in her work: "On est dans le "old style" [laughs]. Tout est papier, crayon, imprimante, photocopieuse—gaspillage de papier. Ça c'est sûr et certain qu'on est zéro sur la technologie."

Emerging Organizations

Agnès's account contrasts starkly with those from emerging organizations. For example, Jamal at Organization D (an organization created in 2016) told me: "Everything, all our communication's online, all of our program is online, we track students' progress online. We use Google Classroom. All the stuff we use is usually online. We try to avoid paper as much as possible, actually." Unlike Agnès, John and Anabelle, Jamal was more than comfortable discussing how his organization made use of ICT. In fact, he seemed to expect such questions, as Organization D relies heavily on ICT to function. It is explicitly at the core of their strategy, and omnipresent in their work.

A student-led initiative, this non-profit organization is dedicated to refugee and new immigrant integration. Their services include English classes (the only ones in the province offered to refugees) and professional integration workshops, with a focus on the tech sector. Jamal, who has refugee background himself, is convinced by the potential of ICT to facilitate displaced persons' lives in Canada. In collaboration with teams of resettled refugees, the Centre is developing applications designed to help newly arrived refugees navigate the Canadian asylum system. The applications, which Jamal demonstrated during our interview, built on Artificial Intelligence technology to orient refugees and assist them with immigration procedures and forms, community services, language classes and other resources.

Organization E, created in 2017, also described ICT as a major facilitator for their work. As I already explained above, social media was central in the organization's creation, and it continues to be particularly useful to recruit and manage volunteers—an aspect which will be discussed later in this chapter. The organization uses a program called Slack to coordinate their team, and another called WhatsApp to converse with refugee claimants they assist. They circulate online surveys to their members to get feedback and work on improving their service. While they do have a storage unit to hold donations, most of their work is done remotely from their personal laptops and phones. In their first six months of operation, this

organization worked with over 180 refugee claimant families, recruited and managed 50 groups of volunteers, and delivered thousands of household donations. "None of this would be possible without Facebook," repeated Emma, Organization E's coordinator, who estimated that about 80 percent of the persons they came in contact with were directly through the social media platform.

The Proliferation of New Organizational Forms

In many ways, these two organizations differ from the traditional structures of organising collective action, such as what was evidenced at Organizations A, B and C. Emerging organizations stray away from the formal organization model. They are initiated by groups of people who are not necessarily associated with traditional networks of refugee activism or support. Organization D is run by Concordia University students and alumni, many of which have backgrounds in engineering. Organization E is composed of citizens with diverse professional backgrounds. Their structures are less hierarchical than formal organizations. Most importantly they use ICT as a major way to organise, communicate and coordinate their action.

Organizational Fecundity

Traditionally, structures of civic engagement are based on formal organizations bringing people together around a collective cause, such as refugee support and inclusion. ICT now offers alternatives to formal organizations, in favour of more personalized forms of engagement (Benett and Segerberg, 2013). Because ICT reduces transaction costs of all kinds, blurs boundaries between private and the public realms, and makes information and communication easier and faster (Bimber etc, 2006), those seeking to organize around a particular cause have available to them many alternative forms and strategies. In other words,

persons wanting to engage in refugee support and inclusion no longer need to go through formal established organizations.

This does not imply a disappearance of older forms of organizations. The refugee support network is growing and changing without losing established organizational forms, and it is also evolving to include a wider range of actors. The formation of ICT-driven entities such as Organizations E and D can be associated to what Bimber et al. (2006, 2012; see also Crowley and Skcopol, 2001) call "organizational fecundity." The creation of innovative forms of refugee support, enabled by ICT, adds to the rich diversity of collective action:

> In these and other ways, the landscape of political organization and collective action shows change: many new types of organizations are doing new things in new ways, old organizations are doing old things in old ways, and old organizations are doing new things in new ways. (Bimber, Stohl and Flanigan, 2006, p. 74)

John, at Organization C, adds to the conversation:

> An organization like ours, which has been around for 20 some years, operates with a certain ethos. […] Some employees have been here for a long time, so you kind of do things a certain way. I think it is important, as new technologies emerge, that there are other players—new entities—that come up. And this is what they're thinking about. So, if it's question of me or other people my age, or other organizations, uh, trying to best accompany refugeed people, we have to learn a whole new language to do it. Maybe new entities, that already have that language, are appropriate.

This expansion in organizational forms is therefore the result of adaptive collective action, and does not signal a replacement of old organizations by newer ones.

System Overload

The context in which new organizational forms develop is also key. In Montreal, the emergence of new organizations is prompted by the drastically increasing asylum claims since 2016. The growing backlog revealed the flaws of an outdated immigration system, incapable of handling such a large number of persons in a reasonable amount of time. As a result, service providers found themselves overwhelmed and ill-equipped to deal with such high numbers of persons in situations of prolonged vulnerability.

Service providers reported being unable to attend to each individual, during the 2017 peak in asylum claims in particular:

> On voyait des dizaines et des dizaines de personnes par jour. C'était la folie totale. On était dans le minimum, minimum, minimum… c'était pas vraiment du travail social. On voyait les gens à la chaîne, puis on regardait pas les vulnérabilités. On était juste dans les hébergements, le dépannage, l'administratif et le bureaucratique. (Agnès)

The vast number of applicants, the variety of their situations and the limited amount of financial and human resources hinder service providers' ability to accompany each person fully. Danielle, who is still awaiting a court hearing for her asylum claim, said she was sympathetic with organizations working on the front line:

> I think it's the lack of man power. You have so many people and yes, so little employees, it makes it difficult to multitask. Like for me—I have children, I came in the snow, I'm trying to find my bearings—and then there's another mother, who probably has a disability or comes sick and she has the same amount of strain as me, she needs attention as well. You know, trying to prioritize is hard for them.

With the increased numbers of asylum claims over the past three years, service providers are often overwhelmed and report feeling limited in their ability to provide optimal support. Danielle's quote shows the impact this can have on refugee claimants, especially regarding persons in vulnerable situations.

Facing this surge of clients, some service providers have resorted to digital alternatives to relieve the pressure and delegate some of their tasks. Through ICT, the existing refugee support network can solicit the participation of the local community, as illustrated by Marianne's quote in the introduction of this chapter: "It was Facebook—a doctor who I didn't even know posted 'we can't handle this.'" In turn, this led eventually to the emergence of a whole new organization, Organization E. In the next section, I provide several examples of the ways service providers (from both established and emerging organizations) utilize the connectivity afforded by ICT to facilitate their work and continue to include a broader array of actors in the collective effort towards refugee support.

Decentralizing Refugee Support

The digital practices reported by these service providers offer insight on how ICT has transformed refugee support networks and continues to produce hybrid forms of social engagement in Montréal and elsewhere. In what follows, I examine the reported use of ICT by service providers in four major areas of their work: information sharing, donation management, outreach and attractivity, and volunteer recruitment. Through ICT, overwhelmed service providers found a way to facilitate their work, delegate some tasks, and solicit participation from the local community.

Aiding Refugee Information Seeking Practices

Service providers can alleviate their role as information mediators (Lloyd et al., 2012) by encouraging refugees to conduct their own research online. In chapter three, results revealed that forcibly displaced persons used ICT to gather information on a wide range of topics related to resettlement in Montréal. This practice, which proved empowering for refugee participants, can allow service providers to spend less time dispensing information. Agnès, discussing the overwhelming amount of new information to provide to newcomers, reported advising her clients to undertake their own research:

> On peut pas tout leur dire, ce serait infini, ce serait, comme, 20 heures par personne, par jour pour expliquer ce qu'il faut savoir. À un moment donné, c'est une bonne façon pour nous aussi de dire « Va chercher l'adresse sur Internet puis regarde le site web. Va t'informer toi-même. » Nous c'est un peu une façon de nous décharger, dans un sens, et de faciliter l'intervention.

Service providers remain the main (or most reliable) informants for refugees, but ICT provides multiple alternative sources of information.

Jamal and his collaborators want to take this idea further. They are developing applications which will collect resource information and provide assistance with immigration forms. For Jamal and others involved in the project, ICT provides access to endless amounts of information (which refugees can tailor to their own needs), while service providers like himself can only dispense a limited amount:

> It's easy enough to come here and attend a workshop, right? But I can only offer a finite amount of resources. We have a very strong government that offers a lot of services. If I can find a way to use technology to ensure that refugees find those services and utilize them, then, you know, I've done my job in a way more efficient manner than having a workshop once a month describing it for what is only an hour—which you can't really do.

The apps from Organization D are not yet operational, but the concept echoes what is already occurring: the availability of information online allows forcibly displaced persons to bypass service providers and find resources on their own. Effectively, ICT use decentralizes the role of service providers.

Managing Donations

While emerging organizations such as Jamal's are working on innovative solutions like these applications, established organizations are increasingly recognizing that they can embrace new methods of engaging with the wider public. The YMCA Facebook page, already mentioned in chapter three, illustrates this phenomenon. The page was first created by Organization A's social workers to deal with the vast amount of items donated to the YMCA shelter. Today, service providers from different organizations recognize the importance of the page and appreciate its ability to mobilise the community to relieve overwhelmed existing support networks. John, although cautious about the enthusiasm which surrounded the page, considered it helpful: "I think it's a way for the host society to engage with people who need a helping hand. It's an interesting—something like five or ten years ago you wouldn't have had this."

On the Facebook page, the connection between forcibly displaced persons and the community can alleviate the burden of logistics when it comes to donations—an issue that can quickly become overwhelming. John calls this "being the middle-man." In the past three years, the increasing attention given to refugee claimants in the press gave rise to a wave of generosity. But organizations were not necessarily equipped to deal with a flood of items, and quickly became inundated by their role of "middle-man":

That's inefficient for us and that's not really our role […] it's been a problem

for many small organizations like ours because there were so many things

being offered and we struggled with the idea that people want to give

something, share something, and we don't have a mechanism to accept it.

(John)

Social media, such as the YMCA Facebook page, can alleviate the pressure for service

providers, and offer an opportunity for the community and newcomers to interact directly and

entirely bypass organizations.

Outreach and Attractivity

All service providers reported the importance of ICT to broaden their outreach and

attractivity. Participants described the significance of using ICT to expose their work and

communicate information on a large scale. As organizations working with refugees, raising

awareness about displacement and resettlement in Canada is an important part of their

mission. In the past couple of years, the increase in asylum applications in Québec has led to

significant controversies. Forcibly displaced persons and general rules for claiming asylum in

Canada are often unknown to the wider public, causing inaccurate, sometimes hostile

representations of refugees. Raising awareness about the legal, social and political realities of

asylum is a crucial role for organizations involved in refugee support. On the organizations'

social media, they presented counter-narratives to the problematic online representation of

refugees. The posts I observed related immigration statistics and facts, personal stories from

resettled refugees, refugee-led community initiatives, et cetera.

Organizations can use social media to explain how they fit within this landscape and

explain the different roles they take on within the community. Organizations will frequently

post about the services and activities they offer (e.g. workshops, language classes, various

events) on public Facebook pages. Regardless of how intensely (or not) service providers

engaged with ICT, they were all aware of the importance of online presence to increase their attractivity. According to John, whose organization created a Facebook page in 2012,

> I probably spend too much time on Facebook. […] We've learned—it's pictures. Things with pictures get clicked on. So, we post photographs of different things that happen in our office, in our activities. We will post newspaper articles where we are quoted because we figure it helps people become aware of our brand.

Anabelle also emphasized the importance of social media presence to divulge information on local, national and even international scales.

> C'est important, pour divulguer les informations, pour que la société puisse savoir. Que ce soit ici au Québec, au Canada et même à l'extérieur, pour qu'on sache ce qu'on fait ici à La Maisonnée. Donc ça a une plus longue portée, une plus grande portée. Donc non seulement ça facilite le travail ici à l'interne, mais à l'externe aussi c'est important pour nous à La Maisonnée, ça c'est évident.

> (Non-profit) organizations can no longer afford to remain entirely "offline," as social media platforms offer increased visibility at almost no cost (Treem & Leonardi 2013). A majority of the individuals seeking out these organizations' services, or those looking to contribute to their efforts, are already on these platforms. Of course, organizations have their own existing networks of official and unofficial partnerships. But ICT represents an alternative to these networks and offers the opportunity to open up participation to collective action beyond those who are already invested in the established structures. This is particularly important in a global context of decreased engagement in community life and civic goals (Putnam, 2000), which can be problematic for non-profit organizations who often heavily rely on volunteer work.

Encouraging Engagement from the Local Community

Organization E is an example of how organizations can mobilise ICT to solicit and encourage engagement from the community. Because their organization pairs refugee claimant families with local welcome groups, the Collective highly depends on these volunteers to keep providing support to newcomers. For Emma, their coordinator, Facebook is the best platform for recruitment because it offers a casual, personal way of presenting their action to potential volunteers. This approach stems from her personal experience. Before working with Organization E, when she first started taking part in refugee support as a volunteer, she felt constrained by the options she found in existing organizations:

> I had e-mailed an organization about working with Syrian refugees and it was like "you need to be available for a three-hour block once a week and make a six months commitment and you need to come into this meeting and that meeting…" And I was, like: "Dude. I have two little kids, I have work, I need something that I can really do more on my own."

Implicit in Emma's comment is the difficulty for women to take on what Gerstel (2000) calls a "third shift" (in direct reference to Hoschild's (2012) second shift). In other words, volunteers (and especially women) are expected to carry the burden of others while their own burden is also increasing. I will touch on this more in the next chapter. What is clear, existing volunteering options, which are demanding and require formal commitment, are becoming unfit for increasingly individualized lifestyles.

This process underlines what Bimber et al. (2012) describe as a "trend in citizenship practices away from institutions and norms of duty fulfillment toward more personalized ways of being civic" (p. 5). By relying on Facebook as a platform to recruit volunteers, Organization E can give a personal touch to the call, as they appeal to their Facebook

"friends." The platform allows persons who are usually not involved in community organizations, or volunteering with potentially vulnerable populations to feel "invited" to contribute. It allows for a level of visualisation, which Emma thinks is critical in pushing potential volunteers to take the step:

> None of that stuff would be possible without social media, they just wouldn't be ready to take that step. And even just hearing about us or thinking 'oh yeah, this is something I could do.' I mean, that depends on the Facebook page. Or that post that they see, where really, it's couched in terms that they're like 'Oh yeah, that is something I'm capable of doing,' they can imagine themselves doing it because of the way the post is worded or the photo that goes along with it.

In the previous quote, Emma is talking about volunteer "welcome groups," who are paired with refugee claimants and accompany them during the first months in Montréal. But Organization E uses Facebook to recruit other volunteers, including persons to help out at their storage space and with furniture deliveries.

I myself had started volunteering at their storage space after seeing a post on the YMCA Facebook page: "Volunteers needed at our new storage space to sort through donations. Comment on this post if you can come." This contrasted with previous volunteering experiences for which I had to sign up, wait to be contacted, attend meetings, and eventually start working on defined tasks. Most, if not all of the volunteers I met at the storage had heard of the organizationthrough social media. Brian, now employed fulltime as the official mover, told me he had started as a volunteer after hearing about the group through "random Facebook posts." Aamira, a Sudanese refugee, and one of their most active volunteers, contacted them after seeing an advertisement on Instagram. Through ICT,

Organization E expose their organization's work to different actors and can solicit individual engagement in a compelling manner.

Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I showed how forcibly displaced persons can utilize the connectivity afforded by ICT to facilitate their resettlement, which in turn offered a strong sense of empowerment. Results showed that refugees have increasingly diverse means of finding resources and combatting social exclusion. In this chapter, my aim was to examine how the diversification of these means of support impact service providers and their work, and how they adapt their action in consequence. I argue that ICT can alleviate the work of service providers by opening up refugee support networks to a diverse range of actors beyond established organizations. This includes the emergence of new organizations and a greater participation from the local community.

In the first section, I discussed the place of ICT within both established and emerging organizations. There was a clear distinction in ICT use: emerging organizations (created in the last five years) placed ICT at the centre of their action, while established organizations used ICT more sporadically. In the second section, I examined how availability of ICT drives the formation of new organizational forms, which diversifies the landscape of refugee support. The emergence of these new organizations was also prompted by the context of urgency caused by the dramatic increase in asylum applications over the past two years. In the third part, I explored the diverse ways in which service providers reported using ICT to facilitate their work. This was mostly done by relying on the connectivity afforded by ICT to delegate some time-consuming tasks, and encourage engagement from the local community. I discussed the utility of ICT in four major areas of service providers' work: information sharing, donation management, outreach and attractivity, and volunteer recruitment.

Examining the digital practices of these five organizations has shed light on an important transition: collective action towards refugee support and integration is restructured to include a broader array of actors. Results show that through ICT, displaced persons themselves as well as the public can organise and participate in collective action outside of traditional organizational structures. According to Bimber, Fanagin and Stohl (2012), "Because technology places the requisite tools for organizing more fully in the hands of individuals and informal or semiformal groups, collective action can more seamlessly arise from those with an interest in shared goals," (p. 5) such as refugee support and integration. The role of traditional organizations as federating instances is steadily declining; engagement in refugee support can take place outside of these structures. The emergence of informal online groups (YMCA Facebook page), or hybrid, ICT-oriented organizations (Organization E), does not indicate the disappearance of established organizations, but simply represents an expansion in organizational forms.

While there was a high level of enthusiasm surrounding innovative digital solutions to social issues associated to forced displacement, service providers also expressed concern about the potential dangers of ICT use. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, service providers turned to ICT-based solutions amidst a context of urgency brought by a sudden increase in asylum claims over the last two years. ICT alternatives were developed by overwhelmed service providers as part of a crisis response, and not necessarily as an organic or ideal solution. As such, participants' attitudes towards ICT use in a context of resettlement were varied. In some regards ICT was a way to facilitate their work and had a positive impact on refugee inclusion.

However, in other aspects, ICT could become problematic and potentially complicate service providers' work by posing a threat to refugees' well-being. As digital technology becomes an integral part of organising refugee support, it is critical to consider the potential

hazards associated to ICT use in a context of forced displacement. In the next chapter, we will see how ICT can turn into a space of risk and control, and subsequently exacerbate refugees' exposure to certain threats. Shifting the focus from the enabling, empowering forms of connectivity discussed in chapters three and four, the next chapter will be dedicated to overwhelming, invasive or even harmful forms of connectivity.

Chapter Five: "The Double-Edged Sword"

But again, with any technology, you still have to do that double check—are

there negative consequences that could come out of here? Not to jump on the

bandwagon and say, "this is great, wonderful, everybody should have it."

Let's make sure that we consider the possible negative ramifications before

everybody jumps in. (John)

In chapters three and four, results showed a significant enthusiasm around the positive

impacts of ICT on resettlement. The connectivity afforded by digital tools provided forcibly

displaced persons with a sense of empowerment and regained autonomy. Through ICT-based

co-presence, they were able to maintain a certain level of intimacy with their families.

Simultaneously, ICT allowed them to build a new network in Montréal, connect with the

local community, facilitate employment and housing searches, and help them create their

own understanding of a new environment. Service providers, although conflicted on the

centrality of ICT in their action, acknowledged the utility of such tools to facilitate several

aspects of their work. Overwhelmed organizations understood the potential of enhanced

connectivity with locals and refugees alike in order to spread information, advertise their

services, delegate certain tasks and facilitate the engagement of a wide range of persons.

These overwhelmingly positive accounts of ICT use seem to suggest digital

technology could be a "solution" to many social issues brought about by forced displacement

and resettlement. While it is compelling to think about ICT in this way, results presented in

this last and final chapter will show this is only one part of the story. The role played by ICT

in resettlement is complex and paradoxical; while it can ease some aspects of resettlement,

ICT use can also threaten refugees' wellbeing. As Saskia Sassen (2002) notes, "[these

technologies] can indeed be constitutive of new social dynamics, but they can also be

derivative or merely reproduce older conditions." In this sense, ICT use cannot be considered

separately from the social and political conditions of forced displacement and resettlement in which it is inevitably embedded.

In this final chapter, I address the aspects of ICT which can exacerbate refugees' exposure to various forms of risk and control. In doing so, my goal is to shift the focus from a desirable, empowering form of connectivity to an overwhelming, invasive or even harmful connectivity. In the first section, I discuss the issue of ICT as a space which generates and enables the spread of dangerous amounts of misinformation, and the effect this can have on refugees and, in turn, on service providers' work. In the second section, I discuss the issue of privacy and surveillance by examining how refugee ICT use can expose their personal information and create a space for harm and control.

Misinformation: ICT as a Space of Risk

While most interviews started with enthusiasm about ICT's potential to change the experience of displacement for the better, many participants nuanced this enthusiasm by pointing out to the potential risks associated with ICT use. The main risk identified was usually erroneous information circulating online, potentially causing displaced persons to make decisions based on incorrect facts. Fisher and Karlova (2012) cite the Oxford English dictionary to begin defining misinformation as: "wrong or misleading information," and refine this with Losee's (1997) statement that "misinformation may be simply information that is incomplete." Combined, this definition implies there are many forms of misinformation: inaccurate, insufficient or misinterpreted information. Fisher and Karlova (2012) examine the diffuseness and impact of misinformation over time, concluding that social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, have made dissemination and diffusion of misinformation easier and faster. They identify the possible consequences of inaccurate and

deceptive information as suspicion, fear, worry, anger, which can lead to poor decision-making.

While the context of globalisation and information ubiquity has made everyone at risk for misinformation online (del Vicario et al., 2015), the impact can be particularly negative for displaced persons, who can already face what Wall et al. (2017) call *information precarity*. Building on Judith Butler's (2004, 2009) understanding of precarity, these authors define information precarity in the context of displacement as "a state in which [refugees'] access to news as well as personal information is insecure, unstable, and undependable, leading to potential threats to their well-being." In previous chapters, I discussed how refugees could utilize ICT to gather and share information independently. In what follows, I look deeper into the complexity of receiving and processing information. In this context, ICT can contribute to blurring facts and spreading misinformation, depending on the nature of the source and how it is subjectively interpreted. This can have disastrous consequences on both the well-being of refugees and also the work of service providers and volunteers.

Official and Unofficial Sources: "Knowing Where to Look"

Participants made a clear distinction between official and unofficial sources of information. On one hand, there are official government and organizationwebsites (considered trusted online sources), and on the other there are social media, blogs and forums (described as the usual culprits for spreading misinformation).

> La technologie a un côté négatif, bien sûr, parce que cette information qu'il y
> a en ligne… bon, si tu es sur un site militaire ou du gouvernement ou quoi que
> ce soit, c'est de l'information sûre. Maintenant, si tu vas aller lire sur Facebook
> ce que les gens écrivent sur ces groupes, de réfugiés ou de communauté—que
> ce soit Syrienne ou Libanaise ou quoi que ce soit—les gens écrivent ce qu'ils

veulent. Tu peux pas t'assurer. Parfois, ma mère, elle vient me voir, ou elle

m'envoie un screenshot de trucs—genre… « Mom. Lit pas ça. Ya pas de

sources. Y a rien. Y a juste des gens qui ont entendu parler et qui parlent ».

Comme tout ce que tu peux trouver sur les réseaux sociaux, tu peux pas

t'assurer que "oui c'est vrai," ou "non c'est faux." (Bilal)

This was echoed by all participants, in particular service providers. Agnès, a social worker,

claimed many refugees she worked with conducted research on unofficial websites and then

ended up with the wrong information: "Parce que les gens ne savent pas où chercher, ils

cherchent pas sur les bons sites, ils vont sur les blogs et les forums. Là, c'est n'importe quoi.

Si tu vas sur les sites officiels, c'est plus sûr."

Forcibly displaced persons must engage with information landscapes that are often

complex and difficult to navigate (Lloyd et al., 2012, Qayyum at al., 2017). Choosing a

source for information upon which major life decisions will be based is highly complicated

and situational. Often, the lines are blurred by the complexity of different platforms available,

the way the information is conveyed, and the personal history of the person. Can this source

be trusted? Is the information presented purposely deceiving? The answer to these questions

depends on cultural, political, and emotional factors unique to each individual.

Trusted Sources

Government and official sources of information, for instance, are not always

considered trustworthy by refugees. In the European context, Carlson et al. (2017) highlight

how limited and poorly communicated information can lead refugees to question the validity

and reliability of official information sources (governmental and non-governmental

organizations), and sometimes entirely dismiss them as biased or discriminatory. Their

research also shows that unofficial sources may be preferred when they indicate information

displaced persons may hope to be true, or which explains frustrating or unclear phenomena, in line with literature on motivated reasoning.

Agnès noticed her clients would often trust what they read online over what her or her colleagues would tell them.

> Parce que c'est sûr que les gens ont un rapport différent à l'institution qu'à la technologie, c'est définitif. Les gens nous font pas confiance. Puis, la technologie c'est « neutre ». Entre guillemets. C'est ce que du moins tout le monde pense. Au fond, c'est pas vrai—mais c'est l'image qu'on se fait. C'est sur Internet, donc c'est vrai. C'est sûr que les gens ont moins cette méfiance par rapport à la technologie, c'est pour ça que c'est très utilisé […] puis souvent [ils] vont faire plus confiance à Internet que ce qu'on leur dit nous.

What is posted on community forums, social media pages, or discussed in private conversation threads emanates from sources that seem more familiar than service providers, especially if, like Agnès, they are employed by an organization funded or partly funded by the government. Because refugee claimants are made to feel unwanted in host countries, they can easily perceive institutional forms of support and the government as biased or willingly deceiving, and associate them to surveillance or risks of deportation. This builds on the already traumatic and unpredictable experience of displacement. Sami, for example, spoke about being unable to trust anyone in his first weeks in Montréal and systematically refusing to take advice from helpful strangers: "I literally believed that that person who speaks Arabic is helping me on purpose because he's a fucking spy. So, I refused. And then, I met my social worker, who I also expected to be a spy."

In this context, it is not surprising that persons may turn to unofficial online sources, which, as Agnès said, can be perceived as "neutral" (i.e., not invested in controlling or monitoring their life). The trust refugees may put in the Canadian government, and by

extension some service providers, can also be influenced by the political situation in their previous countries. For persons fleeing political oppression, the perception of legitimate institutional power is inevitably challenged, and they may be used to considering alternative online sources as safer.

The Subjective Interpretation of Information

Misinformation is not limited to erroneous or incomplete information from unofficial sources. Even when emanating from an official source, information can be misinterpreted depending on the context and the perception of those involved. On January 28, 2017, a day after US president Donald Trump put an immigration ban on seven Muslim-majority countries, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau tweeted: "To those fleeing persecution, terror & war, Canadians will welcome you, regardless of your faith. Diversity is our strength #WelcomeToCanada." The hashtag immediately started trending and gained momentum online, creating rumours and misleading information about the possibility to claim asylum in Canada, especially for those fearing deportation from the United States.

The message was retweeted over 400,000 times and sparked countless discussion threads online, spreading rumors and misinformation about asylum possibilities in Canada. According to some participants, like Jamal, this contributed to the increased numbers of asylum claims in 2017:

> Yeah, definitely! Like there's this study… they did a little survey and all the [refugee claimants] that came, you know, through a border crossing, not directly through an [official] border crossing, through the US, they said that they saw the tweet that said 'all refugees welcome' or all 'whatever'… right? Yeah, they see it, they're like "okay…" And the fact that the political situation in the US is so… unstable. It only makes sense.

The message was misinterpreted and taken out of its political context, creating difficult situations for many. John told me, "Certainly, in the last year, with people who are physically in the US and they heard a rumor 'well, come to Canada'—but there's something about the Safe Third Country, you know, people need to inform themselves properly." He referred to the agreement between the US and Canada which stipulates that any refugee claimant who has arrived through a "safe country," such as the US, will be denied entry into Canada and returned to the safe country to claim asylum.

A loophole in this law has allowed refugee claimants to enter Canada through irregular entry points in order to claim asylum from within the country, but this does not guarantee their claim will be accepted. Despite Trudeau's welcoming tweet and Canada's crafted "safe haven" reputation, the state's actual immigration policies are far less welcoming than this sounds. Historically, the nation has preferred to process asylum claims outside of its territory, maintaining refugees at a safe distance, and has systematically denied entrance to several groups seeking international protection (Melnyk, 2018).

Exacerbating the Risks

For displaced persons, making a decision based on misinformation can have potentially devastating effects. Anabelle, a service provider, discussed the rumours about guaranteed asylum in Canada, and the impact this can have on refugees' lives:

Un impact négatif considérable. Un impact sur sa santé physique et mentale. Économiquement aussi, ça a un impact, sur lui et sur sa famille. Parce que souvent, ces gens-là sont responsables de leur famille à l'extérieur. Donc ils viennent ici, ils ne savent même pas encore comment, combien de temps ils vont commencer à travailler, tout ça… donc, euh… ce n'est pas évident.

(Anabelle)

Deciding to make their way to Canada to claim asylum could have dire consequences for some. If their claim is rejected, the risks include detention or deportation to a country they do not know, or where they could face violence and persecution. Moreover, they could spend up to four years (Lacroix, 2006) awaiting a decision on their claim, unable to leave the country or access certain services, and hence be subjected to prolonged vulnerability. These potential consequences can cause significant psychological distress for refugees, adding to already unstable or precarious situations (Jackson & Bauder, 2014).

These risks, of course, exist outside of ICT, but are exacerbated by the high pace at which misinformation or misused information can be shared online. As we saw in chapters three and four, ICT is seen by a vast number of forcibly displaced persons as a privileged space for gathering and sharing information. The same processes that empower refugees by providing them with increased connectivity and access to information can also transform into a space of risk, compounding some of the issues already associated with forced displacement and resettlement. The following quote from Sami illustrates this overwhelming connectivity, this overflow of information that makes it impossible to differentiate rumours from facts:

> Everybody's putting their opinion on the Internet, everybody's saying what
>
> they listened into it, everybody's putting what he experienced into it,
>
> everybody's putting what their friend experienced into it… and then you have
>
> this mix of 'yes you can,' or 'you cannot,' 'maybe yes,' 'maybe no.' And
>
> then you're just frustrated. (Sami)

Containing the (Mis)information Flow

The overabundance of information online and the risks it implies for displaced persons push service providers to perform additional tasks which go beyond their professional responsibilities. Many service providers (and volunteers) therefore perform

invisible work in attempt to contain the flow of (mis)information. This consisted of, for example, constantly having to verify what is posted in online support groups in order to flag, remove and replace inaccurate information. It can also mean having to spend time trying to convince their clients of which information to believe.

The spaces ICT opens for collaboration with the community need to be tended to, or else they transform into hubs for misinformation. The YMCA Facebook page, for instance, may give out the impression that it sprouts harmonious, organic online content. Emma, however, revealed that there was a constant "behind the scenes" effort on the part of administrators to keep misinformation away:

> There's a rather long and intense Facebook group conversation that goes on behind the scenes for probably about 50 percent of the posts [laughs]. Of, like, "what do we think about this, what should we add to this? Should we ask them to stop?"

On top of being Organization E's coordinator, Emma has a fulltime job and two young children. Much like the other administrators of the page (who are all volunteers and almost all women) she devotes valuable time and energy to make sure the information posted is valid, although they receive no form of compensation, and their efforts go unnoticed by most of the users.

This is consistent with Arlene Kaplan Daniels' (1987) notion of invisible work. Often associated to women's work in the private sphere of the household, volunteer work in the public sphere is also highly disregarded as "real work." Online spaces, although requiring consistent care and maintenance, further contribute to the invisibility of volunteer work, without which user-generated content would become chaotic. Despite the importance of the YMCA Facebook page for displaced persons, service providers, and the community in general (as discussed in previous chapters), the work provided by those who keep it afloat

remains largely unseen, hidden behind the screen. Like Emma, the service providers who voluntarily contribute to the page have little choice but to continue, or else deal with the inevitable fallout of misinformation later. Tending to the YMCA Facebook page and working with the other "admins" to ensure the validity of the information shared on the platform is crucial, as the high level of connectivity associated with this page means somewhere down the road its content will impact people she works with:

> That's why I continue to stay involved, because I know some of our families, some of our welcome groups have come through that page, some of our asylum seekers will end up on that page. I like to stay involved there because I like to know whether the information is good or not […].

> The YMCA Facebook group (and its content) is just a drop in the ocean. There is no way to control the huge amount of information which appears elsewhere online everyday— on social media, websites, forums, public and private discussion threads. For many service providers, dealing with misinformation amounts to doing damage-control. Agnès talked about "undoing ideas" based on misinformation. A common issue she faced in her daily work had to do with clients wanting to move to another province because of rumours they read online. For many refugee claimants, English-speaking provinces might look more appealing, as only a portion of them speak French, which is required for most jobs in the Province of Québec.

> Il faut tout défaire cette idée-là. Ils ont cherché sur Internet et ils ont vu qu'il avait un centre, autre chose. Mais ce centre-là, ne va peut-être pas les accepter, parce qu'ils sont demandeurs d'asile, pas réfugiés, pas immigrants. C'est des nuances. Il faut alors défaire ces idées-là, car les gens arrivent avec des plans basés sur ce qu'ils ont vu sur Internet. (Agnès)

By moving to another province, lured by online rumours, refugee claimants may lose the benefits they have in Québec, and find themselves and their family in precarious economic and social conditions.

Service providers are identified by Qayyum et al. (2017) as key mediators in the (increasingly) complex information landscape forcibly displaced persons must navigate. As we saw in chapter four, many service providers are already overworked and often find themselves unable to provide sufficient information to every single person they encounter in their work day. Through ICT, the same persons can be exposed to an abundance of potentially erroneous information, on which they may base life-changing decisions. This adds a layer of complexity to service providers' work, as they must compete with contradictory online information. This does not mean service providers are always correct about the information they provide to their clients, but their significant experience, based in legal and social work best practices, is often more valuable than impersonal online sources.

Contradicting the person's information, and eventually their decision, may be frustrating and take a toll on the relationship between service provider and refugee. At the end of our interview, Agnès concluded, obviously frustrated:

> Parfois des gens ont leur vie défaite parce qu'ils ont lu des choses puis… certaines personnes quand on leur présente des arguments ils disent « ok, c'est correct », ils vont nous croire. Mais il y en a beaucoup qui vont décider d'y aller quand même malgré toutes les avertissements, parce qu'ils ont vu ci ou ça sur Internet, qu'ils vont plus croire que nous—ils n'ont pas vraiment de raison de nous croire.

This speaks to the various levels of trust refugees can have in service providers and the role ICT plays in this relationship. This last quote from Agnès also reveals the emotional implications of this relationship, and how misinformation can impact it.

In this section, we saw that although ICT enhances access to diverse sources of information, it can also favour the spread of misinformation and subsequently impact service providers' work. These points served to illuminate the overwhelming dimension of the connectivity allowed by ICT, which can contribute to accentuating the "information precarity" faced by many refugees. In what follows, I address another aspect of information precarity enhanced by ICT use: the quasi impossibility to control personal information online. The lack of privacy in digital spaces concerns anyone who uses ICT on a daily basis, but it has particularly heavy implications for refugees.

Surveillance and Privacy: ICT as a Space of Control

As ICT evolves in a globalized context, researchers are increasingly concerned with mobility and privacy issues, with a focus on the development of invasive surveillance technologies (Lyon, 2006; Broeders; 2007; Bigo, 2008; Hintjens, 2013; Dijstelboem & Broeders, 2015; Vallet 2016) Refugees (and other migrant groups) are particularly concerned by this as they are systematically framed as a potential security risk, and often (wrongly) associated with "illegal" border crossing, smuggling, terrorism. The movement of refugee claimants across borders is therefore heavily monitored and controlled. A forcibly displaced person's digital practices do not exist outside of these political forces, which condition their existence. Failing to acknowledge this amounts to what Saskia Sassen (2006) identifies as a deeply flawed understanding of digital technology as "eliminating territory and functioning outside national jurisdictions, autonomous from state authority, and hence potentially subversive of state authority" (p. 325).

Refugee participants in this study were not overly vocal about online privacy, though it was clear they were concerned about their personal information being used against them.

Service providers, on their end, were generally more outspoken about the privacy risks implied by ICT use, in particular during the asylum claim process. Regardless of each participant's perception of the matter, surveillance and privacy issues remained inextricably linked to ICT use. ICT, even used cautiously, can exacerbate threats faced by forcibly displaced persons and further expose them to control and violence.

In what follows, I first discuss how two refugee participants altered their digital practices in an attempt to remain undetectable and avoid exposing loved ones. Second, I examine how ICT can be conceptualised as a new space of border control and, in turn, as an object of discipline. Third, I explore how ICT can be used against refugees beyond the border, as a way to further scrutinize refugee claimants and question the legitimacy of their claim.

Being Exposed, Exposing Others

Several participants expressed they were not concerned about tracking by foreign governments after their arrival in Canada, but remained mindful of potential repercussions when communicating with loved ones back home. Youssef, for instance, explained he went through several messaging apps in order to keep communication with his family safe. First, he tried WhatsApp and Viber, which he says are now monitored by the Egyptian government. At the time of our interview, he had settled for Emu, an alternative messaging app. While at the time of our interview Youssef was in Montréal and therefore safely out of the Egyptian government's reach, he still worried those who persecuted him would threaten his family if they were to discover contact had not been severed between them. He hinted on several occasions during our meetings that retributions directed at his family had happened before, when he first left Egypt.

Finding a safely encrypted messaging application was crucial for Youssef, who expressed the need to talk to his parents daily, all the while fearing for their safety. The availability of applications (such as Emu) conditions the relationship he has with his family and friends back home. The existence of these applications and their safety is not guaranteed, and may evolve over time: "Some applications—you know Viber? First, when it was new, the government couldn't control it, but now they do. Maybe one day, they will control Emu. But for now, it's safe." Here, we see the unstable nature of ICT as a space for safe communication, and its simultaneous capacity to quickly turn against its users and transform into a space of control and violence.

While Youssef sought safe digital communication, Danielle tried to evade communication altogether in order to keep her children and herself safe from her husband. Escaping an abusive domestic situation conditioned her use of ICT in significant ways, and vice versa. Whereas others may seek the connectivity, she sought to cut it off, to remain disconnected from the man who pushed her to flee her home.

> I avoid all of that. I avoid giving out my [email] address, because… The job that he does, he is very good at computers. So, when I moved here, I had to change everything—my Gmail, my email, my children's accounts on Facebook. We had to basically sign over nothing with our last name that would divert… my old account is still there, yes, but I have not been on it, I don't log on, I don't log off, I don't do anything with it, just stay away. (Danielle)

Cutting the connection with her husband has hindered Danielle's ability to make use of social media platforms to engage with other members of her family and local networks of support, thus limited her ability to ask for assistance:

Because that's how I connected with my family abroad as well, through Facebook. And with that off, there's no reaching out to say I'm here and I could get assistance, that sort of way. Because everything would lead right back to him finding out.

ICT as a New Space of Border Control

Today I met a volunteer who came to Montreal as refugee claimants 8 months ago. After hearing about my thesis, he told me that when he was intercepted at Roxham Road, the officers took his computer, phone and tablet, and later came back to ask for his passwords. He said he had no idea what they looked for on the devices, or if they checked his e-mails/social media or not. He had also heard of people ditching all electronics before getting to the border. (Field notes, 23.10.18)

During their time at the Canadian border, refugee claimants are questioned about their motives to enter Canada, and their eligibility as refugee claimants is evaluated by border agents. If they are suspected of posing a threat, or if they cannot prove their identity, they can be taken to the immigration holding centre in Laval. There, they face scrutiny extending to digital spaces, as border officers increasingly request access to digital devices when entering Canada. The choice to request access to a person's device is not consistent and is at the officer's discretion. It constitutes a legal search and is not limited to persons entering the country as refugee claimants—anyone crossing the border may be subjected the procedure. This broadens the invasion of privacy to intimate parts of a person's life, making it rather difficult to keep certain information private if they did not anticipate the search.

In the case of refugee claimants, this further contributes to a context of suspicion, already heavily marked by the criminalization of migrants and refugees. The volunteer

mentioned above reported being surprised by the attention given by border agents to electronic devices, and noticed some persons around him were being thoroughly questioned about their devices' content. His experience suggests there is no explanation given to refugees intercepted at the border, and there is confusion around the confiscation of personal devices. This raises questions of transparency, accountability and justice. What are the rights of refugee claimants over their personal information when questioned at the border? Which parts of the devices do border officers explore? In the following paragraphs, I discuss the consequences of not knowing the answers to these questions.

ICT as an Object of Discipline

For some, the device searches can have drastic consequences. Youssef, for instance, was taken into custody and detained for ten days at an immigration holding centre after landing in Montréal. One of the main reasons he was intercepted was because of an email exchange with a childhood friend, also trying to claim asylum in Canada (from Vancouver):

> He came here before me, one week. When he got to the airport, they catch him and they took his computer and entered his email. In one email, I said: "I am coming in one week, I will make asylum after you." You understand the situation now?

Youssef's experience in detention was negative. Occupations were scarce, and contact with the outside world almost inexistent, except for payphones, with expensive international call rates. Youssef recounts feeling distressed by the lack of contact with his family, which was in part due to the confiscation of all electronics.

Most of the time, the persons held at the centre cannot prove their identity or are suspected of being a threat to Canadian society. For John, whose association visits the

holding centre twice a week, restricting ICT use minimises the chances for displaced persons to be released and prolongs their detainment:

> Most people who are detained in the Montréal area, it's because Canada Border Services Agency isn't sure of their identity. And so, they need to get identity documents, but they put them in this holding centre where you don't have access to the Internet, so you can't email anybody, you can only make local phone calls… It's kind of a disingenuous system. 'Ok, so well, we're holding you so you can prove who you are, but we're not making it easy at all for you to reach out beyond the four walls of this particular building to prove who you are.' So, people end up staying longer than they need to.

Prohibiting ICT use keeps detained persons under the control of the CBSA. Unable to contact others or gather identification documents, they remain in detention where they can be legally monitored at all times (Dawson, 2014).

This is particularly interesting in Youssef's case, as online content turned out to be the key to his release and, a year later, the acceptance of his asylum claim. The films he made in Egypt, posted online, were central to his case:

> Yes, they are still online, and you can still see them. I have a channel on YouTube, so anyone can see it. I told you, when I came here, I had problems. I told the police and the immigration: "See my movies—I'm not a liar." So, it saved me. Go and see my movie [on YouTube]. I am also an actor. You can see that's me, here, in front of you, you can trust me.

Youssef's experience displays the contrasting possibilities of ICT in the context of resettlement, and in particular detention. An email conversation with a childhood friend contributed to his detention in an immigration holding centre, where he faced deportation and

dehumanizing conditions[8]. Simultaneously, it was online content which helped him prove his identity, allowing for his release and possibility to claim asylum on Canadian soil.

Beyond the Border: Policing Refugee Narratives

ICT can also be conceptualised as a space of control beyond the physical border as a means of questioning and sometimes refuting refugee narratives. As part of the asylum claim procedures, refugee claimants must give a detailed account of the events that led up to their arrival in Canada. The Basis of Claim form, or BOC, is designed to inquire about a person's reasons to claim asylum in Canada. Refugees must demonstrate that they fit the "Convention refugee" definition[9], as stipulated in Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (BOC form, p.11). What individuals write on this form will be examined by the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) and used to decide whether or not the person's claim will be accepted. Any misleading or false information can result in a rejection of the claim (BOC form, page 1).

According to John, social media can be a way for the IRB to scrutinize the statements made on the form:

> We don't encourage people to be "hyper social media posters" while they're
> in a refugee claim process. Because certainly one of the things that the
> Canadian government is going to do is check your Facebook feed. You know,
> "well, are you having fun? Where have you been? Are you… does it match
> with what you said?" And so, if people have left a digital trace that doesn't

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[8] http://cjf.qc.ca/vivre-ensemble/webzine/article/detention-au-centre-de-prevention-de-limmigration-la-realite-des-detenus-vue-par-des-intervenantes-sociales/

[9] https://irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/refugee-claims/Pages/ClaDemGuide.aspx#definitions
"You are a Convention refugee if: you have left your home country (your country of nationality or, if you do not have one, the country where you usually lived in the past); you have a well-founded fear of persecution based on your race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group; and you are unable or, because of your fear, unwilling to try to get the protection of your home country."

match with whatever they've said in their basis of claim form, they could be

into some trouble.

Here, it becomes evident how ICT contributes to the (state sanctioned) control of mobility by opening up a space where the government can refute or question statements made by forcibly displaced persons. Online, refugees and some aspects of their lives become perceptible by the State, they leave a "digital trace," as John put it. This digital trace can be used against them in an effort from the Canadian state to exert tight control over refugee claimants entering and residing in the country. Confronting social media posts and other digital content to declarations from the BOC enhances the state's ability to monitor refugee narratives and reject the claims of persons whose profiles do not fit the "refugee" definition stipulated in the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

Being a "Legitimate" Refugee

If they find that you've been googling, you know, "how to claim refugee

status," or if you've been stumbling upon sites where it kind of gives you

recommended stories or whatever, you could find yourself in some

difficulties with Canadian authorities … Because they always seem to be

looking—one of the aspects they try to find is 'does everybody have the same

story?' If everybody has the same story, well then, maybe, it's like copying

an exam, so people [think] 'well, here's a story that seems to work so let's

just say that this is what happened in my life'—hoping that they don't notice

that it's been plagiarized, shall we say." (John)

The vocabulary of "cheating" John uses here is recurrent in the political and media discourse which surrounds refugee claimants. Are they "real" refugees? Do they deserve protection? ICT use is generally not consistent with the social and political construction of

the refugee figure: on the run, unprepared, vulnerable (Malkki, 1995). Researching asylum procedures, the risks and the possibilities, signals preparedness, which clashes with the concepts of urgency, flight and exile so tightly associated to the "refugee" figure. A digital trace revealing extensive documentation on the matter could be interpreted as an intention to "cheat the system."

This speaks to an inherently paradoxical dimension of asylum claim procedures. On the one hand, the process is dense and opaque, with narrow definitions and standards for the "profile" a "legitimate" refugee should fit. On the other hand, John's quote here seems to suggest that doing research on this complex process can be interpreted by authorities as potentially dishonest or deceiving. Refugee claimants therefore have to carefully present their life stories so that they seem unique and authentic, all the while fitting a social, political and legal narrative consistent with the narrow Convention refugee definition. This double bind is clear when looking at refugees' digital practices, and is symptomatic of a larger incoherence in asylum claim processes. The rigid "refugee" category is abstract. It is detached from the reality of forced displacement and the vast range of human situations it encompasses. This construction allows states to tightly control and limit the number of persons entering their territory as refugees.

The monitoring of refugee claimants' digital practices by border authorities reveals an attempt to control information around the determination of an acceptable refugee claim. Digital devices such as smartphones, tablets and computers open up a space of enhanced information sharing amongst refugees, but it also allows the state to question their legitimacy as refugees. This furthers the authorities' ability to scrutinize refugee claimants and reject their claim.

Conclusion

This chapter provides nuance to the results presented in previous chapters. While the connectivity allowed by ICT proved to be empowering and desirable for refugees in many respects, this chapter addresses the adverse effects of pervasive connectivity, which can become invasive, overwhelming and harmful.

First, I discussed the problematic spread of misinformation through ICT, which can push refugees to take life-changing decisions with drastic consequences. Digital platforms add to already complex information landscapes that refugees must navigate, and the flow of information from countless sources can become overwhelming. Service providers are conscious of the dangers of misinformation, which pushes some to stay heavily involved online, performing additional work to reduce the flow of misinformation. Additionally, the contradicting information online can weaken the trust between service providers and their clients. Likewise, there are also elements about the subjective experience of the refugees and their own interpretation of which information is trustworthy.

In the second section, I addressed the possibility for ICT to become a space of control and surveillance. Regarding tracking from foreign governments or individuals, participants were not outspokenly concerned, but some of them were still careful about the modes of digital communication they chose in order to avoid exposing others and risk jeopardizing loved ones' safety. At the Canadian border, ICT sometimes became an object of scrutiny and concern. The confiscation and examination of devices by border agents demonstrates the state's ability to extend the control of refugees moving across the border to digital spaces, which can potentially be used to police and refute refugee narratives.

Looking at ICT as a space of co-presence, self-continuity (chapter three), innovative solutions and community building (chapter four) is not sufficient, because it overlooks crucial aspects of the social and political realities of displacement, in which ICT use is always embedded. This does not refute or deny the advantages of ICT presented in the previous

chapters, but it adds some contrast to these benefits and paints a fuller portrait of ICT use amidst forced displacement. While ICT brings on exciting solutions, it can also exacerbate threats faced by refugees. Looking at both of these processes demands that we consider ICT as embedded in the social, which Saskia Sassen (2002) encourages in order to surpass "the common duality between utopian and dystopian understandings of the Internet and electronic space generally" (368).

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I explore the place of ICT in the experience of refugees resettled in the city of Montreal. I argue that digital tools are essential in promoting the social inclusion of refugees, but must be used with caution, as ICT use can exacerbate certain forms of risk and control in a context of forced displacement. The results of this study corroborate other findings about the centrality of ICT in the experience of forcibly displaced persons; ICT was omnipresent amongst refugees in Montreal and shaped diverse aspects of their resettlement experience. Participants reported ICT use yielded a sense of empowerment for refugees by allowing them to remain connected to their country of origin, underlining the importance of ICT for co-presence and digitally mediated family intimacy. At the same time, participants reported relying on ICT to develop locally situated support networks, by generating new relationships in Montreal. This was a crucial part of finding local social support and thus limiting social exclusion. Finally, ICT was associated with increased levels of autonomy for refugees, thus challenging the stigma associated to this label.

Beyond echoing results from existing research, this study adds to the discussion by taking into consideration the standpoint of service providers on ICT use in a context of resttlement. Social workers, community organization employees and volunteers add a crucial dimension to this conversation. Indeed, local service providers often are the first individuals refugees interact with upon arriving in Canada. In many cases, they represent the main source of social, financial and emotional support for newcomers. As such, they significantly influence initial feelings of inclusion. From the standpoint of the network society (Castells, 2010), service providers are crucial constituents of the network and need to be accounted for when exploring the place of ICT in the experience of resettlement. Their lived experience central to this analysis and allows a comparison between the perspective of service providers and refugees on the role of ICT in a context of resettlement.

Moreover, this study addresses a seemingly unexplored terrain: how local service providers make use of ICT themselves in order to facilitate their work. This is particularly important when considering the key role ICT plays in refugees' experience. If refugees are increasingly relying on digital technologies (a fact service providers are well aware of), then there is value in understanding how service providers adapt their intervention to fit these new tools. This thesis has shown that they adapt to both the advantages and risks brought by the omnipresence of ICT among refugees. For instance, service providers have created online support groups to encourage the direct interaction of refugees and the local community, in an effort to simplify their work and create a higher level of engagement. On the other hand, they report the potential complications ICT use could create, and adapt in consequence: some perform additional work to verify the accuracy of information shared on popular online groups; others warn their clients about online rumours or advise against social media use while going through the asylum claim process.

One thing is clear: ICT has become an integral part of refugee support, and service providers increasingly take refugees' digital practices into account. This has implications in terms of social work and psycho-social intervention with persons experiencing forced displacement. Digital tools have become a central part of the resettlement experience and must be fully considered by those who work with refugees daily. As we have seen, these tools can have a lasting impact on the social inclusion of refugees. This impact that can be positive in many aspects, but also potentially harmful.

Many (in Montreal and elsewhere) are keenly aware of this and are trying to take this further by developing applications designed specifically for refugees. In chapter four, I discussed the (prototype) smartphone applications designed by Organization D, although there are other similar application projects, in the city and elsewhere (Schreiek et al., 2017; Ngan et al.2016; see also *The Atlantic*'s 2016 "*Apps for Refugees. How technology helps in a*

humanitarian crisis"). A lot of enthusiasm surrounds these innovative projects. In Montréal, the persons I spoke to worked on applications designed to help refugees with languages, resource information, and immigration procedures. Mostly, the applications are made by, with and for refugees. This drives the idea behind these applications and relies on the empowering dimension of ICT.

Though ambitious, the projects face considerable challenges. When asked about the applications during interviews, some service provider participants expressed concern, mostly pertaining to the security of personal information provided by users. Other obstacles stand in the way of these applications' success. Once available, will the applications be used? Will government officials and service providers endorse these digital tools? If they are recommended by the government and service providers, will they actually be trusted by refugees? Can ICT remain interesting to refugees if it is no longer an alternative, but an established channel? While both service provider and refugee participants remained optimistic regarding the potential of these applications, such questions remain unanswered.

Limitations and future research

There are several limitations to this research and its results. First, the sample size was limited to 10 participants. This narrow sample size allowed for in-depth, personal interviews and was mitigated by a diversification of data sources (conducting online and offline ethnography). However, future research could benefit from looking at a greater sample of participants and identifying trends in ICT use which are consistent over longer periods of time. This is particularly important to understand nuances in ICT use depending on culture, gender, age or socioeconomic status (and their intersection). These factors could influence ICT use and have an impact on the analysis.

Similarly, this study was limited to persons who had access to ICT. I aimed to understand how ICT was used, and not how it was accessed, mostly because preliminary finding indicated ICT was prevalent amongst refugees in Montréal (see introduction). Future research should however continue to investigate conditions of access, taking into considerations factors mentioned above: age, gender, socioeconomic status, amongst other variables, can impact how people access ICT. This research, for instance, outlined the negative impact of restricted access to ICT for refugees detained in Canadian immigration holding centres. Investigating other forms of access restrictions could be an interesting starting point to better understand the crucial role ICT plays in the social inclusion of refugees in Montréal and elsewhere.

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