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Confronting Uncertainty:
Syrian Refugee Women in Germany

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Abstract

This study thematizes the experiences of the Syrian women who fled to Germany to escape the crises that has been ongoing since 2011. Adding to the traumatizing escape from their home country, ensuing the loss of their previous status and life, the women must orient themselves in a new environment, adapting to a new culture with different laws and customs. The women had been accompanied by a gruelling uncertainty since the beginning of the war in Syria, and the question is raised what effects the resettlement had on the women's life and how they adapted to the new situation. To provide an answer, an extensive fieldwork has been completed in Bayreuth, Berlin and Brandenburg, including 44 interviews with Syrian refugee women of all ages and with different social backgrounds. The women talked about their everyday life experiences in Germany and about how they approached the different challenges. Faced with uncertainty, they confronted the new situation by first retrenching themselves into their pre-war lives. By observing and judging what happened in their new environment, some women began to consider a path forward for their new life in Germany.

Zusammenfassung

Die durch den Krieg ausgelöste Krise und verschlechterte Sicherheitslage in Syrien, hatte 2011 einen massiven Flüchtlingsstrom zur Folge. Diese Arbeit thematisiert die Erfahrungen der syrischen Frauen, die in diesem Zusammenhang nach Deutschland geflohen sind, um Schutz zu suchen und Asyl zu beantragen. Nach einer traumatischen Flucht aus ihrem Heimatland, mussten die Frauen sich in einer ihnen unbekannten Umgebung zurechtfinden und sich an eine unterschiedliche Kultur mit den einhergehenden Gesetzten und Gepflogenheiten anpassen.

Seitdem der Krieg begonnen hatte, waren die Frauen stets einer zermürbenden Unsicherheit ausgesetzt: sei es während der gefährlichen Reise über das Mittelmeer und durch Europa, oder durch ihren Flüchtlingsstatus in Deutschland. Die Arbeit setzt sich mit der Frage auseinander, welche Effekte diese Umsiedlung auf das Leben der Frauen hatte und wie sich diese an die veränderten Gegebenheiten angepasst haben.

Um diese Frage zu beantworten, wurde eine Feldforschung in Bayreuth, Berlin und Brandenburg durchgeführt. Frauen unterschiedlichen Alters und sozialer Herkunft wurden in verschiedenen Lebenslagen begleitet, und in Interviews umfassend zu ihren Geschichten, Gedanken und Herangehensweisen befragt. Um dabei möglichst aussagekräftige Ergebnisse zu erzielen, war es notwendig, durch eine methodische Herangehensweise das Vertrauen der Frauen zu gewinnen, ohne die wissenschaftlich notwendige Distanz zu verlieren, und Ihnen somit eine selbstbewusste und wahrhaftige Übermittlung ihrer Gedanken zu ermöglichen.

Kontextualisiert, wurden die Geschichten der Frauen in drei unterschiedlichen Topographien arrangiert, die ihrer Aussage zufolge ihr neues Leben in Deutschland maßgeblich geprägt hatten: den temporären – „exceptional“ – Lebensraum in den die Frauen nach ihrer Ankunft in den Flüchtlingsheimen eintraten, den institutionellen Lebensraum, sowie den öffentlichen Lebensraum. Des Weiteren ermöglichten die Ergebnisse aus diesen

Kapiteln, eine Betrachtung der durch die Frauen, im Hinblick auf Veränderungen ihrer eigenen Anschauungen, entwickelten Herangehensweisen, um mit der konfrontierten Unsicherheit umzugehen.

Die Frauen wurden in unterschiedlichen Flüchtlingsheimen untergebracht, in Gebäuden, die nicht immer für diesen Zweck ausgelegt waren. Die Art wie die Unterkünfte gestaltet waren, der enge Raum und die fehlende Privatsphäre hatten einen bedrückenden Effekt auf die Frauen. Die Sicherheitsleute gaben den Ton an, und die Frauen hatten das Gefühl gefangen gehalten zu werden. Sie waren verschiedenen Problemen hilflos ausgeliefert, in Situationen wo ihre Privatsphäre missachtet wurde und ihre Beschwerden nicht ernst genommen wurden.

Diese Erfahrungen bekräftigten den Wunsch der Frauen, sich weiterhin ausschließlich mit Erinnerungen aus ihr vergangenes Leben zu identifizieren, und die gelebte Wirklichkeit als bloße Auflistung von Problemen abzuarbeiten. Auch der Umgang mit den Behörden im institutionellen Lebensraum führte zu keiner Absicherung, da die Frauen weiterhin, in ihrem Verständnis, willkürlichen Entscheidungen über ihr Leben ausgesetzt waren.

Die Schwierigkeiten den bürokratischen Prozeduren gerecht zu werden, gaben den Frauen das Gefühl machtlos zu sein. Sie hatten keine Erfahrung im Umgang mit Briefen und Behördlichen Terminen, und waren der Last der neuen Verantwortungen oft nicht gewachsen.

Sie vermissten das Leben, dass sie in Syrien geführt hatten. Die Veränderungen, insbesondere bezüglich ihrer neu gewonnenen Rechte als Frauen, führten zu Verwirrungen. Sie waren einem vollständig veränderten öffentlichen Lebensraum ausgesetzt, wo sie vieles neu lernen mussten. Angefangen bei der deutschen Sprache, mussten sie sich in der neuen Stadt zurechtfinden, sich an die langen und kalten Winternächte gewöhnen und mit den

unterschiedlichen Mentalitäten der Menschen klarkommen. Jede einzelne Frau fand andere Methoden, um mit diesen Schwierigkeiten umzugehen.

Mit der Zeit endeckten sie einen öffentlichen Raum der weniger von Männern geprägt war als den, den sie in Syrien gekannt hatten. Hier waren sie gezwungen neuen Beschäftigungen nachzugehen und mehr im öffentlichen Raum zu beobachten, zu urteilen und zu interagieren.

Die syrischen Frauen hatten sich angesichts der traumatischen Erlebnisse und der überwältigenden neuen Verantwortungen, zuerst der neuen Wirklichkeit verschlossen. Sie schwelgten in Erinnerungen an ihr altes Leben, an ihren verlorenen sozialen Status. Die Umstände, führten aber in einigen Fällen dazu, dass die Frauen ihre Lebensweise und Überzeugungen überdachten. Einige wagten den Schritt, sich von ihrem Ehemann scheiden zu lassen, da sie nicht mehr zu befürchten hatten ihre Kinder zu verlieren. Einige entschieden sich dazu, ihr Kopftuch abzulegen, andere verwarfen jeglichen Gedanken an einen radikalen Neuanfang.

Die Frauen entwickelten unterschiedliche Herangehensweisen, um mit ähnlichen Problemen umzugehen. Vorwiegend waren die Frauen überfordert, und zogen sich zurück, die neue Realität auf Beschwerden reduzierend. Dieser Zyklus wurde nur in einigen Fällen durchbrochen, in denen die Frauen die Vorteile der neu gewonnenen Rechte endeckten, und sich infolgedessen der Unsicherheit stellten.

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Introduction

The refugee crises that began in 2015 has been the cause of great political turmoil in Europe. Adding to the humanitarian challenges that the sudden influx of refugees posed, it put a test on the western countries' moral commitments and the political cohesion within the European Union. What had once been written down in the 1951 United Nations refugee convention and had been incorporated into national legislation was now being scrutinised and reinterpreted when faced with the reality of the situation, fuelling extremes on both ends of the political spectrum.

At the centre of these political upheavals stood the refugees, coming at that time in great numbers out of war-torn Syria. The unstable situation in this country and the entire region resulted in the biggest internally displaced population in the world. The longer the pace of displacement was to remain relentless, the more Syrians would find their way into neighbouring countries. Those who continued their journey had to pay the high costs that smugglers were charging for the passage to Greece and would then continue from there on further into the European continent.

Amongst these Syrian refugees, women were particularly vulnerable. Whether they had been forced to flee with their families or on their own, were often accompanied by their children. They encountered challenges that they could not have imagined facing during their pre-war life in Syria. For them, leaving their home country also meant leaving the comfort and security of their strong social network; to leave a life shaped and predetermined by a traditional societies' immutable boundaries. Now, they were left fending for themselves and their families.

The journey into Europe made women suffer through considerable hardship. Upon their arrival, they entered into the complicated refugee status, associated with lengthy bureaucratic processes and gruelling uncertainty.

Arriving into a different culture also meant for the women that they had to cope with a new environment and its associated norms, while at the same time, they became able to fall back on legal protection that grants them the same legal rights and responsibilities as men.

Based upon extensive ethnological fieldwork, this thesis shall cast a light on these Syrian refugee women who fled to Germany. The question the thesis is going to answer is what effects the resettlement had on the women's life and how did they adapt to their new situation. Drawing upon the different theoretical approaches of embodied space and gendered space, this thesis will explain their everyday experiences reciprocally with the space they are in. To determine the new environment, the women's experiences will be classified according to three topographies.

The first space the women experience is what can be described as an exceptional space. Exceptional for the unique structure it exists in, and for the experience the people go through behind its doors. Refugee resettlement is, for them, a place of exclusion, loss, and endless waiting. Although some are better organised than others, they still affected the women's life immensely in the beginning.

The second space the women had to go through, almost simultaneously, is the institutional space in which the women deal with and interact with its various institutions to manage their everyday life. This space reflects power, knowledge and authority. How it functions is not only in its physical location but also in its power and authority outside its spatial boundaries. The women in this study never experienced managing their paperwork, appointments, the different tasks regarding their legal status, and in facilitating their life in general with institutions before. The lack of knowledge they needed in handling their different duties does not only involve the lack of language but also the lack of having experience in this space in general. Coming from a gendered space in which the

institutional spaces are part of the public space and therefore not a space for women, made them face difficulties and challenges with their own identity.

The third space the women interacted with and built experience within is the public space. In practising their everyday life, the women experienced the difference in space and places in which they were trying to navigate. Not understanding the different meanings and symbols in their new environment, their everyday life became challenging and full of uncertainty.

In the fourth part, the changes that resulted from their experiences, and the answer they provided to the faced uncertainty, will be analysed to provide an overall picture of their situation.

1. Context and Theoretical Framework

1.1 The Arab Spring and Syria: Tracing the Route to Europe

The demonstrations that began in 2011 and spread through North Africa and the Middle East had a significant impact on the entire region. What had started as peaceful demonstrations in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen and Syria took a different direction in each country, ending up in some cases in great political crises and civil wars. Syria has been an example of this development, and the effects of the war have been considerable, especially due to the large number of displaced persons. According to the United Nations, there have been more than 6.6 million people displaced internally and over 5.6 million people displaced outside of Syria since 2011 (UNHCR). When the war started the living conditions gradually deteriorated region by region and forced the people to flee to other regions or countries. Many Syrian women first had to witness the violence and expansion of the war and then had to suffer the loss of beloved family members. For many, these traumatising experiences had become reason enough to flee Syria for good.

Some women had to take on significant responsibilities after being left behind with their children, in situations where their husbands, brothers, and sons had left Syria first. The men were fleeing as they would have been forced to join up with the Syrian army, and would have had to fight for the

Syrian government (Danish Immigration Service 2015, p. 5). When the situation became dangerous for the women and their families, they packed what they could carry and left. At first, the refugees would enter one of the neighbouring countries before coming to Europe. In 2015 what had been declared a "migrant crisis" reached its peak in Europe (BAMF, pp. 2–3), when refugees in considerable numbers from Syria and other countries reached the European continent.

1.2 Being a Refugee: A Legal Status

The word refugee was defined during the 1951 UN refugee convention to be the following:

> A refugee […] is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion (UNHCR, p. 3).

This definition has been adapted and changed by the UN's member nations to fit their own understanding of what refugees are and to formulate their asylum laws.

The standard procedure in Germany consists of an examination of the asylum application and a further determination as to whether the refugee is eligible for asylum or not. According to German law, the following four kinds of asylums are distinguished as:

1. Refugee protection: The asylum applicant is granted under the definition mentioned above the status of refugee (section 3 subs. 1 of the Asylum Act) and will obtain a permit for three years with the possibility of an extension and the right of family reunification (BAMF).
2. Entitlement to asylum: The asylum applicant is granted the status due to the threat of political persecution in their home country, making it impossible for the applicant to return. A necessary reason for this status is a severe danger to the applicant's life (Article 16a para. 1 of the (BGB)). This applicant is granted a permit for three years with the possibility of an extension and also has the right to family reunification (BAMF).

3. Subsidiary protection: This status is granted if the asylum seeker does not fit into the two categories mentioned above, by not fulfilling the required conditions. However, the applicant could still be in danger in their homeland. Examples include the risk of the death penalty, or of being tortured (section 4 subs. 1 of the Asylum Act (AsylG)). This status includes a permit for a year with the possibility to be extended for two years based on the reassessment of the situation in their home country. This status does not grant the right to family reunification (BAMF).

4. The national ban on deportation: This status indicates that the applicant's asylum application has been rejected, yet the deportation has been halted. Although this means that the person has to leave the country, health problems and various other reasons can make deportation impossible (Section 60 subs. 5 of the Residence Act (AufenthG) and Section 60 subs. 7 of the Residence Act (AufenthG)). These persons will get a permit that could be renewed, but they have no possibility to invite their family members (BAMF).

The refugee definition from 1951 is problematic in multiple ways, and the definition has been criticised and discussed by many academics, either because of its vagueness or in some cases because of its consequentialist approach (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al. 2014, pp. 49–50).

Some of the studied Syrian women had been granted asylum, some humanitarian protection, and others were still awaiting a decision by the authorities. While some women had received their asylum decision within a few months, others had to wait for more than 14 months, and some even longer. During this time, the women had to face great uncertainty, as they awaited the verdict on their status. This had an impact on their physical and mental health, as will become further apparent through the women's personal stories.

1.3 Post- arrival: Syrian Women in Germany

The subject of this thesis is Syrian refugee women who left their home country following the Syrian crisis that began in 2011, and who fled to Germany. Their life had been impacted by the war, with them having to flee and adapt to a new social environment. This thesis shall be an account of the Syrian women refugees' personal stories and their new life in Germany.

What had motivated the Syrian women to come to Germany was for them and their families to be safe. After arriving, the Syrian refugees had to face a completely different life in a culture they had no, or very little, prior knowledge of. The difficulties the women had with the German language added to the complicated situation, whereby they were confused by the inner workings of the culture they had arrived into. This thesis will recount what the Syrian women experienced at the beginning of their new life in Germany.

The Syrian women often mentioned what they had heard the society had thought about them: That the refugees take money from the state and the taxpayers without doing any work and without deserving it. The women had heard such stories from the beginning of their stay in Germany, which had an impact on their wellbeing. They felt stigmatised as refugees, labelled and under constant observation and judgement (Zetter 1991, pp. 39–41; Malkki 1995, p. 496). As Malkki wrote, these people were being marked as "abnormal" by the rest of society (Malkki 1992, pp. 33–34).

Being away from their native society had a significant impact on the women, as shall shortly be exemplified. In one case, one of the women that were interviewed invited me to her wedding. There, I saw people trying to live their life as normal as possible. Places differ, but cultures and traditions remain with people. A wedding day is usually a happy day for the bride when she can marry the man she loves, but the woman was not happy. She was trying to hold back tears the entire time. She was getting married, and her family could not be there, and the only relative present in Germany was one of her uncles. There were not as many people at the wedding as would be

expected from a sizeable Arabic family. Walking into the room, the bride was crying. All of the guests kept talking about the absence of the bride's family, ruining the festivity of the event.

On another occasion, I accompanied another woman to the hospital because her young daughter had to undergo surgery, and she needed someone to translate for her. I went with her and experienced how hard it was for her without her family who would have been present and would have helped her emotionally.

All of the women happily remembered the past and the way they had lived before, and they recounted memories emotionally and nostalgically. The significant changes in their lives had shocked them in the beginning, and there were still moments where they could not understand how their situation had changed in such a negative way.

All of the woman I met shared the love they had for their Syrian homeland, associating it with the past and a less stressful way of living.

1.4 The Conceptual Framework

1.4.1 Space and topography

This subchapter will lay out the theoretical foundations. Through the different anthropological approaches, the women's experiences will be analysed from different aspects in order to understand their experiences within its cultural context. Thus, a better understanding of how the women make meaning of their situation in their new environment will be provided. Furthermore, it will show the crucial relationship between human beings and the environment inhabited.

The notion of space

The subject of space has been an interesting area to analyse the different cultural aspects in anthropology (Low and Lawrence 2003, p. 1; Kokot 2007, p. 10). Although according to Kokot,

anthropology, in a way, has failed to create a complete anthropological theory of space and culture, geography and sociology studies provide orientation for the theoretical part (Kokot 2007, p. 10).

The cultural geographer Yi Fu Tuan defined space as "an abstract term for a complex set of ideas" (Tuan 2001, p.34). His work and the work of other cultural geographers examined the connection between the lived experience and the place (Tuan 2001, Buttimer and Seamon 1980).

Due to the lack of a defined concept of space and culture, some researchers emphasised the importance in constructing one (Appadurai 1996; Low 2014; Geertz 1996; Gupta & Ferguson 1992; Tilley, 1994). The concept of space evolved to be a crucial part in the study of culture and people; its importance is essential in the field of cultural studies and sociology (Low and Lawrence 2003, p. 1). Space, place and landscape are terms that need to be understood in connection with each other (Hirsch 1995, pp. 3-6). Space is the result of being and experiencing one's surroundings, and when this relationship lacks meaning and understanding the individual can be in conflict with it (Tilley 1994, p. 11).

Spaces in conjunction with the landscape, and its differences, material aspects, and societies has emphasised the subject of space in anthropology (Low and Lawrence 2003, p. 1). Aside from that, the concept has been interesting to many fields of studies, such as geography, sociology, philosophy, and History (Low and Lawrence 2003, p. 1). Primarily through the work of Lefebvre's, "the production of space", which established a new understanding of space that has since been used in a variety of fields of study. Lefebvre explained that humans, as biological and social characters, produce space in three ways: by perceiving it and participating in everyday life, by conceiving it through its urbanist and planners, and lastly, by living and dwelling in it and understanding the symbols and different signs in it (Lefebvre 1991, pp. 39-40). De Certeau in his work "The practice of everyday life" described practices that people use in everyday life which he also called "ways of operating" to reproduce and appropriate space, as tactics by which it becomes a lived space (De Certeau 1984, pp. xi-xxiii).

The concept of space is not static and needs to be understood as Martina Löw, a professor in sociology wrote: "as processual, relationally ordered systems" (Löw 2006, p. 120). In other words, Löw's definition of space is a relational concept of human beings, material objects, symbolic signs, and social structures (Löw 2001, p. 271). All of these aspects are part of the space and define it, making it a continually constructed term (Massey 2005, p. 9). Understanding the different components of space makes for a better understanding of people, the space they inhabit, and the way it is used and recreated.

The use of the different concepts of space in different topographies is applied to the conceptual framework of this thesis. In doing so, the women's experiences will be separated into three topographies: the exceptional space, the institutional space, and the public space.

The embodied space

The embodied space "is the location where human experience and consciousness takes on material and spatial form" (Low and Lawrence 2003, p. 9). According to this definition, the spaces' body is created by our presence in it. The space takes shape depending on the experiences we have, by our way of perceiving and communicating, as well as through different ways of producing meaning, including words, symbols, or signs (Low and Lawrence 2003, pp. 2-7, Richardson 2003, pp. 74-76). Through being and moving in a specific space with its objects, our lived experience becomes a mix of emotions and feelings, sounds and signs that create a relation with the space that we occupy (Low and Lawrence 2003, pp. 2-7; Küpers 2010, p. 82).

Gendered spaces

The gendered space associates a culturally constructed gender type to a space (Low and Lawrence 2003, pp. 7- 13). These spaces are created for specific genders, in which identity affiliations are generated, produced, and reproduced through specific practices and behaviours, expressing the differences in status and value (Low and Lawrence 2003, pp. 7- 13). While gendered spaces differ

in their presentation and degree from one culture to another, they need to be understood in these different contexts historically concerning their economic, social, and political elements, which led to gender stratification (Low and Lawrence 2003, pp. 7- 13). The result is gender asymmetries where men have power, and authority over the women (Low and Lawrence 2003, pp. 7- 13). The subject of gender and space has been analysed from different viewpoints in anthropology. Shirley Ardener in her book *Women and Space* (1981) presented studies that suggest that the hierarchies, which she refers to as *social maps,* indicate the ground role in which "space defines the people in it" and "people define space" (Ardener 1981, pp.12- 13). In another study, Michelle Rosaldo in her book *Women, Culture and Society* (1974) argued that the reason why women are lower in status to men is that they are connected to the private "domestic" sphere in contrast to men who are connected to the public sphere. These studies and others have helped to understand the relationship between people, power, and the space they occupy.

These different anthropological approaches of spaces, such as the embodied space and the gender space, are essential to analyse the results of this study's fieldwork. The Syrian women's experiences can be understood through their interaction with these spaces, and the expressing of their emotions and feelings in their narrations about everyday life.

The Private Space

Whilst the Syrian women's narratives include matters associated with their private space, this thesis has been structured according to the changing public spaces that the women have experienced. One of the women's greatest concerns throughout their entire journey has been the total lack of privacy, their inability to autonomously shape their private space, as well as the dissolution thereof.

The change in physical location and the associated regulations and duties had taken over the women's life; now determined by the changing public space. The women repeatedly deplored that their private space had merged into the public space, having to exclusively deal with exterior factors.

1.4.2 The Lifeworld

Associated to the different spaces and their respective experiences, comes a key concept in which all human experiences take place, the *lifeworld*. The lifeworld is a concept in phenomenology used by Husserl and defined in sociology by Schütz and Luckmann. The lifeworld is a way of understanding the everyday lived experience (Husserl 1970, p. 50). The lifeworld ("Lebenswelt" in German) refers to the real world in which each individual is present physically and acts consciously in a subjective way (Husserl 1970, pp. 49-51). The everyday lifeworld is the evident and unquestionable reality that was pre-given and mediated to each individual through other people, such as one's parents (Schütz and Luckmann 2017, p. 29-33). Humans live in the reality of everyday life with other individuals and the surrounding nature. Accordingly, the reality of everyday life becomes intersubjective through communication and the use of symbols in order to make sense of our reality and to be able to handle it (Schütz and Luckmann 2017, p. 29).

1.5 Situating the Study of Refugees in the Ethnographic Field

The study of refugees and displacement was first developed by anthropologists in the 1950s (Black 2001, p. 58). Not paying attention to the subject of displacements occurring before that time, migrant studies took place in the department of sociology (Colson 2003, pp. 4-7). In 1920, members of the Chicago school were interested in urban sociology and researching the urban environment, in which the immigrant was also a subject of interest (Nieswand 2011, p. 15). The growth of research regarding refugee studies in anthropology generated theories and knowledge about different social structures and other concepts, which helped explain a variety of aspects in the studies of refugees (Colson 2003, pp. 4-7). Interest in the subject grew, and different fields of study became interested, including anthropologists who started researching the subject in different area's and stages (Colson 2003, p. 2).

One of the early classic works of sociology from the Chicago school about immigrant's experience in another country and the problems facing them in a host country was the work of W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki: *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America 1918-1920*. Thomas and Znanieki investigated in their monograph how polish people tried to organise their lives, in the beginning, having moved to a new place. By building new networks in the host country, and at the same time maintaining connections with their people at home, their new life became organised. Thomas and Znanieki created new methods to study people's experiences. These have had a significant influence on further refugee studies (Colson 2003, pp. 4-7; Abbott and Egloff 2008, pp. 223-225). The researchers were also focused on the experience of people living abroad but did not investigate the reason they left in the first place (Colson 2003, pp.4-5). Through the effects of continuing industrialisation and labour migration in the 1930s, anthropology started to pay attention to the labour migrant, and by the 1970s, numerous analyses were added to the studies of anthropology (Colson 2003, pp.4-7).

Different aspects of migration have been written about, and it has enabled a better understanding of the associated problems. With increasing refugee flows, the necessity to better understand the phenomena was already recognised in the 1980s, in order to develop strategies to contain the problem (Stein 1981, p. 320). In one of his books *The Refugee in Flight: Kinetic Models and Forms of Displacement 1973*, Kunz wrote about the refugee experience. Kunz described two kinds of kinetic types of refugees: the first is the anticipatory refugee movement, including refugees who decided to leave their homeland before the situations escalated and made the choice of where to go and prepared everything accordingly. The second refugee type is the acute refugee movement, including refugees who leave their country of origin only when they are forced to. This refugee leaves because of a dangerous situation and is not able to prepare for thier departure (Kunz 1973, pp.131-133).

His work, explaining the different categories of refugee behaviour, has been beneficial to explain the link between a refugees' experience and their behaviour (Kunz 1973, pp. 135-136). The specific

situation of refugees can certainly not be generalised or fully compared to the situation of other refugees at different places and times (Kunz 1973, pp. 126- 130). Even when it comes to the same group of refugees who have left the same country, the perceived experiences are different (Kunz 1973, pp. 137-138). However, generally being labelled a refugee, can in itself be a problem (Zetter 1991, pp. 39–62).

The author Stephen L. Keller wrote in 1975 about the situation in India: *Uprooting and Social Change: The Role of Refugees in Development*. In his work he explained the different kind of stages the refugees went through and explained how the phenomena took shape. The different stages he describes are the perception of threat in the home country, the decision to flee, the escape and the flight, reaching safety, and finally, camp behaviour. Following these stages, the refugees either return to their home country, they repatriate, they settle or are resettled, they enter into a period of adjustment and acculturation, and a change of behaviour in the host country due to their experiences can be observed (Keller 1975). However, this kind of research in which the stages were analysed sparked the interest of other researchers including, Malkki, who also criticised it as a functionalist model that considers the uprooted as abnormal and urged from a changed view (Malkki 1995, p. 508).

The camp experience and its influence on the refugees have also been a subject of interest to other scholars (Mamdani, 1973; Murphy 1955; Loizos 1981; Harrell-Bond 1986). Different writings have provided deep insight into the different conditions and situations the refugees go through in the different camp settings. Following these experiences, the refugees enter a stage in which they either integrate, resettle, or return to their homeland (Stein 1981, pp. 324- 325; Colson 2003, pp. 2). Studies have analysed both groups, those who stay in the first land of asylum and those who resettle in other countries.

The subject of involuntary repatriation has also been researched since the Second World War by historians (Harrell-Bond 1989, pp. 41-43), and over the past decades by anthropologists and other social study scholars (Colson 2003, p. 2). The literature has evolved into different areas. Some

focused on the different refugee movements, others on agencies and policies, or subjects of assimilation. The research conducted by the anthropological scholars evolved to cover an appreciated research base in refugee studies and opened up the field for future studies.

2. Research Design, Methods and Subject

The methods applied during the fieldwork varied according to the specific field and the women that were interviewed. In this chapter I will present the different methods and corresponding rationale.

2.1 Methodology and Fieldwork

A range of methods were used during the fieldwork, including writing field notes, participant observation, observational data, writing protocols and individual and group interviews. At first, I am going to explain how I used the methods. The women interacted with me, telling me about their lives and their experiences in different ways. Some of them started to tell their stories from the very beginning in Syria and others started from the time before the war.

The reason why I used different methods was first to gather as much information as possible and second to have as much consistent data as possible.

One of the main reasons I was able to carry out my research was the promise to keep the identity of the interviewees confidential. That is, to not mention any information that could affect the women's personal life or their right to stay in Germany.

Trying to gain the women's trust to talk was the most challenging part. Sometimes, this process was swift, and in some cases, it did not work at all. Often, I was able to gain the women's trust

after several meetings, and through small talk with them. Seeing them from time to time, they started to trust me. Time was of the essence to gain the women's trust, and the primary objective was to keep the conversation going and be able to spend more time with the women. The importance and difficulties in gaining the migrants' trust have been pointed out in the literature (Colson 2003, pp. 4-6). Before I started with the interviews, I explained my research purpose and aim, and answered all of the women's questions regarding the thesis. After clarifying my intentions and having gotten their permission, I was able to interview them, or in other cases, obtain their phone number to arrange a meeting via text messages at a more convenient time.

2.1.1 Individual and Group Interviews

The first method that was used during the fieldwork was conducting interviews. This method was advantageous in gaining information and details about the women's life. By using this method, I was able to not only gather information about the women's lives in general, but also understand how they expressed and described themselves, and how each woman interpreted her own story by emphasising certain events. The richness of the information obtained through this method was substantial, and its results can be found in all of the following chapters. Of course, this method is limited to the subjective perspective of the women themselves, and to gain a deeper understanding of the women's situation, additional information was necessary. That is why I decided to keep in contact with the women and meet them several times on different occasions, and additionally, use other, less formal methods.

2.1.2 Participant Observation

Through the participant observation I gained knowledge by taking part in the women's everyday life, spending time with them doing different activities and getting to know them better. These activities included having lunch with them, going out with them, and helping them when they

needed someone for translations. This made them trust me and open up more. Through this method, I was able to obtain different insights into their everyday life, and get information that the women had not mentioned to me during the interviews.

2.1.3 Observational Data

The method of observational data gave me the opportunity to be involved in the women's lives differently. I was able to observe their reactions and the way they handled challenges without being involved and influencing them directly or indirectly. By doing so, new data complemented the other gained results and improved the information that was gained

2.1.4 Field notes and Protocols

Another method that was used was the keeping of field notes and protocols. These allowed me to document the short stories the women mentioned at different times. I was therefore able to get to know the women in a more personal way with their family and children and hear them talk about how their life had changed. These collections of stories and memories played a significant role in the women's lives and were of great value to them.

2.2 The Types of Syrian Narration

One of the forms of narration the Syrian women used was the life history approach. A life history approach is a form in which a person tells about their own individual lifetime experiences (Atkinson et al. 2007, p. 408). The individual's life is the focus of this method, and the subject's personal life experience, stories, and events are central to that approach (Atkinson et al. 2007, 369). However, the approach was criticised for its limitations and problems in focusing on the individual's

subjective representation and own truth, and not necessarily represents the majority of the examined group (Frank et al. 1995, p. 145; Abu Bakar and Abdullah 2008, p. 7; Atkinson et al. 2007, p. 408).What made this method very useful for the research was the information and insights that I was able to gain, completing a detailed picture of the women's individual life and the socialisation process (Abu Bakar and Abdullah 2008, pp. 6–7).

To be able to counter the inevitable influence of the researcher's subjective representation, I did ask a set of standard questions to address subjects the women would not have talked about by themselves. Additionally, I made use of other methods to understand the cultural and social characteristics of a specific group and to gain a less subjective perspective (Abu Bakar and Abdullah 2008, 6-8).

Another form of communication the Syrian women chose, was the standard questioning method: To help them tell their story, they told me to ask them questions.

All interviews were conducted in the women's mother language: Arabic. Almost all of the interviews were recorded. The women talked in Arabic and used some German and English words when they were talking about the accommodation or the different metro lines, the street names, and the kindergarten. I started the interview with a standard question and continued by adapting to the women's narration with semi-structured questions. Depending on the women I talked to, some used the life history approach, and others preferred me asking them the questions.

The interviews were conducted in the way of a friendly conversation in which the interviews took on a more casual mode (Spradley 1979, pp. 461-463). Following the interview, I translated and transcribed the relevant parts for this thesis. The translation itself had the potential to be problematic as was often pointed out (Clifford 1986, pp. 51–52), I was cautious.

2.2.1 Settings

The interviewees always chose the setting for the interview. By letting them choose the place, I wanted to make them feel comfortable talking. The place where the interview took place was either at their place of residence, whether it was in their apartment, or in a refugee shelter, or at places they knew or had been to before, like a café, a shop, a mall or near the area of their language schools.

To locate women to talk to first, I contacted and went to different refugee shelters in Bayreuth and in Berlin. I would then often go to the location and try to talk to the people in charge to get the permission to access the facility and talk to the women. Additionally, I approached women in the different institutions who were helping them. I located some stores employing women from the Middle East and after making sure they came from Syria, I asked them if they would be willing to be involved in the study.

Al-Nadi[1] (figure 1 and 2) was one of the places that I visited and was able to do my research at. Through this place, I was able to find other interview partners by asking the ones that had been interviewed if they knew of any other women I could talk to.

I was trying to look for different perspectives by talking to women who lived in refugee accommodations, and to women who were living in their place. I was able to interview women from very different backgrounds and of all ages, by looking for places where they were meeting and spending their time. I was able to conduct 44 interviews with Syrian women who were living in Berlin, Bayreuth, and Brandenburg. All of them had been living in Germany for at least three months.

[1] Al-Nadi means „The Club" in Arabic and is a place where women can gather and do activities with other women. Al-Nadi in Berlin is a neighbourhood social centre which is a project that started 30 years ago to helps migrant women from the Arabic speaking countries living in Berlin. They offer consulting, support, many activities and language courses for the women. It is administrated by three women one of them being Lina Ganama, a woman originally from Syria who has been working for Al-Nadi for thirty years. Although it was intended as a temporary project, it is extended every year.

Figure 1 - The building where the meetings of Al-Nadi take place

Figure 2 - Al-Nadi information sign

2.2.2 Limitations

The significance of the fieldwork's results is limited by the necessity to interact with the subjects in the field personally. To counteract possible inaccuracies transparency is critical, and I have tried to recount all of the contextual information concerning the fieldwork.

By trying to visit as many accommodations as possible, I was not always permitted to enter the facilities or interview the women living there, because the administration would not always allow it. Some accommodations provided access but did not allow to make recordings or take pictures. In these places, I would exchange phone numbers with the women living there and arrange a meeting somewhere else.

While talking to the women, I tried to avoid using the Arabic word "refugee" (the female form لاجئة). Instead, I explained the studies' subject; writing about the women who had fled from the war and come to Germany. Avoiding this single word made a tremendous difference, expressed more empathy, and I therefore did not risk insulting the women. The word refugee has a negative and discriminating connotation for them. The women knew about peoples' thoughts that they cannot or are not able to manage and handle their lives in this new place on their own, and they did not want to be associated with this stereotype (Olwig and Hastrup 1997, p. 145).

What greatly helped me carry out the interviews with the women, regardless of their age or social status, was the fact that I am not from Syria. The women did therefore not fear discussing Syrian politics. Although the women were far away from the conflict in Syria and the political situation there, they still took political sides. The women would not talk to another Syrian if their political party and beliefs about the war in Syrian were different.

I clearly explained the study to the women. I also made it clear to them that I did not work for any newspaper and did not belong to any public or private institution that could change their present condition, nor have any effect on their stay.

The women were encouraged to tell their stories because I was speaking their language (the same Arabic dialect), and was able to understand their cultural background. They had a great need to share their stories and they wanted the experiences they had to go through to be known.

2.2.3 The Women Involved in this Study

I was able to interview women from very different backgrounds and of all ages. The women came from Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Idlib, Latakia, Al-Hasakah, Deir Ez-zor, Tartus, and Rif Dimashq as can be seen on the map (figure 4).

The women had one thing in common, they had enough wealth in Syria to finance the costly journey into Europe and onto Germany. Some women came by plane, and the vast majority had to pay smugglers to get into Greece or Italy (as shown in figure 3 and 4). Some of the women were already staying in their own place when I interviewed them, but most of them were staying in

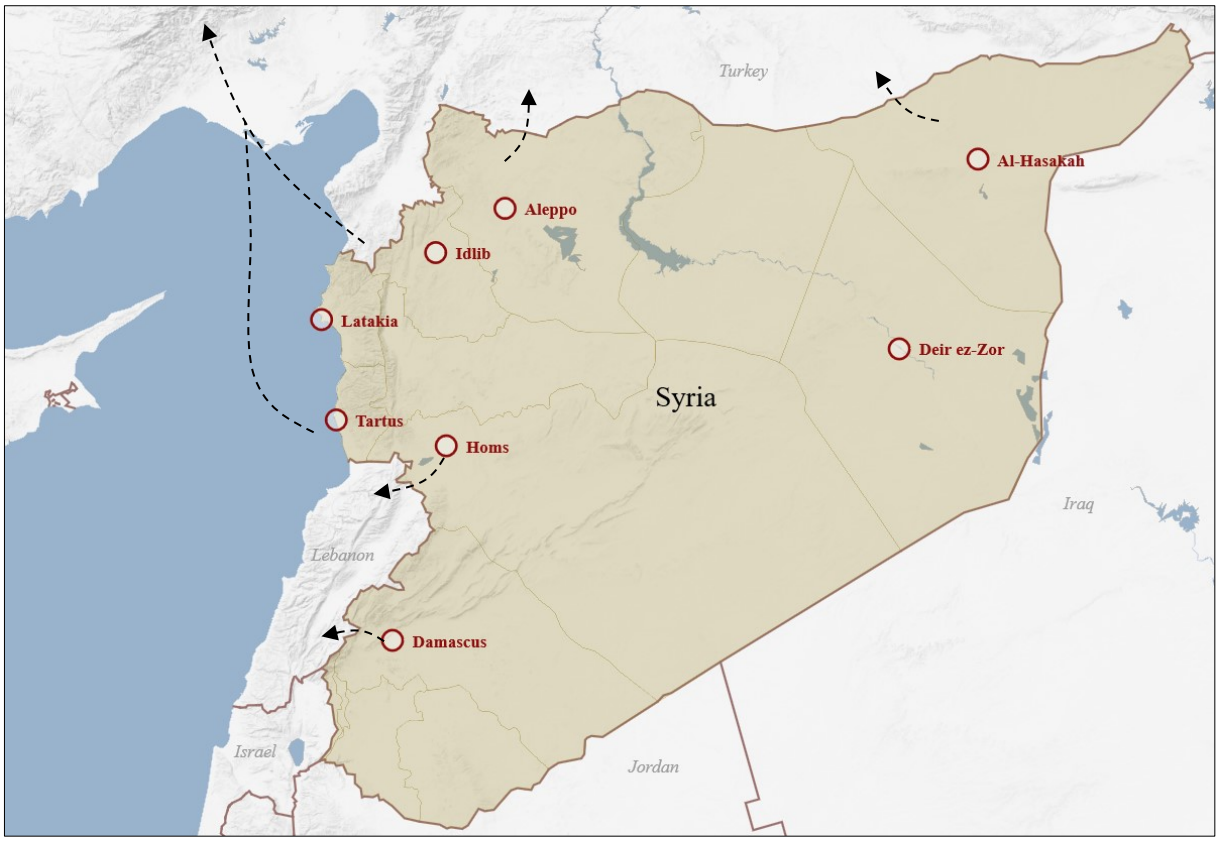


Figure 3 - Map of Syria with the women's city of origin

different refugee shelters in Bayreuth, Berlin, and Brandenburg (figure 4). The women who came by plane were almost all staying in an apartment (figure 4).

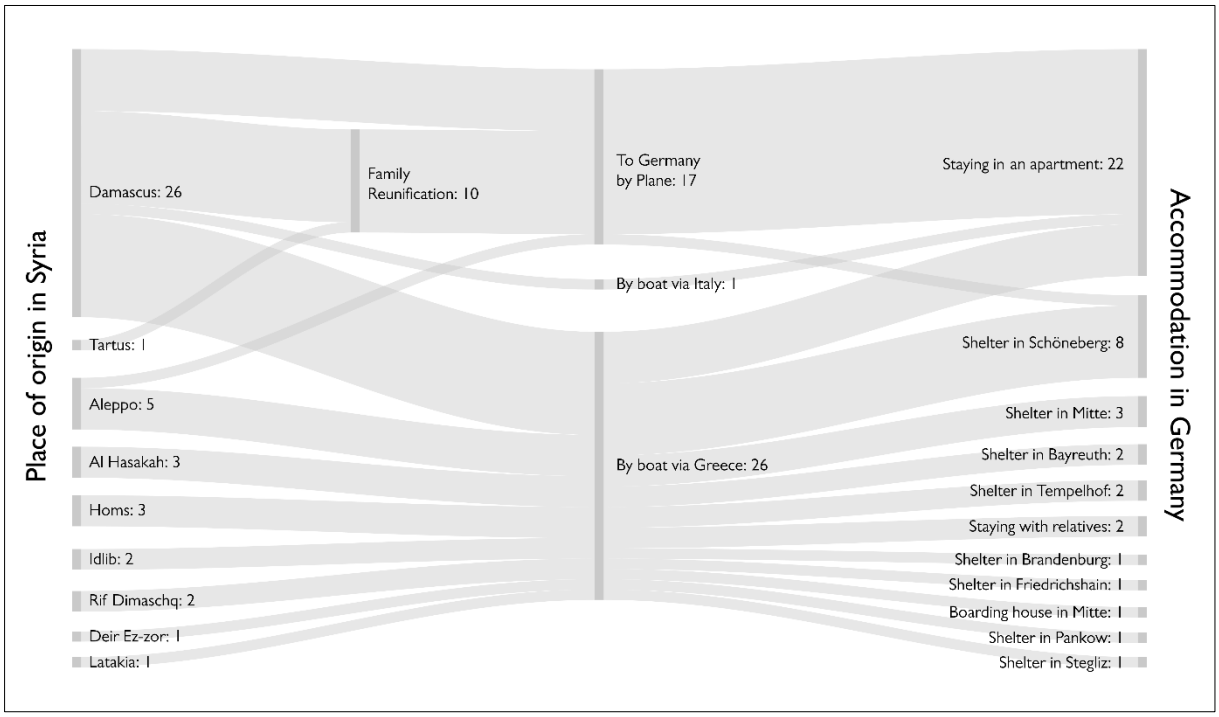


Figure 4 - Count of the place of origin, the escape route and the accommodation at the time of this study

The women's age varied from 18 and 75 years (figure 6). Some were businesswomen who had worked in real estate and other private companies, while others had worked as public employees, such as a school director, bank accountant, hairdressers, seamstress, nurses, a journalist, and as a gymnastic teacher (figure 7). Some were homemakers or students (figure 6). The women had Arabic, Kurdish, and Assyrian backgrounds. The women were either Muslim or Christian.

The interviewed women all spoke the Arabic dialect associated to the region they came from. They had all, through the experiences they had gone through as refugees, developed the same new vocabulary. This included: كتير تعزبنا: we suffered a lot - طلعنا على اليونان بل بلم: we crossed to Greece by a boat - المهرب: the smuggler - طلعنا من الحرب: we came from a war- لاجئ: refugee. All these words have been used by all of the women regardless from which area they came. Remembering their

previous life in Syria they used a different, positive vocabulary such as: كنا مدللين: we were pampered - عشنا احلى عيشه: we lived the best life -we were honoured and respected: كنا معززين مكرمين. The war and the common experiences had influenced the way they spoke.

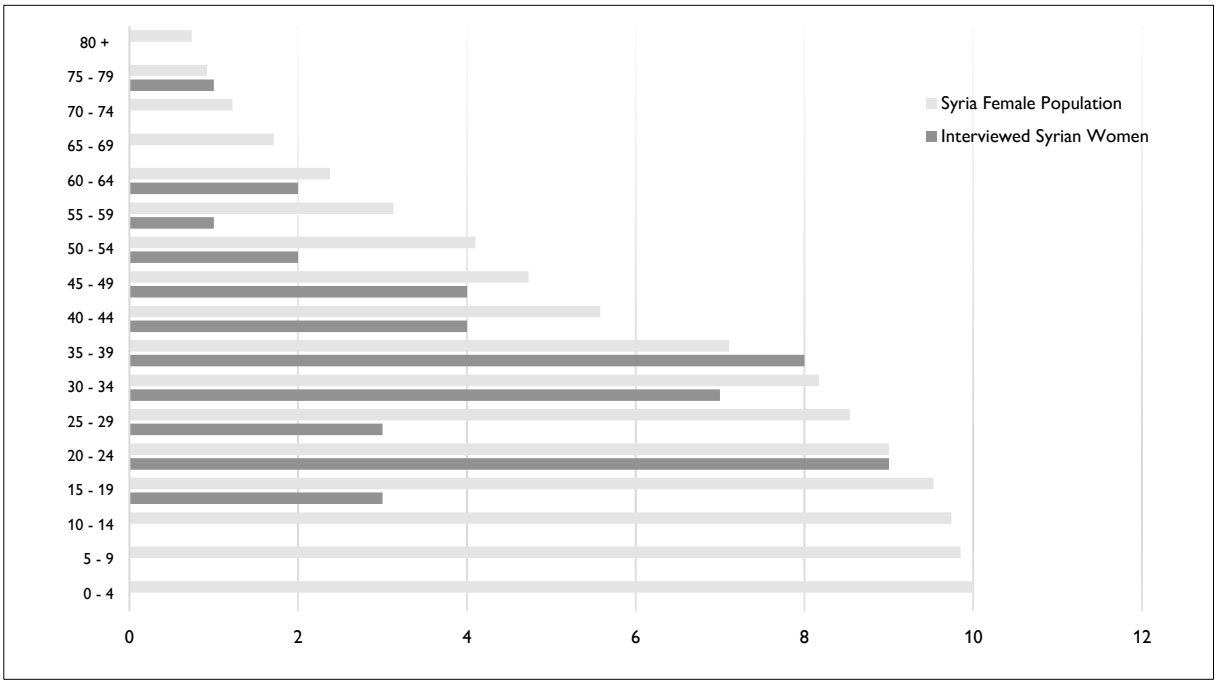


Figure 5 - Age Pyramid of the women involved in this study and the general Syrian female population

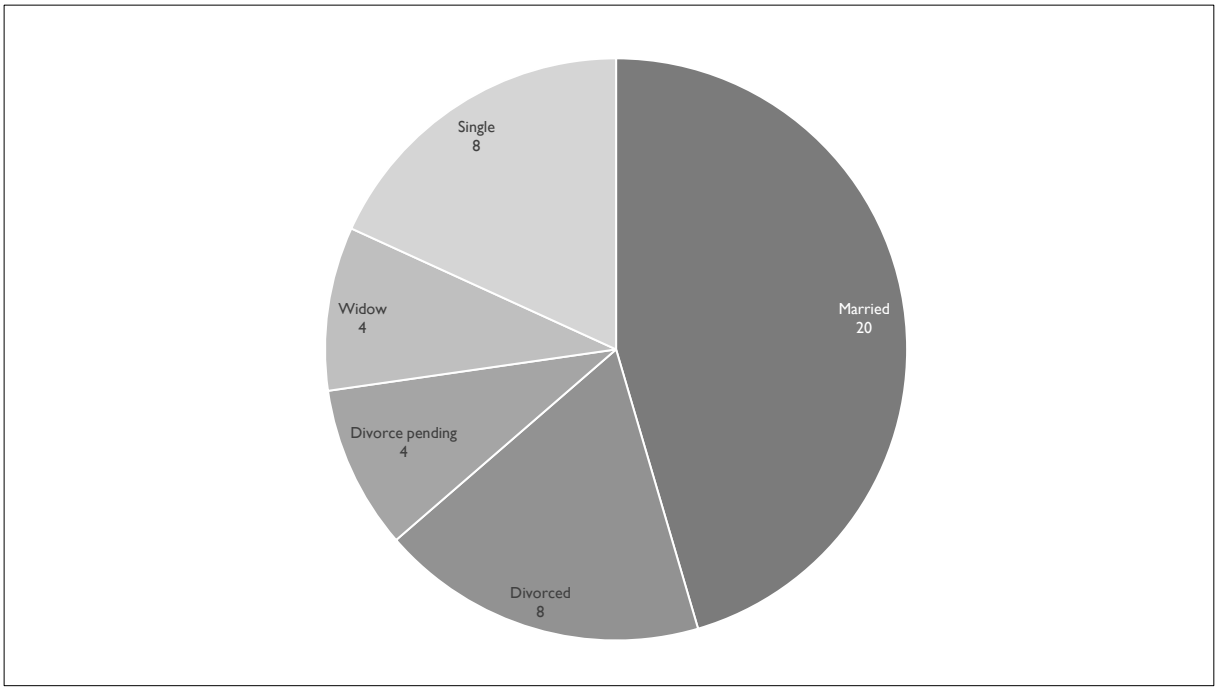


Figure 6 - The marital status of the women involved in this study

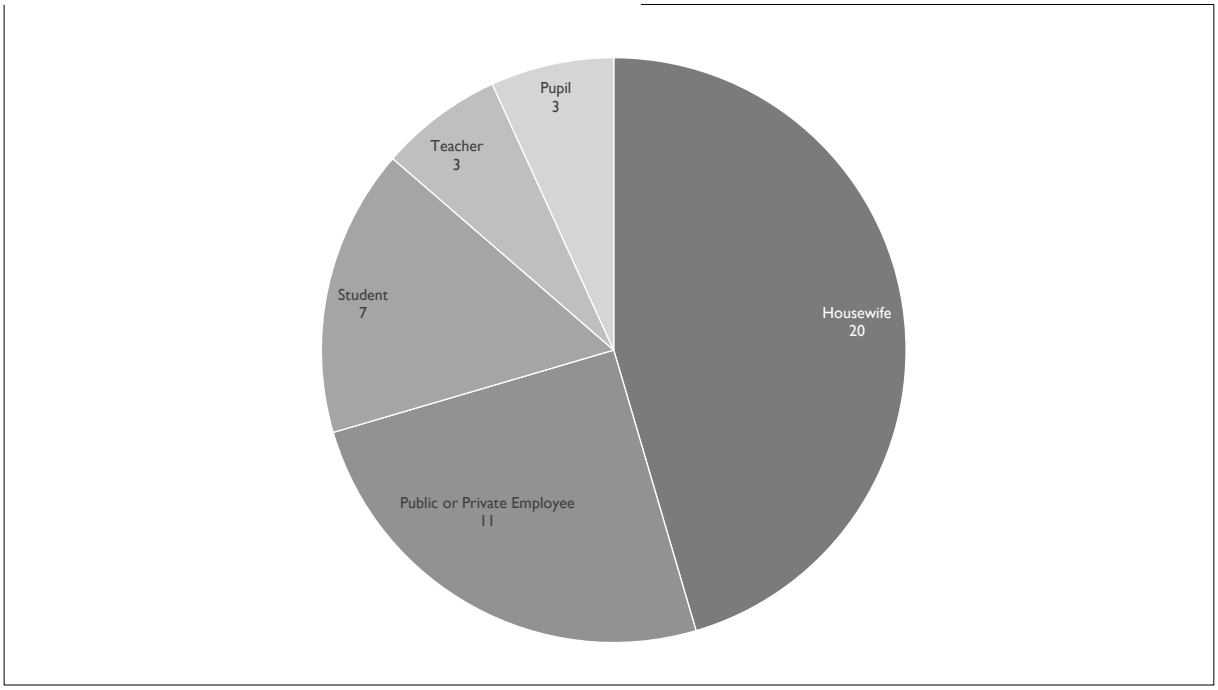


Figure 7 - The occupation of the women prior to the war

3. Perceiving Danger

3.1 The War and the Decision to Leave

The women interviewed had not been able to plan their escape and had to make a quick decision when they decided to leave their home country. They do, therefore, belong to the acute refugee movement that Kunz characterised in his work *The Refugee in Flight: Kinetic Models and Forms of Displacement*. This group of refugees flee when the situation becomes dangerous and it is no longer possible to stay. The decision to leave is taken swiftly, having done no prior planning (Kunz 1973, pp. 132–133).

All of the women I spoke to told me that at the beginning of the war, they had stayed in Syria, hoping that the difficult situation was not going to last. They had made no plans to leave Syria, and only temporarily moved within Syria when the situation required it. However, as time went by, and the situation slowly began to worsen, the women of this study had to leave Syria, each for different reasons.

The women recounted that the war only took over the entire Syrian territory gradually. While in some areas the war was raging, some regions were not yet affected. The decision to leave was only made when the conflicts came dangerously close to the area the women lived at. Some lost members of their family, and so leaving was not an option anymore, but it had become more of a necessity to survive.

Some women had to flee because the men in their family were increasingly at risk of being forcefully recruited into the military. It was clear that if the men were drawn into the military, their lives would be in great danger. Therefore, some families decided to leave or send their men away. Some women and children were left behind in Syria while the situation was becoming increasingly worse. At some point, these women had no choice other than to leave. One of the women recounted: "When the

situation in Syria started to be difficult, my husband and I stayed at home. After a while my husband received a notice that he needed to join the military, which made him leave Syria first."

Another woman told me: "They [the government] demanded that my husband join the military. He ignored them two times, the third time he was asked, we left the country".

Most of the Syrian women I had spoken to told me that their departure had to happen as quickly as possible and that they were unprepared for what came next during their journey towards Germany.

3.1.1 By Plane and by Sea

Most of the women interviewed had crossed the Mediterranean by boat and had endured a long journey across several borders. They had already been confronted with a feeling of otherness. Some women came to Germany by plane. These had to endure fewer difficulties when fleeing their country and arriving in Germany.

3.2 Crossing the Borders

Most women who belonged to the group that had crossed the Mediterranean by boat had to pass through many foreign cities and cross numerous borders on foot before arriving in Germany. They had passed through Turkey, either directly or after having first entered Lebanon, depending on what border crossing was the nearest. Some had travelled across several different Syrian governorates to Turkey. One woman recounted:

> We left from Damascus to Homs and from Homs through different governorates until we reached Turkey.

This woman had fled because her husband was a member of the Syrian opposition and would have been killed had he stayed.

A woman who had travelled by plane told me:

> I took a plane from my area Al Malikiya (in the governorate Al Hasakah) to Damascus and another plane from Damascus to Lebanon and then another plane to Turkey.

In some cases, the women were against the decision to leave Syria. One woman explained to me:

> I didn't want to leave Syria despite the bad situation and the fact that everyone we knew had left. When the husband of my sister insisted that we leave my parents told me to take my daughters and to go with him.

When many people fled the country, others were encouraged to leave. They had no reason to stay anymore as they had lost their employment, and prices had increased dramatically. Additionally, the war had worsened the security situation.

3.2.1 Reaching Turkey and taking the Boat

After having reached Turkey, the pace of the women's continued journey towards Europe was determined by their financial means. While some were able to directly continue their journey by passing through Greece (or in one case Italy), others had to wait several months, and in some cases even years. One woman told me:

> I stayed in Turkey for five months and when the price for the boat ride to Greece went down, I went to a smuggler and I left.

Another woman recounts:

> We stayed in Turkey for a week […] then we travelled to Izmir, found a smuggler and we made a deal with him.

In Turkey, the women had to pay smugglers up to $1,000 per person to reach Greece and $3,500 to reach Italy. The price for the children differed depending on their age. A younger child less than one year would go for free while older children would have to pay half of the adult price. After

having collected the money, the smugglers would arrange boats and make plans for the day of departure. The smugglers also determined how many people would be on the boat, who was going to leave on what day and what personal belongings they could bring onto the boat.

One of the women told me:

> I had a son and I was pregnant at that time. I had brand new baby clothes from Syria […] the smuggler saw the big bag and told me to throw everything away […] Instead he gave me a small bag and told me that I wasn't allowed to take the big bag with me on board.

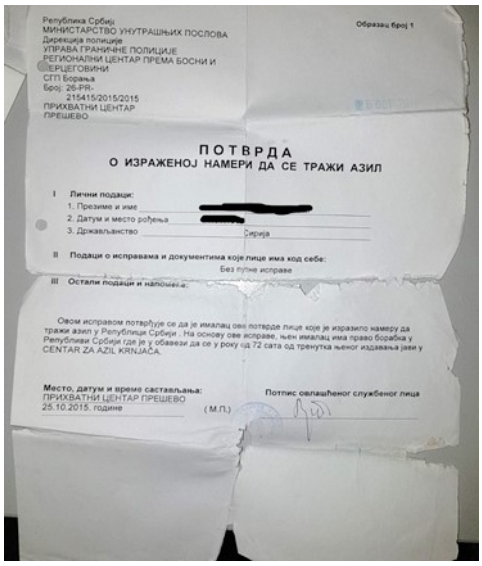
Another woman told me:

> I had a bag in which I put everything my daughters needed. I had a two years old child at that time. When I looked for the bag to change her clothes when we had to swim to the boat, I couldn't find the bag. Other people told me that the smuggler had thrown the bag away.

Reaching a Greek island from the Turkish mainland took the refugees between half an hour and two hours depending on the weather. One woman who travelled through Italy had to endure a 10-day boat ride. She had travelled from Turkey to Italy because her husband had thought that the continued journey would be much safer than passing through Greece and the following route over the Balkans.

The boat ride to Greece lead the women either to Lesbos, to Chios or Samos, as these are the nearest islands to the Turkish shore. Though the boat ride was relatively short, it still was a perilous sea passage, made even more dangerous by the smugglers' mismanagement and greed. Sometimes the boat would sink after a few hundred meters, and those who made it back to shore were often asked to pay again for a new passage. One of the women told me:

> They took us to the boat. We were about 40 people. It was very crowded, and the bags were put in the middle of the boat. I didn't want to see the sea at all, so I put my head on the lap of a woman next to me. One of the smugglers started the boat and the moment it began to move, he jumped out of it and returned to the shore. No one knew how to drive the boat, but we were able to see the island from the distance. When we were about halfway to the island, the boat stopped moving, the engine run out of fuel. We started praying and after a while a Greek rescue ship came and rescued us.



Република Србија
МИНИСТАРСТВО УНУТРАШЊИХ ПОСЛОВА
Дирекција полиције
УПРАВА ГРАНИЧНЕ ПОЛИЦИЈЕ
РЕГИОНАЛНИ ЦЕНТАР ПРЕМА БОСНИ И ХЕРЦЕГОВИНИ
СПТ Борања
Број: 26-PR-215415/2015/2015
ПРИХВАТНИ ЦЕНТАР ПРЕШЕВО

Образац број 1

ПОТВРДА
О ИЗРАЖЕНОЈ НАМЕРИ ДА СЕ ТРАЖИ АЗИЛ

I Лични подаци:
1. Презиме и име [redacted]
2. Датум и место рођења [redacted]
3. Држављанство Сирија

II Подаци о исправама и документима које лице има код себе:
Без пуне исправе

III Остали подаци и напомене:

Овом исправом потврђује се да је ималац ове потврде лице које је изразило намеру да тражи азил у Републици Србији . На основу ове исправе, њен ималац има право боравка у Републици Србији где је у обавези да се у року од 72 сата од тренутка њеног издавања јави у CENTAR ZA AZIL, KRNJAČA.

Место, датум и време састављања:
ПРИХВАТНИ ЦЕНТАР ПРЕШЕВО
25.10.2015. године

Потпис овлашћеног службеног лица

(М.П.)

РЕПУБЛИКА МАКЕДОНИЈА
МИНИСТЕРСТВО ЗА ВНАТРЕШНИ РАБОТИ
ПС за ГГ и ГП „Богородица"
(организациона единица)
бр.28.7-345/132348
25.10.2015 година
Богородица
(место)

ПОТВРДА ЗА ИСКАЖАНА НАМЕРА ЗА ПОДНЕСУВАЊЕ НА БАРАЊЕ ЗА ПРИЗНАВАЊЕ ПРАВО НА АЗИЛ

1. име и презиме [redacted]
2. датум на раѓање [redacted]
3. пол Ж
4. место и држава на раѓање луѓа, Сирија
5. државјанство Сирија
6. Документи кои лицето ги поседува , ПРВКИ
7. Држава од која влегува во Р.Македонија Р.Грција

Лица кои го придружуваат носителот на оваа потврда (малолетни лица)
1. [redacted] родена [redacted] година сродство син

Со овој документ се потврдува дека носителот на истиот е лице кое искажало намера да поднесе барање за признавање право на азил во Република Македонија и истото се упатува во рок од 72 (седумдесет и два) часа од моментот на неговото издавање да поднесе барање за признавање на азил пред овластеното службено лице во просториите на Одделението за азил кои се наоѓаат во Прифатниот центар за барателите на азил.

25.10.2015 година
5:18.06 час
Богородица
(место)

Добрило Богев
овластено службено лице

ОДБИВА/ПРИФАЌА вакцина

Figure 8- The document on the right was issued by the Republic of Macedonia, on the left by the Republic of Serbia

Having arrived in Greece or in Italy the refugees bought a SIM card to contact their family and friends to let them know that they had made it. They would then wait for the required papers from the authorities to continue their journey. Remembering this waiting period, one of the women told me:

> We stood in lines every day and were able to get the necessary papers after three days.

The pictures below show documents one woman had to get to be able to cross the border. Having obtained the required documents, the refugees would split into different groups depending on the destination they were going to. During the entire journey they would stay in their groups to ensure the safety of each other until they reached their destination.

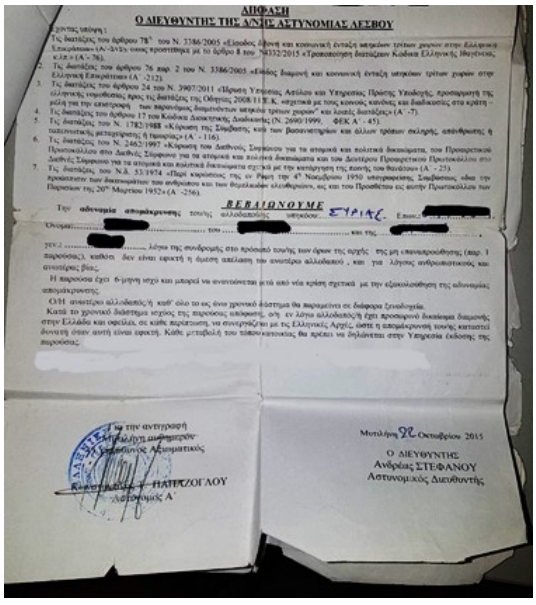
During the trip the refugees exchanged information with those who were ahead of them, those who had already arrived at their destination and with the ones that had stayed in their home country. Making use of different communication channels and keeping up on social media helped the refugees navigate changing conditions.

The long journey on foot was very dangerous and many people got lost or had to be left behind when they could not keep up with the group's pace. The refugees also had to witness some of their group members who were too weak or old die. The women had to keep up with the group's pace and had to cope with the other's mentality and endurance. One woman remembered:

> We went with a group and a smuggler. He lied to us and tricked us. He told us that we would sleep in hotels which didn't happen as we mostly slept in the woods. On one occasion when we travelled through Hungary, we were very thirsty and suffered from the cold. He took all our money and we had to sleep in the woods. After he had taken our money he disappeared.

The women had to bear low temperatures, rainy weather and freezing nights. Addition to these difficult conditions, food was often scarce, adding to the fatigue, the emotional and physical exhaustion. They had to walk, switch between buses and trains to reach their destination.

The refugees were not in a normal state of mind. The children suffered greatly from these conditions. What was needed for this journey was discipline and self-control. Emotions had to be hidden and all the energy had to be focussed on the physical effort, so as to keep on going even when the exhaustion exceeded the mental capacities. In this state of mind, the refugees would move on without thinking too much, and without looking back. If someone could not keep up with the group, it was all too natural in this situation to leave them behind.



ΑΠΟΦΑΣΗ

Ο ΔΙΕΥΘΥΝΤΗΣ ΤΗΣ Δ/ΝΣΗΣ ΑΣΤΥΝΟΜΙΑΣ ΛΕΣΒΟΥ

ΒΕΒΑΙΩΝΟΥΜΕ

Μυτιλήνη 22 Οκτωβρίου 2015

Ο ΔΙΕΥΘΥΝΤΗΣ
Ανδρέας ΣΤΕΦΑΝΟΥ
Αστυνομικός Διευθυντής

Figure 9 - A document from the Lesbos police department in Greece

No matter what happened the refugees stayed focused on their goal to reach safety. The journey was formative for the women, and when they reached their destination, they would already have developed a changed perception of their status and life as refugees. Other people had become part of their journey, some had left. The singular decision to leave had been made part of a greater movement. When the women arrived to Germany, they endured an emotional breakdown. It was then that they were able to let all the pressure of the journey out. Some people cried for days, other slept for three days in a row and other became ill. Processing the experiences would take time and would add to the women's difficult emotional situation, having in some cases lost friends and relatives.

3.2.2 Arriving by Plane

Some of the women had the opportunity to come to Germany by plane. One possible way was to get an invitation by a family member that was already living in Germany. One of the women told me:

> We didn't come by boat and didn't face the difficulties the others did. The brother of my husband lives here, and he was able to bring us, his other brothers and their families to Germany.

Another way for the Syrian refugees to come to Germany was through the federal admission program for Syria[2]. Having obtained a tourist visa, these refugees were able to apply for asylum once they had arrived in Germany. Some opted not apply for asylum directly, hoping that the

[2] Germany enabled through three humanitarian admission programs between 2013-2015 for approximately 20,000 Syrian citizens to enter Germany. These needed to fulfill specific criteria such as having no health problems, being within a family, being in real need for help, being someone who belonged to a religious minority and being a woman whose life was in danger (BMI). Those chosen needed to have a kind of relation to Germany such as being in Germany before, having a relative living there, have studied in Germany or have knowledge of the language (BMI). Those who had someone who was willing to sign a guarantee that their living expenses would be covered in Germany had also been taken in consideration (BMI).

situation in Syria would improve soon enough. Eventually, when they ran out of money and the situation hadn't changed in their home country, these refugees also applied for asylum.

Some of the refugees were able to come to Germany through the family reunification program. This is a lengthy process and only few refugees were able to successfully complete the requirements.

How the Syrian women came to Germany has a significant impact on their initial perception of them being refugees. What differs most, are the feelings of strangeness and otherness. The presence of relatives and friends who have been living in Germany for years can help in the beginning. The strong feeling of being out of place, can, however, not be prevented. When the process is slowed down by avoiding the strenuous journey across Europe, the psychological effects are nevertheless felt by the refugees who are not capable to associate their state of mind to a one-off occurrence.

The women had noticed, that their stay in Germany was much different from previous experiences they had when they visited friends of family as tourists. Being a tourist with a mind-set of being there for a certain time and for a specific reason, puts you in a protected mental state of mind. The feeling of being lost is not experienced in the same way. The tourist knows that he will return after a while to a known life. As a tourist, you don't have to deal with the real life of people, the system or anything else. You can limit your stay to numerous entertainments. What is confusing is when the new life becomes permanent, without any possibilities to escape.

Some women had never left their country, their city or even their village. Leaving the country by itself was a great shock. Suddenly, everything was new to them. How people dressed, how they interacted, how they talked, how men and women were behaving with each other. Astonishment was met with great uncertainty, not knowing how to navigate the new environment and build up a new life.

3.3 Arriving in Germany

When the refugees arrive in Germany, they need to register at a police station or at another state agency. The initial registration took some refugees months. Only then they were able to register at the social welfare department.

The women I talked to designate the social welfare department with the word "social" (pronounced [sɔsjal]). One of the women told me:

> I went to the social every day for a month. It was always crowded. I had two kids with me, and I couldn't get a number. I went there every day. The first time I was able to register was a month after my arrival.

Whether they were young, old, sick or pregnant, all the refugees had to wait in the queue. If they left to go to the bathroom, to eat or to sit down without having someone to hold their place, they would have to start and join the end of the queue.

After the refugees had registered themselves, they were sent to a shelter or to another type of accommodation. Either they already had applied for asylum during their registration process, or they would do so the following days at the federal office for migration and refugees.

The refugees are invited to a hearing and have to wait until they are notified about the decision. In some cases this process took longer, due to the refugees arriving without any papers. Some will be attributed the "refugee" status, others will be granted a status as "humanitarian refugees" and others will be denied the right to stay in Germany. Some are given a permission to stay for one year, others for a duration of up to three years with the possibility to extend the residence permit.

When the Syrian Women arrived in Germany, they felt happy, excited and had high expectations. Over time, their enthusiasm would diminish, when they would be confronted with the bureaucratic reality and the strangeness of the new place and the people living there. They entered into a completely new environment: the people, the system, the language, the culture, everything was new to them.

All the women interviewed felt safe immediately after their arrival. They were happy to have reached safety. The journey had been difficult, and they had to overcome their desire to stay in their home country. Initial hopes, that the situation in Syria wouldn't last hadn't materialized and the women were finally driven to flee the country to a secure place for them and their families.

How the Syrian women came to Germany had an immediate impact on their first impressions and perception of the different culture they encountered. Other factors such as the refugees' age, their travelling experience (or lack thereof), or whether they had relatives already living in Germany facilitated their first months.

While the same reason had driven the interviewed women to Germany, they had very different experiences. Their individual perception will be further presented in the following chapter.

4. The exceptional space

The exceptional space is defined by the differences to what can be considered the norm in a specific environment (Murray 2017, pp. 233- 236). The exceptional space can designate different setting where the normal law is suspended (Agamben 2000, pp. 37- 49). In emergency situations the physical space is often improvised, adapted to the situation to temporarily accommodate people (Murray 2017, pp. 233- 236).

The refugee camp as an exceptional space has been the subject of numerous studies, who have attempted to analyse its dynamics and legal implications (Murray 2017, pp. 233- 236). Scholars have been particularly interested into how these spaces are operated and how the refugees experience this place (Stein 1980; Keller 1975, Murphy 1955; Malkki 1995; Agamben 2000; Turner 2005). The exceptional space is produced by its physical environment and through the people living in it. The space takes on the role to "order, control and protect" the refugees' life (Katz 2018: p. 2; Klinke 2018: p. 282). The experiences the refugees have in the exceptional space are formative and have influence on their further stay in Germany. This chapter will answer the question what it was like for the Syrian women to be in this exceptional space.

Where is my home?

> I was surprised by everything in the beginning, not everything was good [...] It felt as if I was dreaming. I refused to accept it as the reality. I heard a language I had never heard

> before; I see people I had not seen like before, new people! Where was I? Where is my home? Why did this happen? Why did I come here? What have I done to myself?

Huda, a 41-year-old divorced mother of two girls from Yarmouk Camp, was lost. She had worked as a gymnastic teacher in Syria and had been living a life as a single mother with her daughters, her family and friends. Her relationship with her ex-husband was good. Her daughters used to visit him often, and she was able to live a peaceful life. When she arrived in Germany, she was shocked. She had to quickly flee from Syria and had not asked herself what life she would live in Germany.

Huda said that she initially refused to leave Syria and only changed her mind for the well-being of her daughters when most of her family members had left her city. Her parents greatly encouraged her to leave. Leaving her elderly parents and her beloved country behind made her angry and fall out of love with her new home before even reaching it. At the beginning Huda was in a state of disbelief. For her, it was a bad dream from which she couldn't weak up. In this dream she was experiencing being lost for the first time, and everything that she once considered to be normal became strange.

Many Syrian women's stories about their departure from Syria resemble the story that Huda told. However, once they arrive in Germany their experiences differ greatly. An experience that reflects what the philosopher Bollnow wrote about space. For him, it is not at all homogenous, each place having its own significance and its own rules about what is right and what is wrong, how we should act in different places and how we use the space around us (Bollnow 2010, pp. 17–18).

Looking at this new place through their own eyes makes this new space resemble a dream in which everything they see is completely different from what they had previously experienced in their entire life. The new environment looks different, feels different, tastes different and even smells different. The challenges the women were faced with as refugees in this new space had a considerable impact on them and on their families. These complicated experiences had an influence

on their wellbeing. The stress and the pain from leaving a previous life makes any person vulnerable (Huseby-Darvas 1993, p. 7).

The women try to examine everything and anything in their new environment. Sometimes with a childish curiosity, but still fearful and cautious, they explore everything: movements, voices, the language, people, colours, behaviours. Not understanding what is happening around them triggers feelings they had never felt before. Raised within a certain culture, with its corresponding rituals and processes, the way they learned to do things made them feel safe. In this new place they analyse everything through their own cultural glasses (Kessing 1976, p. 139).

4.1 Settling Down: Types of Housing

After the refugees arrive in Germany, they must register at an arrival centre and can subsequently apply for asylum. The length of their stay at the arrival centre can differ. The refugees are intended to stay there from 3 to 6 months, but in some cases, they stay there much longer.

Having come together as a family can make the move to another facility faster depending on the capacity of the facility and on how big the family is (BAMF). The asylum decision is determined through a review of the asylum application and the in-person interview (BAMF). The refugees are distributed in Germany according to a distribution system, the EASY quota system[3] (BAMF). When the Refugees arrive, depending on the capacity and availability, they are distributed to reception centres, collective accommodations, local accommodations or shelters. In some cases, refugees have also been accommodated in hostels and hotels.

The Syrian women used the Germany word "Heim" to designate their accommodation. According to Wendel there are no camps in its literal sense in German (Wendel 2014, p. 247).

[3] Initial Distribution of Asylum-Seekers/ BAMF

In German the word camp is replaced by the word "accommodation" ("Flüchtlingsheime, Gemeinschaftsunterkünfte"), used instead of "camps" to avoid the words' negative connotation (Wendel 2014, p. 7). In every state in Germany the accommodations are under the responsibility of the municipal government, often delegating the accommodations' management to private contractors. The lack of supervision and regulation that this construct creates has been identified as one of the main reasons for the often-occurring problems in the accommodations (Wendel 2014, p. 6).

Within the refugee accommodation, the women had shocking experiences. There were multiple problems in the housing facilities. The living conditions in these accommodations are a recurring theme in the women's conversations. Even after having left, this formative experience still needs processing and is an important part of the women's thoughts and conversations.

While I was doing my fieldwork, I went to several accommodations to look for women to talk to. I wasn't always welcomed and given an entrance permit from the people in charge. In some accommodations I had to talk to the camp's manager or write an email to get a permission to visit. In some cases, my request was approved, and I got an appointment that allowed me to enter the facility. Sometimes I was then able to talk to the women, sometimes not. I was able to enter some accommodations without any conditions, in other I had to follow certain rules and regulations. There were significant differences between the accommodations where the Syrian women lived.

Tempelhof

Tempelhof is a former airport in Berlin where operations were stopped in 2008. At the time of the refugee crises in 2015, part of the airport was transformed to accommodate the great number of refugees. It is the largest refugee shelter in Germany.

Some accommodations are located in repurposed buildings. Some have a very official appeal to them. They were not initially designed as housing facilities, and can thus not be transformed to feel like a home. The enormous buildings are surrounded by big walls or fences and the place is being constantly monitored by security guards. This way of monitoring the place gives the impression

Figure 10 - The Tempelhof airport building

Figure 11 - The passageway to the Tempelhof airport shelter

that these barriers are the line between the inside and the outside world. It is a place where the inside is protected from the outside and the outside is protected from the inside.

Before having the permission to enter, a security man told me that I had to write an email to the contractor in charge of the Tempelhof accommodation named "Tamaja". The person I was communicating with asked me several questions about the reason for my visit and asked for written proof. I was then given an appointment the day the social worker was on duty.

The company "Tamaja" is in charge of two shelters in Berlin. One is located in the former Tempelhof airport building in the Tempelhof district and the other is in an event hall in Spandau. According to their website, they support, consult and provide security to people in need such as refugees (Tamaja). On their homepages they also claim that the Tempelhof shelter has the capacity to host about 1.550 persons and the event hall in Spandau can house up to 620 persons (Tamaja).

In Tempelhof, the refugees weren't staying in the airport's main building, they were staying in one of the Hangars (Hangar Nr. 6, Tempelhofer Damm 45). When the Airport was still is use, these Hangars were used as a place to fix the aircrafts and store spare parts.

The entire process of requesting access made it feel like I was requesting access to a high-security prison. I had to have an appointment and leave at a specific time. Before entering I had to go through security, and had my belongings checked. For the duration of my visit I had to leave my ID at the entry and carry a visitor ID. I had the permission to visit the place for an hour and I wasn't allowed to take pictures, record videos or take any audio recordings. I was only able to make the first contact and ask the women if they agreed to exchange phone numbers and meet elsewhere. To make sure that I wasn't breaking the rules, I was escorted by a social worker the entire duration of my visit.

After the shelter's security checkpoint, one enters into the main living area. The living situation was very different from what I had seen before. Security guards are constantly monitoring the living quarters, showing that they are present. The large hall consists of thin built rooms without roofs. Several people share a room separated only by curtains. The space is very loud and there are voices all around. The refugees are sitting in groups and children are running everywhere. As a stranger, walking through the hall, I was the centre of attention and I felt the tension.

The complete lack of privacy and tight living space easily create conflicts that can break out at any time. As Fanning wrote, these kinds of difficult situation, that the refugees live through in shelters, puts them under constant stress and affects their physical and mental health (Fanning 2007, p. 114).

During this visit I was able to experience the place from the inside and exchange numbers with two women living there. During the following weeks, I was able to make an appointment with the two women and meet them in the shelter's "THF" café, located in the hangar Nr.1. The access to this place is not restricted. The place was chosen by the women as a meeting point, because they didn't know the city at that time and were afraid to get lost. Later on, I was able to interview other

women who had been sent to the Tempelhof shelter, but were able to stay with relatives or friends and only went to the shelter to get their official letters.

Being the first place most of the women came to when they had arrived in Germany, their experiences within the shelter greatly impacted their mental health. Most of the women arrived with uncertainty, traumatized from what they had seen and sad to have left their family members and friends behind. When arriving to the unknown the women didn't know what to expect. The only certainty they had, was that their situation could only become better after what they had gone through.

Air supported structure

One of the shelters that I was able to visit was a structure supported by air. The air supported structure is normally used as a sport hall or as recreation facility. When I went there the first time, the security guard gave me a card and told me to write to the written address to ask for permission. Having presented my research to the people in charge, they agreed to let me into the shelter. The day I got the permission to visit, a social worker showed me around. The main room is very large and noisy. Children are screaming, people are talking and shouting. While the interior had been nicely designed and was made to be welcoming, it still didn't feel comfortable as a home. The rooms had thin walls, no roof, and were only separated from the other areas by curtains. Inside the rooms there were six double bunk beds. In this shelter I was able to talk to two women. When we were talking, the noisy background was making the women very uncomfortable. In this shelter, it was not possible for the refugees to cook. Food was therefore provided.

Sport Hall

One of the shelters in Berlin had been set up in a sport hall. This shelter was comparably worse than the others presented in this study. The conditions were very bad. In the big hall each individual or family had a designated spot. There they had set up self-made tents around their camping beds.

This place was also very noisy. Everything was dirty and the room was lacking fresh air.

I introduced myself to a security guard and to a social worker and was granted the permission to enter the place. The social worker was careful to first ask the women I wanted to talk to, if they agreed. In this place the food was provided, and it was not possible for the refugees to cook.

Other shelters

In other shelters the buildings were designed as dormitories with a kitchen on each floor where the refugees could cook their own food. The rooms and the bathrooms were shared, the rooms separated by doors. This ability to close the door made a significant difference to the refugees' wellbeing. Even in accommodations where a room is shared by a number of people, having a door gives the inhabitants the feeling of being protected and of having one's own place.

In some rooms there were six and in others four double bunk beds. If a family consists of four or six people, then they will get the room for themselves. Else the family will be separated into two gendered sections. An exception is made for children under the age of 12. They are allowed to stay with their mothers. This sharing situation with other strangers in the room is very difficult and challenging for the Syrian women. This situation also affects the families' life. These measures, that are used to control and hold order inside the facilities, can hardly be reconciled with the inhabitants' culture of living together as a family. The gendered separation does not provide a sufficient method to avoid the occurrence of problems, and still presents a challenge to the women's cultural habits, as they are only intended to have limited contact with people outside of their own family.

During the refugee crises hostels, hotels and pensions were also used to host refugees due to the great numbers of refugees that arrived every day at that time.

Although the vast majority of the refugees that reached Germany stayed in refugee's shelters or in other lodging provided by the state, other refugees didn't. Some had the financial means to stay in a Hotel or rent a place on their own. They had thought that the situation in Syrian would only last

for a few months, and that they would be able to return soon. Only when they ran out of money, they resorted to the solutions provided by the state for refugees. Others stayed with relatives or friends, until they were able to find an apartment.

4.2 Being in the Refugee Shelter

4.2.1 Being imprisoned

Detained

Amina is a 42-year-old woman originally from a rural area in Aleppo, where she lived her entire life on her own land taking care of the home and her children. She had never felt herself imprisoned until she fled to Germany. She now lived in the Tempelhof shelter. She said:

> I don't like it here […] I feel as if I am being detained, as if I am being held in a prison. I'm sitting here the entire time without doing anything […] I don't even go out because I'm afraid to get lost […] imagine, I have two sons that are here in Germany, but each one of them is in a different city.

An airport is a place where you go to at a certain time for a certain purpose. You are there only for a limited period of time. It is a place where you know that after having arrived from your destination you will leave, but never stay in or live in. The place is not designed to be lived in. Being in an airport which is a non-place, means that people stay there but don't really engage with the place because they lack the ability to create a personal history, identity and relations (AUGÉ 1994, p. 103). Without having the basics that makes it a place to live in, even transforming it won't help. The way the living quarters were arranged for the refugees gives them the feeling of being a prisoner. The security measures and procedures including the guards, the controlled entrance area, the ID card, the security check, the visiting hours, the beds in each room, the absence of doors,

the amount of people present at any time; all of this made the women feel alienated, abandoned and lost.

The daily rhythm at the shelter reinforces the feeling of being trapped. The noise starts at 5 a.m. caused by the security employees that have the permission to enter any room at any time. There are certain times for meals and the refugees are not allowed to cook their own food. There is only one place where they can charge their phones and when they do so, they must stay there and keep an eye on it to avoid getting it stolen. All these factors add to the inability to settle down, and can gradually impact the women's wellbeing.

Although the women are not prisoners in the proper meaning of the word, they still don't have the feeling to be free. Because of all the rules within and outside of the shelter, the women feel a great constrain. Amina told me:

> […] although they say we can go visit another city I am not able to go alone, and my sons are afraid because they are not sure if they are allowed. Everyday a new law, every day.

The Continuous changing of the asylum laws made it very confusing for her to understand what she was allowed to do. After 2015 several changes were made to the law. For example, the refugees could not anymore move freely to any city within Germany. The refugees had to stay in the city where they applied for asylum or to which they had been distributed[4] (§ 12a AufenthG). The reasoning behind this law was to keep the refugees from all moving to certain cities, where they would have, in their eyes, the best opportunities.

Amina isn't sure about what is allowed and what is not. This situation frightens her, and she does not dare to ask her sons to visit her. At her age, being in a situation in which even seeing her sons could be a problem, greatly complicates her life. This "in between" is a result of two factors: the

[4] Residence Regulation: § 12a Wohnsitzregelung, Aufenthaltsgesetz (AufenthG). Accordingly, the refugees need to stay in place for three years after getting their asylum papers or maybe longer, depending on the individual's cases. There are exceptions: getting a job in another city or having a family living in another city.

physical place she was at this moment and the mental status in which she has become a prisoner of her own thoughts.

During the refugee Crisis in 2015 when many refugees arrived in Germany and came specifically to Berlin, the accommodation possibilities soon reached their limits and it was not possible to house any more refugees. Other facilities such as hostels and hotels had to be used. What had been planned to be a temporary solution, became in some cases a permanent solution.

The treatment in the Camp

> The first shock I had was the way they treated us in the Camp. I didn't expect this kind of treatment. It was all programmed, like a computer. I don't know if that is the way they organize things here. I don't know […] you wake up at a certain time and go to sleep at a certain time and food is served at certain hours. At the Camp entrance you are always controlled, checked and have to show the card. I don't know, if it's for security reasons. I mean, we stayed there for 7 months and they still didn't know us and couldn't remember us! I mean, 7 months and the security still doesn't know who we are?

Rema is a 45-year-old mother from Homs. She has three children. She worked as a school director in Homs and had a very organized and calm life. She had her first shock when she arrived in Germany and experienced the accommodation she was staying in with her family.

She was still wondering whether the way she was treated was how things there were handled generally or whether is was specific to the shelter she had been assigned to. They were forced to wake up and take meals at certain times. The constant cadence of timed events was new to her and the reoccurring security check also quickly began to annoy her, especially after they had been staying at the same shelter for several months. This gave her and her family the feeling of being imprisoned, without having the freedom of deciding when to wake up and when to go to sleep. She told me, that in the morning they forced them to wake up and at night they forced them to go to sleep by turning the light off. She had come to the conclusion, that being a refugee was like being a prisoner without having committed a crime.

Visiting hours were limited and the refugees were controlled when they entered the facilities and when they would leave the place. Not only Rema felt this way about the shelter, it was a feeling that several other women who lived in a camp shared.

The collective accommodation's structure and design makes the people living there feel unwanted and worthless. The women living there, and their visitors had the feeling of being imprisoned. These feelings make the women feel their status as refugees. As the anthropologist Malkki describes it in her book purity and exile, the refugee status is thus not merely a legal one but a social one as well (Malkki 1996, pp. 228-229). The people in these accommodations are treated as refugees and thus are put into a specific social category, without them having any means to influence on how they are being perceived. These people are not only refugees by law, but also in the eyes of the society they live in.

The shelter's food

Food is not only necessary for survival; it also translates the people's culture and identity. The Syrian culinary culture is known for its colourful variety, and for the love to enjoy the food with others (Phillips and Gritzner 2010, pp. 49-53). Food is a very important part of their everyday lifeworld. Each region in Syria has its own signature dish, well-known to be best prepared (Phillips and Gritzner 2010, pp. 49–53). The German diet greatly differs from the Syrian one, making it difficult for the Syrian refugees to adapt to the food served in the shelters.

In some accommodations the meals are included. They are responsible for feeding the refugees three meals a day. The refugees are therefore given less money, as the contractor is payed more for the refugees' meals. This led to a difficult situation for the refugees, who were not used to the food they were being served. In some accommodations, if the refugees refused to eat the food, they would be served the same food the next day. This greatly humiliated them and made them feel worthless.

The refugees would get food that they didn't want to eat. Several women and their families stopped eating in these accommodations and got out to buy food even though they were not able to afford theses expenses.

One woman, Maria remembered the food she was being served in the Tempelhof shelter:

> They take 160 euros per month from our money for food but the food that they provide is bad.

Maria is a 24-year-old woman from Ghouta who had been studying Arabic literature in Syria. When the situation became dangerous because of the war, her father told her to leave Syria with her older brother, two younger brothers, her aunt and the husband of her aunt. The situation was difficult, and she had to leave with her two younger brothers, her aunt and her aunts' husband without her older brother.

They had first planned to go to Switzerland, but the moment they arrived her aunt's husband changed his mind and everyday he was suggesting going to another country. Maria decided to go to Germany because her uncle was already there. She left her aunt and her aunt husband, and went to Germany with her two brothers. When she arrived, she was assigned to the Tempelhof shelter in Berlin.

When Maria said: "the food that they provide is bad" she explained to me that this kind of food was new to them. She was not judging the foods quality. She simply didn't know these dishes.

I noticed early on that the women often mentioned the food as an issue. Even the women who had been put into hotels, told me that they didn't like the food that they were being served. They didn't like being served food, without having the option to prepare it themselves. It had been an important part of their lives, a part that they could control, and now this possibility had been taken from them.

In other collective accommodations there were either large kitchens for the entire building or one on every floor of the accommodation where refugees were able to cook their own food. In these

accommodations the refugees were given money to cover the expenses of their alimentation. This option was much more appreciated by the refugees. They were able to buy what they wanted and spend the money the way it suited them.

The women had the feeling that they were able to preserves their identity by preparing their own food. They were thus able to maintain an important part of their everyday routines (Valsiner 2013, pp. 735-742).

In these accommodations the food is not a problem. However, sharing the kitchen with other people can be complicated and lead to conflicts. The women living in these accommodations all wanted to use the kitchen at the same time. When the women were cooking, the atmosphere would get tense. They would often not talk to each other, and some refused to clean the dishes they had used. Even though the rules had been translated into multiple languages, communication was difficult. Often the cooking sessions were chaotic.

Privacy

One woman, Shiren, talked to me about her accommodation. She had great difficulties sharing everything with strangers:

> It is a big change for us, because we are not used to it.

Shiren's greatest concern was the lack of privacy. A problem shared by several women that were staying in refugee shelters. This situation has a great impact on the women living in these accomodations. In some cases, the women had to share their living space with other women with whom they could not communicate because they spoke different languages. In other cases, the entire family of 5 or 6 shared the same room. This meant that problems and conflicts were numerous because of the lack of private space. Being a family didn't make it easier.

The women I talked to had always greatly valued their privacy. It had protected them from the outside world, ruled by the society and the Islamic tradition. Regardless of the religion, living in a

country with an Islamic culture meant living in a part open, part conservative society. Here, some spaces are reserved for women, and men who don't belong to the family are not allowed within these spaces.

The Islamic religion, supported by the cultural segregation, made the women and the women's privacy a mysterious and unknown space for the people from the outside. Women have their own space, shared only with their families. The situation in the refugee shelter does not allow such privacy, and the women are lost between what they knew and the new situation they have to face.

In the Syrian household, the woman must be given some privacy. The family and the society protect this space. The women learn that their homes are the places to meet others and to enjoy their time with their sisters, female friends and relatives without the interference of any men, whether they are relatives or not (Bowen and Early 2002, pp. 291-293). Having lost this possibilities, made it difficult for the women to adapt to their new life in Germany.

The women who were wearing a headscarf were particularly affected. They were not used to share with people outside their family. These women had learned since their childhood, that they should avoid any contact with strangers. Because these rules were reliable, the women knew the boundaries of their freedom, and were able to act accordingly. They had now lost, what they had considered their greatest freedom.

Faced with the situation in the shelters, the women had to adapt and were not able to continue their life within the social boundaries they had known. This often led to conflicts and profoundly confused the women.

4.2.2 Bathroom Stories

A Man in the women's bathroom

> I had a problem here in the camp 3 days ago. You know we are Arabs and I wear a hijab. There is a women's bathroom and a men's bathroom. I was in the bathroom with my daughter and I wanted her to take a bath and then take a shower myself. Suddenly a man came into the bathroom. When I screamed at him: "What are you doing?" He answered: we don`t have warm water in the men's shower. He wanted to take a shower here. When I said: "This is not a mixed bathroom", he ignored me and went in and started to take a shower. I took my daughter and left to the camp's office and told them what had happened. They then hang a paper on which they had written "Men are not allowed to go to the women's bathroom". But the next day the guys removed it and threw it away.

For Jory a 30-year-old mother of a 2-year-old girl from the city Douma, located in the north-east of Damascus, the hygiene in the bathroom facilities had been a problem since the beginning. However, for fear of repercussions, she didn't want to make a problem out of it. What definitively crossed the boundaries for her, was a situation in which she didn't feel safe anymore going to the bathroom. She thought that it was strange that rules which usually apply everywhere were infringed upon in these accommodations and that the rules were not consequently enforced by the people in charge of the accommodation.

For Jory another problem was the location of her shelter. Located in Brandenburg, she was only able to reach the nearest city by bus. During the week the bus would come once every hour, and on the weekends once in two hours. For everything she needed she had to travel to Berlin, being the nearest city. For this she had to take the bus and the metro. She would make this long trip to go to the doctor or to buy groceries. Travelling on a tight schedule with her child was very stressful for her, the entire day had to be planned and every incident at the shelter was weighting on her.

She had tried to find a place in Berlin to stay at, this was however denied to her, as she was restricted to move solely within the state of Brandenburg.

The W.C.

> I have a problem with the bathroom and the kitchen. I have to go up 2 floors. Please excuse what I am about to say, but at night I pee in a small metal container because I can't get up the stairs at night, it's too far for me.

Amani is a 62-year-old woman that has great difficulties with the bathroom being that far away from her room. In Syria Amani led a good life, she had her own house and her own car and didn't have to worry about anything.

She told me that during her stay in the accommodation she tried to change the room several times, but it never worked. She asked if she could have a room on the same floor where the bathrooms are, but the shelter's administration refused. The reason they gave her was that there were no free rooms. She then asked to be moved to another accommodation, but this request was also denied as her reasons were dismissed, not being important enough.

The women had the feeling that they were being ignored and neglected by the people in charge. This frustrated them, because their needs were not being taken seriously. This is one of the main reasons for the constant conflicts between the refugees and the people in charge. The living situation had a great impact on the refugees. They thought that they were not treated like humans.

One woman explained:

> I have a problem at the camp with the bathrooms and the hygiene. I asked the people in charge at the camp and at the "Jobcenter" to move me somewhere else, but they refused. Even after I found out that mice are eating my clothes and I complained about that, they just gave me a mouse trap! I got sick and had a food poisoning and they took me to the hospital, despite what hade happened to me, nothing changed […].

Because she was constantly failing, trying to change her situation, she had concluded, that because she was a refugee and alone in Germany, she was treated this way.

> […] When I was in the hospital, I was alone. I didn't even have someone to hold my hand.

Another story she recounted happened during her stay at a hospital. For the first time, she had no one accompanying her. She realized how lonely she was, as an old woman without family, away from her home country. Such a situation would never have occurred to her if she would have stayed in Syria. In Syria she would have had her mother, her daughters and friends by her side.

After she had returned to the shelter, she one day saw the mice with her own eyes and was so scared that she screamed. She was making so much noise, that some of the other inhabitants came rushing to the room and killed the mice. She then took a picture of the mice and went to the jobcentre, showed them the picture and explained the situation. They promised to do something about it. When the person in charge of the facility she was staying at heard what she did, she got very angry at Amani. She had damaged the management's reputation at the jobcentre. Following what Amani had done, the shelter took the decision to kick Amani out of the accommodation and gave her two weeks to leave.

Amani was afraid that she would end up on the streets. Where was she supposed to go? She knew nobody in Berlin and had no one to ask for help. Advised by other people in the shelter she went to the jobcentre to tell them what had happened. They solved the problem by sending her to another accommodation, one that was not only sheltering refugees but also homeless people.

Amani was able to solve her problem and change her situation. There were however other refugees who were still suffering from the situation in their accommodation and that didn't have the possibility to change their situation, nor did they have the courage to do so, out of fear of consequences.

Discrimination

> There is a lot of discrimination here. They prefer the Afghanis. For example, when we complained about something they did [the Afghanis], hurting our children, they just told them to stop without taking it seriously.

Noor is a 40-year-old mother of two from Naher Eshe, a district in Damascus. She felt humiliated and depressed in the refugee shelter. She had left Syria because of her sons. She couldn't bear the sight of them growing up in the middle of a civil war. They had started to play war with each other, shooting at each other with wooden sticks. When Noor saw that, she was shocked and didn't want her kids to become what she feared. After that she left with her husband, one of his relatives and the two children.

When Noor arrived in Germany, she was allocated to the air supported accommodation in Berlin. Now, the fear of the war had been replaced by another kind of existential fear. She thought that the accommodation administration didn't solve the daily problems they were facing and preferred some people over others. The hygiene and the sanitary situation were a problem for her two sons who had to go to the doctor because of numerous infections. The lack of hygiene made her worry about her sons' health. Even the doctor couldn't diagnose what kind of a skin rash they had at the time.

The hygiene in the accommodations is one of the principal subjects that the women discussed with me. They mentioned it because they and their children had become sick. The children easily got infections or an allergic reaction and had to go to the doctor. The women had to clean the entire bathroom, every time their children wanted to use it. This was difficult to do, as the bathrooms were frequently used by different people.

Another problem Noor had, was that she was not able to find a school for her two kids. Because of this, her kids spend time with other groups in the accommodation. These were older than her kids and had been causing trouble in the shelter. These groups were also known to be drinking alcohol and using drugs. This was Noor's worst nightmare, and she felt helpless watching her kids all the time and trying to keep them out of trouble. She told me, that if she had known how the situation would be in Germany, she would never have left Syria.

Some other women I talked to had the same issue in the shelter regarding their children getting in trouble. They want to play and get to know other children. When other kids in the shelter are causing problems, the women start to worry about their own kids and how they are being influenced. They therefore tried to control their children as much as they could.

The bathrooms being far away

One woman named Joel also had a problem with the bathrooms. These were located far away from her room in the accommodation. This was especially problematic at night, as the women needed to go to the second floor or even farther to go to the bathrooms. Sometimes they needed to go several times in one night to take their children to the bathroom. This was very exhausting for the women who had to wear a scarf, as they needed to put it on when they left their room.

4.2.3 Feeling Helpless

In the balloon

Abeer is a 30-year-old mother with a son who comes from the Yarmouk Camp. She was working in a bank in Syria and when the situation became dangerous, she left with her son. She lived together with her son in an air-supported structure in Berlin. This air-supported structure was normally designed to host sport events, not to be a place for people to live in, especially not for a long period of time.

> I don't like it here, staying in this balloon puts me in a bad mood. There is no feeling of settling down, your home feels like a sports hall […].

The system at this shelter was the same as in the Tempelhof shelter regarding security and the time the meals were served. However, the way it was designed, and the colourful walls and furniture made it look much friendlier than the Tempelhof shelter.

> […] Here you feel as if you are frozen in time. It is like being a stone and they move us to their liking.

She felt lost, being away from her family. It was for her, as if she had been "frozen" into unproductivity. This obliged her to be a much different person than the one she had been in Syria, where she was working in a Bank.

She felt that the system was controlling everything in Germany and that she wasn't able to do much about it because she didn't understand it. Being in such an in-between status has been also observed by the social and cultural anthropologist Bousquet in her study about Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong Camps (Bousquet 1987, pp. 34–53).

Abeer should have left the shelter at an earlier date, she had received a notice that she was going to be relocated. However, even though they told her so, she was still not moving. Every time she went to the jobcentre to ask when she would be able to change the shelter, they told her that there was no available place in another accommodation and that she had to wait.

Endless staying

Rula had just turned 18. Because of the situation in Syria she had not been able to go to school anymore and had married a man although she was still 17 at that time. She had no problem being married at a young age, because she was in love. She left with her husband to Germany.

She told me:

> When we first came, they brought us here [in the shelter]. Once we had arrived, they told us that we will stay put for 2 or 3 months at most. Look at me now! I have been here for 10 months. I am in a place and my husband is in another. We are only able to meet during mealtime in the eating room.

She felt very lonely, and it was difficult for her to stay away from her husband. She felt as if her freedom had been taken from her. Even though her husband was staying in the same shelter, she

could only meet him for short periods of time. She knew nobody else in Germany, and missed her Family.

> We are sitting here the entire time without doing anything. When I came, I didn't have any identification papers, so they Identified me as "without a country" (بلا وطن). This means that I don't have, and won't have, access to courses for migrants or language courses like the others here until I receive my asylum papers.

When Rula came to Germany, she didn't have any identification document with her. Until the authorities confirm her identity, she wouldn't be granted any of the services that other refugees become. Until then, she was considered stateless.

During the refugee crises some refugees had the idea to pretend to be from Syria, because they thought that this would give them better chances in the asylum process (BAMF, p. 16). At that time, being Syrian became an advantage because asylum was given to them more easily due to the situation in Syria. Other countries of origin were not considered with such priority, even if objectively speaking the situation in their home country didn't differ much (Holmes and Castaneda 2016, pp. 17–19). Because the German authorities uncovered cases in which people pretended to be Syrian, they started to look very carefully into each case, slowing down the entire process (BAMF, pp. 16–18).

Rula felt disadvantaged. Other Syrians in the shelter had more opportunities to better their situation than she had. This condition of being not identified by the authorities gave her the feeling of being in an "in-between" situation. Neither was she able to fit into her old life, nor into her new life. Sitting the entire day without doing anything was especially frustrating for her since she had only known the school-life when she had been in Syria.

Getting helped

> Here in the Camp some are being helped, and some are ignored! Why? The people from the church come to the camp every two weeks on Mondays and ask everyone if they need any help. However, the people from the camp help some and others they don't! Why? I mean, I also have a special condition. I'm pregnant [...] They took half our money because

> they feed us, but I don't eat or drink from there I have to pay everything from my own pocket.

Faten is a 37-year-old mother who has three children from Damascus. Faten left Syria to make a better life for herself and her children. To do so, she borrowed money from people in Syria, and hasn't yet been able to pay them back, because she doesn't have the money. In the accommodation, she feels humiliated and discriminated. She regrets her decision to leave Syria and to come to Germany. She has the feeling that the people in charge of the camp selectively help some and ignore others. Because she lives in an accommodation that serves meals, most of the money allocated to each refugee goes to the accommodation and not much is left to cover other expenses.

Faten was very upset, cried and said that after reaching Germany she was confronted with so many problems she couldn't handle.

Faten had lost her husband in Syria in 2011 and was given state welfare benefits as a widow. Since she had come to Germany, she was not able to cover her family's expenses anymore. Everything in Germany seemed expensive to her, and she wasn't able to afford what she had been able to buy in Syria.

She remarried a year ago and became pregnant. Her husband lived in a camp in Stuttgart as she lived in Berlin with her other children. I asked her what she was going to do now, and she answered:

> I don't know. I need help, but nobody wants to help.

Sexual harassment

One woman, Lames told me about a serious issue that she had in the shelter. She remembered:

> What shocked me the most was that […] those [the security guards] who are supposed to make sure we are safe and protect us if there are any problems or any fight, are the ones who are sexually harassing the girls here. Especially those who are younger. I'm not that young they won't try it with me […] However, when I go in or out of the camp the security guards say things to me I didn't like, just to harass me.

Lames had seen the security guards harassing the women in the accommodation she was staying at. This situation put the women in a precarious situation, as the security guards were intended to protect the people inside. When the protector becomes the predator, the women can't go anywhere for help. Lames said that the guards where mostly Arabs who have been living in Germany for a long time. She told me that although they know the Syrian society, they didn't refrain from such shameless acts. She told me that this would not have happened in Arabic countries in such an open way. She said that these acts of harassment were very shocking to her, because it came from people with the same cultural background she had.

The guards

Rema a 45-year-old mother from Homs who recounts a story that is very similar to the one Lames told me:

> The security guard treated us badly […] especially the women who came alone without a man. Because my husband was with me that helped a lot, but the ones who came alone are being harassed by the security and if they complain to someone, the guards will translate what the woman says the way they want. They are exploiting the situation and the fact that we don't know the language and the law. The guards once said to one of the women: "You are a Syrian! I can buy you for 5 Euros. I can buy a Syrian woman for 5 euros!" He didn't have a problem telling her that face to face, insulting her, 5 euros is 1000 Syrian Lira.

The security guards that are hired to work at the refugee's accommodations are employees from private security companies. These companies saw a great opportunity in the refugee crises to increase their revenue. Rema criticized the guards because she changed the accommodation 3 times and said that the problem was always the same. In every accommodation the women were treated badly according to her.

In addition to the bad treatment from the guards, came the careless behaviour of the accommodation directors who disregarded the refugee needs and problems. Most complaints were being ignored or false promises were being made.

Rema told me:

> I asked a lawyer, why are they treating us like that in the camp? The lawyer said that the camp director benefits from the refugees. For them [the camp's director] the condition the refugees live in, is not what matters, what really matters is how much money they can get from you, for the director we are a business deal.

During the refugee crises, accommodations made it their business to increase their capacities and to lower their costs. Therefore, some accommodations wouldn't help the refugees with the housing and moving out. They were securing a constant money stream and they wanted to benefit from them as much as possible according to Rema.

Distribution

How they were being distributed was puzzling for the refugees. If the place they arrived at was full, they would be moved somewhere else, to another city or another district. Depending on the situation they would sometimes be moved in for a few days and would have to leave after some time without knowing where they would be taken. They would be told by the state's agencies when they had to prepare the move.

One woman, Seham, remembered what had been told to her and her family:

> After spending 15 days in the refugee camp they told us that they would move us to another place we didn't yet know. When we were in the bus, I was thinking about the place we were moving to: whether it would be another camp or a more private home and if we would have to share rooms or the kitchen with others or not.

Seham was moved to a youth hostel for a while, they were not allowed to cook there. They had to go to a hotel's restaurant 10 minutes by foot, three times a day. For her and her family the youth hostel was fine, and she was happy that they didn't end up in a worse place. Going to the hotel three times a day wasn't something they liked, but she had accepted this minor inconvenience, compared to what other women in the shelters had to endure.

Mobbing

Joel's children were being bullied. She had two daughters, one 12 years old and one 10 years old. She had to watch them every time they wanted to go to play with other girls, go to the kitchen or to the bathroom. Joel and her daughters were staying in an accommodation where some kids were causing trouble. If she was not accompanying her daughters, the girls didn't dare to go alone to do anything. They were afraid that they could get hurt or be mobbed, as this had happened to them before. Joel said that she tried talking to the accommodation's director, to the perpetrating boys, as well as to the boys' mothers several times but nothing changed.

Another woman, Lila a 31-year-old woman from Deir Ez-zor who lived in the same accommodation as Joel had reported the same mobbing problem. She had two young children, one 5-years-old and one 4-years-old who were not able to play outside their room without getting mobbed by the other kids.

Lila told me:

> One day my 5-year-old son was sitting on the stairs playing, when some boys came and hit him in the back of his head, making him fall down the stairs.

For a mother, these kinds of situations make her life much more difficult. When she feels that the environment she lives in is not safe for her children, she is constantly thinking about the well-being of her children. She told me that, if this happened in Syria, she would have beaten the boys back. But in Germany she can't do so, because the law protects the children and beating children even if they are your own is not permitted by German law (§1631 BGB).

4.2.4 Being Excluded from Society

Unwanted

Lames, a 38-year-old woman, told me what the word refugee meant to her and how it affected her life in Germany. According to her, the society looks down on refugees. She was uncertain about her future in a country where she thought that she would not be able to become integrated.

> You are an unwanted Person here. Because they call you "refugee", you are a refugee and they treat you that way. Of course, this is not true for everyone. Several people helped me, but you can't ignore the way the society looks at you. […] We don't know what our fate is going to be. In the end, we are not the people of this country. At any moment, they could tell us "that's it" and after all your suffering, learning the language and having worked for an employer, that's it. All your work will be for nothing, because we are unwanted here […].

The arrival of the Syrian refugees to Germany was extensively covered by the media. Reflecting the societies' general need to discuss this phenomenon, it led in some cases to the fabrication of stories, constructing an image of the refugee as someone exploiting the generosity of others. This narrative omitted the refugee's reasons for having fled in the first place.

Generalizations in such a context are certainly not advantageous, especially given the existing cultural differences that exist (Holmes and Castaneda 2016, pp. 12–21). Different tragic events are associated to the Arabic cultural area and directly affect how the refugees are being perceived by the society (Holmes and Castaneda 2016, pp. 12–21). Although people are not all necessarily influenced in a direct way by these stories, the constant attention created fear.

The gaze

> Sometime some people look at me in a particular way […] you can feel how they don't like us at all.

Mona lives in a women's shelter in Berlin-Schöneberg with her mother, sisters and grandmother. She described how she felt, scrutinized by people from another culture. The way others looked at

her makes her feel out of place. Whenever she has the impression to be looked down upon, she feels unsafe and rejected as a stranger.

She was therefore uncertain about her future. She talked about the unstable situation refugees are in, and how it can at any time be possible that they are rejected. Mona and her family have been rejected from Germany because they were already registered in another country. She felt unwanted.

Isolation

> You feel isolated from the entire world in the camp. You don't see the people outside in a positive way, because the people outside the Camps think that you are worthless.

Lames felt isolated from the rest of the society when she was living in the refugee shelter. For her the outside was something she didn't know much about because of the lack of interaction between the people in the accommodation and the people outside of the accommodation. The only Germans they knew were the shelter's workers and the volunteers.

These had however many responsibilities and had no time and sometimes no language skills, to talk to, and to explain the outside world to the refugees. The refugees living inside the shelter felt isolated from the rest of the society.

If they took me to a Camp

Huda remembered:

> Had they put me in the camp from the beginning, I would for sure have committed suicide. They first took us to a hotel where I stayed with my two daughters.

Huda was grateful to have been put into a Hotel in the beginning. When she had arrived, she was depressed and sad. During that time, she had lost the desire to live. Living in the Hotel gave her some room to recover after the shock. Like the women mentioned before, she was still having issues with the food being served. She wasn't used to these dishes.

The women I talked to had very different experiences in the refugee shelter. Their own subjective perception played an important role. For some the physical building or the fact that they had to share with others was a problem. For others the lack of privacy or safety was the main concern. The women were generally unable to settle down and find the necessary space to process their traumatizing experiences, greatly affecting their well-being.

The living situation in the shelter where they were staying, greatly affected the women's mental condition and further journey as refugees in Germany. All they could do was complain about their daily problems, because these preoccupied them all the time. The war and the ensuing experiences had put them in a fragile physical and mental situation. Due to the problems they were not able to process these experiences. Several women I talked to, had become sick during this time. All had kept bad memories, that they recounted long after their stay in the shelter.

4.3 Finding a Home

After having completed the first stages as refugees in Germany, the women were required to find a home. One woman, a 50-years-old mother with 3 children from the al-Mazzah district in Damascus recalled:

> In the beginning everything was new to me. I thought it would be like in Syria where you can easily find a home. But then I discovered that it's one of the most difficult tasks to accomplish here, in Berlin.

Another 20-years-old woman from the al Yarmouk camp remembered:

> We can't find a home […] and we have been looking for one year and asked around in all the companies [real estate agencies]. However, we weren't able to find one yet.

Several women faced the same challenges, looking for a home. One 25-years-old woman from al Hasakah told me:

> A home […] you know it's the most important thing for a person to settle down. But here I can't find a home.

Finding an apartment is a difficult task in Berlin, especially for the refugees, who have no prior knowledge of the system. In most cases, it is for them an impossible task that they cannot tackle without outside help. The housing shortage in bigger cities is increased by the influx of refugees, who tend to want to live in the same districts (Multitude 2015, p. 3).

Several reasons made it especially difficult for the Syrian women to find a place:

1. **The Social interaction:** The Syrian Women are not as social as the men. They don't go out that much and don't ask around like men do. This reduces their opportunities to find a place for themselves. The women don't engage in talks with others like men do and don't go out to ask at different places (Bündnis Neukölln 2017, p. 2).

2. **The Asylum duration:** The kind of asylum a woman gets, whether she is recognized as a refugee or as a subsidiary protected person doesn't matter. What matters is for how long she is allowed to stay in Germany. If she is given a year to stay, her chances of finding a home are very slim, because no one wants to rent for such a short period of time. But if she is given three years, the duration is much less problematic (Multitude 2015, p. 3).

   If a refugee is only given a year, it does not necessarily mean that the person is going to stay just for a year, it could be extended depending on the situation in Syria. After one year the refugee needs to extent her permit at the federal office for migration. The situation in the homeland will be assessed first, followed by an analysis of the asylums record. The refugee will then either get an extension or not (BAMF).

3. **The tenant:** Not every tenant wants to rent an apartment to a refugee. They would never mention it, fearing the legal consequences of this discriminating behaviour (Multitude 2015, p. 3). Another reason the women mentioned, was that the jobcentre who pays the rent for the refugees, doesn't pay the tenants on time.

4. **The language:** To find a place you have to speak the language or have someone who speaks it for you. Talking to the tenant, knowing him well and understanding the rules gives a person better chances getting a place. The tenant needs to know that he is understood and to have the impression he is giving the apartment to someone who will take care of the place and respect the house rules (Bündnis Neukölln 2017, pp. 2–9).

5. **Availability:** Finding an apartment is a time-consuming task. It requires an extensive online research (Bündnis Neukölln 2017, p. 6). The refugees need to know how to operate a computer and search the internet. Additionally, the price plays an important role. The jobcentre has very strict requirements regarding the maximum rent they are willing to pay.

6. **Submitting all the documents:** To rent a place, papers and documents are needed. The women must have the needed documents ready when they are given an apartment. If they are missing a document, they might miss out on the opportunity (Bündnis Neukölln 2017, pp. 4–5).

Real estate agents 1

Given the above-mentioned difficulties that the women faced looking for an apartment, many had no other choice than to commission real-estate agents. One women, Faten told me:

> We are looking for a home, they called me on the phone [The real-estate agent] and asked how much I was willing to pay for their services. They told me: I want 6.000, others want 5.000 and others 7.000 euro. […] I told the real-estate agent that I only get 200 euros per month. Where am I supposed to get 6.000 euro?

There is an established Arabic community in Berlin. Some immigrants have been living in this city for several decades. They spoke the language well and they know how the system works in Germany. Early on, some saw the opportunity to earn money with the new refugees arriving, as it quickly became known that they had money to spend. They introduced themselves as real estate agents and took large commissions, in the range between 800 and 7.000 euros.

Faten was frustrated by this situation as she did only have little money. Several women took on these expensive offers, because they were desperate to leave the refugee shelters. In order to do so, they often borrowed money.

Real estate agent 2

One woman, Maria, told me:

> For this apartment [shows me images in her phone] the real estate agent wants 800 euros, and this is a good price. Normally they ask 3.000 or 4.000 euros.

Maria said that she was having problems in the shelter and that she wanted to get out of there. The refugees will have to pay the real-estate agent and they won't get the money from the jobcentre. The apartment she talked about had four rooms and because they were just three, she and her two brothers, she would have to await a decision by the jobcentre. Although she knows that the jobcentre pays an exact amount per square meter and per person, she still wants to give it a try. Should the jobcentre agree to pay only part of the rent, she would have to come up with the remaining costs.

Find me a place

One woman, Hiba, asked me once:

> If you can find me a place to live in, an apartment with three rooms, I will pay you 2.000 euros.

She had been asking several agencies without finding anything, and was so desperate to leave the accommodation she was in, that she had started to ask everyone who was able to speak German, if they could find her an apartment, regardless of their expertise with real-estate.

Getting the necessary papers

One woman, a 23-years-old mother from Latakia, told me:

> I don't know, I went several times to the companies, and they told me you have to see online, you have to try this and that, and you need a WBS[5]. And I told them that I'm still waiting for the WBS. You know, with the real estate agents you get the feeling that there is no hope, and that there is no other choice than to borrow the money from someone. That's what I am thinking about.

She was not able to find a home. For some women this is a major problem, to not have a home.

Without a house

Understandably, getting a home was a priority for the refugee women. One woman, Hind, told me:

> Without a house there is no settling down

Hind was annoyed that she had not yet been able to find a home. She knew that it was difficult in Berlin. She hoped that it would be a matter of time, and that she needed to be patient. Her husband had been getting increasingly aggressive, not being able to cope with the situation. However, she thought that the only way to go forward was to stay optimistic.

She said that in Germany everything is difficult, and that people get easily depressed. All, the other refugee women were talking about their problems. She did not want to be influenced by such talk and had opted to wait until the situation would get better and she would be able to move out of the shelter.

4.4 The lifeworld experience in the exceptional space

The women's everyday life experience in the exceptional space was dependent on the kind of shelter they stayed at. The life in the accommodation is controlled by the authorities and the people managing this place. The experiences the women had during this time, made them regret their decision to flee Syria. They had never imagined their life in Germany to begin in such a way.

[5] WBS: is an abbreviation for the German word "Wohnberechtigungsschein" which means: a permit for subsidized housing. To rent some places, this document is mandatory.

The women continuously felt humiliated and disrespected, and they happily remembered and idealized their life in Syria. Some of the women mental and physical health was damaged by the poor conditions in the shelters. They were not able to recover the shocks they had endured during their long journey to Germany. They thought that the were not safe in this place, and felt constantly threatened.

The women lived in the shelter with other people from different countries. However, most of the time they were not able to communicate and help each other. They were not able to overcome their mistrust, and give each other more confidence sharing the same space.

The women perceived the place as a hostile environment where even the people from the same country became a threat. The isolation and lack of communication had a significant impact on the women who had never felt being excluded from a place and its social life before. They were constantly hoping to be moved to another place, and rather than support each other, they were easily getting envious. They rarely understood how the authorities were taking the decision regarding the duration of their stay, putting them in a constant state of fear.

The women were not able to work through their traumatic experiences. Preoccupied with new challenges every day, all they could do was complain.

5. The Institutional Space

Institutional spaces are part of the public space and their associated urban features. Institutions are a social construct that exist in every society (Berger and Luckmann 1967, pp. 70- 85). Institutions are the product of history in each society, and to understand them we must look at how they came to be. The social interactions between the individuals and the institutions are reciprocal. The institutions try to control the individuals conduct and actions by prescribing how the individual should act (Berger and Luckmann 1967, p. 70).

In this chapter the institutional space will encompass the different governmental and state agencies that manage the refugees' everyday life. From the beginning of their stay in Germany, the institutions played an important role in the Syrian women's life. Their accounts and the stories they told reflect the influence their experiences within the institutional space had.

In this chapter I am going to present what kind of challenges the women faced dealing within the institutional spaces.

5.1 A Lengthy Process

During the refugee crisis in 2015, public agencies and authorities were put to the test in Germany and had to take on a great influx of applications that they had to manage as efficiently and fast as possible. At that time, the number of asylum cases was increasing every day.

Dealing with the authorities immediately became a task the women had to get used to. From the moment they had arrived in Germany, they had to start the registration procedures and had to file their applications to different authorities. To enable them to start their new life in Germany they had to visit several different agencies including the Bamf and the jobcenter. The inevitability of these tasks and the crucial role they had for the women's further stay in Germany meant that the

women had to spent much time with these administrative tasks. They had much to say about what had happened to them during these processes.

Asylum procedures

> I had my first shock […] when I arrived. I was so happy being here in a safe place. But then another kind of suffering started. When you enter the asylum procedures, you must leave your home at 4.30 a.m. to stand in line at the social services to wait for your asylum application to be processed. This is something new to us, we never did this before.

I was introduced to Lames – who told me this – by another Syrian women. We had exchanged numbers the first time we had met, but were only able to meet sometime after in a small café she had chosen in her neighbourhood. We ordered something to drink and started talking.

Lames arrived in Germany in the winter. She came to Germany on her own and when we met, she told me that she was missing her old life and her friends. She had been going to a therapist because she was not able to process the significant change in her life on her own.

She first came into contact with the authorities after she had arrived in December. She was told that she needed to register. To do so, she had to arrive early in the morning at the Bamf. It was then still dark, cold and the city was asleep. She felt empty inside as she recounted these experiences.

Refugees needed their papers to be complete and as there were many refugees, they had to be at the Bamf or at the jobcenter very early to stand in line to have a chance to get in. At that time refugees had to come several times before they could complete all their paperwork. The agency would close at a certain time and send the rest of the people in line back home, telling them to come on another day.

The refugees had to stand in line outside in the cold weather for hours before they would be able to get into the building to sit or stand. Lames had difficulties adapting to the cold weather. Sometimes she had to come several days in a row, because some papers were missing. Lames felt

very lonely. She told me that having someone with her would have made the situation easier for her. Doing this on her own was hard, painful and she had become depressed.

She was not even able to get to know other people waiting in line with her, because she didn't want them to recognize her family name. Lames' lifestyle was completely different in Syria. She is the daughter of a rich businessman and was able to live a luxurious life. During this time, she never had to do anything on her own, as everything was being taken care of. However, in Germany her situation completely changed as she had to take care of everything. This was very challenging for her as an individual, especially given her previous life.

The Syrian live in a collective society where the family plays an important role (Lauckner 2011, pp. 25–29). Women and men are not treated equally. Men are given more freedoms and can act more individualistic compared to what women are allowed by the society to do.

There is a range of tasks that women in Syria don't usually do on their own. For several tasks the women are accompanied either by their father, by a brother, a sister, a friend or a relative (Schweizer 1998, p. 131).

People are raised from a very young age to think about the family as a whole, to act together and not in an individualistic way (van Eijk 2016, pp. 100–103). Hence, the sudden shift in roles and the amount of duties the women had to take on had in Germany overwhelmed them, coming all at once.

Bureaucracy

> I have a problem with their [the Germans] routines, with their papers and bureaucracy. I mean, with the going and coming they need a lot of stuff [documents].

Maya is a 25-year-old woman from al-Hasakah. She started talking about her life and family and said that she learned to be patient in Germany. She became aware after her arrival in Germany, that her life would from now on be guided by restrictions and regulations. She would have to

constantly fill out forms, repeating the same tasks several times. For everything and anything she needed, she would need to get permission or approval from a different agency. She would spend endless amounts of time to go back and forth between different government agencies, carrying around her documents.

She told me that she often felt overwhelmed and that the pressure had become a day to day challenge for her. Maya thought that it was because she is a refugee that she was treated a certain way. She had tried to ask several people advice on how to fill out the documents. And even though she had gotten the necessary help, she was not able to satisfy the administration's requirements.

When she had accomplished one task after multiple failed attempts, quickly a new task would emerge. In the end she had abandoned any hope to finish the bureaucracy once and for all.

Applying for asylum, jobcenter applications, opening a bank account, filling out insurance papers, filling out papers for the accommodations, and many more. During this entire process of filling out forms or getting a certain document, an additional problem was the communication with the agencies' employees. She often didn't understand what they were saying to her, further delaying her applications. She then would be asked to come again with someone who could translate for her.

When the women go to fill out papers they are usually accompanied by a friend, a relative, their son or daughter. They fear going alone, getting lost. Additionally, they hope, that being accompanied they will have a much better chance at understanding what is needed from them in the administrative procedures. Although some agencies have hired translators who are able to translate into Arabic and help by explaining what the authorities need from them, this was still not the case for the majority of the agencies. If the required procedures could not be accomplished within one day, it meant that the refugee women would have to come again. Though it can easily be understood that such heavy administrative tasks could not be accomplished in one day, it becomes a problem for the women when the person that accompanies them isn't able to come

with them anymore. Sometimes, the women I talked to had to resort to pay a translator that would accompany them. However, this would cost them a lot for the lengthy procedures.

5.2 Difficulties with the Bureaucracy

Different resident permit

Faten, a 37-year-old mother of three from Damascus, had a problem concerning her adult daughter. Faten told me:

> I was granted asylum for three years, but my daughter got a residence permit for one year. […] I don't know [why], my older son got three years, he received it a while ago. But I didn't receive my papers yet. I got 3 years and my younger son also got 3 years just my daughter got only one year.

I met Faten at Al-nadi, a neighbourhood social centre in Berlin. She was talking to me about her daughter. That adulthood is reached with age 18 is new for people from the middle east. Faten couldn't understand why the age of her children made a difference in the treatment they received. She thought that, given her idea of what a family is, that her entire family should have been treated as an entity. When I asked her what she was going to do, she told me that she had not yet found a solution and that she was praying to god that her problems would be resolved.

While in several countries in the Middle East being of age 18 grants the person certain legal rights, it does not affect that person's standing as a member of his or her family. A relative independence for the children from their family is only reached after marriage.

No identification papers

Rula is an 18-year-old woman from Damascus. Her problem was that when she arrived, she didn`t have any documents. She was therefore considered stateless until the authorities were able to identify her. She told me:

> When I came, I didn't have any identification papers, so they identified me as "without a country".

Those who come without any papers are first put on hold until the authorities can individually verify their identity. Rula told me, that she couldn't understand how the authorities wouldn't understand her situation and that their handling of her case was ruining her life. For her, it was incomprehensible how other refugees could be granted more rights than she was.

Bringing Documents

Joel was a journalist working for an online newspaper in Syria and she had always been reliable. She said:

> When I go to any office, they see me for the first time and then ask me to bring a specific document and tell me to go and bring this document. I mean, I'm in Berlin, how am I supposed to bring it when I don't know how to get anywhere. I don't have friends. I don't know any translators who can translate for me what they [the authorities] want. You know, whenever they tell me to bring a document, I cry the entire week. […] In Syria when my boss told me to do something, I was always punctual and did all my work on time.

Since she arrived in Germany, she had the feeling that she was unable to do anything on her own. When she needed to bring a paper to the jobcentre or elsewhere, she had to spend a long period of time until she knew and understood what they needed from her. A time limit would make it only worse for her, especially when she had to accomplish several tasks at the same time: appointments, caring for her daughters, getting groceries from the supermarket and preparing food, making her all stressed out. She felt that all the tasks that she was doing at that time are too much for her.

Women who are educated and had a job in Syria found it very difficult and hard that they are not able to do anything with the knowledge they had gained in their previous life. They are not used to ask others to help them constantly for everything.

5.3 Receiving Post

The stories that are concerned with the reception and sending of letters are amongst the most interesting the Syrian women shared with me. In Germany, the postal service is very important, and widely used as a communication tool. For every official matter, letters are sent through the post. Work documents, house contract, bills, school notifications, tickets, bank information, new credit cards everything comes with the post. Such usage of the postal services had been unknown to the Syrian women in the past, and they not only had to get used to it when they arrived in Germany, but they also had to gasp its importance and weight it holds within the system.

For this communication tool, each person living in Germany needs to have an address. If they are staying at a refugee shelter, this becomes their address to which they receive their post. Confronted with this unknown tool, several refugee women I talked to told me that especially in the beginning they were terrified by the letters they were receiving.

Not only are the letters the main communication channel between the state and the citizens – notifying the citizen about different deeds and matters – for the asylum seekers it was also a matter of decisions being made about their lives. Whether their asylum has been granted or denied, was unclear to all of the refugees until they received a letter.

The women had to wait longer periods of time for their letters to arrive. During this long waiting period, the women exchange information with others. They are told stories, where refugees have been denied, are not receiving help from the state and others who have had to leave the country immediately. When a woman finally receives the letter, she is very anxious and fearful.

They would open the letters sees what's in it, although they knew that it was written in German, they would still try to figure out what had been written to them. The letter is important because of its content, and not being able to know their own fate is very disappointing for the women. The

refugee women have to ask someone to tell them what has been decided about their stay in Germany. It is a very emotional moment for them, when their hopes are met with reality.

A country of letters

One woman, Lamya, told me:

> This country is a country of letters. They contain information about the insurance or about the immigration authorities, about the jobcentre or about anything concerning my son's school […] and you need to know how to read it. […] When I get a letter, I spend about 3 hours to go to someone to translate it for me to just know what is written in it.

Lamya knew how important the letters were to communicate with the different agencies in Germany. Before being able to act, she first had to get every letter she receives translated. She had been informed about every decision regarding her situation through letters, and she had gotten accustomed to their crucial role in the system in which she was trying to get by.

She felt isolated from the rest of the society because she was not able to read the letters. She did not understand what was happening, and she did not have the feeling of being understood. Being obliged to deal with the letters, while at the same time not being able to understand them made her feel bad about herself, and she felt very lonely.

The women ask everyone who can understand the German language to explain the letters' content to them, and every time they receive another letter, they try to ask someone else, because they hesitate to ask the same person all the time for help.

Too many letters

> The letters here are too many, we can't handle them all, letters after letters after letters.

Hanna was overwhelmed by the great number of letters she was receiving. At the same time, dealing with these letters meant that she had to go to appointments and that she had to get documents from one authority to bring them to another authority.

She told me that until this point in time, she had not been able to finish any letters' requirement within the given deadline. There had always been some papers missing and she would have to manage to get other documents the next time. She felt left alone, even though she knew that everybody in Germany has to handle such tasks.

Missing the appointments

Amina is a 42-year-old woman from Aleppo. She told me that she once received a letter from the jobcenter that had instructed her to come and finish filling out her paperwork. She didn't wait for her given appointment; she directly went to the jobcenter and was able to fill out all the necessary documents on the same day.

She thus thought that she didn't need to go to the appointment anymore. However, after missing her appointment, she was surprised to receive another letter that told her, that because she didn't come to the appointment, they would cut part of her allowances. She didn't understand, as she thought that the purpose of the appointment had only been the papers she had already dealt with. When I asked her whether she had asked them if she needed to come to the appointment or not, she told me that she didn`t ask them . Amina didn't know that her appointment could have been about other paperwork or regarding another issue, she thought that having already been there, the matter was settled.

The German letters

> Post after post after post without an end [...]

When I met Lila, she told me that she had been sick for a week and had to stay home the entire week. After she had gotten better, she said that she was confronted with a large pile of letters in her post box. She didn't understand from where the letters came and what they said. She told me

that she had gone to Al-Nadi and had asked them to translate for her to know what is written there so she could respond.

In one way or another the letters keep the women busy and under constant pressure, trying to figure out what is written in them, and then trying to manage the different tasks. Some women had found a place or an address where people who could translate for them for free. That helped them a lot, even if some organizations offer that service only once per week. Other women had to rely on people they could ask in their shelter.

After a few months when I met Lila again, she had again had problems with the letters she received. When I asked her how she was doing, she answered me:

> Terrible! Every day I leave the house early to start managing the letters and the requests and I am never able to finish the tasks. Every day they want something else from me and I fill out the same form and then they give me another one, and the jobcenter forces me to take the language course, but how? I have so much things to do and no time to breath.

She had gone to the jobcenter that day, had gotten another form that she needed to fill out and was very frustrated. She couldn't handle the pressure of the simultaneous duties, the appointments, the language course and her children.

Dealing with her administrative duties, Lila had to rely on other people who could help her understand what was needed from her. The concomitant deadlines made it very difficult to manage a timely translation and accomplishment of the tasks. Before she would have filled out a form, she needed someone who could translate it. If she needed to communicate or talk to someone about a specific paper, she would have to take someone with her. Doing this every single time the women had gotten a letter was not easy and could become very frustrating. They felt humiliated to constantly ask others for help, because they were not able to manage their duties themselves.

On another occasion, Lila needed to go to the doctor and needed someone who could help her with the translation. She thus asked me, if I could help her. I met her and after we were done with her appointment, she opened her bag and took a few letters out and asked me if I could explain to

her what they said. One of the letters was from her lawyer about a court appointment that she was supposed to go to. She wanted to change her and her children's asylum status from subsidiary protection to refugee.

Lila had missed the date as it was a week before we had met. When I told her about that she stayed calm and it seemed to me that she hadn't understand how important these letters were. When I asked her about the matter, she said that she wanted to change her asylum status and that she had hired a lawyer to take care of it. She told me that she had paid the lawyer a large amount of money. Although the letters had been opened, giving the impression that she had seen them, she had still not done anything about it until we met.

5.4 Put on Hold

My job

One woman, Abeer, arrived in Germany without any papers. She told me:

> The thing I miss the most in Syria is my Job.

Abeer used to work at a bank in Syria. Since she had arrived in Germany, she had spent all her time watching her son. She wanted to avoid him getting in trouble in the accommodation they were staying. This long waiting period made her feel empty and useless, and the sudden shift from being a busy woman to this condition – being in a complete standstill – had a great impact on her.

Under the Ba'th regime the law was reformed in 1971 and the Syrian women were given the right to vote and to enter the workforce (Freedman et al. 2017, pp. 17–19). Going to school became mandatory for both genders until the age of 12 is reached. And although these vast reforms brought fundamental changes to the women's rights, the new law wasn't at first easy to implement, due to its acceptance within the population (Schweizer 1998, pp. 142–145). Even though the women were

given these new rights by law, they still often depended on their families who decided what the women was allowed to do (Shoup 2008, pp. 122–125).

That Abeer had to fight to get the right to work, made it even harder for losing her job when she had arrived in Germany. Abeer told me that she thinks that because she is a refugee the authorities attempt to control her by forcing her into endless application procedures.

Missing papers

Because the women had to wait a long time for their applications to be processed, they became increasingly angry. One woman, Salma, told me:

> I haven't received anything from the jobcenter in the last 3 months. When I asked them about it, they told me: your papers are not completed yet […] every time I go to the jobcenter, they give me a new paper and ask me to fill in this and that.

Salma had not completed her application. She found it strange that the entire application process would be halted just because of one missing paper. Salma didn't have any money at that time, but she was able to eat at the shelter. Her older brother who came months before her was in the same city she was in. Therefore, she didn't have to sleep in the camp and stayed with him. Her brother and her mother who was in another city in Germany tried to help her as much as they could. Had she been alone, she wouldn't have gotten any help at all. She was in disbelief about how the jobcenter who was aware of her situation, could neglect her in such a way.

Child-care allowance

Shiren is a mother of 3 from Latakia. She hadn't received the child-care allowance for her newly born yet who was three months old. We had the following conversation:

> S: My son is three months old, and he is going to be four months old in a few weeks. Until now they didn't give me the child-care allowance for him, nothing!
>
> I: Why?

S: We only received the money for four people [her husband, her two children and herself]!

I: But why?

S: I don't know, I have handed in my application for the family allowance and for the child allowance at the jobcenter and until now, I swear, I have not gotten any response.

She did not understand why she had not received an answer to her request. She did not dare to ask the jobcenter, out of fear that she would not be able to understand the response.

Shiren felt very vulnerable and was not confident at all. She did not understand how the system worked. She felt intimidated by the officials, who she felt held so much power over her, with whom she could not adequately communicate. The entire administrative process was a black box whose results would decide upon her life. Out of fear that her actions could negatively influence the outcome, she preferred to hold back and do nothing.

The women I talked to come from a society in which the abuse of power, bribery and other kinds of corruption are common (Al Sheikh and Hamadah, pp. 3–4). That is why they fear to say anything, thinking they could put their families and themselves in danger. After the interview she asked me if I can come with her to the family and social welfare office and if I could help her understand why she didn't yet get the money for her child. We went together a week after our first meeting. The problem was that her application wasn't completed, and some papers were missing. She asked if one paper could really hold back the money she so deeply needed for her child, but the woman behind the desk explained that she wouldn't be able to do anything and that she needed to have all the documents completed before she could receive the money.

She was very upset when we left and started to insult the woman behind the desk. I explained to her that the woman was doing her job and that she was only following the regulations, that it was her duty to make sure the applications are completed so that she can forward it to the department in charge of the next step. Shiren was not convinced.

Didn't receive my paper yet

Hiba is a 31-year-old mother of three boys that I met in Berlin. She is from Idlib, a city in north-western Syria. She used to work as a hair stylist. At the time I met her she lived with her children in a shelter for women. She told me that she didn't feel safe. This was not due to the shelter, but to the uncertainty concerning her application process. She told me:

> I have been here for a year and 3 months and I didn't get my papers yet. It's very strange and it's something that worries me. I'm a woman who wants to learn and work. I visit the language classes regularly. I want to learn the language fast to be able to rent a home and get a job, but I didn't receive my papers yet, I have a bad luck.

Because of the great number of refugees, the authorities were taking much time to process the applications. The asylum procedures, the verdicts, the permissions to work, rent, or even the admission into language classes, everything was mixed up and confusing.

Until Hiba would get her papers, she wouldn't be able to do anything. She said:

> I send them a letter three times to ask about my papers, but until now I got no answer. This is frustrating and when I ask the people in the shelter, they tell me to wait.

Hiba was motivated to move on. Most of all, she wanted to learn the language. However, because her application was still being processed, she was not able to do so. She though that she had bad luck, and that she had been forgotten and ignored.

5.5 Estranging Bureaucracy

The birth certificate

Waffa is a 24-year-old mother of two boys. When she reached Germany with her husband and her one-year old child, she was pregnant. After giving birth, they were surprised to see that in the birth certificate her son was given the family name of his mother instead of – as is commonly done in Arabic countries – the father's last name. She said that she didn't bring her marriage certificate with

her when she came to Germany and had not thought that it would become a problem or a complicated issue to handle. She told me:

> I came with my husband and my other son to the hospital. I thought that the situation was unambiguous.

When I asked her what she thought about that she said:

> I don't know, everything became so complicated now.

Another woman, Shiren, had the same problem as Waffa. Shiren had her marriage certificate with her but still had her newly born given the mother's family name. In her case, the document proving her marriage had not been admitted because a translated version had not yet been handed in.

The administration does make mistakes, necessitating the women to step in to correct the errors. This can be problematic if they are not aware of what is happening. Additionally, the women may not have sufficient knowledge about their rights and may therefore not get the idea to object a decision. The lack of knowledge regarding the women's rights in Germany led them to accept situations that they would have been able to change.

What struck me when I was talking to Waffa, was that she was firmly believing that the German government should have given her and her family a better treatment. Even though her demands were legally justified, it seemed to me as if she blamed her entire situation on the agencies. She got very angry when she talked about her demands that had not been fulfilled and didn't seem to believe that her arrival in Germany had led to any improvements to her situation. This kind of behaviour has been observed before in migration studies. Stein observed that: "Since their persecutors are unavailable, refugees shift their demands to the government and the helping agencies (Stein 1981, p. 327)".

Waffa and other women were not satisfied with their current situation. They complained about the allocated amount of money, the shelter they were staying at, the bureaucratic hurdles. Most of all they felt as if their initial expectations about their arrival in Germany had not been met.

Stein further explained that the problem that leads to this kind of behaviour is that the refugees are lost in their new environment. They don't know how to act. At this stage they lack the necessary knowledge. They need everything to be explained to them, what they are allowed to do and what is forbidden. They need to learn how this new space functions through instructions and advices (Stein 1981, pp. 327–328).

Changing the residence title

Sama is a 42-year-old mother of two boys from Bab Tuma, an area in the old city of Damascus. She told me:

> S: I wanted to change my residence title and apply for asylum but the people in the foreigner office told me that I can`t change it now ! Germany is very expensive […].
>
> I: What is your residence title?
>
> S: I was able to come to Germany through an admission program with my children.

Sama's brother, was already living in Germany and had agreed to sign the required documents, assuring that he would guarantee that the expenses engendered by the Family would be covered. She explained that she made a deal with her brother that he wouldn't have to worry about any of the commitments he had signed of, as she would carry all the expenses. She was able to cover all the expenses in the beginning, but after a while, without having found a job, her resources were getting scarce.

She decided to apply for child allowance. Her application was rejected because of her permit of residence (§ 23 Abs. 2 AufenthG). According to the law she could have only been able to receive the child allowance after a period of three years.

The admission program had made it possible for Syrian people who live in Germany to have their relatives admitted. However, all their expenses had to be covered during their stay by the person signing the document. To get out of this status she needed to wait until the signed declaration's deadline. Only then she would have been able to change her resident title. If she did decide to change it at this time, her brother who had signed could be forced to reimburse the state. This was not an option for her.

She further told me:

> I didn't want to apply for asylum in the beginning. But when I noticed how difficult and expensive my situation became, I changed my mind.

She wanted to be given the same rights as the other refugees and didn't understand how it could be that the other Syrian woman could be treated differently than she was.

She felt powerless and as if her life had become a game. Her situation did not allow her to move forward and she was not able to change anything. She felt that she had lost the control over her life.

Registered in Bulgaria

Mona is an 18-year-old woman that felt that she was being let down by the system. She had not been given the right to stay because her family had already been registered as refugees in Bulgaria.

> The problem that I have is that Germany has rejected us [her family] and that we have to leave Germany to go to the country where we registered first. At any time, they can take us and send us back there.

During the refugee crisis in 2015, Germany eased the immigration guidelines, putting the chancellor Angela Merkel in a critical position inside and outside her political party (HOLMES and CASTAÑEDA 2016, p. 11). At that time the European border countries had a problem with the significant numbers of refugees arriving every day. This caused a great deal of controversy in

Europe about how the refugees should be distributed and about how they should be treated (HOLMES and CASTAÑEDA 2016, p. 11).

Mona and her family had been registered against their will. The way they were treated and the violence they had experienced in Bulgaria had made them leave this country to go to Germany. There, their application had been rejected.

She told me:

> They refused us although we are all women [Mona, her mother, her two sisters and her grandmother].

They hired a lawyer after they had been rejected to help them and were able to get a document that needs to be renewed every 25 to 30 days to extend their stay in Germany. She told me that they were trying to extend their stay hoping that the lawyer would be able to help them.

She did not understand how others were given a status that they were not able to get, despite them having the same background. She told me that she didn't want to return to Bulgaria with her family, no matter what would happen.

My resident permit

Maya is a 25-year-old Kurdish woman that had been in Germany for a year and one month. Despite her being allocated to the Tempelhof shelter when she arrived, she was able to stay with an uncle that had been living in Germany for some time. She told me:

> Now they [the authorities] make it so difficult. I was given asylum for one year, a residence permit for a year, but my brother and my mother got a residence permit for three years. So, I asked myself how could that be? I got a year and they got three years, I mean, we are one family!

Maya thought that the system had let her down. Although she had her papers with her when she came and although she handed them all to the authorities she was identified as a person "without a country". Yet, her mother and brother were identified as Syrians.

She was then able to receive the residence permit, but only for one year. Her mother and brother had been given 3 years. She couldn't understand how this could have happened, especially since they were from the same family. Because of her situation, she felt that she was being disadvantaged, she could not explain this situation.

5.6 Law and Order

Like robots

> […] they work the entire time like robots and eat their meals in the U-Bahn [...] You are tied to the law, order and the system […] Working hours here are fixed. The breaks for the employees were also fixed. In Syria it wasn't like that we could go out for a few hours during working hours. We had a fun atmosphere in the office there, here everything is taken seriously.

Maya is a 25-year-old woman from al-Hasakah. She told me that she thinks that the lifestyle in Germany is very regulated. The working hours are fixed times to be taken seriously in Germany. She had the feeling that in Germany the system that rules the working place cannot be negotiated or changed unless there is a reasonable excuse, or an exception is made. This working atmosphere was new to her, and the different way of handling discipline and control gave her a strange feeling.

Maya did not yet have a job in Germany. She was describing to me what she had observed in her new environment. She recounted her observations at the jobcenter and at the Bamf. She realized how different the workplace was. In Syria everything had been handled differently. According to her, work was done differently in Germany and in Syria.

Busy life

> M: For me everything was strange. We didn't live like this in Syria. They have a very different lifestyle, very different.
>
> I: What do you mean?

> M: I mean everything… order is above everything here and you have appointments all the time, they are strict.

Mona, an 18-year-old woman, told me about how she perceived and experienced the order in Germany. When talking to Mona one can get the impression that she thought that these new rules are inflexible and negative. She thinks that there should be room left to negotiate the rules. The behaviour of the people behind their desks made them seem intolerant and inflexible.

The women interpreted these acts of sticking by the rules as being mean and they believed that they were being purposefully discriminated because they are refugees. Not understanding how the system works made the women understand this behaviour as an act against them.

Order in Germany

One woman, We'am, told me:

> I love their order, and I follow it. When I take the Bus, I always buy a ticket and I have seen them caught people without tickets and they had to pay 60 euros instead of two euros. I don't know but I like the order. […] here you can trust your kids to cross the roads on their own, because everyone in the streets and the people driving the cars follow the rules. This was not the case in Syria.

We'am was pleasantly surprised by the way order works in Germany. Law is powerful and she had thought that it was respected by everybody without exception. This kind of discipline towards the laws and the toughness of the law itself signalled to We'am that nobody was above the law in her new environment.

She believed that the legal system in Syria was less powerful. According to her, the rules were ignored most of the time and had led to a dictatorship. Corruption and the abuse of power often leads people to condemn their own countries' system (Lauckner 2011, pp. 19–23). We'am attempts to cope with her new life, was an attempt to better accept her new reality.

She also talked to me about the traffic and the transportation system in Germany. In Syria the rules are not always followed when crossing the streets. The only rule is to cross as fast as possible and

avoid getting hit by a car. Although there are traffic lights, they are ignored, making it difficult to navigate the city for pedestrians. When the rules are not followed and others are not taken into consideration, the situation gets dangerous for everyone (Lauckner 2011, p. 24).

Child custody

Hiba is a 31-year-old mother of three boys. She told me:

> Here the law gives me and my children the right to stay together. In Syria the law gives me this right until they are 12 years old, then the father becomes the right holder and most of the time the law is ignored, and the father takes the kids even before that age. My children won't be taken from me here, the law is strict, in Syria it is not the case, he [the father] can take them by force.

Hiba had left her husband in Germany and was going to demand divorce. Her husband had been abusing and hitting her for a long time and when I asked why she did it now, she answered that it wouldn't have been possible in Syria. There she would have risked losing her 3 boys. She mentioned that although she thought that the law was strange in Germany, she was still thankful that she was able to keep her children.

According to the Syrian law, in the case of a divorce the mother is given the child custody only up to a certain age. The age limit is set to around 13 for boys and around 15 for girls. When the child reaches that age, the father becomes the legal guardianship (van Eijk 2016, pp. 67–68). This right can also be taken from the mother if she remarries someone who is not from the same family (van Eijk 2016, p. 67).

Although there is a law, it is often ignored. The state's social system is ruled and governed by men. The constitutionally fixed equal rights for women are not always applied in everyday life (van Eijk 2016, p. 77). Very much depends on the judge's personal assessment of the situation. The law's application can be abused to resolve private issues. It can be used as an act of punishment and revenge. The judge's personal point of view plays an important role. In a society where traditions

and believes are more important than the law, no one can count solely on the justice system. The people who believe in the old traditions, will follow their own rules.

The law protects you

Amal is a 75-year-old Christian mother from Damascus. She told me:

> They have a law which they follow. Even if the people who live here don't like you, they still have to accept you, because the law protects you.

Her daughter, a 35-year-old mother, added:

> That's right, and even the people who work at the jobcenter or elsewhere will follow the law and keep order. Even if they don't like us or don't want us here, they will still do their job the way they should.

These women appreciated that the law applies to everyone. They liked that minorities were protected and that the people working in the administration were bound by law. The society had given them the feeling of not being included. However, they knew that they had rights.

5.7 The lifeworld experience within the institutional space

The experiences the women had within the institutional space include completely new situations that they had never experienced before. Their biggest challenge was, that most of the time, they did not know what they were expected to do.

Their subjective perspective was shaped by their own misunderstandings, and they were shocked when what they had imagined differed from reality. They were not able to communicate and did neither know how to identify mistakes nor how to ask for them to be corrected.

The women I talked to had gotten used to this space being male dominated in Syria. In Germany – to their own astonishment – they were taken seriously and treated equally. Some women appreciated this system that seemed to protect their rights.

While the women valued that they had entered into an environment shaped by rules, they sometimes missed the flexibility they had known in Syria. They felt intimidated by the vast amount of laws, and their inability to fully understand them.

Dealing with the authorities within the institutional space had become a daily activity for the women. They were given no choice, whether they understood what processes they had entered into or not, they would have to continue to the end.

6. The Public Space

We differentiate the public and the private space. This traditional distinction is defined by certain rules and physical boundaries (Low and Smith 2006, pp. 3-4). Streets, parks, malls, neighbourhoods, the civil governments buildings, the media and the internet: all are social locations in the public space (Low and Smith 2006, p. 4). Nevertheless, the meaning of public space is different in other societies (Low and Smith 2006, p. 4).

This chapter is going to explore the women's life and experiences within the public space.

6.1 Language and Communication Problems

In their new social setting in Germany the women are not able to use their native language anymore. This became a multifaceted problem for the women, as they were having great difficulties performing even the smallest tasks, including for example getting groceries or buying a ticket for the bus.

The women had difficulties navigating the new culture, as big differences exist in how the processes are shaped (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 49-61). Referring to their own cultural knowledge, they would misinterpret the signs and the patterns of the new culture. They could thus be led to misunderstand how they were being treated.

Additionally, the women had lost the social status they had gained in Syria by practicing a specific role within society. They were thus disoriented, and it was shocking for them to relearn how they had to handle social encounters.

The women were not able to apply their knowledge, and continue their every day life activities they had gotten used to in Syria. What had been their everyday life could not be compared to their new

life. Berger and Luckmann described this as the "taken for granted reality"[6], that applies when the Syrian women ignore the here and now reality of everyday life (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 43-48).

People told me where to go

> When I first arrived, I had a problem. I didn't know where to go and I was with a small child. But thank god, I found some people who could speak Arabic and they told me where to go. I suffer a lot without the language, it's very hard and difficult for me.

Jory is a mother of a 2-year-old girl, the moment she arrived she was completely lost. She didn't know where to go at first, and she did not have the feeling that her painful journey was over yet. She first needed to find her way.

Jory told me that in the beginning nothing besides her getting away from the war in Syria mattered to her. Like many other women I talked to, all Jory wanted to do, was to keep going and not to reflect on her situation so as not to break down.

When the women remembered their journey, they were still wondering how they had been able to manage the difficulties and challenges. That they couldn't speak the language of the country they arrived in, meant that they weren't able to communicate and exchange with the people in their daily life the way they had used to do.

Jory felt that her not being able to speak the language, isolated her from the entire society. She told me that the only thing she knew how to say was "thank you" and "hello". Besides smiling, she had no other way of communicating, and she didn't like it.

[6] A series of actions that people get used to do and act upon in a natural way without thinking about them and only realizing them when their everyday life changes (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 43-48).

Large bills

> In the beginning I was not able to say a word in German at all Even at the supermarket, to avoid any embarrassment, I used to give the person behind the cashier large bills, so they wouldn't tell me something that I wouldn't be able to understand.

Sama had found some ways to avoid public embarrassment. In every situation she was trying to avoid the occurrence of any communication, and she had gotten accustomed to not ask for any help. Her solution to avoid any misunderstandings had been not to communicate at all. Certainly, this was not always possible.

Speaking the language

> The biggest Problem for me was that I don't speak the language of this country and that I don't understand anything. I will never forget the first time I attended the language course. I am a graduate student from Damascus University, and I speak English and French. But when I went to the language course I cried, because I didn't know the German alphabet and I didn't know the German numbers. This was the biggest challenge for me.

Lamya, an educated woman, found it particularly difficult to learn the language from scratch. In Syria she had been working and had what she described as a perfect life. She had been unexpectedly put in this situation and she felt like a child. She told me that this situation made her cry many times because it hurt her, that she was suddenly not able to manage her life the way she used to. She thought that as an educated woman, being in situation where she didn't know anything at all, should be impossible. She was shocked that her entire education – from high-school to university – had lost all of its benefits.

Misunderstanding

> I had an appointment at the Sparkasse to open an account and because I have a young child it took me longer to get there. When I arrived, they didn't let me in because I was late, I tried to tell them that I have a child hoping that they would make an exception, but they didn't and when I tried to ask them again, I was thrown out.

Jory arrived late to her appointment and because she lacked the language and communication skills, she couldn't communicate properly with the bank's employees. She couldn't understand the importance of an appointment and what it meant to be on time. She was expecting the employees to take into account that she had a young child, she insisted several times and didn't accept the refusal. She told them with the words that she knew that she had a baby and had to come from far way. Jory kept on trying with the little she knew in German and still couldn't believe that they would refuse her. The entire situation was getting out of hand as she refused to give up and the security guard was then asked to escort her out. She was very shocked how she had been treated as a mother.

Jory had acted according to her own cultural beliefs. She had behaved like she used to in Syria, thinking that it would work everywhere. However, this was not the case and she didn't have the required knowledge about the new culture.

The act of insisting is widely used in the Middle East as a way to ask for something. Most of the time, insisting until the person gives in will work, as it becomes too embarrassing to refuse something after multiple requests.

Insisting triggers the emotions of the other person and can easily became annoying and provoking. This way of communicating is not common in Germany and could be understood as an act of forcing someone or mobbing them, making them react the way they did.

The entire situation could have been solved if Jory had been able to communicate in German and if she had known what the regulations for the bank's employees were. Not being able to speak and understand the language made her get into trouble that easily.

Not speaking the language

The lack of language skills specifically amongst the refugee women, make it easy for other people to take advantage of the situation and make money out of it. Some people who migrated from the

Middle East to Germany long time ago and speak the language, took advantage of this situation. They offered their services as translators or as real estate agents, being able to set high prices for their services as the women didn't knew any alternatives. Often the translation would not be completely correct or honest. This could easily become a problem for the women.

The people who migrated to Germany in the past or applied for asylum in the past, hadn't access to the same services the Syrian people did, and therefore thought that these were "privileges". The Syrian refugees' ability to apply for asylum and the way everything was organized for them, including the housing, the food, the residence permission and the salary made the newcomers confront hate and envy from the other migrants.

We'am told me:

> W: The old Palestinian and Lebanese people here, when they see someone from Syria they make negative comments.
>
> I: How?
>
> W: A Lebanese man came to my house to put the furniture together and he said: "You Syrians are very lucky; you have a resident permit. We could only dream to get a resident permit".

The people who came before had to wait longer periods of time to get their permits, and some are still waiting. This led these people, that had initially only been paid as translators, to openly speak their minds to the Syrian refugees. Their feeling of resentment carried on during translations, and because they hold great power as translators, in some cases, they were able to influence the women's fate.

The women told me that in some situations they had the feeling that the Germans were more tolerant than the Arabic communities already living in Germany.

They told me that the translators always take the money but don't translate correctly. They often discovered later, when they received a letter from the jobcenter or from elsewhere, that the translation had been wrong.

Certain applications were ignored, and when they asked someone else to translate the next time, they got information that they had not been given the first time. They felt betrayed, and regretted paying the translator. In most cases a correct translation is crucial for the refugee's future in Germany.

The lack of language and communication possibilities isolated the Syrian women from the society they were living in. They were rarely able to build up a lasting relation with Germans. Not being able to talk the same language and communicate with others meant that they were not able to have integrate into the society they lived in, because neither the language nor the other culture's signs are known to the them (Schütz and Luckmann 1991, pp. 90–93).

Deaf and mute

Rama is a 57-year-old Assyrian woman from Syria. She found it very difficult to have lost everything she had before. The changes had affected her mental wellbeing. Because of her anxiety, she had started taking sleeping pills.

> Everything changed: for me, the street and what a street is, changed. The language changed. You come to a strange place without knowing its language. You feel deaf and mute. You need time until you can get used to it.

Even when she was sleeping, she told me that she would wake up, hoping that she was back in Syria. She was not able to recognize the streets near the place she was living at. By imagining herself being in another place – in a place that doesn't exist within her current physical reality – she was trying to avoid this space and trying to keep her sanity. She had created a reality that resembled the one she was used to, and where she felt safe. What she saw at that time was not what she knew and not necessarily what she wanted, that's why she avoided it in her own way.

6.2 Orientation

On the one hand, orienting oneself in a city means to be able to find the way from A to B and to know how to reach a given destination. On the other hand, having a sense of orientation means knowing how everything works and knowing how to be able to manage the different tasks of everyday life.

Every place has its own system of orientation that people can follow and understand, navigating to their desired destiny. Signs and symbols play a major role in the everyday life and in order to understand, communicate and interact with our surroundings and with the people we live with, we need to understand and use them.

This chapter will show problems the women encountered, trying to navigate their surroundings.

How to remember

> The first thing that shocked me was the transportation system here. How to remember the correct route and which U-Bahn or S-Bahn I should take […] we don't have this kind of transportation system in Syria. It was very difficult for me. It was so difficult for me to take my son to school and to travel back to my place afterwards.

Sama is used to the transportation system in Syria that consists of buses and taxis. The 42-year-old mother of two boys from the Bab Tuma area in the old city of Damascus, was overwhelmed by the transportation system in Germany.

In Syria she had not left her home that often and when she did, she would go visit her mother or be accompanied by her mother. Sama told me that they always stayed in their area in Syria and didn't go out of it. Now that she was on her own, the biggest challenge became to reach her first destination with her son and then go to her own school. The other challenge was to understand how the transportation system worked in general. Sama had never used a map before and didn't knew how to use it. She didn't know how to use the phone's navigation system.

She told me that especially in the beginning she had been struggling a lot and had been trying different methods to be able to find her way. The very first time her older sister who had been living in Germany for more the 10 years took her to the school and to her child's school, trying to help her find her way.

Her sister was however not able to accompany her every day. Sama tried to count the number of stops to her destinations, and had tried to remember signs or specific objects. As she was struggling to find her way in the beginning – being in a very fragile state – she was often overwhelmed by the situation and she sometimes became very stressed to the point that if she missed the underground train or bus she would cry. She began to use her smartphone's map only after a while, as she didn't really understand how to use it.

I can't read

> Imagine that you can't read what's written everywhere; you will get lost, and you don't even know who to ask for help […] this hurt me so much. I once got lost in the U-Bahn and I started crying. I found someone who could speak English and helped me, but I imagine that when you don't know your way, unless you have a paper with your address written down, it can become very difficult.

Lamya is a 50-years-old mother of three from the al-Mazzah district in Damascus. She though that she would never get lost, as she was able to speak English. She did not have to face such a situation before, and when she did, she wasn't ready and didn't know what to do.

The women are challenged, because they don't know how the transportation system works. They are not able to communicate with people. The problem gets even bigger when they get lost, not being able to pronounce the word designating the area where their home is located, and not being able to understand instructions from the people who are trying to help them. They have no prior experience they can associate these problems to. The sole emotion they can express is fear, being overwhelmed by the daunting task that is to find one's way without any indications nor prior knowledge.

Lamaya had written down her address on a piece of paper in case she would get lost. This way she attempted to make such an event less stressful. Especially in Berlin, the transportation system overwhelmed the refugee women, regardless of their age.

Garbage

One woman, Joel, told me:

> The first time I arrived in Germany I didn't dare for days to throw the garbage away, because I didn't know where to put what in which container. I was so embarrassed.

Joel didn't have to separate the garbage into different containers before in her life. In Syria the garbage is not separated, and everything is normally put into a single container. She didn't understand what the different containers' colours meant and because she didn't know where to put what kind of trash, she didn't do it at all.

She told me that this was one of the experiences that had a big impact on her, because it showed her that the difference can be made by the things you never think will be different. The people become so accustomed to some actions that they never think about them. That is what Berger and Lukmann described as "the taken for granted". She said that she then asked other women what the different containers colours mean and was able to understand how the system worked.

WhatsApp 1

L: Let's meet at the mall at the end of the line U6[7]?

I: What station?

L: Alt-Mariendorf [8], there is a mall on the way, we can meet there?

[7] The underground train line which runs from the north to the south in Berlin.
[8] The last station.

I: But at which stop?

L: Ullsteinstraße [9].

WhatsApp 2

I: Where do you want us to meet?

W: Let's meet in Steglitz[10] .

I: Ok, but where?

W: In the mall there.

I: Which stop?

W: Rathaus Stegliz.

I: What's the name of the mall there?

W: I don't know, lets meet at the train station and go together.

WhatsApp 3

L: Let's meet in Zehlendorf[11]?

I: Ok, where?

L: Near the train station, in a café there.

I: What stop?

L: The last one.

[9] One of the stops on the U6.
[10] A district in Berlin.
[11] Stegliz-Zehlendorf is a district in Berlin .

The women described the place where they wanted to meet the same way they would have done in Syria. In the cities the women lived in, they would orient themselves according to specific sites. They would set the meeting at the mall, at a market of a specific area or a street and everyone in Syria would understand what they meant.

Navigating in Berlin was still confusing for the women. The city does not have one city centre, and mentioning the train stop station is not sufficient to understand where they wanted to meet. They had associated specific stations with a landmark.

High building

> Let's meet at Beusselstrasse[12]. And from there we will go together to the jobcenter. I don't know which stop it is, but I know what the stop looks like.

Amani had asked me to accompany her to the jobcenter for an appointment. She needed to bring a translator.

On the day of the appointment we met, and we took the train as planed and needed 45 min until we reached the stop. When we arrived, she went out of the metro, looked up and said that we had

Figure 12 - The building that helped Amani orient herself

[12] A street in the district of Moabit.

arrived. She was right. When I asked her how she had known that it was the right stop, she told me:

> I memorized a high building here [she showed me which building she meant], and this is how I navigate to the jobcenter.

The jobcenter is not that far away from the place she lived. It would have been possible to reach the jobcentre in 25 minutes, but this was the only way – using architectural clues – she knew how to navigate the city.

Fast trains

Boshra is a 23-year-old mother and has one child. She comes from the Rukn al-Din municipality of Damascus. She told me:

> About the trains and the S-Bahns: […] In in the beginning I used the U Bahns, no, first the buses and then the U Bahns, Yes. The U-Bahn is very fast and when I'm in them I hold on to anything because in Syria we don't have trains and when we go out, we take our time until we reach any place but here it goes fast. Every time I take the U Bahn, I say my prayers in case anything happens, because it's so fast […] at the stations I speak English and it helps me find my way.

Boshra had no fear of getting lost, she was scared by the speed. Buses and taxis didn't surprise her as much as the prevalence of the trains in the transportation system. She told me that she was positively surprised by how the system worked and had tried to learn to know her way around in the transportation system by reading the letters of the stations and trying to memorize them.

When Boshra made these new experiences, she was overwhelmed. However, she was still able to associate these new observations with what she had known in Syria. Compared to the other women, who were not able to make the connection to any of their previous experiences, she had found a way to make sense of the new situation. She was thus able to better understand her new environment, making sense of it.

6.1 Climate and Clothing

The weather and its effects on a region, and on us human beings differs from one place to another. The place in which we live affects us in many ways, and the climate certainly plays a role. It is also scientifically proven that the weather and the changes in climate have a significant impact on human's health and well-being (Thomas 2004, p. 139).

The climate in Syria is Mediterranean. The region has a hot and dry summer and a cool and wet winter. The weather in the desert areas differs from the inner parts of Syria. There it can be very warm in the summer and very cold in the winter (Shoup 2008, 2-5; Federal Research Division 2004, 57-58).

Although it gets cold and wet in the winter, the climate is still very different in Germany and central Europe. The summer in Syria is hotter than in Germany, where the summer is mostly short and mild. In Syria the winter is also different. The winter in Germany comparatively much colder.

Several women I talked to were shocked by the weather. They had arrived in the beginning of the winter and were not prepared for such cold weather.

Why did I come here?

> I came to Germany in November. When I first arrived, I was very happy for several days or even a week. I kept telling myself that I had finally gotten rid of all the previous stress, the feeling of insecurity and the sound of the bombs. Then, after one week, after two weeks, after a month or so I noticed that the sun wasn't there anymore at 8.00 a.m., that it was still dark. I was not seeing the sun! I miss the sun, you know, until now, I miss the sun when I see the sun it's for me like the Eid. I was telling myself: what am I doing here, why did I come here?

Maya is a 25-year-old Kurdish woman from the Al-Hasakah region in Syria. She was shocked by the cold in Germany.

Coming from a place where the sun shines most of the time, it was very difficult for her to see the sun so shortly in the winter. Sometimes days passed without seeing the sun at all.

When I asked her how it affected her, she told me that at the time she, her mother and brother were staying with her uncle and his family and that being surrounded by people helped her. She said that being with her family gave her the strength not to be too sad. However, she still missed the sun during the winter.

Where is the sun

> After we had arrived, we went to the jobcentre. There, we saw that all the people were wearing jackets and it was very cold. It was snowing and everybody was wearing gloves and scarfs. I had the impression that everybody was depressed. I thought that I would become like them. I was asking myself: where is the sun, where is it, where?

Rana is a 57-year-old Assyrian woman and a practicing Christian. She was shocked by the weather in Germany as many other women I talked to.

She told me that especially at her age the difficult weather conditions make everything much harder. According to her, for younger people everything is easier than for older ones. Coming from a place where the sun shines every day – the entire year around – makes the switch to a country where the winter isn't only cold but also dark very dramatic.

Rana told me that her faith and family made her strong and had helped her get over the dark days, although that didn't help her all the time. She had to go to a psychiatrist to help her with her new life and enable her to face it.

The weather affects me

> The weather here is much different. We have a winter that is not as cold as it is here, and we have a summer during the summer months. But here all seasons happen simultaneously on one day, it changes a lot. This did affect me very much.

We'am talked to me about the weather in Germany. The winter was very hard for most of the women who came to Germany during the winter. The women had only brought with them light

clothing and were not prepared for the weather conditions in Germany. They feared the long dark nights in the winter.

The Winter

> The cold weather was very hard for me. You know, I don't have anybody here. Here you have to wear boots and I don't have any [...] I'm not even prepared for it [the winter], I came with a leather jacket in the end of the summer and I wasn't planning to stay. It was difficult to find the appropriate clothing for my son and for my daughter because we have no idea where to get them and what types of clothing will be sufficient for this kind of weather.

Lamya had never experienced such weather. She had never lived within a region with such climate. Now she had to find a solution on her own. The winter had a strong impact on her well-being and reinforced the feeling of loneliness. It was not very pleasant for her to remember the winter and the difficulties she had faced during this time.

Lamya also had great difficulties preparing for the weather conditions. She didn't know what outfit would be fitting for this kind of weather or how cold the winter could become. Lamya wasn't sure how to find an answer to her questions as she was very confused.

Was a coat enough? Did she need a scarf and gloves? How should she dress her children? Lamya asked herself these kinds of questions. To make sense of the new situation, she was trying to relate the new problems to what she had known in Syria. However, limited her prior knowledge had been, she was still able to hold onto the habit of caring for her children. The new challenges could therefore be introduced as new elements in the enduring task she had known since she had been in Germany, giving her some sense of security and the courage to continue.

A great change

> H: The weather, the weather was for me a very great change.
>
> I: When you say the weather, what do mean exactly?

> H: The cold weather, the climate here. The weather changes so much. I have never lived with this kind of weather before. I haven't seen such a weather my entire life. In Syria, I haven't experienced such a weather and they tell me you haven't seen the real winter yet. It's still the beginning of the winter.

Huda didn't think that the changed weather in Germany would affect here the way it did. She said that this was something she didn't thought about but had a great impact on her.

It is cold

Boshra is a 23-year-old mother from the Rukn al-Din municipality in Damascus. She told me:

> Before coming, my husband warned me about the cold here. In Syria, even when it hails there, it's not that cold. But since I arrived here, I tell him the entire time: "I'm cold, so cold".

Boshra hadn't taken her husband's advice seriously. She had thought that the weather was the same everywhere and that it couldn't be that bad. But when she came to Germany, she was shocked by the winter's cold. She said that although she wears many layers of clothing, it was still not enough.

> There are times where I refuse to wear that much or leave the gloves at home on purpose because I don't want to wear them. But then when I go out, I freeze and regret it so much.

The weather is challenging physically and emotionally for her. She had not been able to adapt to these conditions. She tried to ignore the weather and she thus made it much more difficult for herself.

We were prepared

One woman, Ghada, told me:

> My mother prepared us for the winter. She used to tell us that it was cold in Germany and that she had to wear several layers of clothing when she was leaving her home, alike an ice-bear.

Ghada's mother had come to Germany on her own earlier and she had been preparing everything for her family to join her. During that time, she told them about the life in Germany to prepare them for the change. Ghana was glad that she had known in advance how the conditions would be, and that it had helped her to better cope with the new situation.

6.2 Assuming new Responsibilities

Doing everything

> A: Here you must do everything yourself. Here you must do a lot, to manage your papers and manage your appointments. There are so many of! And you always need help. You need someone to help translate.
>
> I: And who helps you with that?
>
> A: Sometimes you find people who help you and sometimes they are treating you badly.
>
> I: Do you take your daughter with you when you have an appointment?
>
> A: Yes. However, the waiting time – the long waiting time – its very hard to make her wait that long.

Afaf had a 3-year-old daughter and whenever she needed to go somewhere, she had to take her daughter with her. She had no one that could have taken care of her while she accomplished her tasks. Although she always had an appointment at the places she went to, she still often had to wait for her turn to come, sometimes for more than an hour. Having to bring her daughter with her made it very difficult for her as other people that were waiting with her would get annoyed by her daughter's impatience.

Getting out of the house

Amar is a 37-year-old housewife and a mother of three children. She explained to me she had not suffered as much as the other refugees, who had to cross the borders on foot. Her husband's brother had been living in Berlin and when the situation in Syria started to become difficult, he was able to bring them to Germany by plane. She talked to me about her life in Syria:

> When we were in Syria I was living in my family's and my husband's family house. I rarely went out to visit my friends, maybe once every six months.

Amar was a housewife who took care of the children and the house. She did not miss the way she was living before. When she came to Germany, she started to leave her home more often in order to fulfil her administrative duties. While she was still struggling with these new tasks, she appreciated the variety it had brough to her life.

More responsibilities

Sama, a 42-year-old mother of two boys had left Syria on her own with her children. She was working as an art teacher at Al-Nadi in Berlin. She talked to me about her previous life in Syria:

> In Syria I didn't leave my house that often. Just sometimes to visit my mother and sometimes we went out together. Now I must leave my home every day. This is a new thing for me, I have more responsibilities here.

Sama's lifestyle resembled that of Amar, as she usually went out with her family. Now, she was going out every day.

From rich to nothing

Hind a 35-year-old married mother of two from Aleppo, explained to me:

> R: In Syria, I had a pleasant life. Financially everything was more than fine. That was, of course, before the war.
>
> I: Were you working?

> R: No, I wasn't working but my husband was working. My life was nice, and I had settled down, but the war destroyed everything. In Germany everything is difficult. Here I have more responsibilities. In Syria I wasn't responsible for that much. […] Here the women have much more responsibilities. In Syria everything comes to you, here nothing comes to you. On the contrary, you have to do it yourself, you have to arrange it […]. In Syria the nurses would even come to my house for my son, but here everything is different, and everything takes time.

Like Amar and Sama, Hind had started going out of the house more often than she used to in Syria. In Germany, she had taken on responsibilities that she had not been concerned with in Syria.

The women's duties would require them to go outside. They had to take their children to school, they had to go to the authorities, do the necessary paperwork and buy food.

In most of the middle eastern countries, including Syria, the lifestyle for women is very different from the one in Germany. The influence of tradition and religion puts restrictions on different areas of the women's life (Chafetz 2006, p. 86).

Gendered segregation, which is part of the culture they lived in, separated their lives in two different spheres. The women main space is the domestic sphere and the men's main space is the public sphere (Tiffany 1978, p. 42).

Most women in the middle East grow up in a society where their entire life is mostly centred at home. This is also the case in Syria. Although it is a secular country, its social system is based on the Islamic believes, shaping and organizing the everyday life (Lauckner 2011, pp. 24–25). In the middle east the men have much more power and can regulate the women's life, regardless of whether they are younger or older. The men carry much more responsibilities within the family and have the right to allow something or to forbit it. From a very young age the women learn these rules and follow them without questioning them.

Despite this culturally entrenched behaviour, the Syrian women have, over time, gained some rights (Lauckner 2011, p. 26). Having more rights opened up their life to the public sphere, giving them

more opportunities. However, in Syria, is the idea that the women's place is at home, is very much alive.

The lifeworld in Syria is also systematically arranged to reduce and discourage the women from going out. They can get everything they needs without stepping a foot outside of their house.

For example, the men will take the children to school, or else they will take the school-bus.

In Germany, not everything could be arranged the way the women's life had worked in Syria. The women had to take on duties that they could not delegate to the men in their families. While some felt empowered, others missed the carefree life they had been able to live before.

Doing everything yourself

Maya, a woman from al-Hasakah, told me:

> Here because of the bureaucracy, including the papers, you have to do everything yourself.

She needed to take care of multiple tasks at the same time on her own. She told me that never before in her life, she had to accomplish such tasks. Now she had to do everything by herself, and she felt that the paperwork had taken over her life.

She further told me:

> […] In Syria you rent a house or buy furniture without asking anybody. But here: no way! You need to go to the jobcenter to get a permission, then you must go to the town hall and get a permission, you need to sign the papers from the citizen's office and all that you need to do yourself. Once you are 18 years old, you have to do everything yourself.

Maya thought that her new life was very demanding. She thought that her freedom had been taken from her.

In Syria we were pampered

> You have so many responsibilities here, it is difficult. I feel as if I am a man. […] We are not used to this way of living in Syria, there we were pampered.

Maria felt that she was taken out of her gendered role in Germany. While she tried to keep up with her tasks, she found it challenging because she had to do everything on her own. What had been men's responsibilities had suddenly become her responsibilities, and she felt overburdened.

Get an ID

Lila is a 31-year-old mother of two from Deir Ez-zor. She told me:

> I have been living in Syria my whole life and I went only once to get an ID. That was the only time I went to a government's building there.

For her, the Arabic societies were not taking the lives of a woman into consideration. In Syria her rights had not been sufficiently protected. There, the paperwork or legal papers could be filled out by a male family member: by her husband, her father or her brother without requiring her permission.

In other cases, the men accompany the women in their families, and they fulfil tasks concerning them personally. The man takes on the role of the 'protector', who has to watch the women with a careful eye and has to intervene if necessary (Roggenthin 2002, pp. 33–35). In Germany the women are given equal rights, something the Syrian women had experienced for the first time.

6.3 Expectations

The daycare

Solaf is a 32-year-old mother of a three-year-old girl from Baniyas, a city in the Tartous region in north-western Syria. She told me:

> I've got a problem with my daughter. She is 3 years old and we weren't able to find a daycare for her. I once went to the youth office and they gave me a list of daycares in Berlin to contact. I asked my husband's brother to help me to call and ask for a place. We called approximately 30 daycares! All of them but one had no availabilities. When I went there and they saw that I was wearing a headscarf, they tried to convince me that it was not a good place for my daughter. They told me that they serve kids pork and that they

> don't do exceptions and would therefore refuse to take in my daughter. That is why I had no other choice but to keep looking.

Finding a daycare is difficult in Berlin. Because Solaf was not able to find a place for her daughter, she was not able to go to the language course. The girl needed to play and learn, and Solaf was not able to handle her all day long.

Solaf told me that she felt sorry for her daughter because she had to go through big changes after having left Syria where her cherished grandparents were still living. Her daughter had also been affected by their stressful journey to Germany.

In Syria the grandparents, relatives and neighbours were taking care of the children. Because of this, the children would grow up amongst their entire family.

In Germany, Solaf and her husband were alone with their daughter. Solaf quickly realized how difficult it would be for her to take care of her daughter without her grandparents and without her family. She felt left alone, searching for a daycare.

Facilitating Services

> In Syria most services were provided to me. For example, there was someone who would bring vegetables to my home and there was someone who would bring me meat. But now I have to take care of all these things. Now I have to go the supermarket every day, I have to go to school and buy the things I need, and I have to hurry up to cook something. I have so many appointments, so many…

Sama was not able to live, like she had in Syria. In some families the men are tasked to take home the groceries, in others the neighbourhood grocery store brings the grocery directly to the homes. One call would be enough, and someone would deliver the groceries without the women having to leave their home.

The most common place where women spend time in Syria, is in their homes. Sometimes they visit each other, they go out to the hammam, to a women's salon or to cafés (Roggenthin 2002, p. 38).

Because they had taken on new responsibilities and duties in Germany, they had to leave their homes more often. They did not always enjoy this. However, going out had become a way to protect themselves from being lonely and excluded from society.

In the beginning

Hind is a 35-year-old mother of two from Aleppo who escaped the war with her family and came to Germany specifically because of her sons' condition. Her son has an autism spectrum disorder and because she had heard that Germany was leading in the medical field, she came to Germany.

She told me that she thought that everything would be happening fast, but had to admit that she had been wrong:

> I suffered a lot in the beginning. But after the doctors examined him [her son] and everything started to work out for him, I felt much better.

She told me that she had to take care of everything on her own and that she had learned to be patient. Everything in Germany was taking much more time than she had expected, and she needed to learn how to manage the new situation.

6.4 The lifeworld experiences within the public space

Within the public space the women were facing tremendous challenges. They did not know the language; they lacked the cultural knowledge, and everything was different. They had to take on new responsibilities and where not able to continue their routines they had developed in Syria.

In Germany they had to relearn everything, and living there, they slowly realized that life had become much different. They had become vulnerable, left alone without their extended family and their friends. Life in Syria had been different, and now everything that was left of this life were memories.

7. Processing change

In the previous chapters, the changes in the women's life have been described. These put the women into difficult situations, and they were brought to question their convictions, to address the uncertainty the were faced with. In this part of the thesis, I will proceed to a more thorough analysis of these changes by classifying them, and by showing how they affected the women.

7.1 Lack of Belonging

Everything is strange

Amal is 75-year-old Christian Syrian woman who described to me her feelings as a stranger abroad. She told me:

> We left everything and came here as strangers. Everything is strange to me since I arrived in Germany.

It was painful and very difficult for her to start all over again. In this new place she had to leave her memories and her past behind. She believed, that at her age she won't be able to do much about it. She doesn't go out alone because wouldn't be able to find her way back on her own.

In her previous life, she felt that she had more freedoms, as she had been able to go out and find her way back.

In Syria, she had felt more confident, relying on her life's rhythm. In Germany everything had changed for her. She felt as if she had lost her freedom, being dependent on others.

It still feels strange

Lamya is a 50-year-old woman who described to me similar feelings as Amal did. Everything was different to what she had known before. Although she had been in Germany for over 4 years at that time, she still had troubles adapting to her new environment. She told me:

> Everything is different here. Although I have been here for 4 years now, I still feel the strangeness of the place. I can't get used to it.

She felt isolated and did not want to open up to the outside world. In the beginning, she had still hoped, that she would be able to adapt.

The feeling of respect

Aya is a 35-year-old woman who lives in an apartment with her family. She told me that even if she learns the language, she doesn't believe that she will ever feel at home in Germany.

> What I miss most about Syria, is the feeling of belonging. Here, no matter what I do, I am still a stranger. In Syria there is a feeling of respect and there I am 'the daughter' of Syria.

Aya thought that she will always be a stranger in Germany, no matter what she does because the she was missing the cultural connection to this country.

By growing up in Syria, she had developed the feeling of belonging to a place. She had now been disconnected to this place and she felt lost in Germany. For her, it was clear that she would never be able to adapt to her new environment.

7.2 Comparison and Nostalgia

Since they had arrived in Germany, the women's feelings of love towards their old life and home country grew bigger and bigger. They were constantly thinking about their old life. When the women would begin to talk about Syria and the life they had been able to live there, they would get

lost in their thoughts and romanticize every aspect of their previous life. As if it had been a perfect dream without any flaws.

They would become very emotional and their eyes were shining, when they were talking about their homeland and about their life before the war. They were missing their neighbourhood, their family, their old home and everything else. Having been separated from their life in Syria was still painful for them. The moment they finished recounting their past memories, the light in their eyes would fade away and a conversation that had started with laughs and smiles would end up with a sad smile or a tear in the eye.

There are great differences between the environment in Germany and in Syria. Thus, the women were comparing everything between those two countries in their everyday lives. They instinctively thought about the differences and evaluated the differences, as often happens when we enter into a new environment (Capo Zmegac 2007, pp. 95–97).

Comparison is not only one of the most used tools used to express difference – to build and justify a personal perspective – for refugees, it becomes a necessity to be able to evaluate the place they are living in at the present time (Jung and Müller-Doohm 1993, pp. 433–435). When the women would recount their memories of their homeland, they thus expressed their belonging to it and the importance they attached to the place they came from, being a part of it (Christou 2006, pp. 32–36).

Through their stories they express their belonging to the group and to a place. Even if it makes them sad to talk about the past, recounting their memories plays an important role for them to be able to process their traumatic experiences (Essed et al. 2004, pp. 106–118).

The women all felt a certain nostalgia, independently of their socio-economic background. Remembering their past had become the sweetest part of their new existence.

Stores closing time

We'am is a 36-year-old mother of two kids. She is divorced and worked as a hairdresser in Syria. She fled Syria because she was fearing for her children's lives. On her way to Germany she had to leave her daughter and her son with relatives in Turkey. After a long struggle, she was able to get them to Germany through the family reunification program. She told me:

> What surprised me very much is that at 8 p.m. all the stores close here. In Syria the shops are open all the time, people are everywhere, and you can get everything you need at any time. Here everything is dead after 8 p.m.! You get the feeling that after 8 p.m. you can't do anything anymore.

We'am was comparing her new life with the life she had in Syria. She had felt less constrained by strictly timed appointments, having more time leeway.

She told me that she thought that Syrian people are very social and like to do things together. The family played a more important role in her life, as did neighbours and friends. The Syrian life is coined by these kinds of relationships (Lauckner 2011, pp. 25–27). Shopping, sitting in cafés with others, drinking coffee and smoking shisha with friends: there is a sense of togetherness is part of the syrian lifestyle (Lauckner 2011, pp. 25–27).

A better life in Syria

> W: Syrian people were living the best life and would dress in the most beautiful clothes. Here I can't afford what I used to buy in Syria.
>
> I: Was your life better in Syria?
>
> W: So much better because I was working. I love working and I want to work, but here to be able to work, I must have at least the language level B1 […]. I miss my house and my bed in Syria. I miss my neighbourhood, my friends and family and our trips every Fridays. In Syria everybody goes out every Friday. It's a holy thing.
>
> I: Did you feel your life changed very much here?

> W: Yes, so much. The taste of life is gone, it became much more functional than pleasant. Every day is the same, here they have more nature but in Syria there is more passion, there are feelings. Here you don't have that.

In Syria We'am had been working as a hairdresser. This is a common job for women in Syria as it enables them to work and at the same time avoid troubles with their family or husband who wouldn't want the women to mix with men in the working place.

Although We'am wasn't earning much, she was still able to meet ends needs and felt proud that she was able to be independent.

In Syria she was very attached to her social life, be it within her family or her neighbourhood. Habits and rituals, such as taking a trip every Friday with her family and her friends, were very important to her. She had been looking forward to these special occasions every day of the week.

It is common in Syria that families go out on Fridays and do small trips to the countryside and enjoy the weather with the family outside (Shoup 2008, pp. 132–134). Doing activities together like going to restaurants or preparing food at home, eating outside and enjoying the company of each other is an essential part of the Syrian lifestyle (Shoup 2008, pp. 132–134).

Though We'am was impressed by Germany's natural landscapes, she felt no connection to this country's people. Certainly, the language barrier played an important role, and her situation as a refugee. Nevertheless, she had concluded that the cultural divide was insurmountable for her. She understood that she had not yet been fully integrated into the German society, but her conclusion was based much more on the interactions between Germans she had observed. She thought that they were lacking the warmth and societal cohesion that she had appreciated in Syria.

I had a different life

Huda is 41-year-old divorced mother of two girls, who was heartbroken to leave Syria. She described to me her life in Syria:

> H: I was working as an aerobic trainer. I didn't have my own gym, but I had been working in a place for more than 10 years.
>
> I: Did you have a good life in Syria?
>
> H: Yes, thank god, it was fine. But the war didn't leave anyone in peace. Even though, and despite the situation there, which was getting increasingly worse, it is your home country. It is something different, no matter what […] in Syria I used to invite my friends to come over, or I would see them at the gym. But here I don't have any friends and my life became much different.

When Huda arrived in Germany, her life was completely changed. In the past, she had been an independent mother who worked hard for her living, having been able to accomplish this by stubbornly following her dreams.

Although she was divorced, she had been able to send her daughters to school and had given them a stable environment. She had even been able to keep up a good relationship with her ex-husband. Her daughters visited their father on a regular basis. She was proud to work and was happy living with her daughters, meeting friends and family. Coming to Germany meant losing all that. Everything was new and she didn't know anything; the city, the people, the language and everything was new. She felt lost and emotionally weak.

In her new life, what came first were the bureaucratic procedures. No time was left for the societal interactions that she had highly valued when she was still living in Syria. And even when she would meet new people in Germany, she felt that she could not become a part of their social context.

I lost a lot

Lames is a 38-year-old wealthy widower who had lost everything with the war:

> I: What changed in your life since you came here?
>
> L: A lot changed […] any war changes the life of the people to the worse. My family was very wealthy, and everything was covered in my life. But the war destroyed everything. My husband died. He was providing for me. Before my marriage I had been taken care of

by my father and my father's brothers. I had a maid in my home I was living a very luxurious life.

I: And what happened when you arrived here?

L: Here I have to do everything myself […]. I have to learn the language […] I had to start from zero.

I: Do you feel that you have many duties here?

L: Yes, so much more than I can take.

I: Were you working in Syria?

L: I was working depending on my mood.

I: Depending on your mood? What do you mean?

L: I mean, when my father died, he left my brothers and me some properties, so I was selling and buying houses. When I got married, I worked for my husband who owns a company in the administration and when I didn't want to work for a while, I would tell him so, and somebody else would take care of my duties.

Everybody knows everyone

Maya is a 25-year-old Kurdish woman who had just graduated from university in Syria as an agricultural engineer when she was forced to flee to Germany:

> I come from Amude a small city in the Al-Hasakah region. It's very small […] like a small neighbourhood here in Berlin. The souq there is also small, and everyone knows everyone. We would always make the joke that if someone in Amude was cooking something, everyone in Amude would know who was cooking and what. Life was simple there, but here everything is different.

Maya was living a tranquil life in Syria in a small city with a very strong communal sense, were nobody's actions would go unnoticed.

For her studies, Maya had moved to another small city. In her last year of studies, she had been able to move back to Amude as she didn't have to be present for every single class anymore. She then studied at home and went to the university just to take the exams. During her senior year she had also been able to find work in an organization.

She described the way her life and work were as simple, easy and not stressful. This changed when she came to Germany. She missed her previous life, not just only her small city but also the people, her friends, the way of living and everything there. What had kept her strong was the presence of her family.

I had my own house

Shiren is a 23-year-old mother of three, who came to Germany with her husband and her children. She told me:

> I was living in the city and I had my own house […] I got married when I was 16 years old and lived with my husband in our own house. My husband was working as a fisherman and sometimes on a ship. His family had a boat and his work was going well. Sometimes he also worked as an accountant for a toy company and we lived a very comfortable life.

Shiren lived a comfortable life in Latakia. She always had enough financial means, as her husband's position guaranteed a steady income. In Germany, she was struggling with the money allocated to her family by the jobcenter. She told me that when her kids wanted something, she can't say no because she doesn't want to deprive them from anything. The minimum subsistence payments are barely enough for the five family members.

Her happies memories were from her past life she had in Syria. The present was not as she had expected it to be. Having to count everything she buys to be able to manage the money until the end of the month was very challenging for her.

The living conditions in the accommodations and sharing everything with people who don't respect the rules was difficult for her and her family. She was constantly thinking about her previous life.

I miss Syria

Noor is a 40-year-old divorced mother who has two sons. She comes from the Naher Eshe district in Damascus and had been financially independent in Syria. Since she was 18 years old, she had worked different jobs: as a dressmaker, a photographer and in a restaurant. This enabled her to make a good living in Syria. She told me about her previous life:

> I miss Syria […] I was born and raised there, and I can show you around everywhere in Syria. I know everything there. My friends, family, everybody is there […] even the chair that I used to sit on is there.

Noor felt a very strong bond with her Syrian home country, telling me that she would feel comfortable everywhere there. Family and friends were a big part of the life she was able to lead there.

Some aspects of our life are associated to a specific place. After time, places become more than their physical manifestation, they constitute an environment to live with other people. We associate stories with this place and with time passing by, the peoples' love and feelings towards their places grows (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 37-41).

Noor told me that she wanted to continue living her life the way she had used to live it before leaving Syria. She expressed her longing for Syria and how the separation from her beloved country had made her life difficult.

In Germany she had lost all these known places. Here, she doesn't know anyone outside her family and she doesn't go out that much because she fears to get lost. She told me that she only knew how to get to the jobcenter, nowhere else. Some days she didn't want to leave her bed, she was sad and depressed.

The stones of Syria

Amal is a 75-year-old woman who told me:

> I miss the streets and the stones of Syria [taking a deep breath] I even miss the smell of garbage there.

Amal expressed a strong longing for her home country. For her it was the ideal place and she wouldn't recount any negative aspects of the life there.

As many other women I talked to, she had the feeling that she had lost part of her identity by leaving Syria. Having gotten out of the country, the women quickly realized that Syria was much more for them than a physical place.

7.3 Relationship Problems

Some women I talked to had to face challenges within their families due to their arrival in a new culture. The problems that the refugees must face test the relationships they had before. Some women I talked to have told me that since they arrived, they were having increased difficulties with their husbands and with their children regarding different issues related to their new situation and new surroundings.

Every aspect in their new cultural surrounding can affect the relationship that the women have with their families. The women fled together with their families and had overcome the associated challenges together as a family. When they arrive in Germany however, each member of the family has to face different challenges. The children and adults have to adapt different new environments and have to learn the language.

Problems with my husband

> All our problems are due to the situation in the camp. Cooking is a problem, the bathrooms are a problem, everything is stressful, and I am always fighting with my husband because of the camp.

During the Interview Shiren's husband was sitting in the room with us. After 45 minutes he left the room. During his absence Shiren told me about the problems with her husband.

When she was living in Syria, she had a peaceful life with her husband. Her husband was working, and they were doing great. This had changed since they had arrived in Germany. Her husband who was working in Syria and had a good life, now had no work and spend almost the entire time at the camp in the same room with his wife and their three children.

Being in one room added to the stress her husband was having because he was now unemployed, a situation he had not known when he was still living in Syria.

The relationship with my children

The initiative to flee Syria was often taken by the women. Rema is one of these women who fled with her family. Now that they had arrived in Germany, she would be blamed for the situation they were in at every occasion. She told me:

> My children fight with me all the time because I was the one who decided to leave and to come to Germany without discussing it with them. My daughter is having a lot of problems at her school and from time to time she and her brothers let their anger out at me and blame me for their sufferings here.

Rema felt guilty because she didn't ask her children or even discuss the subject of leaving with them before she had taken the decision to leave. She further told me that she had taken the decision on her own. When it was time to leave, she had told her children to pack their things without mentioning anything about leaving Syria.

This rushed departure had deprived their children from saying goodbye to their friends and family. They regretted not having been able to do so. Her children were now telling her that she was responsible for all of the problems and difficulties they were facing at that time.

She had never been in a situation like that before and her children had always respected her. This new place changed her relationship with her children completely. The social and moral order they had before was no more there.

Relationships with other Syrians

The relationships the women had with the other Syrian families and women in Germany was difficult. One of the factors is the uneven distribution of money among the refugees. Other factors include the problem of either being identified as a refugee or as humanitarian refugees, thus being given different opportunities and rights.

The women were also often confronted with prejudices against them when they had fled on their own with their children. One woman, Jory told me:

> Since I arrived in Germany, I was shocked by the Syrian people here and the way they think.

Jory came to Germany with her daughter and she said being alone was the source of her problems. Her husband had not accompanied her. She told me that she had heard most nonsense talk about her by other Syrians. Even her neighbour, who was also a Syrian woman wouldn't talk to her and did not let her husband talk to her.

The language courses

The duties that refugees have in Germany can also pose a problem to the women's relationship with their husbands. One woman, Boshra, who told me:

> My husband didn't let me go to the language course and every time I tried to convince him we had a fight.

She told me that her husband is a very conservative man who doesn't believe that women should get any education. For him the woman's place is her home and her duty is to be a good housewife, to have children and take care of them.

When Boshra came to Germany, the jobcenter required her to take a language course. Her husband was strictly opposed, as he did not want his wife to leave their home every day and learn the language in a classroom with other men.

Boshra told me that since they had come to Germany, she was feeling lonely and sad. She tries to convince her husband because she needed an activity as she did not want to be on her own the entire day. It had not worked. She had become pregnant and was now preoccupied with her new-born child.

I learned faster

Some men did not like being measured against their wife learning the language. Hind was one of the women who had more ease learning German than her husband. She was therefore the only one who was able to manage their everyday life. She told me:

> You know, I learned the language faster than my husband did and I was able to get used to the life here in Germany. My husband doesn't like it here, […] and he didn't want to learn the language. This is why we are having problems. He can't get used to this new life here.

Hind told me that back in Syria her husband had a job and a work schedule. He now thought that he was competing against his wife, learning the language. Having left Syria and his previous life he was now unemployed. He felt that his status as a man and provider for his wife was being threatened by Hind's talent and his inability to keep up.

Talking to other men

When the women had fled with their husbands, the contact with other men was generally problematic. Living in the shelter and having contact with the administration, meant that the women had to talk to other men. Rula's husband was strictly opposed to this. She told me:

> I try to avoid talking to other men in the accommodation but when someone comes to talk to me, I try to make it as fast as possible to avoid any troubles.

She further told me that other Syrian men were well aware of the troubles she could get in, if she talked to them. Nevertheless, they provocatively looked for reasons to address her. Because of this situation, she was stressed and tried to stay in her room as much as she could.

7.4 Divorce

While I was conducting my fieldwork, some women were in the process of dissolving their marriage. Some had been married in Germany, but other had been married for a long time in Syria before they had decided to leave the country.

In middle Eastern societies, a divorced woman is seen badly. To protect the family's reputation, the women is often forced to not get a divorce. The society often blames the women for the divorce.

The women I talked to, didn't dare to get divorced in Syria. The people and the society would have stigmatized them as a divorced woman. However, the main reason was that they risked losing access to their children.

The law in Syria grant the mothers the custody for their children until a certain age, then the father gets the full custody. To lose their children and never be able to see them anymore was one of the biggest fears the mothers had. This was the primary reason why the women did not leave their husbands.

In the Syrian society, the behaviour of the women reflects upon the entire family. Most families won't accept it if a woman decides to get divorced. In Syria, the women have to submit such a wish to their families, who have the power to stop them (Shoup 2008, pp. 120–121).

The families will most often refuse a divorce, because it can affect the reputation of the family and could also have financial consequences. The reputation of the family is very important in the Syrian society and must be protected at all costs (Shoup 2008, pp. 120–121).

A divorced woman is badly viewed by the society. Her friends', her family's, her neighbours' attitude towards her will change. When a woman gets a divorce, she will have to return to her parent's home. This is shameful enough for the family and the woman will not be allowed to live alone or to get her own place.

The divorced woman and her family and children are stigmatized, and some people will cease all contact with the woman and sometimes even with the entire family. The children could face problems at school and in the future when they want to get married. Some will refuse the son or the daughter of a divorced mother.

In the middle east the marriage is not only between two persons, but between two families. This complicates everything. The women's desires and suffering does not matter as much as the family's reputation.

Divorced in Syria 1

> Everything is controlled, especially when you are a woman, and it becomes even worse when you are divorced.

Amani was married for almost 20 years when she discovered that her husband had been cheating her with another woman. She was indignant and had informed their entire neighbourhood. Her husband's reputation was thus tarnished, and she was able to divorce him easily.

She did not have to care too much about her reputation, as her daughters had already been married. This meant that she wouldn't have to fight for their custody, and that her children's life would not be affected by her decision.

Her husband's actions were however quickly pardoned and forgotten. She was then still seen badly, and she was often blamed for the divorce. People were always talking about her and she was not treated well.

Divorced in Syria 2

> A divorced woman in Syria is a catastrophe.

Lila is 31-year-old woman from Deir Ez-zor in Damascus. She had been married when she was 13 years old and for two years her husband didn't touch her, because she was still too young. She told me that her relationship with her husband slowly deteriorated when she had her first child.

By the time, she had gotten her second child the problems had become unsolvable. She went back to her family and asked to be divorced. Because her father refused to take care of her children, she had to leave the children with her ex-husband. When she got divorced, her family, her friends, the neighbours and everyone else who knew her, kept talking and gossiping about her.

People started to spread stories about her that were completely false. It became so difficult that even when Lila would visit her maternal aunt, she wouldn't let her husband come in the house or be around, because Lila was divorced. People thought that divorced women steal husbands.

This was not the only incident. On another occasion Lila randomly met a friend accompanied by her husband. When she greeted them, her friend didn't let her husband greet Lila back, for the same reason Lila's aunt had kept her husband away from her.

Lila told me that people with whom she had been friends for a long time and relatives who were close to her changed their attitude towards her the moment she became a divorced woman. Even neighbours, would only talk about her in a negative way. She told me that the life of a divorced woman in Syria is very hard, not only because of the social stigma, but also because of the lack of support that her family was giving her.

At some point, she was not able to live with her family anymore and she had to find a way out. A friend of hers told her about a man who was looking for a wife. He was working in Turkey and had a good life. Without thinking much about this proposal, she agreed to marry him to leave her family's home and to start over somewhere else away from her past life.

She married that man and went to live with him in Turkey. She was pregnant two times. While she was pregnant the second time, she found out that the man she had married was married to another

woman in Syria with whom he had children and to whom he had planned to leave all his wealth. Lila and her children would have been left with nothing.

To make her situation even worse, on night the Turkish police came to their house and arrested her husband who was suspected to work for the so-called Islamic-State.

After this incident she was very frightened and decided to run away with her children. At that time, while her husband was in the prison, she fled from the house taking her children with her.

After a long and hard journey, she finally reached Germany. Somehow, and although she didn't tell anybody where she had gone, her husband had found out where she was. After he had gotten out of jail in Turkey, he followed her to Germany. When she had arrived, she had told the authorities everything. Although she had mentioned that her husband had worked with the IS, she didn't have anything to prove it, and there was no substantial evidence.

She filed for divorce and waited a year as required by the German law. She was hoping to be able to lead a better life now, far away from her family and her ex-husband. Unfortunately, getting a divorce didn't stop her ex-husband from harassing her by using her children, following her and threatening her. That made her go to the police and file a harassment notice against him, but still that didn't stop him.

One day he appeared on her way to buy some groceries, and when she ignored him and refused to talk to him, he pulled her from the back and started beating her in the middle of the street until the people stopped him and called the police. She was taken to the hospital and suffered great injuries on her entire body. She sued him and hoped that this time he would be stopped for good. Lila told me that she knows that nothing is going to stop her ex from hurting her again. She also said that although the law is on her side still it can't protect her from him.

Married to Germany

Two women, Aseel and Sedra, were able to come to Germany through the family reunification program, joining their husbands.

Aseel, a 20-years-old woman, told me:

> My family married me to a Syrian man living here [in Germany]. But when I came here, we didn't get along at all and we were fighting constantly, so I left him.

Sedra, a 30-years-old woman, told me:

> S: I was married because they thought he is fine. He isn't a refugee and he works in Germany.
>
> I: And why do you want to get a divorce?
>
> S: He doesn't want me, and neither do I.

I met both women on the same day at Al-Nadi. There were many women there on that day, because there was an art exhibition for refugees and migrant women from the middle east. In the crowd I saw new faces, and some younger women were sitting in a corner chatting with each other. They had also met each other for the first time on that day. When I was introduced to them by another women I knew, they were very nice and didn't mind me asking them about their stories.

To get divorced in Germany, the couple needs to be separated for the duration of one year. After that they will get an appointment for the hearing and the court will divorce them afterwards (BGB 2014, p. 347).

Both women had been married traditionally. That meant that their families had organized everything and had chosen whom the women had to marry. They both agreed to this procedure and accepted their families' choice. They knew within which boundaries they were allowed to take decisions, and were thus not coerced into the marriage but agreed to the process, as many other women in middle eastern countries do (Abu-Lughod 2013, pp. 143–147).

Having been married some time, conflicts arose, and they were not able to solve the problems in their relationships. At that time, Aseel had already filed for divorce and Sedra was about to do so. Aseel told me that she appreciated that the laws in Germany were much different than in Syria.

I met Sedra again a year after the first encounter and asked her how she was doing. She told me that she was still waiting for her divorce:

> I didn't get the divorce yet; my lawyer is not taking care of my case the way he should. Until now nothing has happened.

She had been separated from him for more than a year now, but still nothing had changed. When I asked her what she was planning to do, she told me:

> I don't know. I will see if I can change my lawyer.

A couple whose marriage has been arranged, needs to communicate with each other to set the foundation of their new life, and at the same time to get to know the other person. During this phase the couple could face some understanding difficulties. These can be eased by the presence of the family and friends. These can demonstrate to the newlyweds how they should care about each other (Berger and Kellner 2016, pp. 12–14).

These mentors were missing in Germany, and not having someone to talk to, made the situation for both difficult. They were not able to handle this new situation. Both partners needed to work together to make their new life possible (Berger and Kellner 2016, pp. 11–14).

The women had to find a way to cope with their new environment, and at the same time they had to get along with their husbands. It was too much for them to handle these two life changing events at the same time.

I left my husband 1

> I left my husband. Now we have been separated but not yet divorced. I thought that this was the best solution. He is not a bad person, but his thinking is limited.

Hiba is a 31-year-old mother of three boys from Idlib, a city in north-western Syria. She had been married for 10 years and had been regularly abused. However, she had never left her husband, because she had feared that she would be separated from her children.

In Germany, the law allowed her to keep her children. Hiba had endured her husband for over 10 years for the sake of her children. She told me that her children are what is most important for her and that she wouldn't be able to live without them.

When she learned that in the case of a divorce, the mother is given the custody of the child, she immediately acted. She didn't want to have to live in fear anymore and wanted to live in peace with her children.

I left my husband 2

Joel had also asked to be divorced the moment she arrived in Germany.

She told me:

> I couldn't live with him anymore. I had a lot of problems and I wanted to get a divorce in Syria, but the law there is unfair for women. The Syrian law gives the custody of the children to the father when they are 12 or 14 and I didn't want to lose my daughters.

Joel is a 37-year-old Christian from Damascus. She had a religious marriage and knew that she wouldn't be able to get the church's permission to divorce her husband. She had thought about getting a divorce in the court.

What made her stop the divorce procedures were her children. She talked to a lawyer in Syria without telling her husband about it and asked him whether her children would stay with her or with her husband. He stated that she would lose access to her children and that they would have to stay with her husband.

After the lawyer had told her this, she had stopped thinking about getting a divorce because she couldn't imagine living without her daughters. She stayed with her husband just for the sake of her

daughters. Should she have divorced her husband, she would not have been able to see her daughters without her husband's permission. She was not prepared to enter into such a struggle.

Before telling me how and when she got divorced, she asked me not to judge her and what she did. She told me that she didn't have another choice and that she hoped that I won't consider her to be a bad woman.

When the people were starting to leave Syria, she was trying to convince her husband to leave. It had not worked in the beginning, but after his best friend talked about leaving, he seemed more inclined to do so. He left first and the plan was to get them to Germany though the family reunification program.

Ultimately, this didn't work out, but she was still able to come to Germany with her daughters on her own. The moment she arrived she demanded to be divorced. She was happy to have succeeded to have been able to leave her husband and to keep her daughters.

Keeping my children

> I came here with my daughter and I don't want to apply for the family reunification program.

Afaf had been married to a Lebanese man after she had fled from Syria to Lebanon. Her husband and his family were constantly treating her badly. She was not allowed to visit her parents and she did not have a phone.

When she became pregnant the problems became even bigger, especially since he didn't want to have any kids. After she gave birth, she couldn't live with him anymore and wanted to get divorced, but he refused to divorce her unless she signed a document stating that she would have to pay back everything that he had given to her. Additionally, she would have been required to leave their daughter with him.

She agreed as she did not expect her daughter to be taken away from her immediately. However, her daughter was taken away from her only two months after they had been living on their own. That is why she decided to go back to her husband.

She was then able to convince her husband, that the best solution for them would be to leave the country and flee to Germany. Her husband agreed that she should go first and give him the possibility to join her once she had arrived through the family reunification program.

Once she had arrived in Germany, she immediately demanded to be divorced from her husband. She did not tell him that she had divorced him, because she feared that he would take revenge and hurt her family that had stayed back in Lebanon and in Syria.

Afaf had finally succeeded, and was able to keep her daughter. However, she still feared that her ex-husband would take revenge.

My mother divorced my father

Ghada is a 24-year-old woman who told me:

> My mother filed for divorce when she arrived here. She came on her own and was able to bring us all through the family reunification program. But my father is a difficult person who controlled her life and ours and she couldn't take it anymore. I don't blame her, my father is a very difficult person.

Her mother couldn't bear the restrictions put on her freedom by the marriage. She had taken the decision to get divorced when she arrived in Germany. Once she was able to get her family to Germany through the family reunification program, she put her plans into reality.

She had been controlled for too long and had suffered from him. Her daughter told me that she had accepted her mother's decision, because she, as a daughter, knew her father well.

If I knew the law

> Do you know about the law in Germany and if I can keep my children with me if I divorce my husband?

This question was asked by Waffa, a 24-year-old woman I talked to in Bayreuth. When I met her the first times, her husband was in the same room and she had to seek his approval for everything she told me.

She had gotten married during the war and had come to Germany with her husband and child. During their stay she had given birth to her second child. Once, her husband left the room, she wanted to know how she would be able divorce her husband, and who would get to keep the children.

Since she had come to Germany, she had been in constant fight with her husband. He had lost a leg during the war and had to undergo several surgeries. He was therefore not able to work, and the entire situation had made him extremely aggressive.

While she was taking care of the home and children, she also needed to deal with his situation all the time. This made it very hard for her, especially when she would have to go out. She had made up her mind, and wanted to file a divorce as soon as the right moment would come.

In Syria the women's marriage was often held together by their fear of losing their children. Once the married women, who had difficulties with their husbands came to Germany, they realized, that they were now safe and could file for divorce. Some were ashamed, and did not want other people to think that they were exploiting the new situation. What they were able to do in Germany, would not have been possible in Syria.

What was also surprising, is that some women who were still married didn't accept the fact that other Syrian women had gotten divorced. They though that they were doing it because of the money. They were not interested to know the reason why the women had acted this way.

The rights granted to the women in Germany allowed them to improve their situation, without having the fear that they would lose their children. They thus learned to take matters into their own hands, taking their own decision and disregarding unfair cultural norms and customs.

7.5 Religion

Religious beliefs mirror the diversity of our societies. Its prevalence and the practice of religious rituals differs greatly not only between the different parts of this world, but also within the same society.

Religion plays an important role in the middle east and in Syria. While most Syrians are Muslims, a minority of Christians has also lived in Syria for several centuries. Their cohabitation has been mostly peaceful.

Religion manifests itself through the way people practice their religious believes in their everyday life. Whether they are Sunni, Shiite, Druze, Alawi, orthodox or catholic Christians. Religion gives some people strength to be able to face the troubles and challenges in their lives. Miller and Stark wrote that women are much more bund and attached to their religious beliefs then men (Miller and Stark 2002, p. 1399). Syria defines itself as a secular country but has implemented parts of the Islamic legal system into its laws (Shoup 2008, pp. 39–60).

When I talked to the women that came to Germany, they recounted to me different experiences regarding their religion. Some told me that since they arrived in Germany, they became more religious, while others told me that they had become less religious.

For some women, the experience of losing everything they went through had cast doubts about the existence of a god. These women felt that it was not their belief that had kept them alive, but their families' support and love. Because the women's previous life had been erased, they had to rethink everything.

For some women, their religion gave them the opportunity to better cope with their new situation and help them through the healing process. They were however also questioning why this had happened to them, looking for answers in their religion.

The women who had experienced a traumatic journey, are met with new challenges within their new environment that require their full attention (Huseby-Darvas 1993, pp. 7–8). They felt vulnerable. They had lost their family, their friends and their communities. In some cases this made them hold onto, or completely reject, the only things that had been left from their previous life: their religion. Some had been disappointed to see, that when they had needed the most help, they had been left alone.

In Germany all religions can be practiced without having to fear legal consequences. Knowing this, the women felt safe. They were not having much trouble adapting to the sight of different religions in Germany. The dress code in the Syrian society allowed woman to wear a scarf, or not (Shoup 2008, pp. 39–60). As Laukner wrote, the religion influences the language that we use (Lauckner 2011, p. 25). In the Arabic language many common expressions are of religions origin.

When the women arrived in Germany, they met different people that influenced how they were thinking. They were able to join communities that fitted them best, and where the other women would follow the same dress code.

Some women would regularly go to the mosque and had found a religious community in Germany. Other Christian women were going to the church. In the community centres like Al-Nadi, women from all religions would meet and were thus able to learn more about the other religions.

Joel and her bible

One woman, Joel, talked to me about her life in Germany. She and her two daughters had been struggling with depression since they had come to Germany. In school, Joel's daughters were not able to communicate with the other children, and they ultimately refused to go there.

Joel tried her best to calm her children by regularly reading the bible with them. She tried to encourage them through the stories in the bible. She thus told them that everything is difficult in the beginning, but that it will get better with time.

They often cried, and it wasn't easy for them. Although she wasn't feeling well herself, she tried to hide it from her daughters. Joel's religion was her way out of her depression and her solution to make the situation of her daughters better. Through her believe, she was able to overcome the difficulties in her life and she told me that she interprets everything in her life as a sign from God.

In Syria Joel had a big family with whom she did activities. They gathered several times a week to talk and sing, having a good time. Beside that she also had a job, her home, her family and her religion. In Germany she felt like she was sinking deeper and deeper into a life that she doesn't understand. Although her belief made her strong, her weak moments were sometimes stronger. The main reason was that she felt lonely and unwanted. Her struggle with her everyday life made her fear the unknown. She told me:

> Since I came to Germany, the darkness frightens me. I am now afraid to be lonely; I am afraid that I will be living alone. Everything frightens me.

She had never experienced these kind of fear before in her life and she began to look for remedies in the bible. For her the bible was her place of refuge, a place where she always felt safe. Speaking to me, she would often make references to the virgin Mary, Jesus and say prayers.

She was in a fragile state. Her new life in Germany had given her the feeling that she had become a stranger and she was having great difficulties. Her religion couldn't provide her all the answers she needed.

Lama and the Halal food

Lama had noticed many differences to the German culture, especially when it came to the food. She told me that as a Muslim she felt the obligation to check anything she would eat before, because as she told me:

> You don't know whether it's pork or Halal, if it's ok or not.

In Syria it had never been a problem for her, halal food was the standard. In Germany she had to be much more cautious, because she knew that pork derivates are often used in industrial processes. Another issue for her was whether the meat was slaughtered in an Islamic way or not. This had never been a problem in Syria. Her religion was very important to her and she didn't want to make a mistake buying the wrong products. The women were often confused and doubtful whether they were allowed to consume a certain product or not.

Lama told me that pork meat doesn't exist in Syria and alcohol would only be sold and served in specific places and not to be put into food items for the public. People wouldn't have to watch out what they would eat and what they are not supposed to.

The women that I talked to who were staying in the shelters told me that although they have been told that the food served in the shelter was halal, they still avoided eating it when it contained meat because they didn't trust the people in the shelters.

Taking off her scarf

Lila told me that when she came to Germany and saw how the people live here, she decided to take off her scarf. She had worn it since she had been 13 years old. She did so because she was told to and didn't question it because all of the women in her family were doing so.

When I asked her, what made her take this decision, she told me that the scarf didn't fit her life in Germany. In Syria, she would never have thought about removing the scarf, but here it was different.

Other women were not taking this into consideration, because they had gotten used to the scarf. Some were wearing the scarf because of their religion.

Lila hadn't thought about the religion when she took the decision. Her brother who was also living in Germany supported her decision. The first time Lila went out of the shelter without her scarf, he accompanied her. She thereby wanted to avoid any negative comments by the other refugees and wanted to show them that her decision had been approved by her family.

In the Islamic cultures the debate about the scarf is a never-ending story, subject to different interpretations and explanations.

Amar and her scarf

I first met Amar at Al-Nadi. I introduced myself to her and asked her if she would like to talk to me about her life in Germany. She was very open about how she came to Germany and about her life in Syria and now in Germany. She was at that time dressed very conservatively, wearing a scarf. After our first meeting we saw each other several times and then she stopped coming to Al-Nadi.

After 6 months she came back to a course for mothers and she had completely changed. She wasn't wearing a scarf anymore and the way she dressed was different. I talked to her after the class and asked her how she was doing. She told me that she had taken the scarf off and that her life had changed.

After a while she had started to think seriously about removing the scarf and then she became possessed with the idea. She told me that she had questioned the reasons why she was wearing the scarf and had concluded that she did not want to wear it anymore. She said that she didn't want to look different from the people in Germany and that she felt more comfortable doing so. Her husband was against her decision, but she didn't care. She had taken some time to have the courage to carry out her plans, but had finally realized them.

Jory and the box of cookies

Jory had once brought a box of cookies and had told me that she used her phone to translate all the ingredients from all the products she bought. She had noticed that the cookies contained gelatine. She asked me if that meant that they contained pork. Because it wasn't mentioned what kind of gelatine was used, I couldn't assure her, and told her that it was not possible to be sure. That was enough for her not to eat the cookies.

Rana and the strange thoughts.

Rana struggled learning the language and when she was in school, she sometimes didn't understand anything at all. She told me that god gave her the feeling that it was ok. She was telling herself that it was normal, because if the Germans came to Syria, they would have the same problems she was having.

Rana had great difficulties adapting to her new environment in the beginning, and she told me that her religious believes had helped her. She had been struggling with depression and insomnia.

She couldn't sleep in the beginning and because of that, she started to have strange ideas like leaving her husband and her daughters here in Germany and returning back to Syria without telling anyone.

She went to a psychiatrist and took medication to be able to sleep. She told me that the presence of God in her life, had helped her through these struggles.

Lamya and Gods plan

When I asked Lamya about her journey to Germany, she told me that she did not decide to come, it was God's plan. She told me that she is a religious person and that God had facilitated many things for her, during the trip and when she and her children had arrived in Germany.

She thought that is was her destiny to come to Germany. She had initially thought that she would only be staying for 3 month and then be able to go back to Syria. At that time, she had been in

Germany for 4 years. She thought that this was God's will, and that he was the one who had enabled her to overcome all the challenges she had faced within her new environment.

7.6 Freedom of Choice

In Germany, the women were able to act independently, and they were given freedoms they had not known before. They were thus able to study, to work, to travel or rent a home. This had not always been possible for them in Syria.

Some women had immediately realized what rights they had in Germany, others were confused when asked, as they had not thought about it. The women's level of education in this study varies greatly and could explain why some were confused by the question regarding their new rights (Tsolidis 2014, pp. 84–87).

The freedom of choice given to the women in Germany, is something they had not experienced before. Even if they are open to it not all of them thought that it might be reason enough for them to change their behaviour, as they still felt bound to the Syrian laws and customs.

A good husband

> I: Do you think that you have more rights as a woman living here than you had in Syria?
>
> R: Look, my life in Syria was very good. My husband isn't the kind that would made me suffer. He is a very kind man and he enabled me to a have a good and comfortable life. But when my child fell ill, my life changed.

Hind is a 35-year-old mother of two boys from Aleppo. She was not thinking about the new rights and opportunities given to her in Germany. She told me that for her it doesn't really make a difference. As a married woman who had a good relationship with her husband in Syria, she did not see a reason to change anything. She did not want to anger her husband, by demanding any changes.

More rights

> I: Do you think these rights are going to help you in your life?
>
> J: No, I don't know why, but these matters [the women's rights] make me feel frightened. I told you no, because I don't know what my rights are until now. I didn't think about this, because I have other things to worry about […] I mean, it's like thinking about things I don't want to think about. I don't want to leave my husband and I don't want equality.
>
> I: It's not about leaving your husband you know?
>
> J: I know, I know but I don't think about these matters, because I have other things to worry about. Like how to settle down and how my husband is going to be able to come to Germany. I think about other things and I won't let anyone hurt me. I ignore some people because some people are a waste of time, I mean they are closed minded and I fear that I might get into a big problem here.

Jory, a 30-year-old mother of a 2-year-old girl from Douma, located in the north-east of Damascus, didn't want to talk about that subject at all. The moment I asked her, she was very confused, and thought that I had asked her when she was going to leave her husband.

She was irritated by this subject and quickly wanted to talk about other things. Her confusion about this subject was reason enough for me not to go any further with my questioning. Her position was simply, that she didn't feel that anything had changed for her, nor that she would need any change. It seemed to me, that in retrospect she didn't want to consider herself helpless in Syria, let alone have to draw back on German law to help her. She changed the subject to the people in her accommodation and made it clear to me that she didn't want to talk or answer the question I had asked.

If I want a home

Maya is a 25-year-old woman from al Hasakah. She told me:

> The last time the woman in the jobcenter asked me if I wanted a home for myself. I was really shocked by that question and said no. I told her that I wanted to share a home with my mother and my brother.

The women don't know how to handle this new place and find it very difficult to understand a different way of living after having been raised in a different way their entire life.

Maya told me she did not want to live on her own. She wanted to live with her family until she would be able to marry.

Looking for a job

> Here the women's life changes and mine also. I even started looking for a job […] you know my family isn't here, I have no friends and I am often bored. […] I fell ill and my hair began to fall off, that's why my husband agreed that I should be looking for a job, and be able to get out more [...]

Although Amar didn't leave her house in Syria that often she had never before felt bored or depressed. Now she had become busier, having to manage several responsibilities at the same time. She was under a lot of pressure.

When she was telling me about her plans to find a job, she was trying to justify it to me. She wanted to make it clear, that the only reason why she wanted to work was to cure her depression. She did not want to be judged and had not considered that it was her right to act as she did.

It is particularly noteworthy, that most women I talked to had been the ones that had decided to flee from Syria and had convinced their families or husbands. In Germany the women had gained the right to work, to open a bank account and to rent their own place. However, these new opportunities were associated with new responsibilities and the women had to learn how to manage their own life according to their own desires.

7.7 Being Excluded: Loss of Status and Control

The Syrian women I met, had gone through great existential crises when they arrived in Germany. They had to rethink their identity and what it meant to be a refugee. While being in Germany opened up more possibilities to the women, it also increasingly gave them the feeling of being

strangers. Some women I talked to, told me that they were trying to live their lives as if they were still in Syria. This was however not possible, and the women had to adapt, forcing them to question their own identity.

In the Hospital

Jory asked me once to help her because she needed to take her daughter to the hospital for an operation. She was told to bring a translator or someone who spoke German to help prepare her daughter and understand what they were going to do and what she needed to do after the operation.

Jory was wearing a scarf and while we were waiting during her daughter's operation, she wanted to go out to smoke. We went out and sat on a bench and while we were talking a woman came to us and stood across Jory and angrily looked at her. She then started to insult her about her religion and told her that she didn't want to see her around here again. I insisted she leave us alone, but she kept talking to Jory.

After she had finally left Jory asked me what the woman had told her, and although I didn't tell her she knew that she had been insulted, she had felt it. The woman had made her angry and she kept on asking what she had said. In that moment she was not only worried for her daughter but also irritated by the woman who had talked to her without her being able to understand what she had said.

After the operation I left, and she stayed in the hospital with her daughter. She had to stay for a few days and wasn't prepared, she told me that she thought that she would be able to take her daughter home afterwards, but the doctors decided to let her daughter stay in the hospital until they could be sure that she was fine.

Although she had not taken with her anything that she would have needed for that extended period, she refused to leave her daughter alone and stayed the entire time with her. Her daughter was sharing her room with another girl who had to stay there on her own because the mother had to

go to work. This was incomprehensible to Jory, who told me that she would never have been able to leave her daughter on her own like that.

She could not only not envisage herself acting in such way, she was very confused by this behaviour. It would not fit with her idea of family, she had shaped in the Syrian society, being the centre of everything.

As van Eijk pointed out, women are brought up in Syria with the idea that their role is to be a good wife and a good mother and to take care of the family as a primary duty (van Eijk 2016, 100-103). Jory was judging the other mother based upon this conviction.

Speaking Arabic in the Bus

> One time I was in the bus with my father going someplace, and an old woman noticed me talking with my father in Arabic. She knew that we are refugees. Although our appearance was normal, like everybody else and people won't notice that we are from Syria, when we start speaking Arabic, they identify us. The woman started to come closer and closer to me although the bus was very crowded and started pushing me while telling us that refugees have rotten blood. She told us: "I don't want to smell your rotten blood". My father was asking me what the woman was saying. I told him that she was not talking to us.

Ghada told me how speaking Arabic in the public had put her and her father in an unpleasant situation. On that particular occasion she described to me, she had been deeply hurt.

Ghada is a 24-year-old woman studying at the university who was able to speak German. She thus understood everything the women was telling them, but she didn't know what to answer. Ghada told me that she understands the reaction of the old woman and she understands if others do share the same opinion about refugees.

She told me that she had once worked with other refugees. She had been employed to identify refugees who were trying to get away with a lie. She said she was shocked by some Syrian people who tried to lie and to use her to translate wrong information, and thereby to be recognized as refugees. This behaviour had shocked her and had showed her how far people were willing to go.

I don't have any change

I was once visiting Jory at her shelter when We'am came by. She was very angry. She explained:

> I was going to take the bus from Schönefeld to your shelter, but I needed to buy an extra ticket to get to your place [to a shelter outside of Berlin, in Brandenburg]. So, after having already travelled more than half the way, taking me more than an hour and a half, I needed to take the bus. When the bus arrived, I didn't have any change. I only had a 100-euro bill. The bus driver told me that he doesn't have that much change and asked me to leave the bus if I was not able to pay. I was very shocked and surprised but then one of the passengers payed for me.

She further told me, that in Syria this would never have happened as a woman would never be forced to leave if she can't pay something. This behaviour specifically against women, was something that deeply contradicted her understanding of 'good' behaviour that she told me she had been socialized with in Syria. She asked herself: "does he have a wife?" and "doesn't he have a sister?".

In Syria, men and women are expected to behave in a certain manner in public. As van Eijk pointed out, this behaviour is very determined by the society (van Eijk 2016, pp. 103–104).

If this situation would have happened to We'am in Syria, the bus driver would have let her in without making a big deal out of it. This has several reasons:

1. The driver may do it because of the religion, thinking that if she needed help and he can help, he would do so. He would therefore accomplish his religious duty.

2. The reason could be moral which would mean that he would help her because she is a woman and he would not want to dishonour her and would not what his sister or mother to be in the same position (van Eijk 2016, pp. 103–108).

3. The third reason is the society, and the judgement that any potential witnesses would pose upon him if he acted in a way contrary to the social codex (van Eijk 2016, pp. 103–108). Manners and behaviours which are usually seen in the everyday life through communications are very important for the reputation of the families (van Eijk 2016, pp. 103–108).

The man who paid for We'am's trip was also going to the shelter because he lived there, and he was a refugee. She was able to pay him back.

Accepting an invitation

Ghada told me another story that showed her how Arabic people are different than Germans:

> For us our neighbours in Syria are very important and when you move to a new place people come to visit you and bring flowers and chocolate to greet you. When we moved to our new apartment, we wanted to meet our neighbours and invited them to come to us for lunch, they said "ok, but we don't have time now". In Germany it's normal to say so, but it would be nice to say it in a more compassionate way.

The way in which people communicate and handle relationships in Germany is very different. For people from the middle east, where living in a collective society is very important, people take care of their relationships with others. The family's reputation and maintaining relationships is very important.

The people invite each other, eat and talk and get to know each other better. How the Syrian women talked to their friends, family and neighbours was very important. The expressed friendliness could be considered exaggerated, but is there regarded as a friendly act of communication (van Eijk 2016, 103-108).

For the women, what mattered most, was living together in a community. It was unthinkable for them to refuse a stranger's invitation.

Very honest

Some women told me about encounters with Germans, were they were shocked by the straightforward communications they had with them.

Sama told me:

> The Germans are very frank. They make an appointment for a cup of coffee and even if they invite you for lunch and you won't leave immediately, they will tell you that they have

> another appointment coming up or that they need to work now. So you will have to leave. In Syria a guest is someone very special and even if someone comes without notice, he or she will be let in and have at least a cup of coffee and will be treated in a special way. Even if the guest stayed after an invitation for lunch for a while and didn't leave early we would never say anything until they leave when they want to […] you know, I find the German way better because it's more honest than ours, but still I feel sometimes the way they express it could be a little bit friendlier.

Sama further told me that her friends in Syria would gather on a regular basis. Suddenly, she had having nobody to talk to. Relationships with Germans are not the same and because the women were not able to speak the language, they were not able to build new friendships.

Even if she had been able to communicate, she felt that she would not have much to talk about because of the different cultural background.

Showing gratitude

Sama a 42-year-old mother of two boys from Bab Tuma, an area in the old city of Damascus. She told me:

> I met a German woman who became a very close friend. I respected her a lot and I thought that she shared the same feelings towards me. When her birthday came, I gave her a gift to show her that I really liked her as a friend, she thanked me, but I thought that her reaction was very formal and cold. I was a little disappointed. And when my birthday came, she didn't even say "happy birthday", although I told her on what day my birthday is. She didn't remember.

Sama wanted her friend to know how much she appreciates their friendship. She had different expectations. When she didn't get what she had expected, she was disappointed and thought that maybe she had been misled, and that the German woman did not want to be her friend.

Teaching Arabic

Sama further told me that she was giving Arabic language lessons to a diplomat. However, he often did not pay her. Sometimes he would only pay half the agreed upon amount. He would then be pretending that he had no money left.

She said that if she didn't mention the money, he would act as if he had forgotten about it. Sama felt embarrassed to ask for the money and would have preferred, if he had given her the money without making a big deal out of it and without making her ask for it.

Although it was her right to ask for the money, she was embarrassed. And because she was not used to ask for the money, it was not only embarrassing for her, but she also thought that she was being rude, making her feel uncomfortable.

She felt as if she was begging for the money. She told me that in Syria she always got the money right away, without having been put in such a situation.

Losing everything 1

Joel opened up about her life in Syria and once told me the following:

> In Syria I was working as a journalist for one of the most important newspapers. I was responsible for their online version. We were in direct contact with the republican palace and we used to publish the transcripts of the official speeches and government announcements in our newspaper. I was respected, and I had a very good position in the company. Since I was working there, I had a driver who took me to work and took me back home every day […] now I do nothing, and everything I worked for is now gone.

Joel had lost her social status and a position she had worked hard to obtain. In Germany she felt as if she was no one, greatly affecting her self-esteem.

Losing everything 2

Another woman, Rema, told me:

> I was a school director, and everyone respected me: the teachers, the students, the parents and even the minister of education. I was known and respected in the area. When the ministry of education called and asked about the school, I was able to report about everything directly: how many students attended, the number of teachers who were working at my school and the ones who didn't attend today. I had a good position and a good reputation […] now here I'm nothing. I am a nobody.

When Rema was talking, she got very emotional, and she started crying. She told me that she had known since the ninth grade what she wanted to do. She had organized her entire life accordingly. She had graduated from university and then found a job as a schoolteacher and had been able to slowly ascend the ladder and finally she became the director of the school. She told me that her entire life had a goal and a purpose and that she was now left with nothing.

The women felt a great loss in this new life, because they felt as if they were not in control of their life anymore. They were not ready to accept their new life, and adapt to the changes. This is what kept them from moving forward and potentially adapt and integrate in their new environment. They were still thinking about their old life all the time.

It did not seem possible for them, that they would never be able to regain their lost social status in Germany. Here, different qualifications were needed, and their age did not make it easier.

First and foremost, they had to learn a new language. This was much easier for their children. The mothers however struggled.

Rema told me that she had been depressed since she had arrived to Germany and when she went to the psychiatrist for help, he told her she was the only one who could be able to help her out of this situation.

I was a respectable person

> You enter into a status that is humiliating and makes everything difficult. And this happens although you are from a respected family and had a position in your own society where everyone knew who you are.

Huda felt lost in her new environment. She had been a respectable person, and now she had become a nobody. She felt degraded as a refugee.

7.8 Feeling Stuck

The Syrian women I talked to, had been struggling to learn German. While all the women had some difficulties speaking the language, it was especially difficult for older women to learn a completely new language. I am going to describe some examples of problems that arose while learning the language.

Too many problems

> The problems in our life stand in the way of us learning. You enter a school to learn the German language and at the same time you have thousand problems on your mind. […] You fear for your family in Syria, you fear for your children here, you have financial problems, you have mental problems, problems with the jobcenter and with the youth office. We have a lot of problems that stand in the way of our integration and because of these problems I can't learn properly.

Joel's problems are affecting her life and her learning process. Having to deal with many issues at the same time. Joel speaks only Arabic and she never had to learn another language before.

Because of the problems she is not motivated to learn. It is not a priority for her, as she has other problems that she thinks are more important.

I'm illiterate

Amina is a 42-year-old woman from Aleppo. She told me:

> They want me to learn the language and work, but I'm illiterate. I didn't learn it when I was young and now, I'm old […]. How am I going to learn the language at this age, it's a real problem for me.

Amina is a woman who had owned a little plot of land in Syria. She was living in the countryside, where she had lived her entire life taking care of her land and her family. When she came to Germany, she was put into the Tempelhof shelter.

She told me that she had never gone to a school all her life, and it was not possible for her to do so given her age. The jobcentre would have taken away 10% off her allocated money, if she did not go to the language course. She was therefore forced to go to the course.

I used to work

Amani is a 62-year-old woman. She told me:

> I used to work at the television as a reporter. When I got married, I stopped working. That was a long time ago.

Amani was not motivated to learn the language at her age, as she did not think that she would have the chance to get an employment. She had to travel one hour every day to go to the language school.

In Syria, Amani had owned a house. There, she had never felt lonely as she had her daughters, relatives and friends around. Even after she got divorced, she was able to live a good life and didn't have to work. During the war, her house was taken by the "free Syrian army" and she had no other choice but to flee.

The course is too fast

> In Syria we had a lot of time, here everything goes fast. Even the language course is fast, everything needs to be done fast here.

Sama was complaining about the new rhythm her life had been given. She told me that at the language course, she had barely the time to understand the course's subject every single day.

The class and the way the teacher was teaching the language was very challenging for her. She was under much pressure, and even though she had passed the final exam, she admitted to me that she still didn't understand much in German.

The school is far a way

Faten is a 37-year-old woman. She explained to me:

> They put me in a school at the other end of the city, in Spandau. I spend the entire time on the way, changing from U Bahn to another U Bahn. I went for 3 months and since I became pregnant, I can't sit for 3-4 hours you know, and that's it. I stopped going to the school, I'm so tired, I can't.

Faten told me that in Syria she had never gone out that far. She had stayed in her neighbourhood where she had everything she needed.

I can't learn

We'am told me the following story:

> When I arrived in Germany, I was alone, and I wanted to apply to the family reunification program as fast as possible to be able to bring my children here. But it didn't work in the beginning, all my thoughts were with my children. I was at school daily, but my mind was with my children.

We'am had to go to school to learn the language while trying to bring her children to Germany. She told me that during that time she couldn't learn the language, because she had a more important issue she had to handle first. She had to take the courses, but wasn't giving much attention to it at all.

Several other women were facing the same problem. The women came to Germany alone and had hoped to be able to get their families to Germany very quickly. However, this turned out to be a lengthy process.

The women had lost everything. Their family was very important to them, and them not being able to bring their families destroyed their spirit and made them lose their sole motivation.

We'am told me that she won't be able to get her children now and that it might never happen. When she learned that, she was enraged, and decided to go back to her children and leave Germany immediately. Her Aunt who was living in Germany calmed her down and they tried to find a way

with a lawyer to bring her children to her. We'am was able after a year and a half to bring her children to Germany.

Trauma

> The things that happened to me and my family in Syria were very painful. Remembering Syria is for me remembering the pain. It tortures me.

Lames is a 38-year-old woman whom lost her family during the war. She was in great pain and was therefore not able to learn the language.

She told me that she had a good life in Syria. Her entire life she had people who worked for her: maids and drivers. When she got married her life didn't change at all as her husband was also wealthy and owned a company. Everything was being taken care of.

Everything changed when the war started. She lost her mother and her husband. The brothers she still has are scattered all over Europe and their properties are lost. And because she didn't have anything to stay for anymore, she left and fled to Germany. Living from subsidies, she was then very lonely, having to take care of everything on her own for the first time in her life.

While we were talking, she became very emotional and it was clear that she was still deeply affected by her past traumas. Because of the condition she was in now, she had difficulties to integrate and to learn the language.

Lames had a very good life in Syria, to start over without knowing how to do so, made it difficult for her. To start over meant that she needed to overcome her past, her sorrows and start learning the language and at the same time take care of her mental health to be able to manage her life in Germany.

In the beginning I couldn't learn

Boshra is a 23-year-old mother of one child form Rukn al-Din, a municipality of Damascus. She has been in Germany since November 2015 and she can only say a few words in German.

She told me:

> In the beginning my husband didn't want me to go to the language class and then after the jobcenter had forced me I became pregnant and my pregnancy wasn't easy.

I can't remember what I learned

Rema is a 45-year-old mother from Homs. She told me:

> I go to class to learn the language, but I forget a lot. This didn't happen to me before; I can't memorize anything anymore.

In Syria Rema had been a School director, and she always thought of herself as having a good memory. Because of her work in the school she was able to memorize everything and make sure everything is organized.

Now she was having difficulties remembering what she had learned during the language class.

I can't take the class

Solaf is a 32-year-old mother of a three-year-old girl from Baniyas, a city in Tartous Governorate in north-western Syria.

She told me:

> I must stay the entire day with my daughter. She is still young and now I can't leave her because I didn't find a day-care for her yet.

Solaf was not able to learn the language because she had to take care of her daughter. The jobcentre had given her a list with daycares. However, she was not able to communicate with the daycares,

as she did not speak German. She had asked her brother in law and her husband to help her, but they had still not been able to find a place for her daughter.

8. Research findings

In the previous chapters, this thesis described the effects of the resettlement on the Syrian women's life. By answering the question of whether the women adapted to their new environment requires an analysis of the experiences the women went through, to be put in relation to the features of spatiality and its associated characteristics. To answer the question of how the women adapted to their new environment, we need to inspect the conditions in the embodied and gendered space, and how the women handled them.

8.1 The exceptional space

The refugees are expected to spend a limited amount of time in the exceptional space. In this space, they await the authorities' decision. This opens up the question of what it is like to be in this space, characterised by uncertainty. The embodied space varies depending on the specific setting of the accommodations. As Küpers described, the everyday lived experience includes being in a space, moving between its objects, and thinking and feeling in it (Küpers 2010, p. 82).

Additionally, every lived experience is connected to a space (Küpers 2010, p. 82). Whether the women lived in the Tempelhof accommodation, in the sports hall, or in the air-supported structure considerably changed how the space affected them. The spatial experience can, therefore, only be described singularly for every woman, living in different types of buildings and structures, as has

become more and more common to accommodate refugees in Europe in the past years (Katz 2018, p. 1). An accommodation's structure with open rooms and no roofs that do not have doors but curtains, and the six double bunk beds in each room in which the noises of children are heard all the time makes for an embodied space characterised by an uncomfortable and unwelcoming feeling.

The women also had conflicting experiences within their gendered space during their time in the exceptional space. The refugee accommodations are dominated by men. The majority of refugees, as well as the security employees, are men. Consequently, many of the women's stories tell about incidents in which the men try to dominate these spaces. The women are often treated in a way that makes them feel unsafe. This is especially true for the women who came to Germany alone or only accompanied by their children. An example for this can be found in the *bathroom stories,* in which a woman was in the bathroom with her daughter preparing to bath when suddenly a man came into the women's bathroom intending to take a bath. For the woman, this behaviour was unacceptable, and she felt threatened and unsafe. This behaviour signalled to the woman that she had broken the social norms of Syrian society by leaving on her own, and that her behaviour was therefore sinful.

In the mixed accommodations where men and women share the same place, safety and uncertainty was a concern to the women. They did not feel safe and worried about their children, mainly because the security employees have access to the entire facility at all times. This was primarily a problem for the women who wear scarfs and who live in a settlement without doors. The tense atmosphere in those spaces makes for the emergence of conflict possible at any time. Even the security employees who should have contributed to a safer environment for all of the accommodation's residents were also causing problems. The single women who came alone or just with their children had suffered more than the ones that had come with a male family member. Being a woman without a man, made the refugee men, and sometimes the security employees, take

advantage of their situation and harass the women. In the accommodations where only women live, safety was not as much of a concern. The spaces are less dominated by men and the women have doors to close behind them. However, problems with other refugees and with the people in charge of the accommodation also existed. The women who lived there did not have their own space because they shared everything with other strangers and had problems of hygiene, problems with their children, and conflicts with the other women.

The women's everyday life experience in the exceptional space was challenging, and leaving that place was everyone's hope. Being in the shelter isolated from people outside made the women feel worthless. When the shelter was mentioned in one of the questions to the refugee women, they always remembered it as the worst place and their most challenging experience. Their attempts to make the place bearable failed. They had tried to make small changes, such as being able to eat what they liked, to cook for themselves or by cleaning the bathroom. This had not worked as other people were not supportive, making it impossible for the women to feel at home.

8.2 Institutional space

The women's experiences within the institutional space are very specific and must be distinguished from the experiences they had in the public space overall. When dealing with the institutions, the women faced several challenges that will be discussed in this subchapter. Within this space, everything is regulated and planned. The refuge's visit to the institutions is compulsory. If, for example, they are not punctual, they could face major consequences, and the outcome can significantly affect their life. Living as a refugee in Germany, one is reliant on the services of the state for all matters. This space presents to the women as a completely new environment that they did not know before coming to Germany.

For the women I spoke to, the institutional space was associated with bureaucracy and the constant going from one place to another to accomplish tasks they did not fully understand the purpose of.

Characterising their changed embodied space was a new feeling of being lost within a system. The system they had known in Syria was dominated by gendered rules, which regulated a woman's entire life. The responsibilities they had experienced in the institutional space were not comparable to what they were now subject to. Living in their own spatial arrangement, segregated from the men's spatial arrangement, had decreased their ability into gaining the knowledge and access to this knowledge within the Syrian society (Spain 1993, p. 140). This missing experience causes a lack of knowledge about how this space functions, what to do in it, and how to do it.

Another problem is that they do not know how to handle their experiences of being in this space. The women try to manage their situation by asking for advice from other refugee women in order to know what to do next. Often, they would also try to accomplish the tasks together with other women. In some cases, the women took their children with them to help them with the translation. This was, however, not always possible. Often, the women had difficulties managing their children and their scheduled meetings and long waiting times.

In Syria, the women had not been concerned by this amount of bureaucracy, as the men within their families managed these tasks. In this new environment, they are suddenly expected to act by themselves. They are, therefore, confronted with a changed gendered space.

For example, one woman had arrived alone and was tasked with going to social services to sign up. For this woman, leaving the place she stayed at and going early at 4.30 a.m. to stand in line, was a completely new experience. She was expected to understand what she had to do next and being lost in this new system she was terrified. She often complained about the letters that she received and how stressful it was to understand what they meant. She knew that these letters were decisive but always had the feeling that she was unable to grasp their meaning altogether.

No exception can be made when it comes to complying with the administrative duties that the women have to fulfil. All of the women felt the power of the state's administration through appointments, the filling out of forms, the different requirements and through how it

communicates with them. The bureaucracy in the institutional space is a constitutive part of it. The difficulties in dealing with the tasks are the result of not learning how to handle and manage them. The women had different experiences with the authorities such as long waiting times for their asylum notifications, different asylum notifications for the same family, or the filling of documents and forms, the women did not dare to question. The women faced the most significant challenge when the administration had made a mistake. In these cases, most of the women I spoke to did not do anything about it because of their lack of knowledge of the language, and because they did not know how to express that an error had happened. What most of them did was ignore the problem, and hope that it would fix itself.

Another problem the women faced was the responsibility and sense of commitment required when dealing with the authorities. In Syria, the women had no experience outside their household, as any communication with authorities were handled by men. In Syria, the way the women had lived did not involve much interaction with state agencies, and in rare cases, they were accompanied and supervised by men.

In Germany, the situation is entirely different. Because of their status as refugees, their life depends on these agencies, and they are utterly dependent upon the state's support. Dealing with authorities had become an essential part of their life. The scheduled meetings were not optional, and they represented a space of commitments and obligations. Only by facing the consequences the women understood the importance their dealings with the authorities had. However, some women found this new system advantageous as it protected them and their children's rights. The institutional space treats everyone equally and does not make the difference between men and women, as long as everybody follows the rules of the new place.

8.3 Public space

Within the public space, the women had to face new challenges. The embodied space within the public space is a lived experience that is characterised by the everyday life activities, by being there, and by communicating with the place, its settings, and the people in it. In public space, body language and cultural references play an essential role (Low and Lawrence 2003, pp. 2-6). Within this space communication is essential. The experience of the public space as such is only possible when the subject can establish a working communication with the people through different signs and symbols. This has been challenging for the women that were interviewed. For example, one woman got lost in the train station and could not help herself out of this situation because she lacked communication tools. Not being able to read the signs and directions, and not being able to ask for help because she could not speak the language, makes communicating difficult.

The Syrian women experienced a public space that is much different from the one they had known in Syria. In Germany, their presence is not entirely judged upon their gender. Depending on the way culture defines the public space, the use of the public space by women can lead to uncertainty if they are using a space that is exclusively a male space (Ruhne 2003, pp. 131- 136; Tonkiss 2005, p. 95). This feeling of uncertainty is the result of the women's understanding of society and the way they were raised according to their gender (Ruhne 2003, p. 131). Being in a different environment from the one they were raised in, lacking any knowledge about this new space with its rules and ways of communicating, can make it difficult and challenging to navigate everyday life.

One woman who had to leave her home daily to manage paperwork and other duties told me that she felt like she had lost her femininity, that she had now become a man. She came to this conclusion because she had been forced to make use of a space she had previously only known to be a male space. This was confusing to several women because based on their socialisation they were out of place, increasing their feelings of strangeness and uncertainty.

Although the women while in Syria did not use public space as much as they had to in Germany, they still had their socially defined freedom and knew how to navigate and experience the city, the streets and their neighbourhood through their everyday embodied activities. The way gender is constructed needs to be understood through the lived experiences and the socio-cultural context (Malmström 2012, p. 1). Using the same cultural lens within another culture caused misunderstandings for the women. Although the relationship between the public space and gender in Germany has changed, it still did not mean that the women had more freedom and were now safe against violence by men (Tonkiss 2005, p. 95).

All of these changes to the women's life made for a completely new space, characterised by specific rules that are very different from the one's they had known in Syria. As a woman in Syria, access to the public space was regulated and restricted. The culture, family, and the place of residence all played a formative role in their everyday life. Knowing the rules, they were able to make their own spaces in which they gathered, communicated, and practiced their everyday life. This kind of socialisation defined how the women grew up knowing their limits within the private (domestic) space, becoming well aware of its boundaries (Ruhne 2003, pp. 97-100). Whether they were working outside of the house or not, they managed to use the public space, navigate, and recognise its boundaries. Since gender is socially constructed, the spatial characteristics that differ from one society to another are also cultural and embedded within its people.

The women shape their own experiences of their everyday life by communicating and interacting within the space, as well as through the material experiences they have in it. The Syrian women had difficulties managing their everyday life in Germany due to a lack of knowledge and experience. The possibilities that they could explore in their everyday life were very restricted due to them not speaking the language and not understanding the people. The women's difficulties with the language and their lack of understanding of the different communication signs made them misunderstand the space and their changing role in it.

These changes in the women's lives within the described spaces had affected different aspects of their lives. While for some, this new space made them miss their old life in Syria with its known and, therefore, more straightforward modes of behaviour, others had to endure different challenges, including going through a divorce or handing problems within the family. The women also had to learn to accept their new status as refugees and the loss of their old social status within the known social norms in Syria. The different lived experience in Germany also affected the women's physical and mental health. At the same time, some found relief by crying or thinking about the past; others became depressed and were forced to seek medical help.

The women continually interpreted their lived environment based upon their cultural background. The experiences are integrated into our knowledge about everything through a process of construction and interpretation (Schütz 1971, p. 5). When the necessary knowledge was missing, this led the women to fill in the missing pieces with what they knew, often misinterpreting the situation. They were thus not able to adapt, locking themselves up into their priori interpretations and expectations. They had decided what was fitting for them, and they often didn't want to change their minds.

While all the women interviewed had different aspirations, their age determined some aspects of their expectations they had as refugees in Germany. The women in their 50s and older were the ones that had the least positive outlook on their new life. They felt that they would not be able to adapt and become part of the German society. They mostly dismissed such possibilities as unrealistic, not because they did not want to, but because they felt that they would not be able to enter into such new beginnings at their age. Not all come to Germany with this belief. However, the mandatory language course proved to be indicative of what paths were open for these women in Germany. They were struggling with the language, having great difficulties to remember the simplest phrases that could ease their everyday life: finding one's way in an unknown city or communicating with the security guards at the refugee shelter. They knew that because they would

not be able to overcome the burden to learn a new language at their age, they would be stuck at this stage of the process.

With regards to the general outlook, the younger women had better perspectives. Their complains about their situation were often made to justify their inaction and their unwillingness to make a new beginning. The women were constantly remembering their past life in Syria. Through the stories they told, they expressed their reluctance to accept their new situation as their lived reality, reducing their new challenges to a mere list of complains. They wanted to keep living their previous life, idealizing it by comparing its advantages to the new challenges they had met in Germany.

9. Conclusion

The Syrian women's narratives that have been recounted throughout this thesis have revealed the diverse challenges the women had to confront, their dreams and expectations, as well as the different approaches they took to face their new problems. The testimonies of the 44 women have been gained through an extensive fieldwork aimed at collecting an account of their true feelings and stories. The most important step was to establish rapport and gain the women's trust without losing the required distance in order to let them speak freely, to give them the confidence and assurance that they did not have to conceal their true thoughts. It was necessary to spend much time with each woman, conducting several long interviews and accompanying them during their daily activities, protocolling each and every interaction. Their accounts were thus contextualized, and the details verified. Observing them in different settings, handling diverse situations, also enabled to follow some developments during the time of the fieldwork.

The women had to flee from their home country and endured a difficult journey to Germany, entering a much different environment than the one they had known before in Syria. Another culture awaited them, and they had to manage a changed social role as a refugee, assuming responsibilities and accomplishing tasks that were new to them. This radically new situation – coined by uncertainty at every new stage – motivated this thesis' main question, asking what effects the resettlement had on the women's life and how they adapted to their new situation.

The Syrian women's account of their preoccupations – their own words – are of unique value to provide an answer to the research question. Once a sufficiently detailed profile of each women had been made, their stories were carefully chosen and presented to accurately reflect their thoughts, stories and highlight the most interesting stages the women went through in their new lives. The stories were organized into three different topographies that had structured the women's lives since

they had left Syria: the exceptional space, the institutional space and the public space. Thus, an analysis of the different situations in which the women addressed the uncertainty they were facing was made possible.

The women involved in this study came from different regions of Syria, from the major cities and from the countryside. Half were younger than 39 years old, one nearly eighty, few younger than 20 years old. They had been studying in Syria, had been working as teachers, employees or had taken care of their children. Some had been able to come to Germany by plane, most had to cross the Mediterranean by boat, paying smugglers, and made their way north to Germany via the Balkans. They endured a difficult journey into the unknown, fleeing because they were not able to sustain a safe existence in Syria. The war had left no other choice than to flee for those who could afford the high costs the smugglers were charging.

Once the women had arrived in Germany they were housed in temporary accommodations: they thus entered the exceptional space. They stayed in different kinds of refugee shelters, where space was limited and privacy non-existent. The architecture of some shelters was intimidating, and not all places were designed to house refugees in the first place. Security guards set the tone and gave the women the feeling of being imprisoned and helpless. Waiting to be transferred to another place, the women had to handle men coming into the women's bathrooms, their children being mobbed, and their various concerns with privacy and hygiene not taken seriously.

Nevertheless, the women did not stay silent, and while they were not always able to successfully communicate with the authorities or the shelter's administration, they still expressed the desire to share these experiences to surmount these difficult situations. They began to notice the gaze that the society had put on them as refugees, reinforcing their desire to hang onto their pre-war life and identity. They fondly recounted and idealized their memories of Syria and only came back to their lived reality to address what they considered a list of problems.

Following their arrival in Germany, the women were soon confronted with the bureaucratic procedures associated to their status as refugees. Within the institutional space, the women's life was ruled by the appointments and tasks they had to fulfil. They had noticed the system's order, and had to learn to handle the incoming letters and demands. However, they still did feel uncertain about the outcome of the decisions that were being taken, having been confronted with decisions by the authorities that they did not understand.

Unsure about the outcome of the bureaucratic procedures and the consequences that their actions could bring, the women felt put on hold. They missed their job and their past daily routines that had been completely replaced by seemingly infinite periods of waiting and desperately trying to comply with the German authorities' demands. They did not know what to expect and were puzzled by the results, especially concerning the rights that were granted to them as women. Situations in which the child was first given the mothers' family name at birth or where the mother was able to keep their children's custody after a divorce, gave the women a glimpse into a changed reality that could bring advantages.

The confusion that the women experienced within the institutional space was even greater in the public space, that did not provide any known processes to tether ones hopes onto. Their difficulties to learn the language and effectively communicate, made it very difficult for the Syrian women to navigate this space. They felt as if they had to relearn everything: how to travel in the city, how to handle simple tasks as for example the system to separate the waste, interacting with people, adapting to the cold weather and the long winter nights. The women found ways to handle all these issues, adapting to the changing conditions. As time went by, they discovered a public space that was less dominated by men than in Syria. A space in which they were slowly getting used to by being forced to take on responsibilities they did not have to deal with in Syria.

While the women had been complaining about several aspects of the exceptional space, they were less complaining when they were recounting their experiences within the public space, more

observant, judging what they saw. At some moments it appeared as if they had accepted this new environment as their lived reality. Still, the women mourned the loss of their social position and – for some – the material wellbeing they had enjoyed in Syria.

Finding their own individual response to the uncertainty that had accompanied the refugee women since they had departed from Syria, had led them to question some of their most fundamental beliefs and the lived reality they had been accustomed to. The changed spaces and the associated difficulties and characteristics affected the women's way of thinking and – in some cases – broadened the scope of action they allowed themselves to think about.

At first, the lack of belonging had induced the women to retrench into their past lives, developing a feeling of nostalgia, idealizing the community and life they had known in Syria, a place all sorely missed. Some women had not been satisfied with their marriage, and the new situation had tested the relationship they had with their husbands. In Germany, they had to interact with men that were not part of their family, and they could prove their abilities learning the language. Most importantly, they could consider getting a divorce without risking to never be able to see their children again. Some women refused to talk about such matters, not wanting to give the impression that they would be interested, others had immediately taken the opportunity when they arrived in Germany.

Nonetheless, during the time of the fieldwork, only few women considered a radical new beginning, getting a divorce or taking of their scarf. Most changes were more subtle. Some questioned their religion, other hang on to it. The women were mostly confused by the possibilities to make their own path and sufficiently preoccupied by observing and judging how everyday life customs differed in Germany, especially regarding the notion of family.

The women had lost everything, they felt stuck, having difficulties learning the language and processing the traumatic experiences they had gone through. Since the war began in Syria, a gruelling uncertainty had accompanied them: during the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean and the Balkans, coping with the authorities in Germany and considering a path

forward for their new life in Germany. The women developed different ways to cope with similar difficulties, at first refusing to grow into a new reality where they felt degraded as refugees. Their daily challenges then amounted to a list of problems they did only want to be resolved and not be thought about again. Not being able to effectively handle their problems, due to difficulties communicating and having the feeling of being helpless in a completely different environment, led the women to still hold onto their old lives they happily recounted and idealized.

During the time of the fieldwork, only few women escaped this cycle, where they had too many pending worries to be able to situate themselves into the present situation. To 'adapt' then meant, to be able to cope with the authorities' demands. Deviation from this routine happened when the women considered a path that was self-determined and advantageous, one that had not been open to them in their previous life in Syria. This included the possibility to get a divorce without the fear of losing access to their children, or to take of their scarf. They did not necessarily have to act upon these possibilities, but the mere though, brought them to begin shaping their lived reality, not solely complaining about the unfulfilled expectations and thus confronting the tedious uncertainty head on.

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