SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

Department of Social Sciences and Economics

Renegotiating Gender Roles and Relationships in Displacement:

Syrian Families in Lebanon and Germany

Ph.D. Candidate: *Supervisors:*
Irene Tuzi   Prof. Dr. Hans-Peter Müller
                                                       Prof. Dr. Paul Tabar

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PH.D.)
DOUBLE DEGREE IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE SOCIALI ED ECONOMICHE
UNIVERSITÀ SAPIENZA DI ROMA

INSTITUT FÜR SOZIALWISSENSCHAFTEN
HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN

AUGUST 2021

Thesis defended on 30/08/2021

The international examination committee was composed of:
Prof. Dr. Naika Foroutan
Prof. Dr. Hans-Peter Müller
Prof. Dr. Jane Freedman
Prof. Dr. Rosita Di Peri

Renegotiating Gender Roles and Relationships in Displacement: Syrian Families in Lebanon and Germany

Ph.D. Thesis - Sapienza University of Rome

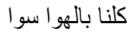Author's email: irene.tuzi@uniroma1.it; ire.tuzi@gmail.com

Abstract

This thesis investigates the impact of displacement on gender roles and relationships among Syrian refugee families in Lebanon and Germany. It is based on eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork carried out between 2017 and 2019. The research questions that have guided this study are: What kind of gender role and relationship transformations do Syrian families experience in Lebanon and Germany? How do Syrian men and women renegotiate relationships in displacement? Can different displacement situations generate similar experiences? I argue that due to the specific legal and bureaucratic conditions put in place by Lebanon and Germany, Syrian families experienced a protracted-temporary displacement. I conceptualize this space as *liminality*, a non-structural context that allows for alternative dimensions of *agency* to take place. For each case study, I identify four typologies of transformations in gender roles and relationships and how Syrian men and women renegotiated them in refugeehood. In its final discussion, this thesis compares the two displacement situations and suggests that three dimensions of agency can be uncovered in this liminal space – an iterative dimension, where agency is positioned towards the past; a projective dimension, which orientates agency towards the future; and a practical evaluative dimension, in which situational judgments are contextualized within concrete circumstances. This thesis offers three main contributions to knowledge: a theoretical one, by using agency as a lens to analyze gender relations in forced migration; a methodological one with its relational perspective that explores interconnected sets of relationships; and an empirical one, based on the comparison of two displacement situations – one in the Global North and one in the Global South. In this sense, this work aims to understand forced migration experiences as interconnected phenomena, and relationships as dynamically evolving in the space of displacement.

To all the women and men who told me their stories, wherever you are

كلنا بالهوا سوا

Table of Contents

Note on transliteration

In this thesis, Arabic words are transliterated according to the system proposed by the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES). However, when appropriated, the transliteration has been adapted to the pronunciation of the Syrian dialects. For example, the word *ʿalāqa* (relationship) in Modern Standard Arabic would be transliterated as *ʿalāʾa* in Syrian dialect, when appropriated. Geographical names have been transliterated according to this system except for those that have an English translation (e.g., Damascus instead of *Dimashq*) or those that are commonly used also in English (Raqqa instead of *ar-Raqqa*).

Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis would have not been possible without the support, advice, and assistance of many people. First of all, I would like to express my infinite gratitude to all the women and men who have participated in this study, who granted me their time and shared their stories with me. They hosted me in their homes, regardless of all the difficulties, and helped me to understand what it meant to *become* a refugee. This thesis would not exist without you all. I am infinitely indebted to every one of you.

I am also indebted with my research assistants Ghenā, Nora, and Meī, to whom I would like to pay my special regards. I could never thank you enough for having accompanied me through the incredible adventure of fieldwork. Your assistance has been outstanding and this work would have not been possible without you.

I would like to thank the Department of Social Sciences and Economics at Sapienza University for having fully funded this research, and the Department of Social Sciences at Humboldt University and the Berlin Graduate School for Social Sciences for having welcomed me and given me the best work environment I could wish for. A special thank goes to the Institute for Migration Studies at the Lebanese American University, which has hosted me for several months between 2017 and 2019 and given me the best technical support I could hope to receive.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor at Humboldt University Prof. Dr. Hans-Peter Müller for helping me find the right direction with my work and for the exceptional advice he gave me during these years. Our long conversations were incomparable food for thought. Your expertise and critical reflections helped me to find the right place where to express myself as a scholar in the academic debate. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my supervisor at the Lebanese American University and Sapienza University, Prof. Dr. Paul Tabar. You have always believed in me and convincingly supported and motivated me to carry out my work even when the road got tough. Your advice made a difference in my work.

Then, I would like to recognize the invaluable assistance of colleagues and friends who supported me during these years. First and foremost, Weam Ghabash and Maurice

Introduction

Before starting my PhD, in May 2016, when I was conducting fieldwork in Lebanon to research coping strategies in displacement, I met Lama, a Syrian woman from rural Damascus, whose story was particularly revealing. She told me that by becoming a refugee she realized to what extent her role as a woman had changed and that, besides the difficulties brought about by this new position, including the violence she faced, she was aware that she would never go back to her old self. Through this experience, she found out who she truly wanted to be. Lama's account made me realize that significant changes were happening in the intimate life of displaced Syrians and that old paradigms were perhaps no longer capable of embodying those experiences.

Motivated to understand better the nature of those changes and their impact on people's lives, I intend to explore, with this thesis, gender role and relationship transformations among Syrian families in Lebanon and Germany and how those are renegotiated in the space of displacement. Although a growing body of literature addressed these issues since the Syrian "refugee crisis" started (see Freedman et al., 2017), several unanswered questions remained. For instance, we do not have a clear idea of how relationships are renegotiated or whether different displacement situations can generate similar experiences. Moreover, the relational dimension of gender role and relationship transformations did not find sufficient space in the literature, as women and men's issues have often been studied separately. Finally, the literature did not tackle the temporal dimension of those transformations.

Inspired by these unexplored areas, my work investigates how *agency* is exercised to renegotiate gender roles and relationships in what can be called a protracted-temporary displacement. Following Turner (1974), I conceptualize this space as *liminality* or a non-structural context. Building on this, I discuss the temporality of agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) and I argue that by placing agency on a temporal scale, three dimensions of the concepts can be uncovered – an iterative dimension, where agency is positioned towards the past; a projective dimension, which orientates agency towards the future; and

a practical evaluative dimension, in which situational judgments are contextualized within concrete circumstances. I apply this model to the experiences of Syrian families in the two countries and I discuss how they *do gender* and *do family* in the private and public space.

The on-going Syrian war and the so-called "refugee crisis"[1] that has followed have had a significant impact on gender roles and relationships. A growing scholarship has dealt with gender-related issues and many authors have focused on different aspects of "gender" among Syrians in forced migration. A considerable amount of academic and grey literature has given great attention to Syrian women and the difficulties they face in displacement (Charles & Denman, 2013; Mhaissen, 2014; Haddad, 2014; Christophersen, 2014; El-Masri et al., 2013; Al-Hayek, 2015; Asaf, 2017; Özgür Baklacıoğlu, 2017; Freedman, 2017; Naser-Eddine, 2017; Ayoub, 2017; Kapur, 2018; Taha, 2020). Although exact figures are unknown, it has been reported that women and children represent the majority of displaced Syrians (Deardorff Miller, 2017; Freedman et al., 2017) and that one out of four Syrian families in displacement is headed by a woman (UNHCR, 2014; UNFPA, 2014). When this is the case, the lack of resources is one of the main difficulties for families. As a matter of fact, most households in pre-war Syria were headed by a male breadwinner and many women were supported by male partners (Al-Hayek, 2015). In Syria, men and women had strong social networks and extended families to support them. With the outbreak of the conflict, the whole social structure fell apart and many were forced to leave their homes and start a new life away from their families. Life in exile brought about new responsibilities that are not always in line with traditional gender roles and norms (El-Masri et al., 2013; Asaf, 2017). For this reason, many Syrian women and men felt that they were no longer able to fulfil their gendered responsibilities and support their families or provide the quality of care they were providing to their families in Syria (El-Masri et al., 2013, p. 14).

---

[1] The concept of a European refugee crisis has been criticized by various authors (Baerwaldt, 2018; Gilbert, 2015). Some have proposed to call it a crisis of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) to emphasize that the shortcomings of the system, not refugees themselves, caused the crisis (Niemann & Zaun, 2017). In this thesis, I will use inverted commas to refer to it: "refugee crisis".

Several empirical studies and non-academic research have highlighted increasing intimate partner violence against Syrian women and generally increased levels of gender-based violence among displaced Syrians (El-Masri et al., 2013; UNHCR, 2014; Usta et al., 2016; Yasmine & Moughalian, 2016), including high levels of sexual abuse, rape, and assault (Anani, 2013). However, the extent of sexual exploitation is difficult to express in figures, as women are reluctant to come forward with complaints, for fear of being stigmatized (UNHCR, 2014). Early marriage and survival sex have also increased among refugees who have fled Syria (ibid., p. 37). These strategies are used as survival mechanisms to deal with the financial difficulties of displacement (UNHCR, 2014, p. 21).

Although most literature has dealt with the negative impacts of forced migration on Syrian women or their vulnerabilities, many authors have linked Syrian women with the dimension of agency (Al-Hayek, 2015; Almakhamreh et al., 2020; Taha, 2020). Katty Al-Hayek (2015), for example, argued that although the representation of Syrian women in the media, literature, and public discourse is dominated by victimization, there is no distinct category that can fit all "Syrian refugee women" (Al-Hayek, 2015, p. 70). The dominant representation of "invisible women" overlooks the political and economic issues that women experience in the process of "becoming a refugee" (ibid., p. 25). Women confronted private and public struggles, which are likely to continue in the post-war era with a renegotiation of their gendered identities (Al-Om, 2015; Altalli & Codur, 2015). Women also played a fundamental role in many aspects of the Syrian conflict and made efforts formally and informally in peacebuilding processes (Asaf, 2017). However, it has been observed that Syrian women have been deliberately excluded from peace negotiations and often depicted by the Syrian regime as submissive individuals who should not be involved in politics (Al-Om, 2015; Ghazzawi, 2014). Nonetheless, researchers and practitioners have become increasingly aware that the role of Syrian women is crucial for a lasting democratic transition (Kapur, 2018; Asaf, 2017).

A great deal of research has recently focused on Syrian men (IRC, 2016; Turner, 2019a; 2019b; Allsopp, 2017; Suerbaum, 2018a; 2018b; Keedi et al., 2017; El-Feki et al., 2017). Several studies have shown that war, conflict, and displacement have challenged men's position as head of the household and their traditional gender role as providers.

The loss of work meant for many a loss of self-esteem, which jeopardized their gender identity (El-Feki et al., 2017). Some studies have observed that an undermining of men's patriarchal role corresponded to domestic violence towards women and children (Keedi et al., 2017). Across these studies, there is consistent evidence that Syrian men are often associated with violence. Throughout the "refugee crisis" in Europe, the image of the "militarized man" has been set against those of the "man as a provider" and the "threatening young male" (Allsopp, 2017). However, Magdalena Suerbaum (2018b), who explored how Syrian men in Cairo renegotiated their masculinity in exile, found that these men rearranged their lives around new hierarchies to negotiate new notions of masculinity. They engaged in the process of "unbecoming" refugees to take distance from the label of "real refugee" as a strategy of masculinization (Suerbaum, 2018, pp. 8-11).

Several authors have proposed approaching refugee masculinities with an intersectional angle to better account for boy and men's specific displacement experiences (Allsopp, 2017; Suerbaum, 2018b). In this sense, it is essential to acknowledge that refugee men should not be seen as victims *or* soldiers but as vulnerable *and* agentic (Allsopp, 2017). Along this line, Lewis Turner (2019a) observed that Syrian refugees in Jordan had "an uncertain position as objects of humanitarian care" (Turner, 2019a, p. 3). Conceiving them as in need of humanitarian care, or vulnerable, would challenge the binary understanding of refugee men as political actors and refugee women as in need of empowerment (ibid., pp. 13-14). In another paper (Turner, 2019b), the author argued that the recent increased focus on the vulnerability of Syrian refugee men fails to critique vulnerability itself as a form of humanitarian governance. Nevertheless, it plays a part in expanding a system, which "is disempowering for refugees of all genders" (ibid., p. 14).

Over the past ten years, several scholars have approached the theme of gender roles and relationships among Syrian refugees from a wider angle, namely by focusing on the intersecting experiences of women and men (Asaf, 2017; DeJong et al., 2017; Daniely & Lederman, 2019; Taha, 2020). A non-academic study conducted by two humanitarian organizations, Abaad and Oxfam (El-Masri et al., 2013), was a pioneering analysis of changing gender roles among Syrian families in Lebanon. The authors found that Syrian women and men displaced in Lebanon were forced to redefine fundamental aspects of

their gendered identities. While for men, this process led to adverse outcomes, such as the loss of self-esteem, for some women, taking on new responsibilities in contrast to their traditional gender roles created a sense of empowerment (El-Masri et al., 2013, p. 14). Nevertheless, relationships within the family have been studied beyond the wife-husband relations (DeJong et al., 2017; Lokot, 2018). Michelle Lokot (2018), for instance, considered that understanding relationships only on the base of husband-wife dynamics would leave other complex power dynamics aside. She suggested that the discourse around gender relations in displacement should consider the role of sons as critical in understanding power dynamics, as well as the relationships between older and younger women (Lokot, 2018, p. 34-35).

The area of relationships between LGBTQ+[2] Syrian refugees and asylum seekers has certainly been neglected until recently. The number of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans* and intersex Syrian refugees is unknown, as many feared revealing non-heterosexual gender identities or sexual orientations (Freedman et al., 2017). However, LGBTQ+ refugees have been targeted for specific gender-based violence during the Syrian conflict. Because they do not have access to strong social networks, they are often considered more vulnerable than other refugees. Fadi Saleh (2020) argued that the LGBTQ+ Syrian population became visible through the paradigm of the "suffering Syrian gay refugee", a construction, consolidation, and circulation of easily sharable narratives of oppression and invisibility (Saleh, 2020, pp. 4-5).

This rich literature has unquestionably covered many important aspects of gender roles and relationships in displacement. Nevertheless, significant gaps can be identified. First of all, there is a lack of robust research tackling the relational aspect of gender relations. Although scholars have analyzed relationships in forced migration focusing on women and men, inter-individual dynamics have often been disregarded. However, a relational perspective could offer a more nuanced understanding of complex interactions within the family. This perspective would also help to analyze how gender roles and relationships are renegotiated through the interactions of family members. Another

---

[2] The plus (+) in the acronym "LGBTQ+" as well as the asterisk (*) in the word "trans*" are used to refer in an inclusive way to a multitude of identities within the gender identity spectrum.

significant gap in the existing literature is that it does not deal sufficiently with the temporal dimension of gender role and relation transformations. It is not clear how changes can be analyzed through a temporal perspective. Moreover, little is known about how agentic renegotiations of gender roles and relationships can be framed within a temporal perspective. Displacement is closely related to time, other than to geography. Similarly, renegotiating relationships is an exercise that could take different perspectives depending on whether a person's agency is oriented towards the future or the past. Finally, the literature has not sufficiently analyzed different displacement situations in comparison. More generally, there is a lack of research that compares the experiences of refugees in the Global North vis-à-vis the Global South, especially in terms of gender-related issues.

This thesis aims to fill some of these gaps by analysing gender role and relationship transformations and by embracing different experiences. In the first place, this work employs a relational analytical perspective, which allows the exploration of the phenomenon as interconnected sets of relationships. Social experiences are continuously evolving phenomena shaped in a network of complex relationships (Kyriakidou & Özbilgin, 2006). In this sense, the relational perspective sees relationships not in a contrastive way (Swartz, 1997), but as a dynamically evolving space of interconnections, interdependencies, and interrelations (Buber, 1970; Somers, 1998). The relational approach is also a valuable perspective to circumvent individualistic and functionalist research that reduces *agency* and *structure* to contrastive entities that are not in relation to one another (Tatli et al., 2014). In this study, the relational perspective will help to shed light on different dimensions of agency exercised by individuals in relationship with one another and not simply in contrast to one another. This approach will also be useful to unpack another dimension that has been largely overlooked by previous research, namely the renegotiation of gender roles and relationships. This topic has been mostly analyzed from the viewpoint of men *or* women or in contrast to one another, but rarely considered within a space of interaction. Although my work does not have, by any means, the presumption of being comprehensive, I propose in this thesis an analysis of relationship renegotiations based on a relational approach. The sociological concept of agency, in particular, can help

to identify different types of renegotiations. In this sense, I propose to apply the theoretical notions of agency, structure, and reflexivity to forced migration studies. This approach will help to develop a Sociology of Migration that is critical and engaged with social reality (Castles, 2007, p. 364). Stephen Castles (2003) had already pointed out that "forced migration needs to be analyzed as a social process in which human agency and social networks play a major part" (Castles, 2003, p. 13).

This is a thesis about relationships and it focuses, in particular, on family relationships, namely on connections between individuals tied by some form of kinship. Kinship patterns might include people related by descent or marriage. In this dissertation, I consider the central viewpoint of the spouses or parents or mother/wife and father/husband, namely those relationships established through affinity or marriage. From this standpoint, I explore relationships resulting from connections with or between the spouses. However, by using this viewpoint, I do not mean to take into account only the nuclear family, as different types of households will be considered. In particular, extended family and single-headed family. However, although the nuclear family is not necessarily representative of Syrian society in its whole, or even the Syrian diaspora, it was in this study the most widely represented in terms of numbers, together with what I call the single-headed family, headed by one parent. I do not refer to this latter type of household as a "single-parent family", because sometimes these families were headed by a person who was still in a marital relationship but with someone who was not in the same country of displacement.

Another way in which this thesis aims at contributing to the existing literature is by focusing on the temporal dimension of gender role and relationship transformations. Since the beginning of this work, I often confronted with whether those changes were to be considered permanent or temporary. This question cannot be answered in this thesis, as it goes beyond the scope of this work to make predictions about the duration of social changes. However, I found that a temporal viewpoint helped to explore how people's agency in renegotiating gender roles and relationships is oriented on a temporal scale. In this sense, this work can serve as a preliminary analysis for studies that aim at developing along these lines.

This thesis focuses on Lebanon and Germany. This comparison cannot be immediately discerned, as these are two very different countries and Syrian refugees have very different relationships with each of them. This choice was motivated by the interest to compare two different displacement situations, one from the so-called Global South and one from the so-called Global North.[3] In this sense, I aim at filling a gap in the existing literature, which has often lacked a comparative analysis in this sense. Juxtaposing the Global North to the Global South could be useful in critically analysing the refugee experience as a whole. Nevertheless, the reasons behind Lebanon and Germany as focus countries for my study go beyond the North-South comparison explanation. Lebanon and Germany are among the countries that have been most strongly affected by the forced migration of Syrians. Around 1.5 million Syrians have fled to Lebanon, a country with a native population of approximately 6.8 million.[4] Germany received about 790.000 Syrian refugees as of 2019,[5] around 80% of all Syrian nationals who fled to Europe since 2015.

Lebanon offers an interesting example in terms of gender perspectives in forced migration. According to UN Women (2018), 52% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon are women. It has been reported that the absence of men in many Syrian families has grown the number of women-headed households, which represent today one out of three Syrian households in Lebanon (UNHCR, 2019). A number of these women have entered the job market to support their families. Nevertheless, women are more likely to be underpaid, employed in the black market, or exploited (El-Asmar et al., 2019). The engagement of women in the job market and the growing number of female-headed households in Lebanon have led to many changes in traditional gender structures (UN Women, 2018), as historically, Syrian women were not particularly active in the workforce and their roles

---

[3] The notion of Global North typically refers to the so-called "economically developed societies", such as Europe, North America, Australia, amongst others, while the Global South includes the "less developed societies", such as most African countries (not including South Africa), India, China, Brazil, Mexico, the Middle East, including Lebanon (but not including Israel), amongst others. See Odeh (2010).

[4] See World Bank Data. Available at: https://data.worldbank.org [Accessed September 10, 2020].

[5] See BAMF. Available at: https://www.bamf.de/DE/Startseite/startseite_node.html [Accessed September 10, 2020].

and responsibilities were primarily confined to the home.[6] Despite these changes, Syrians in Lebanon found themselves in an environment that is somehow similar to what they had at home. For example, in terms of family relationships, familial values and household structures are analogous. The family has a central role in people's lives in Lebanon as in Syria.

The case of Germany is equally impressing. Germany has received many Syrian families who have arrived jointly through regular or irregular channels or have later claimed family reunification. Nevertheless, the majority of Syrians who arrived in Germany were men alone (Worbs et al., 2020). Rapidly changing policies and legal and bureaucratic obstacles have made reunification difficult (or impossible) for many. For this reason, family separation is one of the biggest challenges for Syrians in Germany, as it can change family structures and dynamics fundamentally. In this sense, the reason why the German case is particularly interesting for this thesis is that relationships cannot easily be reconstructed as other aspects of life. A house, a job, and economic stability can somehow be re-established in the resettlement country, but disruptions and transformations that occur within relationships cannot always be resolved in the short term – or resolved at all.

Along with these differences, Lebanon and Germany share similarities, which is perhaps what motivated the comparison in this thesis. In both countries, I observed that Syrians experienced a "protracted-temporary displacement", caused by the specific legal and bureaucratic framework of hospitality. In Lebanon, Syrians are not accepted as refugees because the State is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention (Janmyr, 2017). This condition poses a dimension of temporality because it does not allow permanent resettlement in Lebanon. Still, at the same time, there are no alternative solutions for a safe return to their homes in Syria or for resettlement in a third country. Similarly, in Germany, Syrians experience a protracted-temporary displacement as they are mostly granted subsidiary protection. This form of protection does not ensure the

---

[6] UN country data reveal that, as of 2010, only 13,3% of women were part of the labour force, compared to 72,7% of men. Unsurprisingly the outbreak of the war increased unemployment among both the female and male population. See UN Data Country Profile, Syrian Arab Republic. Available at:
http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx/_Images/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Syrian%20Arab%20 Republic [Accessed January 12, 2020].

same benefits as the full refugee status, including the right to family reunification. For this reason, the German legal and bureaucratic framework also holds Syrian refugees in a dimension of temporality, although they have no alternatives to displacement in the country. However, the lived experiences of Syrians in these two countries especially resonate in the way they *feel* about protracted-temporary displacement, namely suspended in a limbo.

This thesis is especially about Syrian men and women, who are the real focus of this study and the standpoint I privileged to study gender role and relationship transformations. Displacement, war, violence, and destruction have strongly challenged relationships among Syrians. The extreme violence caused by the Syrian conflict and displacement has challenged families in many ways. Economic hardship, unemployment, livelihood issues, and the traumas caused by life in forced migration have impacted relationships – for example, divorces, child marriages and domestic violence have increased among displaced families. Consequently, both Syrian women and men had to confront new roles and responsibilities. The accounts of Syrian men and women, their intimate stories, and their experiences are the voices through which this thesis is narrated. In this sense, aware of the "politics of voice" (Haile, 2020), I do not have the presumption to *give voice to the voiceless* or to *speak on behalf of the refugees*. In this dissertation, I aim at *reporting the voices* of those who participated in this study in an attempt to include them not as objects of this thesis but as subjects. In this sense, I adopt what Sociologist Norman Long (2001) described as an actor-oriented approach and I place people's agency at the centre of this study. However, in doing this, I am aware of the fact that people's voices cannot be merely represented in terms of victimhood versus resistance (Haile, 2020, p. 33) and that refugees might simply not be interested in the framework of hyper-visibility within which public and academic discourses tend to place them (ibid., p. 34). Along this line, I hope that this thesis will give an idea of the diversity and the complexity of the refugee experience.

This thesis is by no means a representative and all-encompassing look on gender relation transformations among Syrians. It does not aim to be unbiased or exhaustive in analysing changes among displaced Syrians, nor is it comprehensively explanatory of

those transformations. However, it gives a perspective of how the intimate lives of Syrian families are changing in displacement. It offers a reading of those transformations based on the experience of the people who participated in this study. Above all, this thesis aims to go beyond the dichotomies that emerged or consolidated with the "refugee crisis", according to which women are either the most vulnerable in the crisis, or they are fully ground-breaking in their new positions in the family or society, and men are either perpetrators of domestic violence, or they are backward individuals who are unwilling to give up their advantaged positions in the patriarchal system. These narratives are based not only on Eurocentric and Orientalist epistemologies that do not go beyond the "patriarchal nature" of the Arab and Muslim culture and religion (El-Said et al., 2015); they are also very simplistic and uncritical in their description of a reality that is considerably more articulated and diverse. They tend to homogenize the experience of Syrian women and men and the complex variables at stake. This thesis aims to reflect on this diversity and explore ruptures and continuities in gender roles, gender norms, and relationships resulting from the Syrian displacement.

This work aims to be innovative in going beyond these monolithic and uncritical understandings and capturing the complex nature of people's agency and subjectivities in the renegotiation of gender roles and relationships in displacement. In this sense, I intend to highlight relevant overlooked issues in focusing on Syrians not as refugees, but as women and men, individuals and families, who happened to become refugees at a particular stage of their life. Moreover, by comparing groups of Syrians in two different countries of displacement, this study aims to give a novel viewpoint to studying gender issues in displacement. In my view, gender role and relationships transformations are very relevant and deserve to be analyzed from different perspectives in comparison. As discussions about refugees' integration and their future in resettlement countries have acquired considerable urgency at a political level, changes occurring in a decade-long displacement cannot be excluded from the discourse. Gender role and relationship transformations are not discussed in this thesis in quantitative or positivistic terms. I chose not to search for positive or negative outcomes, or more specifically for "empowerment" or "disempowerment". Instead, I decided to focus on people's stories and their accounts

and perceptions of those changes. In a framework of decolonizing knowledge production, whilst I am aware that aspiring to objectivity and neutrality is simplistic, counterproductive, and informed by "coloniality"[7], my purpose is to minimize the influence of my cultural and social prejudices and let those stories guide my observation and my analysis.

Finally, this thesis also opens doors to a nuanced and inclusive study of the renegotiation of gender roles and relationships through a relational lens. In this sense, I seek to contribute to the existing literature about gender and forced migration by analysing men and women's responses to changes occurring in displacement and how these are interrelated and intertwined with one another. In this thesis, I focus on the meanings of renegotiations of gender roles and relationships in displacement. In other words, I endeavour to understand, through induction from collected data, what happens to relationships when someone becomes a refugee, how these relationships are renegotiated in the space of displacement, and whether different displacement situations can generate similar experiences in terms of the exercise of agency.

Ontological and epistemological positions

In this thesis, I understand masculinity and femininity as socially constructed within specific cultural, social, and historical contexts. I see *gender* as embodied in its representation in society and as performativity, based on socially constructed features and behaviours. Following social constructivists (Eagly, 1983; Deaux, 1984; Butler, 1990; Kimmel et al., 1994; Bohan, 1993; Connell, 1995; Courtenay, 2000), I contend that individuals are encouraged to conform to stereotypic beliefs and behaviours, and to adopt dominant norms of femininity and masculinity. Both women and men use these gendered categories to perform their role in the common space and to express specific characteristics of their feminine and masculine identity in relationship with one another. In this sense, I

---

[7]Ali Meghji (2021) defines coloniality as the "long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism" and that keep informing knowledge production, culture and relations (Meghji, 2020, p. 20).

understand femininity and masculinity as existing in interrelation with one another. In other words, they cannot exist independently.

Gender identities are not static as the meanings of masculinity and femininity are continually being altered and revised through social interactions. Because the experiences of women and men are fundamentally interrelated, gender identities change as relationships change. In this sense, the expressions of gender identity in the social space result from how people interact with each other (for instance, when they talk, follow norms, or create rules). Moreover, gender identities are not monolithic, as multiple layers of our gender identity can be performed in different contexts and in intersection with other dimensions of social identity (Crenshaw, 1989).

Theories of gender constructivism explain why women and men *become* feminine and masculine through social conditioning (Alsop et al., 2002), socialization, and cultural training, or in other words, how we learn our gender role and how we relate it to our biological sex through our interactions in social structures (family, work, school, among others). In particular, post-structuralist scholars built on the concept of *doing gender* (West & Zimmermann, 1987) and introduced the notion of *gender performativity* (Butler, 1990). By intersecting the two conceptualizations of performativity and doing gender, Philosopher Judith Butler argued that "gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. […] [G]ender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed" (ibid., 1990, p. 33). In this sense, gender identity is conceptualized as both constructed and performed through a set of actions that are said to be in compliance with dominant societal norms. Other social-constructivism theorists have enlarged this perspective and presented the idea of fluid or multiple gender identities (Zohar, 2009; Benhabib et al., 1995). Along these lines, for example, theorists such as Raewyn Connell (1995) and Michael Kimmel (1994) enhanced the scholarship about masculinity studies, hitherto largely disregarded.

Feminist scholarship has also engaged with migration and with how gender relations change as a consequence of migration and displacement (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2003). In particular, these scholars understood "gender as a constitutive element of immigration" (ibid., p. 9) and challenged hegemonic and culturalist understandings of

migration. Following Connell's conceptualization of gender relations (1987), the migration literature started focusing on agency, resistance, and survival (Taha, 2020). Connell's early work paved the way for conceptualizing individuals as active agents in changing gender structures. Nevertheless, those initial contributions had their limitations as they mostly adopted a Western feminist viewpoint, with its cultural and historical specificities, to "explain the non-Western women's experiences" (Taha, 2020, p. 2). By describing non-Western women as victims of an inherently patriarchal and uncivilized system, one might fall into biased analyzes based on preconceptions (Razack, 2004). As we will see in the next section, patriarchy has an important role in shaping people's worldviews, perception of gender roles, and agency (Taha, 2020, p. 2). However, we should also acknowledge the role of orientalism and colonialism in engendering those concepts (Taha, 2020) and the existence of those notions within European and Western societies.

Perhaps, the main merit of postcolonial theorists has been the introduction of the intersectional dimension of gender and its interrelation with other categories of social identity as ethnicity and class. In particular, postcolonial authors (Nicholson, 1990; Weedon, 1987) stressed the idea that to be a woman or a man depends on the meanings associated with it, which are not fixed and closed connotations but flexible and fluid understandings. My analysis and conceptualization of gender role and relationship transformations falls within the framework of emphasizing "the process whereby subjects *become gendered* as a process in which subjectivities form in relation to the meanings that people have available to them" (Alsop et al., 2002, p. 81). This is a volatile process of becoming gendered that cannot be separated from other aspects of becoming. In its attempt to bridge together the analysis of various social categories and their hierarchical positions (Nash, 2008), such as gender, ethnicity, and class, my thesis is informed by the concept of intersectionality. The intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1990; Hancock, 2007) is a valuable interdisciplinary theoretical foundation to study forced migrations and a tool useful to systematically investigate critical aspects of the multi-layered social contexts in which migrations occur. In sociological terms, intersectionality is an ideal means to study the interactions between structure and agency (Archer, 2007; Hancock, 2007). Furthermore, an intersectional approach in migration studies and gender

studies can help to overcome given-for-granted categories and "methodological nationalism" (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2003; Mügge & De Jong, 2013) disregarding the diversity of people's experiences of migration. However, in this work, I only give a partial contribution to the potential of the intersectional lens to analyze how forms of social differentiation can influence gender identities. In this sense, with this thesis, I intend to inspire further and more in-depth analyses of gender role and relationship transformations through the lens of intersectionality.

Key concepts

Before turning to the heart of this thesis, several issues need to be discussed to set the context for understanding this research. I will now briefly introduce the fundamental concepts around which this work is framed. I will start by presenting a background of gender roles and relationships in pre-2011 Syria and the question of women's right and gender imbalance. Then, I will introduce the concept of State feminism in Syria and the problem of private and public space. Finally, I will discuss the notion of patriarchy.

Gender roles and relationships in Syria

The literature about "the family" in the Middle East and the Arab world has been scarce until the late 1980s, as little attention was paid to it from a historical and sociological point of view (Tucker, 1993, cit. in Rabo, 2008, p. 129); when research was carried out, it mainly focused on relationships between men (Rabo, 2008). This trend has been challenged by the rich scholarship of "family studies" that since then has extensively analyzed familial relationships in the Middle East and Arab world[8] (e.g., Kandiyoti, 1988; 1991; Joseph

---

[8] In 2001, Lebanese American Sociologist Suad Joseph gathered a collective of sixteen scholars to carry out research about Arab families and youth in Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, and their diasporas. These countries emerged as the foci for the Arab Families Working Group (AFWG), which however committed to advancing knowledge on the family in the Arab world as well as engaging new generations of Arab scholars in conducting research in their own communities. See Joseph, S. (Ed.) (2018). *Arab Family Studies*. Critical Reviews. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press.

1993a; 1993b; 1996; Rabo 1996; 2008). Compared to other Middle Eastern countries, scholarship about gender roles and relationships in pre-war Syria is rather scarce. During the last decades, the authoritarian regime of the Assad family (especially Hafez) limited the access to Syria for researchers and journalists and the country was considered impenetrable to social scientists (van Eijk, 2016, p. 8). Only limited "nonthreatening themes" such as nomadic pastoralists and nonurban social settings of the past were allowed to be researched (Chatty, 2018, p. 236). The work of Social Anthropologists Down Chatty (1984 and onwards) and Annika Rabo (1986 and onwards) belongs to these fields. During the 1990s and 2000s, the scholarship about Syria started engaging with postmodern conceptualizations of gender and family (Böttcher, 2002; Rabo, 2008; Maktabi, 2010) and more social research was conducted in the years prior to the war. These scholars agreed that in Syria, as in most Arab societies, family is central in the organization of social life, as people's lives are firmly centred on the relationship that individuals maintain with the family[9]. However, although the family is an institution that is considered as "essential" and "natural" (Moghadam, 2004, p. 137), we can hardly define "the Arab family" as a uniform and monolithic unit (Meriwether & Tucker, 1999). On the contrary, most scholars agree on the ephemeral nature of the family and the "highly varied conditions of 'family life'" (Rabo, 2008, p. 130).

Although with many differences, in Syria, like in other Middle Eastern countries, families are described as commonly patrilineal, where descent is traced through the paternal line; patrilocal, where the married couple settled in the husband's home; and "patriarchal", where older men are the head of the family and women and children are subordinated to them (van Eijk, 2016, p. 100-101). Among Muslims, men and women constitute distinct social groups, interacting mostly within the private sphere. However, a division of labour between the sexes was observed in most social settings, including Christians (van Eijk, 2016, p. 107). The type of family in Syria also varied greatly. While rural, poorer, and Sunni Muslim Syrians tended to have larger families, better-off families,

---

[9] The word "family" can have different translations in Arabic according to the context (see van Eijk, 2016, p. 100). While most Syrian participants used the word *ā'ila* to identify their kin, the Western term "family" can hardly capture the dynamic social system in the Arab region (see Joseph, 2018, p. 3).

Christians, and other minorities had smaller households (Rabo, 2008, p. 129). Large extended families still existed before the war, but they were no longer the norm in many urban centres.

The role of the Syrian State in the construction of family cannot be ignored as the organization of family also occurred through laws, policies, as well as practices (ibid., p. 130). The Syrian Constitution describes the family as the "nucleus of society" (van Eijk, 2016, p. 100). All laws oblige the husband to provide for his wife and children and he can exercise, in return, the authority over them. The wife is obliged to take care of the children (Barakat, 1993, cit. in Joseph, 1993, p. 14) and obey her husband (van Eijk, 2016, p 102.). In this sense, in terms of personal status law, men and women can be considered gendered subjects as their roles in the society were defined as husbands, fathers, wives, mothers, sons, daughters, etc. A married woman who wants to work outside the home should obtain her husband's permission. However, no law prevents single women from entering the labour market (Kelly & Breslin, 2010, p. 471).

The role of Syrian women in contemporary society is very multifaceted and largely depends on their background and the social class they are part of. The options available for women at the upper level of the Syrian society are not the same as those at lower levels. This is particularly evident in education and the workforce (Chatty, 2018, p. 236). While a rather large number of women are able to pursue education and access certain professions, a smaller percentage of women are present in other sectors of the workforce and women in lower classes of the society are generally denied access to higher education (ibid.; Meriwether, 1999). This is also confirmed by data available, which reveal that despite higher levels of education that Syrian women obtained compared to men,[10] their participation in the public sphere and their employment options were limited and constrained by overlapping legal restrictions and social norms (Kelly & Breslin, 2010, p. 472). Prior to the war, Syrian women in rural areas were particularly affected by these norms. While many (over 70%) worked in agriculture for many hours a day, only a small

---

[10] In particular, 63.1% of women attended secondary school compared to 62.8% of men. See UNICEF Education Data 2013. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/syria_statistics.html [Accessed January 12, 2020].

percentage (3%) participated in marketing, as their work was mostly unpaid and informal (Kelly & Breslin, 2010, p. 473). Before the war, the majority of Syrian women were housewives. Those who worked outside the home were mainly employed in education and agriculture (ibid., p. 471). Syrian women's participation in political, financial, and legal life was also restricted. Only 10% of women were employed in ministerial positions, and 11% encompassed diplomatic posts (ibid.). Participation in civil society organizations and activities was also limited, for both women and men, to those aligned with the Ba'ath party and the Assad's clan.

In general, conservative customs prevailed over formal laws in pre-war Syria and in most areas, women were relegated to secondary positions in society. They were expected to uphold domestic responsibilities and to conform to those norms in order to maintain the family's honour (ibid., p. 460). A special control was exercised over girls' sexuality as the kin's honour and reputation are tied to their behaviours (van Eijk, 2016, p. 105). For this reason, early marriage was considered as a "safety valve for young people's sexuality" (Rabo, 2005, p. 88). Similarly, to most Arab societies, upholding the family's reputation was of great importance in pre-2011 Syria among the various communities. This reputation is mostly centred around women's sexuality (ibid., 81). For this reason, the concept of *'irḍ* (honour), a "controlling value, legitimating the family structure and the 'modesty code' required" (Dodd, 1973, p. 40), is crucial to understand the organization of the family. The community around families had a great role in damaging, improving, or reinforcing the reputation of an individual and her/his family (van Eijk, 2016, p. 121). Many Syrian families lived in closely tight communities in villages, neighbourhoods, or towns where their kin may have lived for many generations. In this sense, people's control over each other's behaviours and relationships was a way to reinforce dominant social norms and conservative ideals (van Eijk, 2016) in a sort of panoptic setting. The control of the traditional community was reinforced by the awareness that by dissenting to this system one could often damage not only the individual's reputation, but also that of the entire family, and consequently isolate them from the community.

Women's rights and gender (im)balances

Syria has often been regarded as one of the most secular and advanced countries in the Arab world, especially in terms of women's rights. Women obtained the right to vote in 1949 and were encouraged to participate in the workforce and to pursue education. The Syrian Personal Status Law, or family law, the Penal Code, and the Constitution determine women's civil status. However, while the Constitution guarantees equal rights to both female and male citizens (Maktabi, 2010, p. 559), the Ba'ath Party, the pan-Arab nationalist group who seized power in 1963, imposed a state of emergency that suspended most constitutional and civil rights including freedom of expression and right to association (Kelly & Breslin, 2010, p. 459). The family law, which combines elements of the Ottoman *millet*, the French civil law, and the *sharīʿa,* is the primary source of inequalities between man and women and between women of different religious affiliations. It includes patriarchal notions of differences between sexes as interpreted through religious laws and jurisprudence and is one of the most discriminatory sources of law in terms of gender equality. It establishes, for example, the principle of male guardianship[11] for women in many articles, or states that girls are allowed to marry at the age of thirteen if the guardian agrees (Maktabi, 2010, p. 559).

Measures to ensure gender equality were never implemented and because the Islamic jurisprudence, the *sharīʿa*, is the main source of legislation (Maktabi, 2010, p. 559), women continued to face an inequitable system and discriminatory practices. For example, according to the citizenship law, Syrian women are not able to pass on their citizenship to their children if they are married to a non-Syrian, while there is no restriction for men (Kelly & Breslin, 2010, p. 460). Moreover, the Penal Code allows a husband to control his wife's behaviour, including limiting her from working outside the home (ibid.; van Eijk, 2016) and travelling. In this sense, citizenship in Syria is gendered because family law, which defines women's personal status, considers the constitutional rights of women invalid (Maktabi, 2010, p. 558). Moreover, in the framework of Islamic

---

[11] A male guardian can be a woman's father, brother, or another male relative, and her husband after she gets married.

law, unequal inheritance rights are mandated and are commonly justified by the consideration that men financially provide for women in the family. These practices greatly exacerbated women's financial dependence on men in pre-2011 Syria (Kelly & Breslin, 2010, p. 461).

Public and private spheres in Syria

The debate around the private/public divide cannot be ignored when discussing gender roles and relationships. Many authors have given their contribution to defining what private and public spheres represent in the Arab world. Suad Joseph (1997) argued that the private/public boundaries are established as "a 'purposeful fiction' constitutive of the will to statehood" (Joseph, 1997, p. 73). Because the state is an "imaginative enterprise", these boundaries are "fluid" and "porous" and lead to different constructions of the "public" and the "private" (ibid., p. 74). For example, Joseph found that in Lebanon, as in other Middle Eastern States, the centrality of patriarchal kinship structures made the private/public divide unclear, as patriarchal modes of operations were produces and reproduces in domestic and in public spheres (ibid., p. 79).

Annika Rabo analyzed the interconnections of the "private sphere" with the "public sphere" and the State in Syria (Rabo, 1996). She argues that the public/private debate in the Middle East, as in any other society, is shaped around women's role and it is historically rooted (ibid., p. 156). She suggests that instead of looking at dichotomies such as private/public, female/male, and subjugation/domination, we should rather look at the interdependencies between these concepts. As also suggested by Suad Joseph, the private sphere of the domestic and the household settings and the public sphere of the social, governmental and non-governmental spaces, are dependent on each other (Joseph, 1997, p. 89). In Syria, where universal suffrage, educational, and employment policies asserted the similarity between women and men, the dichotomy between the public and private sphere was little emphasized at an institutional level. Nevertheless, there was a great discrepancy between political rhetoric and the personal status law, which regulated people's private space (Rabo, 1996, p. 160).

The author argued that the Syrian State practised "state feminism" (ibid., p. 163) inasmuch it promoted gender equality and women's liberation from backwards families and communities in order to enhance the development of the Syrian society (Rabo, 2008), while at the same time it emphasized the dominance of the "patriarchal family" in the Syrian society. The Ba'ath Party in power had long stressed the need to abolish traditional "feudal, tribal, and patriarchal institutions" (Rabo, 1996, p. 161) and to modernize the society in the framework of a large-scale nationalization campaign. Women were considered to have a crucial role in this process of modernization. This critical position, however, was not seen in the light of gender equality and equal rights, but more in terms of women as economic resources for the society (Rabo, 2008; Kandiyoti, 1991), a consideration that was part of the economic ideology of the Ba'ath regime. The public sector, for example, employed a large number of working women, and Syrian women also held about one-quarter of the seats in parliament.

The State rhetoric was charged with morality and in its attempt to promote a "progressive" future, women were depicted as both the victims of traditional backwards attitudes and as those who reproduce such attitudes when they did not conform to those ideas of development (Rabo, 1996, p. 162). This rhetoric, however, was not in compliance with the real conditions of Syrian women, who were subjected to unequal personal status law and still burdened with housework and child upbringing. In this sense, women's lives did not improve with the coming to power of the Ba'ath Party, as its promises of modernity had not been fulfilled, and "state feminism" only increased women's economic burdens (ibid., p. 163). Moreover, because family law still considers women as subordinate to men, access to the public sector does not entail an economic, political, or social liberation of women from the burden of the tradition. On the contrary, the public sector offered women a "safe environment" where they could be economically productive in compliance with the tradition (ibid., 169). In this sense, it seems that it was not in the interest of the State in pre-war Syria to improve people's lives in the private sphere or to create the basis for gender equality. In the same vein, violence against women continued to be regarded as a private issue that has to be solved within the family.

Gender Roles and Patriarchy in the Arab World

The concept of patriarchy is useful to explain the existence of gender inequalities in the private and social space. Patriarchy is a social construct that defines the hierarchical dominance of one social group (normally men) over the others (normally women and children). It also defines labour division by sex within the family and the division of productive and reproductive roles between women and men in society. Patriarchy, as a sociological concept, explains why masculine characteristics are socially valued more than feminine ones, and why power and privileges held by masculinity set rules accordingly (Bromley, 2012, p. 5).

In the Arab world, patriarchy has been defined as "a hierarchy of authority that is controlled and dominated by males" originating in the family (Krauss, 1987, cit. in Joseph, 1993a, p. 14). Several scholars have analyzed the various forms of patriarchy in the Arab world and the Middle East and their impact on the social space, not only the domestic sphere but also the public space (Schilcher, 1985). Relevant contributions came from John Caldwell (1978, cit. in Kandiyoti, 1988) and Deniz Kandiyoti (1988). Caldwell identified a world region with common societal characteristics in terms of gender roles and gender norms, which he called the "patriarchal belt". This region includes North Africa, the Muslim Middle East (including Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran), and South and East Asia. Kandiyoti used the term "classic patriarchy" to define the patriarchal system in this region. This type of patriarchy cuts across cultural and religious traditions, and it is based on the patrilocally extended households, which ensures its continuity through a cyclical nature of power.

Hisham Sharabi (1988) offered a significant contribution to the discussion about patriarchy in the Arab world. He questioned the Arab world's failed transition to "modernity" on the model of Western Europe and argues that the reason for this "failure" lies within the consolidation of the patriarchal culture in modernity. In this sense, while patriarchy is the "universal form of traditional society" (Sharabi, 1988, p. 3) patriarchal values also exist in modernity. This is called neo-patriarchy. The author contends that instead of transforming into modern societies, Arab societies turned into a "distorted

modernism". For example, in terms of culture, despite widespread rhetoric of modernity operated by neo-patriarchal leaders, these regimes honoured family customs persisting from the feudal period, which "represented a higher, more developed form of pre-modern patriarchy precisely because it was able to transcend the kinship system" (Sharabi, 1988, p. 51). Following Arab feminists Fatima Mernissi and Nawal Saadawi, the author argues that neo-patriarchy limits the expression of a mature and liberated Arab female personality. Because traditional familialism is fostered by neo-patriarchal regimes, patriarchy in the Arab world "provides the ground for a dual domination – of the father over the family household, and of the male over the female" (ibid., p. 32). Other authors have argued that the roots of patriarchal authority in the Arab world are familial and social, as it is within the family or kinship, that inequalities based on patriarchy are generated (Curtis, 1986). Anthropologist Suad Joseph (1993a) elaborates further this conceptualization. Following Pateman (1988, cit. in Joseph 1993a, p. 14), the author considers that in the European context, fraternal patriarchy replaced the "father" with the "brother" and, for this reason, women are subordinated to men as men, rather than to men as fathers. As a consequence, patriarchy in the West has been seen as the power of men over women. She argued that two main elements distinguish patriarchy in the Arab world from patriarchy in Western societies – "age" and "kinship". Kinship is the primary source of economic security in the Arab world, but it also defines political membership and networks of political resources as well as religious identity (Joseph, 1993a, p. 15). In terms of age, in the Arab world, patriarchal privileges are for males and seniors. For example, "economic patriarchy gives men and elders control over kinship labour; they can call upon others for services and labour (paid or unpaid) more than women and juniors can" (ibid.). In this sense, Arab societies use patriarchy to prioritize males over women and elders over youth (males and females) and to mobilities kinship structures and moral values to institutionalize power (Joseph, 1993b, p. 459).

In a later work, Joseph (1996) defines the relational dimension through which patriarchy sustains itself. On the one hand, patriarchy is transferred by kinship into all spheres of social life. On the other hand, it has its individuality because it is depicted as independent from kinship, yet justified by man and older people's physical or intellectual

superiority (ibid., p. 15). In this sense, patriarchy in the Arab world becomes relational and embedded in relationships, because it links the sense of self to others (Joseph, 1993b). For example, many Arab societies encourage individuals to perceive themselves in relationships with others, especially with their significant others or families, not only as individuals (ibid., p. 458). Finally, patriarchy is used to direct the behaviour of others, even against their will, to normalize inequalities and hierarchies (ibid., p. 459-460). In this sense, Joseph follows Sociologist and Novelist Halim Barakat, who argued that the traditional Arab father "has authority and responsibility… expects respect and unquestioning compliance (Barakat, 1993, cit. in Joseph, 1993, p. 14). This power is justified by the control over land and resources, including income.

Research questions

The research questions that will guide this thesis are three: 1) What kind of gender role and relationship transformations do Syrian families experience in Lebanon and Germany? 2) How do Syrian men and women renegotiate relationships in displacement in terms of agency? 3) Can different displacement situations generate similar experiences? How do refugees in the Global North and the Global South deal with these transformations? Along with these main questions, I will pose further side questions: What is the role of the receiving society and local actors in promoting changes or maintaining continuity in terms of gender roles and relationships? Do refugees living in similar cultural environment hold traditional gender roles? Do transformations take place only inwardly or also outwardly?

Given these research questions, one might wonder how we can compare two very different displacement situations. Are we going to find that different groups of displaced people experience refugeehood similarly? Do Syrian women in Lebanon and Germany respond to displacement in a similar way? How does a displaced man in Lebanon feel about his condition of refugeehood and how can this experience relate to that of a refugee in Germany? In other words, how is displacement experienced in the two countries? And consequently, how do people exercise agency in *doing gender* and *doing family* in the space of displacement?

To answer these questions, I will focus on a series of variables. Firstly, I will look at the division of labour and gender roles and responsibilities inside and outside the house. This includes people's engagement in the regulated and non-regulated labour market, their participation in political, recreational, and vocational activities, their access and control over resources and services (including livelihoods income, health and reproductive health care, school attendance of children), and their engagement in social reproductive activities and responsibilities in the house (including children nurturing and housework). The second variable looks at decision-making processes in the household. This includes decisions about children's education and upbringing of boys and girls, decisions on financial resources, and decisions about the social life of the family outside the house. The third set of variables concerns perceptions and aspirations. I will investigate how people adapt to new familial and social structures, how they deal with transformed gender identities and power dynamics, and how they look at the future – for example in terms of migration aspirations. Keeping in mind these variables, I will analyze along with three levels: a) a micro-level perspective, where the personal experience of individuals is central; b) a meso-level or intra-individual level, where the relationship with other family member is predominantly significant; c) and finally a macro-level standpoint, which focuses on how participants interact with the external world, or the exosystem of their social networks, workplace, governmental and non-governmental organizations, institutional actors, and the host community at large. Both the sets of variables and the levels of analysis are reflected in the interview framework. Besides, to better understand the dimension of changes, I investigate the same aspects of participants' lives in Syria and in displacement. For example, I would focus on who was considered the breadwinner in Syria and who was the main provider in displacement; I would explore how participants were making decisions related to the house in Syria and how they were making the same decisions in Lebanon or Germany; or I would investigate their feminine or masculine perceptions, their understanding of being a mother or a father, a wife or a husband, before and after forced migration. The study was conducted through qualitative methodologies, the most relevant being the semi-structured interview, complemented with focus group

discussions, consultations with institutional and humanitarian actors, and participant observations.

Outline of this thesis

This thesis is organized into six chapters. In the first chapter, I will critically explore refugeehood in the literature through a multidisciplinary approach. I will not only describe the legal framework and the fragility of its boundaries, but I will also question the position of the refugee in sociology and the room for gender in refugee studies. Drawing on the line of social constructivism and the accounts of Syrian participants, I aim to give a sense of the complexity of the refugee experience and explore the meaning of becoming a refugee. This chapter also deals with the background of the Syrian displacement in Lebanon and Germany and the so-called "refugee crisis".

The second chapter is dedicated to the methodology. It is divided into two parts. The first section presents a critical reflection on the ethical and methodological challenges of this research and discusses the implications of doing fieldwork in fragile contexts and sensitive research areas. I will examine gender-specific challenges, researcher's positionality and self-reflexivity, access to the field, and practical and social implications of the research. In its second section, the chapter gives a detailed overview of the research design, including data collection and data analysis techniques.

In the third chapter, I will provide a brief review of selected literature on the concept of human agency and its relationship with social structure and I will position my research in the theoretical academic debate. I will start by presenting the main strands in literature dealing with the interplay between agency and structure. I will then review the literature about agency in displacement and forced migration and reflect on the specificities of refugees' agency. Next, I will conceptualize the space of displacement in theoretical and empirical terms and finally, I will question whether there is a space for reflexivity in refugeehood.

Chapters four and five delve into the empirical study. In each chapter, I will identify four typologies of transformations in gender roles and relationships and how

Syrian men and women renegotiated them in displacement. In chapter four, I will focus on Syrians in Lebanon and I will discuss the division of labour inside and outside the house, the role of humanitarian interventions on gender roles and relationships, changing gendered aspirations, and the transformation of the intimate lives of Syrian women and men. In Chapter 5, I will present the case study of Germany, where significant changes involved Syrian refugees in a separated family. I will then discuss the impact of social security policies on gender relations, the consolidation of religious practices to come to terms with a new social environment, and finally the continuity of the extended family in a transnational space.

The final chapter brings together the findings from the two fieldwork investigations in a final discussion that embraces the theoretical considerations presented in Chapter 3. Here, I will return to the question of agency in displacement and I will further develop my analysis. Finally, I will discuss varieties of *doing family* and *doing gender* in forced migration.

Chapter 1.

What does it mean to be a refugee?

This chapter aims at giving a sense of the complexity and diversity of the refugee experience, which is often represented in monolithic and simplistic terms by the literature and practice. The term "refugee" is intensively political and its meaning has been highly contested in the literature (Black, 2001). In this thesis, drawing on the line of social constructivism and the accounts of Syrian participants, I aim to present an understanding of the figure of the refugee that is comprehensive of different experiences.

Comparing different groups of displaced Syrians in two different countries offers a privileged viewpoint to explore how people navigate displacement in different circumstances. Since the beginning of my fieldwork, this double perspective pushed me, in the first place, to ask myself: Who is a refugee? And, as a consequence, to ask my participants: What does it mean for you to be a refugee? Answers were very different from one another and varied according to geographical contexts. For instance, in Lebanon, the word "refugee" (*lājiʾiyn*) was tied to Palestinians who lived in refugee camps.[12] At the same time, Syrians were called displaced persons (*naziḥiyn*) or migrants (*muhājir*), because of their history of migration to Lebanon (Chalcraft, 2009). In Germany, some Syrians identified themselves as "refugees" (*Flüchtling*) to claim civil and housing rights and aid provision, while others refused the word entirely because it evoked a sense of poverty, hardship, and loss that they did not want to relate to their identity. At the same time, on the side of the local community, "*Flüchtling*" carried a relatively positive and compassionate (but also paternalistic) connotation, as opposed to "*Wanderarbeiter*" or "*Migrant*", which can take a more derogatory meaning and are mostly avoided in the

---

[12] Today, there are 58 official Palestinian refugee camps located in Lebanon, Jordan, the West Bank, Gaza, and Syria. Most of them were built in 1948 as a response to the exodus of Palestinians (al-Nakba) following the creation of Israel. More camps were established after the 1967 war when Palestinians escaped as a consequence of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Golan Heights (an-Naksa). See UNRWA. Available at: https://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees [Accessed September 10, 2020].

public discourse – or replaced by *"Flüchtling".* For these reasons, I could not avoid wondering what it meant for people to be refugees across history and geography and whether there were common traits in different displacement experiences.

In what follows, I first outline the position of the refugee at a multidisciplinary level; I then place the discussion in the field of sociology and explain what it means to "become" a refugee, following the experiences of the participants in this study. Next, I delve into the background of the Syrian "refugee crisis" and briefly describe the flight from Syria and the conditions of hospitality in Lebanon and Germany.

1.1. Who is a refugee?

The position of the refugee has taken various connotations in different research areas – from political debates to media representations, from academic discourses to legal settings, and in the humanitarian sphere. For this reason, the debate has been characterized by terminological ambiguities and has raised some questions: Who is a refugee? Are political and humanitarian refugees in the same category? Do refugees in the Global North and those in the Global South live similar experiences? Is there a unique definition of the refugee as a legal, political, and humanitarian category? Furthermore, and most importantly, how can we define the position of the refugee in sociological terms?

Since the academic discipline of Refugee Studies was born, in the 1980s,[13] it has been tied to the legal and political fields (Müller-Funk et al., 2019), which at the beginning of the 20th century defined the category according to the 1951 Geneva Convention, and following the establishment of the UN Refugee Agency, or UNHCR (Black, 2001). During the 1990s, the discipline was replaced by Forced Migration Studies (Chimni, 2009), which called for interdisciplinary research intersected with International Relations, International Law, Political Sciences, International Development, Anthropology, Sociology, among others. Meanwhile, the discourse around forced migration in the public debate detached itself

---

[13] The birth of the discipline can be formally traced back to the establishment of the *Refugee Study Programme* at the University of Oxford, in 1982, and the foundation of the *Journal of Refugee Studies,* in 1988 (Chimni, 2009).

from economic migration, with which the discipline of Migration Studies was mostly dealing. Sociologist Stephen Castles was amongst the first to propose the launch of a Sociology of Forced Migration. He summoned the need to use both a macro and a micro-level perspective since transnational dynamics cannot be detached from the contexts of local communities.

At the level of practices, the transition from Refugee Studies to Forced Migration Studies also marked the need to respond to migration phenomena that gradually became more diverse and the concerns of Western States to deal with increased movements of refugees and asylum seekers towards the Global North. In this sense, hosting countries' responses have been a gradual narrowing of international protection policies and, at a European level, outsourcing of procedures outside the European borders.

The experience of refugees can hardly be "labelled" under a single definition, as different groups of forced migrants have emerged in history after the Convention was signed. This is the case of climate refugees or people displaced due to war – who might not be directly threatened by political persecution. In this sense, it has become increasingly difficult and at times simply impossible to distinguish economic migrants from forced migrants. Migrants arriving in Europe today are part of what the UN Migration Agency (IOM) has defined as *mixed flows*, or complex population movements that involve different categories of people including refugees, asylum-seekers, economic migrants and other migrants, crossing international borders in an unauthorized manner and under the same migratory drivers.[14] For this reason, using merely legal categories would reduce the emphasis on the fluid character of the migration phenomenon in its whole, as well as its complexity.

---

[14] See Glossary on Migration, IOM, International Migration Law. Available at: http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/published_docs/serial_publications/Glossary_eng.pdf. [Accessed July 1, 2020].

Today, the most commonly accepted definition of "refugee" is that given by the 1951 Geneva Convention (and its 1967 Protocol), which stipulates that a refugee is someone who:

> "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of her/his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of her/his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."
> Article 1(A)(2) 1951 Refugee Convention.[15]

This definition is also legally binding upon all States that have ratified the Geneva Convention, the main source of international law concerning refugees. The Protocol, ratified in 1967, removed the geographical and temporal limitations of the Convention, which was limited to the protection of European refugees considered as such following the events that took place before 1951. The Protocol opened access to the protection of all people without limitation for the States that have ratified it (almost all States Parties of the Convention). The signatory States of the Convention are free to create their policies, national laws, and procedures to determine whether a person is a refugee and assess the protection status for asylum seekers. However, the Convention's provisions are binding and cannot be overlooked. This is the case of the principle of *non-refoulement*, which does not allow States to "expel or return ('refouler') a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his

---

[15] For full text, see the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/about-us/background/4ec262df9/1951-convention-relating-status-refugees-its-1967-protocol.html. [Accessed July 1, 2020].

race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion".[16] It is widely accepted that *non-refoulement* has become customary international law and therefore binding upon all States, whether or not they have ratified the Convention (See Coleman, 2003). At the core of the Convention's definition is the concept of protection of individuals from persecution. Strong criticisms have been hurled at this view. International law Scholar Andrew Shacknove expanded the interpretation of the meaning and proposed using "needs" as basic principles for recognizing the refugee status instead of "persecutions". He suggests looking at the unprotected basic needs of people to identify international assistance. (Shacknove, 1985, p. 277). Further criticisms towards legal definitions came from Anthropologist Michel Agier (2011), who, following Sociologist Saskia Sassen (1988), argued that the universalistic aim of protection became a control mechanism, at the end of World War II when the issue of large-scale movements of people needed to be faced within the framework of nation States.

European Union law represents a very advanced transnational model of regulation for people's movement across borders. The birth of the European Community, in 1957, marked the beginning of the process of homogenization of asylum and immigration policies between the European States. This uniformity was operated through the Schengen Convention, signed in 1990. The Convention aimed to establish standard rules and procedures regarding visas and asylum applications to eliminate the controls on people's movement along internal borders and facilitate the movement of goods within the Schengen area. In 1995, the Qualification Directive was adopted to harmonize the criteria by which Member Stated defined who qualifies as a refugee and other forms of protection (for example, the subsidiary protection). However, because the Qualification Directive was not supposed to homogenize Member States' action but only to harmonize it, chances of obtaining protection still vary considerably from one Member State to another.

The Dublin regime represents a milestone in European Union law, if for no other reason than the harsh criticisms with which it has been addressed. It was initially

---

[16] For full text, see the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/about-us/background/4ec262df9/1951-convention-relating-status-refugees-its-1967-protocol.html. [Accessed July 1, 2020].

established by the Dublin Convention, which was signed in 1990 and first came into force in 1997, to limit the responsibility of the refugee status determination to only one Member State. However, the system never managed to reach the goal to "ensure" that applications are only examined by one Member State. In this sense, the Dublin III Regulation (Regulation No. 604/2013)[17] is a legal instrument, currently in force, which applies to asylum applications submitted starting from 1 January 2014. It determines which State is responsible for examining an asylum application [or] an application for international protection.

A room for gender in the definition of "refugee"

Several scholars have criticized the Convention for being gender-blind and for not including gender as a category that can be subjected to persecutions along with race, religion, and nationality. These considerations are relatively new. Until the last decade, refugees were considered men almost by default and the Convention was established for the prototype of an adult heterosexual man (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014; Edwards, 2010). Refugee women and children were considered only as part of a family headed by a man. According to Wallace (1996) and Valji et al. (2003), refugee women need a special space in international law because they experience unique persecutions when targeted as women. In particular, persecution faced by women fall into four categories: (1) Women who fear persecution on the same or similar grounds and under similar circumstances as men, because they participate in the same activities or they share the same identity but are harmed and persecuted as women – for example through gender-based violence; (2) Women who fear persecution because of reasons related to their kinship – for example when the harm is perpetrated to a woman to punish other family members, because of their actions or political views; (3) Women who fear persecution resulting from conditions of discrimination on grounds of gender; And (4) women who fear persecution as a result

---

[17] For full text, see Regulation (EU) NO. 604/2013 of the European Parliament and the Council: Available at:
https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:180:0031:0059:EN:PDF.
[Accessed July 1, 2020].

of transgressing religious, customary, or social mores – for example, female genital mutilation, honour killings, or dowry burnings. Here, the dividing line between persecution and discrimination is somewhat unclear. Discrimination can take on a vast number of forms. For instance, women who were the targets of military attacks found it difficult to show that the discrimination they face amounts to persecution (because it is sufficiently severe).

Because a growing number of asylum claims have been recently made by lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, and intersex individuals (LGBTQ+), more powerful interpretative instruments have been employed to ensure protection against gender-based violence of LGBTQ+ persons (UNHCR, 2011; 2012).[18] According to Vitikainen (2019), some of the specific gender-based violence faced by LGBTQ+ individuals can be identified threefold. In the first place, there are active State-sponsored persecutions such as anti-gay/anti-LGBTQ+ criminal codes. Secondly, an LGBTQ+ person can face other types of discrimination against which the State lacks effective response. For example, a gay person can be attacked for being gay but cannot report this to the police because this kind of attack is not taken seriously (Vitikainen, 2019, p. 68). This is an example of a lack of protection by the State. Finally, according to the Convention, an LGBTQ+ person can be subjected to structural violence or discrimination that would not be considered persecution. Structural injustices occur when the institutional system or social norms create a systematic power imbalance to the detriment of part of the population. For example, a non-heterosexual person can find him/her/them/itself marginalized by social services commonly designed for default heterosexual persons (ibid., p. 69).

In light of these varieties of gender-based violence, the principal legal controversy is defining what constitutes "well-founded fear of persecution". Although only a few states have taken up the step of precisely defining this aspect within their domestic legislation, status determination bodies and courts have agreed that a threat to life or freedom on account of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group constitutes persecution. Gender can influence and define the type

---

[18] See also CEU. 2004. *Council Directive 2004/83/EC*. Luxembourg: Council of the European Union; CEU. 2011. *Qualification Directive 2011/95/EU*. Strasbourg: Council of the European Union.

of persecution suffered. Persecution against refugee women and refugee LGBTQ+ individuals can differ from persecution against men by forms and reasons. For example, persecution can become gender-specific if it involves rape and sexual violence. Moreover, most gender-based persecutions are exercised by individuals who do not directly relate to the State – thus apparently should not be considered persecution. Nevertheless, if a State helps, conditions, permits, or justifies private violence, it becomes itself responsible for persecution. States should have the negative obligation not to violate a citizen's right, and the positive commitment to respect and protect those rights. If this burden of responsibility is evaded or refused by a State, individuals have no other recourse but to seek international protection (Valji et al., 2003).

For gender to be integrated into international law, many have suggested that gender should be regarded as a "social group", as risks, needs, and rights of refugees can be gender-specific (see Millband, 2013; Lovell, 2000; Freedman, 2007; Wallace, 1996; Bunch, 1990; Neal, 1988). As early as 1984, the European Parliament stated that a woman who fears cruel or inhumane treatment should be considered part of a social group to determine her status. During the last twenty years, LGBTQ+ persons have also been recognized as a relevant kind of social group when victims of hate crimes or prejudice-motivated crimes (Stotzer, 2012). Gender-specific persecution against them may also be ground for asylum recognition (Millband, 2013). Social groups are usually defined as having specific immutable characteristics that the members cannot change (such as gender). In 1993, Canada became the first country to produce a comprehensive set of guidelines on the inclusion of gender as a social group. The Canadian precedent and good practice were followed in 1995 by the United States, in 1996 by Australia, and in 2000 by the United Kingdom, who have respectively drafted their Gender Guidelines. In 1996, the European Parliament also invited the Member States to follow the good practice of Canada, the US, and Australia, by adopting Gender Guidelines for asylum seekers at a national level. Nevertheless, in some cases, the emphasis given to the social group ground meant that other applicable reasons, such as religion or political opinion, have been overlooked (Valji et al., 2003).

1.2. A sociological perspective

As we have seen, the term refugee can be defined along a wide range of lines across different disciplines. However, since this work fits into the field of sociology, it would be worth it to briefly examine the sociological perspective and the major strands upon which the debate has been articulated. Stefano Marras (2009) called to define the position of the refugee in sociological terms and wondered whether the sociological category of refugee exists as a separate classification. Can refugees be considered as a group of subjects united by a shared social identity and common practices of social action? If yes, which traits characterize their identity and which factors define their social action? (Marras, 2009, p. 84). Hein (1993) observed that the debate around refugees in sociology has developed around two main theoretical strands: the realists and the nominalists. The former paradigm, which appears to be dominant in migration studies, is informed by the push-pull theory (Lee, 1966) and a strict distinction between refugees and economic migrants or forced migrants and voluntary migrants. This branch considers "refugees" as "pushed" by political factors, in contrast to "migrants" who are "pulled" by economic factors. In this sense, because refugees are a distinctive legal category, they represent also a distinctive social category and share a common social identity and a common social action (Marras, 2009, p. 84). Scholars engaged in this line of thought see the refugee experience as monolithic, a flight towards a destination that was not chosen or only partially chosen. According to this strand, refugees have little freedom of action and exercise little agency, as they are traumatized individuals who are defined as social actors only as victims of violence and persecution.

On the other hand, the nominalist strand rejects the idea that the refugee can be defined in sociological terms as a distinct category of migrants and sees them as migrants who have been given a specific bureaucratic connotation (ibid.). A refugee is, therefore, someone who has been defined as such by external actors and according to specific (political, geopolitical, and economic) interests, in opposition to "who is not a refugee" (ibid. p 85). In this sense, refugees do not have a distinctive intrinsic social identity because their character is only attributed to them by the State. Hence, the refugee exists only as a

"nominal bearer of a legal status" (Marras, 2009, p. 85, my translation), which is not definable as a social identity for the subjects that bear the term (ibid.). This line of thinking, like the previous one, however, reduces refugees to entities without power or the capacity to be active social actors.

These understandings are objectively problematic as they are not comprehensive of the diversity of the refugee experience across history and geography. For example, the dependence on the legal definition is challenging in countries where the Refugee Convention is not applied, like in Lebanon, or where some protection is granted to almost all nationals of a particular country, but by creating distinctive forms of protection (e.g., subsidiary protection), rather than through the application of the Convention's criteria, like for Syrians in Germany.[19]

A third paradigm to understand the diversity of the refugee experience

Because legal definitions fail to embrace the diversity of the refugee experience and because their boundaries are a product of processes and practices that depend on the particular political, cultural, and economic conditions of a particular geographical area or in a particular historical moment, "official categories" would unavoidably disregard the specificities of refugees' social identity, as well as their agency. For this reason, it is worth introducing a third strand in refugee studies that is useful to take a step forward in making sense of the complexity of the refugee experience. This third line, which helps to recognize refugees in sociological terms as actors who exercise and perform a social identity in the social space, falls under the remit of social constructivism and has developed around the Labelling Theory. The founder of this theory is Roger Zetter with his essay *Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity* (1991). In this seminal work, Zetter (1991) traces the emergence of differing connotations around the

---

[19] Germany granted asylum status, subsidiary protection, or humanitarian protection to almost 100% of Syrian refugee applicants. According to the Asylum Information Database (AIDA) of the European Council, in 2018, Germany rejected only 0,2% of Syrian applicants. See Asylum Information Database. Available at: https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/germany/statistics [Accessed November 10, 2020].

refugee label that divert from the Refugee Convention and overcome the limitations of the realist and nominalist strands. According to Zetter, labelling processes define the social action of labelled subjects, whose social identity is determined or influenced by the labels used to classify them. Labelling in the context of refugee studies can form, transform, and manipulate identity within the framework of public policy and bureaucratic practices (Zetter, 1991, p. 40). In this sense, the author defines the historical and geographical diversity of refugees and the specific traits of their identity and social action within the processes of labelling, categorization, and differentiation (between refugees and non-refugees), which impose "identity by the programme" (de Voe, 1981, cit. in Marras, 2009).

Zetter defined the labelling of the refugees as a set of processes of which the stereotyping of the identity is perhaps the most "stigmatizing and alienating" (Zetter, 1991, p. 48) and the process that most transforms personal identities into bureaucratic identities. Many have observed that stereotyping identities create the association "refugee-victim", which has often informed and justified humanitarian actions and paternalistic humanitarianism (Barnett, 2011). This narrative treats refugees as "speechless emissaries" (Malkki, 1996) and has the presumption to consider humanitarian actors as moral and expert authorities that decide what is best for them. The victimization of refugees, generated by the labelling processes, can also bring about submissive attitudes towards the system and generate "more refugees", inasmuch aspiring beneficiaries will have to adapt to the narrow categories imposed by the system, at the cost of adapting their narratives or perhaps even lying. In this sense, the account of one participant, Nājūā, was very insightful.

> "The interview [for asylum recognition] is not easy at all. It's very stressful. They [the committee for the recognition of asylum] ask you so many questions. And you have to be very prepared. You have to study your story very well. As if it were someone else's story! You have to convince them that what you are saying is real. […] You have to prepare with your lawyer. Sometimes it is better to avoid some details or to emphasize others" (Nājūā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 5, 2018).

As explained by Marras (2009), another consequence generated by labelling processes is the dynamic of exclusion, which, by giving a physical identity to the label of refugee, creates "dangerous exclusion phenomena, social descend, impoverishment, and stigmatization" (ibid., p. 87, my translation). However, these dynamics can also create a collective consciousness by the labelled person, who embodies the label to lay claim rights and redefine the label itself (ibid.).

A final consequence of the labelling process is that by mainstreaming the category according to specific labels, it generates responses based on definitions of needs that are not based on real needs, but rather on alleged necessities or "primary needs". As a consequence, humanitarian aids and services are standardized and adapted to de-historicized and de-situated presumptions. Individuals' subjectivities are neglected and personal experiences are reduced to collective and uniformed categories (Rahola, 2006, cit. in Marras, 2006). Malkki (1995) had already observed that "the term refugee has analytical usefulness not as a label for a special, generalizable 'kind' or 'type' of person or situation, but as a broad legal or descriptive rubric that includes within it a world of different socioeconomic statuses, personal histories, and psychological or spiritual situations" (Malkki, 1995, p. 496). In this sense, since needs and aids distribution are standardized, refugees and asylum seekers need to conform to those homogeneous categories and *tell the story* that the interlocutor expects to hear. This was the case of Marūa, a woman from rural Damascus I met in Beirut. Together with her husband Salīm, she had an interview with an organization that helped refugees to resettle in Europe, but their application was rejected. In her conversation with me, she told me how the interview went.

"When we took the interview, we had to give a lot of details about our situation. The organization told us what to say and how to say it. […] It's like they knew what the Embassy wanted to hear from us. If we were poor enough, desperate enough, sick enough, then we were good to go. Unfortunately, it didn't work out" (Marūa, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, June 27, 2018).

As we have seen, the labelling process encourages embodying a new social identity in the labelled subjects. This new identity does not necessarily need to be consistent with real-life experiences, but preferably has to conform to the stereotyped image of the refugee. This compliance requires obtaining the rights and the benefits offered to refugees (Marras, 2009, p. 86). In sum, to answer the question "who is a refugee?", we could argue that, according to the Labelling Theory, the refugee is one who is labelled as such and conforms to those requirements, adapts her/his identity as well as her/his social actions (ibid., p. 87) in accordance to a standardized and stereotyped persona.

Who is a refugee in this study?

As it is very problematic to apply a narrow definition to the refugee experience, it was also problematic to categorize the population of this study. In defining who a refugee is in this study I undoubtedly relied on Zetter's labelling theory. However, applying any of the abovementioned models to the population of my study inevitably created dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. For example, the Labelling Theory, as the other theoretical models, did not help to define comprehensively who is a refugee and who is not. A Syrian national can be labelled as a refugee in certain circumstances and as an economic migrant, a student, or an entrepreneur in others. Or she/he can be labelled as a refugee for the rest of her/his life because of her/his Syrian nationality or background. In fact, the labelling model did not help to define the terms under which one person defines him/herself as a refugee. As we will see in the next section, the process of "becoming" a refugee is a process that involves "practices of elaboration/re-elaboration of identities, construction of "otherness" and readjustment of self" (Marras, 2009, p. 85, my translation). However, the identity as a refugee can be embraced in some circumstances (e.g., when housing rights need to be claimed) and rejected in others (e.g., when it entails a sense of poverty and loss that one does not want to recall or tie to her/his identity). Hence, it is not a monolithic identity.

Considering the difficulties in finding a definition that would encompass a wider meaning, I decided not to rely completely on any of those theories, and include instead in

my research all Syrian nationals who were displaced in Lebanon and Germany as a consequence of the war. These included Syrian citizens who were displaced because of the violence and the persecutions caused by the war, those who fled because of the destruction of their properties and cities, as well as those who escaped avoiding the forced recall for conscription imposed by the Syrian regime for all Syrian males between 18 and 42. The way these people defined themselves varies greatly and not always the term "refugee" made sense of their experience. For this reason, I favour in this thesis the term "displaced people" rather than "refugees" when applied to the participants in this research.

Nonetheless, even after having simplified terminology issues, I encountered other definition problems related to the heterogenic nature of the Syrian population. The Syrian society is very diverse and stratified as for the existence of several social groups of various sizes with their values and beliefs, their experiences, and their struggles. For example, a considerable part of displaced Syrians is composed of people with a Palestinian background. These included the descendants of Palestinian refugees displaced in Syria after the creation of Israel (1948). Nonetheless, because of their history, Syrians with a Palestinian background might have a different way of approaching life, a different collective memory, and cultural behaviour. For this reason, although I decided not to exclude this group (which was still a minority) from my study, in interviewing Palestinians I considered the specificities of their background. Instead, I decided to exclude from this study those Syrians whose migration experience was not directly related to the war – for example, Syrians who were already living in Germany when the war started, or Syrians who were living in Lebanon for business reasons.

1.3. What it means to "become" a refugee

If the term "refugee" can shape people's social identity in different ways, in the framework of social constructivism it can be argued that one is not a refugee, but instead, she/he *becomes* a refugee (see Hajdukowski-Ahmed et al., 2008; Suerbaum, 2018b) due to specific historical and political circumstances. In this sense, one of the most meaningful

accounts I collected came from Yāsmīn, a Syrian woman from Idlib whom I met in Cottbus, in the German State of Brandenburg. When I asked her the question, "What does it mean for you to be a refugee?", she replied:

"I wasn't born a refugee. I became a refugee. I had a normal life and then I lost everything. This is what it means to be a refugee: you have a normal life and then something happens and you become a refugee" (Yāsmīn, personal interview, Cottbus, Germany, March 9, 2019).

In Yāsmīn's words I could read the critical need to understand that whether or not refugees have a shared social identity tied to the newly acquired (legal, political, or social) status, they are people who had a normal life and then became refugees because of life circumstances. Thus, de-culturalizing and de-orientalizing the refugee experience is very important to understand the complexity of those life trajectories fully.

Among those respondents who gave their opinion on the meaning of the term "refugee", many associated the word with the idea of loss. This was a broad category, which included the loss of home and properties, the loss of loved ones, the loss of family structure and social bonds, and the loss of reference points in terms of culture and tradition. Samā, for example, a participant from Hama, claimed:

"To be a refugee for me means that I lost everything I had in Syria – my home, my family, the simple life I had. It means that my children lost their childhood and innocence and that my husband lost his job and his position" (Samā, personal interview, Tripoli, Lebanon, September 25, 2018).

Similarly, another participant, Ibrāhīm, from rural Damascus, argued:

"The feeling of having lost the life I had before is what I recognize as being a refugee. And the idea that this cannot be replaced, in any way, by even the most

peaceful life that Germany can offer to me" (Ibrāhīm, personal interview, Munich, Germany, March 19, 2019).

The dissolution of the family was often evoked by women who had lost their social and economic status and shifted from a life centred on the family to a life as a working woman. For instance, Sumaīa, a woman from Raqqa felt that family dismemberment triggered by the war was aggravated by the fact that she spent most of the day away from her family because she had to work.

> "I'm never at home. I spend most of my time outside and when I come back is sometimes too late to spend time with my family. […] I'm making a huge effort to keep the family unite, but sometimes it seems that everything is falling apart" (Sumaīa, personal interview, El-Marj, Lebanon, September 24, 2018).

The idea of loss was often associated with that of precariousness, both in Lebanon and in Germany. As we will see in the following chapters, the feeling of instability, loss, waiting, bewilderment, and being in-between, is what connected Syrian forced migration in Lebanon and Germany. For some families in both countries, the feeling of solitude was also associated with loss and went hand in hand with the process of becoming a refugee. This was particularly felt by Du'ā, a woman from Raqqa displaced in Munich.

> "The word 'refugee' for me means that I'm alone. I can't rely on my community or my family anymore, because they're not here with me. Loneliness became part of me. […] I'll never get the same warmth from people here" (Du'ā, personal interview, Munich, Germany, March 19, 2019).

In Lebanon, the idea of insecurity was another critical issue associated with being a refugee. In particular, female respondents argued that life in Syria, before the war, was safer than life in Lebanon. As Gissi (2019) observed, Assad's top-down system of control and securitization acted in a way that women felt protected (Gissi, 2019, p. 550) or at least

free to move. What placed limits on women's rights and their autonomous access to public space was the conservative traditions of some families or traditional gender roles upheld in Syria (Gissi, 2019). Many participants in the two focus group discussions I carried out in Lebanon had this feeling.

> "We were freer in Syria. We could go out at night without fear. Here we are refugees and we don't feel safe anymore" (Syrian woman, focus group discussion, Beirut, Lebanon, January 17, 2018].

> "I don't feel safe in Lebanon. I'm even afraid to go to the grocery store. When you're a refugee and you're not in your country you don't feel safe" (Syrian woman, focus group discussion, Baalbek, Lebanon, September 25, 2018).

Although these feelings of freedom were associated with life before the war, they relate to the complex topic of social cohesion between local and refugee groups, which traces back to Syria's almost thirty-year occupation of Lebanon and its controversial control on Lebanon's politics (see Di Peri, 2009). For this reason, Syrians are strongly unwelcomed by a large part of the Lebanese population. This attitude was also fostered by the populist political propaganda, which (as in many other countries, including the European States) turned onto refugees (and migrants) all the failures of the system.

Another way in which the status of refugee was experienced was as a tool to reclaim the rights that came along with being a refugee, such as the right to social housing. The account of Rāshid, a friend from rural Hama who lives in Berlin, is very remarkable. Rāshid had a very harsh displacement experience. He arrived in Germany, through the so-called "Balkan route", in summer 2015. He was firstly hosted in the collective reception centre of Spandau, in Berlin, and then relocated to a hotel outside Berlin, while waiting for his asylum claim to be processed. Nevertheless, because of a bureaucratic mistake, during winter 2016 he lost his place in the reception system and remained homeless for some time. Here is how he recalled this experience:

"They sorted people out and allocated them to different locations. I was assigned a hotel. […] Through a guy I know, I found a hotel that accepted refugees, in Friedrichshagen.[20] […] I spent there two months and ten days, and then I had to go back to the Sozialamt [social security office] to renew the papers for the hotel. They told me: "Maybe it will take a few days until you get it". So, I stayed with a German friend, I thought only for two or three days. I started going to the Sozialamt every day for the papers. But there were thousands of people every day. Sometimes I waited for 22 hours, in the street… in the cold, in the snow. It was minus 15... […] I stayed in this situation for one month and 23 days, not for three days... For one month and 23 days! […] Can you imagine? I'm a refugee, it's my right to have a roof over my head, and they left me in the street like a dog" (Rāshid, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, October 28, 2020).

By reclaiming his identity as a refugee, Rāshid reclaimed his right to social housing, as part of the protection he was granted through his asylum-seeker status, and his right to citizenship to be recognized as part of the country. Nevertheless, Rāshid refused to interiorize the word refugee with the meaning that, in his opinion, Germany assigned to it. When I asked him what it meant for him to be a refugee he said:

"I hate this word. […] I don't feel a refugee. I'm a person with a life, a history. I'm not just someone who needs help, a poor thing. That's what people here understand as "refugee". […] I can't feel this way, or it will be too frustrating and depressing for me. […] [In Germany] the word 'Syrian' became another way to say 'refugee'. […] When I say that I'm Syrian, the direct reaction of people is: 'Oh poor you!' […] You know, sometimes I go out after work. I want to enjoy my time and turn off my brain. You know, those thoughts [about Syria and the war] are still in your head all the time because everything is still going on – you keep losing people, everything is destroyed

---

[20] Rāshid explained to me that being assigned to a hotel meant that he received a document stating that the Sozialamt would cover the expenses for him to up to 50€ per night. However, it was his responsibility to find a hotel and most hotels in town did not accept refugees. This was mostly because, according to Rāshid, the Sozialamt paid those bills after several months.

– but if you want to go on with your life you still have to get a small space in your brain that is still clean from all that. So, I go to parties, I meet people: 'Where are you from?' 'From Syria.' Immediately they start speaking about the war. They ask you about what's going on. About how many people died… […] We're not only numbers, you know?" (Rāshid, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, October 28, 2020).

Rāshid and I discussed extensively the meaning that the German institutions, and sometimes the population, assigned to the word "refugee" and this is what he perceived:

"When you say you are a Syrian, they treat you as a refugee. Especially in the Sozialamt, they treat you like an animal. Of course, I don't come from heaven, but I'm not a criminal. […] The people here don't treat you as an equal. They deal with you, as you were inferior. […] You know in Syria I had my own house, my car, sometimes, when my dad was still alive […] we used to have one hundred guests in our house! One hundred people on a weekday! Here they don't have one hundred people at a wedding! You know what I mean? How can you compare this with being a refugee? How can you say I'm less than others?" (Rāshid, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, October 28, 2020).

In this sense, the refusal to accept the social identity of a refugee assigned by the local society meant for Rāshid a refusal to be part of a lower social class associated with the word. He did not want to be a refugee because he did not want to be pitied or considered poorer and inferior to others.

1.4. The Syrian uprising and the "refugee crisis"

I will now turn to the specific displacement experiences of Syrians in Lebanon and Germany and I will briefly trace the background of their flight and the dynamics of their displacement in the two countries.

The Syrian uprising began in 2011 as peaceful grassroots mobilizations against the long-standing dictatorship of the Assad regime that had ruled Syria for more than 40 years – first Hafiz (1970-2000) and then Bashar (2000-2011) (Trombetta, 2014). The unattended promises, the dissatisfaction, and a totalitarian political line that repressed all oppositions were among the causes that set the masses in motion in Darʿā on March 15, 2011. Hostilities began when the regime started responding with fire over peaceful protesters and put the city under siege until May 2011 (Ziter, 2015). Protests spread throughout the whole country demanding the end of the state of emergency, in force since 1963, the release of political detainees, the end of the rule of the security services, as well as changes in the constitution that would determine the end of the control of the Ba'ath Party on the governmental institutions (Ziter, 2015). Before 2011, Syria was characterized by cronyism, corruption, oppression, and a strong sense of discontent by the population, especially among intellectuals and students.

Bashar al-Assad took power in 2000 when his father, Hafiz, died. He inherited a stable country, but he needed to gain the trust of the people.[21] Therefore, he proposed himself as a reformer and with this new image, he won the support of the Syrian leadership, the solid structure of the Alawi clan, and the heads of the security services. However, promises of democracy would never be attended to, and it soon became apparent that not only would reforms never been implemented but that political and social movements demanding those reforms would be repressed. Under this climate, new requests for reforms began in 2011 with street demonstrations organized through social networks in the wake of similar initiatives spreading throughout the Arab world – the so-called "Arab Springs". The future of Syria and the fate of millions of people are marked by a speech held by Bashar al-Assad, on March 30, 2011, where he publicly declined any responsibility for the massacres of the previous days, disregarding expectations towards any chance for a change. Assad promised new reforms again, within the framework of a

---

[21] Bashar was not meant to rule the country. His brother Basil was initially the successor of Hafiz, but his accidental death in 1994 shifted the ground and Bashar was recalled from the UK, where he was studying to become an ophthalmologist (Trombetta, 2014).

plan allegedly already underway, thus confirming that he would not address the discontent at all. He would deny its existence.

Although initially anti-government demonstrations had a secular spirit and involved all the major cities, including those with an Alawi majority (the religious sect of the Assad regime), the protraction of the conflict polarized the communities. The regime provoked sectarian and geographical division by promoting the arming of the Alawi population (Sawah & Kawakibi, 2014); and by gaining the support of the Shia components and other religious minorities, which relied on the protection granted to them by the Baʿath Party. Although the Sunnis did not constitute a compact block, the opposition front, led by the Free Syrian Army (FSA), remained mainly Sunni. The scarecrow of sectarianism was used as the regime's strategy and propaganda to incite the Syrians to mobilize along communalistic lines (Hokayem, 2013). The intervention of non-Arab Shia Iran and the Sunni Gulf Powers increased sectarianism and divided people. With the intervention of Russia and the Western powers, the civil war soon became an international conflict and a proxy war where international groups confronted each other for economic interests or military prestige.

In 2014, casualties had already reached very high numbers (almost 200.000 people were killed). The appearance of the self-proclaimed Islamic State into the conflict made the situation even more challenging for civilians and changed the nature of the war radically. Since the beginning of the Revolution, Bashar al-Assad had used the card of terrorism to appoint pro-democracy protesters as terrorist groups. However, the appearance of Dāʿish[22] in the conflict was not only an opportunity for the regime to increase its rhetoric about fighting terrorism but also a chance of being morally and politically rehabilitated by the West as the lesser evil. In 2014, after having caused the flight of 500,000 people in Iraq, the extremists of Dāʿish entered Syria and soon gained the support of the most radicalized opposition groups – and the moral and economic backing of Sunni Gulf Powers and other Middle Eastern countries. The violence of the group was uncontainable; the economic

---

[22] Dāʿish is the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State, a militant Islamist group and a non-recognised proto-State that originated from a branch of al-Qāʿida in Iraq and then spread throughout Syria and outside the Levant.

power they managed to obtain in a short period with the support of their allies (and the looting of Iraqi weapons and oil) was impressive. Their ideological propaganda was also potent, as no Islamist or Salafi-inspired organization had ever managed to achieve such a strong consensus before (Trombetta, 2014).

The flight of the Syrian population

Due to the protraction of the war and the increased levels of violence in several areas of Syria, over half of the Syrian population was forced to internal displacement or to flee beyond international borders. In particular, starting from 2014, as the conflict intensified, Syrians started fleeing to Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, and only later asylum seekers attempted to reach Europe. In 2015, when Germany opened its borders,[23] more people undertook the journey, including non-Syrian nationals like Iraqis and Afghans. Between 2015 and 2016, the most travelled migration itinerary was the Balkan route, less dangerous than the Mediterranean crossing from Libya to Italy, which have mainly been crossed before 2015[24] – now the destination of many Syrians was Germany. However, most Syrians remained in the Middle East, especially in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon.

The case of the Middle East is particularly interesting because although the Middle Eastern States were those most affected by the "refugee crisis", virtually none of them is a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention.[25] The main reason for this is their official stand against the continuously forced expulsions of Palestinians by Israel. Palestinians are considered the only "official refugees" in the region, but no Middle Eastern State has ever wanted to accept the responsibility to legally permanently resettle Palestinians on their

---

[23] Various actors interviewed noted that technically, it would be more correct to say that in 2015 Germany did not close the brder rather than it did open them.

[24] In 2015, 80% of forced migrants who entered Germany crossed the Balkan routes (Edmonda, 2018).

[25] The only exceptions are Egypt and Turkey that have signed with reservations. Turkey has ratified the Convention with geographical limitations, through the declaration made under Article 1(B) of the 1951 Convention and the declaration made upon accession to the 1967 Protocol. Egypt signed with reservations in respect of article 12 (1), articles 20 and 22 (1), and articles 23 and 24 of the 1951 Convention. See Chapter 2 of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Available at:https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetailsII.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=V-2&chapter=5&Temp=mtdsg2&clang=_en#EndDec [Accessed October 3, 2020].

territory, despite this is what they did anyway. Moreover, the 1951 Convention was initially conceived to give hospitality to the refugees of World War II – namely European Jews – and with the formation of Israel, in 1948, the violent repercussions on the native Palestinian population, and the Arab-Israeli "conflicts", no State intended to sign an agreement that would allow more Jews to resettle in the Middle East. However, despite these considerations, most Middle Eastern States accepted displaced Syrians on their territory. Because most of those States were signatories of other related Conventions – such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) – they accepted displaced Syrians as *de facto* refugees or under different legal labels (Janmyr & Mourad, 2018). However, these countries do not have a proper asylum and humanitarian assistance policy and mostly rely on a Memorandum of Understandings signed with the UN Refugee Agency.

1.5. Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and Germany

The forced displacement of Syrians in Lebanon

Lebanon, a country of about five million people, received the highest per-capita concentration of refugees worldwide. Lebanon currently hosts about one million Syrians registered as refugees with the UNHCR[26] and an estimated number of 300,000 to 500,000 unregistered refugees (Janmyr, 2016).[27] As mentioned, Lebanon is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol, thus it does not recognize the 1.5 million Syrians as *refugees* (*lājiʾiyn*) but rather displaced persons (*naziḥiyn*) (Mourad, 2017). The State operates under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with the UNHCR in

---

[26] See UN Data Population Statistics. Available at: http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/demographics [Accessed October 3, 2020].

[27] Lebanon has received some 45.000 Palestinian refugees from Syria. See *UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response – Lebanon.* Available at: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71 [Accessed March 31, 2020].

2003,[28] which gives the Refugee Agency the autonomy to assist displaced people in Lebanon – albeit only to those who are registered with the UNHCR. Those who are not registered with it cannot benefit from its assistance or be resettled in a third country.[29] Lebanon strongly opposes the notion of a "country of asylum" (Janmyr, 2017). As a result, Syrians are formally considered as *de facto* refugees only when they are registered with the UNHCR and instead as "economic migrants" or "foreigners" when they are not under UN protection (Janmyr, 2016). Conversely to previous humanitarian emergencies, the government responded to the Syrian "refugee crisis" with a "no camp policy", without setting up formal refugee camps dedicated to Syrians. The reasons for rejecting encampment relates in large part to the fear connected to the Palestinian experience. Until 2014, the Lebanese government maintained an open border policy whereby Syrian nationals could live and work in Lebanon. No specific regulation was applied to them and the State's absence during this time was primarily understood and broadly referred to as a "policy of no-policy" (El-Mufti, 2014). As a result, Lebanon's responses to the "refugee crisis" were decentralized, fragmented, and governed by informality. Local municipal authorities took arbitrary actions (El-Mufti, 2014) and governed the refugee presence together with local and international humanitarian actors. While non-encampment may have allowed greater freedom of movement to Syrians, compared to what had happened to Palestinians in camps (Dorai, 2010), the lack of adoption of an alternative protection and shelter policy created challenges for both the UN and the local groups who became the primary respondents to the Syrian "refugee crisis" in Lebanon.

The majority of Syrians in Lebanon live in dire socio-economic conditions with limited livelihood resources (ILO, 2013). Initially, many refugees settled with their relatives or friends but with the protraction of the crisis, they resorted to rented accommodation where they pay high prices for small shelters or shared apartments with other families. The alternative is to rent an apartment in Palestinian camps, abandoned

---

[28] The MoU between the Lebanese government and the UNHCR was signed in 2003 on the occasion of the Iraqi "refugee crisis". Since 2014, the UNHCR is pushing for a new MoU to better manage the Syrian "refugee crisis" within the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) (Carpi, 2018).
[29] In 2015, new registrations for entering and residing in Lebanon have been put on hold, so that the UNHCR has also suspended the registrations as de facto refugees. This situation has led to a situation in which the majority of refugees live without a valid residence permit (Dionigi, 2016).

buildings, or move to tented settlements. Displaced Syrians remain dispersed all over the country, in over 1,700 localities, scattered in private apartments, collective shelters, Informal Tented Settlements (ITSs), unfinished houses, garages and warehouses. [30] Displaced Syrians pay rent also in Informal Tented Settlements (ITSs). Since Lebanon has not provided formal refugee camps for Syrians, informal tents have been built over private lands. The Lebanese landowners who allowed the refugees to settle on their propriety sometimes offered them the possibility to work in agriculture in nearby fields. However, because daily wages for these jobs are relatively low, mostly women or children are employed in this sector.

In Lebanon, Syrian refugees cannot mobilize enough resources, freely engage in regulated labour markets, or resettle and reshape their lives in the country. The labour market for Syrians is regulated by informality. In 2015, the UNHCR closed the registration for Syrians, making all those who could not register before that date categorized as "foreigners" (Dionigi, 2016). At the same time, those who are officially registered as refugees are denied work. In general, unless they have a sponsor (*kafīl*), Syrians are allowed to work only in specific sectors: construction, agriculture, and cleaning services (Tirado Chase 2016).

This fragmented legal system and the difficulties and costs associated with the renewal of the residence permit have made many Syrians displaced on the Lebanese territory irregular. Living without valid residency is also an obstacle to mobility, as being irregular entails the risk of being stopped at checkpoints and arrested, and being threatened by authorities. In this sense, has been noted that the mobility of Syrian men is more restricted than women's as the latter are less likely to be stopped or arrested (El-Asmar et al., 2019), and therefore they can move more freely across checkpoints than men. Because of the absence in many households of adult men, many Syrian women entered the job market to support their families. Nevertheless, women are more likely to be underpaid, employed off the book, or exploited (Errighi & Griesse, 2016). Syrian men are

---

[30] According to UNHCR 2015 data, Syrians are displaced all over the six districts, where the largest numbers (373.124) is hosted by the Beqaa and the Akkar, which include the most vulnerable, poor, and underserved communities of Lebanese. Beirut hosts 314.731 refugees. See UNHCR Data. Available at: https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations [Accessed October 3, 2020].

the most frequent targets of social cohesion incidents – such as verbal or physical aggression (IRC, 2016).

The German Wilkommenspolitik towards Syrians

The year 2015 marked the beginning of the "refugee crisis" for Germany. In less than one year, 1.1 million people[31] managed to escape an increased level of violence and conflict in the Middle Eastern region and reached the country. Many of them were Syrians, but others also attempted to cross the border to seek protection from human rights violations and situations of humanitarian deprivation. Under the flag of *Willkommenspolitik*,[32] a pro-refugee and open-border policy, Chancellor Angela Merkel did not prevent asylum seekers from entering Germany and declared the State responsible for examining their asylum applications. However, the risks related to forced migration remained, including the need to deal with "smugglers" to cross the borders.

Between 2014 and 2016, the Balkan route became the only accessible channel to Europe (Edmonda, 2018). It was formally closed in March 2016 but it has never ceased to be a crucial informal passageway for forced migrants heading towards Germany (ibid., p. 190). From Syria, people reached Turkey through public or private transportation and from the city of Izmir, a city on Turkey's Aegean coast, they took a boat to the Greek islands of Dodecanese. Because in this period Greece turned a blind eye to the Dublin system and allowed people to cross its borders without taking fingerprints, the passage through Macedonia and Serbia was fairly straightforward. From Serbia, people headed to

---

[31] The number of asylum seekers who arrived in Germany is based on estimates, because accurate data were only collected starting from January 2017. See BMI (2017). Available at: http://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2017/05/asylantraege-april-2017.html?nn=3314802 [Accessed July 31, 2020].

[32] The concepts of *Willkommenspolitik* and *Wilkommenskultur* are not new to Germany. They date back to 2005 when a reformed immigration law entered into force and the interest started shifting from immigration to integration (Trauner & Turton, 2017). Although the implementation of these reforms has been criticized, a change in policies starting from this period is central to the discourse around integration. In 2005 the territorial principle was introduced into the citizenship law. As a result, a pure *jus sanguinis* has been replaced with a mix of *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli*, which opened the possibility for migrants to consider Germany their home.

Austria and then Germany following different routes. Some of them continued to Northern Europe – where significant Syrian networks existed before 2015.

In Germany, protection has been granted to almost all Syrians who claimed it, regardless of the formal criteria for application, the political affiliation, and the actual displacement experience. Syrian nationals who resided in Europe before 2011 and whose residence expired can apply for asylum under the EU law, to stay legally in Europe. This was the case of Sāra, a young Syrian woman who worked for an NGO that focused on integrating refugees in Berlin. I consulted her as a humanitarian actor at the beginning of my fieldwork in Germany, in November 2018. Although she did not formally take part in my research as a participant, she gave me interesting insights. My encounter with her was summarized in my fieldnotes:

> "Sāra came to Berlin with a student visa when the war had already started, in 2012. She lived in Damascus before. According to her, her family 'was not in a bad situation'. She wanted to study abroad and when I asked her if she would have gone even if the war had not broken out, she said 'yes'. However, she told me that after her student visa expired, she was not able to find a job straight away and was forced to claim the refugee status in order not to go back to Damascus – where she claimed she would never have a future" (Fieldnotes, Berlin, November 28, 2018).

In accordance with a series of laws,[33] Syrian nationals in Germany were initially granted full refugee status, which ensured full political protection and a longer residency period (5 years). Due to a policy change in 2016, the BAMF started granting most Syrians subsidiary

---

[33] See Refugee Law and Policy: Germany. Available at: https://www.loc.gov/law/help/refugee-law/germany.php. [Accessed October 10, 2020].

protection,[34] which provided a 1- or 2-year residence permit. This is a form of protection granted by the EU to third-country nationals or stateless persons, who are at risk of suffering serious harm if they returned to the country of origin. While the full refugee status falls under the rule of the 1951 Refugee Convention,[35] the status of the beneficiary of subsidiary protection is regulated by the 2011 Qualification Directive of the European Council.[36] Consequently, these two categories are not guaranteed the same status, the same scope of protection, and the same rights (Tometten, 2018). There are four main differences between the two statuses. First, a person who has been granted refugee status is entitled to an initial residence permit of three years while a beneficiary of subsidiary protection to only a one-year residency permit. Second, the permanent residence permit can be agreed to the person with a refugee status after three years or more, while only after five years or more to the person who is granted subsidiary protection. Third, the political refugee is provided with travel documents for refugees (the blue passport), while the other can only obtain a travel document for foreigners if she/he has no possibility of getting a national passport. Finally, there is a difference in the right of family reunification. The person with the refugee status is granted the right to reunite with his or her family (wife or husband, minor children, or parents of an unaccompanied minor) without the requirements of sufficient resources.[37] The beneficiary of subsidiary protection does not

---

[34] According to the Asylum Information Database (AIDA) and the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), in 2015, 95.8% of Syrians had been granted refugee status. This rate dropped to 56.4% in 2016 and to 35% in 2017. Since then, the percentage of refugee recognition, in general, has increased again, reaching 49.5% in 2019 (compared to 41.6% in 2018). Conversely, the rate of Syrians being granted subsidiary protection rose from 0.1% in 2015 to 41.2% in 2016, 56% in 2017. Since then, it has decreased to 39.7% in 2018 and 33.1% in 2019. See *Differential treatment of specific nationalities in the procedure.* Available at: https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/germany/asylum-procedure/treatment-specific-nationalities. [Accessed October 3, 2020].

[35] See the Refugee Convention. Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/4ca34be29.pdf. [Accessed October 10, 2020].

[36] See Qualification Directive. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:337:0009:0026:en:PDF. [Accessed October 10, 2020].

[37] If the application for family reunification is submitted within three months after the attainment of the status there is no need for the refugee to prove sufficient resources – a calculated minimum salary, a work contract, a home etc. (immigration lawyer, personal interview, Berlin, April 3, 2020).

have today these same rights. However, in 2019, 99,9% of Syrian nationals were granted some kind of protection.

In Germany, Syrians were hosted in three types of accommodation: initial reception centres, collective accommodation shelters or hotels, and decentralized accommodations, as apartments.[38] These emergency centres were used mostly in 2015 and 2016 and are no longer active today. As a rule, and especially following the reform of June 2019, asylum seekers were obliged to stay in initial arrival centres until their application was lodged – in general, between 6 weeks and 18 months. After this period, asylum seekers are referred to a *Landkreis* where they are supposed to stay in collective reception centres, or *Gemeinschaftsunterkünfte,* usually located within the same Federal State as the initial reception centre. Because of geographical restrictions, asylum seekers were obliged to stay in the State where they were allocated for the whole duration of the asylum procedure. Once a status is granted, the obligation to stay in either an initial reception centre or a *Gemeinschaftsunterkunft* ends, but since it is difficult to find private accommodation, many status holders continue to remain in those accommodations for a more extended period.

One of the main issues for Syrian families in Germany remains the family reunification regime. As we will see in Chapter 5, the system was suspended for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection until March 2018 and then restored, but limited to a monthly quota of 1.000 claims per month. Because of these obstacles, separation can last for a long time and create several challenges to refugees' everyday lives and their future expectations and aspirations, including significant impediments to the integration process. However, various studies have considered that the impact of refugees upon German society and economy would be positive in the long term (Fratzscher & Junker, 2015). Some of those projections have been confirmed by recent data. According to a study carried out by the Institute for Labor Market and Vocational Research (IAB) about half of the refugees who have arrived in Germany during the "refugee crisis" are employed after five years, making the process of labour market integration faster than it was for refugees in previous

---

[38] See Informationsverbund Asyl und Migration. Available at: https://www.asylineurope.org/reports/country/germany/reception-conditions/housing/types-accommodation. [Accessed July 31, 2020].

years (Brücker et al., 2020). However, the study also reveals that only 29% of these employed people were women, suggesting that although significantly more has been invested in labour integration programmes for refugees and asylum seekers since 2015, traditional gender roles continue to keep women with children in the home.

Chapter 2.

Researching gender roles and relations among Syrian families in Lebanon and Germany

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodological framework underpinning this research, as well as introducing the research strategy and the empirical techniques employed. The chapter is divided into two main parts. The first section outlines the ethical and methodological challenges of this research. I will first reflect on the researcher's positionality in studying forced migration, the aspects of self-reflexivity and positionality, and how I accessed the field. Then, I will introduce some practical and social implications of the research. Finally, I will delve into the matter of security in humanitarian and fragile contexts. In the second section, I will present the methodological approach I have used to carry out this study. I will indicate the data collection strategies, the management of those data, and the data analysis techniques I have employed. The empirical data collected for this study were drawn mainly from primary ethnographic sources, including in-depth individual interviews and collective interviews with refugee families in Lebanon and Germany, and focus group discussions and consultations with institutional and humanitarian actors, as well as humanitarian and institutional actors. Secondary sources were employed to frame the background context and included grey literature, NGO research studies, UN reports, governmental documents, and other available data. The empirical data were collected between November 2017 and April 2019. Still, constant communication has been maintained with some of the participants in both countries throughout the research.

2.1. Ethical and methodological challenges in the study of forced migrations

Studying forced migration with a focus on gender relations can entail different ethical and methodological challenges for a researcher, which can exacerbate if the research is conducted in politically and socially fragile contexts (Eide & Kahn, 2008). Refugees are a particularly vulnerable group of migrants, especially when they are displaced in a country that does not recognize them as such, like Lebanon. For this reason, the researcher has to keep in mind the physical, psychological, and emotional sufferings that these people might face – the loss of their beloved ones and their properties, the physical and psychological tortures that they might have been subjected to in Syria, the destruction of their cities, the humiliation of being unwelcomed in a country of displacement, or transit, and the awareness that they will never be able to go back to their homes. This is the context wherein the researcher has to place her/himself when conducting qualitative research. In such a setting, finding the best way to access the field, especially when the field is in fragile contexts, is crucial for a researcher to gather quality data. When fieldwork is carried out in authoritarian or violent contexts, the research must consider risks and security issues. At the same time, it is also important to be aware of the practical and social implications to better address criticisms and constraints for both the refugee participants and the local community.

Researcher's positionality, self-reflexivity, and access to the field

Positionality and self-reflexivity are essential parts of the research process, especially in critical ethnography, where a major outcome is to reflect on what we learn about the "self" as a result of the study of the "other" (Chiseri-Strater, 1996, p. 119). A growing scholarship has considered self-reflexivity and positionality central in qualitative research and fieldwork (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013; Holmes, 2020; Müller-Funk, 2020; Carpi, 2020b). Through self-reflexivity, the researcher acknowledges her/himself in the research space and defines her/his positionality in the field. This implies the recognition of the

researcher as part of the research (Cohen et al., 2011) because the fieldwork would not exist without the researcher. In this sense, positionality can be defined as an individual's worldview and the position she/he has chosen to adopt about a specific research topic. Positionality is not free from ontological and epistemological issues, as our assumptions about social reality and knowledge cannot be detached from the research process (Sikes, 2004; Bahari, 2010; Marsh et al., 2017). Likewise, we cannot ignore problems related to agency (Sikes, 2004) and how we, as researchers create a structural context for our participants. However, as actors in the field, researchers themselves can encounter structures limiting their access to quality data. In critical ethnography, a researcher should position her/himself in relation to three dimensions of the field: the self, the participant, and the context in which the research is carried out (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013, p. 71). In field research, the fieldworker should negotiate the access to the field with the participants and with the other actors in the field, such as local power-holders and non-state armed actors, which can challenge the knowledge production (Carpi, 2020b, p. 2). In fact, the research context can deliberately allow or not allow the researcher's presence in the field, although the fieldworker might not be aware of these structures (ibid., p. 6).

While some aspects of one's positionality and social identity can be considered fixed, such as gender, age, ethnicity, or nationality, others are more subjective or contextual, such as personality, sexual orientation, class, or background (Chiseri-Strater, 1996). As argued by Holmes (2020), fixed aspects (or structures) might influence contextual aspects (or agency). However, this does not mean that these aspects automatically lead to particular views or perspectives of the field (Chiseri-Strater, 1996). In my fieldwork, self-reflexive considerations were part of an on-going process that helped me to identify, critique, and construct my positionality in the field. For example, some fixed aspects of my positionality, as my nationality and gender, had a central role in my access to the field and whether participants and the research context accepted me. These particular aspects of my social identity often influenced my access to the field positively. For example, being a woman helped me to approach female participants easily. Simultaneously, because my research topic was seen as something familiar, related to domestic life, and thus not connected with political or public issues, male participants

were also rather keen on speaking with me. This does not mean that I had more access to quality data or that participants' willingness to give their account implied that they opened up about certain topics, but simply that I was not seen as a threat. In this sense, other structures were at stake in the relationship with research participants – including their expectations towards me. Moreover, as a woman, I had to deal with aspects related to my gendered position in the field. For example, while entering female-dominated spaces was relatively easy, this was not the case with male-dominated situations, which I could not easily access by myself. This limited the scope of action of my interviews and the depth in which certain topics could be discussed. Consequently, it was not so simple to collect meaningful and quality data from men – for example, about how their intimate lives changed in displacement.

Thanks to my Italian nationality and my position as a foreigner in both Lebanon and Germany, I was generally seen as neutral. This was of great help for me to gain the trust of those participants who had a difficult relationship with the local population or the country – which was often the case, especially in Lebanon. As an Italian, I sometimes had privileged access to the field than others, including Lebanese and German researchers. Nevertheless, my nationality also functioned as a controversial aspect. In Lebanon, I was often associated with an Italian organization that helped Syrian families to resettle in Italy or France. Due to this, many participants had expectations towards me. For many Syrians in some areas of Lebanon, those organizations were sometimes the only glimmer of hope for a life away from Lebanon. Hence, regardless of how I carefully clarified at the beginning of each interview that I was not working with that organization, many participants kept their expectations high during the interview, thus engendering dynamics of power that made me question ethical issues and the quality of collected data.

As a Western researcher, I was aware of being part of a privileged ethnic and social group. For this reason, maintaining cultural sensitivity was of utmost importance for me. According to Müller-Funk et al. (2019), cultural sensitivity relates to respect, shared decision-making, and effective communication (Müller-Funk et al., 2019, p. 8). Cultural sensitivity in research "involves integrating cultural beliefs, characteristics, attitudes, values, traditions, experiences, and norms of a target population into research design,

implementation, evaluation, and materials" (Guntzviller, 2017, p. 317). Being respectful towards participants, their values, beliefs and lifestyle was at the basis of my research, as well as involving them in the decisions related to my fieldwork. For example, in a framework of decolonizing knowledge, I often asked feedback from participants, especially from those families I became closer with. Their comments and opinions helped me to improve research tools, and to enrich my research design. Respecting participants' political view, it was also something that I considered critical. Although I was politically sided about the Syrian conflict, I found it necessary to be respectful of others' ideas. Many times, participants felt safe enough to spontaneously share their political views, which added immense value to my research. As I interacted with people with different cultural traditions and different ideas about relationships and family, I found it critical to maintain a reflexive approach towards these topics. However, I was aware that there is no way to be completely unbiased and objective in describing reality (Dubois, 2015). For example, I would not share my ideas about relationships *ex-ante* and I respected their opinions without judging. Nevertheless, I was open to questions, criticisms, and discussions. Some participants took the opportunity to take something back from their relationship with me and asked my opinion about relationships or what it meant for me to be a woman in a foreign country. As was often the case, those questions placed me in a more vulnerable position, which allowed power dynamics to shift in favour of research participants.

The language was another key element to access the field successfully. It is acknowledged that researchers neither always invest time in learning the language of participants, nor they discuss their linguistic competencies and the impact of these in accessing the field (Müller-Funk et al., 2019). Borchgrevink (2003 cit. in Müller-Funk et al., 2019) argued that it is essential for researchers to learn the language of their informants and simultaneously to work together with interpreters, as they can help to get quality data (Borchgrevink, 2003, p. 96 cit. in Müller-Funk et al., 2019). In my work, I invested time to learn the language of Syrian participants and took several classes of Levantine Arabic before and during my fieldwork. Although I have never reached a level in which I felt completely independent in my interviews, and the varieties of Syrian dialects made this goal very difficult to achieve, I made some progress that helped me to grasp important

pieces of information in my interviews that added value to this study.

The role of research assistants in accessing the field

Various authors have discussed the importance of including members of the same ethnic, cultural, gender, and linguistic group into the research team (Bloch, 1999; 2007; Müller-Funk et al., 2019). This would increase cultural sensitivity and would allow better access to the field. Other scholars have argued that, in the context of refugee studies, it would be better to avoid research assistants or interviewers with a refugee background as their presence might be perceived as politically positioned within the conflict (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003) and thus create hindrances to the access to the field. I personally decided to work with research assistants and I had very different experiences in Lebanon and Germany. Because I considered it of utmost importance that those working with me in the field valued cultural sensitivity, I carried out ethical and methodological training for them before starting the fieldwork. [39] In Lebanon, I worked with Nora, an Australian psychologist with Syrian background who lived in Akkar. Then with Ghenā, a Lebanese translator with Palestinian roots who lived in the Palestinian camp of Burj el-Barājne, in Beirut. In Germany, I worked with Meī, a young Syrian woman with refugee status. Although their support in the field was outstanding in all cases, and their contribution was valuable, I noticed different reactions to their presence among participants.

Nora's presence was generally perceived positively by participants, but it raised certain curiosity. Many were curious about why she was in Lebanon, being able, because of her Australian nationality to live somewhere else. This gave my research an added value because not only Nora's skills as a psychologist and her sympathetic attitude were also very beneficial to create a positive connection with participants, but also Nora's background allowed me to discuss my research topics from different perspectives. Very

---

[39] The training covered methodological aspects such as sampling techniques and participants selections, operative aspects of the fieldwork, management and protection of data collected, etc. The ethical section covered issues such as anonymity and confidentiality, protection of participant's identity, how to use the language in a clear and unbiased way, dealing with participant's expectations, etc.

often when Nora was with me, after having shared their personal experiences, feelings, and intimate thoughts during the interview, participants took the opportunity to raise questions to us, and especially to her, about how we, as foreigners (and she, as Syrian-Australian), felt about relationships. In this way, participants could take something back and engage in a richer discussion, as relative equals, rather than in a one-on-one interview. This dynamic was useful to reduce power structures – at least for the time of the interview.

With Ghenā, the experience was somehow more challenging. She is a Lebanese citizen with a Palestinian background and a Lebanese accent. For this reason, some Syrian families were initially reluctant to share their experiences in depth when Ghenā was there – especially stories related to difficult social cohesion with the Lebanese nationals. Nonetheless, she was very empathic with participants and often chose to share a little bit about herself and her life experience in a Palestinian camp. This information brought her closer to the participants, who were no longer intimidated by her positionality as a Lebanese.

In Germany, I had a very different experience with Meī as many Syrian families did not perceive her presence positively. Because of the alleged temporarily of their status and distribution on the territory, many Syrian families in Germany tend to remain isolated from other Syrians they do not know. In my observation, this was not because of the sectarian nature of the Syrian society, as it could be argued (e.g., Salamandra, 2013), but rather because of the uncertainties related to deportation and repatriation and the fears of being controlled by the regime in the diaspora. For these reasons, many families were reluctant to engage with Syrians from different political views and environments. Since Meī was perceived as an open-minded and educated young woman, she was sometimes not trusted by some conservative families. In other circumstances, she was well accepted, and her presence was extremely valuable to connect with families with a similar background as hers.

When I worked by myself in the field, I also faced several refusals. At the time of my fieldwork in Germany (October 2018-April 2019), many families continuously lived in a perceived limbo and confronted life in Germany somehow defensively. During the first

five years after the "refugee crisis", many participants in Germany did not know what to expect from the future, with the political scenario in Syria subjected to quick changes or normalization and the fear of repatriation.[40] Although there was no reason for considering deportation or repatriation of Syrians as a potential threat, at the time of my fieldwork, some families feared being repatriated or controlled by the Syrian regime in the diaspora.

Practical, social, and ethical implications of the research

Part of the reflexivity process entails evaluating the practical, social, and ethical implications of social research. A scholar should continuously pose questions about the potential harms and impacts of research on participants. Bursting into people's lives, entering their private spaces, asking them personal questions, and then leaving them without giving any tangible or direct help can be difficult for both the researcher and participants to make sense. It is sometimes not easy for the researcher to give sense to the value of fieldwork or go back to her/his comfortable life in a safe country. Furthermore, it is even more problematic for participants to acknowledge that there is no concrete benefit for them, after having welcomed someone into their homes and having invested time and emotions. These two levels of implications can be a source of great distress for both the researcher and the participants. For this reason, it is crucial to reduce the impact of the researcher's presence on the lives of participants. Giving right and comprehensive information is always an ethical choice that should not be overlooked. Taking some time to introduce ourselves and our study and to anticipate how the interview will be conducted could help participants have a comprehensive picture of what will happen. Informed consent should always be asked in either written or oral form and possibly explained in clear terms.

---

[40] At the time of writing, November 2020, an international conference was held in Damascus to discuss possible avenues to "facilitate" refugees' return, though no EU actor participated in it. Nonetheless, the conference, organized by the Syrian regime, together with Russia, saw great participation of the Lebanese politicians, who for several years have been promoting the voluntary return of refugees in Syria. However, no considerable action is expected to be taken without the engagement and the support of the EU.

Using the accurate terminology is also very important. For example, during my fieldwork in Germany, I realized that my intentions were not always understood when I used the Arabic word *muqābale*, "interview". This term was mostly used in the humanitarian context concerning the recognition of refugee status. I thus realized that my message was misleading and that I needed to change the terminology. Therefore, instead of asking participants if I could "take an interview" with them (*baddkon ta'mlū muqābale ma'ī*), I started asking them to "share their experience" with me (*baddkon tishārkūni tajribtkūn*), or to "tell me their stories" (*baddkon tkhabrūnī qostkon*). By changing the language and the message, I found more positive responses to my work and a better understanding of what my research could and could not do.

Research limitations and challenges

In both Lebanon and Germany, I faced some practical and operational limitations regarding access to the field. In particular, in Lebanon, a very fragmented country at a political and social level, I had to deal with the informality in which refugees' hospitality was managed. The fragmented distribution of displaced Syrians in the Lebanese territory, the instability of Informal Tented Settlements (ITS), and refugees' irregular status in the country are some of the most evident issues a researcher has to deal with when approaching fieldwork in Lebanon. Accessing certain rural areas through informal public transportation, and security issues in specific regions may also jeopardize the fieldwork. Nonetheless, the main difficulties when approaching refugee-related research in Lebanon are ethical, emotional, and situational challenges. As we have seen, the interaction between the Western researcher and participants can be ethically challenging especially if research purposes and aims are not fully explained or understood. Emotional issues have a significant impact on empirical-based research as they can expose the researcher to emotional instability (Thomson et al., 2013) and bring about psychological repercussions as burnout. Sometimes the researcher's ethical believes are also challenged. In Lebanon, one may encounter sensitive issues such as gender-based violence, child labour, and other violent practices. Finally, situational challenges are also critical when interacting with a

fragmented socio-political environment such as Lebanon, where certain political forces or local community leaders might interfere with the research or not see it as neutral or altruistic (Goodhand, 2000). When fieldwork occurs in a highly politicized and conflicting environment, challenges emerge and the researcher may respond with fragility, thus compromising her/his work. For this reason, a researcher needs to overcome unexpected barriers with creativity and adjust her/his level of involvement (Li, 2008).

In Germany, a significant limitation to access the field came from the humanitarian environment. Although I expected to face fewer hindrances than in Lebanon, given the better-structured and formal nature of refugees' hospitality, this was not the case. Cronin-Furman & Lake (2018) argued that weak regulatory authority offers Western academics opportunities that are not available in States with a greater reach or capacity. In both countries, I reached out to some of the participants through humanitarian organizations and associations. While this approach was rather successful in Lebanon, where humanitarian actors and refugees were accustomed to interacting with researchers, I had the opposite experience in Germany. There, humanitarian organizations tended to overprotect refugees in what I perceived as a paternalistic approach. In many cases, humanitarian actors even refused to ask potential participants if they were willing to participate in my study, preventing them from being active agents of their lives. In Germany, I repeatedly observed and faced an aid-oriented and agency-limiting approach towards refugees, compared to other European countries. This attitude also interfered with refugees' integration and inclusion. Indeed, concerning social cohesion, many participants felt "disempowered" because they did not have the power to live life on their own accord. However, the different degrees of response that I observed among humanitarian actors in Germany and Lebanon might be also linked to my positionality in the field and the power structures that this conveyed.

Decolonizing methodologies

Some aspects of our "post-colonial roots" or our social identity can profoundly impact how we perceive others, the way we are perceived, and the power dynamics in the

relationship with research participants. Following Anthropologist Estella Carpi, I suggest that the field should be approached in a "transformative" rather than in an "informative" way (Carpi, 2018). To do so, researchers should recognize hierarchies and postcolonial legacies, cultural biases, and structural aspects of identity and critically address the field using "decolonized methodologies" (Tuhiwai Smith, 2017). For example, it is imperative to minimize cultural and social prejudices and let people's stories guide observations and analysis. Concurrently, we should abandon the presumption to *give voice to the voiceless* or to *speak on behalf of the refugees*. Instead, we could consider *reporting the voices* of those who participate in the research to include them not as objects of a study but as subjects. However, we should also be aware of the "politics of voice" (Haile, 2020) and the dynamics of visibility and invisibility within which refugeehood occurs. In line with this methodological decolonization, it is instrumental to consider participants as experts and not as witnesses of displacement (Taha, 2020, p. 5). This can help to go beyond Eurocentric and Orientalist representations (ibid., p. 6). Then, we should adjust our methods to the context and participants at best. Some strategies could work better with some people and being extremely problematic with others. Finally, perhaps we should unlearn biased notions of social reality favouring a participant-driven understanding of the field, and make an effort to understand participants' need to take space in the relationship with the researcher, ask questions, and take something back from the research. However, the best way to decolonize methodologies and to thoroughly understand the field would be to "give something back", namely to give the work back to the participant population and listen to their feedback.

Security in authoritarian and fragile contexts

Authoritarian and fragile contexts pose particular challenges for researchers. Because of the high level of control by governmental agents and/or non-state armed groups, researchers may face problems in negotiating access to the field, gaining field relations, maintaining security for their respondents and themselves (Malthaner, 2014). Lebanon is considered a "comfort zone" for international researchers because is one of the few

countries in the Middle East where one can still conduct field research (Di Peri & Carpi, 2019). However, the fragmentation and informality of the humanitarian field, regulated by the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP),[41] the political instability, and the presence of non-state armed actors might pose limitations to the collection of quality data.

At the beginning of my fieldwork in Lebanon, I reflected on the difficulties in accessing certain areas where potential risks could involve me and participants alike. Non-state armed groups controlling certain areas of South Lebanon made me decide against carrying out fieldwork in those areas.[42] However, security incidents can also occur in other areas. In general, I have not had negative experiences in terms of safety. Only on one occasion, I faced a situation that made me reflect on my security and that of my participants when I was visiting a group of Syrian women in a tented settlement in Bar Elīās, in the Beqaa Valley. I went there with my friend Ward, during my participant observation with her family, because she wanted me to meet women who worked in agriculture. One of those women told me about experiences of child labour and child marriage that involved her children. She was a single mother and she could not support her eight children, so she decided to send the older ones to work in the land managed by the local *shāwīsh*.[43] With the work of her two daughters, the man would allow them a reduction of the rent. However, the *shāwīsh* considered each girl as half of a person; hence the two young girls were paid in total the salary of only one worker. During our conversation, the woman told us that the *shāwīsh* used to abuse the two girls and eventually married one of them. One of the two girls also joined us after a while and told

---

[41] The Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) was built in 2015 as the result of the collective effort of 95 partners, including government ministries, UN agencies, and national and international NGOs. See Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) Overview. Available at: http://www.un.org.lb/library/assets/LCRP_QA-124515.pdf. [Accessed September 15, 2020].

[42] South Lebanon was somehow less interesting for me in terms of data collection because a smaller number of Syrians have resettled in this area. Those who live there, mostly in Informal Tented Settlements (ITSs), are the families of former seasonal workers from Syria who after the war started bringing their families to Lebanon. Other authors have investigated displacement in the Lebanese Dahyeh (Carpi, 2018).

[43] A *shāwīsh* is a Syrian refugee who acts as the leader of the refugee camp. This informal authority is obtained through seniority or by choice of the refugee community. He also acts as a mediator between the refugee community and the Lebanese landowner who rents the land on which tents are built. The *shāwīsh* also takes on the responsibilities for the agricultural work onto the Lebanese land.

us the story. When we were leaving, Ward and I were stopped by a group of men; among those, we recognized the *shāwīsh*. He asked us who we were and what we were doing in the camp. We told him we were visiting a friend of Ward, which was true, but we did not mention my study or the fact that I was a researcher. The man was not happy with this answer and asked us what we were going to do with the information we had obtained – he probably thought we were journalists. Ward's polite demeanour and her mediating skills bailed us out of that uncomfortable situation. Eventually, the man became convinced that we had no intention to report him or his activities to the authorities. He let us go, and as far as we know, there were no repercussions on the women we met in the camp. After this incident, I realized how even the most allegedly harmless situations could bring about risks for the researcher and the people who take part in the research at various stages, including, of course, participants.

2.2. Methodological approach

I will now describe the methodological approach I used in this study. I carried out a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995) and I chose to use a qualitative approach based on a strategy where different qualitative methods were used: in-depth semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation. Two types of sources were considered for the data collection: primary sources, collected among refugee families, and secondary sources, collected among humanitarian and institutional actors. The data collection was developed along with two phases: a pre-data collection phase and a data-collection phase. In the first phase, I planned the research design; I created the research tools; I hired the research assistants, and handed out research training for them to become familiar with the main ethical and methodological aspects of the research. In the second phase, I collected data through three qualitative research methods. Firstly, I carried out individual interviews with institutional and humanitarian actors to frame the research background. Then, I carried out three focus group discussions with refugee women, refugee men, and one with humanitarian actors. Next, I carried out semi-structured in-depth interviews with Syrian families. Finally, I conducted participant observation in

designated focus areas. I analyzed my data through content analysis. Additional informal talks and conversations were carried out randomly in Lebanon and Germany among the local population and the refugee population. This methodology was supplemented by desk research and literature review. At the same time, I integrated these activities with roundtable discussions, conferences, workshops, meetings, and informal talks during my research stay in Lebanon and Germany.

Focus population and sample

As explained in the previous chapter, because of the diversity of the refugee experience, it was not easy to define the focus population and whom to include in the research. I chose to include participants according to the type of family. I first identified three types of families present in Lebanon and Germany: nuclear family, single-headed family, and extended family. Then, I included all Syrian nationals aged between 25 and 65 years old. The only two criteria I used to select participants were a) time after displacement (at least one year) and b) being part of a family before displacement (they got married in Syria). These two criteria were instrumental in focusing on changes that occurred before and after displacement. Therefore, the unit of data collection was the household. For nuclear families, I interviewed both husbands and wives; for single-headed families, I interviewed the female/male breadwinner, one person per household; and for extended families, I interviewed at least one member per household. I chose to design a sample of 60 families, but eventually I interviewed 75. In total, I interviewed 117 Syrian participants.

The diversity of the Syrian society and population is partly represented in this study. Although the majority of participants displaced in both countries are Sunni Syrians from rural, urban or semi-urban areas, I interviewed three families of Sunni Bedouin groups as well as four Druze families (in Lebanon). Only two families were descendant of Palestinian refugees displaced in Syria after the creation of Israel (1948). No Shia, Alawi, or other minority groups of Syrians participated in this study.

Areas of origin varied greatly. Participants displaced in both countries came from several urban, semi-urban, and rural areas of Syria – Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama,

Deir ez-Zor, Qamishly, as-Sweida, ar-Raqqa, Idlib and some families from the Golan Height. A few Sunni families flew from the rural Tartus and Latakia.

As for the social and educational background, most people come from working-class families and have completed primary or secondary education, while a smaller number of participants described themselves as middle-class and higher educated. A minority of interviewees has a university education or was enrolled in a university program when they flew from Syria. As for gender diversity, unfortunately, I did not come across non-traditional families in my fieldwork; therefore I could not include for example LGBTQ+ families, which would have added great value to the research.

Data collection

Data were collected between November 2017 and September 2018 in Lebanon, and between November 2018 and April 2019 in Germany. Fieldwork was preceded by one year of remote networking in which I established contacts with actors in the field and studied the background extensively. Methods differed marginally according to the country. The methodology was adapted according to multiple factors such as the responsiveness of actors, access to the field, and fieldwork challenges. As mentioned, in Germany accessing the field was more complicated than in Lebanon. Often the humanitarian actors I reached out to were not open to share information, or to connect me with their beneficiaries. One international organization was very responsive in terms of informal support, but their personal and professional contacts were not open to discussion; hence, it was impossible to reach their beneficiaries. Since 2015, Germany became an over-researched environment where a high number of (mostly quantitative) data are now available, and humanitarian and institutional actors are no longer willing to engage in more research. Moreover, due to German hospitality policies, refugees were distributed throughout the whole country

according to specific criteria and quota.[44] For these reasons, in Germany, focus group discussions could not be carried out among refugees or humanitarian actors like in Lebanon.[45] After several attempts to organize focus group discussions through local or international organizations, I decided to restructure the methodology by using observation more thoroughly than in Lebanon. The data collection process was organized in two phases: the first phase of pre-data collection, and the second phase of data collection.

How I approached the field

I moved to Lebanon for fieldwork in November 2017. I had visited and worked in Lebanon before,[46] thus I asked for affiliation at the Lebanese American University (LAU), where I was offered an office at the Institute for Migration Studies (IMS) under the supervision of Prof. Dr Paul Tabar. At the same time, I started strengthening my linguistic skills in Levantine Arabic by taking classes in Beirut (from November 2017 to April 2018) and later in Tripoli (in May and June 2018). I also extensively discussed my project with my Lebanese teacher, Nadine Ahmad. She helped me to review the interview framework in Arabic and to reflect on certain linguistic aspects raised during the research. In Lebanon, fieldwork was carried out in rural areas of the Beqaa Valley, North Lebanon, and Akkar and urban areas of Beirut and Tripoli.

---

[44] Refugees in Germany are allocated according to the EASY quota system (Initial Distribution of Asylum-Seekers). The distribution quota is calculated on an annual basis by the Federation-Länder Commission and determines the number of asylum-seekers received by each Federal State. This ensures suitable and fair distribution among the Federal States. See Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). Available at: http://www.bamf.de [Accessed September 15, 2020].

[45] My plan to attempt again the organisation of focus group discussions among Syrian families in 2020 was soon dismantled by the Covid-19 pandemic.

[46] In 2014, I carried out three-month bibliographic and empirical research at the Institute for Palestine Studies (IPS) of Beirut and the Lebanese American University (LAU), about the Palestinian diaspora in Lebanon, with funding from Roma Tre University in Italy. In 2016, I conducted six-month research about survival mechanisms of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon supported by EU funding, within the "Migration Project" of the Italian National Research Council (CNR). I was affiliated with the Lebanese American University (LAU).

In Germany, I started data collection in October 2018. During the previous two years, I had already visited Berlin as preparation for fieldwork and built networks with local Syrian activists and humanitarian workers. As I was enrolled in a double PhD, I started my cotutelle year at Humboldt University (HU) in Berlin, under the supervision of Prof. Dr Hans-Peter Müller. I was given office space at the Berlin Graduate School of Social Sciences (BGSS). At the same time, I kept studying Levantine Arabic through Skype lessons with my Lebanese teacher. I started learning German at the Sprachenzentrum der HU Berlin, for a basic knowledge of the language and the terminology that I needed for my research. In Germany, I worked in Berlin, Brandenburg, Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Schleswig-Holstein, and Bavaria.

Structured consultation interviews with institutional and humanitarian actors

I carried out twenty-eight structured consultation interviews with institutional and humanitarian actors: thirteen in Lebanon and fifteen in Germany. While in Lebanon, I was able to tackle local and international organizations that focused specifically on gender issues, in Germany, almost no organization had specific gender-based programmes. Although we might consider the discourse around gender in Germany more progressive, there was little debate about gender-related issues among refugees. Structured consultations with institutional and humanitarian actors were carried out before starting the data collection through interviews with refugee families. This was thought of to have a better understanding of the humanitarian background, to access wider networks, and to connect with refugee families. All the actors that I reached out to in Lebanon accepted to be interviewed individually and some of them participated in the focus group discussion. In Germany, only around 50% of institutional and humanitarian workers contacted agreed to participate in the research.[47]

Structured interviews with institutional and humanitarian actors were conducted face-to-face and each respondent was posed the same series of open-handed questions.

---

[47] In the case of no response, people were contacted one or two more times. Only a few of them did not reply at all.

Interviews were mostly conducted in the headquarters or branch offices of organizations, in a formal environment. In Lebanon, most interviews were carried out in English, only two in Arabic, and one in Italian. In Germany, I carried out all the interviews in English, except for one in Spanish. All interviews were recorded and translated into English when needed. Interviewees were asked to sign a consent form in which they agreed to participate in the study, not expect any benefit or payment for participation, and consent to the use of the interviews for research purposes. Structured consultation interviews with institutional and humanitarian actors aimed to investigate various aspects of the humanitarian work with a focus on gender issues. I mainly focused on those aspects that were not easily discernible through observation or literature, as the role of humanitarian actors in the field and their observation in terms of gender role transformations among refugees.

Focus group discussions with institutional and humanitarian actors

This activity served to gather together actors from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss the topic of interest. The focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted at the Lebanese American University in Beirut, Lebanon, on March 14, 2018. I facilitated the conversation with the support of Prof. Dr Paul Tabar. Facilitators introduced topics for discussion and helped the group to participate in a lively discussion. Participants were six representatives of international and local governmental and non-governmental organizations working in Lebanon with refugees. The activity was useful to understand the macro-level challenges, including the current legal and regulatory framework, and the Lebanese policies of reception and hospitality for Syrian refugees.

This FGD aimed to collect additional information on aspects that I had already observed and to confirm previous information collected through consultations and observation. I also aimed to create an interaction between participants to collect different opinions on the topic and stimulate new ideas to observe and analyze how the respondents addressed the issue. The positive contradictory results emerging from the FGD helped to highlight real opinions, prejudices, perceptions, and expectations of

humanitarian actors, both as representatives of an organization and as individuals. The individual dimension frequently emerged during the discussion through off-the-record remarks, when participants did not feel represented by their organization on some issues. Creating homogeneity in the FGD group helped participants to feel more comfortable in expressing their opinions.

The tool chosen for this FGD was the questioning route. This is one of the most used tools to conduct collective discussions. Unlike the topic guide tool, the questioning route is made of a structured framework of questions (Krueger, 1998, p. 9-12). I chose this tool mainly because the group was sampled according to inter-group heterogeneity.

In-depth semi-structured interviews with refugee families

This was the primary method used to collect first-hand data and to respond to the research questions. I reached out to participants using two main channels: already-existing networks such as families of Syrians I met in the previous years, and newly established networks, such as local organizations and civil society networks. Then I expanded the sample proceeding through snowball sampling, asking, at the end of each interview, to be connected and introduced to their friends or relatives. While both methods resulted very successful in Lebanon, mostly the first one was employed in Germany, as new networks were particularly difficult to establish. Nevertheless, already existing networks were established through relationships of trust, which were somehow stronger. Interviews with refugee families (first-hand data) helped to investigate participants' personal experiences in depth and to collect qualitative information that would not emerge among institutional and humanitarian actors (second-hand data). Interviews were carried out in Arabic and then transcribed and translated with the support of research assistants. Two interviews in Germany and one in Lebanon were carried out in English.

In Lebanon, I conducted several interviews during the fasting month of Ramadan. This was a tough time for refugee families. Many Syrian families in Lebanon were not able to fully practice the traditions that Ramadan entails – decorating their houses, cooking particular dishes or desserts from their hometowns, and gathering with their extended

families. Hence, they were not able to experience it as a joyful time. To some extent, this was reflected in the interviews, as some participants were particularly pessimistic about their lives and their future during this time. It was also very challenging for my assistants, Nora and Ghenā, who respected the fast. For these reasons, I maintained great flexibility towards assistants and participants, respecting their times and their needs – not only by avoiding eating and drinking in front of them but also by ensuring the interviews did not interfere with the break of the fast (*ifṭār*).

Because the object of the study was very sensitive and the issues tackled by the research were very intimate and personal, my approach as a researcher was to endorse non-directive conduction of the interview. Hence, I avoided comments or opinions, and I rather promoted empathy and flexibility by encouraging participants to speak freely, and feel understood and accepted. Informed consent was asked at the beginning of each interview. Only a few participants posed questions about the use of data. In Lebanon, I often observed that informed free participation was biased by participants' expectations towards me as a Western researcher.

The interview framework was flexible to the extent that participants could direct the interview towards the areas they cared most about. Nonetheless, when needed, I re-directed the discussion and focused more on certain aspects. The interview was divided into three parts: a) life in Syria; b) life in displacement; c) perceptions and aspirations. Every interview started with collecting preliminary personal information about participants. Interviews were maintained anonymous, but to organize and manage data, I asked interviewees their first name or their family name, or their *kunīa.* The first two sections of the interview focused on participants' experiences as individuals and as part of a household, in Syria and in displacement. Both sections were framed into three sub-sections: 1) general questions and life stories; 2) division of labour and roles inside and outside the family; 3) decision-making processes. The third part focused on their perception of displacement, their ideas on gender roles and relationships, and their future aspirations. At the end of the interview, most participants felt drained out for having revived sentiments of discomfort and distress. Hence, to conclude the interview I often asked them to recall a happy life moment.

Most of the times, interviews were conducted at participants' homes – with only a few of them (in Germany) carried out in cafes or public places. Each interview lasted between one and four hours. In most cases, participants were interviewed only once. Nonetheless, because I established a closer relationship with some families, I visited some of them more than one time. Where living condition and the specific situation allowed, interviews were carried out individually. This request sounded uncommon for some families, but most participants accepted it.

Focus group discussions with refugee women and men

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were crucial for this study. They solicited the perspectives of refugees in interaction with each other. In Lebanon, FGDs were conducted in Beirut and Baalbek. I was supported by a UN Agency and a local organization, which provided Arabic-speaking facilitators and a space to conduct the activities. Sessions were held in a relaxed environment and refreshments were distributed to establish the right atmosphere. FGDs were carried out separately – one with Syrian men and two with Syrian women. The main criteria deemed central for defining the focus group participants were marital status (married, divorced, separated, or widowed) and duration of participants' displacement (at least one year). Each activity lasted around one and a half hour. Firstly, guidelines were given, and research purposes were explained. The first round of questions focused on changes as a household. Participants were asked to talk about how family life had changed in displacement. Then, they were asked to discuss changes as individuals. Here, they expressed their thoughts on how they felt like a man or a woman in this new situation, the support they received from their partners and their family. Some of them shared their ideas towards new perceptions of masculinity and femininity.

FGDs aimed to stimulate dynamic conversations that led to discover and explore in depth the topic of discussion. Among intragroup dynamics, it was interesting to notice that older men felt more comfortable in speaking than younger men, while this was not the case in FGDs with women. Similarly, higher-educated men and women created a state

of interdependence, through which their opinions and attitudes influenced the other group members.

Participant observation

Participant observation was conducted among Syrian families in Lebanon and Germany. Observation is a research strategy in which the researcher engages her/himself, directly, for a relatively long period, with a given social group, building a relationship of trust and personal interactions with its members, to describe their actions and understanding, towards assimilation, their motivations (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Nonetheless, observation among refugee groups is not always easy to carry out. Despite the difficult living conditions that the researcher has to face, just as refugees themselves (lack of services, comfort, and privacy), other aspects need to be considered. For example, the responsibility to put families in the position of being obliged to welcome the guest even if they do not have the means to do it or the embarrassment that they may feel in showing the dire living conditions they face. For these reasons, it is imperative for the researcher to be flexible and to adapt to the environment without showing discomfort or unease. At the same time, it is important not to normalize refugeehood in order to not put in place monolithic "orientalist" or "culturalist" attitudes – living in tented camps, unfinished houses, garage, and other challenging living conditions is not normal for anyone.

In my study, participant observation was fundamental to have a more in-depth understanding of family dynamics. I sought to go deeper into the articulated nature of the topic and to understand refugees' intimate perceptions and attitudes towards their new life in displacement. For several weeks, I participated more or less actively in the lives of two families displaced in Lebanon and Germany and those around them. In this way, I involved myself in a subjective and personal interpretation of the observed reality. I observed and took fieldnotes. I had long and constant informal talks with refugees that challenged my fundamental points in life. I had to continually renegotiate my positionality in the field as a researcher, as a Western person, and as a woman. In Lebanon, I carried out observation in Chtoura (Beqaa), while in Germany I selected the city of Grimma (Saxony).

In Chtoura, I spent several weeks living with the family of a Syrian friend, Ward, whom I met three years before. In Grimma, I stayed with the family of my friend Amīra and engaged in different activities with them (cooking together, visiting relatives and family members, among others). My ethnographic approach was complete and partial participation – I was at times participating entirely in the activities of the families (e.g., cooking with them), at times partially (e.g., as a guest). Both families were aware of my research, although not all the family members were aware of my role as an observer in the home. This overt/covert observation was specifically designed to avoid the so-called "paradox of the observer" (Labov, 1972) and observe natural attitudes and behaviours without pushing people to act differently because they were observed.

My action as a participant-observer was selective. I decided to focus my observation only on those situations that could be useful to my study. The reason for this choice is double. Firstly, I had a closed relationship with the two families, and I wanted to avoid an invasive attitude toward them, by giving them the idea that I was studying them. Secondly, I did not want to find myself overwhelmed by the richness, the diversity, and the complexity of the context of displacement. My observation was primarily driven by the theoretical framework. I was driven by the expression of *agency* and searched the concept in three fields of my observation: a) in informal interactions; b) in formal interactions; c) in the interpretation of social actors. First, I observed hierarchical interactions within the family (the relationship between father and children, mother and children, older and younger siblings) and the environment in which these interactions took place (for example, how the family used to have lunch: men and women separated; all in one room; in which moment of the day they sit for lunch; who was serving whom). Then, I observed the informal interactions, such as conversations among family members (how they discussed everyday issues related to my research topic), where and under which circumstances those occurred (family gathering, privately, in a hidden way). Finally, I observed how social actors conceptualized certain social facts, between them and with me. This last dimension emerged mostly through informal talks with the two families, often through my intervention, participation, and interrogation. I recorded my observations through fieldnotes on diaries.

Data analysis

The management of data occurred throughout the whole process of data collection. During the pre-data collection phase, I designed a template to organize the interviews and to quickly access basic information of interviewees (name, age, marital status, number of children and age, area of origin in Syria, and area of displacement in Lebanon or Germany, date of the interview, notes). Interviews were recorded, and fieldnotes were taken during and after the sessions. I then transcribed the interviews translated into English with the help of my assistants. Similarly, consultation interviews with institutional and humanitarian actors and focus group discussions were also recorded and transcribed. I had a diary that I updated daily with fieldnotes. Once all my data were collected, well organized, and transcribed, I proceeded with the analysis.

I used thematic analysis to investigate the content of data collected from interviews and FGDs with refugees. This type of analysis allowed me to gather and categorize data into themes and sub-themes. Written texts in English underwent systematic reading to examine the nuances of meaningful pieces of information. Coding categories were derived directly from the text data, and then these pieces of information were used to interpret meaning from the content of text data. Content analysis helped me to simplify collected data and to make it qualitatively "measurable". The first step of my analysis started during the data-collection phase. As I completed each interview, I achieved an intimate knowledge of my data by listening to the recordings several times. After transcribing and translating each interview with the help of my assistants, I read each paragraph one more time, without making assumptions or taking for granted what participants said. At this point, I assigned a pseudonym to each interview transcript to ensure confidentiality and protect participants' identities. This step also served to define my data document. For data document, I mean what is typically defined as the set of transcripts representing the unit of data to analyze. I defined my data document before starting the coding. My approach was to define three separated data documents, which followed the sections of the interview framework: a) life in Syria, b) life in displacement, c) perceptions and aspirations. I clustered all the interview transcripts into these sections and created my data

documents. Then, I analyzed each data document separately. While reading the transcripts line by line, I took notes about my first impressions and added theoretical insights that crossed my mind while reading.

The coding

Once I defined and read my data documents, and shaped a first impression of the content, I started categorizing information or coding the data. Coding is the labelling of relevant pieces of data (words, phrases, sections), which helps to index the text material. It is the first step of translation of empirical data into interpretative categories suggested by the theoretical framework. Information was framed in terms of typologies of changes. I decided to code pieces of information that I found relevant because they were repeated, because they surprised me, or because the interviewee claimed that it was necessary. I also selected information when referred to previous studies, theories, or concepts. My process of coding was strongly informed by theories and sets of key concepts.

I carried out two phases of coding. I went through my data and organized them to make them more easily accessible for analysis. I built preliminary descriptive labels useful to describe the data obtained. I chose to use portions of a line, as using a small meaningful segment would help me not to miss any important information. I typed my comments in the margin of the document. The second phase of coding was more focused. In this phase, I retraced the data and the initial labels to extract more general labels, useful to categorize larger portions of text. This phase served to identify more abstract categories or theoretical labels. This phase of coding required a certain degree of scientific creativity.

Clustering topics and creating categories

Once I completed these steps for all three data documents, I decided which codes were more important than others and created categories by bringing several codes together – namely, I combined codes into categories (or themes). Categories can be everything the researcher decides is relevant: objects, processes, similarities, or differences. It is essential

to try to be unbiased at this point. Then, I highlighted similar themes in the three data documents and aggregated them. I made hierarchies of themes and sub-themes to have them differentiated.

Once this process was completed, I started conceptualizing my data. I reflected on similarities and differences, spending quite some time looking at the collected material in one theme and paying attention to the actual content before going to the next theme. To do that, I needed to review my transcriptions often, and ensure I understood what was contained in each theme. Sometimes, I needed to listen to the original recordings again. It was also helpful to keep the research purpose and questions nearby.

2.3. The problem of integration: Merging qualitative methods

Integrating different methods can be challenging for a researcher even if the data we have are purely qualitative. Integrating and merging methods has been largely discussed in the field of mixed methods (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003; Bryman, 2007; Creswell, 2011; Bazeley, 2016; Gobo, 2016). Nonetheless, whether the question of integration should be viewed as a problem is an issue that has not been largely dealt with in the literature (Bryman, 2007). Some authors have discussed that a "genuine integration" of methods involves whether the components of different methods are related to each other or are independent of each other (ibid., p. 8). Sociologist Alan Bryman (2007) argued that the lack of integration might not always be making the most of data collected while merging methods "has the potential to offer insights that could not otherwise be gleaned" (ibid., p. 9). However, Sociologist Giampietro Gobo (2016) considered that "merged" methods provide a higher potential than mixed methods "because the former overcome some weaknesses of the latter" (Gobo, 2016, p. 199). However, Bazeley (2016) found that it is a real challenge to ensure the integration of (qualitative and quantitative) methods used during the analysis and the writing process (Bazeley, 2016, p. 189). In this sense, Creswell (2011) recommended having the two forms of data combined (or merged) by having one built upon the other, in a way that gives priority to one or both (Creswell, 2011, p. 271).

Concurrently, the researcher can "frame these procedures within philosophical worldviews and a theoretical lens" (Creswell, 2011, p. 271).

Following this approach, I decided to merge the analysis of qualitative data coming from different sources and methods. As explained, interviews with refugee families were the primary method used and constituted the main data documents among first-hand data. Secondary methods were FGDs with refugees and participant observation. Hence, to integrate them, I built these latter methods upon the former. To do so, I created additional data documents with FGDs' transcripts and fieldnotes. I followed the same procedures used for the interviews (organization, coding, and elaboration of results), and I finally integrated this information with the information of the primary data source.

A particular remark has to be made about data resulting from secondary sources: consultation interviews and the FGD with institutional and humanitarian actors. Being these second-hand data, I found it not useful to merge them with primary data. Therefore, I decided to analyze them separately and to compare the results with those of primary data. In particular, I compared themes emerging from the primary data sources with those of secondary sources. The analysis of these datasets was instrumental in framing the background and going more in depth into the role of the receiving society in driving changes or promoting pre-existing patterns of gender roles and relationships among refugees.

Chapter 3.

The question of agency:

Positioning the research in the academic debate

This chapter provides a brief review of selected literature on the concept of human agency and its relationship with social structure. By introducing the central theoretical concepts around which this thesis is built, this chapter aims not to participate in the theoretical debate by framing new theories about agency and structure. Instead, I aim to position this research within relevant academic debates, to conceptualize theoretically gender role transformations that occur in displacement and the renegotiations of those.

I will first trace the question of agency and its conceptualizations in social theory through the main theoretical strands approaching its interaction with structure. I will present here the positions of Pierre Bourdieu, Margaret Archer, and Anthony Giddens. Then, I will explore refugees' agency and how the concept has been approached in refugee studies regarding negotiations of gender identities, coping strategies, empowerment, and disempowerment. Next, I will present how agency has been denied to refugees by paternalistic approaches and dehumanization of displaced people. I will then question the specificities of the refugees' agency focusing on the peculiarities of Syrian displacement in Lebanon and Germany. I will end the chapter by questioning whether there is room for reflexivity in refugeehood.

3.1. Conceptualizing human agency and its interplay with social structure

The problem of human agency, or in general, the problem of free will, has a long tradition in the philosophical debate and it has been largely discussed in academia (see, for example, Archer, 1988; 2000; Shanahan et al., 1997; Wendt, 1999; Hay, 2002; Bandura, 2006;

Campbell, 2009; Pacherie, 2011; Coffey & Farrugia, 2014). Agency is also a key concept in sociology and it is useful to answer the question: Are human beings free to act and to make their own choices? The term agency helps to conceptualize individuals as social actors who rationalize their own experience and those of others in the social space while acting upon these experiences (Essed et al., 2004). Although there is no universally agreed-upon definition of agency in social sciences, in the interest of the following discussion, it will be worth it to specify that agency will be understood as a distinctive capacity of all individuals. When discussing agency, it is ineluctable mentioning its relation with social structure.[48] The interplay between the two concepts can be understood as an issue of socialization versus autonomy in determining whether an individual can act as a free agent or she/he is driven by social structures. In other words, the question of agency against structure relates to the enduring and enigmatic dispute between freedom and determination.

The interaction between agency and structure is primarily based on three understandings of the discussion: (1) the influence of structure over agency, which can be ascribed to social determinism; (2) the influence of agency over structure, which falls into voluntarism; (3) a middle-stance where agency and structure are complementary forces and agency is situated into social structures. The literature has discussed these three strands of the debate extensively. However, amongst many authors who have tried to reconcile structure and agency, three social theorists are mainly representative of these points of discussions: Pierre Bourdieu with his theory of practice (1972/1977; 1979/1984); Margaret Archer with her morphogenetic approach (1995; 2000) and with her reflexive modalities (2012); and Anthony Giddens with his structuration theory (1979; 1984).

(1) Structure shaping agency – Bourdieu presented his interpretation of the dichotomy agency/structure in many of his works. In *An Outline of the Theory of Practice* (1972/1977), he presented the concept of *habitus,* which he then elaborated in his following works, including *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979/1984). For Bourdieu, habitus is a "structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices" (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, p. 170). Habitus is a range of dispositions and

---

[48] For a review on the concept of structure see Porpora (1998) and Lefebvre (2002).

predispositions or incorporated social relations that subconsciously guide actors' behaviours and perceptions in various social spaces, or *fields*. For Bourdieu, the agent is "socialized" in a field, or a social domain, where the various forms of capital are at stake (Bourdieu, 1986). As individuals adjust their role and position in the field, they internalize relationships and expectations within that field. These internalized expectations and relationships shape, over time, the habitus. For example, a gendered habitus is structured by social norms, which enhance a gendered division of labour, space, and time, and create a "vision" that makes this division "natural." In other words, both women and men express specific characteristics of their feminine and masculine identity to perform their role in the common space, and in relationship with each other. This interaction is related to the concepts of power and domination. Power requires a dominant actor and a dominated actor, that tacitly and mutually agree upon their power relation (Bourdieu, 1998/2001). The dominant part (usually the man) has hegemony over the dominated part (usually the woman), and this hegemony is essentially symbolic. Distinctly, the French sociologist privileges a structural constraint on actors where agency is socially structured. In this sense, other authors (Mendelsohn et al., 2014; Evans, 2007; Shanahan, 2000) have talked of "bounded agency" as an alternative to the notion of a socially-situated agency or "structured individualization" to make sense of the experiences of people in changing social landscapes (Evans, 2007). This approach, often falling into (post)structuralist conceptualizations, sees the individual action as a product of social structures rather than an individual choice.

(2) Agency shaping structure – The second approach is ascribable to Margaret Archer, who first presented her model of investigation in *Culture and Agency* (1988). In her work, the British theorist provides a connection between culture and agency. Later, she re-elaborates on the linkage between structure and agency in *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (1995). The problem of agency and structure is, to her, "the most pressing social problem of the human condition" (Archer, 1995) as it is part of the human experience "to feel both free and enchained, capable of shaping our future and yet confronted by towering, seemingly impersonal constraints" (1988, p. xii). Her approach is based on an analytical dualism between the cultural system and the interactions of social

actors. The author elaborates on this by developing the theory of *morphogenetic sequence*. She recognizes the interdependence of agency and structure, although distinguishing between different timescales of action of the two concepts. For Archer, existing structures can constrain and enable agents, whose interaction produces intended and unintended consequences. These lead to the elaboration, reproduction, or transformation of initial structures, which, in turn, can constrain and enable future agents. Archer argues that only by isolating structural factors will it be possible to investigate how those factors drive later interactions of agents and how those interactions reproduce the initial context again (Archer, 1995). Morphogenetic sequences repeatedly constitute social processes. They work by employing analytical dualism to outline sequences of structural conditioning: "structure conditions agency, and agency, in turn, elaborates upon the structure which it confronts" (Archer, 2000). Agency is here understood as exercised in opposition to social structure and at the same time in a dialectic relationship with social structure (Kristiansen, 2014). In this sense, agency has the potential to transform structure as leading to actions of resistance or opposition – although it is not those actions *per se* that counteract. According to this strand, which is ascribable to a form of liberal individualism, individuals as rational beings are sovereign subjects and can shape their circumstances through their actions.

(3) Agency as situated in social structure – Anthony Giddens' theory (1984), among others, offers a middle-stance in the debate around agency and structure with his *Theory of Structuration* (1984). To reconcile the two notions, he argues that agency and structure are mutually constitutive, for agency is both enabled and constrained by structures (Giddens, 1984). His structuration theory poses a continuum between the two concepts in a circular relationship that sees the two notions as mutually constitutive. Human agency is conceived by Giddens as closely related to action and sometimes in an interchanging relationship with it. He defines agency as something involving practical consciousness that occurs when the subject can observe her/his own experience and give a reason for their action. In other words, social actors are conscious of their actions and continuously rationalize what they do. This constant rationalization occurs in a framework of routine actions, which give individuals security (Craib, 1992). Social structures take place when rules and resources are organized as part of social systems. In this sense, structuralisms

are the conditions shaping the duality of structure and the system for the reproduction of social systems (Giddens, 1984). Giddens understands the relationship between structure and agency as the "duality of structure" wherein individuals reflexively produce and reproduce their social life (Tucker, 1998). The main limitation of Giddens' work is perhaps the lack of focus on the empirical aspect of agency to support his structuration theory (see Bryant, 1992). Nevertheless, his merit is probably in having deconstructed the dichotomy of free will/necessity, or voluntarism/determinism (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 1003). This approach has paved the ground for discussion for many philosophical and sociological debates (see Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Glynos & Howarth, 2008; Carle, 2005; Ahearn, 2001; Leach, 2005; Hakli & Kallio, 2014). These authors placed themselves neither in the position of denying human being's capacity of agency, nor ignoring the influence of structure on individuals.

It is essential to acknowledge that theoretical debates and interpretations of agency should not be understood as exclusively qualifying the meaning of agency, because we cannot hope to generate "objective knowledge of the conditions of our actions, but must be content with telling ourselves stories about the world" (Barker, 2003, p. 86). It is also imperative to consider that different interpretations have been given of the work of these authors and that their theoretical approach has developed and evolved. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to understand each of these conceptualizations as extremist or exclusively one-sided. For example, an enduring debate about the fluidity/rigidity of Bourdieu's concept of habitus has been going on. The theory of habitus has mainly been criticized as an overly deterministic concept (Adams, 2006; King, 2000; Reay, 2004). Critiques have argued that the concept of habitus excludes the possibility of social change or agency of individuals. Because it is deeply inscribed in individuals, habitus rarely or never changes (Adams, 2006; Jenkins, 1994; King, 2000; Reay, 2004). Other authors have argued about the fluidity of habitus. They claimed that criticisms focused on Bourdieu's early works and are based on the misinterpretation of Bourdieu's theory (Baxter & Britton, 2001; Horvat McNamara & Davis, 2011; Lee & Kramer, 2013). They assert that Bourdieu admitted the possibility of habitus' alteration. For example, these studies showed empirically that habitus could be altered when the social environment changes (Reay,

2004; Gilbert et al., 2013; Lehman, 2013). As early as in *Le Sens pratique* (1980), Bourdieu explained that classificatory structures are unlikely to be permanently perpetuated without modification. For example, specific events, such as economic transformations can alter the distribution of capital (Weininger, 2005). This is the case in forced migration where the balance of economic capital between genders is likely to change in favour of the dominated gender.

In this thesis, I chose not to consider one single understanding of the debate around the interaction of agency and structure, and instead take distance from bottom-up or top-down dichotomies (Glynos & Howarth, 2008). Instead, I aim at framing a participant-driven understanding where the focus is on agency and its nuanced meanings. For this reason, I build upon the definition proposed by Naila Kabeer (1999), which goes beyond the understanding of agency as observable action *per se*. Here, agency will be conceptualized as a nuanced set of visible and non-visible actions, "the meaning, motivation and purpose, which individuals bring to their activity, their *sense* of agency, or 'the power within'" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438). This approach will help to develop a conceptualization of agency that is comprehensive of many different displacement experiences. In fact, following Dykstra & Van Wissen (1999), I consider people's lives always in transition as the interdependence of trajectories of different domains of the individual experience.

3.2. Agency in displacement and forced migration

In refugee studies, agency refers to displaced people's potential to process their own experience of displacement and make use of the new opportunities generated by forced migration. According to Long (2001), "agency implies both certain *knowledgeability*, whereby experiences and desires are reflexively interpreted and internalized (consciously or otherwise) and the capability to command relevant skills, access to material and non-material resources and engage in particular organizing practices" (Long, 2001, p. 49). Making agency central in refugee studies helps to contrast essentialist representations of the refugee as a victim or a passive recipient of relief aid (Essed et al., 2004) and preferably

to recognize refugees as people who make use of the resources made available by the new environment to make their own choices. These choices can be made in response to transformations, negotiate social identities in the new social space, or take advantage of new opportunities. Actors can exercise agency to process social experiences and to cope with life events (Long, 2001). In this sense, social actors possess the "knowledgeability" and "capability" to act against even the most extreme constraints (ibid., p 16). Following Turner (1992, cit. in Long, 2001, p. 18), Long argues that a comprehensive interpretation of agency should go beyond the interpretation of knowledge-ability and capability and must also comprehend "feelings, emotions, perceptions, identities and the continuity of agency across space and time" (Turner, 1992, cit. in Long, 2001, p. 18).

If looked at from this perspective, social action in displacement can take different forms, including resistance, negotiation, bargaining, deception, manipulation, and subversion (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438). It can be understood in positive or negative terms, whereby in the positive sense, it is exercised as the "power to" and in the negative sense as the "power over" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438).[49]

Limited sociological analysis about the interplay of agency and structure has been carried out in migration and refugee studies (Bakewell, 2010). In this sense, Bakewell (2010) argued that there is an impasse in the study of agency and structure, as migration theories have a tendency to skirt around the problem. Most literature in refugee and migration studies has focused solely on agency, without clarifying the place of structure in the debate. In this brief review, I cannot hope to include the vast scholarship about agency in migration and refugee studies. For this reason, I will expressly exclude the literature referring to theories of migration, which focus on the reasons why people move and the exercise of agency in this sense (e.g., Boyd, 1989; Glick Schiller et al., 1992; Massey et al., 1998; Carling, 2002; de Haas, 2011; Hoang, 2011). I will neither present the scholarly debate concerned with comparing how *voluntary* migrants and *forced* migrants exercise agency in

---

[49] According to Kabeer (1999; 2005), agency exercised as "power to" refers to an individual's ability to define her or his own life choices and to act on those. Agency exercised as "power over" is the capacity of individuals to override the agency of others – for example exercising authority or violence. Nonetheless, not every exercise of power is "power over" as not every act is "power to". Power can operate without the exercise of agency as certain actions are produced and reproduced without any apparent exercise of agency (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438).

migration (e.g. Schindel, 2017; Sajjad, 2018; Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). Concerning these branches of scholarship, the question of agency has been rarely applied to refugees' movements because going "too far towards explanation and ascribing any agency to such people may undermine their case for refugee status" (Bakewell, 2010, p. 1690).

Instead, since I am interested in understanding how people exercise agency, in terms of gender relations, after forced migration has occurred, I will focus on the rich body of literature that has investigated agency in displacement with a focus on gender relations, gender roles, gender identities, and gender norms. This is a widely explored field, as many authors have discussed gender and agency in forced migration (e.g., McSpadden, 1999; Matsuoka & Soresen, 1999; Hunt, 2008; Krause, 2014; Krause & Schmidt, 2020; Harrell-Bond 1999; Freedman, 2019; Ilcan & Rygiel, 2015) and a growing literature has dealt with in particular displaced Syrians (e.g., Mhaissen, 2014; Haddad, 2014; Christophersen, 2014; Al-Hayek, 2015; Suerbaum, 2018b). In what follows, I will briefly trace the main strands in which agency has been used to analyze people's experience of displacement through significant scholarship in the field of migration and refugee studies.

Agency as a negotiation of gender identities

Rich academic and grey scholarship has focused on refugees' negotiation of gendered identities in the new social spaces of displacement. Essed et al. (2004) argued that refugeehood brings about a redefinition of gender identities that in some cases have "demonstrably reinforced women's social, political and economic empowerment and emancipation" (Essed et al., 2004, p. 3). Forced migration from repressive to more liberal political environments can change the socio-political place of both women and men (Daniely & Lederman, 2019). Despite the dire conditions that it produces, displacement is assumed to generate a deconstruction and a reconstruction of gender roles, especially among refugees displaced from countries affected by highly patriarchal social structures (Krause, 2014). For example, to access fundamental rights and resources, refugee women in the UK contrasted practical constraints of displacement – including geographical dispersal and the loss of status after becoming a refugee (Hunt, 2008). Those women

agentically developed social networks and accessed resources that were useful to improve their own lives. They refused to identify as "victims". Instead, they projected themselves into new social identities as professional individuals, thus distancing themselves from the category assigned to them by their legal status (Hunt, 2008). In this sense, they performed their gender identity beyond what was considered "natural". These findings resonate with what Naser-Eddin (2017) found: Syrian women and men's gender performativity changed in the UK, as displacement generated new forms of interaction within families. For this reason, people's experiences of displacement differ and shift according to the context. The author argued that gender dynamics could change in certain circumstances while in others remaining intact (Naser-Eddin, 2017, p. 152).

Interesting insights emerged from the rich scholarship that investigated the relational aspect of gender identities. Rapone & Simpson (2004) found that Guatemalan women refugees in Mexico overcame the debilitating and disruptive effects of displacement by renegotiating relationships and gaining stronger political, economic, and social identities (Rapone & Simpson, 2004). These women used newly acquired skills to "empower" themselves, and also to serve the whole community.

In line with these findings, an increasing number of feminist authors have acknowledged that "gender" should not be understood as a characteristic of women. However, it should be rather framed in relational terms (Indra, 1999). For example, Matsuoka & Soresen (1999), who have analyzed how Eritrean men and women in Canada renegotiated their gender roles, found that some refugee men "found themselves facing a contradiction between traditional ideologies of male superiority and dominance" and gender equality ideals. (Matsuoka & Soresen, 1999, p. 239). Other men, who were less embedded in patriarchal ideology prior to displacement, did not feel this contradiction. The authors argued that refugee women were also highly affected by displacement but generally better endured the hardship associated with forced migration. However, they remained more disadvantaged in terms of control of resources, skills, and constraints that did not allow them to maximize opportunities (Matsuoka & Soresen, 1999, p. 240).

Building on "womanism" and intersectionality, Almakhamreh et al. (2020) explored the strategies through which Syrian refugee women negotiate patriarchal barriers in

protracted displacement in Jordan. They found that displaced women acted collectively, namely with their families and relatives, towards the host community. Firstly, they accessed services and economic opportunities through which they could economically empower themselves. At this point, their agency was reinforced due to their active engagement with institutions that promote gender equality. The authors concluded that in displacement, Syrian women had the chance to engage in income-generating activities that are perceived safe and therefore acceptable. In this way, they also had the opportunity to acquire a more outstanding agentic power to resist patriarchy (Almakhamreh et al., 2020, p. 15).

Lucia Ann McSpadden (1999) also reflected on the "relational dimension" of gender. She questioned how the experience of Eritrean and Ethiopian men in separated families in the US could be understood under relational terms if they were alone in displacement. She found that masculine identity became transnational when it was related to the left-behind gendered social space. The author argued that displaced Eritrean/Ethiopian men lived up to Eritrean/Ethiopian ideals of masculinity and feel responsible for constructing a social space in the diaspora and the society of origin.

Magdalena Suerbaum (2018a) also investigated masculinity identity in displacement and explored how Syrian men dealt with the challenges of forced migration in Egypt and how their masculinity was reconstructed in exile. She argued that Syrian men in Cairo rearranged their lives around new hierarchies to negotiate a new notion of masculinity. In the process of "unbecoming" refugees, Syrian men in Cairo distanced themselves from the label of "real refugee" as a strategy of masculinization (Suerbaum, 2018a, p. 683). Similarly, Jennifer Allsopp (2017) dealt with the labels associated with refugee men over the so-called "refugee crisis" in Europe. She argued that the figure of "militarized man" has been set against those of "man as a provider" and "threatening young male". In this sense, the association of masculinity with violence is hegemonic and driven by cultural and ideological norms. To better account the specific experiences of boys and men, the author invited to approach refugees' masculinities from an intersectional angle. In this way, refugee men are not seen as victims *or* soldiers, but as vulnerable *and* agentic (Allsopp., 2017, p. 170).

These kinds of dichotomies are very present in the literature. Refugee women have mainly been considered able to renegotiate their gender roles better than men and gain more power in displacement. While they are considered to exercise agency positively (Daniley & Lederman, 2019), male refugees' agency is often narrated in a derogatory way, associated with disempowerment, violence, and various forms of authority or coercion (El-Feki et al., 2017; Keedi et. al., 2017).

Agency as coping strategies

Several studies have focused on coping strategies and practices that women and men employed in displacement at an individual and collective level. Some authors have suggested that refugees' coping strategies can be categorized into "active" and "passive" attitudes and behaviours (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2003). A great deal of literature understands coping strategies in negative terms as harmful behaviour with which people engage to face dire conditions of life, like displacement. These survival strategies have mainly been narrated regarding Syrians displaced in Lebanon. For example, several non-academic and grey studies found that Syrian families in Lebanon used survival practices like survival sex, forced marriages, child marriages, and child labour, to overcome the challenges and barriers of life in displacement (UNHCR, 2014; Christophersen et al., 2013; Charles & Denman, 2013). These practices could hardly be considered agentic as they do not improve people's lives in a reflexive sense nor do they constitute a conscious choice to keep the current conditions unchanged. Instead, they intensify stress and endorse adverse outcomes.

Although rich scholarship dealt with coping strategies in refugeehood, most of these works addressed the topic from a clinical and psychological perspective. However, a significant contribution has also been given to the area of sociology. For example, Iyad Eid Nurazzura Diah (2019), who investigated Palestinian refugee families in Malaysia during a transition period from a first asylum country to a resettlement country found that these displaced people used a series of coping strategies to overcome challenges and barriers of that uncertain period – including reinforcing their spirituality, keeping in touch with

relative and friends in the diaspora, projecting positive images of their current situation. They also plan the migration to Europe as a possibility to go back to their home country with a European passport, one day (Eid & Diah, 2019).

Women and men exercise agency when they express their resistance to a system that is considered to be within the "natural state of things" but does not represent them. This is the case of Karen refugee women in the Thai-Burma border, who shifted their meanings of cultural norms and redesigned their position in the space of displacement (Hoffman et al., 2017). In particular, these women negotiated between a socially constructed inside and the outside world of the refugee camp by depicting a hybrid third space (ibid., pp. 1359-1360). Karen women used this space to bridge forced migration and their future at an individual and familial level. Meertens' (2004) findings resonate with this. The author found that refugee women in Colombia developed new "life projects" as an act of resilience in displacement. This was possible because, among the Colombian rural community of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Bogotá and provincial capitals, women have been rooted in the urban environment sooner than men. Because they were less invested in formal and institutional power structures prior to displacement, they could look forward and project themselves into the future rather than look at the past.

Coping with forced migration can involve religious practices. Shaw et al. (2019) have investigated how Shia Muslim refugee women displaced in predominantly Sunni Muslim first-asylum countries reinforced their religious beliefs to manage the stress of displacement. Within "intersecting contexts of powerlessness", these women trusted in God to solve problems and relied on prayers and other religious practices to cope with life in displacement (Shaw et al., 2019, pp. 526-528). Khawaja et al. (2008) found similar dynamics among Sudanese women residing in Australia. Their study has shown that although refugees reported having gone through life-threatening experiences and traumatic events during displacement, they developed a series of agentic coping strategies such as reliance on religious beliefs, relying on inner resources, and focus on plans and aspirations. In particular, religious beliefs are tied to the process of resilience and endurance in forced migration but are also employed to adapt to life difficulties (Khawaja et al., 2008; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2003). Many of these findings resonate with what I

have observed in the field, among Syrian families in Lebanon and Germany.

Agency as empowerment

The discourse of the humanitarian sector around human agency has been often based on enhancing empowerment, especially for women and girls. Over the past two decades, humanitarian agencies have called for gender equality and equal opportunities for women and men to make life choices that are not constrained by traditional gender norms. According to Kabeer (1999), women's empowerment is the process through which women manage to exercise strategic forms of agency and emancipate themselves from constraining structures that position them in subordination to men. The author conceptualizes empowerment as inevitably connected to disempowerment. The terms refer to the condition in which those who were denied power, or the ability to make choices, acquire this power (Kabeer, 1999). Because empowerment "is about change, it refers to the expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them" (ibid., p. 437). Hence, empowerment implies a process of change. Without this change, namely, without the prior condition of disempowerment, there cannot be empowerment.

A rich literature has focused on the role of humanitarianism on refugees' agency, the question of empowerment, and the effects that humanitarian programmes had on displaced women and men. Elizabeth Olivius (2014) found that humanitarian gender programming has moved towards neo-liberal rationalities and thus produced an "instrumental and depoliticized conception of gender, where the legitimacy of programmes promoting gender equality is measured by their utility for the achievement of operational goals" (Olivius, 2014, p. 98). Similarly, Ulrike Krause (2014), who investigated refugee women's empowerment in Uganda, noted that programmes such as gender-awareness campaigns, education interventions, and gender-responsive planning had little positive effects on refugee women. These programmes were addressed to women, and particularly to female-headed households because these women were considered more disadvantaged than men (Krause, 2014, p. 45). The author also found that

these interventions negatively impacted refugee women because high school dropout rates of girls and gender-based violence were still very consistent in Uganda.

The problem of the woman-vulnerable association here is very relevant and resonates with other studies. For example, Lewis Turner (2016) questioned refugee men's vulnerability and observed that humanitarian workers in Jordan considered Syrian male refugees less vulnerable than women. The author argued that this biased understanding of vulnerability also affected the distribution of aids and services. Cynthia Enloe (1991) had already written about the rethoric of "womenandchildren", which essentializes women's experiences and ignores their agency and independency. Turner furthermore argued that considering refugee men as vulnerable would challenge the binary understanding of refugee men as political actors and refugee women as in need of "empowerment". Assuming that men are equally vulnerable would have disrupted the prevailing understanding of gender and power relations among refugees (Turner, 2019a). Turner (2019b) also argued that the recent increased focus on the vulnerability of Syrian refugee men fails to critique vulnerability itself as a form of humanitarian governance, yet it plays a part in expanding it. Olivius (2016) also found the representations of refugee men as perpetrators of violence, powerful gatekeepers potential allies, and emasculated troublemakers limited their potential to transform unequal gender relations (Olivius, 2016, p. 59-62). Consequently, these gendered stereotypes generated by the humanitarian discourse about empowerment produced labelled figures of refugee women and refugee men that do not serve the greatly advocated gender equality.

3.3. The denial of refugees' agency

The literature has dealt largely with negative and reductionist representations of refugees and the circumstances in which these people are treated as individuals without agency (Stedman & Tanner, 2003; Nyers, 2006; Sigona, 2014; Moulin, 2012; Kagan, 2006; Harrell-Bond & Voutira, 2007). As mentioned, the dichotomy "victim/threat", for example, is one of the most widely used pictures of refugees. It not only broadly dominates the discourse of international humanitarian regimes, states, media, and academia, but it also shapes

policies and practices, which then reflect on refugees. As we have seen in Chapter 1, these categories create a framework within which refugees have to fit to be recognized as such. Fitting those labels (Zetter, 1991) then becomes essential to meet the legal definitions required by the hospitality system and humanitarian actors' expectations (Pupavac, 2008).

The paternalistic approach towards refugees

The literature has largely dealt with humanitarian actors addressing displacement in a paternalistic way (Barnett, 2011; Malkki, 1996), and growing scholarship has discussed the impact of this approach on refugees' agency (Stedman & Tanner, 2003; Nyers, 2006; Sigona, 2014; Moulin, 2012; Kagan, 2006; Harrell-Bond & Voutira, 2007). Dworkin (1972) defined paternalism as "the interference with a person's liberty of action justified by reasons referring exclusively to the welfare, good, happiness, needs, interests or values of the person being coerced" (Dworkin, 1972, p. 65). In the context of development, paternalism was used to critically describe Western policies aimed at reducing social problems, which were applied by "supervisory means" (Mead, 1997).

Among the authors who have discussed paternalism in the context of refugee studies, Liisa Malkki (1996) argued that humanitarian actors in Tanzania perceived refugees as "speechless emissaries", namely as victims whose experience of displacement compromised their ability to reason (Malkki, 1996, p. 384). These findings resonate with the perception of participants in my research. For example, 'Abdelraḥman, a Syrian young man I met in Munich, opined, "Germans make refugees more victim than what they are so that they can help them better" ('Abdelraḥman. Personal interview. Munich, Germany. March 20, 2019). In the humanitarian context, the paternalistic approach is mostly based on stereotypes and selective humanitarianism, which communicates that the refugee is a powerless individual experiencing only violence and abuse. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2010), in a study about the protracted Sahrawi refugee situation, highlighted that refugee women in Algeria-based camps were considered as the "ideal refugee" by the UN Refugee Agency, who presented camps as a good practice on gender mainstreaming intervention (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2010). While driving refugees' political representatives to speak under

gender equality to ensure a continuation of funding, the discourse of "ideal refugee" reinforced the exclusion from services of all other gender categories of non-ideal refugees (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014). In doing this, humanitarian narratives establish who is "worthy" of humanitarian assistance by placing them into categories of exceptionalism. These narratives generate processes of inclusion and exclusion and keep displaced people "in their place" in a framework of epistemic violence (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2020). For example, from such mainstreamed discourse has emerged the figure of the "super refugee" (i.e. the extraordinarily of the Olympian swimmer) (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2020, p. 3).

Those "policies of innocence and victimization" (Turner, 2010) not only label refugees but also transform their identities (Zetter, 1991) and affect their capacity to be active agents of their life. In fact, by speaking on behalf of refugees, humanitarian actors silence their voices and exercise a moral authority that denies people's capacity of agency. Michael Barnett (2011) called this phenomenon "humanitarian paternalism", meaning the condition in which the freedom of action of an individual is hindered by the actions of others justified by beneficent or protective reasons (Barnett, 2011). Practices of humanitarian paternalism, like encampment as the preferred response to displacement, engender a "dependence syndrome" (Kibreab, 1993) perpetrated in the unwillingness of dealing with refugeehood as a complex, heterogeneous, and diverse phenomenon. This attitude not only victimizes refugees and generalizes their experiences but also normalizes the exceptionality of their situation. In this sense, refugees stop being individuals who happened to *become* displaced due to certain life circumstances and start being dehumanized individuals whose condition of refugeehood is part of their culture and collective identity.

As shown by Jane Freedman (2017), humanitarian paternalism in its extreme form can be a form of symbolic violence. In interviewing Syrian women in Greece, the author found that they felt diminished by the lack of respect from European authorities and aid workers. Veiled women mostly "felt that they were treated as 'other' and less educated, enlightened or intelligent than both European women and refugee men" (Freedman, 2017,

p. 138). Through this kind of violence, humanitarian and institutional actors not only treat women as oppressed victims, and deprive them of their human dignity.

The dehumanization of refugees

Dehumanization is an area of research that has been studied crosswise and with vast implications in different human sciences. It has to do with the perception of otherness, the notion of race, and racism, war, and genocide (Livingstone Smith, 2012). The concept has been addressed extensively over the past years around the events of the "refugee crisis" when refugees and migrants crossing borders to reach Europe were repetitively denied fundamental human rights, dignity, compassion, and empathy – mostly because they were recognized as unfamiliar (or less human) for being born across national borders.

The representation of the dehumanized refugee has widely dominated the media and political discourse (Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008). These narratives depicted displaced people as powerless victims of crises and addressed them with the above-mentioned paternalistic approach, and pictured them as threats to Western democratic societies. Indeed, refugees are sometimes described in metaphorical terms as "floods," "hordes," "influx", "flows," appointed as numbers rather than persons and as a phenomenon rather than individuals with diverse experiences (Behrman, 2014; Malkki, 1996). They were often denied full humanness in an animalistic sense (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014) by implying a lack of civility, morality, self-control, cognitive refinement, and emotions (ibid.; Lippert, 1999). These findings resemble Agamben's distinction between qualified citizens with civil rights (the category of *bios*) and the mere biological existence (*zoe*) (Agamben, 1995). Although the Italian Philosopher's argumentations about the figure of the refugee have been considered by some unpersuasive (see Owens 2009), his empirical evidence based on Foucault's notion of biopolitics promptly highlights the exclusion or de-politicization of refugees as inhuman people. Paradoxically, they are included in political matters only in light of their deprivation of political agency (Agamben, 1998). They exist only as non-citizens/non-humans in opposition to citizens/humans. This argument gives a sense of the "imagined communities" in which we live (Muller, 2004). In this sense, because the figure

of the refugee threatens this common sense, refugees are considered either a danger to humankind or passive recipients of humanitarian aid. Both approaches can drive more rigorous refugee legislation and/or aid-oriented humanitarian programmes, which constitute structural forces to refugees' agency. In a similar vein, both political and humanitarian actors have de-historicized and depoliticized the experience of displacement and treated refugees as a homogenous group of people in need of aid – within the framework of "hegemonic refuginity" (Khoday, 2012).

3.4. Specificities of refugees' agency

As refugees are not a distinctive category of human beings, they do not exercise agency distinctively. However, it will be worth it at this point to explore the reasons behind the specific necessity to investigate displaced Syrians' agency in depth. Previous literature argued that the specificity of refugees' agency is determined by the specificity of the social, economic, geographic, political, and legal structures they encounter in their displacement condition (Oskay, 2016; Hunt, 2008; Healey, 2006). Those can be the refugee camp, the status of refugee, or the loss of status, the dispersal of displacement, a refugees' broken relationship with their home country etc. (Hunt, 2008; Oskay, 2016). However, as I have discussed in Chapter 1, the action of "labelling" or categorizing refugees is problematic and reveals the importance of approaching forced displacement within a broader perspective, capturing and comprehending the diversity of the refugee experience. In this sense, limiting the analysis to specific structural contexts can be reductive and it would exclude other equally relevant categories of structures. For example, in Lebanon, most displaced Syrians do not live in refugee camps (Carpi & Şenoğuz, 2019), while many Syrians in Germany might not have a damaged relationship with the home country. For this reason, the agency of Syrians in Lebanon and Germany cannot be determined by the specific social, economic, geographic, political, and legal structures that they confront in displacement. I argue that the specificity of the Syrian forced migration in these two countries is the condition of protracted-temporary displacement.

This condition lies behind the specific legal and bureaucratic framework wherein Syrians stand in displacement. In Lebanon, Syrians are not accepted as asylum seekers or refugees because the State rejects to apply the international refugee law regime. As a matter of fact, Lebanon is not a signatory State of the 1951 Refugee Convention (Janmyr, 2017). This condition creates a dimension of temporality because Syrians are not allowed to resettle legally in Lebanon, but at the same time, the real conditions of their stay are permanent because they have no alternative solution for a safe return to their homes in Syria or resettlement in a third country.[50] Similarly, in Germany, displaced Syrians experience a temporary-protracted displacement as they have been mostly granted subsidiary protection.[51] This is a form of protection that does not ensure the same benefits as the full refugee status, including the right to family reunification. For this reason, the legal and political framework of Germany also holds Syrian refugees in a dimension of temporality (as they cannot think of themselves as permanently resettled) while being in a permanent displacement, because they have no alternative solution. This temporary-protracted dimension is distinctive especially for the way people feel, as it makes Syrian refugees experience a legal, psychological, and social state of liminality – "they live betwixt and between" (Gold, 2019).

On a theoretical level, this dimension has been conceptualized by several authors. Cathrine Brun (2003), for example, defined displacement as "a state of being attached to several places and simultaneously struggling to establish the right to a place" (Brun, 2003, p. 26). The author does not understand displacement as an event that simply relocates people from one place to another, but as a state of transition of being out of place and a process of adjustment that entails new homemaking practices (Turton, 2005). According to

---

[50] The number of Syrians resettled to a third country of asylum is extremely low. UN official programs of resettlement have managed to relocate only around 100,000 Syrian refugees in the period between 2013 and 2017. See UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response. Available at: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria#_ga=2.71290704.1320122952.1585659319-1356410080.1560496988 [Accessed March 31, 2020]. The privately sponsored program of humanitarian corridors managed by Mediterranean Hope has resettled around 1900 displaced Syrians to Italy as of May 2020. See Mediterranean Hope. Available at: https://www.mediterraneanhope.com [Accessed March 31, 2020].
[51] See Refugee Law and Policy: Germany. Available at: https://www.loc.gov/law/help/refugee-law/germany.php#skip_menu [Accessed March 31, 2020].

this understanding, displacement is a *limbo*, within which people have new opportunities and can employ new strategies. The concept of *liminality*, developed by Victor Turner (1969), is perhaps what best represents this suspended state. According to the author, liminality is a state of transition from one status or stage of life to another. This state generates "violence, humiliation and reconfiguration" (Turner, 1967, cit. in Gold, 2019, p. 16). Although Turner considered this status as a finite process, wherein rituals provide the resolution of the crisis that generated liminality, he later re-elaborated on the concept and argued that in modern societies, this space in the edges of structures escapes ritual moments and becomes extended, holding people in a prolonged state of "in-betweenness" without necessarily putting an end to the liminal period (Turner, 1974; see also Gold, 2019).

Several studies have discussed the state of liminality among refugees exploring their condition of being "on the threshold" or "in-between structures" (Harrell-Bond & Voutira, 1992; Hynes, 2009; Knudsen, 2009; Ghorashi et al., 2017; Gold, 2019;). Ghorashi et al. (2017) argued that "the condition of liminality provides an intensified doubleness of impossibility and possibility for action, which casts a different light on conceptualizing agency" (Ghorashi et al., 2017, p. 373). The authors show that the lack of connectivity with past and future structures enables reflection and imagination and allow new (though conditional) forms of agency (ibid.).

Barbara Harrell-Bond and Eftihia Voutira (1992) argue that refugees are subjected to violent "rites of separation" and remain in a state of legal, psychological, social and economic liminality until they are incorporated into the hosting State as citizens. Nevertheless, the refugee status today does not necessarily imply the possibility of becoming a citizen and being "incorporated" into a new state (Harrell-Bond & Voutira, 1992, p. 7). For this reason, asylum seekers remain in legal and political limbo for many years before they can become citizens – and sometimes they never do. This condition makes them remain liminal vis-à-vis the State. Patricia Hynes (2009) has discussed the policy-imposed liminality of the British asylum system. She argued that the exclusion of asylum seekers as a result of dispersal and their separation from the mainstream social

security, as a result of the asylum system, generated feelings of loss of control over people's own lives and a sense of imposed liminality (Hynes, 2009, p. 114).

For Marina Gold (2019), the rite of passage is rather a "rite of exclusion". Refugees and asylum seekers are left in a liminal state for an indefinite period because the local population excludes them through dynamics of "otherness". In this sense, the asylum procedure is a dialectical process in which boundaries between the "national" and the "other" are reinforced. For this reason, the liminal period is not a moment of transition from one status to another, but a permanent process, which acts to eliminate differences that would threaten the "democratic and secular constitution of local structures" (Gold, 2019, p. 16).

In line with these understandings, I suggest that Syrians in Lebanon and Germany experienced protracted-temporary displacement as a liminal space. Nevertheless, the state of liminality can be experienced with different feelings. While in Lebanon Syrian participants described this condition as a suspended state connected to feelings of disorientation, bewilderment, and loss (*ḍayāʻ*), in Germany they described it as a waiting state experienced with feelings of anticipation (*intiẓār*). In Lebanon, one participant, Abū Qāīs, a sixty-year-old man from Darayya, expressed this feeling of being lost (*ḍayāʻ*) many times in our conversations. He lived with his family in the Lebanese area of the Beqaa Valley and left Syria in 2013. After forcibly migrating to Lebanon he could not find a job and provide for his family, as he was doing before in Syria. His older daughter, Ward, was now supporting the whole household with her work. I spent several weeks with this family and often discussed with Abū Qāīs about gender role transformations. Although he was a very traditional man, he was also well aware of the changes he was going through in terms of gender roles and relationships. My fieldnotes provide a significant photograph of this sense of suspension and feeling of disorientation experienced by Abū Qāīs.

"Ward told me that her father often says that he feels like furniture in this house…
"I am like a chair," he says. This is not only because he is not working and he feels useless, unable to provide for his family, but also because he is no longer the centre of the family life" (Fieldnotes, Chtoura, Lebanon, September 6, 2018).

Abū Qāīs felt lost (*ḍayāʾ*), disoriented and suspended in a space that he did not recognize as his own. He felt "like furniture" in the house because he had no space left where to express his gender identity. He lost his role as a patriarch in the family. In this sense, Abū Qāīs remained in-between spaces because unable to gain a new social space. This change of gender roles will be renegotiated within the liminal space of displacement through the exercise of agency.

Similarly, in Germany, the condition of liminality was distinctively expressed by Abū Moḥammad, a participant from Hama in his late twenties, who now lives in Neumünster, in Schleswig-Holstein, north Germany. Abū Moḥammad arrived in Germany in 2015 through the so-called Balkan route. He left his wife and children behind in Syria, hoping that he could reunite with them in the not-too-distant future. Unfortunately, he was granted subsidiary protection and because of the hindrances of the family reunification system (see Bick, 2018), after four years, Abū Moḥammad was still waiting. When we met, he was living in precarious living settings. Abū Moḥammad felt suspended in a waiting state (*bintiẓār*), which he experienced with feelings of continuous anticipation (*intiẓār*).

"When I talk to my wife in the evening, we always imagine how our life will be when she comes here. I tell her that we will go to the park to make a BBQ, or to the cinema – we have never been to the cinema together! Oh my God, I cannot wait for her to be here and for our life to finally start! (Abū Moḥammad, personal interview, Neumünster, Germany, March 4, 2019).

This state of protracted temporality makes Abū Moḥammad experience a suspended life because his *life will start* only after he will be able to reunite with his wife and children – an event for which Abū Moḥammad has no control over.

3.5. Is there a space for reflexivity in refugeehood?

Before proceeding with the analysis of my empirical data, one last consideration will be due. Having explored the question of agency and its peculiarity in refugee studies, it is important to consider whether agency opens the door to reflexivity and how. In other words, is there a space for reflexivity in the analysis of gender role and relation transformations in displacement? However, does the condition of the refugee allow for the exercise of a reflexive exercise?

Margaret Archer plays a leading role in the conceptualization of reflexivity and its interplay with structure and agency. According to the British Sociologist, reflexivity is a mediating mechanism between structure and agency (Archer, 2003; 2007). It is built on an inner conversation based on a relation between the individual and the society. Reflexivity can have two dimensions: an internal and an external dimension. The former relates to the inner dialogue that all individuals have with themselves, through which they define beliefs, attitudes, goals, and practices. The latter expresses the relational (or familiar) dimension of an external dialogue that manifests itself through interaction with others. In general terms, reflexivity has been conceptualized in modern societies as social actors' capacity to account for their actions and replace habitual actions with reflexive actions (Archer, 2012). According to Archer, socio-cultural changes of late modernity have, for the first time in history, "made the imperative to be reflexive" and "categorical for all" (Archer 2012, p. 1). Reflexivity is a property of individuals, which can activate the causal power of structures and allow actors to actively control their future actions (Golob & Makarovič, 2019). In this sense, individuals become "active agents" of their lives and can consciously alter their place in the social structure.

Whether this capacity can be applied to refugees largely depends on the specific conditions in which they are. I argue that because the refugee experience is very diverse, it is difficult to generalize and claim that refugees can or cannot practice social reflexivity. In general terms, we could say that the condition of "bare life" in refugeehood might not allow for reflexivity because living conditions are extremely precarious and daily survival is the priority. In this case, basic needs are overriding the inner conversation because there

is no space to fully elaborate on future aspirations, projects, goals, or social circumstances. This state was clearly expressed by one participant in Lebanon, Hānī', who lived in an unfinished house of one room with his wife and three children. Two of his daughters had a severe illness in their eyes and could not see. They arrived in Lebanon in 2017, when UNHCR registrations were already closed (see Dionigi, 2016) and had no access to any form of aid from any NGO. They were left alone. One other Syrian family lived in another room of the house, with which Hānī' and his family shared the bathroom and the small kitchen. There were no windows, tiles on the floor, or paint on the walls. When I asked Hānī' about his future projects, he replied:

> "I don't have the privilege to think about the future. This is something that I can't do. My family needs food, clean water, medicines, and the money to pay the rent for this house, not projects, or plans. There's no future for us. We have lost everything. We can only live in the present, not in the future" (Hānī', personal interview, Tripoli, Lebanon, June 26, 2018).[52]

Moreover, when I asked Hānī', at the end of our interview, to recall a happy moment of his life in Syria, he thought about it for a long minute and then said:

> "I'm sorry, but I think I'm forgetting the past because at the moment I can't recall any happy moment of my life in Syria" (Hānī', personal interview, Tripoli, Lebanon, June 26, 2018).

Nonetheless, because the refugee experience is not monolithic, and because the state of liminality functions as a *non-state*, I observed that various forms of reflexivity are possible in displacement, which at the same time can be oriented towards the future or the past. One example, which will be further discussed later on in the chapter dedicated to Syrian families in Germany, is the "religious reflexivity." This is a form of reinforcement of religious practices and beliefs in a framework of self-construction of a new identity in

---

[52] In 2019, Hānī' and his family have been resettled in Italy through the humanitarian corridors.

displacement. Some Syrian participants in Germany have (re)engaged in religious activities and practices or reinforced existing ones, as a way to cope with life in displacement and particularly the separation from their beloved ones. For instance, Nabil, a Syrian man displaced in Dusseldorf, claimed that he found in religion the strength to keep hope alive. Nabīl lived in an apartment by himself, and he had been separated from his family for three years when I reached out to him in March 2019. His situation was more stable than Hānī's. Nabīl had a job and a decent salary. He was able to provide for himself and his left-behind family in Turkey. When I asked him which daily techniques he used to maintain hope alive in the difficult situation of separation, he replied:

> "Praying helps me to believe that there will be a better future for my family and me. I didn't know it could be so beneficial. I was never very religious. I believe in God and everything, but I've never truly engaged in the practice" (Nabīl, personal interview, Dusseldorf, Germany, March 11, 2019).

In contrast to Hānī', Nabīl was in the position of producing social practices from his reflexive deliberation. Nabīl focused his life on a choice that was meaningful for him and not merely instrumental and rational (Archer, 2012). In this sense, religious reflexivity is a form of self-formation, self-promotion, and legitimization for new forms of self-construction (ibid.).

Other forms of reflexivity are possible in displacement, as many different experiences of refugeehood exist. Archer considers reflexivity to be common to all social actors, even though it is exercised differently. She understands it as a homogeneous process of internal deliberation. She defines modes of reflexivity (see Caetano, 2015, p. 62), representing human existence. Nonetheless, I believe that it will not be possible in this thesis to investigate reflexivity in depth as a daily practice that is exercised differently by all refugees, because not all Syrians I have met were in the "privileged" position of thinking of themselves reflectively. Perhaps, if we were to read the displacement of Syrians in terms of reflexivity, we would find some of these experiences in the *fractured reflexivity* that Archer (2012) refers to as experiences in societies that are in constant change.

Nonetheless, this understanding cannot be comprehensive of the experience of most Syrian families I met. For this reason, it is more meaningful in the interest of this thesis to explore how different dimensions of agency are exercised in the reconstruction of gender roles and relationships in displacement.

Chapter 4.

Renegotiating gender roles and relations in displacement: Syrian families in Lebanon

---

In many societies, including Syria, gender roles of women and men differ significantly. While the man is the head of the household, the breadwinner, and the person in charge of the economic well-being of the family, the woman's roles and responsibilities are confined mainly to the home. Societal barriers have often prevented women from accessing the labour market in Syria (Korotayev et al., 2015), as gender roles and relationships are strictly connected to traditional gender norms. Gender identities and social expectations largely reflect gender norms. Masculinity is traditionally associated with what men *do*, or with their work, while femininity is linked with the roles of caring and reproduction (El-Feki et al., 2017).

Forced migration, like other disruptive events of people's lives, can challenge traditional gender roles and gender norms, but at the same time, it can provide new opportunities for individuals to overcome oppressive relations or hegemonic gender constraints (Krause, 2014; Rapone & Simpson, 2004; Boyle & Halfacree, 1999; Willis & Yeo, 2000). Some scholars have observed that relationships become more egalitarian in displacement, especially when women gain more economic power and independence while men decrease their economic contribution in the household (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992; Willis & Yeo, 2000). Other authors have observed that different elements of traditional gender relations remain unchanged even when there is a shift in gender roles (Messner, 1997). This chapter explores how Syrian families in Lebanon renegotiated relationships through the exercise of agency. In what follows, I will present four typologies of changes in gender roles and relationships that have affected Syrian families and the ways in which women and men have dealt with these changes. Firstly, I will discuss how Syrian families navigated divisions of labour and responsibilities in displacement, and the neo-patriarchal mechanisms they employed to renegotiate a

gendered social space. Secondly, I will explore how humanitarian actors challenged family relationships and the different ways in which Syrian women and men bypassed the humanitarian system to regain gendered self-worth. Thirdly, I will tackle changes in gendered aspirations and how Syrian families challenged the social perception to change the traditional and dominant culture. Finally, I will delve into gender relation transformations in the private space and the reconstruction of the intimacy of displacement.

4.1. Shifting social spaces: Navigating new divisions of labour and responsibilities in displacement

When I started my fieldwork in Lebanon, in November 2017, I did not have a clear idea of what kind of transformations I would witness among Syrians in displacement. However, everyone seemed to have perceived that Syrian refugees were going through severe transformations in their lives, especially in terms of gender relations. One of the main fields in which these transformations were being discussed was the labour market. According to practitioners, humanitarian and institutional actors, scholars, and refugees themselves, in Lebanon, many Syrian women had entered the labour market and thus created disruptions of traditional gender patterns (UN Women, 2018).[53] Nonetheless, the entity of these changes was an element of further discussion. Some of my interlocutors perceived it as a revolution of gender relations among Syrians; others were more inclined to consider those transformations as temporary and too weak to truly impact the structural patriarchal system of Syria. Although several authors have discussed household labour and the division of responsibilities in history, and especially in Western societies (for a review, see Coltrane, 2000), less attention has been paid to the division of labour in forced migration.

---

[53] According to UN Women (2018), 52% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon are women. See *Unpacking gendered realities in displacement: the status of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon.* Available at: http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/2018/16-days/syriacrisisimpact-lebanon-final2.pdf?la=en&vs=3545 [Accessed November 12, 2020].

When I asked Syrians in Lebanon about their perception of gender role transformations, both women and men were very keen on giving their opinion. One of the fieldwork activities where I discussed these changes in depth was a focus group discussion, which I organized and conducted, supported by an international organization, among Syrian men displaced in the area of Baalbek, in the Beqaa Valley. During this activity, the participants gave me interesting insights into their personal experiences. Most of them claimed that, in displacement, gender responsibilities and roles changed, since women gained more power and men lost the power they had before displacement. A parallel fieldwork activity, a focus group discussion conducted among Syrian women also displaced in the area of Baalbek, gave me a different point of view of the matter. Syrian women agreed that gender roles and relationships changed in displacement not only because women started working, but also because they continued to be responsible for the house – they did not have more power, they had more responsibilities (*mas'uliyāt*). In other words, women entered the public sphere by working outside the house and at the same time maintained their control over the private space, while men, together with losing their role as providers, with forced migration they lost their "space" in the public sphere. As a result, men remained without a social space where to express themselves and their gender identity. While some saw this shift in social spaces as a double power, others perceived it as a double burden.

One of the participants, Moḥammad, a man from Hama, in his forty, who lived on the hill of Ābū Samra, in Tripoli, with his wife Samā and their two children, claimed:

"Women were weak in Syria, but now they are taking the roles of men! Back in Syria, the man never allowed his wife to work outside. However, this is not the case right now because, unlike men, women are easily finding jobs. Thus, they [women] are the ones earning money and paying the expenses" (Moḥammad, personal interview, Tripoli, Lebanon, September 25, 2018).

Like many other men I talked to, Moḥammad seemed very frustrated about losing his role as a provider. Because his wife was working as a volunteer with a local NGO,[54] she was engaged in activities outside the house. At that time, Moḥammad was unemployed, and when Samā received the job offer from the NGO where she was attending a computer literacy course, he accepted that she worked. However, Moḥammad later explained that, although he gave his consent, he felt embarrassed to tell people in Syria that in Lebanon Samā was working:

"I feel ashamed. We need my wife's salary here, of course, but it's shameful for me that she works outside. I can't tell anyone in Syria… they would not accept this. Women shouldn't be into public life!" (Moḥammad, personal interview, Tripoli, Lebanon, September 25, 2018).

Samā's perception of these transformations was somehow different. Although she recognized that her family went through significant changes, she had her view of those changes. For Samā, it was not a matter of power, as she did not feel more powerful than her husband or more empowered than she was before. For her, it was a matter of responsibility. In displacement, she had double responsibilities – she had to work outside the house to generate income, support the family, and continue to work inside the house to take care of the chores and the children.

"I don't feel more powerful. I feel loaded with more responsibilities. I have to work outside every day. It takes half an hour to get to the centre and half an hour to go back. Then, when I come back, I have to cook, clean the house, and take care of the children. They're grown up enough to help me, and my husband helps me too – but it's still my job to do all that" (Samā, personal interview, Tripoli, Lebanon, September 25, 2018).

---

[54] Because access to the labour market is restricted for Syrians in Lebanon, being hired as a volunteer is a common practice in many sectors. The humanitarian sector, in particular, has made a great effort to offer these kinds of opportunities to Syrian refugee men and women to integrate them semi-informally in the local labour market.

Samā experienced a double burden because Moḥammad did not replace her with work inside the house. Taking care of those responsibilities was "still her job". She could ask for help, but she was still burdened with those duties. While Samā gained a new social position outside the house, Moḥammad lost his previous position and role. Somehow, Samā's career progression corresponded to a regression in social status for Moḥammad, which made him feel frustrated and insecure.

In his interview, Moḥammad also raised another central point that helped me to conceptualize his frustration – the question of gendered citizenships in Syria (Maktabi, 2010), inasmuch as the Syrian legal system accorded male and female citizens different legal statuses (ibid., p. 557). The Syrian Ba'ath regime encouraged a patriarchal setting of the private sphere in the society where women's engagement in the labour market and the private sphere was not fully supported (Joseph, 1996) and only encouraged as part of the neoliberal economy implemented by the Ba'ath regime (Rabo, 2008). As a result, the man was the full citizen of the State and the woman was only able to interact with the State through the male relative (Moghadam, 2004; Joseph, 1993b). Moḥammad embodied the masculine identity also as part of his national identity, which he had lost together with losing his role in the public space in displacement. Thus, due to the loss of his role as a provider and the broken relationship with the state, Moḥammad was twice deprived of his masculine identity.

Many other Syrian families had similar experiences as Moḥammad and Samā. When forcibly migrating to Lebanon, women and men were often forced to act according to "new settings", which led to a role reversal in some instances. Two Syrian women who participated in this study expressed similar concerns as Samā. Roqaya, a woman from rural Homs, displaced in Tripoli, and Bāsila, a woman from rural Damascus, displaced in Chtoura, had never worked in Syria. In Lebanon, they were now forced to enter a new social space, through the informal labour market, to support their families. In both cases, their new status brought about important changes in their relationships. Roqaya was separated from her husband and lived with her children in Ābū Samra, in Tripoli. She

worked as a housekeeper for a company and became economically independent from her husband, who was still in Syria and not providing for the family anymore.

"I came to Lebanon in 2013, only with my children. My husband stayed in Syria and didn't want me to come. But I came anyway because I wanted to protect my children […]. For the first two years after we came, my son was working. I was not allowed to work. My husband didn't want me to work, but he was not sending money. So, I convinced him and I started working. In the beginning, it was horrible. But then I liked it because I was independent. Of course, I don't like to have all the responsibilities! […] The relationship with my husband changed a lot after I came here and I started working. He started participating less in decisions about my life and in our children's life. I think I should divorce him now. I have no other choice" (Roqaya, personal interview, Tripoli, Lebanon, June 6, 2018).

The new position, which Roqaya was forced to take on and the condition of separation from her husband, who remained in Syria, changed her relationship with him. With her work, she gained control over resources to support her family. At the same time, she became independent from her husband by considering the idea of divorcing him. Nonetheless, independence came along with the burden of new responsibilities, which Roqaya did not face without a certain level of discontentment.

Bāsila, who was part of a nuclear family, lamented similar concerns and raised the question of the temporality of those changes. As a matter of fact, because of the extraordinary situation, the acceptance of women entering the workforce in opposition to, or along with, men seemed to be situational.

"When I came to Lebanon I started working for the first time in my life. I never worked in Syria before, my husband wouldn't accept that, he's a traditional man; he thought he was the one responsible for supporting the family and I was the one who was in charge of the house and the children. But here in Lebanon, he changed his mind. When we found ourselves in a difficult financial situation, he agreed to let me

work. […] I think the only reason why he accepted is that we are in difficult conditions and because I work only with other women" (Bāsila, Lebanon, personal interview, Chtoura, June 4, 2018).

As suggested by Bāsila, a new division of roles is accepted in the unique circumstances of displacement, but it is not expected to be permanent if the situation remains temporary. Furthermore, it is easily acceptable if it remains in the feminine sphere of action. This shift in spaces of domination was forced by the circumstances and not entirely welcomed or accepted by either side.

Although some studies have found that it is somehow easier for women to come to terms with a new environment (Meertens, 2004; Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2004) and to react to changes in a less confused and defeatist manner than men (Kibreab, 2004), it was not always easy for female participants to make sense of shifting gender roles. This dimension was surprisingly unexpected for me. In line with the stereotyped narrative around women's empowerment, I expected more economic empowerment to correspond to more satisfaction with the new position in the household. For instance, ʿĀʾisha, a Syrian woman from rural Damascus, whom I met in Chtoura, in the Beqaa Valley, was working as a teacher in a school for Syrian children, and she had recently become a mother. Her husband, Ghīāth, was not working regularly, and he struggled to find a fixed position or a decent salary. She was the breadwinner of her household, and at the same time, she was also the primary caregiver for their child. She would take the baby with her to work or ask her mother to look after him when she could not do it.

"My husband and I have a baby, he is one year old. […] I love my son, but it's very difficult for me to balance my life outside the house and my family life. Working is hard, but I have no choice… we need my salary. […] Due to my work outside, I have no much time left to carry out my duties in the house" ('Ā'isha, personal interview, Chtoura, Lebanon, March 28, 2018).

When I asked her if her husband was contributing to the activities inside the house and with the child's upbringing she answered:

"Yes, of course, he helps me, but those are my responsibilities anyway. You know, in our culture, the man should work and the woman should take care of the house and the children. Everyone has his own role and responsibility" ('Ā'isha, personal interview, Chtoura, Lebanon, March 28, 2018).

Some women who participated in my research also lamented the burden of responsibilities (*mas'uliyāt*). Ibtisām, a Syrian woman displaced in Baalbek, articulated this view very clearly when she told me:

"I have so many responsibilities in Lebanon! I never felt this burden before. In Syria, I lived like a princess. Of course, I had my responsibilities as a mother and a wife, but here I also need to be a father and a husband! […] The worst thing is that I'm not happy with this. What should I do? Should I celebrate that my husband's not a man anymore? He's supposed to work and he's not working. He's not able to provide for this family anymore. […] I wish we never came to Lebanon sometimes" (Ibtisām, personal interview, Baalbek, Lebanon, May 2, 2018).

Humanitarian workers interviewed for this research also argued that Syrian men in displacement were still reluctant to participate in domestic work and childcare even when their spouses became the family's breadwinners (humanitarian worker, personal interview, Beirut, March 13, 2018). As a result, "women have the double burden of both the productive and social reproductive role, while men keep only taking on the productive role in the family. This is so because engaging in reproductive activities would jeopardize their masculinity and self-esteem" (humanitarian worker, personal interview, Beirut, March 13, 2018).

Some Syrian male participants admitted to having partially entered the private sphere and engaged in social reproduction activities such as housework or children's

upbringing. Nonetheless, even when they participated in those activities, they continued to position their identity in the public space. Some men felt ashamed in acknowledging the new position in the private sphere. Ghīāth, for example, had to take on the responsibilities of the housework, but instead of considering this as his newly gained role, he described it as "helping out" his wife.

> "I do help out my wife in the house with domestic work and with taking care of our child. We both work and I understand that sometimes she needs my help. But we don't tell people because I don't feel comfortable with people knowing that. It's the way we organize our life and there's no need for people to know that" (Ghīāth, personal interview, Chtoura, Lebanon, March 28, 2018).

From his words, Ghīāth did not seem comfortable in this new social space. With this new role, he could no longer act in the public sphere. Furthermore, Ghīāth did not acknowledge the role of his wife as the breadwinner fully. Although she had more stable employment than him, he maintained that they "both worked". This is because masculinity, or manliness, has to be validated by other men and by the male community that measured whether one was a "real man" (Bourdieu, 1998/2001, p. 52). Michael Kimmel (1994) had already framed this need for validation as part of men's "homosocial" environment (Kimmel, 1994). For the American sociologist, masculinity is a constant fight for recognition by other men, where women are the "currency" that men need to improve their position on the social scale (Kimmel, 1994, p. 129).

The reluctance of men to take on the role of caregivers, or occupy the space in the private sphere, is also related to women's resistance to giving up on that role, which is strongly related to their gender identity. Previous studies have found out that femininity and women's sense of self-esteem is closely associated with their traditional gender roles (Hoang, 2011; El-Masri et al., 2013). Many Syrian women who have participated in this study claimed that they perceived their femininity as strongly related to their motherhood and their ability to take care of the household. Two participants displaced in Ghaze, in the Beqaa Valley, claimed:

"Femininity, for me, is not only related to my appearance or my behaviour as a woman. It's related to the fact that I'm a mother and a wife. If I don't get to be these two things I don't feel feminine" (Laṭīfa, personal interview, Ghaze, Lebanon, September 25, 2018).

"I feel like a woman when I can take care of my children, and my house. […] In Syria I felt like a woman because I was the queen of the house. And my husband was the king. Here, I'm both the woman and the man because I have to do two jobs. And my husband's not doing any" (Em Samīr, personal interview, Ghaze, Lebanon, September 25, 2018).

The ability to be a mother and a housewife, or the social reproductive role, is central to a woman's identity in most patriarchal societies, as a woman is often judged for the quality in which she performs this role (Hoang, 2011). For this reason, engaging in the productive role and giving up social reproductive duties, would bring about negative judgements and a sense of guilt that would jeopardize the feminine identity. In this sense, as Em Samīr pointed out, others' opinions are a major issue to take into account for Syrian women. By engaging fully in the productive role, a Syrian woman would publicly state that her husband cannot do *the man's job* – hence *to be* a man. Similar perceptions about gender roles and identities could be found in many other similar patriarchal environments. For instance, Naila Kabeer found out that traditional feminine identities were a major constraint for Bangladeshi women to take up employment in a factory (Kabeer, 2000, p. 99), while Lan Ahn Hoang observed that female Vietnamese internal migrants were afraid of being addressed as "greedy" for putting economic benefits above the interest of their families (Hoang, 2011).

The acceptance of new roles in displacement was also very challenging for many men who participated in this study. Middle-class men expressed even a lesser disposition to accept their new roles and the loss of their gendered space. For example, ʿĀbed, a man

in his fifty from Aleppo, was forced to take on the social reproductive role in his family, while his wife worked in Syria and commuted from Lebanon.

> "Because of the situation here [his condition of unemployment in Lebanon], my wife is still working in Syria, so sometimes she goes for three months and comes back for one month. This is also putting a strain on the family because now I have to do everything in the house. Sometimes I have to cook, I have to clean, and I have to take responsibility for the girls when they go outside, to school and everything. This is putting a lot of pressure on me because I have to do everything by myself. […] There's nothing in my hands that I can do" ('Ābed, personal interview, Tripoli, Lebanon, May 22, 2018).

Like Ghīāth, 'Ābed lost his space in the public sphere, and although he was asked by the circumstances to take on the role of caregiver in the private sphere, he felt not comfortable with it, and he did not recognize it as his new role. Moreover, because 'Ābed did not recognize this new space as his own, he felt he no longer belonged to any social space.

> "My wife and my daughters are going on with their lives. She works just as she was working before; they are going to school and they have a future ahead. But I feel I'm just in the middle of nowhere, I'm waiting for something to happen but nothing is happening" ('Ābed, personal interview, Tripoli, Lebanon, May 22, 2018).

Some meaningful insights on how men face the challenges of gender relation transformations came from my participant observation activities. In Lebanon, I spent a long time with the family of my friend Ward, displaced in Chtoura, Beqaa Valley, from rural Damascus. The father, Abū Qāīs, whom I mentioned in Chapter 3, was a traditional man, rather educated. In Lebanon, he lost his position as a breadwinner. His wife Hāla, his daughter Ward, and his adolescent son Aḥmad lived with him, together with another relative and her son. After displacement, Abū Qāīs could not find a job and keep providing for his family. His older daughter, Ward, was supporting the whole household

with her work in a local NGO. When he found out about my research topic, he was keen on discussing gender role transformations with me. I have mentioned in Chapter 3 how Abū Qāīs felt in this new gender role in the home – disoriented and suspended in a space that he did not recognize.

> "Ward told me that her father often says that he feels like furniture in this house… 'I am like a chair', he says. This is not only because he is not working and he feels useless, unable to provide for his family, but also because he is not the centre of the family life anymore. His wife does not sit with him to have lunch anymore, she waits for Ward to come back from work and she eats with her. Ward's mother seems not to recognize the authority of her husband, and now she seems to acknowledge Ward as the breadwinner in the house" (Fieldnotes, Chtoura, Lebanon, September 6, 2018).

Abū Qāīs seemed to have lost his role as a patriarch in the family. He felt "like furniture" because he had no space left where to express his gender identity. Like other male participants, Abū Qāīs remained in-between spaces because unable to gain a new social space.

Neo-patriarchal mechanisms to renegotiate a gendered social space

Like other social identities, gender identity is an on-going construction, a "dialogue between one's self-image and others' perceptions of one" (Khosravi, 2009, p. 591). With (forced) migration, this dialogue is put in an unfamiliar social context, in which previously constructed social identities are challenged and new identities have to be renegotiated. The participants in this study performed different actions to reconstruct or renegotiate their gender identities in displacement. In particular, those who have experienced changes in the division of labour and responsibilities renegotiated their new roles through what Deniz Kandiyoti (1988) called a "patriarchal bargain". This is a tactic through which women accommodate and uphold patriarchal norms, by manipulating the system to their

best advantage, but leaving the system intact. The author identifies different forms of patriarchy analysing women's strategies in dealing with them (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 275; see also Shirpak et al., 2011). One of those is the classic patriarchy; a patriarchal system found in traditional North African, Muslim Middle Eastern, and South-East Asian societies. It is based on the idea of the cyclical nature of women's power in the household. When they are given away in marriage, young women are subordinate to their husbands, to other men of the extended household, and to their mothers-in-law. The deprivations they undergo are then superseded by the power they will have on their own daughters-in-law (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 279). According to Kandiyoti, women may often resist a breakdown of classic patriarchy through a change because the benefits they can gain from resisting are not overriding the loss of a system, which in its cyclic nature promises protection and later power to them. These agreements keep the division between genders symbolically natural and "exert a powerful influence on the shaping of women's gendered subjectivity and determine the nature of gender ideology in different contexts" (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 275).

I suggest that Syrian refugee women in Lebanon used a form of patriarchal bargain to renegotiate their positions in the family and the social space vis-à-vis their husbands and the Syrian community to keep the old system unchanged. The benefits both women and men obtained by conforming to the old system exceed the benefits of changing the whole structure. This might not resonate with the academic discourse that developed in the wake of Western feminism emphasizing women's empowerment and their liberation from patriarchal constraints. Nevertheless, previous studies (Taha, 2020) found that refugee women strive for autonomy and empowerment through accepting patriarchal cultural norms and utilizing them strategically (ibid., p. 1). In line with this understanding, Samā and Moḥammad used their tactics to keep the old system alive. Samā called this agreement a "traditional deal" (ṣafqat taqlīdiyya) that she and her husband had tacitly agreed upon to maintain the balance in the house.

> "My husband and I have one drawer where we keep the money. When I receive my salary, I don't keep the money with me. I put it in the drawer, from where both of us can take it. […] Although most of the time I'm the one who puts the money in the

drawer, my husband is the one in charge of paying the bills. He deals with the landlord and everything... […] We can say we made a sort of traditional deal" (Samā, personal interview, Tripoli, Lebanon, September 25, 2018).

Through this technique, Samā and Moḥammad renegotiated their traditional spaces. In this way, it no longer mattered who earned the salary. Samā was aware of her increased power, but she gave some of it up in order for Moḥammad to regain some of his dignity. Similarly, Niḥāl, ʿĀbed's wife, used analogous strategies to renegotiate her role through a traditional deal. Niḥāl was born in Syria to a Syrian father and a Lebanese mother.[55] She lived in Lebanon as a child and was raised by a "modern family."

> "I always worked. I worked even before I met my husband. I come from a modern family and he accepted this. Actually, he wanted to marry a woman who worked. We had our system in Syria. Both of us were contributing to the family and we used to share and manage everything as a couple. We used to split the bills equally. […] Now we do the same, we split the income equally […]. But of course, now I'm the only one who has an income. I give my husband most of my salary now […] because he's the one taking care of the daughters" (Niḥāl, personal interview, Tripoli, Lebanon, May 22, 2018).

In his interview, ʿĀbed also pointed out that he had no problem with the fact that Niḥāl worked:

> "I didn't ask her to work. I know that our society would not really accept a woman who works, but I don't care what society thinks. I wanted someone to share a life with when I married her, someone who had equal responsibilities as me" (ʿĀbed, personal interview, Tripoli, Lebanon, May 22, 2018).

---

[55] Citizenship in Lebanon, like in Syria, is transmitted by paternity. Mothers cannot confer citizenship to their children. For this reason, although Niḥal was half Syrian and half Lebanese and had lived part of her life in Lebanon, she was still considered a foreigner, and a Syrian refugee.

Patriarchal bargains are not only built around rational choices that women make, they can be shaped (un)consciously by women and men in different contexts. For example, Nādiā, a woman from rural Hama in her late twenties, who was displaced in El-Marj with her husband and two children, underplayed the importance of her role as the primary breadwinner. By doing so, she could rekindle her husband's position in the household.

"I work as a teacher in a Syrian school.[56] […] I'm the main provider in this house, yes. But this does not mean that my husband has less power than me. He's still the one who makes the decisions and manages the money, the breadwinner, I mean. […] This situation is temporary. Soon, if God wills, he will find a job" (Nādiā, personal interview, El-Marj, Lebanon, September 7, 2018).

In Nādiā's words, her role as a breadwinner did not increase her decision-making power in the household. However, this was only the external manifestation of her new identity and how she renegotiated her position in the patriarchal framework. When she spoke of the salary earned and the fulfilment her job as a teacher gave her, she revealed a greater pride and self-awareness of her role. Further in the interview, she claimed:

"Now my husband values my opinion better. I think he respects me more now because I work. I've never worked before, and maybe he didn't expect me to be able to earn money. […] I don't feel more independent, because we are in a condition of poverty, and there is nothing good about it. We don't have enough money for a decent life. But with my job, we can buy the food and pay the bills. […] I feel good that I can do something like that. Of course, I don't speak like this with my husband or he would feel like he values nothing" (Nādiā, personal interview, El-Marj, Lebanon, September 7, 2018).

---

[56] In Lebanon, Syrians can be employed as volunteer teachers in Syrian schools to teach early education classes to Syrian children before they enrol in the first grade in Lebanese public schools.

By not acknowledging great value to her work and presenting her husband as the head of the household for being the decision-maker, Nādiā renegotiated her role in the relationship within a "traditional deal". Nonetheless, she recognized that they tacitly agreed on her newly gained entitlement of participating in decision-making by giving her opinion. For Nādiā, renegotiating her relationship within a patriarchal deal made gender role transformations more acceptable. Moreover, she did not give up attaining her new aspirations, which emerged in the stances of pride and satisfaction she revealed when talking about the future.

> "I love to be a wife and a mum. But I realized I like working as well. It makes me feel proud of myself. […] Displacement changed everything, I will never go back to be the woman who sits in the house the whole day. I'm not the person I was before and I'll never be again" (Nādiā, personal interview, El-Marj, Lebanon, September 7, 2018).

Syrian men attempted to renegotiate their new gender roles by employing different techniques and practices, including "protest masculinity" (Connell, 1995). This is perhaps the most widely debated practice of reaffirmation of patriarchal or "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) within the "refugee crisis". Throughout the Syrian displacement, protest masculinity was often exercised in the form of domestic violence by Syrian men to compensate for the loss of their patriarchal role (Keedi et al., 2017; El Feki et al., 2017).[57] Protest masculinity was performed as a rejection of the new standards imposed by the changes and expressed mainly by people unable to fulfil their personal, family, and community's expectations as traditional patriarchs (Keedi et al., 2017).

In my fieldwork, domestic violence emerged as a response of men to the loss of masculine identity caused by the loss of the role of provider. Manāl, a woman from Deir

---

[57] Domestic violence is a ubiquitous practice that has no social, economic, or national boundaries. In Lebanon and Syria, domestic violence against women and children existed before conflict and displacement, among all social classes. Nonetheless, whenever there is a breakdown in the routine, especially when it is a negative one, violence exacerbates (humanitarian worker, personal interview, Beirut, March 14, 2018).

ez-Zor displaced in Tripoli, claimed that her husband became more violent because of the economic conditions he faced after displacement:

"My husband abuses me with verbal and physical violence since we got married [at 16 years old]. He was young and did not know how to talk to me without beating me. Then he changed. [...] But displacement made him violent again. [...] With the lack of privacy in the house where we were living and the pressures of unemployment he started beating me again" (Manāl, personal interview, Tripoli, Lebanon, June 6, 2018).

According to local organizations working with displaced Syrians, domestic violence also resulted in the inability to find coping mechanisms to deal with the strains associated with losing a power position in the family as a whole (humanitarian worker, personal interview, Beirut, January 17, 2018). Violence is the only tool many men have known and used in their lives to respond to challenging situations, and it is often practised by individuals who had previously experienced it in their childhood in the form of physical punishment by their fathers.

Other varieties of protest masculinity were also exercised as expressions of dominance, through subdued violence. Abū Qāīs, for example, used non-violent punishing behaviours against his wife to reaffirm his patriarchal role in the family.

"Ward told me that when her father is angry with his wife he does not let her prepare his breakfast. He goes to the kitchen and tries to prepare it himself, but he does not know where all the dishware is, so he does not manage to do it" (Fieldnotes, Chtoura, Lebanon, September 6, 2018).

The reaction of Abū Qāīs was a form of protest masculinity not expressed with physical violence. He found a way to punish his wife for no longer dedicating herself to him. Because Ward's mother did not recognize his role as the patriarch, he responded by refusing to acknowledge her role as a wife. However, his response was ineffective because

he tried to restore his dominance in a field where he was no longer at the centre of the stage.

Another way Syrian men reaffirmed their gender identity as a patriarchal deal was through the masculinization of the private sphere. It was so for janitors and concierges who carried out activities of housekeeping as a remunerated job. 'Imād, for example, a Syrian man from rural Sweida, a Druze area in South-western Syria, used to work as a janitor in a building in Bshāmūn, a southern suburb of Beirut.

> "I work as a janitor; I'm expected to keep the stairs and the hall clean. In exchange, I'm given a room where I can live with my family and a small salary. […] It's my duty to clean, my wife helps me with some errands like delivering the mail or something else, but cleaning is my job" ('Imād, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, March 24, 2018).

In this sense, if domestic work is paid, it can be carried out like any other job, because it falls within the productive sphere. The salary generated by this work transforms the space in which it occurs into a masculine space.

4.2. Humanitarian actors challenging family relationships: The thin line between "empowerment" and "disempowerment"

Social sciences have often emphasized economic factors as the primary variable affecting women's status and gender roles (Mukhopadhyay & Higgins, 1988; Baluja, 2003). Nonetheless, due to their multidimensional character, gender roles and gender identities are not easily ascribable to one sphere of gender identities. For example, in traditional Middle Eastern settings, masculinity is not only associated with being a provider but also with being a protector (Keedi et. al., 2017). At the same time, women's empowerment not only results from women's economic independence from men but is also based on the desire to challenge ideas and structures that frame the imbalance of power between

women and men thus transforming the space into an "enabling environment" (O'Kane, 2005, p. 251).

In forced migration and displacement, gender roles are often challenged, especially in those settings where Western humanitarian engagement is relevant (Krause, 2014). Since the beginning of the crisis, humanitarian actors have become major providers of livelihood, health care services, and shelters in Lebanon. Syrian males' accounts suggested that these interventions challenged their role as protectors. This was done at two levels – on the one hand, through humanitarian programs of women's empowerment, which were not designed on a relational basis but on gender stereotypes that regarded refugee women as vulnerable victims to be empowered; on the other hand, when humanitarian organizations became the main providers of livelihood, health care services, and shelters, thus replacing the man in this role.

Several authors have discussed the various ways in which humanitarian interventions have impacted refugee's gender identities, especially engendering "emasculation" (Turner, 1999; Lukunka, 2012) and how humanitarian actions are often designed upon gendered stereotypes (Turner, 2019a; Lubkemann, 2008). Various studies have discussed the homogeneous representation of refugee women as victims of violence and war, and the monolithic image of men as perpetrators of violence and conflicts (Engels, 2008; Harders & Clasen, 2011; Krause, 2014). Naila Kabeer's conceptualization of empowerment (Kabeer, 1999), for instance, explains how humanitarian interventions targeted to refugee women often need to "disempower" them before "empowering" them again. At the same time, because men are considered those who exercise violence, they are believed not to need humanitarian protection (Turner, 2019a). This binary understanding of gender roles in displacement has created imbalances in many humanitarian contexts in history. In Lebanon, many Syrian refugee families faced the consequences of these attitudes.

One participant, 'Alī, a teacher from rural Damascus displaced in Majdal 'Anjar, in the Beqaa Valley, put this ironically when he said: "Women in Syria were weak, but because of NGOs now they are taking the roles of men!" ('Alī, personal interview, Majdal 'Anjar, Lebanon, September 19, 2018). 'Alī used a sense of humour to minimize a situation

that affected him deeply. Further on in the interview, ʻAlī stressed the psychological challenges that men had to face in displacement and how those challenges affected power dynamics in the family. When I asked ʻAlī in which ways he was affected by displacement and whether he felt he was still in the position to protect his family, he replied:

> "[Displacement] was a huge shock for me, to the extent that I could no longer give attention to anything around me. So my wife looked for support outside and she found it in the UN.[58] She went to those courses and she became more powerful. Now, she believes that I'm not able to protect her anymore" (ʻAlī, personal interview, Majdal ʻAnjar, Lebanon, September 19, 2018).

ʻAlī also claimed that he suffered from various traumas generated by war and displacement and that he was unable to support his family as he wanted. So he felt that his wife Zahra replaced the support she used to receive from him with that offered by humanitarian agencies.

> "The job of the man is to protect his family, to support his wife and children, to be the rock of the family. I can't do this anymore in Lebanon. I don't have a stable job or my community around me. I'm nobody here. […] My wife started going out with other women. She was convinced by an organization and she's now studying computer and English" (ʻAlī, personal interview, Majdal ʻAnjar, Lebanon, September 19, 2018).

When I asked ʻAlī whether he was upset with his wife because she was going out or with the condition of not being able to support her as he wanted, he replied:

> "I'm happy that she goes out, that she learns, and has fun. I wish I could do that

---

[58] With "the UN" (*al-Umam*), ʻAlī referred to the UNHCR, which supported his family with humanitarian aids because they were officially registered as refugees. However, his wife, at the time of our interview, was attending a computer literacy course at a local NGO.

too. But I'm sitting here [in the house] all day with no place to go" ('Alī, personal interview, Majdal 'Anjar, Lebanon, September 19, 2018).

'Alī told me that the organization did not offer the same courses to men. When I asked him why, he laughed and then said: "I don't know, maybe they want to make women more powerful than men so that they will divorce us eventually" ('Alī, personal interview, Majdal 'Anjar, Lebanon, September 19, 2018). 'Alī seemed uncomfortable with a situation, which he seemed not fully understand: Why was his wife helped to learn and improve herself while he was not given this chance? In this sense, as other male participants at the beginning of this chapter, 'Alī remained without a social space where to express his gender identity, having lost the two characteristics he recognized as part of his being a man: being a provider and a protector. In contrast to his wife, he was not supported in renegotiating a new gender identity in the new field.

As in many other humanitarian settings, in Lebanon, actions addressed to women's empowerment were not designed on a relational basis. They mostly targeted women without including their partners in those programs or creating specific programmes for men to rationalize new roles and positions. These actions are based on the idea that refugee women need to be familiarized with the idea of gender equality. Nonetheless, the way these programmes were implemented was not only far from creating a power balance, but also created discrepancies between husbands and wives instead and eventually brought about a reversed disempowerment. In other words, by considering women the most vulnerable category in the "refugee crisis", humanitarian actions have pushed women into a new *hexis* and challenged pre-displacement gendered dispositions without creating the bases for more equal gender relations.

Humanitarian actors in Lebanon have jeopardized the balance between dominant and dominated positions of men and women because they have overturned the gendered access to resources and especially to social networks. In displacement and migration, social networks are important determinants of gender role transformations (Baluja, 2003). They are essential to establishing a new social space (McKenzie & Rapoport, 2010) and to provide the connections through which "the individual is confirmed, but also through

which boundaries, structures and social support functions are provided" (Baker, 1981, cit. in Kibreab, 2004, p. 20). When individuals (forcibly) migrate, they have to rebuild a new entourage in the new environment. The way women and men interact with local communities in a new environment can be different (Kibreab, 1995). Migrant men, especially in traditionally patriarchal societies, are assumed to be the pioneers of the household's new life (Moliner, 2020). They are those who establish public social networks wherein the family feels supported and protected. Migrant men often have the role of bridging between the household and the receiving society and negotiating between the private and the public space. For this reason, the burden of the loss of such a role can be difficult to bear. Moreover, when women build their own networks outside the house, the social standing of their husbands can be threatened (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994).

When humanitarian actors in Lebanon offered Syrian women a "safe space" (UN Women, 2018) to go out, to learn, to socialize, and to access the public sphere that supposedly men were expected to occupy, instead of creating gender equality, they, again, reversed power balances. Social networks are driving forces for power because access to local networks can facilitate access to a more widespread net of resources and information (Hagan, 1998). Accessing social networks can also facilitate access to belief systems that can open to new aspirations. Because the control of resources is an important element of power control in displacement, a power position in the public space is expected to bring about a better position in the private sphere. Nonetheless, because in Lebanon power was unequally distributed by external actors without giving everyone the same possibilities to rationalize new roles and new positions inside and outside the house, this was not the case for many Syrian families.

Basām, a Syrian man from Raqqa displaced in Baalbek explained to me that when his family was first approached by a humanitarian agency promoting women's empowerment, he was sceptical about letting his wife Ṣafiyya engage in those activities:

"When we came to Lebanon, many NGOs came to us to tell us about their programmes for women. I didn't know what it meant and I didn't want my wife to go out of the house. So I didn't allow her to go out and take those courses. […] They

came for her, I was not invited" (Basām, personal interview, Baalbek, Lebanon, September 20, 2018).

Basām was not *invited* by those NGOs to take on a learning path along with his wife. On the other hand, Ṣafiyya was invited to participate in learning and vocational activities and was also given a chance to acquire knowledge and power to change her position in the social space and, consequently threaten her husband's positions. Because those humanitarian actions were addressed only to refugee women, Basām and 'Alī were perhaps afraid to lose control over their wives – and the capacity to perform their duties to protect them. As Geographer Cathrine Brun has already pointed out, changing women's practices or identities does not automatically change the dominant gender ideology of a male-dominated society (Brun, 2000).

The perceptions of Syrian women about empowerment are noteworthy accounts of the real effects of those programmes. In many areas of Lebanon, programmes of women's empowerment were not based on the acquisition of new skills, but mostly on reinforcing already existing skills. For example, often, women were offered cooking, sewing, or beauty courses that promised to enhance their chances of future employment. Many of these programmes failed in providing sustainable support in the long term. Anthropologist Estella Carpi called humanitarian livelihood programmes in Lebanon "neo-cosmetic" as what refugees get out of these programmes is almost a cosmetic accessory (Carpi, 2020a, p. 225). Among my participants, some Syrian women were sceptical about such actions. Although for some women those activities were a first step towards acquiring more familiarity with new rights and possibilities or a way to exchange views with other women from different social and cultural backgrounds, some participants found those activities mostly recreational, an excuse to go out of the house with the approval of their husbands, or a way not to think about the hardship they were facing in their daily lives. However, they did not feel empowered or more skilled. Ranā, for example, a single mother of three, from rural Damascus, displaced in Chtoura, in the Beqaa Valley, claimed:

"I firstly enrolled in a cooking class. I went because I thought it could be a way to get to know other women. I didn't go to learn how to cook. I know how to cook […]. I had fun and made new friends, but I didn't learn anything that I didn't know. Maybe I learnt new recipes... But what should I do with this? How exactly will I use this course to make a living, and to support my children?" (Ranā, personal interview, Chtoura, Lebanon, January 17, 2018).

Similarly, A'bīr, a divorced woman from Homs, displaced in Bebnīn, in Akkar, maintained:

"I went to a sewing course with other women. We realized products that were sold in a boutique with the support of the organization. It was hard work because it takes so much time, concentration, and effort. And the outcome was not so good compared to the effort I made. […] I don't feel different than before, I learnt how to use the sawing machine, but I wouldn't know how to find a job with what I learnt in this training" (A'bīr, personal interview, Bebnīn, Lebanon, June 18, 2018).

One of the main challenges of similar programmes is the lack of sustainability and continuity in the long term. In my observation, when programmes timing or funding end, also the support given to families stops.

Another major obstacle is the limited possibilities for Syrians to access the labour market in Lebanon. Unless they are employed in the three sectors allowed by the Lebanese government (agriculture, construction, and cleaning services), they would need a sponsorship (*kāfala*) to obtain a regular work permit (Tirado Chase, 2016). Thus, the job market is mostly regulated by informality. These structural problems have been often addressed by other scholars. For example, Carpi (2020a) argued that humanitarian actions in Lebanon are regulated to maintain the stability of host economies (Carpi, 2020a, p. 238), which gives no space to refugees' integration. In this vicious circle, NGOs implemented their programmes to enhance self-reliance in refugees and women's empowerment. However, they helped them to acquire skills that were not useful to obtain future

employment or to improve their economic stability in the host country. These actions are functional to promote an inter-ethnic balance of Lebanon (ibid., 240).

Although humanitarian programmes of empowerment often failed in providing support to women's economic stability, access to the job market, and gender equality in refugees' households, some Syrian women found these activities beneficial. Zahra explained that she found these courses a good chance to learn more and to open doors to increasing knowledge of women's rights.

"I like to learn. I always liked it. I first started with an English course at this organization, and then I also enrolled in computer literacy classes. I wanted to improve my skills. I participated in all their activities but the most beautiful was the psychosocial support activities for women. I also participated in sessions of empowerment awareness and women's rights. […] I found them interesting, I learnt a lot, but society still treats me as I don't exist" (Zahra, personal interview, Majdal 'Anjar, Lebanon, September 19, 2018).

Zahra was eager to learn and to improve her life. She was passionate about discovering and shaping her future goals and possibilities. For her, participating in those courses was also a way to engage in the public sphere for the first time in her life. Nonetheless, as already expressed by 'Alī, her husband, these new activities put a strain on her relationship with her husband:

"My husband is not happy that I enrolled in all these activities. He's not angry or upset. […] I think he feels ashamed that I need to engage in these classes to find a job and uncomfortable that I'm now going out of the house every day. I feel really bad for him because I know he thinks that I want to divorce him. I'm also afraid that our marriage could end. […] Through these courses, I discovered a new world and I want to be part of it" (Zahra, personal interview, Majdal 'Anjar, Lebanon, September 19, 2018).

Bypassing the humanitarian system to regain a gendered self-worth

Syrian refugee men and women in Lebanon put into practice several agentic mechanisms to overcome and bypass the obstacles of humanitarian interventions that jeopardized relationships between wives and husbands, emasculated men, and victimized women. Those mechanisms served to regain the dignity that they felt they had lost in the process for both men and women. Nonetheless, by reconstructing their self-worth as individuals, they also renegotiated their gender identity in their relationship with their partners.

For those Syrian men who had lost their role of protectors because of humanitarian interventions, becoming community leaders was a way to regain their self-esteem and the respect of the community, and to reconstruct the sense of being protectors of their families. The literature has dealt extensively with these dynamics. Anthropologist Simon Tuner, for example, has explored extensively how UNHCR women's empowerment programmes in Lukole Refugee Camp in Tanzania were reinterpreted and given new meanings (Turner, 2000). Paradoxically, instead of empowering women, those programmes provided upward social mobility for young men, who managed to out-manoeuvre older patriarchs and gained a better position in the community (ibid, p. 9). Similar circumstances occurred among displaced Syrians in Lebanon, in particular through the figure of the *shāwīsh.* The word refers traditionally to the position of Syrian men engaged in labour migration in Lebanon. With the beginning of the Syrian crisis, the term was used to refer to Syrian men who became leaders of Informal Tented Settlements (ITS) by seniority or by choice of the refugee community. As there are no official refugee camps for Syrians in Lebanon, informal settlements are managed privately between Lebanese landowners and the families that want to build tents on their land. The *shāwīsh* mediates between the families and the landowner. He also takes over agricultural work on behalf of the Lebanese landlord and employs other Syrians to work on it – especially women and children. In general, he acts as the sheriff of the refugee camp and manages the relationships between families and those with humanitarian workers. Many *shāwīshīe* rule the camp to their own advantage, they pocket some money from people's rent and humanitarian aid, and control people's movements and businesses. As a matter of fact, in some ITSs where humanitarian

aids were distributed, *shāwīsh* were reported to control the distribution of resources to the point of becoming crucial negotiators whose approval was indispensable for NGOs to operate. Nonetheless, some *shāwīsh* are also motivated by good intentions and have made a great effort to help refugee families.

Often, the recognition that a Syrian man obtains with the position of *shāwīsh* brings about social mobility and the advantage to regain self-worth and respect from the community. This was the case of Abū Maḥmūd, a Syrian man from rural Aleppo who became the *shāwīsh* of a small settlement in Akkar, after being chosen from the community.

> "I was always the one who helped others. Since we came here [in Lebanon], I was always ready to do something for my community. I help people to solve their problems. […] Being the *shāwīsh* of this community makes me feel respected and trusted" (Abū Maḥmūd, personal interview, ʿAdūe, Lebanon, May 15, 2018).

Abū Maḥmūd was chosen by the camp community for his attitude to help others. He and his wife also went through important transformations of gender roles and relations. However, he was able to use his personal attitude to his advantage in order to regain his self-worth and the respect of the community. It is worth observing that when Abū Maḥmūd stated he felt *trusted*, he meant more than this. The meaning of the Arabic word, *thiqa*, means "trust" and "confidence." Hence, by gaining the trust of the community, Abū Maḥmūd became more confident and regained his self-esteem, with which he could reconstruct his gender identity as the protector of the family and the community. A 40-year-old Syrian male participant from rural Homs, Sheīkh Aḥmed, who was displaced in the village of Minīāra, in Akkar, had a similar experience. Since he forcibly migrated to Lebanon, with his wife and one child, he always put himself at the service of the community. For this reason, he deserved the honorific title of *sheīkh*.

> "I became a *sheīkh*, even though I have no religious education because I am good at giving advice and supporting people. […] When I came to Lebanon, I was helping

people with everything I had. If someone needed a medical check or medicine, I used to help them find it. […] In 2013, some people I knew from Syria went through the journey of death [i.e. the crossing from Syria to Lebanon through the border of Wādī Khāled]. The journey can take up to one month and it is extremely hard. So there were these people crossing and I was still living in Wādī Khāled. They called me to help them out because they knew no one in Lebanon and some of them were in desperate conditions… So, I helped them and I hosted 92 people in my house! Imagine that, I had two rooms, a living room and a kitchen. It took forever if someone needed to go to the toilet! [He laughs] We stayed in this situation for one month. We had no one but each other" (Sheīkh Aḥmed, personal interview, Minīāra, Lebanon, June 21, 2018).

Unlike other people I met, Sheīkh Aḥmed stated he did not feel like a foreigner in Lebanon because he found a community of people he felt similar to in the way they thought and acted. I met Sheīkh Aḥmed in a Lebanese centre that supported Syrian children to pursue an education, where he was acting as the field manager of the project. The local organization leading the project strongly valued his opinion and considered him a focal point of the community.

"It wasn't easy for me to come to Lebanon, I was a civil activist in Syria and I had a position, I was respected. When I came to Lebanon I lost everything. […] Everything changed. It's difficult to think that you don't belong anywhere anymore. […] The community around me here never made me feel like a foreigner" (Sheīkh Aḥmed, personal interview, Minīāra, Lebanon, June 21, 2018).

In line with what other scholars have observed in their studies (Turner, 2000; Brun, 2000), the reconstruction of a new social identity as a community leader in Lebanon was certainly based on gender. Nevertheless, in Lebanon, some Syrian women were covering the position of community leaders or *shāwīsha*. Shāwīsha Labeeba, for example, was reported to be a focal point for local organizations, UN agencies, local authorities, and

Syrian families in an informal settlement in Akkar (Haddad, 2019). I never managed to meet her in person, but some people I talked to in Akkar referred to her as a matriarch who used to take care of people in her community as if they were her own children. However, Shāwīsha Labeeba never got married or had children. This may have given her the freedom to act against social norms, which otherwise would have wanted her relegated to her primary roles as mother and wife (humanitarian worker, personal interview, Tripoli, June 1, 2018).

The way Syrian women navigated a humanitarian system that considered them powerless victims is also worth mentioning. Some Syrian women who participated in this study complained about the programmes offered by humanitarian actors, asked to take part in different activities, or refused to participate at all. For instance, Monā, a Syrian woman from Homs, was not happy with the coiffeur and beauty workshop offered by a local NGO. She felt offended by the offer and she refused to participate.

> "They [the humanitarian worker] came to us [she and her sister] and invited us to participate in a workshop. They told us it was a project of economic empowerment for women and that we would have learnt skills useful to find a job. So, my sister and I went. We wanted to learn and improve ourselves. As we arrived we realized that it was a beauty workshop. I was not interested. […] These projects hurt my dignity. I want to learn real things that I can use here or wherever I end up living. I don't want to work in a beauty salon just because I am a woman!" (Monā, personal interview, El-Marj, Lebanon, September 8, 2018).

Similarly, Inṣāf, a woman from rural Damascus, who was displaced in Ghaze, in the Beqaa Valley, was not happy with the way humanitarian organizations assumed that she had gendered-specific needs.

> "I attended many classes with humanitarian organizations: sewing classes, cooking classes, beauty classes, but when those projects ended we always remained with nothing in our hands. So, I went with other Syrian women to the organization that

offered those courses and we asked if it was possible to have courses, to gain skills to open a small business" (Inṣāf, personal interview, Ghaze, Lebanon, September 24, 2018).

Like Inṣāf and Monā, other Syrian women in Lebanon became more self-aware and felt not comfortable with the way humanitarian organizations were dealing with their needs. Because cooking and sewing classes were not making them more skilled, they asked for tools of financial education to use already acquired skills and to be able to place themselves in the job market.

Local organizations interviewed for this research also confirmed the tendency. One humanitarian worker claimed that, with time, women's needs changed. If at the beginning of the crisis they were asking for hairdressing, makeup, or sewing classes, later on, they started requesting training courses that would help them have a career. English and French classes were also required by women who wanted to support their children with their homework better.[59] Lastly, according to humanitarian workers interviewed, because the "refugee crisis" has become protracted, recently Syrian women have started having more migration aspirations than before. For this reason, they are keener on improving their skills to be able to succeed in a potential migration project (humanitarian worker, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, March 31, 2018).

The way refugee men and women "manipulated" the system that allegedly put them in stereotyped and homogeneous gendered categories, has somehow been underestimated by the literature. Nonetheless, as I observed from people's accounts, there was a further step in the process. In some cases, by manipulating the system to their needs, Syrian women and men came to terms with gender role transformations. They started incorporating the new ideas in their relationships, which were now more egalitarian and power-balanced. This was the case of Zahra, whose husband, ʿAlī, felt somehow

---

[59] The language gap is the main obstacle for Syrian children's education. Starting from grade seven, the main subjects in public schools are taught in either English or French. In Syria, the teaching language is Arabic and most Syrian children have no knowledge of foreign languages (Focus group discussion with institutional and humanitarian actors. Beirut, March 14, 2018). See also UNHCR Education. Available at: http://www.unhcr.org/lb/education [Accessed March 11, 2020].

emasculated by the intrusion of humanitarian actors in their private life. According to Zahra, after a while, 'Alī started dealing with her aspirations differently, to the point that he opposed his own family to protect her empowerment ambitions.

> "I was offered a job as a teacher by the same organization [i.e. where she was attending the training courses]. My husband's family did not accept in the beginning, but my husband was supportive and eventually, they accepted. He has never done anything like that before. I think my husband realized the importance of a real partnership between women and men. After this incident, he never made a decision without consulting me first" (Zahra, personal interview, Majdal 'Anjar, Lebanon, September 19, 2018).

As a final consideration, it will be worth it to acknowledge that improvements have been made at the level of humanitarian interventions; especially in the way projects of women's empowerment were implemented. Over the past few years, many NGOs, international organizations, and local organizations started including men in their programmes of women's empowerment. Some agencies started offering activities to men in order for them to renegotiate their new position in the social space, others directly included them in the programmes created for women. This is what happened to Basām, who initially refused to let his wife Ṣafiyya participate in women's empowerment workshops. He was later invited to participate in one of those programmes with his wife, and eventually, he accepted.

> "With time, I changed my mind because the NGO came again and told me that I could participate too and that my contribution was important" (Basām, personal interview, Baalbek, Lebanon, September 20, 2018).

I suggest that Basām changed his mind because he felt included. A local NGO interviewed for this study confirmed my understanding and argued that men resisted humanitarian interventions at the beginning of the crisis because they considered that these new actors

threatened their dominant status. Nonetheless, men's inclusion in humanitarian programmes of gender equality and "empowerment" decreased their resistance.

> "When we started including men in our programmes, they became more comprehensive of the importance of women in their lives. For them, women were needed only for raising children and… in the bed. Now we see that things are changing. Men do not underestimate women's role, and they understand that women are important for the management of their lives – for family expenses, raising children, and taking decisions…" (Humanitarian worker, focus group discussion with institutional and humanitarian actors, Beirut, Lebanon, March 14, 2018).

Another humanitarian worker interviewed explained that sometimes providing vocational training to men helped to re-establish the patriarchal balance in the relationship and introduce them to ideas about gender equality (Focus group discussion with institutional and humanitarian actors. Beirut. March 14, 2018). Through such activities, men reinforced their power in their relationship with their spouses. They redeemed themselves from a contradictory gender position that undermined their masculinity. However, at the same time, they were introduced to concepts that they could use to build more equalitarian relationships with their wives. As a result, they could re-establish their role as protectors in a more gender-balanced framework. Nevertheless, humanitarian actors interviewed also argued that those programmes often encountered opposition at the community level, because local actors, as Syrian communities, or religious guides had a prominent role in maintaining patriarchal values.

> "In our interventions, sometimes we lose the attention of our participants because of stigma, and rejection by the community. This is one of the main challenges. The main problem is that religion is a very patriarchal system, and it is difficult to push people beyond the patriarchal representation of the family when the religious community is permeated by patriarchal values." (Humanitarian worker, focus

In my observation, the sustainability of those programmes remains an issue. Due to their temporality, those actions do not allow continuity in the process of re-evaluation and renegotiation of gender relations and gender roles. Moreover, although compared to other Arab countries, Lebanon is considered to have a relatively progressive legal structure, the country still strongly relies on a traditional patriarchal system that places women in the private sphere instead of the workforce (Avis, 2017). These obstacles are challenging to overcome. It would be too ambitious to believe that short-term empowerment programmes would have a long-term impact on gender relations to the point of breaking the patriarchal system. In this sense, through practices of inclusion and exclusion (Carpi, 2018), it seems that the humanitarian industry has an interest in maintaining the old structures alive, as they ensure the political and social stability of the country (Carpi, 2020a). This does not mean that humanitarian work has no influence at all in challenging patriarchal values. Most Syrian women and men I talked to had at least questioned traditional ideas and concepts about gender roles and relationships in some way.

4.3. Changing gendered aspirations: Confronting the loss of prior identities by projecting new ones

One of the techniques I used to analyze my data was to search for what surprised me the most. This exercise helped to identify the third typology of gender role and relationship transformations among Syrians in Lebanon: the changes in gendered aspirations. I was particularly surprised by how Syrian participants projected new gender identities to renegotiate the loss of prior identities as wives and husbands, and as mothers and fathers. They did so, through navigating new gendered aspirations by exploring new opportunities or imagining new openings. Both women and men were keen on reconstructing their gender identities as an individual exercise and in relational terms.

Looking at the literature, we cannot neglect the importance of Arjun Appadurai's conceptualization of aspirations (2004). Although he focused on disadvantaged groups in general, he gave very fascinating insights that can be applied to refugeehood. The Indian-American anthropologist argued that the *capacity to aspire* is not only based on class identity but is also gendered (Appadurai, 2004, p. 65). This capacity is a cultural capacity and a "navigational capacity", which is generally employed by the rich because they are better resourced, in terms of available experience, about the relationship between aspirations and outcomes (ibid., p. 68). In this sense, the poor accept the terms of the recognition of the cultural regime dominated by the rich in a Gramscian *senso comune*. Appadurai argued that the more privileged in the society have more opportunities to aspiring, while the less fortunate can afford fewer experiments as they "have a more brittle horizon of aspirations" (Appadurai, 2004, p. 69). Nonetheless, as the capacity to aspire is a cultural capacity, it "thrives and survives on practice, repetition, exploration, conjecture, and refutation" (ibid.). When the more disadvantaged exercise their voice as a cultural capacity and they oppose, contest, and debate this dominance through actions of performance, they can change the terms of recognition.

Appadurai's capacity to aspire can also be conceptualized in terms of reflexivity. As we have seen in Chapter 3, the reflexive capacity is something that all individuals can have. However, we may not exercise reflexivity at all times throughout our life. The "survival state" in refugeehood, for instance, might not allow people to see themselves reflexively, or to aspire. The powerless condition of "bare life" (Arendt, 1943) or *nuda vita* (Agamben, 1995) would not let people project themselves in the future and exercise their voice to redefine the terms of recognition with the dominant society or host communities. Many Syrians I met in Lebanon lived in a survival state, in extremely vulnerable conditions, which would not allow them to project themselves into future aspirations or new identities. On the other hand, some families that took part in this study fully exercised this capacity to aspire and projected new gendered identities by navigating various dimensions of aspirations. In particular, I observed three varieties of changing aspirations, which Syrian women and men used to come to terms with the loss of previous

gender roles in the social space. These are aspirations on migration, aspirations on work and education, and aspirations to participate in public life and political discourse.

Migration aspirations have been the focus of a rich literature (Carling, 2002; 2014; de Haas, 2011; Castles, 2010; Carling & Schewel, 2018). Scholars have investigated the triggers of migration aspirations (Alpes, 2014), the interplay between aspirations and the ability to migrate (Carling, 2002), the interactions of aspirations and migration decision-making (Müller-Funk, 2019) as well as aspirations on return or to stay immobile (Müller-Funk & Fransen, 2020; Schewel, 2015; 2020). Most literature about migration aspirations maintains a strict analytical division between voluntary and forced migration, often overlooking the complexity of migration processes and the impact of many other factors (de Haas, 2011; Müller-Funk, 2019). Migration is often not an option for Syrians in Lebanon. Due to the obstacles of the legal system, it is generally very complicated for Syrian nationals to be considered for formal resettlement through the UN. In general terms, only those who are formally registered with the UNHCR are eligible to be resettled. Nevertheless, resettlement capabilities are deficient compared to the case-load and only about 100.000 refugees have been resettled from Lebanon to other countries since 2011.[60] For this reason, many have tried to reach Europe spontaneously by attempting the dangerous journey, often facing tragic consequences. To respond to the increased demand for resettlement from Lebanon, in 2013, a privately sponsored programme of humanitarian corridors was established in Italy and later in France. The main aim was to prevent human trafficking, smuggling, and exploitation of vulnerable people, and allowing legal entry in Europe with a permanent humanitarian visa (just as the UN resettlement). Because this programme does not consider the formal registration of people as *de facto* refugees under the UNHCR, it opened the doors to more Syrians in Lebanon to access the legal channels of migration to Europe. Some of the families I interviewed were in this programme at different stages of the process. Some of them were about to leave Lebanon, others only at an initial stage, whereby their resettlement was not yet confirmed, and some families had the application

---

[60] See UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response – Lebanon. Available at: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71 [Accessed March 11, 2020].

rejected.[61] When talking to these families, I was especially interested in understanding their migration aspirations, their expectations, and perceptions about the resettlement country (in most cases Italy).

In terms of gender relations, migration aspirations among Syrians in Lebanon resulted in a very different experience for women and men who participated in this study. While men saw migration as an opportunity to gain back their old roles as breadwinners, women perceived it as a chance to liberate themselves from their previous roles especially from the control of the extended family. These dynamics were particularly evident for Riḍā, a man from Sweida, and his wife Rīm. They lived in a one-room basement apartment in Chūeīfāt, in the outskirt of Beirut, with their three children. When I met them, in June 2018, Riḍā's mother was also living with them, as she wanted to spend some more time with the family before they left for Italy. They had been accepted into the programme, and they would be leaving after a few weeks. I was particularly impressed by the extremely poor living conditions of this family: six people lived, ate, and slept in one room. In summer, they arranged an external sitting room in one corner of their building's parking garage to have "some more space to breath" (Rīm. Personal interview. Beirut, Lebanon, June 23, 2018). Like other Syrian families in Lebanon, Riḍā and Rīm had been granted the basement room of a building, in which they would have lived for free while working as janitors in the building. Rīm took care of most duties as a concierge, while Riḍā, formally in charge of the position, also had another job as a deliveryman. Despite the difficult conditions, they had to deal with, and the embarrassment of having guests in similar circumstances, they were extremely hospitable to my research assistant Ghīna and me. They were thrilled because they were accepted into the programme and they were already preparing to go to Italy. When I asked Riḍā what his expectations were and how he thought the life of his family would have changed in Italy, he gave me a very detailed description of how he expected it *not* to be.

---

[61] It is worth clarifying that the programme of humanitarian corridors has an active role in selecting the applicants and preparing them for the interviews with the embassy. However, the final decision of their acceptance or rejection is left in the hands of the host countries (Italy or France).

"I want a better life for my family. I want my kids to study and my wife to have the life she deserves. What we have here in Lebanon we cannot call it life. […] The other day we were watching the World Cup match and Brazil won against the other team… I don't remember which team it was. My kids support Brazil and when it won they exulted. They went outside running around and cheering and a resident [of the building] saw them and yelled at them telling them that they can't be so loud and disturb others. What he meant is that they can't make noise because they are Syrians. They can't play outside, like other kids, because they are Syrians and the residents of this building don't want to see Syrian kids playing around. […] One time, they [the children] ask me if I could bring them a PlayStation II and I felt so bad because I can't really afford that. It's really too expensive… But I told them I'd get them one as soon as we arrive in Italy" (Riḍā, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, June 23, 2018).

Riḍā's aspirations as a man were mostly related to his role as a provider. He wanted to provide a better life for his children and his wife where they would not feel humiliated for being Syrians. He was also very concerned about his wife.

"When my wife saw the room where we live for the first time she was shocked. She couldn't believe we would have lived here. […] I feel really sorry for her because sometimes she has to take care of my job as a janitor and the humiliation that it brings. One day, someone threw an open bag of garbage all over the stairs… the trash was all outside the bag. They did not even bother to remove it from there or to tell me to do it. So I was blamed for not keeping the stairs clean. I felt furious and humiliated and I wanted to yell and hit something, but my wife stopped me from doing any nonsense and she went to clean the stairs… I felt so bad. She is continuously humiliated here. I really wish I could give her a better life" (Riḍā, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, June 23, 2018).

Through migration, Riḍā hoped to redeem his role as a provider and protector to give his family a life where they are not "treated worse than animals" just because they are Syrians (Riḍā. Personal interview. Beirut, June 23, 2018). Riḍā's gendered aspirations related to migration were very connected to an idea of traditional masculinity, which is based on the expectations he had in Syria. In other words, by engaging in onward migration, he was willing to regain his old identity and reaffirm his prior gender role in the household.

Rīm, on the other hand, had different expectations from migration. She was the one who brought out the idea of resettlement in the family. She had heard from someone that a church or a Christian organization helped Syrian people to migrate to Europe and she discussed that with her husband.

"It was more than one year ago when my husband started working as a deliveryman. He met someone who told him that many organizations were helping people to migrate. So I started asking around and someone told me about this Christian organization in Beirut. I spoke with my husband and we decided to give it a try. He went there several times before he could finally find the right people" (Rīm, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, June 23, 2018).

Riḍā also recalled the struggle to connect with the organization in charge of humanitarian corridors. His account exemplifies his desperation and at the same time, the firm belief that he had to try everything in his power to provide his family with a better life and to realize Rīm's dream of migrating.

"I went to see this religious organization in Gemmayze [a neighbourhood of Beirut] for thirteen times. Can you imagine? It cost me a fortune to go there and come back home. I spent LBP 40.000 each time [around 23€], which means LBP 10.000 more than my daily salary as a deliveryman. But I had to insist because even if I had only a 1% chance to succeed it was worth the money and the effort. […] They rejected me every time, they said they were not helping people to migrate and they kicked me out. Finally, on the last day, a person in the church told me that it was someone

else doing this [the humanitarian corridors] and they told me where to find them. I went to see them and I succeeded" (Riḍā, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, June 23, 2018).

Rīm also aspired to migrate because she wanted her children to have a better life, an education, and a happy childhood.

"I want to leave Lebanon because people are too racist here with Syrians. My kids can't play outside like other kids because they are Syrians. This is too sad and makes me cry all the time. […] I want to be able to buy clothes for them and to give them a cheerful childhood, and a good education." […] I hope I can give them a better life and a future" (Rīm, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, June 23, 2018).

Rīm's humiliation for her children was not the only reason why she wanted to leave Lebanon. Her migration aspirations resulted from specific individual and relational pressures she was subjected to in her daily life. In Lebanon, she felt constantly judged by her husband's mother.

"One of my children failed at school this year, he didn't pass to the next class. I haven't told my husband yet. I'm afraid to tell him because he spent a lot of money on a private teacher for my son. […] Public schools are not good at all here, especially for Syrian kids. Nobody cares about them. […] I feel very much judged for the way I raise my kids, especially by my husband's mother. If they fail in anything, it's my fault" (Rīm, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, June 23, 2018).

Later in our conversation, she expressed the degree of pressure and control she had from Riḍā's mother more in detail:

"My husband and I have no life as a couple. We have no chance to spend some time together. We all live in one room. I basically sleep with my mother-in-law's feet on

my face. […] My husband's mother lives here with us… but she never leaves the room. Sometimes, if Riḍā and I want to have some intimate time, we ask her to take the children out… but this happens very rarely. […] I miss my husband… a lot! [She laughs]" (Rīm, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, June 23, 2018).

Through migration, Rīm hoped to gain freedom and liberate herself from the judgement of the extended family, represented by her mother-in-law. Her migration aspirations were gendered and relational, as she did not see migration as an individual improvement. In migration, she saw an opportunity to have a happy relationship with her husband and a better life with her family.

"I want to go to Italy in order to finally start my life with my husband. I haven't experienced life yet. I can't even untie my hair because if I do so, someone would judge me for doing it. I'm tired of feeling judged and controlled all the time" (Rīm, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, June 23, 2018).

Something curious happened during my conversation with Rīm. In my fieldwork, when it was possible, I asked couples to be interviewed separately. So when one of them was being interviewed, the other was not in the room. This was not always possible because some people did not have the chance to go somewhere else. In some cases, I did not even dare to ask people to leave their house and wait outside for one or two hours. This was one of those cases. When I saw Riḍā and Rīm's living conditions, I did not feel comfortable asking them to talk separately. However, they told me to do so in order to go on with their duties as janitors. Riḍā's mother, on the other hand, was staying around with the children. During Riḍā's interview, she disappeared but when Rīm was talking, she suddenly showed up and sat with us. I obviously could not say anything, but I noticed that Rīm changed the way she talked and answered my questions. She somehow restrained herself from speaking freely. After the interview, when we were outside the sitting room and about to leave, Rīm took Ghīnā aside and privately spoke to her. My fieldnotes best narrate the facts:

"Rīm took Ghīnā aside while Riḍā was showing me their place and the surrounding of the building. She told her that during the interview, when Riḍā's mother came, she was no longer free to speak. She had to keep her mouth shut and answer superficially because she could not say the truth in front of her. She said she could no longer stand Riḍā's mother. The woman interferes with their lives constantly – especially with Rīm's. She judges everything Rīm does with the house, with the children, and with her own husband. Rīm thinks that her mother-in-law does not leave the house on purpose so that they cannot remain alone. She said to Ghīnā that she can't wait to be in Italy so she can finally liberate herself from that woman and they can finally have a real life as a couple" (Fieldnotes, Beirut, Lebanon, June 23, 2018).

The control of Riḍā's mother over Rīm is what Deniz Kandiyoti (1988) described as a "cyclical nature of women's power in the household" (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 279). In classic patriarchal environments, young brides experience deprivation and hardship and total control over their lives, labour, and progeny (ibid.). They will eventually supersede this authority over their daughters-in-law. This cycling nature of authority and the anticipation of the power they will gain make this condition more tolerable and this form of patriarchy internalized. In this sense, Rīm's gendered aspiration lies in her subversive desire to migrate in order to liberate herself from this system.

According to Moulton et al. (2015), aspirations differ from expectations. While the former represents something that individuals would like to achieve, the latter reflects something that they think that they will achieve. In my understanding, expectations are also projections into the future. However, they remain in the field of anticipation, while aspirations go more in depth into imagining the future less fantastically and more realistically because they are based on an internal consideration that migration is preferable to non-migration (Carling, 2002).[62] Nonetheless, not all individuals who have

---

[62] Whether individuals have the resources to achieve aspirations lies in the debate of aspirations against abilities, which has been widely addressed by Jørgen Carling (2002).

aspirations to migrate have the resources to achieve them. Carling (2002) called these people involuntary non-migrants (ibid., p. 12-13). Their aspirations and self-projections into a possible future remained unattained. They are left only with expectations, which are not likely to be realized.

While Riḍā and his family had both migration aspirations and the resources to achieve them, other people did not. Some participants perceived expectations about migration unrealistically. In particular, they anticipated a quasi-perfect life, which disguised an imprecise knowledge of the challenges of migration and the opportunities offered by resettlement countries. While I have discussed the gap between migration expectations and host country opportunities in another paper based on fieldwork in Italy (Tuzi, 2019), I found similar dynamics among Syrian men in Lebanon who aspired at migrating but did not have the means to do it. For instance, Salīm, a man from rural Damascus, who was displaced lived in Beirut, had unrealistic migration expectations based on the accounts of friends who had migrated to Europe before. Salīm had his resettlement application rejected for reasons that he did not specify or did not know. Nonetheless, migrating was a big concern for Salīm and this topic took ample space in his interview with me.

> "If I had the chance to migrate, I would like to work in restaurants. Being a deliveryman here in Lebanon made me skilled in this field. I know exactly what happens in restaurants. […] I know that you can earn a lot of money by doing this job. […] My friends in Europe also told me that in Europe you receive 2.000€ from the State and if you also work you can make at least 500€ or 1.000€ more. […] Here [in Lebanon] renting a house costs 500$, in Europe, it will not be so expensive – or at least not in comparison with your income. Am I right?" (Salīm, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, June 27, 2018).

Salīm's expectations about migration were driven by other people's accounts of life improvement after migration. Informal exchange of information between migrants is very

powerful, and often more substantial than the information given by institutions, practitioners, and researchers.

> "One of my best friends migrated to Europe two years ago. At that time, I was scared to go with him across the sea. I didn't want to risk my life. Now I wish I had gone with him […] We have reached a point in which we are not considered humans anymore. This is not life anymore" (Salīm, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, June 27, 2018).

Like Salīm, other male participants I talked to thought about undertaking a spontaneous migration through the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe. They did not have a clear idea of what to expect from Europe, but rather a monolithic understanding of Europe as a perfect land. In most cases, expectations were based on "sweetened" accounts given by other migrants.

The case of Lebanon was particularly fascinating in terms of work and educational aspirations, the second type of changing gendered aspirations that I have observed among Syrian families. This was so for two main reasons. In the first place, the country poses several limitations to Syrians' work and study aspirations. As already mentioned, working is only formally allowed in a few sectors, while higher education is either too expensive or not easily accessible for displaced Syrians. Secondly, Lebanon's cultural environment is somehow similar to Syria, especially in rural areas, and it encourages the continuity of gender roles, norms, and relations. The control of the extended family or community is still very substantial, and social cohesion incidents are common. Acting against the tradition would bring about stigma because the traditional society (or *al-mujtamaʿ al-taqalīdī*) can still exercise tight control over Syrians in Lebanon. Despite these obstacles, which created a systematic exclusion of Syrian men and women from most working sectors and education, some people did not interiorize those exclusions and decided to stand out from the crowd and attain their aspirations. For these two reasons, I was particularly attracted by people's subversion of traditional and classical patterns.

Perhaps what most captured my attention was the re-signification of women's education after displacement. After forcibly migrating to Lebanon, many women underwent new incitements and encouragements. This certainly occurred in a framework of women's empowerment promoted by Western and local organizations, which I have discussed previously. Nonetheless, Syrian women acted to pursue an education in different ways and for different reasons, which did not always include the involvement of humanitarian actors. By re-signification of women's education, I refer to the process of embedding education in a framework of self-awareness and recognition of one's rights. In Syria, women were not particularly encouraged to enter the workforce, while their education was generally well supported. Before the war, Syria was one of the most educated countries in the Middle East (Lie & Vogt, 2002), as education was compulsory and free. Nonetheless, despite higher levels of education that women obtained compared to men (63.1% of women attended secondary school against 62.8% of men), political and social barriers limited them from entering the labour market (UNICEF, 2013).[63]

During the years that I spent in Lebanon before and during my PhD, I observed that Syrian women's aspirations on education and work shifted. While between 2014 and 2016, I could notice a limited number of Syrian women talking about their desire to improve their skills to enter the job market. After 2018, more and more Syrian women were eager to learn and challenge the role society assigned them. In my view, this shift was influenced by many factors. While international NGOs had a role in promoting women's economic empowerment and women's access to the labour market, the protraction of displacement was also an essential factor because it increased the need to earn a salary and become more actively engaged in public life. Over time, more and more women felt the need to improve their education and their skills to increase their chances of being employed in the job market.

Laiāl's account is very significant in this sense. Laiāl was in her late twenties when we met in Ain El Remmaneh, a neighbourhood of Beirut, at the beginning of 2018. She came from rural Homs and had lived in Lebanon since 2013. She was a woman full of

---

[63] See UNICEF Education Data 2013. Available at:
https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/syria_statistics.html [Accessed January 12, 2019].

vitality, despite the hardship she faced in her life. She was a single mother of two children. Her husband had disappeared in Syria years before and she was forced to move to Lebanon where she had relatives.

> "I started studying English this year. The classes are offered by a Lebanese organization. I'm French-educated so I've never studied English before. […] I decided to start because I want to be able to help my kids with their studies. […] I want my kids to be proud of me. If they ask me a question I want to be able to answer. […] I studied until 9th grade in Syria, but then I didn't continue. I got married at a very young age and I got pregnant soon. Here, in Lebanon, I feel like I started another life and I want to do the things that I haven't done before" (Laiāl, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, November 21, 2017).

Laiāl, in Lebanon, lived with her aunt and uncle. She did not depend on them financially, but she felt the pressure of the tradition on how her family members discouraged her from acting against the norms.

> "My family never encouraged me to study and even today they push me to get married again. When I told my aunt that I wanted to start studying again, she asked me why. I told her that it's my desire to learn and to do something good. […] One day I told a relative that I want to be an example for my kids, and she answered that I should get married to a man who can be an example for them. […] I don't want to accept this. I don't want this for my kids. […] I want them to have a better life than the one I had. They should study, learn many languages, go abroad and be able to live with dignity" (Laiāl, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, November 21, 2017).

By rejecting the idea that she was not entitled to be an example for her children, Laiāl refused to feel delegitimized by accessing a field that is male-dominated or controlled by

the dominant group. I later asked Laiāl what kind of future aspirations she had, and this is what she replied:

> "I want to learn English and go to university. I want to become a teacher and to work to help children like my own to have a better life. […] I became stronger in Lebanon. The responsibilities I had to bear made me the person I am today. I used to get scared of everything in Syria. Here I'm not anymore. […] I want to bloom like a flower, not withering like a dead branch" (Laiāl, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, November 21, 2017).

Daūla, just like Laiāl, had the aspiration to study. She was a 30-year-old woman from rural Damascus, who was displaced in El-Marj, in the Beqaa Valley, with her husband's family and two children. She was widowed; her husband died in Syria. She migrated to Lebanon with her in-laws, with whom she was already living in Syria. In El-Marj, she worked in a small shop, which her father-in-law had rented to make a living. She did not get any salary from the shop, but she was willing to improve the activity, so she enrolled in a course of financial education organized by an international organization.

> "I wanted to improve the activity. When he opened the shop, my father-in-law was not skilled in this field. He didn't know how to run an activity, so he got bored very quickly. And he asked me to work here. I was happy because I had the chance to do something during the day. […] I didn't have knowledge in this field either, so I didn't know if we were going to make enough money or not. I started attending a course with an NGO and they taught me a lot. Now I can use these new skills to improve the activity" (Daūla, personal interview, El-Marj, Lebanon, September 7, 2018).

Daūla had never worked in Syria and she acknowledged she never had the aspiration to work or study before. The job opportunity her father-in-law offered her opened doors to future possibilities that she had never thought of before. I then asked Daūla how she

would identify herself, as a woman, now in Lebanon.

> "I'm not a wife anymore. I'm a mother and I'll always be. But I know that I can be something else as well. Being a mother does not prevent me from being a woman who is able to take care of other things. I always liked math and I'm good at this […] Now, I want to become the creator of my life" (Daūla, personal interview, El-Marj, Lebanon, September 7, 2018).

In Lebanon, Daūla no longer identified herself as someone who was not entitled to access work and education. In other words, she did not internalize this social exclusion based on gender. Many authors have argued that social class is a key factor for social exclusion in higher education (Thompson, 2000; Reay, 2001; Archer, 2003) and that the hegemonic discourse of social exclusion is embedded in taken-for-granted assumptions about failure or cultural deficit of marginalized groups (Archer & Leathwood, 2003; Burke, 2006). These problematic suppositions are present in every society and are internalized by both the dominant and the dominated groups. Since Daūla's social context changed (she was asked to work), she no longer identified herself with the traditional femininity identity, which would exclude her from that field. I later asked Daūla if she encountered resistance from her in-laws. Because she lived with her husband's family, I imagined that she was part of a rather traditional environment. However, I also assumed that they could not have hindered her aspirations significantly if she had attained them.

> "Actually they [her in-laws] didn't want me to attend the course. They didn't want me to be successful in my work. My husband's father just wanted me to sit there and wait for the customers. But I wanted to do more. […] I made small changes in the shop and I tracked the income and expenses" (Daūla, personal interview, El-Marj, Lebanon, September 7, 2018).

By acting against her in-laws, who represented the tradition, Daūla became able to attain her changed gendered aspirations, which were no longer only related to her identity as a

mother and as a wife, but also included aspirations that are not "traditionally" associated with being a woman. Although Daūla did not receive a salary from her work and asserted she did not find it easy to deal with her husband's family, she acted against them and against what they thought would be the norm for her.

Educational aspirations have not only changed for Syrian women. Syrian men who participated in this research have also acknowledged that they gave more importance to education after displacement. This was the case of Yūsef, a photographer from rural Aleppo, who lived in the southern outskirt of Beirut, with his wife and three children. He had placed an application for relocation to Italy, but he was only at the beginning of the process and his departure was not confirmed yet. In our conversation, he confessed that he had a dream – he wanted to become a nurse.

"My dream is to become a nurse. I found a nursing sciences course at the Lebanese University. If my application to Italy is not accepted, I will register the next semester. […] If I have the chance to go to Italy, I would still like to become a nurse. Can a man become a nurse in Italy?" (Yūsef, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, June 25, 2018).

In the context of men's educational aspiration, Burke (2006) argued that aspirations are shaped around complex negotiations, which are made within the social context and can change according to the identification with that context (Burke, 2006, p. 720). Aspirations are formed around class and gender identifications, which are discursively constituted (ibid.). Because aspirations are socially contextualized and embedded in gender relations, both femininity and masculinity identifications act to shape aspirations. Nonetheless, since these identifications can change according to the social context, also aspirations change. Being a nurse fits perfectly in the category of traditional male aspirations. In Syria, it was not considered a woman's job, as in many other countries, including Western countries. What changed for Yūsef was the decision to study instead of working – which is what the traditional society would expect from him as a man, a husband, and a father. In rural areas in Syria, where families had properties and lands, studying was not considered a good

investment for the future. In urban or mountain areas, women and men were more encouraged to study because they would be employed as civil servants if they had an education. However, it was rarely worth it for people to study after getting married (Syrian activist, personal interview, Berlin, July 20, 2020). In this sense, Yūsef, who came from a rural area, changed his aspirations and challenged the idea that study is not worth it for an adult man.

The attitude to aspire to something different from what was considered "traditional" in Syria also emerged from the focus group discussions with women. Albeit with many differences, many women claimed that they had the aspiration to learn more and that they valued education more than they did before.

"I want to learn for the sake of my children. I want them to be properly educated. In Lebanon, they are not educated. Nobody cares about them" (Syrian woman, Focus group discussion, Beirut, Lebanon, January 17, 2018).

"Syrian people usually don't study or get a degree. They believe that if they study they won't find a job, and even if they do they will be underpaid. I used to believe this too, back in Syria. Now, I understand how important it is to learn" (Syrian woman, Focus group discussion, Baalbek, Lebanon, September 25, 2018).

"It's not that we have more freedom here. In Syria, our husbands used to take care of everything, including official papers. Now we can go out alone and get everything we need. I had to force myself to deal with those things. I had to study to be able to understand them properly" (Syrian woman, Focus group discussion, Beirut, Lebanon, January 17, 2018).

"In Lebanon, I realized how important is to study. We had our land in Syria, and we didn't need to get a degree. Here without education, it's impossible to find a job" (Syrian woman, Focus group discussion, Beirut, Lebanon, January 17, 2018).

A final type of changed gendered aspirations among Syrians in Lebanon are aspirations to participate in public and political life. A number of Syrians who participated in this study claimed that after forcibly migrating they aspired to be more politically involved in the discourse around Syria's reconstruction and democratic transition or in advocating against human rights violations in Syria. Many displaced families have faced security incidents like arbitrary arrests, random stops at checkpoints, political harassment, and mandatory military conscriptions for men between 18 and 42 years old (Yahya et al., 2018). In Lebanon, they have more space and freedom to express themselves publicly and politically (Syrian activist, personal interview. Berlin, July 2020). Although only a minority of interviewees was politically active in displacement, many of them felt insecure at a political level in Syria – a condition that was exacerbated by the deterioration of security conditions due to the war. Participants gave very significant accounts in this sense:

"You are always afraid in Syria. You don't know what you are afraid of, but you are afraid" (Khāled, personal interview, Minīe, Lebanon, June 26, 2018).

"I used to stay at home all the time in Syria, but things changed here. I feel more secure! Even before the outbreak of the war in Syria, I was afraid to go out. Now, I can go out, even at night, without fear" (Syrian woman, focus group discussion, Beirut, Lebanon, January 17, 2018).

"Security was the main issue in Syria, even before the war. We had our land, our work, but we didn't feel secure. […] This is never going to change if he [Bashar Al-Assad] stays" (Badr, personal interview, Tel ʿAbbās, Lebanon, June 14, 2018).

These are only some of the numerous accounts of political insecurities in Syria. These stories of fear are not to contrast with the sense of security in the host country. Many participants felt equally insecure in Lebanon or Germany for different reasons. It is important to notice here that many Syrian men and women felt uncomfortable politically

and, as a consequence, felt the need to be politically involved in the struggle against those insecurities.

Sheīkh Aḥmad, whom I mentioned in a previous section of this chapter, was perhaps one of the most noteworthy examples of politically involved people even after displacement. In Syria, he was an activist. He advocated for social cohesion and equal rights of all religious sects and communities. The regime persecuted him for his actions. In Lebanon, he restored his activism aspirations, as he was no longer afraid of disseminating messages of justice and freedom.

"My mother is Shia and my father is Sunni. […] In 2013, when the regime came into our area, I became an activist. I made an initiative to gather all Muslims and Shia together. I thought it would be a good thing to make people aware of what was happening in the country and about the risks of being divided. Unfortunately, the officials in the regime didn't think the same. One night, it was Ramadan and it was very late, I received a call from an official in the regime. He told me to leave Syria because they were coming after me. I didn't take it seriously in the beginning. The next day, that person called me again and told me 'I told you, you should go as soon as possible! Your name is not on the blacklists at the borders yet, but it will be soon!' So I didn't have time to think. We prepared ourselves, took a few things and left. […] Then, I was informed that they came and destroyed my house and everything. I also had a big library – it was gone" (Sheīkh Aḥmed, personal interview, Miniāra, Lebanon, June 21, 2018).

In Lebanon, Sheīkh Aḥmad addressed his political aspirations differently – towards children's education. When he fled, he first helped to build up an informal settlement for displaced Syrians in Akkar, and then he built a school for Syrian children. When I asked Sheīkh Aḥmad what had changed in his way of being politically active, he said that two things had changed since he left Syria. In the first place, Lebanon was a foreign country for him, and although he was surrounded by people he trusted and made him feel at home,

he felt he did not have complete freedom of action. Secondly, he had recently become a father, which strongly influenced his way of being an activist.

> "Since I became a father, I understood the importance of education, because future generations are those who will have to fight for their rights. […] Building a school and educating our kids it was the first thing I'd want to do when I came to Lebanon" (Sheīkh Aḥmed, personal interview, Minīāra, Lebanon, June 21, 2018).

Sheīkh Aḥmad's political aspirations changed their focus. While back in Syria he was focusing on social cohesion and was politically active. In Lebanon, he focused on fostering children's education as a form of non-formal political participation.

Another participant I have already mentioned, Ward, also became more active politically in Lebanon. She was particularly involved in feminist movements and civil society activism about citizenship, gender equality, and transitional justice. She came from a religious background, and after she encountered the world of feminist thinking, in displacement, she started questioning how feminist theories would match with the principles of Islam. She started reading contemporary interpretations of *sharīʿa* law to articulate a feminist discourse within the Islamic paradigm (Badran, 2009). Through this discourse and practice, Ward engaged in political actions, mostly based on helping other women participate.

> "With her engagement in feminist activities, Ward tries to do something useful for women and men in society. She said that her intent is to 'remove the layers of ignorance covering social norms and interpretations of religious texts.' This ignorance, she said, is ruling the society, and the only way to fight it is to raise awareness, starting from small circles of people and ending up with participating in global networks" (Fieldnotes, Berlin-Amsterdam, Germany, July 10, 2020).

Ward's engagement in Islamic feminism was a process that I followed closely. We had been friends since 2016. She had arrived in Lebanon only a couple of years before. She

comes from a rather traditional family, and she has a strong faith herself. However, in Lebanon, the discourse around gender equality started arousing her curiosity. She soon became more interested in the world of *ijtihād,* the process of hermeneutics through which the Qur'an is interpreted, and she started reading the works of Muslim thinkers and liberal theologians like Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Muhammad Shahrour, and Mohamed Habash. According to Renata Pepicelli (2010), Islamic feminism represents a new and complex way of feminine self-positioning, which is capable of merging multiple identities: to be a woman, a Muslim, a religious person. It allows full integration of women within the social and historical context of the XXI century, both in the Muslim world and in the West (Pepicelli, 2010, p. 47). For Ward, not only was it important to be active politically in displacement, but she also believed that it was impossible not to be. The reason for this was very insightful:

"I realized that the reason behind all this [the Syrian war, the displacement etc.] is that I didn't care about politics before. I thought it was only for men or for those in power. This is an idea that I developed step by step. Now, I think that it's necessary to be involved in politics and even if I implement initiatives in my *ḥāra*, my neighbourhood, it's a political action. Anything you do outside the private sphere, it's political participation" (Ward, personal interview, Berlin-Amsterdam, July 12, 2020).

Like Ward, other Syrian women who took part in this study believed that political participation could be attained through public sphere activities. Nasīma, for example, claimed:

"I don't know if you can call it political participation, but I think everything that allows women to gather together and share ideas is political participation. We couldn't do such things in Syria. Now we can freely talk about our ideas and our worries. We can talk about our future as women, as wives, and as mothers and how

we want our society to be" (Nasīma, personal interview, Baalbek, Lebanon, May 2, 2018).

For other people, joining Syrian civil society organizations in Lebanon was a form of political empowerment because these movements did not exist and were not allowed in pre-2011 Syria (Mattes, 2018, p. 35). In this sense, such a change occurred for both women and men. For a man who participated in the focus group discussion in Baalbek, it was essential to be involved in themes like civil peace, civil rights, and human rights.

> "I think political participation can happen in many ways. I personally fight for non-violent political change. [...] I am with the opposition, and I think we have a mission, here [in Lebanon]. We need to continue our fight for justice and political transition" (Syrian man, focus group discussion, Baalbek, Lebanon, September 25, 2018).

Formal and non-formal political participation did not come without any limitations. Some women, in particular, had severe repercussions for being politically active. For example, Ward was constantly controlled by the General Security, a Lebanese intelligence agency dealing with foreigners, and the Syrian regime in the diaspora. While the General Security used to limit her movements inside and outside Lebanon by denying her a regular residence permit, the Syrian regime used to control her actions through the Syrian diaspora in Lebanon. My fieldnotes account for two particular events we discussed together.

> "Ward told me that her name is associated with those of dissident political activists and that the regime now controls her through the Syrian community in Lebanon. She told me that her father was questioned about her working activities with a local NGO that deals with women's empowerment. He had to say that she only works there because she needs a job and that she has nothing to do with those dissident activists" (Fieldnotes, Chtoura, Lebanon, August 23, 2019).

"Ward was supposed to go abroad this week. She was invited to a conference in Asia and she tried to get her residence permit renewed at the General Security in order to leave. She was refused the residence permit, but not the departure. This means that if she goes, she might not be able to enter Lebanon again. That's the way they deal in Lebanon with Syrian political activists" (Fieldnotes. Chtoura, Lebanon, June 24, 2019).

Deniz Kandiyoti (2013) already raised the issue of "post-revolutionary violence" against women in public spaces and protests. She argued that because the discourse of positional superiority of men over women can no longer stand up, and women who became politically active will not go back to their previous roles, a phenomenon called "masculinist restoration" came up. It occurs when patriarchy feels threatened by changing gender roles. It needs higher coercion levels to ensure its survival and reproduction (Kandiyoti, 2013). In line with this literature, many women in this study faced the judgement of the community and extended family or other forms of violence for being subversive in their formal and non-formal political actions and not having maintained the roles assigned to them by the "tradition".

Challenging the social perception to change the culture

Among Syrians in Lebanon, changed aspirations entailed a rejection of a previous gender identity and a projection of one's self into new identities. These identities were to be renegotiated in the social context, which did not always welcome new gendered aspirations. By projecting these new selves into aspirations on migration, work and education, and participation in public and political life, Syrian men and women in this study challenged the social perception to change the culture.

Yūsef talked clearly about this in his interview. He implied that his aspiration of becoming a nurse in Lebanon or Italy was a form of political action. By pursuing his educational aspiration, which was not compliant with his given-for-granted masculine

identity, he became a political subject. Moreover, by challenging the social perception of the male identity he aims to change the culture of a man.

"I don't mind doing something different from what other men do. We need to change what we do, to change the way we think" (Yūsef, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, June 25, 2018).

The idea of "changing what we do, to change the way we think" (*mnaghīr shū mnaʿmel la mnaghīr el-tariʿa mnfakar*) often came out from interviews where people articulated their changing aspirations. Some of them assumed that those subversive behaviours did not come without a prior acknowledgement of the exclusions. The motivation to act against the reproduction of cultural and social exclusions was for many participants a driver that they could not ignore.

In this study, Syrian women advanced a political consciousness by becoming aware of the power structures in which they acted and the actions they needed to undertake to break them. In this sense, Syrian women who participated in this study challenged the perception and especially the one-sided understanding promoted by the West. Various authors (Enloe, 2004; Abu-Lughod, 2013) have noticed that the era of Western military interventions in the Middle East has encouraged a Western perception of Arab women as in need of protection from repressive regimes and families. This was a way to justify the war on terror. This understanding limited the focus on women's experiences and it is far from the self-perception that many of my interviewees had. For women in this study, being a mother and a wife did not dim other aspirations. Some Syrian women became active as political subjects through motherhood and in their relationships with their partners.

Wālida, a woman from rural Aleppo who lived in Zaḥle, is representative of this attitude. In our interview, she showed a strong political consciousness and a great awareness of her reproductive health, including understanding her social exclusion and discrimination.

"I always wanted to have a lot of kids. But when we came to Lebanon I decided not to have more children. […] A child should grow up in a place where he can be happy, healthy, educated, and have the same rights as other kids. Lebanon does not give us this chance. […] My husband didn't have the same opinion in the beginning, then I talked to him and together we decided not to have more children until our situation improves" (Wālida, personal interview, Zaḥle, Lebanon, September 6, 2018).

According to Penny Johnson (2018), women's participation in public life and their political involvement have often neglected a focus on the family. Their experiences only recently have started being analyzed within a multi-dimensional framework of gender and family (Johnson, 2018, p. 447). Wālida's family planning is a non-formal political action because she acknowledged the scarce opportunities that their future children would have compared to other children in Lebanon. For this reason, she decided not to have another child and to wait for better circumstances. Wālida's non-formal political action is to be understood in a relational framework, as she involved her husband in family planning decisions.

Zaīnab and her husband Khalīl, a 28-year-old couple from Aleppo, who lived in Baalbek, used similar mechanisms to act against the power structures wherein they were positioned. They got married in Syria in 2013, five years before I met them, and soon after, they fled to Lebanon following the occupation of the area by the regime forces. Although they had a "complete marriage" in Syria and celebrated the wedding, they decided not to have children until they were "in a better position" (Zaīnab, personal interview, Baalbek, Lebanon, May 2, 2018).

"We're really looking forward to having children. We got married because we love each other, but we promised each other that we would have a better life than this. We don't want to have children in Lebanon, where none of us has rights and we're not even considered human beings" (Zaīnab, personal interview, Baalbek, Lebanon, May 2, 2018).

"We're now trying to migrate. We used to study at the university when the siege happened [the siege of Aleppo, 2011-2014], but we could not finish our studies. Now we are trying to go abroad with a student visa" (Khalīl, Baalbek, Lebanon, May 2, 2018).

Zaīnab and Khalīl's decision to wait for better circumstances before starting a family is a form of non-formal political action because just as in Wālida's case, planning a family is for them a way to oppose the discriminatory contexts offered by Lebanon. According to Khalīl, their decision raised many concerns within their families, as couples are expected to have children soon after they got married, and family planning is not always well accepted by society.

A noteworthy aspect was the relational side of these negotiations. Interviewed men, who manifested changed gendered aspirations, became aware of new opportunities to express their identity in a relational space. This space is still dominated by power relations but can be challenged or called into question thanks to a new awareness. Yūsef, again, gives an insightful account of this awareness:

"In Lebanon, I became more aware of my relationship with my wife. I understand that we are partners, not only husband and wife. I value her opinion more now and we make decisions together. […] We talked a lot about how we want our life to be. And we decided we need to make an effort to have that life" (Yūsef, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, June 25, 2018).

Yūsef's reflexive projection of a better life is also a projection of a new self in the relationship with her partner and children.

In terms of women's role transformations, scholars agreed on the "no going back debate" (Johnson, 2018), which argues that after becoming active in struggles for full citizenship and human rights, women are no longer willing to go back to the domestic

sphere. Syrian participants' accounts show that this is true not only for women but also for men:

> "One of the main things I've learnt in Lebanon is that I can be someone else. And that the world will not fall apart if I don't do what the society wants me to do" (Sari, personal interview, Ghaze, Lebanon, September 24, 2018).

> "I'm a new man and I can't go back to the man I was before" (Syrian man, focus group discussion, Baalbek, Lebanon, September 25, 2018).

> "I want to understand the world better and especially understand why I should have certain rights" (Rodeyna, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, June 27, 2018).

To go back to Yūsef's idea of "changing what we do to change the way we think", aspirations, or possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), in their multi-dimensional forms, have the ultimate goal of changing the social surrounding by changing other's perceptions. In my study, Syrian men and women changed what they did, or the way they acted, in an attempt to change the way others perceived them. In this way, they hoped they changed the way others think about them; hence, the social and cultural environment around them. In this sense, changed gendered aspirations are political actions capable of revisiting and transforming hegemonic social structures.

4.4. Gender relation transformations in the private space: The reconstruction of intimacy in displacement

In the previous section of this chapter, I looked at how relationships were renegotiated in the public space by creating new gendered aspirations. In this section, I will examine how relationships changed in the private space. For this last typology of gender role and

relationship transformations, I will consider how changes in the private space have impacted relationships and how intimacy is renegotiated.

The impact of war, displacement, and migration on intimate relationships has been previously addressed from a clinical and psychological perspective (Rizkalla & Segal, 2019; Muchoki, 2017; Henry et al., 2011; Dekel & Solomon, 2006; Laliberté et al., 2003; Attaca & Berry, 2002), but little is known from a sociological point of view. Some studies focused specifically on intimate partner violence in displacement (Wachter et al., 2018; Khazaei, 2019), gender-based violence, early marriages and survival sex (Charles & Denman, 2013; Schlecht et al., 2013), and conflict and separation (Sarabwe, 2018). Only a few studies are dedicated to the intimate space of Syrian women and men (Charles & Denman, 2013; Culcasi, 2019; Rizkalla & Segal, 2019). While the academic and grey literature mostly looks at the adverse effects of displacement on marital relationships, a few studies reported positive effects like increased of couples' intimacy, affection and communication in displacement (Hyman et al. 2011; Shirpak et al. 2011). In my study, forced migration resulted in having a profound impact on intimacy. However, in line with Brun & Fábos (2015), I noticed that despite the harshest conditions, participants continued to recreate a sense of home by re-establishing familiarity and relationships and re-signifying "homemaking practices" (Brun & Fábos, 2015, p. 10). In this sense, intimate spaces revealed invisible ways in which forced displacement is entangled with daily life, coping practices and gender relations (Culcasi, 2018).

The impact of forced migration on the intimate lives of married refugees cannot be discussed without engaging a certain level of sensitivity and critical attitude. Certain issues of people's private life are difficult to discuss due to the discretion of some people or the conservative background of some Syrian families. It is especially not so obvious for anyone to discuss such topics with strangers, particularly when people's intimate life has been profoundly affected by displacement and war. For example, Syrian women's sexual and reproductive health rarely came out during my interviews, supposedly because of the stigmatization, these issues would bring about. Except for women and men who used family planning as a political action, which we have seen in the previous section, Syrian women and men were reluctant to discuss their sexual health, practices, or opinions.

Nonetheless, in some cases, these themes came out spontaneously, especially in interviews with Syrian women, where the research setting was particularly intimate (e.g., at their homes, and when there was plenty of time to talk). Although only a small sample of participants brought out this topic, I believe it is essential to give space to intimate relationships. They can reveal a great deal about complex and changing relationships and how families cope with displacement in the private sphere.

Intimacy has different dimensions. Jamieson (1998; 2011) defined intimacy as "the quality of close connections between people and the process of building this quality" (Jamieson, 2011, p. 1). Intimacy, as a form of doing family, is a social practice that shapes social identities, enabling and generating a subjective sense of closeness (Jamieson, 2011). In developing their Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR) scale to evaluate the level of intimacy within a relationship, Schaefer & Olson (1981) have identified five dimensions of intimacy, which are theoretically and clinically validated (Schaefer & Olson, 1981; Rizkalla & Segal, 2019). These are emotional, social, intellectual, sexual, and recreational intimacy (Schaefer & Olson, 1981). In my study, two dimensions of intimacy mainly came out related to changes in relationships – emotional and sexual intimacy. In particular, where profound changes in the private space occurred, intimacy was reconstructed as part of the renegotiation of the relationship.

The idea of intimate space is strongly connected with that of "home", as for many participants, intimate life was associated with the private sphere. With displacement, the private space and the meaning of home are subjected to changes, especially when life becomes dire. Living conditions for Syrian participants in Lebanon were generally very precarious as displaced families often lived in extremely vulnerable settings. While only a minority of Syrians in Lebanon live in spontaneously set-up refugee camps, or Informal Tented Settlements (ITS), many "urban refugees" live in unfinished houses, garages, and other shelter-like settings in cities or villages, which are below living standards, overcrowded or in dangerous conditions (UNHCR, 2019). Many of the people who participated in this study lived in overcrowded apartments, unfinished houses, or garages. Only some of them were displaced in informal refugee camps. The settings where gender relation transformations impacted the most on intimate life were informal settlements and

overcrowded apartments – settings where spaces were "profoundly unhomely" (Blunt & Dowling, 2006, p. 221), or where privacy was not always possible to maintain. Nonetheless, the topic of intimacy came out in its emotional form, also in settings where Syrian families lived in privately rented apartments, isolated from the local and Syrian society.

Sohā and Badr are a forty-year-old couple from rural Homs, displaced in a small tented settlement in Tel ʿAbbās, in the region of Akkar. They lived in a one-room tent with their four children and shared a small bathroom with around ten other families settled in the same land. Ramadan of 2018 had just passed when I first reached out to them. I first met Badr and talked to him for several hours about his political position as a dissident of the Syrian regime. Then, I went back the next day to meet Sohā. I spent almost three hours with her while Badr was sitting in a sort of recreational area he had set up with other men inside the camp. Sohā talked about her life with Badr, her second husband, whom she had married out of love when she was 25 years old.

> "We were very happy in Syria. Our marriage was a love marriage and we were very close. My husband was not only my lover but also my friend, my partner. We used to share everything and we did everything together" (Sohā, personal interview, Tel ʿAbbās, Lebanon, June 19, 2018).

Displacement created marital conflict for Sohā and Badr. The couple stayed separated for several months after the war started in Syria, as Badr went to fight with the opposition. Then Sohā moved to Lebanon with her children and other months passed before they could reunite.

> "I was the one who decided to come to Lebanon. It was too risky for us to stay in Syria. My kids were scared, there were snipers in Khāldiyya and my brother-in-law was also killed. My husband and I stayed separated for several months. Then suddenly the phone started working again one day and I was able to call him. I asked him: "Hey, where are you? Are you ok? Listen tomorrow I'm going to make

the paperwork for the kids and I'm going to bring them to Lebanon because here it's not safe anymore." So I came here through Wādī Khāled [the border crossing with Syria]" (Sohā, personal interview, Tel ʿAbbās, Lebanon, June 19, 2018).

The lack of privacy and freedom were the major contributors to conflict in displacement for Sohā and Badr. Moving from a house to a tent had negatively impacted their intimacy.

Sohā: "In Syria, we had one room for us, one room for the kids, and one sitting area for the guests. Here we do everything in one room. We sleep here, eat here; we do everything in this small space that you see. This is all the space we have. […] Here there is a lack of privacy and lack of freedom. We feel like we are controlled all the time."

Irene: "Has your relationship with your husband changed a lot because of this?"

Sohā: "Of course, of course, of course! It changed a lot! There is no time for my husband and me to be together now" (Sohā, personal interview, Tel ʿAbbās, Lebanon, June 19, 2018).

It was difficult for both of them to maintain the same level of closeness and connection they had before the war and the forced migration.

"Our life has changed a lot. One day we are together, in our house, in the countryside, and the next day we are separated for months. You don't know what happened to the other if she's still alive. Then, when you meet one another again after many months, you live in a tent. […] You become a different person. It's not easy to remain steady" (Badr, personal interview, Tel ʿAbbās, Lebanon, June 14, 2018).

"It was difficult to stay close as we were in Syria. When my husband joined me here I hadn't seen him in almost a year. Here we have a lot of pressure. […] We fight

much more than before" (Sohā, personal interview, Tel ʿAbbās, Lebanon, June 19, 2018).

For Sohā and Badr, living in a tent represented a major obstacle to their intimacy. The open spaces and the commonality of life of the refugee camp prevented the preservation of their privacy. The space inside the tent was shared with their four children, and the space outside the tent with other families, visitors, and aid workers. [64] In this sense, although the lack of boundaries of the refugee camp gave women and men more possibilities to access the public space and create networks, it also created a lack of privacy, which resulted in marital conflicts.

Like Sohā and Badr, also other couples that lived in smaller spaces had similar problems. As we have seen in the previous section, the lack of privacy was a major problem for Riḍā and Rīm, who lived in a one-room apartment in the outskirt of Beirut. Similarly, it was difficult for Jamāl and Sumaīa, a couple from Raqqa, displaced in El-Marj, in the Beqaa Valley. They also lived in a one-room apartment with their three children, and both complained that displacement challenged their relationship. I met Sumaīa almost two years earlier, in March 2016, and when I reached out to her again in March 2018, her family was still living in the same place – a garage where a small kitchen had been set up at the entrance and the remaining space was one room, which served as bedroom and living room. Jamāl was 41 years old when I met him in 2018. He did not speak much during our conversation; he was a reserved man, but the little he said was enough to convey his frustrations about the place, and conditions wherein his family lived. He injured himself a few months earlier, and he had lost his job. Sumaīa worked as a house cleaner, and she supported the family.

"My relationship with my wife changed, of course. It became *salty*. […] I lost the respect of my wife and my kids, we live in this small space and it's not easy. I

---

[64] In the informal settlement in Tel ʿAbbās where I conducted the interviews with Sohā and Badr and other Syrian families, was also living a group of Italian volunteers, who supported refugee families in their daily needs and acted as intermediary with NGOs and local institutions.

injured myself and now I can't work or do anything" (Jamāl, personal interview, El-Marj, Lebanon, September 7, 2018).

Jamāl regrets that his relationship with his wife became "salty" (*mālḥe*), namely more difficult or less fruitful than it was before displacement. This is because war, conflict, and displacement can change household dynamics, as well as the position of men as head of the household – particularly when men lose their capacity to remain breadwinners. Since men's central socially defined role is the role of provider, the loss of work meant a loss of masculine identity (Keedi et al., 2017). Jamāl's 'injured masculinity' makes him lose his self-esteem, feel humiliated and not respected by the family.

Their living conditions constitute an obstacle to intimacy and bring about the disruption of traditional gender roles. Sumaīa is concerned about not being able to have some private time with her husband.

"It's not easy in a small place like this. […] My husband is injured and I work most of the time. We don't spend much time together… as a couple, I mean. We all live in one room and it's difficult to have private time when the kids are around" (Sumaīa, personal interview, Lebanon, El-Marj, September 24, 2018).

The couple was worried about the repercussions that their living conditions had on their children. Sumaīa also acknowledged that they became less respectful towards them and she was concerned about the risk that the situation would have soon disrupted the stability of her family.

"I want my kids to keep studying. The older one [he was 13] wants to work and help the family, but I didn't allow him to do so. I want him to finish school. […] I'm making a huge effort to keep the family unite, but sometimes it seems that everything is falling apart" (Sumaīa, personal interview, Lebanon, El-Marj, September 24, 2018).

Parenthood is also challenged by displacement. Migration-related stressors can have a significant impact on the wellbeing of parents and children. Sometimes families find it difficult to adjust to a new environment (Stewart et al. 2015) especially when living conditions are dire, as in the case of Jamāl and Sumaīa. Moreover, new constraints and the difficulty to fulfil economic and social roles can have a negative effect on parent self-efficacy, or their perception of competence in influencing children's behaviours (Ali, 2008), aspirations, and development.

For Jamāl and Sumaīa, it was not only the physical space, which created emotional distance but also the lack of mental space for intimacy. For most families in Lebanon, everyday actions became significantly dire and complicated in displacement. The increased pressures of daily issues also increased the mental load that people had to carry. This was the case especially for women, who are already those who carry the domestic mental load of everyday activities in most societies (Daminger, 2019). Women in forced migration have this burden increased.

Another couple whose intimate life was profoundly affected by the living conditions were Ṣabāḥ and Bilāl, a 30-year-old couple from Sweida displaced in Bshāmūn, in the outskirt of Beirut, with their two daughters of 8 and 4 years. They also lived in a very tiny basement apartment of one room, divided with a curtain to obtain two rooms. Ṣabāḥ and Bilāl's family routine was strongly affected by Bilāl's work as a deliveryman. He worked mostly at night and the family life revolved around him, including their two children's daily routine.

> "They'd never go to sleep. They stay awake until late until 2:00 or 3:00 am sometimes. They want to stay with their father when he comes back. […] We don't have much time as a couple, our kids are always awake and they want to stay with us all the time" (Ṣabāḥ, personal interview, Bshāmūn, Lebanon, June 27, 2018).

> "It's difficult to talk to my wife. When I come back from work, at night, I always hope that the kids are asleep because that is the only time for us" (Bilāl, personal interview, Bshāmūn, Lebanon, June 27, 2018).

As displacement disrupted the family life completely, it was not easy for Ṣabāḥ and Bilāl to recreate the space for their emotional intimacy, because, according to Ṣabāḥ, their children were upset or confused about it.

> "If I want to talk to my husband privately, I have to do it when my kids are not around. If I want to be closer to him, even only by sitting next to him, I can't because my kids would ask me: "Why are you staying this close? It's shameful! Why are you doing this?" They don't get the idea that we are married and we can sit together or even kiss…" (Ṣabāḥ, personal interview, Bshāmūn, Lebanon, June 27, 2018).

Like many Syrian families in Lebanon, Ṣabāḥ and Bilāl did not receive any support to address the psychological distress and trauma that displacement had caused to their daughters. They were growing up confused about many aspects of life, including intimacy, which could affect their future understanding of relationships and their self-image and identity.

> "The kids became hyperactive and restless since we came here. […] We try to tell them the truth about everything that happens in our lives, but sometimes it's very difficult for them to understand. […] We don't receive any psychological support from anyone" (Bilāl, personal interview, Bshāmūn, Lebanon, June 27, 2018).

Wisām and Majīda, a 40-year-old couple from Homs displaced in Tripoli, brought up an example of lack of emotional intimacy in displacement. They had similar difficulties as other couples in reconstructing an intimate marital life. Nonetheless, in this case, emotional intimacy was what they most missed and longed for. Wisām and Majīda lived in a rented two-room apartment with their five children. After changing their life settings completely, and moving from a big house in the countryside to a small apartment in the

outskirt of Tripoli, it was difficult for them to regain the intimate space they had before displacement.

"My husband works all day in a grocery shop in the neighbourhood. Now during Ramadan, he also works at night. When he comes back home he's always exhausted and sometimes we don't speak for days. We only exchange messages but we don't speak. […] He wants to sleep and to stay peaceful, so also the kids remain calm when he's at home. […] We used to speak a lot in Syria, we used to sit together at night and talk about our day and everything else. Now, this doesn't happen anymore" (Majīda, personal interview, Tripoli, Lebanon, May 24, 2018).

"I work all day in the shop. When I come home, I am tired. […] My life is not easy outside the house. I don't want to talk about this when I come home. […] She always wants to talk and we often argue" (Wisām, personal interview, Tripoli, Lebanon, May 28, 2018).

Like many Syrians in Lebanon, Wisām, Majīda and their family did not have a regular residence status, and Wisām, as a man, was more at risk of being arrested. For this reason, the whole family tried to maintain a low profile. Wisām worked and then went back home. Majīda rarely went out. Understandably, Wisām was reluctant to talk to me in the beginning; he was afraid.

"We don't receive support from anyone. […] We don't have Lebanese friends or Syrian friends. […] I don't have many chances to talk. If I have a problem I talk to my wife, but I try not to load her with more worries" (ibid.).

"We are alone here. If I have a problem… I don't talk to anyone. I try not to give my husband more worries. He has a lot of pressure and he doesn't want to talk when he comes home. […] We are not as close as before" (Majīda, personal interview, Tripoli, Lebanon, May 24, 2018).

Among Syrian families I met in Lebanon, emotional intimacy was related to a profound emotional connection with each other, and the psychosocial support that couples gave each other, especially when the community support lacked. With displacement, Wisām and Majīda had lost the support they had in Syria from family and friends. In Lebanon, they lived in a private rented apartment and had no contact with other Syrian or Lebanese families. They were completely isolated. Moreover, Wisām's everyday insecurities related to his legal status made emotional intimacy difficult to maintain. At the core of Wisām and Majīda's issues of marital intimacy were also psychosocial repercussions of displacement.

> "I'm worried most of the time because I'm not sure if I'll be able to work tomorrow and if I'll be able to bring food home" (Wisām, personal interview, Tripoli, Lebanon, May 28, 2018).

The literature has widely unpacked the role of depression, anxiety, lack of self-esteem, and psychological well being generated by displacement upon family conflict (Darvishpour, 2002; Gill & Matthews, 1995; Hojat et al., 2000; Moghissi & Goodman, 1999; Zhou & Xiong, 2005). Together with the insecurities and vulnerabilities of both partners and the ability to stay steady in their roles and expectations, these obstacles led couples to "gradually drift apart" (Majīda. Personal interview. Tripoli, Lebanon, May 24, 2018).

Rebuilding the space for intimacy in displacement

As social actors construct and perform intimacy in the private space of the family, they also re-construct and re-negotiate it after an event that disrupts or distresses marital intimate life. Many Syrian families I met in Lebanon had experienced negative changes in their marital life. However, only a few of them explicitly talked about it in terms of sexual and emotional intimacy. When this was the case, they often referred to creative agentic mechanisms they used to put in practice to reconstruct their sexual and emotional intimacy.

Sohā was perhaps who led me into a more in-depth analysis of the reconstruction of intimacy practices among Syrians in Lebanon. She and her husband Badr had been incredibly creative in renegotiating their intimate life as a couple. Living in a one-room tent did not allow for any private time. Like other couples, they divided the space to obtain two rooms. However, they created a system that made possible the transformation of the second room, protected with curtains, into a bedroom for the couple, a small sitting room, and a storage room where they kept their food provisions. In this way, the couple was free to isolate themselves for "ten minutes" from time to time with different excuses.

> "Our sexual relationship changed a lot. […] Sometimes we go to the other room for ten minutes together and we tell the kids that we are organizing the stored food. […] When they fall asleep sometimes we go to the other room and we sleep there. […] If we need to talk, when the kids are asleep, we go to the small room, we make coffee, and we speak for a few minutes alone" (Sohā, personal interview, Tel ʿAbbās, Lebanon, June 19, 2018).

In the re-construction of their intimacy, Badr and Sohā re-established intimate closeness and re-signified the meaning of "home". Home and intimacy were closely related, and this was evident when Sohā openly named the creative mechanism of re-constructing an intimate space in our conversation.

> Irene: [after she had shown me the other room] "This is very creative!"
> Sohā: "We built a new room to build a new relationship" (Sohā, personal interview, Tel ʿAbbās, Lebanon, June 19, 2018).

Sohā's idea of *baneīnā ghorfe jdīde lanebnī ʿalaʾat jdīde* returned in my conversations with other families in different forms. Jamāl and Sumaīa used a similar practice to adapt to the small private space to their different needs. They transformed the room where they lived into a bedroom at night and into a living room during the day. They did not have the chance to separate the space like Sohā and Badr because to save some space for the kitchen

they had little room left. However, Sumaīa was of the idea that to improve her intimate relationship with her husband, they would need to change the space where they lived.

> "Living in this situation is very stressful for our relationship. […] We could have a better couple life if we lived in a larger space and had more freedom and more privacy. […] I think we need to move to a bigger place if we want our family to survive" (Sumaīa, personal interview, El-Marj, Lebanon, September 24, 2018).

In the same vein, other families I met during my years in Lebanon had strongly connected the re-significance of home with the need to re-construct intimacy. In another family that I met in 2016 in a small refugee camp in Akkar, the husband had built a large master bedroom for his wife and him, with a heart carved into the iron headboard. His wife was very proud of it, and she reported she felt a bit more at home.

Jamāl and Sumaīa's reconstruction of emotional intimacy also occurred by the rebuilding space for intimacy. They set up a couch outside the house, which they used as a sitting room for guests. In summer evenings, after the children went to bed, Sumaīa and Jamāl sit there to drink a cup of coffee together and talk to re-establish the closeness they had lost with displacement.

> "I'm out all day and he sits in the house all day […]. The evening is the only time I have to talk with my husband. […] We sit there and we drink coffee. […] It's very important to have this moment. It's good for our relationship" (Sumaīa, personal interview, El-Marj, Lebanon, September 24, 2018).

The ground for Sumaīa's effort to maintain this private moment with her husband lies in the need to keep the family's stability. With their children distancing themselves from the parents, and her husband losing his self-esteem and masculine identity for not being a provider anymore, Sumaīa felt the need to reconstruct relationality through emotional intimacy. In Lebanon, Syrian participants renegotiated intimacy by constructing "intimate selving" shaped on intimate relationships (Joseph, 1999).

Practices of re-negotiating marital intimacy included regaining the intimate space by reclaiming the time for the couple in the private space. This was done in different ways, often through the help of family members and friends. Ṣabāḥ and Bilāl used similar techniques as Riḍā and Rīm – who won back the intimate space by asking a family member to look after their children. Bilāl's brother and his family lived nearby them, and the two couples often exchanged this kind of favours with each other.

> "Sometimes we ask them to look after our daughters, and sometimes we look after their children. […] It's difficult to spend some time alone when you have kids in such a small space, so we need to support each other in this" (Bilāl, personal interview, Bshāmūn, Lebanon, June 27, 2018).

Although these accounts suggested a mutual reconstruction and renegotiation of intimacy in displacement and the space for it, we cannot ignore that there is another side of the aspect, which is equally important to acknowledge: sexual violence. This cannot be considered intimacy, but rather violence that is made more possible because of the lack of privacy. However, physical violence can be imposed in a framework of reconstruction of intimacy, or it can be mistaken for intimacy. This was the case for Ward's mother, Hāla, who was imposed sexual intercourse by her husband with violence. When they first moved to Lebanon, in 2013, they lived in a small apartment of two rooms – one was for Ward's older brother and his family and the other for Ward, her parents, her younger brother, and sister. This second room was divided into two spaces separated by stairs, but there was no door to isolate the spaces. Ward's father did not stop having intimate intercourse with his wife, although their children were sleeping in the same room with them. When Hāla opposed, he forced her. Ward recalled this time as "the worst memory I carry from displacement" (Ward, personal interview, Berlin-Amsterdam, July 22, 2020). She also acknowledged that her sister stopped respecting her father because of his behaviour. Another woman I met in 2016, when I was carrying out another research in Lebanon, found herself in the same position as Hāla when she moved to Lebanon to live with her daughter's family. Her son-in-law violated her daughter in front of her at night,

as they were all sleeping in the same space. Although the mother was not comfortable with the situation, she somehow normalized and considered these circumstances acceptable. In this sense, through the imposition of physical violence, intimacy was imposed without reconstruction of the space for it.

Chapter 5.

Renegotiating gender roles and relations in displacement: Syrian families in Germany

Having discussed the different ways in which Syrian families experienced gender role and relationship transformations in Lebanon and the agentic strategies they employed to renegotiate their gendered positions in the social space, I will now explore, in this chapter, the experiences of Syrian families in Germany. From a gendered perspective, immigration to Germany has been studied by several authors (for instance, see Inowlocki & Lutz, 2000; Fleischmann & Höhne, 2013; Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2014; Yurdakul & Korteweg, 2021). However, gender relations have been addressed mostly through the perspective of women and rarely considered from a relational standpoint. Migrant women in Germany and Western Europe, in general, have been treated as "icons of cultural differences" (Inowlocki & Lutz, 2000, p. 301). The interactions of women with their male partners in migration and their interactions with the wider German society have been rather neglected. According to Inowlocki & Luz (2000), Muslim migrant women have been confined to the private sphere and denied their chances to be recognized as social actors in a changing society (ibid., p. 301).

The attention given to gender-specific issues of migration and forced migration processes in Germany has increased since summer 2015 when the so-called "refugee crisis" has brought about a broader familiarity with these themes. Nevertheless, the topic has continued to be dominated by gender biases and binary interpretations, which have also impacted gender policies (Elle & Hess, 2018). Women, often associated with children, were considered to be the most vulnerable in the crisis as well as those subjected to violence, while men were seen as the perpetrators of that violence. The "sexualization" of the discourse around gender and forced migration in Germany has led to the consideration that women are passive victims who need protection and male refugees are a threat for both those women and the German society (ibid.). In turn, this perception has

contributed to a transformation in the societal attitude towards refugees and the migrant social space, which is now perceived as masculinized (Nassehi, 2015).

In general, the "refugee crisis" in Germany, initially faced as a project rather than an emergency (ibid.) continued to be framed around the concepts of integration and assimilation, terms that are either internalized or wholly rejected by refugees. The discourse around gender has been integrated into this framework. The concept of "gender equality", for example, became a central part of integration policies. For instance, the integration imperative (Elle & Hess, 2018) is gender-specific in its programmes designed to train women in gender competencies "as if this was a traditional element of the German culture" (ibid.).

In the following pages, I will discuss four typologies of gender role and relationship transformations, which Syrian families in Germany came across and the agentic mechanisms that families put into practice to renegotiate those relationships in the public and private space. I will firstly look at the disruption of household structures when a person is separated from his left-behind family, the everyday insecurities that separation entails and the strategies employed to negotiate relationships as a separated family. Secondly, I will explore the role of social security policies in challenging gender dynamics and how relationships altered by the German welfare state are renegotiated through "reflexive modernity". Then, I will discuss how religion can become a reflexive element used to come to terms with the impact of this (reflexive) modernity. Finally, I will consider how displaced people reconstruct a sense of family in a transnational space when (extended) households are scattered over different countries.

5.1. The disruption of household structures: Everyday insecurities of separated families

When I started my fieldwork in Germany, I had already concluded my empirical research in Lebanon; hence I confronted this new investigation with more confidence and self-awareness. Although I was aware that new challenges would come across my path, I

decided that I would follow a similar direction as in Lebanon – I would explore the field through interviews with institutional and humanitarian actors, policymakers, practitioners, and social workers to have an idea of how my research topic was being discussed and what were the most relevant aspects to take into consideration. These consultations revealed that one of the biggest challenges for Syrian families in Germany was the separation. Many families had fled Syria or neighbouring countries at different stages during and after the "refugee crisis", thus remaining separated across international borders, EU borders, or even across the German states.[65] These separations lasted several years, changed households' structures, and family dynamics completely. In this sense, the account of Shādī, a separated man from rural Hama, was noteworthy:

> "I live in Berlin, and my older brother lives in Montreal. I have another brother in Saudi Arabia and another one in the United Kingdom. I have two sisters in the Emirates and my mother is still in Syria. She lived with my aunt since my dad passed away. I haven't seen most of them for almost ten years" (Shādī, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, November 17, 2018).

Shādī's older brother is ten years older than him and lived in Canada since before the outbreak of the civil war in Syria. Since the war began, the man never returned to Syria. In 2015, Shādī left the country. Although both men live in Western countries, away from war-torn Syria, they are still unable to see each other because travelling is extraordinarily difficult for Syrian with subsidiary protection, as Shādī.

> "Getting visas is too difficult. I have a temporary status here [in Germany]; this means that I have to renew it every two years. You know, it's a piece of paper that they put in your passport. But I still need my Syrian passport to travel, which I also

---

[65] The distribution of refugees in Germany is regulated by the EASY (Initial Distribution of Asylum Seekers), which ensured a suitable and fair allocation of asylum seekers all over the 16 federal states according to a quota system (Damir-Geilsdorf & Sabra 2018) called Königsteiner Schlüssel (Königsteiner Key). This means that asylum seekers have no right to choose their place of residence before being granted asylum.

have to renew every two years. And to do so, I have to go to the Syrian consulate…

I mean, the State from which I'm seeking protection in Germany... Do you

understand what I mean? I don't want to have anything to do with those people, so

I just don't renew it, and I'm stuck here" (Shādī, personal interview, Berlin,

Germany, November 17, 2018).

The concept of "scattered families" is not new in the literature and many authors have discussed the experiences of refugee families displaced over different countries (see, for example, Muller, 2010; Grace, 2019). Family separation for Syrian households is mostly due to three legal obstacles: (1) the Dublin regulation; (2) the EU-Turkey deal; (3) the different protection statuses granted to Syrian nationals (and asylum seekers in general). The Dublin regulation is a legal tool that compels the Member State of first arrival to examine the asylum application lodged by a third-country national.[66] Because Germany froze the regulation only for a few months in August 2015 and re-established it fully in March 2016, family members of refugee families who crossed after this period were transferred back to the Member State in which they were first fingerprinted. Similarly, the EU-Turkey deal, also signed in March 2016 to limit the influx of irregular migrants entering the EU through Turkey, functioned as a major obstacle for refugee families (Heck & Hess, 2017; Tometten, 2018). Those who managed to enter the EU, by crossing the border with Greece, were deported back to Turkey in order for the authorities to process the case in the framework of the agreement.

Nonetheless, the main obstacle for refugee families is perhaps the German reception system, which grants different protection statuses to asylum seekers. As anticipated in Chapter 1, most Syrians in Germany were granted subsidiary protection, while a minority obtained full refugee status.[67] This means that some families might remain separated for several years before reuniting – if they are able to reunite at all. The problem of the *when*

---

[66] See Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013. Full text available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32013R0604&from=en [Accessed June 10, 2020].

[67] Until 2016, Syrian nationals were mostly granted refugee status. Today, about only 20% of Syrians are recognized as political refugees while the rest are granted subsidiary or humanitarian protection (immigration lawyer, personal interview, Berlin, April 3, 2020).

against the *if* is very clear from the words of Sa'ad, a Syrian man from Aleppo I met in Berlin:

"The problem is not only not knowing *when* I'll be able to see my wife and my kids, but *if* I'll be able to see them again. I feel powerless because there is nothing I can do. I just have to wait. But I don't know if all this waiting will lead to something eventually" (Sa'ad, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, February 14, 2019).

Because the new regulation gives no legal right to family reunification, the humanitarian ground upon which reunification can be granted is particularly relevant. In this sense, the competent authorities are supposed to take into consideration various elements, including the duration of separation, the age of children, integration-related aspects, or elements of "particular hardship" in the country of origin. However, living in a warzone is not considered particular hardship if not exacerbated by other conditions (e.g., severe illness) (immigration lawyer, personal interview, Berlin, April 3, 2020).

For beneficiaries of full refugee status, family reunification should be claimed within three months after the attainment of the status. In this case, there is no need for the refugee to prove sufficient resources, which need to be proven otherwise, including a salary that falls within specific calculations, being independent of social aid, and a work contract that is valid for at least one year, a home etc. (Immigration lawyer, personal interview, Berlin, April 3, 2020).

For beneficiaries of full refugee status and subsidiary protection, family reunification includes only the nuclear family members and excludes the extended family. Other dependants can obtain a residence permit only in specific cases to avoid particular hardship (Bick, 2018). This is mostly related to parents of adults in need of specific care. Tometten (2018) has observed that although this special condition would perfectly apply to members of the extended family who live in warzones, like Syria, it is not applied to avoid precedents in the application (Tometten, 2018, p. 49). Various authors have argued that with the arrival of an increasing number of people seeking protection the German legislator used family reunification as a control mechanism (Bick, 2018, p. 105). The

German legal entry framework, combining various programmes of protection, is not thought to "necessarily ensure protection, but rather to facilitate administrative procedures and to contain refugee flows" (Tometten, 2018, p. 203).

As the examination of the complex legal framework has shown, it is particularly difficult for most Syrians under subsidiary protection to be reunited with their families outside the European Union. Even when this eventually happens, it occurs after many years of separation. These obstacles are likely to challenge family structures for a long time, exacerbate vulnerabilities for left-behind families, and create profound ruptures in relationships. Many participants from separated families argued that they felt insecure about life in Germany – in contrast to what they expected from a country that was supposed to offer them protection. As other authors have discussed (White, 2010; Innes, 2014; Crawford & Hutchinson, 2016; Tiilikainen, 2019), everyday insecurities can take different forms and dimensions, affecting the wellbeing of people and consequently their integration process. For separated Syrian families in Germany, everyday insecurities took three main dimensions, a material, a relational, and an ethical dimension (See Al-Sharmani et al. 2019; White, 2010; and Tiilikainen, 2019 for a three-dimensional model of well-being and security). Within the material dimension, fall insecurities related to tightening financial conditions and living conditions; the relational dimension concerns living a double positionality and a transnational life; while the ethical dimension is related to the feeling of guilt that Syrian women and men felt towards their left-behind families.

Tightening economic conditions are a significant source of insecurity for separated families. Although this is an obstacle for many migrants and refugees, members of a separated family are particularly vulnerable in this sense because they have to support left-behind families for an indefinite amount of time. This can compromise their financial stability in the resettlement country. This was the case of Fādi, a man from Damascus in his late twenties who arrived in Germany in 2015 and lived in Berlin.

> "Every month I send half of my salary to my wife. She's still in Syria and she needs to pay for the rent and the expenses for her and the children. […] I had to leave Syria because I was at risk of being recalled for conscription. […] We sold our house

and she went to live with relatives. […] I used all the money for the journey… the smugglers, I mean. But then she was forced to leave the house of her relatives and she's now staying in a rented apartment with the kids" (Fādi, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 6, 2019).

Fādi had been waiting to reunite with his family for three years at the time of our interview in March 2019. He expressed his concerns about his family's economic condition, which was extremely vulnerable and dependent on the money he used to send. Fādi ran out of all his savings to pay for the journey to Germany and had to rely on the social security allowance for several months before he was able to find a job and support himself.

"I live with little now. I never go out or buy any extra. I save as much as I can to send my wife the money to live. We've been living like that for three years. What kind of life is this?" (Fādi, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 6, 2019).

Another participant, Māyā, from Idlib, faced similar difficulties. After moving to Turkey in September 2015, she fled to Germany with her father, mother, and two brothers and left her newly married husband behind. They got married just before she travelled, and in her account, they had no "decent wedding party yet" (Māyā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, October 20, 2018). At that time, he was working in Turkey and decided to stay longer, save some more money, and then follow her after a few months. Unfortunately, things did not go the way they expected. After a few months, her husband was illegally deported from Turkey back to Syria, and he remained stuck until he was able to cross again and try another attempt. In the meanwhile, Māyā supported him financially, sending him money from her social security allowance.

"We've been separated for three years already, but when we left each other we thought it would have been only a few months. […] I'm a married woman but I still live the life of a daughter. […] The most difficult thing for me is waiting. I have no

idea when I will be able to see my husband again. […] I have to send him money to survive every month and keep hoping that soon he will be able to find a way to join me here" (Māyā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, October 20, 2018).

For Āmal, a woman from the countryside of Aleppo who had fled Syria leaving her extended family behind, life in a separated family was even direr. She left Aleppo to escape a violent husband, whom she had divorced but would not leave her alone. She fled to Turkey before she continued the journey through Eastern Europe to reach Germany. In Turkey, she had to work for one year to provide for her left-behind parents and save money to continue the journey. When she arrived in Germany she had to support her parents with the State allowance and occasional freelance jobs as a translator.

"I'm sending almost the whole allowance to my parents in Syria. Here I can work as a teacher of Arabic and I do translations when I get the chance. […] My dream is to study here in Germany, but I can't afford it because I have to support my parents" (Āmal, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 2, 2019).

Āmal argued that she struggled significantly upon her arrival in Germany. When she arrived she got sick of depression and anxiety due to her previous traumas and the pressure of supporting her parents.

"I wasn't able to do anything. For one year, I couldn't even start studying the language. I wasn't able to take care of myself and I was living in a state of distress that affected everything. […] I needed help to overcome my traumas, the loss of my life in Syria, the failure of my marriage. But I couldn't find *the right way to live*. I couldn't even enjoy my regained freedom from my husband. […] Now I'm doing better. I have good days and bad days. But the pressure of my parents in Syria is something that affects everything else" (Āmal, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 2, 2019).

Because extended families cannot be reunited and due to the lack of any other welfare option for some left-behind families, Syrian women and men often need to include this expense in their budget for an indefinite time. These economic difficulties can limit their options and opportunities in the host country and make them experience a precarious life with no alternative solution. At the same time, as Āmal's words demonstrate, sometimes the pressure of this responsibility paralyzes people to the point of making them unable to find *the right way to live life*.

These feelings resemble how other families in Lebanon felt about separation. Em Walīd, a woman from Homs in her mid-fifties, whose son had migrated to Turkey with the intent of reaching Europe, also lived in a constant state of anxiety and apprehension. Abū Walīd, her husband, explained to me that the separation from their son caused his wife a sense of paralysis, *'ajez*.

> "Sometimes, if we don't hear from him for the entire day, she stops doing everything and starts worrying about him. She just sits there and doesn't do anything. […] When she feels like that, I take care of the house and the chores because she's paralysed" (Abū Walīd, personal interview, Tripoli, Lebanon, June 19, 2018)

The issue of family reunification for extended families raises various questions about the meaning of "family" in different cultures (Georgas et al., 2001; Kofman, 2004; Fonseca & Ormon, 2008). In this sense, the imposition of the Western concepts and constructions of "family" to those who give a different meaning to it is a form of "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977/1990, p. 4), which shapes or consolidates inequalities.

Precarious living conditions are another source of material insecurity in separation. Among the elements taken into account by the competent authorities when assessing a claim of family reunification are integration-related aspects, including the living conditions of the person who claim to reunify with his family. However, sometimes it can take years before people can meet some of the conditions of "integration", such as a suitable home for the family. For this reason, many participants claimed to live suspended

in a state of continuous waiting. One of them was Abū Moḥammad, a participant from Hama, who arrived in Germany alone. He left his wife and two children in Turkey and now lives in Neumünster, in Schleswig-Holstein, north Germany. He expressed the feeling of being on hold very clearly in his interview with me:

"I live in an apartment with two Syrian friends. One of them is in the same situation as I – he's separated from his family – while the other is younger than us and he has no family with him. We live in a small apartment. […] It's temporary but I can't say how long it'll last. It's very difficult to find a good apartment in Germany and the prices are high. I also have to send money to my family every month. How can I afford to live alone? Plus, I would not want to live by myself and be isolated right now" (Abū Moḥammad, personal interview, Neumünster, Germany, March 4, 2019).

With temporary housing solutions becoming permanent, participants kept living in a condition of protracted temporality that did not allow them to see their life in Germany as a long-term project for themselves and their families. As we have seen in Chapter 3, with participant Abū Moḥammad, whose life *would start* only when he would be together with his family, separated families put their lives on hold until the family is reunited (social worker, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 6, 2019).

The second dimension of everyday insecurities for Syrian separated families is the relational dimension. In particular, some of the participants in this study expressed their frustration towards their relationships in Germany. Some of them found it difficult to relate to the local population and attain relationship standards in Germany. For example, Wā'el, a man from Damascus, displaced in Cuxhaven, in Lower Saxony, showed distress for not building meaningful and deep relationships as he had in Syria.

"I do have friends here. I have Arab friends and German friends. I don't share everything with them as I used to do with my friends in Syria. Relationships are different here. They're more formal. If I want to visit someone, I have to make an

appointment with them or give them prior notice. In Syria, people would come and visit you without calling. […] Relationships are very superficial here and I'm not so comfortable with it" (Wā'el, personal interview, Cuxhaven, Germany, January 17, 2019).

In his interview, Wā'el also emphasized another element of his frustration, which falls into the relational dimension of his everyday insecurities. He felt he lived a "double absence" (Sayad, 2004) for not being together with his family, or living fully in the resettlement country. This condition prevented him from focusing on his future in Germany.

"I have the head in two places, I live here but I am in Syria with my mind. I'm worried about my family all the time and I'm not able to concentrate. I can't commit to anything here. I'm learning the language but I'm not proceeding very fast, it's too difficult. Every evening I talk to my wife and my children, I try to be there with them all the time. We spend so much time over FaceTime. […] When I go to bed I can't sleep, I'm too worried" (Wā'el, personal interview, Cuxhaven, Germany, January 17, 2019).

Fātma, a participant from rural Damascus had the same concerns. She left her husband behind, in Turkey, with whom she was supposed to build a family. She fled to Germany only to realize that this was not what she expected because the migratory project she had with her husband would probably never have come true.

"Most of the time, I feel I'm not fully here [in Germany]. But I'm not there either [in Turkey]. I don't feel I'm alive, I carry on, I live my life but I'm not alive" (Fātma, personal interview, Leipzig, Germany, January 20, 2019).

Like other Syrian women I spoke to, Fātma fled to Germany with a group of family members, when the Dublin regulation was still frozen at the end of 2015. Her husband had remained stuck in Turkey, with no chance to reunite with her.

Similarly, Sānā, a woman from Homs, displaced in Berlin, fled to Germany with her two daughters as part of a migratory project that she had planned with her husband to escape the war in Syria. She experienced the relational dimension of her everyday insecurities with feelings of loneliness, helplessness, and frustration towards Germany.

"My husband and I decided to come to Germany together, but I'm here and he's not. We were supposed to start a new life together, but this is my life without him. I don't feel at home here. Of course, I feel safe and my daughters are happy – and they are learning German very fast! But I don't feel at home because I'm not with my husband" (Sānā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, December 16, 2018).

Sānā's feelings towards the host country changed because of separation, and the enthusiasm towards Germany soon turned into frustration.

"In the beginning, everything was new; people were so nice to my daughters and me. I thought Germany would be a perfect place to start a new life as a family. But now I'm not so sure anymore. […] I'm realizing that it's so difficult to live as a woman alone. If in the beginning I was comfortable about life in Germany, now I'm not anymore" (Sānā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, December 16, 2018).

Due to the long separation from her husband, Sānā experienced a loss of emotional balance, where she no longer recognized the environment around her as a familiar space. In this sense, the experience of separation and the everyday insecurities it entails is gendered (Tiilikainen, 2019). Sānā's frustration lies in the fact that, in his attempt to reach Germany, her husband was fingerprinted in Austria and thus stuck there without the possibility of reuniting with her in a short-term period. Although geographically relatively close to her, Sānā's husband is separated from her by a European border.

Ethical insecurities were also deeply sensed by Syrian men and women in a separated family. Many participants expressed a deep sense of guilt towards their left-behind families in Syria or Turkey, which brought them to question their future in

Germany. Sa'ad, whom I mentioned earlier, arrived in Germany through the Balkan route in 2015. After a long process, which lasted almost two years, in 2017, he was granted subsidiary protection. He moved from the reception centre to a private apartment, learned the language, and found a job in a factory. Sa'ad felt he was on the right path with his life, but expressed his discontent towards a situation, which he could not control. His family was still in Syria, under extremely vulnerable conditions, and because of this, Sa'ad's sense of insecurity was exacerbated by a sense of guilt.

"I feel guilty because I feel privileged. I have the possibility to live here. I have a decent apartment and a good job. But what is all this if I can't share it with my family? They are still at risk in Syria and I can't do anything to bring them here. […] I came here for my wife and kid to have a better life. I'm having a better life but they are still in Syria, what's the point with all this? […] Sometimes, I think maybe I should go back there" (Sa'ad, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, February 14, 2019).

Similarly, Ibrāhīm, a man from Damascus displaced in Munich, felt guilty because he survived all the hindrances of the war, the flight, and the displacement but could not enjoy his achievements fully as his family was still in danger.

"I shouldn't be here without my family. I should be with them [in Syria]. They are in very dangerous conditions. They cross the border with Lebanon to reach the [German] embassy in order to keep on going with this process [of family reunification]. […] I feel ashamed because I am here and they are not" (Ibrāhīm, personal interview, Munich, March 19, 2019).

The insecurities felt by Sa'ad and Ibrāhīm were mainly associated with the frustration of being in a privileged position as compared to their families and not knowing if the situation would have ever changed. This "survivors' guilt" has been identified by other authors (see Bemak et al., 2002; Bughra & Becker, 2005; Goveas & Coomarasamy, 2018) as

a condition familiar to many refugees, which contributes to eliciting emotional stress and jeopardize the sense of safety, well-being, and integration in the host country (Bemak et al., 2002, p. 35).

Reconstructing a social self to negotiate relationships as a separated family

Separated Syrian households in Germany put into practice some agential mechanisms to come to terms with the new family structures in displacement and to deal with the strains of separation at least in the short term and to respond to everyday insecurities engendered by separation. These are the establishment of new networks and the consolidation of family relations. Along with these strategies, some people performed a series of more extreme actions, including proxy marriages and onward migration towards irregular channels. It is important to acknowledge that renegotiating relationships as a separated family is not unidirectional and static. As insecurities are multidimensional and mobile, renegotiations can intersect or change according to spatial and temporal circumstances. As explained by Tiilikainen (2015; 2019) and White (2010), the sense of insecurity is not static and changes spatially and temporally (Tiilikainen, 2019, p. 149).

It was interesting to observe that renegotiating relationships as a separated family always followed an individual acknowledgement of separation as a new condition to navigate. For most participants, coming to terms with this condition individually was a preliminary step to renegotiate a new position on a relational level. Participants put into practice individual resilience mechanisms to cope with daily struggles. In this sense, a significant account came from Āmal, who faced tremendous stress and anxiety in her daily life in Germany due to her tightening financial situation. When I met Āmal, she lived in a small but cosy two-room apartment, which she told me she renovated herself. After a first period in which Āmal suffered from the stress of her multi-layered trauma, she managed the strains and found the internal strength to develop emotional resilience.

> "I acknowledged my condition and found a way to cope with it. It was the only way to survive. […] I realized that I might be in this situation for the rest of my life.

Probably my parents will never be able to join me here and I am a 35-year old divorced woman… But, I am a 35-year old divorced woman [she smiles]. I mean, my life has just begun [she laughs]. There are still a lot of things that I want to do in life! […] I want to improve myself, to study, to do something good with my life and to do all this I need to stay healthy. So my priority is taking care of myself. I'm trying to eat healthily and be organized. More importantly, I'm learning to be flexible and to not overthink" (Āmal, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 2, 2019).

The establishment of new networks and the consolidation of connections with locals helped separated Syrian families to build a new sense of belonging. As we have seen in the previous chapter, social networks are essential to establish a new social space in displacement. It becomes even more important in the case of separated families to re-establish a relational self, which was lost with the separation or left in the liminal dimension of the protracted-temporary displacement. Often, people look for new networks among communities with similar traditions, language, and culture. Nonetheless, in other circumstances, people are keen on building new relationships with locals. This is especially the case when they are encouraged by the local population. In Germany, a large part of the civil society has made a great effort to help Syrian refugees to rebuild their lives in the resettlement country. Some separated Syrian families I met, argued that they were encouraged with great enthusiasm by the German population.

Previous studies on transnational migration confirm these results. In particular, Bryceson & Vuorela (2002) use the term *frontiering* to refer to the multiple ways in which migrants put into practice specific strategies to navigate different normative systems and to develop their lives in a new country where they lack support networks and social capital. Through frontiering they also define new identities, new spaces and new roles (Bryceson &Vuorela, 2002, p. 11). The experience of Farīd, a man from Damascus who lived in Berlin, is very significant in this sense. Farīd was separated from his wife, who was still in Syria waiting to be reunited with him. He established a new network of connections in the local community as a coping mechanism for his life as a separated

husband.

> "It's not easy to live alone. I have to work double: outside the house and inside. In the beginning, it was difficult. I felt lonely most of the time and I didn't know how to organize my life. Maybe I was depressed. Then I met a German friend who helped me so much. Even before we were really able to communicate, because I didn't speak good German, he used to take me to the Jobcenter, help me with everyday duties and responsibilities. He even helped me to find a job! Now we're good friends, also because I speak German and we can communicate better" (Farīd, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 22, 2019).

Through this new connection, Farīd was able to rebuild a sense of belonging that made life in displacement as a separated man more bearable.

> "I've been waiting for my wife to be reunited with me for three years now. I don't know how much longer it'll take. But I decided not to waste my life and to use this time to improve myself. Establishing good connections and friendships is a way to improve" (Farīd, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 22, 2019).

Similarly, Fādi, who in his account had always devoted himself to help the community back in Syria, used new connections to re-establish new social networks and feel useful for the local and migrant community in Germany. He engaged in a network of young German volunteers who created a project for refugees to feel part of the community. Among other activities, Fādi was involved in language exchange and cooking activities, aiming to create participation and inclusion of locals and migrants.

> "Somebody told me about the Sprachcafe [language exchange gatherings] here in Berlin, which are for free. So I went in order to practise the language and I found out that this group of young Germans was organizing many activities in the centre. I was immediately involved in their activities. […] Thanks to them, I learnt the

language and met many new people. I have new friends and new people I can trust. Plus, I'm helping others to learn Arabic" (Fādi, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 6, 2019).

Ibrāhīm, in Munich, had a similar experience. In searching for a coping mechanism to overcome stress and difficulties at an individual level, he built new relationships with local groups. Ibrāhīm's forced migration experience was very traumatic; he had to deal with a great amount of stress related to the separation from his family, the insecurity about their future as a household, and traumatic experiences faced during the journey (Ibrahim, personal interview, Munich, March 19, 2019). To overcome these anxieties in a resourceful and not harmful way, Ibrahim tried to re-establish mental well-being by engaging in something that made him feel good – playing football.

"The first year in Germany was very hard. My family wasn't here with me and I was very stressed all the time. I know I'm luckier than others because I have a good job and a good salary – the highest I have ever had! But I could not help but being miserable all the time. […] My days were all the same and the only thing that made me happy was to talk to my family in the evening. But I could not bear the fact that they were away and I could not sleep. Then, a colleague from work, a German man, invited me to play football one evening, and I went. And you know what happened? I remembered how much I like playing football. I had forgotten about it with the journey, all the worrying, and the stress. Now I play with them every week. I feel much better because playing helps me to stay mentally fit and my wellbeing is also the wellbeing of my family, even if we are separated" (Ibrāhīm, personal interview, Munich, Germany, March 19, 2019).

While doing something for himself at an individual level, he also reaffirmed his social identity in a new community. Similar to what happened among Syrian men in Lebanon, who became community leaders to regain the dignity taken away from humanitarian actors, Syrian men and women in Germany took advantage of local networks to re-

established their role as social actors in a new environment. This renegotiation made them re-establish a new sense of belonging.

The consolidation of relationships with the left-behind family was another tool Syrian women and men in Germany used to renegotiate their social identity in displacement. In particular, consolidating family relations with the left-behind family members helped to mutually support each other in the difficult time of separation. Fātma, whose husband was still in Turkey, was able to turn insecurities into possible securities and the frustration against separation into a source of power that she used to overcome hardship.

> "When my husband and I speak over the phone, we speak about the future, we make projects; we imagine that he is here with me. This is the only way we have to be together at the moment, but planning the future helps not to lose the hope that this future is still possible" (Fātma, personal interview, Leipzig, Germany, January 20, 2019).

Planning and imagining the future is a way for Fātma to turn her double absence into a double presence. In this way, she and her husband maintained hope, expectations, and aspirations alive by visualizing a possible future.

Similarly, Āmal, who was separated from her extended family, emphasized that her relationship with her parents in Syria improved since she was in Germany. As she stated several times during the interview, she started putting more effort into the relationship with her left-behind parents.

> "In the beginning, I felt the responsibility of supporting my parents emotionally as well as economically. They are old and alone. It's my duty to do so. But then I realized that in fact, they are also supporting me. Even if we do not know whether this separation will end we help each other to go through it" (Āmal, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 2, 2019).

At the same time, Āmal's parents in Syria became more understanding of her needs and more open-minded.

> "They no longer put pressure on me about the fact that I should get married again or start a family… or not like before at least. They understand that my position has changed, that I live in another environment and I can make different choices. […] I think it also depends on the fact that I provide for them now and they respect me more for this. […] They were not close-minded before, but ten years ago, what I did would have been impossible even to imagine" (Āmal, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 2, 2019).

Although most participants found their ways to renegotiate their new roles and relationship in displacement, more extreme and desperate ways of dealing with life as a separated family are also quite common. To avoid excessively long waiting times, some Syrian families have claimed having taken on the dangerous journey to reach a member of their family who was already in Germany. In this case, the risk is that they keep staying separated across the different EU States or the German States for a long time. Many participants claimed that they had thought about leaving Germany, or migrating back to Turkey or Lebanon at least once.

> "If you have a one-year residence permit [subsidiary protection] you are not entitled to bring your family here. […] I know plenty of people who returned to Turkey because they were not able to bring their families to Germany. […] I have thought about that too, of course. When I feel down sometimes I think about going back to Turkey" (Abū Moḥammad, personal interview, Neumünster, Germany, March 4, 2019).

As other authors have argued, the sense of insecurity is one of the triggers for migration movements (Sirkeci & Cohen, 2016), including secondary migration movements (Tuzi, 2019), and spontaneous return migration (Bolognani, 2007; Kunuroglu et al., 2018), as well

as a driver for separated family members to undertake the journey across borders, using dangerous means including smuggling organizations (Damir-Geilsdorf & Sabra 2018).

Finally, one participant, Amīra, a woman from Aleppo in her late twenties, was engaged when she left Turkey in 2015 and left her fiancé behind. Amīra eventually decided to get married by a proxy marriage, where she was not present at the ceremony and commissioned her uncle to enact the marriage contract on her behalf.[68] A legal union under Islamic law could serve as a base to claim family reunification. Nonetheless, when I talked to her in January 2020, she told me that they decided that he would take on the journey across the sea to reach Germany.

> "We have been separated for four years already, now we are married but the risk is that I am not going to see him for four more years. […] He decided he will come by boat with the smugglers, so we are now waiting for the right time" (Amīra, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 18, 2020).

As a beneficiary of subsidiary protection, Amīra could not foresee when or if her claim would be accepted. Moreover, it is sometimes difficult to prove that those proxy marriages are real and will result in cohabitation. For this reason, the risk that after long waiting times the claim would not be accepted is also something that separated families have to take into account.

> "I just want to start a family with my fiancé. We have been waiting for so long and we cannot wait anymore. […] We found our way to deal with unfair policies. […] I only hope that everything goes well…" (Amīra, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 18, 2020).

---

[68] Proxy marriages are allowed by the *sharīa'a*, which regulates family law for Muslim people in Syria. If the woman is not present at the marriage, a *walī* (guardian) or a *wakīl* (delegate) should be present (van Eijk, 2016). According to the German civil code (*Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch*), Germany does not allow proxy marriages within its jurisdiction, but it recognizes those contracted abroad, where they are possible unless they are incompatible with the body of principles that underpin its legal system (interview with an immigration lawyer in Berlin, April 3, 2020).

As with many other separated families, Germany's immigration policies limited Amīra's chances to *start a family* in displacement, leaving little space for plans or integration. The agentic mechanisms put into practice by Amīra and her husband were exercised to "deal with unfair policies" (Amīra, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 18, 2020) in order to take full advantage of the protection opportunities that Germany offered to Syrian refugees, which otherwise would not be sustainable in the long term.

5.2. Social security policies changing gender dynamics: The impact of the welfare on marital relationships

In Germany, I also met a number of divorced women from Syria. One of them is Mahā, a woman from rural Damascus, who lived in Berlin. She was divorced, with two children and defined herself as "an independent woman" (Mahā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 29, 2019). I met her through a common Syrian acquaintance and unlike other participants, she seemed immediately at ease with the research topic and the interview. She was very friendly to me. She proposed meeting me in a café in Mitte, Berlin, where we conversed for at least two hours, mixing different languages, mostly about her love life, and about relationships in general. She got married to a cousin when she was 19 years old, and she had her first child soon after. She claimed that it was her decision to get married so young but she later said that the family suggested the marriage. Her parents, she claimed, were very open-minded. Both worked and imparted to her the value of work, to the extent that she considered it "essential" in her life. However, the person she married "could not let go of the Arab traditions" and he did not accept she "wanted to go out and work outside the house" (Mahā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 29, 2019). When the war started in Syria she recalled she was always scared and worried about her children's future – at that time, she was pregnant with her second child. Her two brothers were in Europe already and solicited her to leave the country and migrate to Germany.

> "I started thinking about migrating without telling my husband. My husband didn't like the idea to live in Europe, although his mum is from Poland. […]

Eventually, she helped us to go to Poland and from there we moved to Germany. […] I didn't experience what other Syrians did. I didn't risk my life. I came to Germany by plane. […] My husband didn't want us to live in Germany, he wanted to stay in Poland and from there, go to Dubai, as he once lived there. But I didn't want to live in Dubai!" (Mahā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 29, 2019).

When she came to Germany, Mahā "started enjoying life and having a European life – going to cafés, sitting in parks" (Mahā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 29, 2019). She said her husband would not allow her to go out alone in Syria and together they had not done much social life since the war started. However, her husband did not like the idea of Mahā having a "European life."

"He didn't accept the fact that I wanted to go out and work. Maybe he just couldn't adapt to the new culture. He was afraid! On the other hand, I wanted to work and develop. I wanted to learn the language and make new friends. […] Eventually, we decided to leave each other" (Mahā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 29, 2019).

Mahā said that the decision was mutual but she later claimed that she left him because they disagreed on how they should have lived life in Germany.

"I had a job opportunity, but my husband did not want me to work because it was a night-shift job. In Germany, it's usual for women to work at night. […] Everything that was not acceptable in Syria is now possible in Germany. I have more freedom here! […] My husband was not of the same idea. He was so jealous! But I understood his jealousy as mistrust. […] He couldn't let go of the old traditions. He believes that women cannot wear whatever they want or work outside their house" (Mahā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 29, 2019).

She later told me about the divorce and how she motivated herself to break up with him. When she received the job opportunity, she declined it because her husband did not allow her to work. However, later on, she got in touch with a German association, which helped her to "divorce him, and access the Jobcenter" – namely the social security system.

> "I couldn't accept that job opportunity. He didn't allow me to. But I chose my freedom over him! If I had chosen him, he would have been so happy and relaxed now. But I wanted myself to be happy first. I didn't want to spend the rest of my life doing nothing. […] I was helped by a German organization. They supported me with legal issues and practical issues. My kids could also stay with me. […] Now I'm with the Jobcenter, but I was working before. I left my first job and I'm currently looking for another one. I don't mind working anything, as I'm still studying the language" (Mahā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 29, 2019).

Mahā's spoke about divorce very proudly – especially about the fact that she was able to keep custody of her children. Although in Syria the personal status law is based on *sharīa'a* for all Syrians, including Christians, women are allowed, under certain circumstances, to take the initiative to divorce with the consent of their husbands (van Eijk, 2016, p. 119). However, with divorce, a woman loses the physical custody of her children (ibid., p. 121). In general, German law recognises joint custody for children, and Mahā was able to keep her son and daughter with her – "their father was only showing up from time to time" (Mahā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 29, 2019). Mahā's independence from her husband was made possible by the German welfare state, which supported her and gave her an alternative to an oppressive marriage that kept her "captivated" (Mahā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 29, 2019).

Asylum seekers and refugees, as can happen to any other migrant, initially struggle to find a job and learn a new language. For this reason, the German State covers their basic needs with a basic monthly income, living expenses, healthcare insurance, and other benefits

such as the child allowance.[69] The highly developed welfare system of Germany, as well as that of other Central European and Northern European countries, has been criticized by many for being what Zimmermann (1996) identified as a "pull-factor", and for creating imbalances between the Member States in terms "burden shouldered by European countries" (Bloch & Schuster, 2002, p. 394). Traditionally, Germany has been labelled as a "conservative" or "continental" welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990). However, policy "drift, layering and recalibration" have led to transformational adjustments (Seeleib-Kaiser, 2016). Today, although dynamics of exclusion of some groups in society still characterize the system (Bommes, 2003; Bloch, A., & Schuster, 2002: Williams, 1996), the German welfare regime provides opportunities to vulnerable groups who would not be able to support themselves otherwise.

Accessing the system is not always simple or given for granted for migrant and refugee women. When men and women migrate jointly, women are often classified as dependents of their male partners. Nonetheless, they are entitled to file an individual application for refugee status or separate the family status from that of their husbands in case of divorce or separation and still be entitled to social benefits. As some female participants told me, in most cases, they are not given this kind of information from the reception centres or at any step of the asylum process. For this reason, some women may find it difficult to break unhappy relationships or oppressive marriages.

The literature has focused on many aspects of access to social welfare for refugees and vulnerable migrants. In particular, the literature argued that through social welfare, the State puts refugees and other fragile categories in a state of dependence. Scholars have looked at the risks of migrant women's dependency on the social security system (Ghorashi, 2005; Eggebø, 2010). The risk is that the welfare state transforms "active participants into passive dependants", as it treats refugees as people who are unable to act independently (Ghorashi, 2005, p. 195). In this sense, the welfare state wastes "the most effective years of their lives in a new country", it isolates them, and place them in passivity (ibid.).

---

[69] See Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz, Asylum Seekers' Benefits Act. Available at: http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/asylblg/index.html [Accessed January 12, 2020].

In line with these studies, in my research, I found that women who found themselves "liberated" from the dependence of their husbands became dependent on the State. This could be read as a Western mirror of what Simon Turner called a "better husband" for Burundian refugee women to refer to the UNHCR in Tanzania refugee camps (Turner, 1999). The experience of some participants resonates with those findings. The German State became a better husband for Wafā, a mother of three children from Aleppo, who got separated from her husband. She was in her thirties when I met her in February 2019 and lived in an apartment in Marzahn, in Eastern Berlin. She left her husband because, after displacement, she reported, he became violent and did not want her to work. Like many Syrians, Wafā came to Germany through the dangerous journey across the so-called "Balkan route" in 2015, after crossing different countries before reaching her destination. She and her husband lived in Turkey for a while before deciding to continue the journey. In Germany, life was not what Wafā had expected and her relationship with her husband changed.

> "When we came, we were together of course. We lived in Ahrensfelde [a neighbourhood of Berlin]. […] My husband changed a lot when we came. He did not want me to make new friends, to go out, or to work. I always found work important in my life and I worked in Syria as well. […] He became stressed and violent and we argue all the time. […] Eventually, we decided to get a divorce and to live in separate houses" (Wafā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, February 25, 2019).

I later asked Wafā how she managed to do that in a country where she did not know the language or laws. She replied that a German friend helped her:

> "I didn't know the language and I was new. I was afraid. […] I was helped by a German woman I met. She told me that I could easily get a divorce and go live by myself with the kids. I didn't know the laws here so I stayed with my husband for a

long time before I decided to break up with him" (Wafā, personal interview, Berlin, February 25, 2019).

Wafā argued that the main reason for breaking up the relationship with her husband was that he changed, became violent and oppressive – her greatest desire was to work, and he would not let her work. However, after the breakup, it was not so easy for Wafā to put herself back on her feet, and as often happens, her responsibilities doubled.

> "I have never worked in Germany. I am still learning the language and I do not have the chance to work now. I am with the Jobcenter. […] I left my husband in 2017; I have been living here with the kids since then. […] In Syria it wouldn't be possible [to do what I did] because I would have never been able to go live by myself and pay for the rent. […] I have the desire to work of course, but I have monthly support and I can live with this now" (Wafā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, February 25, 2019).

The social welfare allowed Wafā to break a relationship in which she no longer felt comfortable and gave her "a chance to be a better person and improve" herself (Wafā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, February 25, 2019). The support of the State replaced the support that she received from her husband in Syria. However, access to that support was possible only through an intermediary person.

> "Leaving my husband was the best decision I made, and it wouldn't have been possible without the help of this friend. I wouldn't have known where to go, how to do it, how to say things! She helped me a lot!" (Wafā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, February 25, 2019).

Another participant, Hiba, had a similar experience. She stayed in an oppressive marriage for four years after she forcibly migrated to Germany, before obtaining a divorce from her husband. Also, in Hiba's case, divorce was possible through a local intermediary, who

helped her to extricate from the muddle of German bureaucracy. Like other women participants, she was not informed, at any stage of her asylum process, of the possibility of being in separate family status in case of divorce.

> "I didn't know I could divorce my husband so easily. Nobody told me. […] A German friend helped me in the beginning. Then she decided to stop contacting me because when I wanted to separate from my husband, I didn't stick to my decision and I decided to give him a second chance. She told me that we Syrians can't make decisions. We are always hesitant. […] Then I contacted her again and told her that I was ready to leave him and I needed help. She was so nice and helpful. She gave me positive energy!" (Hiba, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, April 29, 2019).

Like Wafā, Hiba navigated the German bureaucracy to get divorced from her husband with the help of a German friend. Whether the judgement of her friend was influential in Hiba's decision is hard to say, but when she told me the story, I felt that this person played a more important role than what she claimed. However, the support of the social security system was what made up Hiba's mind.

> "Before coming to Germany, I went to Egypt with my kids. I had relatives there. My husband stayed in Syria. I wanted to divorce him already, but I couldn't adapt to Egypt. Living there is too expensive. I tried to work in my profession [aesthetician], but I wasn't paid enough. […] My father didn't accept the fact that my husband was not with us. So my dad told him that he should either follow us or brings us back to Syria. I had to go back to Syria with my kids to my husband" (Hiba, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, April 29, 2019).

In Egypt, Hiba could not get a divorce from her husband because she could not support herself and her children with her work and her family did not encourage her in this decision. In Germany, thanks to the support she received from the State, which she accessed through the local social networks that she had established, she could finally get a

divorce. However, she claimed that her husband did not want to accept the separation initially and the fact that she obtained custody of the children. Eventually, he blamed her for having "become German".

> "He told me: 'You're becoming German, you should go back to Syria to learn what your culture really is like.' He also threatened to take the kids. Thank God he found the reason" (Hiba, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, April 29, 2019).

The literature about family ruptures after migration anticipates that sometimes migrant and refugee women decide to divorce from their husbands not because they changed after migration, as in the case of Hiba, Wafā, and Mahā, but because they did not change (Al-Ali, 2002, p. 255). This was the case of another participant, Wiṣāl, a mother of two, who decided to separate from her husband because he "did not have a goal in life". Wiṣāl started comparing her husband to those of her friends in Germany, and she realized that he was no longer the person she wanted to be with. When I asked her, who made the decision to divorce and what was the main reason for divorce, she replied:

> "It was my decision. I wanted to leave him because he didn't have any goal in life. Never has he thought of buying a car or starting a new job, for example. Actually, he did not want to work at all! […] When I met the husbands of my German friends I understood that I didn't want to be with him anymore. They were cooking, cleaning, making plans for the family; my husband was sitting in the house all day. This hasn't changed from Syria, but back then I didn't realize that things could be different" (Wiṣāl, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 2, 2019).

From Wiṣāl's words, it seems clear that the impact with a more individual society made people aware of the fact that relationships are based on mutual consent rather than on duties or obligations. In this sense, in more traditional societies, relationships might appear stronger because they can only be broken by external causes, while in "reflexive

modernity" (Giddens, 1991), internal causes can disrupt a marital relationship when mutual consent is no longer present.

When Wiṣāl came to Berlin, her family was supported by the social security system as many other refugee families. However, she complained that the man was not oriented towards becoming independent from the welfare system. He was making no effort to learn the language and be economically integrated into the job market.

"We had the Jobcenter allowance and maybe he thought we could live like that forever. But what kind of life is this?" (Wiṣāl, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 2, 2019).

While the perception of dependence can be stigmatizing for many (Fraser & Gordon, 1994), including migrants and refugees, for most women I met in my fieldwork it was somehow well accepted mainly because it was seen as a temporary dependence. Those who use the welfare system to liberate themselves from oppressive relationships and unhappy marriages also have high expectations towards their lives in Germany. They use this system to become active participants in society.

"Of course, I get an allowance from the Jobcenter. They pay for almost everything, but I want to reach the point where I pay my own bills. I want to work and handle these responsibilities" (Wafā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, February 25, 2019).

"There are plenty of things I want to do in my life. I want to study and work. I am also thinking of buying a car" (Mahā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 29, 2019).

"I want to stay in Germany for my kids. Their life here is much better. My life is much better as well. […] I'm studying German and I took a nursing course, I'm

willing to learn the language and work in this field" (Hiba, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, April 29, 2019).

"Things are different now, but it doesn't bother me at all. I like being responsible, as it makes me feel more human" (Miriam, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, February 3, 2019).

"I can't imagine me sitting in the house all the time like my husband was doing. It bothered me so much. […] There are plenty of things that we can do here and I don't want to limit myself anymore. I want my daughters to grow up with the idea of being active in life" (Wiṣāl, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 2, 2019).

The welfare system did not impact only women and did not only reflect upon the marriage in the form of divorce. Syrian men were also affected by the system but in a different way. In those interviews where this dimension emerged, Syrian men in a marital relationship complained that they had lost the respect of their wives and children in Germany. This concept is connected to the Arabic word *yamūn*, which is a colloquial word in Syrian dialect that has no literal translation in English, but it can be expressed with the term "unquestioning deference". To better understand the concept, this is how a Syrian journalist and friend explained it to me:

"If somebody is so close to you, even when he does something wrong, he makes you upset, or he even hurts you emotionally, you can forgive him because he is *yamūn 'aleīkī*. Also, if a person is *yamūn* to you, if he asks for a favour or for your help, even if it is against your own will, you would do it. It is a common thing between parents and children. But it is even more than that: children in our society (such a patriarchal society) have to respond to their father's will even if it is against their own will… the parents are *yamūn* by default. In Europe, men feel like they are not *yamūn* anymore. They can't shout to their wives and their kids. They can't even force them to do something against their own will. So they feel like they are losing

the main role as a father, as a patriarch" (Maurice, journalist and friend, personal conversation, Beirut, Lebanon, November 30, 2017).

Some authors mentioned the notion of unquestioning deference. Barakat (1993, cit. in Joseph, 1993) for example, argued that the traditional Arab father "has authority and responsibility… expects respect and unquestioning compliance" (Barakat, 1993, cit. in Joseph, 1993, p. 14) as the person in control over land, resources, and income. This concept was of utmost importance in understanding the experience of two Syrian men I met in Germany – Murād, a man from the Golan Heights I met in Grimma, a small city in the State of Saxony, and Ṭalāl, from rural Hama, who lived in Leipzig, also in the State of Saxony. For both men, forced displacement in Germany meant a re-calibration of power in the relationship. The financial and social independence that women gained in Germany decreased patriarchal authority over them. For example, when I asked Murād about decision-making processes within his family in Germany, he replied sardonically:

> "My wife makes all the decisions now. She does not respect my opinion anymore. She listens to her new friends, and she thinks my opinion is not important anymore" (Murād, personal interview, Grimma, Germany, March 16, 2019).

Similarly, Ṭalāl complained that he did not live the same "family atmosphere" as in Syria, because he lost the respect of his wife and children.

> "Here, I feel I'm not the man anymore and this is not my home. There is a difference in our family life between here and Syria. In Syria, I felt respected. My wife and kids didn't dare to oppose my opinion. Everything is different here. They [his wife and children] are different and our life is different. We are oriental and also our roles are. Everything is different here…" (Ṭalāl, Leipzig, Germany, March 15, 2019).

Many interviewees in Germany brought up the feeling of losing the respect of their wives and children. Murād and Ṭalāl, among others, have experienced the loss of *yamūn* vis-à-vis their wives and children. In Germany, the social position of Murād and Ṭalāl changed, and this challenged the patriarchal ideas on which familial duties were based. By losing their right to unquestioning deference and unconditioned respect from wives and children, they felt like they have lost their patriarchal position.

Both Murād and Ṭalāl linked the loss of *yamūn*, especially to the social security system and the role that this new element played in their family life. For example, in Murād's view, his wife did not respect him anymore because "she knows that she does not need the support of her husband anymore" (Murād, personal interview, Grimma, March 16, 2019). Indeed, his wife, Salūā, was aware of the support she could receive from the State and the options she had in Germany.

> "I have learnt a lot from Germany. I have more freedom here, including the freedom to decide what I want to do in my life, regardless of what my husband thinks. I have more options than before. […] There are different laws here and we all have to respect them" (Salūā, personal interview, Grimma, Germany, March 16, 2019).

Similarly, Raḥmā, Ṭalāl's wife, was informed about the freedom she had gained and the rights she has to maintain that freedom.

> "I want my kids and I to live peacefully and respectfully here. I don't want anyone to take control of my life, not even my husband. […] I don't want them [her children] to be limited. […] I'm free to do whatever I want here" (Raḥmā, Personal interview, Leipzig, Germany, March 15, 2019).

As we can see, in both cases social security support alone did not change the power balance and granted women awareness of their power. Both women were well aware of the better-resourced German legal system and the protection they could receive from it.

To understand the experiences of Ṭalāl and Murād, I discussed with an Arabist friend about the term *yamūn*. She told me that the origin was not Arabic, but rather Syriac or Aramaic. Hence, we could not understand the etymology of it. Nevertheless, she also said that in her opinion, the term *yamūn* carries an element of violence – if *yamūn* obliges you to do something, you are forced to do it against your own will (Simona, Arabist and friend, personal conversation, Rome-Berlin, July 28, 2020). In this sense, then, *yamūn* as unquestioning deference is also a form of symbolic violence. It is based on power dynamics – the *yamūn*, the dominant party, holds the power by providing for the dominated party, the family members, who are compelled to show unconditioned respect and consideration. The allocation of power and the preservation of power unbalance are possible thanks to this symbolic violence because both parties, the dominant and the dominated, tacitly agree upon their roles.

Nevertheless, reflecting on these considerations concerning the experiences of participants in Germany, I realized that there could be a further level of analysis. The loss of *yamūn* for Syrian men in Germany is not necessarily linked (only) to the loss of their role as providers and breadwinners. Unlike what had happened to Syrians in Lebanon, where a shift of gendered social spaces had made clear the loss of man's role of provider and the "replacement" of the woman as the breadwinner in the household, here, Syrian women and men experienced different circumstances. In Germany, I observed a disruption of mutually constitutive structures and practices producing gender differentiation, inequalities, and hierarchies. This is made possible thanks to the adjustment of gender balance created by the German welfare state. Newly arrived Syrian men and women are similarly dependent on the social security system, which has balanced power dynamics and consequently reduced men's power over women. In line with these findings, previous literature has also captured the role of social provision in promoting an amelioration of gender inequalities (Orloff, 1996). However, often this is coupled with better-regulated gender policies. In this sense, whether the modern welfare system could engender a transition from "private" to "public" patriarchy (Holter, 1984 cit. in Orloff, 1996) among Syrian families, as scholars have already observed within Western societies, and whether social reproduction of gender roles and relationships could occur

cannot be assessed in this study. Instead, it will be noteworthy to explore how gender relations that were challenged by the welfare state were renegotiated in displacement.

Renegotiating gender relations through a reflexive modernity

The renegotiation of gender relations threatened by the social security system of Germany was performed differently by divorced women and men who had lost unquestioning deference from wives and children. Nonetheless, in both cases, these occurred within a framework of "reflexive modernity." This concept has been elaborated widely in sociology (see Lee, 2006). The term indicates social transformations occurring in different areas of public life, as the market and the workplace, and in private life, in family life, and intimacy (Belliappa, 2013) due to globalization movements. British sociologist Anthony Giddens, German Sociologist Ulrich Beck, and Polish-British Sociologist and Philosopher Zygmunt Bauman played a fundamental role in conceptualizing *reflexive modernity*, *late modernity*, and *liquid modernity*. They played a central role in developing the concept by introducing theories of the individualization of societies and methodological cosmopolitanism. For Giddens, Beck, and Bauman, contemporary social change does not comply with modernity but reflects a new stage of modernity, which is reflexive. This new version of (late, reflexive or liquid) modernity is not postmodern in opposition to the earlier version, but *mehr-moderne,* more modern (Beck, 1992). In this new phase, there is a new awareness and a new realization of modernity ideals reflecting directly on individuals. These authors focused more on structural changes in society than on relationships between individuals. However, it is noteworthy to use reflexive modernity as a lens to understand how the reconstruction of gender relations occurred within Syrian refugee families in Germany. Although the three concepts are often used as synonyms, in what follows, I will use "reflexive modernity" to refer to the experiences of the participants in this research. Giddens' perspective perhaps better captures the nuances of gender relations' reconstruction performed as a "reflexive project of self" (Giddens, 1991).

Some scholars have argued that reflexive modernity brings about the de-traditionalization, erosion of traditional values, and valorization of the individual

dimension over the collectivity (Belliappa, 2013). In Germany, I received many interesting insights about how women and men changed their perspective about the meaning of traditional values when their relationships were disrupted by the welfare system as a product of modernity. For example, for divorced women in this study, the breakup of oppressive relationships came with the rejection of traditional ideals. For example, Wafā, reflecting on the matter of time, appreciated newly discovered practices and criticized old behaviours.

> "In Syria, my time was wasted on visiting relatives. In Germany, my time is well spent. I have learnt here about the importance of time management. Moreover, there are so many activities that I can do with my kids here" (Wafā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, February 25, 2019).

She later explained more clearly that in Germany she started questioning traditional practices. She became critical towards these traditions and started embedding this new view in a self-reflexive project:

> "I want to run away from the traditions that I loathed. These traditions have destroyed Syria. […] I am not saying that I want to forget my life in Syria, but I came here for a reason. I want to be a better person and improve myself" (Wafā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, February 25, 2019).

Following Giddens (1990), Rasborg argued that the roots of individualism cannot be found in the denial and uprooting of traditional habits from our lives (Rasborg, 2017). Wafā's individualization here results from her "liberation" from the traditional bonds, which occurred thanks to the welfare system.

Mahā, on her side, left a husband who, in displacement, had changed and become more conservative towards gender roles and relations.

"In Syria, my husband and I lived together in the same house before we got married. Then, when we came to Europe he changed and became controlled by Arab traditions" (Mahā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 29, 2019).

Like Wafā, she also started questioning some of the assumptions that she recognized as given for granted in Syria; for example, the idea of having a numerous family.

"If a woman has many kids, she won't be able to separate from her husband (if she wants to), as she cannot leave the kids. Syrian women must have awareness of this issue. Kids are amazing, but life is not just about giving birth." (Mahā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 29, 2019).

As for Hiba, when I asked her whether she had friends in Germany and whether they were locals, she said:

"Yes, I do. Most of them are German. In fact, I really don't like the company of Arabs. They are still controlled by their traditions. […] I also have German friends who speak Arabic fluently. The only Syrian friend I have is Mariam [the person who connected me to her]. She has been living here for a long time. She has a very open mentality. She's someone who knows how to enjoy life" (Hiba, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, April 29, 2019).

In reflexive modernity, the self becomes a reflexive project, as individuals are constantly encouraged to make "political life choices regarding career, lifestyle, and consumption" (Rasborg, 2017). In this sense, the contributions of Murād and Ṭalāl are noteworthy. Both men reconstructed gender relations through reflexive modernity by making precise political life choices. They accepted the loss of *yamūn* and chose to perform a less hegemonic masculinity and reconstruct more equal gender relations with their wives.

"I understood that things are different here. We are not in Syria. Women have to be respected and valued. In the end, I don't care who is the one who makes the decision. I just want my family to be happy. […] I chose to *become a modern man*" (Murād, personal interview, Grimma, Germany, March 16, 2019).

Like Murād, also Ṭalāl "became a modern man" (*zalame mutaḥrir*) and reconstructed his relationship with his wife by choosing to be more equal to her. Individualization is not just mere egoism or the rejection of traditional values, but it concerns the emergence of new post-material values (Rasborg, 2017). This aspect was vivid in Ṭalāl's desire to bring gender equality values in his relationship.

"Here we are both [his wife and him] in the same situation. Now we are with the Jobcenter, but later on, we will both work. We are equal in Germany. […] I'm fine with this. I don't care if my wife wants to have a career. I also want to have a career and to improve myself" (Ṭalāl, personal interview, Leipzig, Germany, March 15, 2019).

In light of Ṭalāl's choice of being more equal to his wife, Raḥmā, claimed that her husband became more emotionally supportive of her and their children.

"Yes, he has changed. But in a good way! He understands me better and he talks to the kids and me more. He's more focused on us now. He even does the cleaning!" (Raḥmā, personal interview, Leipzig, Germany, March 15, 2019).

The subject of cleaning, doing the chores, or taking care of the house came up in several interviews with Syrian families in Germany. According to these accounts, Syrian men in Germany became more aware of equal roles and responsibilities. Similarly, for Salūā, her husband became more attentive in the house.

"He never washed a dish in Syria. Now he even cleans the floor. […] Of course, I like it, but when it comes to cooking, that is my space and I don't want anyone there" (Salūā, personal interview, Grimma, Germany, March 16, 2019).

Salūā, who invited me for lunch one day, was a very talented and passionate cook and had no willingness to share that space with her husband. Despite this specific case, these accounts suggest that Syrian men in Germany could gain some gendered space in the private sphere, which did not happen to Syrian men in Lebanon. This study is not able to assess whether this variation can remain such in the long term. Nevertheless, in light of what I have observed, I can perhaps consider that the private space can have a different meaning in reflexive modernity; and that the passage from *yamūn* to *zalame mutaḥrir* (modern/liberal man) can bring about a new share of responsibilities in the private sphere.

As a final consideration, it is worth mentioning that the rejection of traditional values, habits, and behaviours can also have an alternative meaning. Some Syrians I interviewed claimed that in displacement, they distanced themselves from "traditional society" (*al-mujtamaʿ al-taqalīdī*). This is certainly a choice of reflexive modernity, but not necessarily linked to the disruption of relationships due to the impact of reflexive modernity. Germany received Syrians of different backgrounds and different political views. For this reason, often families took distance from other Syrians they did not know. For example, as mentioned, some families I reached out refused to consent that my assistant Meī came with me, and my reassurances of confidentiality and anonymity were not enough to convince them. Migrants and refugees' choice to take distance from the traditional society and the passage from the extended to the nuclear family has been the focus of rich literature. It will be analyzed later on in this chapter.

5.3. The consolidation of religious beliefs in displacement: Navigating relationships in a new social environment

Having discussed how Syrian women and men exercised agency in a framework of reflexive modernity to renegotiate relationships altered by the welfare state, I will now explore how religion can become a reflexive element and how it can be used to come to terms with the impact of "reflexive modernity" on relationships. I will mainly look at how different aspects of a new social environment in the West have impacted relationships and how these were renegotiated by consolidating religious practices in Germany.

Over the past three decades, religion and migration have been the focus of a large number of studies. Increasing scholarly attention has been given to transformations of religious beliefs, and in particular, to how migration influences faith and practices of religious communities. The debate has focused on the significance of faith and religion for migrants who deal with stress, insecurities, and challenges (Haddad et al., 2003; Adogame & Weissköppel, 2005; Min, 2005; Shaw et al., 2019), on religious organizations and transnational networks (Levitt, 2007), as well as on religious pluralism and intra-religious dialogue (Henkel & Knippenberg, 2005; Gallo, 2014). Most studies agreed that religion plays a fundamental role in the lives of many migrants and forced migrants, both individually and at a community level (Schreiter, 2009 cit. in Frederiks, 2015). Migrants' approach to religion has been observed mostly in relation to experiences of loss, disorientation, and separation (Smith, 1978), in cases where religion functioned as an identity marker in a new social context, and as healing mechanisms to recover from humiliating and hurtful experiences (Schreiter, 2009 cit. in Frederiks, 2015). In some cases, migrants became more religious than they were in the destination country, and not only religion served as a symbol of identity, but it became a symbol of difference (Kurien, 1998).

Most of these studies have focused on North America and economic migration. Little comparative research has been carried out to link those findings with other migration contexts or groups of migrants. One exception is represented by Foner & Alba

(2008), who have studied the impact of religion on social inclusion in the United States and Western Europe. The authors have found that while in North America, religion has a positive role in constructing identity and fostering integration, in secular Europe, religion is seen as a barrier to social inclusion (Foner & Alba, 2008). However, in my observation, when religion is considered a threat to migrants' integration it is not because European countries have a more secular mindset compared to the United States. Perhaps except on paper, Europe is far from being secular in many aspects of society. Contrary to what Foner & Alba (2008) observed, my findings suggest that what hampers social inclusion for refugees is the different understanding of integration in Europe and North America. While the United States has traditionally a "multicultural" approach to integration, Europe traditionally understands integration as "assimilation". Thus, diversity is not really encouraged in Europe – especially religious diversity. In line with the two authors, in my observation, when the religion to "integrate" is Islam instead of Christianity, social cohesion is perceived as more difficult. Islamophobia plays a fundamental role in this sense. Muslims are often perceived as a threat, a source of violence (Ciftci, 2012) or holders of a retrograde and sexist culture (Navarro, 2010), which are seen as barriers to integration, namely assimilation. From this perspective, differences between the United States and Europe are substantially reduced.

The integration discourse is considerably more complex than this and cannot be reduced to binary classifications of integration models. I will come back to this debate in the last section of this chapter. For now, I would like to emphasize that the new social environment wherein Syrian families have been welcomed in Germany, has been experienced by some as a threatening *milieu* – precisely because they felt the burden of Western expectations of assimilation. Shādī, whom I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, expressed this feeling very clearly in his interview with me:

> "They [the Germans] want us [the Syrians] to become like them. […] They talk about integration all the time as if it is only our duty. But would it be the same if I was Canadian or an Australian? I don't think so" (Shādī, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, November 17, 2018).

He went further when I asked him if he believed it could be a matter of religion, ethnicity, skin colour, etc.

> "It is all this together. I'm Muslim, dark-skinned, and Arab. I'm different from them [the Germans]. That's why they want integration. But this word 'integration' is what made me reject integration itself. When I came here, the way I was treated in 2015 and 2016… like an animal, made me reject the language, the society, everything. I didn't want to be part of this society and I withdrew into myself" (Shādī, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, November 17, 2018).

Shādī, like many other Syrian men and women, had a very traumatic displacement experience, and for a long time, he was not able to fully accept the new social environment, of which "integration" was the tool to become part.

Similarly, for other participants, the impact with the German society, the new social environment and the pressure on integration very often perceived and fostered as an assimilation duty, were very distressing, violent, and demeaning experiences. One of the most interesting accounts, in this sense, was that of Em Ghazal, a woman from rural Damascus in her thirty, who described Germany as "the country of sin and moral corruption" (Em Ghazal, personal interview, Berlin, March 7, 2019). She lived in a *Wohngemeinschaft* (WG), a shared apartment, with her three children and two Syrian students who were not related to them. After her husband was jailed and died in Assad's prisons, her 15-year-old son was also harassed and persecuted by the Syrian regime. Thus, he decided to leave the country and join other people on the journey to Europe, in 2015. Em Ghazal and her two other children were later reunited with him.

> "I feel I can't fit in here [in Germany]. I'm afraid because I can't learn the language until now I haven't learnt German very well. I don't have friends, and I'm not happy here" (Em Ghazal, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 7, 2019).

In Berlin, Em Ghazal spent most of her time in her room, which she shared with her 12-year-old son and 17-year-old daughter, while the older son, Ghazal, shared a room with his two schoolmates. For her, the migration experience, which followed her husband's death by only a few years, was very traumatic. When I met her in March 2019, she had no expectations towards her future in Germany, although she is still very young.

> "I am a conservative person. I got married when I was 14 and I had my first son when I was 15. I'm not educated and I've never thought of working. […] In Syria, I had a simple life. I used to work inside the home, cleaning, cooking… Everything had to be clean and ready for when my husband came back. […] This is our [women's] nature. The job of the woman is inside the home: cleaning, cooking, and taking care of her husband. […] My husband used to work outside. He rarely helped me with my duties. Also, because it wasn't ok... Once, I was pregnant, and I had to clean the floor but I was so tired so I asked him if he could do it. He said 'no' and the reason why he didn't help me is that it wasn't good in front of my mother-in-law that he worked and I sit without doing anything" (Em Ghazal, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 7, 2019).

In Germany, Em Ghazal tried to maintain a sort of continuity with the past. For this reason, she performed traditional gender roles and preserved traditional settings. In the WG, she used to cook for everybody, clean the house and "sit in the room most of the time" (ibid.). The painful experience of suddenly finding herself alone, in a country that she did not fully know or understand, with two adolescent children and a son who was now a young man, seems to be very distressing for her.

> "I've never expected to remain alone. I've never learnt to live outside the house because my husband used to do everything outside. […] I've never had to make decisions alone before… and I don't know how to do it even now. I don't know what's better for my children because I don't know this country, its language, and its rules… […] My older son is very independent, like my husband. He helps me a

lot. […] For example, when the other boys are at home, he washes the dishes so I don't have to go out of the room and wear my *ḥijāb*. He helps me to cook too. […] He makes the decisions in the family now. He's well aware of life in Germany. If I want to do anything I ask for his opinion" (Em Ghazal, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 7, 2019).

In terms of decision-making, after displacement, Em Ghazal replaced the figure of her husband with that of her older son. As often occurs in migration and forced migration, the younger generations take on the responsibilities and duties in the public sphere (Ali, 2018). They become spokespersons of their families because they learn the new language faster, and through school, they have easier access to social networks. For this reason, "second-generation" migrant children become more readily familiar with the dominant culture. Em Ghazal, who was not familiar with the German culture and did not recognize the value and legitimacy of her social capital in the host society, withdrew almost totally from the new social environment. In her account, the main reason for this decision was the perception of Germany as a country that would undermine her own traditional beliefs.

"Germany is the country of sin and moral corruption. So many young children smoke weed, take drugs, or drink alcohol. […] I'm afraid for my children because the most important thing for me is that they keep their religion" (Em Ghazal, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 7, 2019).

Another participant, Aḥmed, a 40-year-old man from Aleppo, claimed that he was scared that his family could "lose its religious values" (Aḥmed. Personal interview. Cottbus, Germany, March 9, 2019). He lived in Cottbus, Brandenburg, with his wife, Saḥar, two daughters and one son. Saḥar was 26 years old and pregnant with their fourth child when I met them in March 2019. The encounter with Aḥmed and his family was full of interesting insights. I was connected to them through an acquaintance of my assistant Meī, a Syrian social worker named Nadīm, who kindly agreed to connect me with some families he knew. Aḥmed and Saḥar accepted to participate, and they invited us to their

place on a Saturday afternoon. Saḥar made *kunāfe*, a Middle Eastern dessert, and prepared the Arabic coffee. The ʾ*ahūe ʿarabiyye* is a symbol of hospitality, and it is served to guests as a traditional sign of respect. My assistant Meī and I greatly appreciated this traditional welcoming. We soon understood that Aḥmed and Saḥar were a conservative couple. After extended pleasantries with Aḥmed, from which Saḥar remained out, we started our interview with Saḥar. Aḥmed and Nadīm left the room and gave us privacy.

Although initially, he seemed reluctant, Aḥmed agreed to be interviewed separately from his wife. However, during the interview with her, he remained in an adjacent room, where he could hear what she said. We were all aware that he was there and that Saḥar was not free to speak. Therefore, I started the interview with very general questions about her life in Syria, to which she replied mostly in monosyllables or answering what perhaps her husband would expect her to say. After a while, and many attempts to find a way to go more in depth, Nadīm from the other room asked Aḥmed to go for a walk outside. As soon as the men left, one of Saḥar's daughters came to us and told her mother that her father had left the house. She was finally free to speak. Saḥar took off her *ḥijāb*, proudly revealed shiny blonde hair and a lively personality, which she was holding back until only a few minutes before. She argued that her life had not changed considerably since she left Syria, as her husband and she maintained continuity with the past.

> "I got married when I was 15 years old. I was ok with it, I didn't oppose it. You know, because of our traditions, when a good guy proposes to you, you say yes. […] I've never had the opportunity to work. My husband didn't want me to work outside the house. He is convinced that the man should work outside and the woman should stay inside. Here [in Germany], if I had the opportunity, I would like to work outside the home. I would like to be a hairdresser. But we haven't talked about this with my husband yet. I haven't thought about it yet actually because I'm pregnant. […] Because I was pregnant with my son when I came, and now I'm pregnant again, I didn't have the chance to learn the language. And right now, I'm not taking any German course" (Saḥar, personal interview, Cottbus, Germany, March 9, 2019).

Due to two consecutive pregnancies, Saḥar had not yet had the chance to explore social life in Germany. She had never enrolled in a language course, had no friends, no social contacts outside of her family. In Germany, her husband had the last word on family planning.

"I gave birth to two children on my own accord, but the other two were my husband's desire. I didn't want to have more children" (Saḥar, personal interview, Cottbus, Germany, March 9, 2019).

She was aware that her pregnancies and her husband hindered her contact with the outside world and her experience in Germany, but she had somehow a very independent attitude instead. For example, she told me that she was the one who decided to come to Germany. She and her husband left Syria together, they reached Turkey, then, as many other families did, she remained there with their children and he continued the journey and arrived in Europe.

"My husband went to Austria. I stayed in Turkey with my sister-in-law. Then she told me she wanted to go to Germany and I said to my husband that I wanted to go with her. He refused because I was alone with two kids, but I didn't listen to him, and after travelling for nine days, I reached Austria. There he asked me if I wanted to stay or go to Germany, and I said 'Germany'" (Saḥar, personal interview, Cottbus, Germany, March 9, 2019).

Although her life had not changed significantly, in Germany, Saḥar was able to gain "a little bit of independence" Saḥar, personal interview, Cottbus, Germany, March 9, 2019) and make reflexive choices for her and her family.

"Now, if I want anything from him I just say: 'because I want it so.' In Syria, I couldn't dare say so. Here, I feel I have more rights" (Saḥar, personal interview, Cottbus, Germany, March 9, 2019).

As we shall see in the last section of this chapter, increased decision-making power is often related to the transformation of family structures in displacement and to the absence of the extended family that in the home country was responsible for making many decisions. Saḥar talked about her gained independence with enthusiasm, laughing and speaking loudly about what she was amazed by, in Germany. Although she essentially had only little independence, she was well aware of the advantages of being in Germany.

"Being a woman in Germany is even better. Her women have more rights; like if I don't agree on something, it's not going to happen. As for my girls, I am so happy that they will grow up here and not in Syria. They'll have an education, and nobody will force them to get married at a young age. The good thing about Germany is that nobody can force my daughters to do things that they don't want to do. […] As for me, I haven't explored my opportunities yet, because of my pregnancies" (Saḥar, personal interview, Cottbus, Germany, March 9, 2019).

Aḥmed's account was also very insightful. The man was a bit hesitant to express his opinions about gender relations as if he expected them not to be consistent with what I was hoping to hear as a white European woman. I tried to reassure him by saying that I was there to listen to his voice and I would not have judged him for his opinions. He said that his life changed consistently in Germany. He had more responsibilities and more pressure because it was not easy for him to find a job in Germany. After three years, Aḥmed was still struggling with learning the language and navigating the German system.

"I'm taking a German language course now. I'm struggling a lot because I'm not good at learning languages. I have only studied until the 7th grade and then left

school to start working, so it's difficult now to go back to school at my age. […] Although I tried, I couldn't make any friends here, but I can't communicate with my neighbours, and my Syrian friends don't live in the same area. […] The Germans are always busy they don't easily find the time for friends. Most of my Syrian friends have the same problem with Germans. […] I tried to find a job but I couldn't because of my weak German. I'm now trying to find a good course so that I can learn the language and then work" (Aḥmed, personal interview, Cottbus, Germany, March 9, 2019).

For many migrants, including myself, the German language is perhaps the first and most critical obstacle to life in Germany. For Aḥmed, struggling with the language also meant that he had no access to work, which he recognized as a man's responsibility.

"The man's responsibility is to work outside the home. Women have to work inside. In my opinion, women's experience outside the home is weak, so they should stay home and take care of the house and the children. […] I feel more pressure here in Germany because I have to think about the future. I used to work in Syria, but here I feel I'm doing nothing" (Aḥmed, personal interview, Cottbus, Germany, March 9, 2019).

Contrary to what I observed among some Syrian families in Lebanon, in Aḥmed's case, not working was not directly related to providing for his family; as in Germany he and his family were supported by the social security system. Aḥmed's discomfort with not working was more associated with his expected position as a man than with the actual need of providing. Like Em Ghazal, Aḥmed tried to maintain traditional settings in his family and forced his wife into traditional gender roles.

Although his own experience as a forced migrant in Germany was undoubtedly challenging, Aḥmed stressed various times in the interview that he had great expectations for his children. He emphasized that he decided to migrate to Germany because he wanted his daughters to have a promising future.

"I want them to study; I want them to become doctors. I don't want them to get married too soon" (Aḥmed, personal interview, Cottbus, Germany, March 9, 2019).

Nevertheless, it was not in his conversation with me that Aḥmed expressed his opinions and fears at best, but with Nadīm, while I was interviewing Saḥar. My fieldnotes report what Nadīm told me after we left Saḥar and Aḥmed's place.

"The man confessed to Nadīm that his biggest fear is to lose his wife. He doesn't want her to work or do anything outside the home. That's why, he said, he wanted her to have more children in Germany. So, that she could stay at home. He said to Nadīm that his biggest fear is that his wife will be liberated!" (Fieldnotes, Cottbus, Germany, March 9, 2019).

To maintain continuity with the past, Aḥmed delayed Saḥar's experience with Germany by keeping his wife pregnant. On the other hand, Saḥar was unwilling to have more children and seemed instead eager to start her life in Germany.

I later wondered why Aḥmed was so strict towards his wife and seemed to be more open-minded towards his daughters – he did not want them to get married soon; he wanted them to study. Meī suggested an explanation when, after the interview, she said that Saḥar was given away in marriage at 15 years old because she is blonde and has blue eyes. She was too beautiful to remain unmarried for too long. Hence, Aḥmed's biggest fear of losing his wife was perhaps related to the fact that she was so beautiful. However, most probably, Saḥar's beauty was not the only reason. Certainly, Aḥmed was also conscious of that side of his wife's personality that I discovered when he left. She was a joyful, self-aware young woman who was well informed about the opportunities and rights she had in Germany. Therefore, by keeping her away from the outside world, weak, unskilled, and isolated, Aḥmed was keeping her tied to him to keep his marriage stable. On the other hand, his relationship with his daughters was perhaps more robust than that with his wife, whom he married by an arranged marriage when she was 15 years old. By all

likelihood, he was not afraid of losing his daughters, as he feared losing his wife. Hence, he could allow himself to be more accommodating with his daughters in terms of personal freedom.

A final dimension of relationships intersecting with reflexive modernity that is worth mentioning is that of friendship. Although it is not directly related to marital or family relationships, it strongly emerged among some participants and I believe it deserves to be dealt with. Like Wāʿel, at the beginning of this chapter, who was frustrated about friendship relationships in Germany, other participants were not happy about their social life in Germany. Abdallāh, a man from the Golan Heights who lived in Münster, was very concerned about his friendships in displacement. Abdallāh lived with his sister and his brother-in-law. He had a very traumatic displacement experience, from which he was still trying to recover after four years. He was now comfortable with his life in Germany. After he escaped violence and persecution in Syria and Lebanon, he finally lived in peace, had a comfortable house, and built his future. Nonetheless, one of his main concerns was that, according to him, relationships in Germany were very artificial and superficial.

"You have to plan your time with friends much in advance. You have to book them on the calendar. What kind of friendship is this if I am not free to see my friends when I feel like it? I have this German friend who helped us a lot. He works with my sister. We went to smoke *argīle* together a few times. He wanted to practice Arabic and I wanted to practice German. We had fun. But every time we had to schedule our visits weeks in advance... I mean, how am I supposed to know if I feel like smoking *argīle* or eating *shawarma* in three weeks?" (Abdallāh, personal interview, Münster, Germany, March 22, 2019).

After many attempts of making new friends, Abdallāh isolated himself. At the time of our interview, he told me he suffered from depression and started drinking.

"My sister and her husband were not happy at all with this. They are very religious. But they understood that I was depressed. […] I miss my social life in Syria. I was younger, but I had a lot of friends, I used to go out, go to cafes. […] We used to speak about our private lives. Germans never open up, they don't speak about their private issues" (Abdallāh, personal interview, Münster, Germany, March 22, 2019).

Syrian friends I met during my years in Germany had similar feelings towards social relationships. They somehow felt that in Germany, "you see your friends in your free time, while in Syria you find free time to see your friends" (Syrian friend, personal conversation, Berlin, September 1, 2020). For Abdallāh, life without friends was difficult to bear. His sister later told me that he was a very social person in Syria. He used to gather people together and spend most of his time with his friends. For this reason, he had problems with the Syrian regime during the Revolution. With his unresolved traumas related to the time he spent in Syrian prisons, all the violence and the tortures he underwent, the young man was keen on building meaningful relationships in Germany. However, he failed, and he chose to isolate himself from social life.

The topic of friendship in Arab contexts is almost non-existent as an analytical category in sociology and anthropology compared to kinship, which has been extensively tackled (for example, see Joseph, 1993). Among the few exceptions, Michelle Obeid (2010) has observed that in certain Arab contexts where kinship relationships are dominant, friendship is valued in opposition to kinship for being "'free' of the oppressive obligations dictated by kinship" (Obeid, 2010, p. 94). Abdallāh's desire to build friendship relationships in Germany resembles this view.

"Here, it seems that friends are like work commitments. It shouldn't be like that. Friendship shouldn't be an obligation" (Abdallāh, personal interview, Münster, Germany, March 22, 2019).

For him, friendship should be spontaneous, voluntary, and not dominated by obligations (*wājib*) as kinship is. In line with Obeid's findings (Obeid, 2010), although participants in

Germany perceived friendship as an autonomous realm, they conceived it as part of the same ideology of sociality where kinship lies. For those participants who had a strong network of friends before forced migration, as Abdallāh and Wāʾel, creating new social networks in Germany was crucial for the (re)construction of their social identity in displacement. Those concerned with not having meaningful relationships in Germany blamed the "modern life" of the West. In a conversation I recently had with a Syrian friend, he said: "Germans are like machines, they only think of working, and they organize everything according to their work. They put even friends in organized spaces on their calendars" (Syrian friend, personal conversation, Berlin, September 1, 2020). As the other dimensions previously explored, the dimension of friendship lies within the framework of the impact of "late modernity" on people's lives and it is confronted through religious reflexivity.

Religious reflexivity to renegotiate relationships in "reflexive modernity"

The literature has shown that (forced) migration can stimulate a reinforcement of religious beliefs in rebuilding a collective identity, which was lost during migration (Smith & Fetner, 2007 cit. in Kraft, 2017, p. 229). Nonetheless, religion can also be used to renegotiate individual identities when collective structures are unsettled (Kraft, 2017, p. 229). As faith is part of the complexity of identities, it can compensate for the loss of other dimensions of identity, which can be brought about by displacement. In this sense, religion can become a coping mechanism to come to terms with stressful events and direct people towards specific actions useful to restore a sense of wellbeing (Wessells & Strang, 2006 cit. in Kraft, 2017, p. 229). At the beginning of this chapter, this was the case of Nabīl who engaged in religious practices to find the strength to cope with the separation from his family. Like Nabil, Abdallāh also found in religion a way to compensate for the loss of his support networks and the disappointment of not being able to build new ones. For him, however, traumas were more profound.

"I suffered a lot in my life. I escaped from bombs, I had no food, I ran away from oppressors, and I remained without documents. I was prisoned and tortured by those terrorists [the Syrian regime] even without having an identity. […] I was not so religious before, but the *discovery of religion* helped me to go through all this, as I had only God to support me" (Abdallāh, personal interview, Münster, Germany, March 22, 2019).

The "discovery of religion" (*āiktishāf al-dīn*) sustained him and helped him to heal from the painful experiences of war, violence, imprisonment, and forced migration.

"I was broken… really. Broken. When I came to Germany I was already another person. I don't know how I survived. But what I knew was that I would have never been the same person again" (Abdallāh, personal interview, Münster, Germany, March 22, 2019).

In Germany, religion also became a source of reconciliation for Abdallāh and a tool to reconstruct an individual identity, after his own self was damaged during the last years in Syria.

"I was completely lost, I wasn't myself anymore. I started drinking and I was smoking so much. Only God helped me to survive, to find myself again. […] In Germany, I found no one I could really trust. Either people were seeing me as a terrorist or as a broken thing. I really miss having friends and sharing my thoughts with them. […] When I feel lonely I pray, I read the *Qur'ān.* […] I feel better after that" (Abdallāh, personal interview, Münster, Germany, March 22, 2019).

Suʿād, Abdallāh's sister, later emphasized that her brother was extremely traumatized and found in religion a way to cope with life stressors in the West. She asked me to reassure him that he was safe in Germany.

"He's still scared. I want you to give him positive energy. I want you to tell him that there's nothing to worry about here and that he's in a country that respects people's rights. You know, whenever he hears a police car he gets scared. He's afraid of being arrested. […] He became more religious in Germany. I'm happy that he found his way to overcome his traumas. He has so many traumas. He should talk to someone. I tried to find him a therapist to help him, but I could not find anyone" (Suʿād, personal interview, Münster, Germany, March 22, 2019).

Suʿād made me realize that the language was a big obstacle for Abdallāh to connect with the German population. I understood that she counted on me to reassure Abdallāh and that my word was valued because I am a European person and because I could communicate in Arabic with him, which in Münster was most likely not something that happens every day.

"I think religion helped him to find a safe place in life and to overcome the difficulties of this life in Germany. The fact that he has no social contacts other than my husband and me, is frustrating. We have our work, our friends, but he's really lonely" (Suʿād, personal interview, Münster, Germany, March 22, 2019).

Abdallāh used religion as a tool to find stability and to cope with the great changes that invested his life. I suggest that Abdallāh's reinforcement of religious beliefs in Germany occurred through a "religious reflexivity" (Martí, 2015), "a deliberative and problem-solving dynamic that is a distinctive and avoidable element of contemporary religious selves" (ibid., p. 3). Abdallāh used religion to reconstruct his own self in response to great life-changing experiences, and contemporary life in Germany, and to heal from hurtful and humiliating experiences. In this sense, religion became itself a "segmented aspect of modern, 'Western' everyday life stemming from profound transitions" (ibid., p. 2).

Similarly, for other participants, the consolidation of religious beliefs and practices was a reflexive exercise to come to terms with life in Germany. This was done in a framework of traditional gender roles and gender norms. For Em Ghazal, religion became

an identity marker, in a social environment that she perceived as hostile, to ensure continuity with the past and stability in the present.

> "My religion became the most important thing in my life in Germany. We have nothing else left. Everything is gone. […] There are no good values in this country and youngsters can get lost easily without religion. I want my kids to keep their values and to become good Muslims, as their father was" (Em Ghazal, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 7, 2019).

A revival or rediscovery of religious identity is not an attempt to act deliberately religiously in every sphere of life, but a reflexive reaction to settings that do not adhere to religious values, commitments, or desires (Martí, 2015; Archer, 2012). Displacement and migration are settings in which beliefs and values are often questioned, rediscovered, and challenged. In this sense, re-experiencing a religious self was, for Em Ghazal, a way to address the sense of upheaval she felt in Germany.

> "I feel like I can't have a life in this country. There's nothing for me here. I'm not happy, and I'll never be. That's why it's so important for me to maintain my religious principles" (Em Ghazal, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 7, 2019).

Em Ghazal employed religious reflexivity as a tool to come to terms with "reflexive modernity" and its facets, including religious pluralism, secularism, and cultural liberalism.

Em Ghazal's account resembled that of Aḥmed for his use of religion to ensure continuity with the past. As we have seen, Aḥmed tried to maintain control over his wife by keeping her isolated and wholly marginalized from the external society. The traditional way of living he established in his household, which laid within the conservation of past norms and customs, also encompassed religion.

"Religion is so important to me. It's something that I want my daughters to understand. Their life here will be so different from the one we [he and his wife] had. They can become whatever they want. I'm only asking them to maintain their religion. […] I want them to maintain all the values of Islam" (Aḥmed, personal interview, Cottbus, Germany, March 9, 2019).

Towards Saḥar, Aḥmed was equally ambitious in terms of the conservation of religious identity.

"I want my family to stay united. And keep our religion and our values it's the only way to stay united. […] Here women have more power and they don't value men's opinions anymore because they feel equal. But we're not equal; we're different. Don't you think? […] I want my wife to respect me and obey me without question because this is what a good Muslim does" (Aḥmed, personal interview, Cottbus, Germany, March 9, 2019).

I understood that Aḥmed felt a loss of authority in his family and especially from his wife, who instead was convinced that if she doesn't "agree on something, it's not going to happen". His will to maintain respect and obedience, which contrasted with Saḥar's understanding, was a form of "power over" (Kabeer, 1999; 2005). In this sense, he exercised agency negatively to override Saḥar's theoretical increased power in Germany. I suggest that this is a form of imposed religious reflexivity. If Em Ghazal's and Abdallāh's religion was a personal, meaningful choice (Archer, 2012), made to come to terms with the insecurities of displacement in the West, for Aḥmed it was a choice he imposed on Saḥar to decrease her power. Nevertheless, religious reflexivity did not become internalized by Saḥar, who continued to maintain her positive and optimistic attitude towards her opportunities in Germany – even when these differed from her husband's expectations and the choices he imposed on her.

5.4. Doing family from afar: Transnational extended families in displacement

One of the questions I asked families in Lebanon and Germany was: What does family mean to you? While this was a deeply felt topic in both countries, it is perhaps in Germany that I collected the most interesting accounts about it. Several people replied that family to them meant "support" (*museāʿda*), "respect" (*iḥtirām*), "joy" (*faraḥ*), "generosity" (*karam*), and "unconditional love" (*ḥob gheīr mashrūt*). More sarcastic accounts reported that family meant "obligations" (*wājib*) and "heart attack" (*waʾef ʾalbi*). However, most respondents categorized the role of the family in one central sphere of life, the socio-cultural one. For the majority of participants, the family was related to emotional and social domains. Family is a source of values and norms that regulate social relations and social life, a means to develop and maintain social capital.

Several Syrians I interviewed in Germany claimed that forced migration had a huge impact on the family structure. They argued that they shifted from an extended to a nuclear household. Although this might not be true for all Syrians in Germany, many Syrian families I met went through similar transformations in displacement. Duʿā and Rāmī, a couple from Raqqa I met in Munich, claimed that they moved from a "big family" (*ʿāʾile kabīre*) to a "small family" (*ʿāʾile zghrīre*). When the war started and the Islamic State (ISIS) occupied the city, Rāmī went to Turkey and crossed the Balkans to reach Germany, in the wake of the "refugee crisis". After a few months, his wife Duʿā, their three daughters, her mother, and her sister reached Rojava, the Syrian Kurdistan. From there, they entered Turkey, where they settled down while waiting to join Rāmī through family reunification. In Raqqa, Duʿā and her daughters lived with Rāmī's family, while in Turkey, they moved in with part of her family. Because the German family reunification allowed only spouses, minor children, or parents of minor children to reunite, they "became a nuclear family" (Duʿā, personal interview, Munich, Germany, March 19, 2019). However, the distance from the extended family is not always easy to bear. For example, Duʿā did not feel comfortable in this new structure. In fact, she argued that she felt alone:

"My social life changed here [in Germany] as my family is not here and I have no friends. In Syria, it was different; I had my family and my relatives. I was not alone. Here, I am alone" (Du'ā, personal interview, Munich, Germany, March 19, 2019).

When I asked her what she meant by "alone" she replied:

"In Syria, my parents and my sister helped me and supported me. I used to visit them every day. We used to live with my husband's family, and they also helped me a lot. We were surrounded by the love of our family. Here, it's just the two of us, and we can only count on ourselves. […] For example, in Syria, if Rāmī and I had a disagreement, we could count on our families to solve the dispute. Now, some of them are in Damascus, some in Turkey, some in Germany and others in Sweden. Each one is on his own" (Du'ā, personal interview, Munich, Germany, March 19, 2019).

In this sense, Du'ā's account suggests that the meaning of family and the relationship with the extended family can be multi-dimensional. Various authors have discussed the shift from the extended to the nuclear household due to migration or forced migration and the transnational family connections these families maintain ('Esau, 2004; Baldassar & Merla, 2013; Grace, 2018). After migration, many couples feel "alone". At home, they received emotional support from other family members and this also helped to solve everyday issues as a couple. Extended families, in particular, offered psychological and financial support and stability in times of crisis (Dhami and Sheikh 2000). They also supported the couple in decision-making. In displacement, this support is missing and couples find themselves dealing with relational and psychological issues, which can bring about family conflict. The traditional extended Arab family often crosses two or three generations. Respect and esteem are at the base of the family and are values that increased with age. Elders are respected and valued because of their life experiences and their hierarchal position within the family unit (Dhami & Sheikh, 2000). Indeed, extended families

functioned as a welfare system providing services such as children and elderly assistance, socialization, and education and religious upbringing. In Du'ā's account, the support she and her husband received from the extended family was primarily emotional and helped to solve everyday issues as a couple. However, later on in the interview, she mentioned that the extended family (Rāmī's parents in particular) also supported the couple in decision-making.

> "They supported us in decision-making. Rāmī's parents had always the final say on our decisions. It was his house and we had to respect his authority. […] Here we make decisions together. It's something new and we have to adapt to this. But we think that we make better decisions together. We are new in this country; none of us is experienced with life here, so we are equal" (Du'ā, personal interview, Munich, Germany, March 19, 2019).

While Du'ā humbly reported that decision-making dynamics became more equal, according to Rāmī, his wife had more power than him in this area.

> "She knows better than me what is best for the girls and for the house. She has better taste in buying clothes and furniture, as well as in everything related to the house. I've always believed the house is the kingdom of the woman. […] What I mean is, our family life is centred in the house now. We're not working at the moment. We're both still studying the language. So whatever decision has to be made, my wife knows better than me what to do" (Rāmī, personal interview, Munich, Germany, March 19, 2019).

As well as increased equality in decision-making, although differently perceived and perhaps situational, the couple also gained a fairer division of roles.

> "Before the war, we both worked as teachers. […] It was my decision [to work]; I wanted to help my husband. Rāmī didn't mind at all that I was working. […] I

loved my job and I believe that women aren't born to do chores and stay in their houses. However, in Syria, he used to help me in the house only when we were home alone. You know, in our society, men are supposed to work outside, they aren't supposed to help their wives in doing chores. […] Here, he helps me a lot. He cooks, he cleans… we don't have to care about what other people say" (Rāmī, personal interview, Munich, Germany, March 19, 2019).

Like Du'ā and Rāmī, other couples reported the same changes in labour division inside the house as a consequence of the separation from the extended family. Ḥanān and Mo'ataz, a couple from Aleppo who lived in Berlin, argued that after displacement they not only have they gained more privacy as a couple and as a nuclear family, but they have also adjusted the division of roles and responsibilities.

"Before [they moved to Germany,] he never helped me in the house. It was a bit weird for a man to help in washing dishes and doing house chores. […] It was ok to help me if I was sick; otherwise, it might be insulting for him, especially if I have nothing to do. Here in Berlin is different. He can help me to do the cleaning and nobody will judge him for this" (Ḥanān, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 12, 2019).

Ḥanān seemed more comfortable than other women with receiving help from her husband in the house. She told me that what held her back in Syria was the negative judgment of his family, which would have reflected on her if her husband helped her with the housework. In Germany, they had taken the family of Ḥanān's sister as an example, where the husband had begun to ignore all the "norms of tradition and started acting as a German" (Ḥanān, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 12, 2019).

"For example, if she's working in the kitchen, he'd go and change his child's diaper. If she's doing her German homework, he'd wash the dishes. He doesn't care what people say here… because they don't say anything. We're not in our *traditional*

society anymore. We have more freedom here" (Ḥanān, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 12, 2019).

Mo'ataz felt the same and critically confirmed that he did not miss the traditional society (*al-mujtama' al-taqalīdī*). Moving away from the extended family was, for him, something positive. He did not know how he could bear the pressure of the "oriental traditions" before.

"I'm very happy to live only with my wife and my children. We've finally gained some privacy. Now we have the right to live our lives as we want. We can make our own decisions without the interference of our parents and raise the children as we want. I can help my wife without being judged or without being teased" (Mo'ataz, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 12, 2019).

To understand better the pressure of the judgement of the traditional society, including the extended family, on men who take care of the housework, Laṭīf, a Syrian man from Grimma, told me an anecdote.

"I used to help my wife, even in Syria. In my family [of origin], we were 18 boys and 2 girls, so I learnt to do everything. I used to iron clothes every Friday. But, you know, when you get married it's different. The wife is expected to do the work in the house. […] One summer, my wife was sick and the carpets needed to be washed, so I did it myself and I hung them to dry on the balcony. Accidentally, my cousin passed by and saw me helping my wife; he told me 'soon we will see you in the kitchen!' People had this oriental thinking there. If you help your wife in the house you're not a man" (Laṭīf, personal interview, Grimma, Germany, March 16, 2019).

It is no surprise that Laṭīf's experience is shared across different social contexts, including the West, where a man who engages in the housework is sometimes mocked and

associated with women in a derogatory way. For some participants, like Mo'ataz, the distance from the traditional society is an opportunity to act against such dynamics. However, although for many families moving away from the extended family or the traditional society meant a redefinition of roles and responsibilities inside and outside the house and a more equal understanding of social roles, for others, performing non-traditional gender roles did not entail necessarily a redefinition of gender responsibilities. For Fahīma, a Syrian woman who lived in Leipzig, engaging in work outside the house did not mean that she changed her perception about gender responsibilities. She believed that her husband ʿAdnān was still responsible for the family income and she was responsible for the upbringing of the child.

> "Of course I want to work; I don't want to stay at home all the time. But I still haven't decided what kind of job I prefer. I can't work anything because I have to take care of my child. ʿAdnān works for long hours; I cannot do the same. It's my responsibility to take Aḥmad to the Kindergarten and pick him up from there, so I need a suitable job. I might work in a library for example. […] My husband is responsible to support the family, I'd work to help him" (Fahīma, personal interview, Leipzig, Germany, November 24, 2018).

Life away from the extended family was also more advantageous for Shaghaf and Mūsā, a couple without children I met in Grimma. Shaghaf was originally from Damascus and was studying law. Her husband, Mūsā, was an engineer from Daraa. Mūsā arrived in Germany crossing the Balkan route in 2016; Shaghaf joined him through family reunification from Saudi Arabia, where she was studying. Living away from the extended family gave the couple the freedom to decide freely on their future. For example, when I met them, they were focusing on their career without pressure from traditional society.

> "We decided not to have kids for now. It's too early. First, my wife should finish studying the language. Then she should finish her studies at the university. I'm currently a teaching assistant in an elementary school, but I'm an engineer and

that's what I want to do. But I'll need more years of study. I was accepted at the university and I will start the next semester" (Mūsā, personal interview, Grimma, Germany, March 16, 2018).

Shaghaf, who had arrived only a few months before our interview, was aware that she could focus on her career without pressure because she was away from the control of society.

"I want to become a judge. This was my dream before we decided to come to Germany. It will take more years, but we're not in a hurry. […] Here I have not the same pressures from my family and society. Of course, they still want me to get pregnant soon, now that my husband and I are together. But I want to focus on my career. There will be time for children later. […] If I were still in Syria, well, probably I would have adapted to the conditions there and make different decisions. Yes, probably I would have had children earlier" (Shaghaf, personal interview, Grimma, Germany, March 16, 2018).

Najā, a Syrian woman I met in Berlin was on the same page. She was originally from Homs but had lived in Damascus until she divorced. She had arrived in Germany with a group of friends after she and her husband separated. She was very interested in my research topic and confessed that she was "currently dating". She was not particularly interested in getting married again, but she was willing to meet someone else, so she started dating men. She confessed that she could do that only because she was alone in Germany, without her family.

"I'm actually happy that my family isn't here with me. They would have judged my life. I'm not doing anything wrong or against my values or my religion, but I wouldn't be free to date men, for example. […] I'm single and I want to be free to explore new relationships, without being judged" (Najā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 13, 2019).

For other families, things did not go the same way. For instance, Lujān, a woman from rural Damascus I met in Munich, argued that the distance from the extended family deteriorated her relationship with her husband. The couple got married through an arranged marriage when she was 18 years old. After displacement, when they found each other alone, all the children away and they were far from other family members, she understood that they were not happy anymore.

> "We're far from our homeland and from our family. It's just my husband and me. In Syria, we used to have the support of our families. Our old life was simple but safe. This new life is uncertain and confusing. I'm not sure our relationship is strong enough for this new life together" (Lujān, personal interview, Munich, Germany, March 20, 2020).

The distance from the extended family and the community, the lack of support, and the disruption of everyday life can increase vulnerabilities and insecurities. In this sense, the fears and confusions generated by life in displacement as a nuclear family can further deteriorate less strong relationships.

Several authors have discussed the use of technology in facilitating transnational connections (Mahler, 2001; Opas & McMurray, 2015; Baldassar et al., 2016; Grace, 2019). Technology and in particular social media were also the main means Syrian families used to maintain connections and exchange "social remittances" in the form of social and cultural practices in the transnational space (see Levitt, 2001). For instance, through social media, Du'ā and Rāmī preserved a co-presence (Baldassar et al., 2016) with their scattered family during the month of Ramadan.

> "Last year, for Ramadan, we talked on FaceTime with the whole family every night. Some of them were in Turkey, others in Syria, we were here in Germany. At least for one hour every evening after *ifṭār* [the meal that breaks of the fast] or before

soḥūr [the meal consumed before starting fasting], we made a call and spend time together" (Rāmī, personal interview. Munich, March 19, 2019).

Similarly, Ḥanān and Mo'ataz remained connected on important dates and anniversaries. When I asked Mo'ataz how they maintained the relationship with the extended family alive, he told me:

> "We are still present in our family life. We are with them for all the big events. We call each other a lot and we spend most of our evenings on the phone. But, you know, once you hang up the phone we are alone and this is another story" (Mo'ataz, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 12, 2019).

In this sense, Mo'ataz clearly expressed the transitional dimension. They put effort into the long-distance relationship with their extended family but when the time they dedicate to them ends, they return to their life as a nuclear family. Although the connectivity with left-behind family members is robust, many women and men recognized advantages in being a nuclear family in displacement. Najā employed similar techniques as Ḥanān and Mo'ataz to renegotiate her relationship with her parents from afar.

> "We are all the time on the phone! We use WhatsApp, it's cheap, and we can communicate whenever we want. […] I have to organize my time and adjust my work schedule and personal time accordingly, but I don't feel like having less time for relationships here" (Najā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 13, 2019).

These accounts suggest that the virtual co-presence that these "post-extended" families maintained goes beyond emotional support. It was a strong attachment that overcomes patriarchal gender-based or hierarchical structures (Joseph, 1993b). However, what made these relationships distinctive was the condition of temporal and spatial "suspension", or "limbo", in which they existed. As it happened to separated refugee families waiting for

reunification, these families not only did not know *when* they were going to reunite, but they did not know *if* they were going to see each other again. Or as Duʿā put it in our conversation, *they did not even know where they all were going to be tomorrow* (Duʿā, personal interview, Munich, Germany, March 19, 2019).

Family connectivity in a transnational space

The shift from the extended to the nuclear family is what many Syrian families recognized as one of the major transformations in the family structure after forced migration. However, the continuity of the extended family was maintained in the transnational space and ensured through "family connectivity". Anthropologist Suad Joseph (1993b) defined connectivity as "relationships in which a person's boundaries are relatively fluid so that persons feel a part of significant others" (Joseph, 1993b, p. 452). Following Evelyn Keller (1986, cit. in Joseph 1993b), the author considered that the notion of self for Arab families is defined in familiar terms and conformed to a paradigm of connectivity where the family is "valued over and above the person" (Joseph, 1993b, p. 452) both in the private and public space. The author found this kind of relationality to be central to both women and men in Arab families. Following Joseph, Anthropologist Annika Rabo also observed that for Syrian families, personhood is embedded in "communities, families, in ethnic, racial, or other social groupings [and] this has a profound impact on gender relations" (Rabo, 1996, p. 159).

Joseph and Rabo's works resemble the experience of several families I met. Many Syrians in Germany seemed to see themselves as an extension of their families and their families as an extension of themselves. Here, the role of transnationalism is crucial. In line with previous studies (for example, see Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997), my findings bring into question the notion of "family" as a geographically near unit and the shifting meanings of "family" that occur in displacement. However, these findings do not resonate with what other authors have found (e.g., Al-Ali, 2002), namely that displacement and separation engender a disruption and even extinction of extended families (ibid., p. 253). According to my findings, Syrians in transnational extended families continued to exist as

"relational selves" (Joseph, 1993b, p. 458) and preserved the continuation of this family structure from afar through connectivity.

These accounts also resonate with Bryceson & Vuorela (2002) call 'familial relativizing'. In other words, Syrian women and men in separation were able to *do family* from afar by establishing relationships under different circumstances and in multiple dimensions (see Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Kofman, 2004), including during separation. For example, as we have seen, for Najā, the distance from her extended family was advantageous for her private life, as being far away from her family allowed her to act against the traditional community. Nonetheless, she perceived the separation only as physical, not emotional.

"For me, the emotional support we give to each other is more important than the physical proximity. For me, we are still together even if in different countries" (Najā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 13, 2019).

Further on in our interview, Najā raised a fundamental question in terms of connectivity. She defined her identity as an individual in familial terms (Joseph, 1993). In this sense, familial relationships, interdependence, sentimentality, and commitment are necessary for a successful social life.

"It's really important for me to be present in their lives and for them, it's important to be with me in my daily life. Their presence is necessary for my life here. I would be nothing without them" (Najā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 13, 2019).

The idea of emotional bonding that replaced physical proximity was also expressed by Amīra, whom I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. She was separated from her husband, who remained in Turkey, and with her parents moved to Grimma. In the period I spent with Amīra and her family, for my participant observation, from January to March 2019, and remaining in constant contact with her in the following months, I followed the

vicissitudes of the young couple for about a year. The last time I saw Amīra, in September 2020, she had just returned from Turkey, where she visited her husband for the first time after their proxy marriage and for the first time in five years. When I asked her whether her husband's plan was still to attempt the crossing to Germany, she said that they were not planning to reunite for now. She wanted to start studying at university, and as a student, she could not meet the requirements of family reunification. She was not happy with the vocational training she was attending and she wanted to become a social worker instead. Hence, they planned to stay in a transnational marriage for a longer time. When I asked her whether she felt it would be hard to stay separated for five or six more years, she told me:

> "It's fine. We love each other, and this is not going to change. We support each other all the time. Distance is not a big problem when there is love" (Amīra, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, September 8, 2020).

According to Amīra, a marital life in a limbo becomes bearable only if there is a strong connection, and the relationship is based on love. When I asked her the question: "How do you conciliate your long-distance relationship with your relationships here?", she replied that she adjusted her schedule to that of her left-behind husband. She would stay at home and talk over the phone with him for long hours when they had their phone dates.

> "What we do is we call each other, and we talk while we do our daily life. Like this, we do everything together. For example, we cook and eat together, or I don't know, we watch a movie together" (Amīra, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 18, 2020).

Sometimes the time that Amīra dedicated to the relationship with her distant husband took precedence over the time she devoted to her relationships in Germany. For example, on her husband's birthday, she would not go out with her friends in Germany and postponed meetings to celebrate with him over the phone.

Other people argued that long-distance relationships gave them the strength to build new relationships in displacement. Shādī, the abovementioned participant from rural Hama, was highly disappointed by some aspects of his forced migration experience. He claimed:

> "I would have never made it without the support of my family. They gave me the strength to resist. When I remained without a place to sleep, when I was humiliated and beaten in camps, they gave me the patience to go through all that and don't give up. When I was depressed for months and I didn't want to think about… 'Integration' [he laughs], they helped me to stand up again. They helped me to become confident and make new friends, learn the language and find a job" (Shādī, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, November 17, 2018).

Similarly, Najā, who received strong emotional support from her left-behind family, argued that this support gave her the confidence to endure displacement.

> "[Emotional support] is what I most value in the relationship with my family; even if we're apart. They give me the confidence to be who I want to be in life… even if I cannot tell them everything about my life here. I know that they support me" (Najā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 13, 2019).

Du'ā, who felt "alone" for being only with her nuclear family, had a similar experience. She claimed that the extensive connections that she maintained with her distant family helped her to feel less lonely in Germany.

> "Their closeness helped me to feel more accepted here in Germany. Now I can make friends without fear because I know that I can still count on my family if I have a problem" (Du'ā, personal interview, Munich, Germany, March 19, 2019).

I noticed that, with a few exceptions, men's accounts did not acknowledge long-distance family connectivity as particularly relevant in their lives. They were keener on considering social networks and social bonds with the local population more successful or noteworthy. In this sense, as other authors have noticed, transnational connections seemed to be "the emotional and imagination work" of women (Grace, 2019, p. 127). Indeed, one of the dynamics that stood out the most among Syrian men in Germany was the will to appear as holders of social relations with locals. Those who described their families as middle-class households and those who arrived in the country before their wives tended to highlight the idea that they were the pioneers of social relations in Germany. Mo'ataz, for example, believed that establishing new connections with locals was imperative.

> "I think it's very important to make friends here in Germany. […] You have a better life when you have people around you and you are well integrated. […] Family is family, of course, but it's not ok to be stuck over the phone with your family all day. It's important to live your life here and get to know the people around you" (Mo'ataz, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 12, 2019).

Maintaining connections with the extended family was not considered particularly positive by Mo'ataz'. In his perception, the intensity and frequency of those connections could hinder integration. In this sense, we could perhaps assume that the discourse around assimilation was thus accepted and internalized by Mo'ataz' and perhaps socially reproduced as symbolic violence.

Mo'ataz' account gave me the opportunity to reflect more on the impact of transnational relationships on the life and the future of displaced families in Germany, and most importantly on their integration. Scholars have increasingly investigated the areas of transnationalism and integration in an interconnected way (for example, see Guarnizo et al., 2003; Marger, 2006; Mazzucato, 2008; Bivand Erdal & Oeppen, 2013; Hammond, 2013; Marini, 2014.). However, less attention has been given to the specific dimension of separation (Sauer et al., 2018) and especially to extended families. The issue of integration is a controversial and greatly debated concept that has been mostly tackled

through binary understandings of one-way or two-way processes (Garcés-Mascareñas & Penninx, 2016). For this reason, the literature dealing with integration has been considered not representative of the diversity of reality (Da Lomba, 2010). The term "integration" has itself been criticized for producing symbolic violence. Some authors have proposed to use "inclusion" or "participation", while for others, choosing a different term would not reduce the violence of the discourse around integration (Böcker et al., 2010).

As participants' accounts suggest, integration has to be understood as a dynamic, multidimensional, and multifaceted process that encompasses different areas of people's lives. For this reason, it is important to break down the concept into the different aspects of life that make the integration. Alastair Ager and Alison Strang proposed a framework of integration based on different levels of analysis (Ager & Strang, 2008). One of the domains of their multidimensional approach to integration is the area of social connections and networks. In this sense, they stress the importance of relationships and the private sphere in the process of integration. The authors recognized different forms of relationships that impact integration: (1) social bonds – connections within a community sharing similar ethnic, national or religious background; (2) social bridges – relationships with members of other communities; (3) social links – connections with local institutions (Ager & Strang, 2008). They found that social relations "provide 'connective tissue' between foundational principles of citizenship and rights on one hand, and public outcomes in sectors such as employment, housing, education and health, on the other" (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 177).

Strong social connections with left-behind family members can impact the process of integration. This can be negative when such relationships are destined to remain at a distance and restrain people from living fulfilling relationships in the country of displacement, but can also be positive when the emotional support received from those connections helps them to feel satisfied in displacement (Komito, 2011). In this sense, transnationalism can be used as a lens to approach (forced) migrants' integration (Mügge, 2016). In particular, the transnationalism-integration nexus can be used as a paradigm to overcome binary understandings of integration in terms of assimilation and it can also reduce the symbolic violence of the discourse. Shādī's account is again significant here to

understand how the power of this violence.

> "When I moved into this apartment, my German neighbour told me to go and introduce myself to the other residents of the building. He said: 'like this, they can get to know you and see that you are willing to integrate.' Can you believe that?" (Shādī, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, November 17, 2018).

This study cannot offer a comprehensive understanding of the interconnections between the fields of transnationalism and integration, which certainly deserve further investigation, but it hopes to inspire further reflections by migration scholars.

Chapter 6.

The exercise of agency in liminality:
Varieties of doing gender in displacement

Having discussed the different transformations in gender roles and relationships in Lebanon and Germany and how these relationships were renegotiated, with this last chapter, I will compare the experiences of Syrian men and women in the two countries and I will outline varieties of doing gender in forced migration. To do so, I will return to the discussion about agency in displacement, which I have presented in Chapter 3. I will further develop my conceptualization of the exercise of agency in a liminal space by adding a new element: time. This discussion aims to compare the experiences of Syrian participants in Germany and Lebanon and give a picture of the *in-fieri* flexible process of the continuous construction and reconstruction of agency in time and space.

6.1. The state of liminality as a non-structural context

In Chapter 3, I argued that Syrian families in Lebanon and Germany experienced the protracted-temporary displacement as a liminal space. Turner (1969) defined liminality as a space of transition from one state to another. Drawing on van Gennep (cit. in Turner, 1974), the author described it as the intermediate step of a process that has a beginning and an end. Van Gennep (ibid.) distinguished three phases in a rite of passage – separation, transition, and incorporation. The liminal status is the transitional phase. For instance, in tribal societies, rites of passage bring about a reconfiguration of one's status and a resolution of a crisis, through a ritual. However, in a later work, Turner (1974) argued that, in modern social contexts, liminality escapes rituality and becomes more protracted without necessarily providing closure to the period of crisis (Turner, 1974; see also Gold, 2019). Liminality is a temporary undefined status, a period of ambiguity, a social limbo, which lies "beyond the normative social structure" (Turner, 1974, p. 59). In

this sense, liminality weakens the individuals subjected to this status, "since they have no rights over others" (Turner, 1974, p. 59).

This concept is very relevant to the experience of Syrian families in Germany and Lebanon. It embodies a process that begins with a rupture of social life upon fleeing the home country and ideally ends with a reconfiguration within a new social context in the host country. However, since the ritual of incorporation does not take place, because people remain suspended (*ḍayāʿ*), in a waiting state (*intiẓār*), this process remains unfinished in the space of "in-betweenness" for an indefinite period. As some authors have argued, these dynamics entangle all individuals at the margin of capital – the poor, ethnic minorities, among others – thus creating sections of non-citizens within juridical regimes (De Genova, 2016). In his essay *Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology*, Turner (1974) compared tribal or traditional societies to modern, or capitalist societies. The first kind is representative of the liminal, while the second is the expression of the *liminoid* (or liminal-like), which resemble liminality "without being identical with 'liminal'" (ibid., p. 64).[70] In modern societies, the liminoid is removed from the *rite de passage* context and becomes persistent and prolonged, without necessarily putting an end to the period of crisis. Turner (1974, p. 75) defined liminality as a non-structure, or an anti-structure, or:

> "the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc. from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses, enacting a multiplicity of social roles, and being acutely conscious of membership in some corporate group such as a family, lineage, clan, tribe, or nation, or of affiliation with some pervasive social category such as class, caste, sex -or age-division." (Turner, 1974, p. 75)

Following the British anthropologist, I understand the state of liminality within which Syrians act in Lebanon and Germany as a non-structure. This state is characterized by the

---

[70] In this thesis, I use the terms "liminal" without making a distinction between this term and the "liminoid", as informed by Victor Turner (1969).

liquidity, transition, and ambiguity of the "in-betweenness" and by the failure to close the transition period.

At this point, if we separate the structural context from the analysis of gender role and relation transformations, we can grasp further dynamic possibilities of human agency. Hence, liminality, seen as a non-structure, generates the framework within which the exercise of agency can still occur and offers a privileged viewpoint to capture the full complexity of the agentic dimension of social action in displacement (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). In this sense, the following pages will explore the various forms of agency, which occur in this liminal space.

Because I consider that individuals' self-determination and agency can vary according to the spatial and temporal conditions wherein they find themselves, I will now need to introduce another element into the discussion – the temporal element. This will help us to understand the different trajectories of the refugee experience over time and across social processes (Toma & Castagnone, 2002, p. 67). Anthropologists Conquergood (1988, cit. in Harrell-Bond & Voutira, 1992) and Harrell-Bond & Voutira (1992) found that the liminal space has a temporal dimension as well as a spatial one. They argued, for example, that refugee camps are "liminal zones" where people can express their "playful creativity of performance", through which they are "able to play with new identities, new strategies for adaptation and survival. They invent a new camp culture that is in part affirmation of the past and in part adaptive response to the exigencies of the present" (Harrell-Bond & Voutira, 1992, p. 8).

6.2. Agency as temporally embedded

Agency will be conceptualized now as temporally embedded as suggested by Sociologists Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische in their article *What is Agency?* (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The authors defined "agency as a temporally embedded process of social engagement" (ibid., p. 962) that incorporates three different elements: iteration (or habitual aspects), projectivity (as the capacity to imagine alternative possibilities), and practical evaluation (as the capacity of contextualizing habits and projections). Noticeably,

these three dimensions are linked to three different orientations in time – the past, the future, and the present. The authors draw upon the work of George Herbert Mead (1932, cit. in Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 964) and the symbolic interactionist perspective to distinguish agency as an analytical category on its own (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 964) without limiting the analysis of the interactions of agency and structure. To avoid a perspective that gives human agency for granted, the authors outline the different dimensions of agency through the element of time.

According to Emirbayer and Mische, as actors move across different contexts they readjust their temporal orientation and change their relationship with the structure (ibid.). This chapter aims not to reiterate the various typologies of agency as informed by the two American sociologists, but rather to introduce a further dimension of the debate that will unpack the final discussion. Placing agency in a temporal framework of analysis, which is not understood in Newtonian terms as a succession of isolated events, but as a "multilevel flow of nested events, radically grounded in (but not bounded to) present experience" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 968), can be helpful to understand how actors respond to changing circumstances and environments and how they reconstruct their understanding of their experience of displacement. I argue that the temporal element offers a comprehensive perspective upon the problem of conceptualizing the various dimensions of the refugee experience and the dynamic possibilities of human agency across different phases over time.

Several authors have elaborated on Emirbayer and Mische's understanding of human agency. Life-course approach theorists (Kristiansen, 2014; Hitlin & Elder, 2007), among others, have outlined the importance of including the temporal dimension for understanding human agency to use it as an empirical concept. For example, Kristiansen (2014) focused on the temporal dimensions of the present and future to explore possible empirical implications. Following Marshall (2005), he uses agency as a variable or an empirically measurable concept that individuals can vary with their perceptions and beliefs (Kristiansen, 2014, p. 10).

6.3. The "chordal triad" of agency in refugeehood

Having defined the space of displacement under empirical and theoretical terms and the bases for my analytical conceptualization, it is now possible to focus on the dimension of agency without necessarily taking into account its opposition with structure. By looking at displacement as a non-structure, we can better grasp "the variable nature of the interplay between structure and agency" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 1002) and allow more space for agentic orientations. In this sense, it is interesting to look at how agency works in a liminal system to capture the nuances of its exercise in displacement.

In distinguishing agency as an analytical category in its own, Emirbayer & Mische (1998) argued that agency is embedded in time and more specifically in what they call the "chordal triad of agency" (ibid., p. 970), or a temporal chain that goes from a dimension of agency that is orientated towards the past, through the element of *iteration*; passes through the projection towards the present, with its *projectivity* dimension; and culminates with a dimension of agency that is positioned in the present having gained the element of *practical evaluation.* I aim to endeavour my own intervention to this argument and to analytically frame refugees' agency within a temporal dimension. I consider that this perspective offers an advantageous angle to understand the various dimensions of refugees' experiences to fully grasp its complexity and diversity. According to this conceptualization, the first orientation, connected to the past, refers to:

> "the selective reactivation by actors of past patterns of thought and action, as routinely incorporated in practical activity, thereby giving stability and order to social universes and helping to sustain identities, interactions, and institutions over time." (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 971).

This form of agency is perhaps the one that has been given more attention in sociological terms. The second orientation, which is connected to the future, is the projective element, which:

"encompasses the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors' hopes, fears, and desires for the future." (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 971).

Finally, the orientation towards the present is expressed by the practical-evaluative dimension, which, according to the authors, has been left largely understudied. It refers to:

"the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgements among alternative possible trajectories of action, in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations." (Ibid.).

Drawing on this analytical model, I will now frame my comparative analysis of agency in displacement within which I will analyze gender role and relationship transformations among Syrian families in Germany and Lebanon. In particular, I will outline three dimensions in which one of the aspects of the chordal triad predominates and the consequences it entails. In the first place, I will present the iteration orientation, where traditional gender roles are maintained both in the public sphere and in the private sphere. Secondly, the projectivity dimension, where novel gender roles and relationships are performed inward and outward. Finally, within the practical-evaluative orientation, I will propose a double dimension, where, on the one hand, traditional gender roles are maintained in the private sphere and novel gender roles are performed in the public sphere, and on the other hand, novel gender roles are experimented in the private sphere and traditional gender roles are preserved within the societal dimension.

It should be noted that further nuances of these varieties of doing gender in displacement could be found since a continuous orientation towards the past, the future, and the present can occur in liminality. At the same time, as argued by Emirbayer & Mische (1998), all these constitutive dimensions of agency can be found in varying degrees within several empirical instances of action (ibid., 1998, p. 971). To some degree, most participants expressed their orientation towards all of these dimensions, as individuals, in

different periods of time and different places, have a worldview that can be more or less oriented to the past, the future, or the present. Indeed, the way in which people understand their relationship with agency along the temporal scale makes a difference to their actions. In what follows, I will look at the predominant temporal aspects of agency in the account of those participants who have more clearly communicated their position on one of these dimensions. However, all interventions can be ascribed predominantly to one dimension of agency or another.

6.4. The iteration orientation: When traditional gender roles are maintained in the private and public sphere

Within the chordal triad of agency, the dimension of iteration is "exhibited in memory and in the historical apparatus that extends memory" (Mead, 1932 cit. in Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 975). It occurs when past experiences condition present actions, by means of habit and repetition. Iteration becomes stable guidance that shapes the action and allows enduring identities, meanings, and interactions over time. The experience of some Syrian participants can be ascribed to iteration in how they performed gender roles and relationships by recalling, selecting, and applying tacit and taken-for-granted schemas of action developed through past interactions. Among others, this was the case of ʿĀbed and Salīm in Lebanon, and Aḥmed and Em Ghazal in Germany.

ʿĀbed was one of those participants who deeply expressed feelings of disorientation, bewilderment, and loss (ḍayāʾ), which can be referred to as the state of liminality. As mentioned, for ʿĀbed, it was not possible to maintain his role as a provider after forcibly migrating to Lebanon. In Tripoli, he was never able to find a suitable job position. Meanwhile, his wife Niḥāl was able to maintain her governmental job in Syria and commuted from Aleppo while ʿĀbed was forced to stay at home and take care of the house and the daughters in Tripoli. ʿĀbed's account suggests that in order to reaffirm his role as a provider vis-à-vis his wife he aimed at re-establishing the conditions before displacement.

"The situation in Lebanon is devastating for me because the most important thing for a man is to work and if I don't have a job then… what's the point of me? […] I'm staying at home, I have nothing to do, nowhere to go. I decided to go back to Syria, I'm just waiting for my daughter to finish her exams and then I'll move back ('Ābed, personal interview, Tripoli, Lebanon, May 22, 2018).

'Ābed's agency was oriented towards the past and involved a selective recall from a past moment when he was able to support his family with his work and he was the breadwinner of his household. His selective attention was focused on returning to Syria to regain the dignity of his role as a patriarch that he had lost in Lebanon. This agentic exercise excluded the possibility that, back home, conditions might not be as they were before. 'Ābed identified a pattern of his past experience and recurrent aspects of past events to predict future expectations. In other words, he singled out the elements from the past, which he considered useful to sustain his future gender identity. It is worth noticing that at the time of our interview, 'Ābed's intention to return was only an idea, not a concrete plan that was being accomplished in the short term. However, the propaganda of the Syrian regime and its allies had already started addressing refugees as terrorists, Islamists, and traitors (Mansour, 2019). For this reason, although safe conditions for return are not at all guaranteed and any debate about the return of Syrian refugees from Lebanon remains problematic (Içduygua & Nimer, 2020), some people, including 'Ābed, have started considering going back as a better alternative to displacement.[71]

While 'Ābed was planning to return to Syria in order to re-establish the conditions prior to displacement and regain his role in the public sphere, he did not embody the newly gained responsibilities of the private sphere.

Irene: "Who takes care of the house when your wife is not here?"

---

[71] At the time of writing (September 2020), a number of Syrians have already returned or have been deported back to Syria by the Lebanese or the Turkish governments. See Assi (2019).

'Ābed: "I do, of course! My daughters help me. They know how to cook and clean. For example, one of them always prepares breakfast. The younger one makes the laundry. This is how it is and everyone does something."

Irene: "And who does the work inside the house when your wife comes back from Aleppo?"

'Ābed: "When she's here, she does everything. She normally stays for a few weeks or a month, so when she's here she doesn't have work. But I help her, of course" ('Ābed, personal interview, Tripoli, Lebanon, May 22, 2018).

Although 'Ābed's situation forced him to take care of the house when his wife was in Aleppo, he did not take charge of these responsibilities when she returns to Tripoli. In this sense, 'Ābed remained oriented towards the past regarding his position in the private sphere and the public sphere. As we shall see later, conversely to 'Ābed, his wife Niḥāl was more oriented towards a practical-evaluative exercise of agency.

The experience of 'Ābed resembled those of other participants. In Germany, Aḥmed, whose orientation of agency was not in line with his wife's, was also profoundly oriented towards the past and tried to maintain the *status quo* within the family and the wider society as much as he could.

Irene: "What do you expect life to be for your family in Germany in the next few years?"

Aḥmed: "I hope we can have the same life we had in Syria – a simple life. I just want to work and take care of my family. […] I want my daughters to study."

Irene: "And what do you expect for your wife? Do you expect her to work, to learn the language...?"

Aḥmed: "Of course I'd like her to learn the language. But I'd prefer her to stay at home. I'm a conservative man; I'd like to have the same lifestyle we had in Syria" (Aḥmed, personal interview, Cottbus, Germany, March 9, 2019).

Aḥmed's attempt to maintain his wife away from the external society, as we have seen in the previous chapter, was part of a process of iteration and in particular what Emirbayer & Mische (1998) called the phase of "recognition of types" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 979). The man identified patterns of his pre-displacement experience and shaped the expectations of his future life on those. He used recurrent aspects that characterized his life in Syria, such as the religious connotations, to maintain a routine and continuity with the past. Aḥmed also associated his "simple life" in Syria with the life he expected to have in Germany. In this sense, the iteration orientation becomes an active process by means of which actors maintain a sense of continuity with the past within temporally evolving experiences (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 980). In the public sphere, Aḥmed was also oriented towards the past, as his attempt to maintain his wife away from the local society was a way to keep control over the networks and resources of the resettlement country. Aḥmed continued:

> "In Syria, my wife didn't need to work. I worked as a civil servant in Aleppo; I had a good position. We had a big house. She had everything. […] Once I've learnt the language and found a job, I'll be working here too" (Aḥmed, personal interview, Cottbus, Germany, March 9, 2019).

His desire to maintain his position in the public sphere could be read as a marker of a middle-class identity (Suerbaum, 2018a). Aḥmed emphasized, in his interview that he came from a middle-class background. Although class identity can also be related to possessions, education, family background, Aḥmed, like other middle-class Syrians I met, based his class identity on work, income, and job position. Nonetheless, as Bourdieu (1987) had already found, class identity is expressed not only consciously, but also unconsciously – for instance, through body language, and perceived in relation to others. In this sense, the emphasis on the fact that Saḥar "did not need to work" (Aḥmed, personal interview, Cottbus, Germany, March 9, 2019) was an unconscious expression of his middle-class identity, according to which, if a man has a good position, his wife does not

need to work outside the house. This attitude was based on his past experience and played a significant role in his enactment of gender roles in displacement.

Another participant in Germany, Em Ghazal, resembled Aḥmed's iteration orientation. The 30-year-old woman seemed not to be satisfied with her migration experience and with life in Germany, which she considered to be "the country of sin and moral corruption" (Em Ghazal, personal interview, Berlin, March 7, 2019). Like other participants, she recalled selective past experiences to imagine her life in Germany. For example, in speaking about future possibilities, she claimed that she had no other option but to take a familiar path – getting married again. She associated a past experience that was present in her social memory (Schutz, 1967) with a future possibility.

"If I have to stay here, I want to get married again. Because my husband died and I'm not educated, there isn't much I can do" (Em Ghazal, personal interview, Berlin, March 7, 2019).

In her considerations about the future in Germany, she reproduced a past pattern of action. However, like 'Ābed, the most suitable option for Em Ghazal was to return to Syria to re-establish the conditions prior to displacement.

"I want my children to complete their studies, and then, when the war in Syria ends, I want to go back. My children will work easily there with a German diploma" (Em Ghazal, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 7, 2019).

The iteration orientation is the most challenging dimension to conceive in agentic terms – although it is also the temporal segment of agency that has been given more attention in sociology. It is associated with continuity with the past, routine, tradition, and patterns. Thus, it seems to be more inclined to structure than agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 975). Iteration also entails lower levels of conscious reflection compared to other temporal dimensions of agency. However, actors' iteration orientations do not exclude engagement

in choosing possible alternative actions. This was the case of Em Ghazal, when she spoke about her daughter:

> "I won't let my daughter get married before she turns 20. Getting married is a huge responsibility. A child shouldn't raise a child. I regret that I got married so young. […] If I were educated I wouldn't ask anyone for help" (Em Ghazal, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, March 7, 2019).

By choosing not to let her daughter get married at a young age, as she was forced to do, she recognized a future possibility outside the set of recurring patterns associated with the habitual actions. In this sense, Em Ghazal projected her daughter and her family into a possible future not based on her past experience.

A similar configuration was performed by Salīm, in Lebanon, who was concerned about his resettlement application. In his dream to migrate to Europe, Salīm was remarkably oriented towards a possible future and "patterns of possible developments in an often vague and indeterminate future horizon" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 989). Nevertheless, his expectations towards this hypothetical future, as well as the ways he performed gender roles and relationships in displacement, were iterational and based on the "sameness, likeness, or analogy of an emerging experience with those of the past" (ibid., 1998, p. 979).

> "[If I had the chance to migrate], I'd work and my wife would stay at home. If I get to work in a restaurant, for example, I'd be able to earn enough to support my family. […] In Syria it was like that: I was working and my wife was staying at home" (Salīm, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, June 27, 2018).

In imagining his hypothetical future as a migrant in Europe, Salīm expected to find similar conditions to those he had in Syria – he was the one working and supporting his family financially, while his wife was responsible for the house and the upbringing of the children. The man recalled selective experiences of the past to shape an idealistic moment

in which he would reconstruct the conditions prior to displacement. Marūa, his wife, also had migration aspirations, but her expectations, as we shall see in the next section, were more oriented towards the future. However, due to her position as an involuntary non-migrant (Carling, 2002), she projected herself in a future that is more idealistic than possible.

6.5. The projective dimension of agency: When novel gender roles are performed in the private and public sphere

The second variety of temporal orientation of agency, which can be ascribed to Syrian women and men in Germany and Lebanon, is the projectivity. This dimension was expressed through the enactment of novel gender roles and relationships both in the private space and the public space.

The projective orientation takes place when actors do not merely repeat past routines, but they invent "new possibilities for thought or action" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 984). It is the imaginative engagement into the future of actors who are "capable of distancing themselves from the schemas, habits, and traditions that constrain social identities" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 984) as a response to the challenges or crises of life. According to Emirbayer & Mische (1998), this capacity is neither voluntarist nor instrumentalist, but somewhat interactive, culturally informed, and embedded in the "hypothesization of experience" as individuals reconstruct changing images of possible alternative futures. The two authors defined projectivity as positioned halfway between the iterational and the practical-evaluative dimension of agency. This is the first step towards a reflexive understanding of self in facing challenges that cannot be overcome by employing taken-for-granted habits.

In my fieldwork, participants projected into this dimension constructed what American Psychologists Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius (1986) called "possible selves". These are a type of self-knowledge concerning "how individuals think about their potential and about their future" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). Possible selves are

incentives for future behaviours, which "provide an evaluative and interpretative context for the current view of selves" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). However, possible selves and future possibilities in general are rarely clearly presented and are often based on one's "stock of knowledge" (Schutz, 1967), which is based on past experiences. In Germany, Saḥar and Mahā were perhaps those who gave a richer account of their projective dimension of agency.

As mentioned, Saḥar's experience was disaggregated with her husband's temporal orientation of agency. Although she had little access to the external local society and the new environment and claimed she maintain continuity with the past in the way she lived in Germany, she was fully projected into the future in her aspirations towards life in displacement.

> "My biggest dream is to work. I want to know what it feels like to do something for myself, to have a full life. […] Sometimes I dream of opening my own salon where I can have my own space, my own life" (Saḥar, personal interview, Cottbus, Germany, March 9, 2019).

In her dream of working, being independent, having a full life, Saḥar constructed a narrative of future possibilities that is not necessarily a project. However, it is a way to develop a sense of moving forward in time and space. As we have seen in Chapter 5, Saḥar's agentic orientation was positioned towards the future in the private sphere. In fact, in being aware of new opportunities and more rights for women in Germany, she experimented with a new role – the role of a woman who has more equal opportunities as men – although she might not be allowed to perform it in real life.

Mahā, in Berlin, was on the same page as Saḥar in being oriented towards the future. Her projection was perhaps less abstract and more determinate. If Saḥar had *dreams*, Mahā had *goals*:

> "My goal is to do something different from what I did in Syria. I want to take advantage of all the opportunities I have in Germany. I don't have to care about

tradition anymore. […] I can be an independent woman here" (Mahā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 29, 2019).

Mahā's projective imagination created innovation in relation to the past and a break from the life she had in Syria. Mahā had a goal, which is not a real project, but a rather concrete idea of her possible self. It is imperative to acknowledge that in contrast to Saḥar, Mahā had more opportunities to engage with the external society. She lived in a town, Berlin, while Saḥar resided in Cottbus a smaller city in Brandenburg. Although it is not the aim of this intervention to compare the reality of displacement of big cities against that of small centres, it is worth noticing that existing literature in the field of refugee studies recognized the fact that the experience of displacement can differ from one living setting to another (for instance, Glick-Schiller & Çaglar, 2010).

In Lebanon, the most interesting insights in terms of projective-oriented agency came from two participants in particular – Marūa, Salīm's wife, and Riḍā, Rīm's husband. As we have seen in Chapter 4, both experiences are related to migration aspirations and how those aspirations brought about novel gender roles and relationships. Riḍā was about to migrate to Italy with his family and he was about to have his (and his wife's) migration aspirations accomplished. Similarly, to Salīm, Riḍā is oriented towards future possibilities that he did not know. In his case, however, Riḍā's projection identifies itself with an alternative that had been anticipated by the humanitarian actors who managed the programme that would bring them to Europe. When I asked Riḍā about his expectations of life in Italy, he replied:

> "I have so many plans for our life in Italy. I want to have a simple and happy life. First of all, I want my family to live in a nice house. I don't care if it's big or small. I just want to regain the dignity that we have lost here… Do you know what I mean?" (Riḍā, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, June 23, 2018).

Riḍā's projection into the future was perhaps stronger than Saḥar and Mahā's. He had *plans* and clear ideas about what to expect from migration.

"I expect to work fewer hours so that I can return home early and spend some time with my family. […] If my wife worked too, we could share the responsibilities, and we could both have more time. I'd like to spend more time with my wife and have a happy marriage" (Riḍā, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, June 23, 2018).

Riḍā's possible self is, to a certain extent, also a reflexive projection of a new identity that can serve to overcome the insecurities and hindrances of life in displacement.

"I'd like to take my children out, to spend some time together. I want to be able to bring home chocolate and chips without having to think about it a hundred times if I can afford it or not" (Riḍā, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, June 23, 2018).

Marūa, like her husband Salīm, dreamt of migrating to Europe. However, this theme did not take much space in her interview with me. She only spoke about it when I asked her directly:

Irene: "Salīm wishes to migrate to Europe. Do you also have this desire?"

Marūa: "Yes, I would like to migrate. It's my husband's dream, but I also think our lives could improve if we go there."

Irene: "And what would you do there? How would you expect life to be if you migrate?"

Marūa: "I expect to have more opportunities, to improve my life. For example, I would like to study. […] I didn't get the chance to finish university. […] I was studying economics" (Marūa, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, June 27, 2018).

Marūa's dream was to study. This theme predominated in her interview with me, and she spoke several times of this unrealized dream. She got married to Salīm when she was 19 and was told by his family that marriage would not have dimmed her educational aspirations. After she got married and had the first baby, she could not continue her university studies.

"I had too many responsibilities in the house. At that time, we were living with his parents, and I couldn't do whatever I wanted. I enrolled in college in Damascus, but I couldn't continue. I didn't have time to go, I didn't even have a place where to study at home. Then I had my first baby and I dropped out. […] If we get to migrate, I'd like to start college again. […] I would like to open a small business, have my own income" (Marūa, personal interview, Beirut, Lebanon, June 27, 2018).

Marūa had aspirations that are based on missed opportunities of the past but involved the attitude of distancing herself from past schemas and constraints. The difference with her husband, here, is that while Salīm's account suggested that he was reproducing iteration both in the private sphere and in public, in his migration aspirations, Marūa, was identifying with a future possibility, which would project her into a new role both in the public space (with the desire to open a business and generate independent income) and the private space (by overcoming a past that placed her as primarily responsible for the home and the children).

6.6. The practical-evaluative dimension of agency: When novel and traditional gender roles are contextualized in the present

The final dimension of agency through which I looked at the experiences of Syrians in Lebanon and Germany is what Emirbayer & Mische (1998) called the practical evaluative dimension. This orientation, which is also the one that has received less scholarly consideration, gives actors the capacity to respond "to the demands and contingencies of the present" and to adjust "to the exigencies of changing situations" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 994). The practical evaluation of agency is a situational judgment that is contextualized within concrete circumstances. This is done through a communicative transaction, which can be articulated as a deliberation with others or a self-reflexive momentum.

The practical-evaluative dimension is the one in which the experience of most Syrian men and women I met in Germany and Lebanon can be framed. Through this temporal orientation of agency, actors gain the capacity to make deliberative decisions. As individuals increase "their capacity for practical evaluation, they strengthen their ability to exercise agency" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 994). Although several patterns are possible, this orientation was mainly expressed through two trajectories: 1) the enactment of novel gender roles in the private space and the conservation of traditional roles in the public space; and 2) the upholding of traditional gender roles in the private sphere and the performing of new gender roles in the public sphere. In Lebanon, Nādiā and her husband Qāsim, who were displaced in El-Marj, were among those who practically evaluated their enactment of gender roles in the public and private sphere. In Lebanon, Qāsim did not find a stable job. He engaged in caregiving activities and housework but kept this arrangement private, as other participants did, to maintain a social position in the public sphere unchanged. When I asked Qāsim if he considered he had more responsibilities in the house or outside the house, now that Nādiā was working, he said:

> "I still have the same responsibilities I had before. I still have to provide for my family. […] For example, I'm the one who goes to the UN or the one who speaks with the landlord" (Qāsim, personal interview, El-Marj, Lebanon, September 7, 2018).

Even if he was not the one earning the salary, he still positioned himself in the public space. Nādiā, on the other hand, struggled to maintain her traditional role in the household, although she gained a new space in the public sphere. The couple used what I called a neo-patriarchal deal to renegotiate their gendered social space. As we have seen, in the same vein as other participants, Nādiā downsized her role in the public space and downplayed her husband's role in the private space, to maintain a "patriarchal balance". However, if we look at non-tangible expressions of these new positions, we realize that novel gender roles were better accepted than participants claimed. For instance, when I asked Nādiā why she decided to work as a teacher, she replied:

"You know, we needed an income and my husband didn't find a job when we came here [in Lebanon]. So, I thought that I could work instead. And I'm good with kids because I had many siblings, and I studied until Baccalaureate. […] I decided to be a teacher because I wanted to help Syrian children to have a better future in this country" (Nādiā, personal interview, El-Marj, Lebanon, September 7, 2018).

In Nādiā's account, we find an element of the past, namely the "characterization" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 998), or the recognition of a past experience that can be helpful to the present circumstances (she had experience with children and high education). We also have a projection into the future, which is problematized through self-reflexivity. In other words, she practically evaluated a present circumstance: she recognized a problem (her family needed an income and her husband could not find a job) and through an inner consideration (and a deliberation with her husband), she found the best resolution for that problem (she decided to become a teacher). However, her attempt to keep traditional gender roles unchanged in the private space is part of an internal conversation and a practical-evaluative use of agency – she did not want her husband to feel diminished in his role as a breadwinner. Qāsim, on the other hand, was keener on maintaining his traditional gender role outward than inward and did not fear engaging in caregiving activities.

Irene: "Are you comfortable with your position in the house? With taking care of the children and the house when Nādiā is at work?"

Qāsim: "Of course I like taking care of my children. They are rising in a very difficult time and they need a reference point. […] I don't mind taking care of the house. Things have to be done and if my wife is at work, I have to do it all" (Qāsim, personal interview, El-Marj, Lebanon, September 7, 2018).

Like Nādiā, Qāsim's choice to be at home has been made after recognizing a problem (that his children needed a reference point and things in the house had to be done), a

communicative transaction, in this case, a self-reflexive consideration, and finally the enactment of the decision.

> Irene: "I've noticed that many Syrian men help their wives in the house, especially when they are at work. But sometimes, they don't feel comfortable letting other people know. Is it like that for you too?"
>
> Qāsim: "I don't mind that, but I'd prefer not to tell people. You know, we live in a small community, and if you tell people that you do the chores they tease you. […] For instance, they could tell you that you're becoming a woman" (Qāsim, personal interview, El-Marj, Lebanon, September 7, 2018).

Qāsim's conservation of traditional roles outside the house, or his position in the public space, was also induced by the outside community, who would judge him for not being "man enough" if he engages in domestic work.

Another participant who attempted to maintain traditional roles outside the house while engaging in new roles inside was Abū Maḥmūd. The man was chosen by the community to be the local *shāwīsh* or a community leader. For this reason, his position in the public space remained somehow tied to the tradition and he was able to maintain a centrality in the public sphere. Nevertheless, his wife Em Maḥmūd and he went through many transformations in the private space. They had three teenage daughters and one son and one daughter who lived somewhere else with their families. Since Em Maḥmūd wanted the three girls to study, she started working in agriculture. She used to go out of the refugee camp every day from the morning to the evening. As a response to this situation, Abū Maḥmūd engaged in activities in the private sphere like cooking.

> "When my wife is at work, I should take care of everything. My daughters help me a lot. […] I can cook; I like to do it. My speciality is *maqlūbe*.[72] […] I also have many responsibilities as the *shāwīsh* of this camp. People come to me with their problems

---

[72] A traditional Middle Eastern dish of rice, vegetables, and meat placed in a pot that is turned upside down when served. The name *maqlūbe* means in fact "upside-down".

and I try to help them" (Abū Maḥmūd, personal interview, 'Adūe, Lebanon, May 15, 2018).

Like Qāsim, Abū Maḥmūd placed his gender identity in the public space although he occasionally engaged in the private space too. I was particularly impressed by the pragmatic way in which the couple negotiated the division of labour inside and outside the family. They mutually agreed on the fact that the special conditions of displacement would have led to a special arrangement of family life. The only condition on which the couple was not willing to compromise was the education of the three daughters.

"My wife and I always worked in agriculture in Syria. When we came here we decided that we would have done everything for the girls. When she got the opportunity to work in the field we discussed it and decided that it was a good idea. And of course, I have to carry out the duties in the house when she's not here. […] My daughters also help in the house, but the priority is that they study" (Abū Maḥmūd, personal interview, 'Adūe, Lebanon, May 15, 2018).

Em Maḥmūd, for her part, confirmed that the family arrangement was decided through a communication process and a mutual deliberation:

"When we came to Lebanon, my husband and I discussed what to do here. We are Bedouins, so we know how to work the land. I got the chance to work in a nearby field with other women and he takes charge of the duties here in the camp. […] My older daughter wanted to work as well but we decided that no, she would need to study" (Em Maḥmūd, personal interview, 'Adūe, Lebanon, May 15, 2018).

In this case, the family recognized that the situation at hand was something that needed to be pragmatically addressed and contextualized. Following a deliberation that involved the couple and the daughters, they decided to act within concrete circumstances. Abū Maḥmūd would stay in the area of the camp and take charge of his position of *shāwīsh*,

which maintained him in the public space, and at the same time, he would take on the responsibilities inside the home. Em Maḥmūd would work outside the camp, in a nearby area. In this sense, while Em Maḥmūd became the main breadwinner of the house, she also maintained her roles inside the house unchanged, as she was still in charge of the house when she did not work. Nonetheless, although Abū Maḥmūd tried to maintain his position in the public space unchanged, his commitment to the community was part of a communicative transaction with the rest of the family. Here, the difference with ʿĀbed is that the man's position in the private space was not part of a negotiation, but a condition imposed by circumstances that the man did not fully accept. Abū Maḥmūd, on the other hand, was deliberately taking charge of the domestic sphere after having practically evaluated the situation at hand.

A final remark can be made about Niḥāl, whose exercise of agency was not in line with her husband's. While he was oriented towards the past in his aspiration of going back to Syria, she was more into the dimension of practical evaluation. The woman suggested that the decision to keep working was made as part of a negotiation with her husband and deliberation with herself.

"I decided to maintain my work in Syria because it's a good position, and we need my salary so much right now. Of course, it's not ideal that I live in Syria and my family lives in Lebanon. […] My husband is not happy with the situation and he wants to go back, but I prefer that my daughters stay in Lebanon. At least they can go on with their studies. And my husband should stay with them since he's not working now" (Niḥāl, personal interview, Tripoli, Lebanon, May 22, 2018).

Niḥāl's decision was pondered in the light of the situation at hand and it entailed a conscious consideration of how to respond to a problem. Apparently, there was no communicative negotiation with her husband. According to her, she made the decision to move the family to Lebanon while keep working in Syria. However, while she maintained her job outside the house and so her position in the public sphere, she returned to traditional gender roles inside the house. For example, when I went to visit them for the

interview, it was Ramadan and Niḥāl invited me to go in the early afternoon so that I could talk to ʿĀbed while she was preparing the *'ifṭār*, the traditional meal for the break of the fast. I would have talked to her after she finished cooking. Although she was the main breadwinner of the house, including the person who made the decisions, she went back to her domestic duties when she was in Lebanon.

In Germany, another family from Aleppo, Ḥanān and Mo'ataz, performed novel gender roles both in the public and the private space but maintained traditional gender roles in the transnational space, with their left-behind family. As we have seen in Chapter 5, the separation from the extended family and, particularly, from the control that the extended family had on people's lives engendered some structural changes and led to a redefinition of roles and responsibilities. However, in the space of transnationalism, where they maintained extensive contacts with the extended family, they preserved a more traditional setting.

> Irene: "What does your family in Aleppo think of the way you and Mo'ataz have arranged your life in Germany? I mean, for example, the fact that Mo'ataz does the chores or washes the dishes."
>
> Ḥanān: "They don't know! [She laughs]. When we talk to our families in Aleppo we don't tell everything about our life here. We don't want to be judged or criticized."
>
> Irene: "Can you make an example of something that you don't tell them?"
>
> Ḥanān: "For example, I don't tell them that he helps me cleaning, that he cleans the floor or do the dishes" (Ḥanān, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 12, 2019).

In the transition from a more extended to a nuclear family, the traditional society, and the extended left-behind family, stopped being a limitation for Ḥanān and Mo'ataz. Nevertheless, those limitations that the couple escaped reiterated in the transnational space. These dynamics were created through the deliberation of the couple in considering the best interest for them and for the family in Syria. Life choices made by migrants in host countries sometimes have repercussions on their left-behind families, especially when the

diaspora community exercises strict control on migrants. Left-behind families can be judged, criticized, and even excluded according to migrant's life choices in host countries (interview with a humanitarian worker in Beirut, January 17, 2018). In the same vein, Najā, in Berlin, decided not to reveal her private life to her parents in Syria – and the fact that in Germany she started dating men. A practice that, according to her, is not in line with her traditional background. However, she engaged in this new practice as she practically evaluated the best option possible to resolve a situation that bothered her – she was tired of being alone and she hoped that by dating, she would meet interesting people.

> Irene: "How come you have decided to start dating? I know that, in Germany, when Syrian women decide to remarry, they sometimes ask family and friends to find them a groom.
> Najā: "I'm just tired of being alone, and I'd like to meet more interesting people. But the aim is not particularly to get married, I'm also happy to find new friends" (Najā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 13, 2019).

In addition, in this case, separation can be advantageous for people in displacement. Nevertheless, it can entail challenges that are not easy to deal with. Najā, for example, had to deal with a conservative family who wanted her to get married again and put pressure on her.

> "They [her parents] constantly bring up the topic of marriage when we speak. I understand them, they are getting old and they would like to see me settled down. […] You know, I was married once and I wasn't happy at all in my marriage. I don't want to go there again. […] I'd like them to understand that I can live without getting married again" (Najā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, January 13, 2019).

Najā became aware of her position in the public space. She appeared as an emotionally independent woman who was not looking for a groom to complete her life. This

awareness was developed through an internal conversation, from which she excluded her family. In the private space, which she shared with her left-behind parents, she did not reveal this side of her gender identity.

In other cases, families who performed novel gender roles and relationships in the private sphere sometimes showed traditional gender roles in the public space. This is the case of Ṭalāl and Raḥmā from rural Hama. As we have seen, the couple renegotiated their relationship through reflexive modernity in the private space, where gender roles became more egalitarian. In Germany, Ṭalāl became a modern man (*zalame mutaḥrir*) and recognized gender equality values in his relationship. Raḥmā, at the same time, appreciated that her husband became more emotionally supportive and claimed that their relationship improved in the private sphere. Nevertheless, the couple agreed on maintaining more traditional gender roles in the public sphere, to preserve their positions in the public space unchanged.

> "I still prefer to behave according to the tradition outside the house. We have a traditional community around us in Leipzig. […] For example, sometimes I thought I could take off my *ḥijāb* here in Germany. My husband wouldn't mind. He understands that it's not the end of the world and that you can keep your religious values no matter what you wear. But I don't do it because I'd feel judged" (Raḥmā, personal interview, Leipzig, Germany, March 15, 2019).

As I often remembered in this thesis, the traditional community, *al-mujtamaʿ al-taqalīdī*, can exercise firm control over people in displacement. Some participants both in Lebanon and Germany chose (and had the means to) act against it, without worrying about the consequences. Others, like Raḥmā and Ṭalāl, preferred to evaluate practically their public representation of novel gender roles and relationships.

> "If we showed neighbours and relatives our new way of living, our life would be a nightmare. They wouldn't understand that you're not less of a Muslim if you recognize your wife the same rights you have as a man. Indeed, Islam says to treat

women with kindness, to respect them. To despise women is to despise God. […] But you know, some people have close-minded opinions about life in the family. They don't understand that we are in Germany and things are different here" (Ṭalāl, personal interview, Leipzig, Germany, March 15, 2019).

Ṭalāl and his wife deliberately chose to preserve traditional gender roles in the public space, to maintain continuity with the community life in Leipzig. Performing new gender roles, or showing a less traditional approach to relationships, would turn the "traditional community" against them. In this sense, deliberative decision-making is part of a communicative transaction between the couple. It is based on terms that the couple has agreed upon to have a quiet life and peaceful relationships with the outside community.

Similarly, Wafā, who divorced her husband because he became violent and oppressive, went through profound changes in the private space. In the domestic sphere, she was now performing novel gender roles, with which she was aware of her alternatives.

"Now I know how I want to live my life. I know the options that I have, and I think I know a little better what kind of person I want to have next to me" (Wafā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, February 25, 2019).

As we have seen, the welfare system, which replaced the support Wafā received from her husband, enlarged the woman's scope of choices. Thanks to those improved circumstances, she could now ponder new decisions to act effectively according to present settings. However, the way Wafā positioned herself in the public space was perhaps still tied to traditional gender roles. Although she was willing to work and become economically independent, her relationship aspirations remained set in a traditional scenario. When I asked her to be more specific about her relationships aspirations, she replied:

"I would like to find a religious man but someone who is not close-minded – someone who understands that women and men are equal, I mean. I'm a conservative and religious woman. I chose to wear a *ḥijāb* even after my divorce. But I'm aware I have changed my identity here in Germany. I could never be with someone oppressive like my husband again" (Wafā, personal interview, Berlin, Germany, February 25, 2019).

As we have seen, individuals who positioned themselves into a practical evaluative dimension shifted between agentic orientations and restructured the internal composition of their agency according to the situational context within which they acted. Most participants in this study fell into the latter category of practical evaluation. Nevertheless, while most Syrian men and women maintained gender roles and relationships unchanged only in the private space, a minority of them preserved traditional gender roles in the public sphere and performed novel gender roles in the private sphere. This was the case of Wafā in Germany.

In general terms, I argue that individuals' capacity to shift between temporal-relational contexts of action depends on the current circumstances and the resources they have available at a particular time. For this reason, using the temporal nature of the human experience to unravel agency can be useful to have a more comprehensive understanding of experiences of displacement.

Conclusion

Almost two years have passed since I wrote the first chapter of this thesis. Since then, great changes have occurred on a global scale and have impacted this work. In particular, two events have challenged the process of writing and especially my ability to remain steady and objective throughout the whole process – the global pandemic of Coronavirus, which, starting from December 2019, has spread from the city of Wuhan, in China, to the rest of the world; and the Beirut explosion of August 4, 2020, which has exacerbated the irreversible collapse of the country where I lived for some years before and during my PhD. The outbreak of Covid-19 has affected the entire world in an unprecedented way. As individuals, we had to reconsider our place in the social space vis-à-vis others since a great deal of what we knew about it changed, including the way we work, we learn, and we travel. Above all, the global pandemic has challenged relationships and the way we interact with one another. Similarly, the Beirut explosion of August 4 was a very distressing event for me as a researcher, and as an individual. The city of Beirut, and Lebanon in general, is strongly tied to my development as a scholar. There, I shaped my research personality, challenged my biases and took the first steps into the academic world. The explosion of August 4 was only one of a series of events that are changing the face of the city and the country fundamentally. [73] With the humanitarian and social conditions in the city and the country worsening day by day, it was not easy to write this thesis without thinking about how my friends and the participants in this study were holding on.

The past year not only raised concerns about how my life and my work could be impacted and challenged by these events, but I also found myself in a more vulnerable place than when I started this path. From a relatively privileged position as a white scholar in the West, I felt many of my beliefs crumble. Suddenly, I was doubtful of my position in the world and my future, as it had never happened before. I found it challenging to make sense of what had happened to me at a personal level and to maintain

---

[73] For more than one year, Lebanon has been dealing with the worst economic crisis the country has experienced in decades. See Dacrema (2020).

an unbiased attitude towards my research. I repeatedly questioned the value of this work and the contribution to knowledge that I could make with this research in a world where most of the certainties we had were constantly challenged. Nevertheless, I did not allow those considerations to jeopardize my work and I decided instead to build on those feelings in order to make sense of my experience as intertwined with the liquid times, to put it as Bauman did, we are all living, and the global changes we are experiencing as human beings. Perhaps the most critical outcome of this process of self-positionality was the profound acknowledgement that in the course of our life we might all face, as individuals, different "crises", which can challenge our *senso comune* or given-for-granted settings of beliefs. This happened to many of us during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020; it happened to the population of Beirut on August 4, and to the participants in this study when they were forced to flee Syria and became refugees in Lebanon and Germany.

Findings and results

This thesis has dealt with the profound transformations that displaced Syrian families in Lebanon and Germany have faced regarding gender roles and relationships and how women and men have responded to this loss of common sense. I like to think about this thesis as a path that goes through *in fieri* processes of change. Processes that I have explored through the stories of those who participated in this study. The accounts of Syrian women and men have shown that "becoming a refugee" can be a very diverse experience. We have seen that one single discipline can hardly embrace the profound meanings of displacement. The position of the "refugee" can be defined in sociological terms. A refugee is someone who has been attributed a label and has been framed into monolithic categories and who, in turn, has to conform to those labels attributed to him or her by the dominant group. The requirements of this position, however, are not necessarily consistent with real-life experiences, as refugees have to adapt their social identity and their social action to a stereotyped persona. However, we have seen that this identity is flexible and adaptable to real-life circumstances. The process of becoming a refugee does not have a beginning and an end; it is a fluid and ever-changing experience.

This work has shown that the space of displacement for Syrian families in Lebanon and Germany can be defined by what I have called protracted-temporary displacement. This condition can be translated into theoretical terms as a liminal space. Refugees do not belong to the social space they were previously part of and they are not incorporated into the new social space, a situation that leaves them suspended in a limbo. This limbo is a non-structural context, which generates "the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc." (Turner, 1982). I argued that it is here that the specificities of refugees' agency can be found. In this sense, in Chapter 3, I defined the theoretical and empirical space within which I observed transformations and agentic renegotiations.

This research has shown that, within the space of displacement, Syrian refugee families experienced a series of gender role and relation transformations, which have been tackled in Chapters 4 and Chapter 5, to answer the first research question that this work has posed: What kind of gender role and relation transformations do Syrian families experience in Lebanon and Germany? The most evident transformation was the new division of labour and responsibilities that Syrian families found themselves dealing with, in Lebanon. These issues were being discussed by different actors at different levels, but a critical understanding of how women and men perceived these transformations was missing. In Lebanon, many Syrian women entered the labour market for the first time and this was conceived by many as an element of economic empowerment. This narrative promoted the idea that, through their work, women achieved a certain degree of economic independence, which would have also brought about social empowerment and changed the patriarchal structure of the family fundamentally. A counter-narrative argued that these transformations were temporary and not solid enough to impact the patriarchal system. The way Syrian women and men perceived those changes was also twofold. On the one hand, men believed that through new roles and responsibilities women had gained more power and control over resources and thus diminished their power. On the other hand, Syrian women perceived this new role as a double burden because as well as gaining new responsibilities in the public sphere, they maintained the obligations in the private sphere. This dynamic created a shift in gendered position wherein men lost their place in the public sphere and did not gain a new one in the private space, while women

gained a new place in the public space and maintained the place they had in the private sphere. Moreover, because those responsibilities were traditionally tied to gender roles, this resulted in a disruption of masculine and feminine identities.

These findings resonate with previous studies. For Syrians who participated in this research, gender identities were not only relational, namely, they existed only in relation to one another (Connell, 1995). They were also social, as they existed, and were measured, only in the social space. Syrian men's masculinity needed to be validated by other men, as it was part of men's homosocial environment (Kimmel, 1994; Bourdieu, 1998/2001). Similarly, Syrian women's femininity was judged through the quality they performed caregiving roles (Hoang, 2011).

This work has found that humanitarian interventions engendered important transformations in gender relations. As previous research has demonstrated, in settings where Western engagement was relevant, relationships were often challenged (Krause, 2014). In particular, in Lebanon, humanitarian actions threatened Syrian men's role as protectors. This was done by jeopardizing men's capacity to be the providers of livelihood and shelters and by promoting actions of women's empowerment that were not designed on a relational basis but rather based on gendered stereotypes. Within the humanitarian environment, women were being seen as victims and men as perpetrators. Moreover, these actions ended up "emasculating" men, because their role as protectors was another component of masculinity. These findings are in line with other studies (Turner, 1999; Engels, 2008; Lukunka, 2012; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2010) and demonstrate that in Lebanon, as in other humanitarian grounds, actions of women's empowerment were based on the assumption that women needed to be familiarized with new (Western) ideals of gender equality, but that this process did not need to involve the family and community around them. Moreover, men were almost entirely excluded from rationalizing new dynamics of gender relations as well as new gender roles and positions in the social space. These programmes not only were far from creating gender equality, but they instead created a reverse disempowerment. They pushed refugee women, allegedly the most vulnerable and disempowered category, or the "ideal refugee" (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2010), into new gendered dispositions, thus challenging pre-displacement gender settings, but without

creating the bases for more equal gender relations. I argue that the reason for this misalignment was not necessarily a lack of critical knowledge by humanitarian actors, but rather the lack of a collective vision and long-term planning. On the one hand, this was due to the way in which the Syrian crisis was managed and continues to be managed as an emergency.[74] On the other hand, it should be considered that humanitarian programmes are often donor-driven and that a consistent amount of funding was allocated in Lebanon for women's empowerment.[75] However, programmes of women's empowerment were sometimes based on the reinforcement of already existing skills, instead of the acquisition of new ones. In this sense, as Carpi (2020a) puts it, livelihood programmes in Lebanon were "neo-cosmetic" as the outcome of those efforts was a cosmetic accessory (Carpi, 2020a, p. 225). This work has demonstrated that the sustainability of humanitarian programmes, especially those related to gender issues, remains problematic. Although improvements have been made and in the past few years, several organizations have started including men in their programmes of "empowerment", there is the perception that the humanitarian industry has an interest in ensuring a political and social continuity of the Lebanese system (ibid.). Nevertheless, my work has found that humanitarian actions can help to challenge patriarchal values to some extent. For several women who lived in conservative and traditional environments before displacement, the simple fact of being in contact with other women of different backgrounds, or being able to engage in life outside the house and perhaps discuss their role in the political arena, was sometimes enough to question the closed patriarchal system in which they were raised.

In Lebanon, remarkable transformations were those related to gendered aspirations. My findings have shown that aspirations are both gendered and relational and that the capacity to aspire, as informed by Appadurai (2004), was exercised by projecting new gendered identities in opposition to those put in place by the dominant group or society. In other words, women and men projected their transformed gender

---

[74] It should be noted that the lack of long-term planning is also due to the limitations posed by Lebanon towards the resettlement of Syrians. See Janmyr (2017).

[75] Since 2015, Lebanon has received US$ 5.64 billion to respond to the "refugee crisis". See Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020. (2020 update). Available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-crisis-response-plan-2017-2020-2020-update. [Accessed November 12, 2020].

identities through a series of aspirations. Three varieties emerged – migration aspirations, work and educational aspirations, and political aspirations. Migration aspirations were expressed differently by women and men in this study. While men saw migration as an opportunity to gain back their former gender roles as providers and breadwinners, women perceived migration as a chance to liberate themselves from the control of extended families. In this sense, the desire to free themselves from what Kandiyoti (1988) called the "cyclical nature of women's power in the household" (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 279) was agentic, subversive, and based on the consideration that, in order to gain a new position as a woman in the family, migration was preferable to non-migration (Carling, 2002). Migration aspirations were relational because migration was seen both as an individual achievement and a way to improve marital and familial relationships.

Similarly, I observed that work and educational aspirations were gendered when part of a process of re-signification of traditional patterns and gender norms. Those aspirations were socially contextualized and embedded in gender relations (Burke, 2006) and thus shaped by new projections of femininity and masculinity identities. For example, after displacement, several Syrian women and men no longer acknowledged the gendered position assigned to them by traditional gender norms. In displacement, they no longer interiorized the dynamics of exclusions engendered by the dominant group or the traditional culture, which would prevent them from attaining education and work aspirations in a process of exclusion and cultural reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977/1990). They acted against norms that would delegitimize their access to a field that they were not expected to access as women and men.

A final type of aspirations, which was externalized through the expression of new gendered identities, was political aspirations. Some participants were eager to be involved in the political discourse of the Syrian diaspora, especially when related to reconstruction and democratic transition. For some Syrian men who were already active before forcibly migrating, political aspirations changed their focus. They became gendered because they interconnected, for example, with their identity as a father, as it happened to Sheīkh Aḥmed. My finding demonstrated that some Syrian women were also involved in political participation at different levels. In the past few years, more and more, civil society

organizations included women and advocated to increase political awareness of displaced women. Although women's political participation was still limited because of gender hierarchies and a generalized lack of responsiveness towards political issues (Abu-Assab & Naser-Eddin, 2019), some women in this study expressed their aspirations to participate in the political discourse. In particular, they positioned themselves into the debate around Islamic feminism (Mernissi, 1975; Ahmed, 1992; Adújar, 2013). In this sense, their aspirations were gendered because they were part of a process of pursuing personal fulfilment and acknowledgement of new interests, new desires, and new needs as women in the public space. Before the war, most women perceived the political field as something related to men or to the élite in power, pertaining to the public space to which they did not have access. The disruption of one's gender identity in displacement opened doors for creating new frameworks for understanding transformations. My findings resembled Pepicelli's (2010) when she considers that Islamic feminism represents a new complex way of feminine self-positioning merging multiple identities. Like participant Ward, in Chapter 4, Syrian women could be activists, Muslim, conservative individuals, and active participants in political life in the diaspora.

Findings have reinforced the founded assumption that displacement has a profound impact also upon people's private life and in particular upon their intimate relationships. My research has found that the idea of intimate space was strongly connected with that of "home", as intimate life is associated with the private sphere. With displacement, the private space, and the meaning of home were subjected to significant changes. Living conditions for Syrian participants in Lebanon were generally very precarious as displaced families often lived in extremely vulnerable settings. Nevertheless, in line with what Brun & Fábos (2015) have discovered, my findings confirmed that despite the dire condition in which refugees in Lebanon lived, people continued to recreate a sense of home by re-establishing familiarity through homemaking practices. In this study, two dimensions of intimacy mainly emerged in relation to changes in gender relations: emotional and sexual intimacy. The settings in which intimate life was impacted the most were informal settlements and overcrowded apartments – settings where spaces were "profoundly unhomely" (Blunt & Dowling, 2006), or where privacy was not always

possible to maintain. Nonetheless, the topic of intimacy came out in its emotional form in settings where Syrian families lived in privately rented apartments, isolated from the local and Syrian society. Not only the physical space could create emotional distance, but also the mental space for intimacy. When everyday actions become direr in displacement, the increase of daily pressures and mental loads can disrupt emotional intimacy. Most Syrians in Lebanon lacked consistent support to address the psychological distress and trauma generated by displacement. This, unsurprisingly, had a profound impact on their relationships when also the support of the partner and the community was lacking.

Gender relations in Germany were subjected to significant changes. The most notable transformation perhaps occurred to those families that remained separated across international borders, within EU borders, or even across the German states after forced migration. These separations generated insecurities towards life in Germany, in opposition to the sense of protection expected from asylum. Everyday insecurities (Tiilikainen, 2019) affected people's daily lives and wellbeing. This research explored three types of everyday insecurities – a material, a relational, and an ethical dimension. The material dimension was related to tightening economic conditions. Although this is an obstacle for many migrants and refugees, this dimension becomes protracted for separated families when they have to support left-behind families for an indefinite amount of time. On the other hand, poverty prevents (forced) migrants from fulfilling the expectations of the left-behind families (Goveas & Coomarasamy, 2018). Moreover, when refugees have to support extended families, which can hardly be reunited, financial difficulties can limit opportunities in the host country even further and make them experience a precarious life with no alternative solution. In this sense, I follow Georgas et al. (2001) and Fonseca & Ormon (2008) when I argue that the imposition of the Western concepts of "nuclear family" can be a form of symbolic violence, which can shape or consolidate inequalities.

Relational insecurities were expressed through a sense of frustration towards relationships in Germany when participants found difficulties in attaining the relationship standards with which they were expected to comply. Some participants experienced a double absence (Sayad, 2004) for not being able to be with their family nor to live relationships fully in Germany. This condition prevented participants from focusing on

the future. Lastly, ethical insecurities were expressed through a deep sense of guilt towards left-behind families in Syria or Turkey, questioning the future of participants in Germany and preventing them from enjoying life achievements in the resettlement country. I relate here to authors who have discussed "survivor's guilt" and its psychological effects in migration (Bemak et al., 2002; Bughra & Becker, 2005; Goveas & Coomarasamy, 2018). This condition experienced by Syrians in separated families contributed to eliciting emotional stress and jeopardized the sense of safety.

This study found that the social security policies of Germany also contributed to transforming family settings. In particular, they helped women in unsatisfying relationships to end their marriages. The welfare state replaced the husband in the support he used to provide and it became a "better husband" (Turner, 1999) for women. In highlighting the risks of dependency from the social security system, my findings confirmed Eggebø's (2010) and Ghorashi's (2005). However, although State dependence is stigmatizing for many refugees and migrants, it was mostly seen as a temporary dependence by women who participated in this study. These women instrumentally used the system to become active participants in society. An interesting result of this study is that access to social security services was often facilitated by an intermediary person who helped Syrian women to navigate the complex bureaucratic system of Germany. The welfare system also had a profound impact on men, who lost their unquestioning deference (in Arabic *yamūn*) and patriarchal position towards their wives and children. In line with previous studies (Orloff, 1996), I argue that social provision had an important role in contrasting gender inequalities especially when this is part of a system of regulated gender policies. Nevertheless, this study could not assess whether the German welfare system could engender a transition from private to public patriarchy among Syrians, as other authors have found among other marginalized groups (Holter, 1984 cit. in Orloff, 1996; Walby, 1990).

Interesting findings were also identified in terms of consolidation of religious practices to come to terms with a new social environment. In this research, religion emerged as an element that played a fundamental role in the life of many Syrians, both individually and at a community level. This resonates with what Schreiter (2009, cit. in

Frederiks, 2015) has found – religion functioned as an identity marker in a new social context and as a healing mechanism to recover from humiliating and hurtful experiences. Some participants claimed that they became more religious in displacement. They proved that religion served as a symbol of identity and also became a symbol of difference (Kurien, 1998). In line with Smith (1978), among others, I argue that religion was for Syrian participants also an element of coping with loss, disorientation, and separation. It should be noted that the German social milieu was experienced by many as threatening when they felt the burden of integration expectations. For some participants, engaging with religious practices was an attempt to maintain continuity with the past in response to the new environment, which was perceived as hostile and morally corrupted. However, this resulted in social isolation, unfamiliarity with the German culture and system, and at the same time, it generated a non-acknowledgement of the value and legitimacy of participants' social capital in the host society. Religion was also used to renegotiate individual identities when collective structures were unsettled (Kraft, 2017). As part of the complexity of identities, it compensated for the loss of other dimensions of identity, which can be brought about by displacement.

Forced migration also entailed profound transformations to extended families. Several people claimed that due to forced migration they shifted from an extended or "big family" (*'ā'ile kabīre*) to a nuclear or "small household" (*'ā'ile zghrīre*). Extended families in Syria functioned as a welfare system providing support to its members in terms of children and elderly assistance, socialization, and education and religious upbringing. However, the support that the couple received was emotional and practical. It helped to solve everyday issues as a couple and supported them in decision-making issues. With no surprise and in line with previous studies (Mahler, 2001; Opas & McMurray, 2015; Baldassar et al., 2016; Grace, 2019), findings have shown that technology facilitates transnational connections. Social media, in particular, were the main tool Syrian families used to maintain connections and exchange "social remittances" (see Levitt, 2001) in the transnational space. Through social media, couples preserved a co-presence with their scattered family (Baldassar et al., 2016); they remained connected on important dates and anniversaries. I found that the virtual connection that these "post-extended" families

maintained went beyond emotional support. They were connected in a way that ensured the continuity of the extended family in the transnational space.

These accounts allowed me to reflect more on the impact of transnational relationships on the integration of Syrian families in Germany. Scholars have increasingly investigated the areas of transnationalism and integration in an interconnected way (for example, see Guarnizo et al., 2003; Marger, 2006; Mazzucato, 2008; Bivand Erdal & Oeppen, 2013; Hammond, 2013; Marini, 2014.). However, less attention has been given to the specific dimension of separation (Sauer et al., 2018) and especially to extended families. While this study cannot offer a complete picture of the interconnections between transnationalism and integration, it hopes to inspire further reflection in the field of the sociology of migration.

Interesting findings came about in the area of renegotiations of gender roles and relationships in displacement. These outcomes answered the second research question: How do Syrian men and women renegotiate relationships in displacement in agentic terms? This study demonstrated that Syrian men and women used a series of renegotiation techniques to come to terms with the transformations of gender roles and relationships. They can be categorized into five groups: (1) bargaining, (2) manipulation, (3) subversion, (4) resilience, and (5) self-reflexive behaviours. These findings resonate with what Naila Kabeer (1999) has defined as the multiple dimensions of agency. In this sense, agency for Syrians in Lebanon and Germany was not only exercised through tangible actions but also as "intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438). In my research, I found that these dimensions were often intertwined with one another and created multi-layered agentic patterns where all those dimensions echoed within the same actions. For example, as we have seen in Chapter 4, some participants used neo-patriarchal mechanisms, like "patriarchal bargain" and "protest masculinity", to renegotiate their gendered positions in the family and the social space to keep the old system unchanged. The benefits that both women and men obtained by conforming to the old system exceed the benefits that would come about from changing the whole structure. Nevertheless, they accommodated and upheld patriarchal norms by manipulating the system to their best advantage, but leaving the system intact.

Syrian men and women whose relationships were challenged by humanitarian intervention bypassed and manipulated the system to regain the dignity that they had lost in the process. Nonetheless, by reconstructing their self-worth as individuals, they also renegotiated their gender identity in their relationship with their partners. For example, Syrian men became community leaders or *shāwīsh* to regain self-esteem threatened by humanitarianism and the trust and respect of the community. In this way, they reconstructed the sense of being protectors of their families. Syrian women started requesting training courses that could help them building a career, or improving their skills in view of a migration project. In this way, Syrian participants manipulated a system that allegedly put them in stereotyped and homogeneous categories.

Some participants used subversive techniques to challenge the "natural" order of things. They acted against the reproduction of cultural and social exclusion that would prevent them from pursuing their aspirations. Non-traditional gendered identities sometimes became a driver for subversive decisions, as in Wālida's case, who through an increased awareness towards family planning became active as a political subject, or Zaīnab and her husband Khalīl who decided not to have children until their life circumstances would improve. A reflexive projection into a better life was for other participants also a projection of a new self into the relationship with their families. In this sense, my findings resonated with the "no going back debate" (Johnson, 2018). By becoming active in struggles to transform the natural state of things, or as participant Yūsef put it, in *changing what they do to change what they think*, Syrian women and men were no longer willing to go back to previous gendered dispositions.

The dimension of resilience produced indubitably remarkable outcomes in terms of the exercise of agency both in Lebanon and Germany. For example, as I explained in Chapter 4, Syrian families in Lebanon adapted to the circumstances of displacement by putting into practice creative agentic mechanisms to reconstruct their intimacy. They did so by reconstructing the physical space for intimacy in the private sphere and thus re-signifying the meaning of home. As argued in Chapter 5, Syrian men and women in separated families used other forms of resilience to establish new social networks and consolidate relationships with left-behind families. By doing this, they renegotiated their

social identity in displacement. It should be noted that these kinds of renegotiations often followed an individual acceptance of the conditions of separation. For participants, coming to terms individually with separation as a condition to navigate instead of rejecting it was a preliminary step to renegotiate a new position on a relational level. Transnational extended families also used resilience as an agentic mechanism. In this sense, resilience was used to maintain what Suad Joseph (1993b) called "family connectivity". Syrian participants in transnational extended families continued to exist as "relational selves" (Joseph, 1993b, p. 458) and preserved the continuation of this family structure from afar through connectivity. In this sense, in line with previous studies (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997), my findings bring into question the notion of "family" as a geographically near unit, but do not resonate with what other authors have found (Al-Ali, 2002), namely that displacement and separation engender a disruption and even extinction of extended families (ibid., p. 253).

Reflexivity was used as a non-tangible agentic mechanism by participants in Germany who renegotiated their relationships in a framework of "reflexive modernity" (Giddens, 1991). This occurred especially wherein traditional settings were challenged by the social security system as a product of modernity or Western values. Syrian men and women changed their perspective about the meaning of traditional values, by which they no longer felt represented. In this sense, my findings are in line with what Rasborg (2017) has found: in reflexive modernity, the self becomes a reflexive project because individuals are encouraged to make choices that have a political connotation. For example, those Syrian participants who accepted the loss of *yamūn* also chose to perform a less hegemonic masculinity and constructed more egalitarian relationships with their partners. It is worth noticing that although the choice of some participants to take distance from the "traditional society" (in Arabic *al-mujtamaʿ al-taqalīdī*) was certainly a reflexive choice, it was not necessarily tied to the disruption of relationships as a consequence of reflexive modernity. Some Syrians in Germany distanced themselves from other Syrians that they did not know in fear of being controlled by the Syrian regime in the diaspora.

As Kraft (2017) found, reflexivity in displacement also acquired a religious dimension when religion was used to renegotiate individual identities in those cases in which

collective structures were unsettled. The reinforcement of religious beliefs in Germany occurred through what Martí (2015) called "religious reflexivity", a set of intentional and problem-solving mechanisms that are a distinctively and avoidably part of contemporary religious selves (Martí, 2015, p. 3). Religion was used by participants in Germany to reflexively reconstruct self-identities in response to life-changing experiences, contemporary life in Germany, or, as it happened to participant Abdallāh, to heal from hurtful and humiliating experiences. Finally, while for most participants religious reflexivity was a personal meaningful choice (Archer, 2012), some others imposed this form of "power over" (Kabeer, 1999; 2005) to their partners or families. However, imposing religious reflexivity was hardly sufficient action for others to internalize it. This happened to Saḥar, whose husband endeavoured to limit her agency, but without success. In this sense, her reflexivity laid in the fact that although she was kept away from the external world, she was well aware of her agency and maintained a reflexive attitude towards her opportunities in Germany.

In Chapter 6, I answered the third research question of this work, namely, whether different displacement situations could generate similar experiences. This question was addressed by examining displacement in the so-called Global North and the Sub Global. To make sense of the typologies of transformations within a more comprehensive framework, I compared the experiences of Syrians in Lebanon and Germany through what Emirbayer & Mische (1998) called a "chordal triad of agency" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 970). I found that the experiences of Syrians in Lebanon and Germany were comparable if analyzed on a temporal scale and that participants responded to changing circumstances similarly. In particular, I discovered that in their exercise of agency Syrians in both countries were oriented on a three-dimensional scale. The first dimension is the iteration and it can be attributed to participants in Lebanon and Germany who recalled, selected, and applied tacit or taken-for-granted elements or actions that they developed through past interactions and that are, to put in Bourdiesan terms, ascribable to their *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1972/1977). The second dimension, the projectivity, took place when participants distanced themselves from taken-for-granted schemas of actions learned in their past experiences, or their habitual dispositions, and invented new possibilities for

actions (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Finally, the dimension of practical evaluation, which was the one within which the experience of most participants in Lebanon and Germany could be framed, was the position in the present, where actors gained the capacity of making deliberate choices.

This temporal scale was also useful to answer the side questions I posed in this study: Do refugees living in similar cultural environments maintain traditional gender roles? And, do transformations take place only inwardly or also outwardly? I have shown in Chapter 6 that each of these orientations entailed three different varieties of doing family and doing gender in forced migration. Findings have shown that Syrians in both countries performed gender roles inwardly and outwardly according to how they placed themselves on this temporal scale. In the first place, the iteration orientation encouraged the maintenance of traditional gender roles both in the public sphere and in the private sphere. Secondly, the projectivity attitude inspired novel gender roles and relationships, inward and outward. Finally, the practical evaluation of present circumstances created a double dimension. On the one hand, continuity with traditional gender roles was maintained in the private sphere while novel gender roles were performed in the public sphere. On the other hand, novel gender roles were performed in the private sphere while traditional gender roles were maintained outwardly. In this sense, we can argue that not necessarily a similar cultural environment encourages the continuity with traditional gender roles or it provides a rupture with those. As a matter of fact, many Syrian women and men in Lebanon acted in a subversive way towards what was perceived as "natural" by the dominant society, which provided a similar cultural environment to that in which they had grown up. On the other hand, being in a different cultural environment, as the European or Western, does not necessarily entail the enactment of new gender roles, as many participants maintained continuity with their traditional cultural environment in Germany. In this sense, my findings dissent with both the literature asserting that (forced) migration leads to a thorough change in gender roles and relationships (e.g., Inowlocki & Lutz, 2000; İnce Beqo, 2019; Meertens, 2004) as well as the scholarship claiming that conservative continuity with traditional gender roles is maintained after the migration (Berg & Longhurst, 2003; Datta, 2009). My results resonate more with what Lenette et al.

(2019) have found about the continuity of cultural traditions among South Sudanese women in Australia, namely that complex relationships with the past and the present emerged in displacement. Bivand Erdal & Pawlak (2018) have also discovered, about Polish migrants in Norway, that there are various ways in which change and continuity can run parallel (Bivand Erdal & Pawlak, 2018, p. 882). In line with these positions, I found that through their accounts, participants expressed a fluid and non-static relationship with past, present, and future with respect to tradition and culture. These relationships, especially those related to the positioning into the present were far from being conflictual. They were rather agentic in the practical evaluation of the current context and the adaptation, manipulation, or subversion of culturally prescribed gender norms to the opportunities offered by the settlement country to both women and men. I suggest that more caution is needed when speaking about changes. As suggested by Essed et al. (2004), one should be careful not to celebrate social transformations occurring in displacement too uncritically. New (gendered) identities and agentic transformations are born in trauma, loss, exclusion and "pain of not belonging, due to attributed 'otherness'" (ibid., p. 12).

Another side question that this study endeavoured to answer was: What is the role of the receiving society and local actors in fostering changes or maintaining continuity? This work could not thoroughly investigate this dimension, which would require a special focus in itself; hence, I cannot answer this question with a solid argument. Nevertheless, I reflected on one specific aspect of this matter that would deserve to be discussed here: the different ways in which gender-related issues were understood and operationalized in Lebanon and Germany and the crucial impact that this dimension had upon relationships. My findings have shown that Lebanon is an "over-humanitarized" environment where not only is there a generalized familiarity with humanitarian actions and services, but there is also a widespread awareness of gender-related issues. This does not mean that gender inequalities are not an issue in Lebanon. In fact, as argued by Di Peri (2018), because of a complex interweaving of State norms, religious norms, and societal structures, women's rights have received little attention or protection in Lebanon (ibid., p. 249). However, within the "Syrian crisis", most local and international organizations have engaged in gender programmes. These actors contributed to raising gender sensitivity,

which was received by refugees themselves. In Germany, I found the opposite trend. Organizations working with gender issues in displacement were only a few and were hardly focusing on those relevant aspects for refugee families. Except for one NGO, which advocated for separated families to be reunited, and a few (mostly Syrian) organizations focusing on women's empowerment, the debate around gender was almost completely missing in the German humanitarian environment. I suggest that this is because the German debate around gender is generally more advanced, as German laws protect gender equality with a Gender Equality Policy (*Gleichstellungspolitik*).

Because in Lebanon the debate is still ongoing, as gender equality is not yet guaranteed even for the Lebanese population, somehow the discourse around gender issues and forced migration has developed in parallel to the narrative concerning gender equality. As a result, there was a great sensitivity towards these issues by the humanitarian industry. Furthermore, in addition to the dynamics already presented and despite the obstacles highlighted in Chapter 4, the gender-related discourse in humanitarian environments has proved to be reactive and ready to respond to the evolving needs of the refugee population. This has not happened in Germany, where humanitarian actions towards gender issues in forced migration have been less careful – in some cases even gender-blind. In other words, because gender equality is perceived as generally accomplished in Germany (although inequalities are still numerous), somehow there has been less the need to address these issues, which resulted in non-intentionally discriminatory actions that have led, for example, to a low number of refugee women employed in the labour market, five years after the beginning of the "refugee crisis". This suggests that traditional gender roles continue to keep refugee women in the private sphere (Brücker et al., 2020) and that humanitarian actions and institutional policies have not fully engaged with these aspects.

This thesis aimed to fill some of the gaps in the literature by analysing gender role and relationship transformations embracing different displacement experiences. I have compared the experiences of refugeehood in the so-called Global North to those in the Global South and found that, despite the significant differences in which displacement is managed in the two countries, Syrian families lived similar displacement circumstances.

Moreover, although transformations in gender roles and relationships were different for Syrians in Lebanon and Germany, in both cases, displacement generated a suspended state that allowed for alternative dimensions of agency to take place. This thesis also aimed at using a relational perspective to analyze changes in gender roles and relationships. I have done this at a methodological level by listening to different voices within one family or investigating both the individual and the relational dimensions of relationships. I have also accomplished this aim by analysing those transformations from a relational perspective, namely as an interconnected, dynamic, and interdependent set of relationships (Buber, 1970; Somers, 1998), rather than in a contrastive way (Swartz, 1997). This approach was also useful to study the nuanced set of agentic actions and behaviours without focusing on the individualistic and functionalist relationship between agency and structure, as suggested by Tatli et al. (2014). Another aim of this work was to go beyond the dichotomies that emerged and consolidated with the "refugee crisis". These narratives depicted Syrian women as the most vulnerable, or as "victims", and men as "violent", or "backward individuals" who were unwilling to lose the power of their position in the patriarchal system. With this work, I have offered a picture of the diversity of the refugee experience, as well as a non-binary understanding of gender roles and relationships. As argued by other authors (Kibreab, 2004), displaced people are not a homogeneous mass of people; they differ in terms of their background and their experiences. I refrained from assessing whether changes were positive or negative. Instead, I explored ruptures and continuities in gender roles, gender relations, and gender norms resulting from displacement. A final aim of this thesis was to investigate the specificities of agency in displacement. To do so, I put aside the relationship of agency with structure and I focused on the exercise of agency in a liminal non-structural context. This does not mean that other structures cannot exist within that context at different levels, or that agency cannot be limited by other structural contexts put into place for example by States or institutions at different degrees. However, as we shall see in the next pages, these avenues are left open for further research.

Contribution of this study to knowledge and its limitations

This thesis provides three main contributions to knowledge – a theoretical one, an empirical one, and a methodological one. In the first place, it contributes to the discipline of sociology of migrations by proposing an approach to refugees' agency, where agency is studied explicitly as a theoretical concept and an empirical one and not necessarily based on its interaction with the structures of displacement. Agency has been frequently studied as a core aspect in migration and refugee studies and in gender studies (see, for example, Kabeer, 1999; Long, 2001; Essed et al., 2004). Nevertheless, a few scholars have studied it in depth as a theoretical concept (Bakewell, 2010; Oskay, 2016; Squire, 2017). Similarly, when the empirical aspects have been addressed, no specific connection with a theoretical context has been given. This divide has been exacerbated by the gap between voluntary migration and forced migration, which keeps being consistent throughout the discipline (Bakewell, 2010). In general, the relationship between agency and structure has been incorporated in migration and refugee studies along the same line as the general discourse about agency-structure itself – some approaches favoured functionalist theories, while others lean close to structuralism, with a middle-ground theoretical stance, which tended to draw on Gidden's structuration theory. Bakewell (2010) argued that these elaborations resulted in a structure-agency *impasse* where even the applications of a middle ground position failed in outlining a critical approach to agency and structure in migration studies. Moreover, although alternative avenues were proposed by critical realists (Bakewell, 2010), these studies are still based on the dimension of movement, on the reasons why individuals migrate, and on the level of agency migrants employ in these decisions. An in-depth theoretical and empirical analysis of the exercise of agency in displacement, related to other dimensions of (forced) migrants' life, is still lacking. My work endeavoured to fill these gaps. Firstly, my contribution lies in an understanding of agency in (forced) migration, which is not necessarily concerned with explaining why people (forcibly) migrate, hence with studying migration theories. These aspects have already been addressed by other scholars successfully (Massey et al. 1998; Carling, 2002; Bakewell et al., 2012; Castles et al., 2014). Instead, I have explored, with this work, the

exercise of agency after forced migration has occurred, or in the space of displacement, a space that I understand as liminal. Here, I have engaged with how individuals make choices in performing gender vis-à-vis their partners or families, how they reconstruct disrupted or transformed relationships, and how they do gender and family within the temporal (not only spatial) space of displacement. In other words, I have engaged with the exercise of agency in displacement in dealing with gender roles, gender identities, gender norms, and relationships. Secondly, this kind of approach allowed me to address a wider migrant population without making strict distinctions between voluntary or non-voluntary migrants. As explained in Chapter 1, defining (or labelling) who is and who is not a refugee is very problematic, as terminological limits can create problems of inclusion and exclusion. A critical analysis of agency in displacement can consider the legal status of displaced people, but it would serve no purpose to consider the reasons why people migrate. Finally, the conceptualization of the space of displacement as a liminal and non-structural space and the application of the temporal lens to the analysis allowed me to grasp a more in-depth perspective on actors' varying exercise of agency over time. In particular, through the inclusion of the element of time, as informed by Emirbayer & Mische (1998) and as endeavoured by other authors (Hitlin & Elder, 2006; Kristiansen, 2014), I propose with this work an empirical analysis of agency in displacement, a model that can be applied to other empirical studies as well as being extended and integrated further.

The second way in which this work contributes to the existing literature is through its methodological approach to the study of gender relations in forced migration. In particular, by using a relational perspective in analysing gender role and relationship transformations, this thesis has unpacked interconnected sets of relationships. The literature has often focused on the experiences of men and women as separated from one another or in opposition to one another. However, through this contrastive focus, it is hardly possible to grasp interconnections, interdependencies, and inter-individual dynamics. Instead, a relational approach allowed me to engage in a more nuanced analysis of complex interactions within the family. In this way, a broader set of multifaceted relationships in the family could be addressed, including relationships

between wife and husband, parents and children, nuclear family and extended family, individual and family etc. This multidimensional perspective helped to investigate how gender roles and relationships were renegotiated through the interactions of family members and gave space to different dimensions of agency exercised by individuals in relationship with one another and not simply in contrast to one another.

A final contribution to knowledge that this thesis provides is a more empirical contribution based on the comparison of two displacement situations for Syrian refugees – one in the Global North (Germany) and one in the Global South (Lebanon). Through this multi-sited research, I empirically studied these two displacement situations and compared them to challenge the North/South divide that tends to study displacement phenomena separately. The literature has rarely focused on displacement as an overarching phenomenon that goes beyond the North/South discourse. In general, the scholarly tendency in forced migration studies is to deal with displacement as stand-alone processes. This has prevented an in-depth comparison of the subjective experiences of refugees. In this sense, my contribution is far from being ground-breaking, as other authors have elaborated conceptual frameworks for understanding North/South displacement across different disciplines (Dick & Reuschke, 2012; Hirsh et al., 2020). However, I believe that there is a need to do more comparative research in forced migration studies to understand displacement on a larger scale. In this sense, my work is significant to the discipline of forced migration studies because it enriches the literature by bringing in a double perspective on how the experiences of displaced Syrians in two different situations can be analyzed in comparison. In this sense, I took the opportunity to use the knowledge that emerged from these two contexts to inform comparisons, new meanings, and counter-narratives that I considered significant for further research to problematize how knowledge is produced in a framework of decolonization around forced migration.

This study has its limitations. At a theoretical level, because the scope of this research was a multi-layered analysis of agency in the liminal space of displacement, I did not focus on the specific interactions between agency and structure; thus, I left this level of analysis aside. However, this does not mean that specific structures cannot be found

within a non-structural context at a further level of analysis. The purpose of this thesis was to operate an analysis of agency that could include multiple displacement experiences and a comparison between two displacement situations. However, the limited scope of this work did not allow investigating other dimensions of agency and structure interactions.

At a methodological level, some obstacles have emerged and some things could have been done differently. In the first place, data collection methods could have been better adjusted to the empirical contexts of Lebanon and Germany. If in Lebanon the informality of the humanitarian and institutional context and the specific position of refugees allowed for several fieldwork activities to be conducted successfully, in Germany this was not the case. Because of the ethical and methodological challenges described in Chapter 2, some of the activities planned could not be carried out (e.g., focus group discussions). In this sense, alternative avenues could have been taken, for example using informal channels, personal networks, and personal resources. Nevertheless, because of financial and temporal limitations, this has not been possible. A further attempt to organise such activities in early 2020 was hindered by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has put an end to data collection. Another methodological limitation, also due to the lack of time, is related to the fact that the sample has not been investigated over time. This has limited the analysis of the dimension of changes, which was investigated through participants' accounts. However, if I had the opportunity to study the sample over time, I could have analyzed this dimension more in depth. Finally, on a more ethical note, I found several limitations in the main method used for data collection – the in-depth semi-structured interview. I found the application of this method to the study of relationships in displacement extremely problematic, as it raised several concerns related to the scope of this tool and its Eurocentric nature (Keikelame & Swartz, 2019). The semi-structured interview in my study created a great distance between me as a researcher and research participants and it threatened to undermine the focus on participants and their experiences. In my study, the semi-structured interview as a research tool revealed to be a method that does not easily conform to the topics covered by this thesis. However, this awareness was acquired too late for the research design to be modified fundamentally. Nevertheless, I tried to overcome these problems using a less formal approach, based on

an exchange between researcher and participants instead of the interviewer-interviewee relationship. In this sense, I not only had to unlearn biased notions in favour of a participant-driven understanding, but I also had to make an effort to understand participants' need to take space in the relationship, ask questions and take something back after having shared with me their intimate stories. This approach was chosen because it allowed a certain methodological homogeneity between two very different contexts, which would have not been possible to reach through quantitative data. As a matter of fact, while in Germany, there was an abundance of quantitative data collected throughout the "refugee crisis", in Lebanon, only partial data, collected mainly by the UNHCR, existed. This would not have allowed a comparative analysis and therefore the study could only be carried out through qualitative methodologies.

Implications, recommendations, and avenues for further research

I will conclude with the implications of this study on policy, practice, and further research. First of all, it will be crucial to remark that this study will not transform gender-based policies or practices in receiving countries, nor will it change fundamentally how institutional and humanitarian actors approach gender-related issues. Nevertheless, it aspires to be a tool to start reflecting on specific changes that are occurring in receiving countries and post-migrant societies (Foroutan, 2019a; 2019b).[76] Five years after the beginning of the so-called "refugee crisis", which has initiated a time of significant changes for Europe and the Mediterranean region, it is of utmost importance for academics and policymakers to dedicate time, effort, and resources to understand the forced migration experiences of displaced people. In particular, regarding the increasing debates about refugees' integration, social cohesion, and plurality in European societies, it is fundamental to understand more clearly the consequences of displacement on people's everyday lives from a long-term perspective.

---

[76] Sociologist Naika Foroutan (2019a; 2019b) defined post-migrant societies as those societies in which "migration" is no longer a dominant marker of social difference and instead it underlines the normality of migration in a globalized world (Foroutan, 2019b, p. 144).

Although not all displaced Syrians aspire to migrate onward (Müller-Funk, 2019), it is expected that most refugees will not return to Syria in the short term (Yahya et al., 2018; Fakhoury & Ozkul, 2019; Içduygu & Nimer, 2020). Lebanon and other neighbouring countries have been calling for Syrian refugees to go back to their country for the past few years but with the Syrian regime maintaining the power and with no political transition in sight, there are not the conditions for most Syrians to return to (what is left of) their homes. The myth of return has been long debated in the literature (for example, see Madawi, 1994; Zetter, 1999) and the return has been confirmed being an unrealistic perspective by several protracted refugee situations in history. When I questioned Syrian families in Lebanon and Germany about their future, most people replied that they wished they could go back to Syria if they could get their lives back. Because this is unlikely, they would rather migrate to the West or stay where they are in displacement. It is worth mentioning that the specific situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is subjected to unpredictable transformations, as it is dependent on the multi-layered crisis that has hit the country since 2019. In this sense, the risk that these unprecedented scenarios could trigger more displacement is very high. In several virtual conversations I had with Syrian families and humanitarian workers in Lebanon in 2020, has emerged that some Syrian families have recently started considering returning to Syria. Although the two countries have always been interconnected in terms of the political and economic situation and a dire economic crisis is also hitting Syria, it would be easier for many displaced families in Lebanon to live in their home country and rely on social networks there. For example, those who can return to their homes in the countryside can better live off the land than stay in starvation in Lebanon. Furthermore, with the health situation deteriorating gradually in the host country, due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the more-affordable healthcare system of Syria could motivate some families to return. However, for the majority of those 1.5 million Syrians in Lebanon, a return would hardly be an option.

The situation is undoubtedly different for Syrian families in Germany. Despite the perceptions of insecurity in the host country, many families have built a new life in Germany and will hardly give up such security for the uncertainties of Syria. For this reason, creating the best circumstances for these people to stay and live well in Germany is

of utmost importance. Displacement can be a breeding ground for perpetrating cultural reproduction, symbolic violence, and unequal allocation of power (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977/1990), which do not get along with social cohesion and integration. In this sense, my study advocates for a capitalization of more equal opportunities for all groups of society. In this sense, I believe that is imperative to change the way we speak about "refugees". Not only through the way we address them, by avoiding the so-called paternalistic humanitarianism but also by changing the language we use. As suggested by the German postmigration scholars (see Foroutan, 2016; 2019a; Römhild, 2017; Dahinden, 2016), we should "demigrantise" (*Entmigrantisieren*) the discourse and start acknowledging that many European societies are post-migrant societies, namely profoundly shaped by migration, but where "migration" should no longer be the focus. In fact, the obsessive fixation on migrants and their descendants as people "with a migration background" has transformed migration into a meta-narrative that structures society and is used as a general explanatory category for all the structural problems of society (Foroutan, 2016, p. 234). Instead of falling into this kind of "migrantology" (Römhild, 2017), we should stop seeing these people as peripheral to society and instead start seeing us all as affected by migration in different ways. In this sense, while "demigrantizing" migration studies, we should also "migrantise" social research by including immigrants and their descendants in studies that are not focused on migration experiences (Bojadzijev & Römhild, 2014).

As one of the main findings of this thesis is that the topic of gender roles and relationships has rarely been looked at through a relational lens, this study suggests that the humanitarian and institutional approach to gender-based issues in displacement is based on specific needs rather than homogenized actions. The humanitarian mainstream discourse has often spread the idea that once women access the economic sphere or become breadwinners, they gain more power and a better social position in the family and society. This process is often called "empowerment". Nonetheless, when women's economic, political, and social empowerment is not realized on a relational basis, namely through the involvement of the whole family and community, the risks of violent repercussions can be high. As humanitarian actions often provide aid services on a gendered basis or implement projects designed upon gendered stereotypes (Turner,

2019a), they create a double imbalance. On the one hand, they represent women beneficiaries homogeneously as victims of violence. On the other hand, they propose the monolithic image of the man associated with the action of violence (Engels, 2008; Harders & Clasen, 2011; Krause, 2014). In this sense, humanitarian intervention denies women and men any alternative potential or agency.

My findings have shown that a relational approach could help to mitigate these consequences because it creates a more egalitarian environment for women and men to come to terms with the changes brought about by displacement. For example, engaging men in the struggle against gender-based violence has already resulted in positive outcomes in several humanitarian contexts.[77] For these reasons, this work invites humanitarian and institutional actors to use a relational approach in their actions towards gender-related issues in displacement. This can be done by taking into account the micro-level dimension of women and men's experiences and the meso-level dimension of their families and the communities where they live.

In light of the contributions that this study has made to knowledge, its limitations at a methodological, empirical, and theoretical level, and the current state of the art, I consider that some aspects still merit scholarly attention for further investigation. In particular, I suggest three avenues for future research. First, I propose that an intersectional lens is enhanced in the study of forced migration. This study has demonstrated that *becoming a refugee* is a multi-layered experience. This diversity deserves a specific focus. In this sense, an intersectional approach could help to overcome one-levelled focuses on gender, ethnicity, or class (Mügge & De Jong, 2013) to capture the multidimensional importance of different socially constructed categories that shape identities. Furthermore, because intersectionality represents a multi-faceted theoretical approach, it could be integrated into the conceptualization of agency and better operationalized at a methodological level through mixed-methods (Hancock, 2013). Mixed methodologies and the intersectional lens could be applied to the comparative analysis of

---

[77] See "Syrian Refugee Fathers Fight Child Marriage in Lebanon". Amel News. Available at: https://amel.org/syrian-refugee-fathers-fight-child-marriage-in-lebanon/ [Accessed November 3, 2020].

different displacement situations and/or different migrant or refugee populations (Halfacree & Boyle, 1993; Findlay & Li, 1999). Mixed methods can be instrumental in reaching a broader understanding of the multiple meanings of migration (Halfacree & Boyle, 1993) and help to analyze the relationship between structure and agency in migration research more in depth (Findlay & Li, 1999, pp. 54-55).

A second issue that deserves further scholarly attention is the breadth of gender role and relationship transformations. This study has investigated some of these changes with a certain scope and scale within a specific theoretical framework. However, I consider my analysis non-comprehensive of the complexity of the transformations in gender roles and relationships that occur in forced migration and the varieties of doing gender and doing family in displacement. I believe that plenty should be done to advance a more nuanced picture of those changes and to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how relationships are affected by displacement. The extendibility of my research will hopefully encourage further engagement with this subject.

A final avenue that should be considered for further research is a theoretical one. In this dissertation, I have analyzed three temporal orientations of agency upon which varieties of performing gender roles and relationships can be built. The focus on these dimensions can be extended further as all the temporal dimensions of agency can be found in varying degrees within different empirical instances of action (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). For example, one or more of these orientations can be further investigated theoretically or a better-nuanced temporal scale can be developed to study one of the various aspects of doing gender or doing family. At the same time, the same person can express different orientations of agency at different stages of his or her displacement. For example, the iterative dimension of agency can exist in certain aspects of people's lives at a specific time of their lives and not be present at other times. As other authors have argued (Kibreab, 2004), the breakdown of old social structures instead of constraining changes "provides a stimulus for creativity and innovative adaptation" (ibid., p. 23). In this sense, displacement can encourage the search for additional resources and push people out of the iterative orientation of agency. For this reason, the temporal lens can be also strengthened to understand the length of gender role and relationship transformations. As

a matter of fact, the fundamental question of whether those changes could be considered permanent remained unanswered. A focus on agency in migration and refugee studies can help to go further into the discourse of integration and social cohesion that this thesis has crossed transversely but not analyzed in depth. In this sense, the aspect of reciprocity deserves to be better unpacked. Following Sociologists Marcel Mauss and Arjun Appadurai, some authors have discussed the question of reciprocity in terms of "gift-giving practices" (for example, Heins & Unrau, 2018) in the context of Germany. They argued that by receiving the refugees in 2015, Germany has offered them a "gift" (ibid., p. 225). Refugees themselves have understood this "hospitality" as a gift and responded by "giving something back" to the host society – with small actions of gratitude that would contribute to restoring equality and respect in an asymmetric situation (ibid., p. 230). However, reciprocity, like gratitude, cannot be assured only by compassionate actions. In fact, being treated as mere objects of philanthropy (Harrell-Bond, 1999, p. 143), rather than as persons, is degrading and stressful (ibid., 136). Being dependent is humiliating. In this sense, questions have been raised about the value of humanitarian aid and especially about the break of reciprocity that humanitarian aid provokes. Integration has been discussed in terms of reciprocating the "gifts" offered compassionately in what is called the "cooperative autonomy of humans and human communities" (Hartmann, 2011, cit. in Heins & Unrau, 2018). In terms of social cohesion, newcomers should have the possibility to reciprocate the benevolent gifts by offering their own skills, experiences, and value to the receiving society (Hartmann, 2011, cit. in Heins & Unrau, 2018), instead of being transformed in helpless objects of care and having their agency hindered in a framework of humanitarian paternalism. Including sociological concepts like *agency* and *reflexivity* in the study of forced migration and integration can be instrumental to avoid institutional and humanitarian paternalistic and agency-limiting responses. In this sense, changing the language, as proposed above, could help seeing refugees as a resource instead of a burden. This thesis encourages further research in this sense.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the discourse of refugees' integration is a complex one because apparently, the economic investment that receiving countries make on the refugees is not immediately discernible, as it could be with the integration of

"economic migrants". However, the project implemented by Germany has to be seen from a longer-term perspective. The real asset for the German society will be the descendants of those who have forcibly migrated or the so-called "second and third generations". Whether the consequences will be positive strongly depends on how refugees will be approached and treated today and the equal opportunities they will receive. For this reason, looking at relationships is fundamental to understand people's experiences, needs, and expectations as "relational selves". While many Syrians forcibly migrated to Europe to save their families, they ended up losing them due to, case in point, the obstacles of the reunification system. This paradox of migration is what can make a difference in whether the German project will have positive outcomes in the long term. This thesis invites to consider relationships central in the academic and public discourse around forced migration and integration and to go beyond the simplistic and one-dimensional understandings of gender relations in displacement in terms of "men as perpetrators" and "women as victims". This is crucial also to critically address gender issues more equitably. I suggest that the focus on relationships should be emphasized at an institutional and humanitarian level both in terms of social cohesion between refugees and locals and by promoting gender equality within the broader post-migrant society.

Bibliography

Abu-Assab, N., & Naser-Eddine, N. (2019). *Gender Dynamics within Syrian Civil Society. A Research Based on Gender-Sensitivity Assessment of Syrian Civil Society Organisations.* Berlin: IMPACT Civil Society Research and Development.

Abu-Lughod, L. (2013). *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Adams, M. (2006). Hybridizing habitus and reflexivity: Towards an understanding of contemporary identity? *Sociology, 40*(3), 511–528.

Adogame, A., & Weissköppel, C. (2005). *Religion in the Context of African Migration.* Bayreuth: Breitinger.

Adújar, N. (2013). Feminist readings of the Qur'an: Social, political, and religious implications. In E. Aslan, M. Hermansen & E. Medeni (Eds.), *Muslima Theology: The Voices of Muslim Women Theologians* (pp. 59-80). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang AG.

Agamben, G. (1995). We refugees. *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures 49,* 114–119.

Agamben, G. (1998). *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Ager, A. & Strang, A. (2008). Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework, *Journal of Refugee Studies, 21*(2), 166–191.

Agier, M. (2011). *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government.* Cambridge/Malden: Polity Press.

Ahearn, L. M. (2001). Language and agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 30,* 109-137.

Ahmed, L. (1992). *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Al-Ali, N. (2002). Gender relations, transnational ties and rituals among Bosnian refugees. *Global Networks, 2*(3), 249-262.

Al-Hayek, K. (2015). Untold stories of Syrian women surviving war. *Syria Studies 7*(1), 1-30.

Al-Om, T. (2015). Syria's 'Arab Spring': Women and the struggle to live in truth. In L. Sadiki (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of the Arab Spring: Rethinking Democratization* (pp. 273-284). Abingdon: Routledge.

Al-Sharmani, M., Tiilikainen, M., Mustasaari, S. (2019). Introduction: Wellbeing, family life, and transnational Muslims in the West. In M. Tiilikainen, M. Al-Sharmani, S. Mustasaari (Eds.), *Wellbeing of transnational Muslim families: Marriage, law and gender* (pp. 1–21). London: Routledge.

Ali, M. (2018). *Young Muslim America: Faith, Community, and Belonging.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ali, M. A. (2008). Loss of parenting self-efficacy among immigrant parents. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 9 (2): 148–160.

Allsopp, J. (2017). Agent, victim, soldier, son: Intersecting masculinities in the European 'refugee crisis.' In J. Freedman, Z. Kivilcim & N. Ö. Baklacioglu (Eds.), *A Gendered Approach to the Syrian Refugee Crisis* (pp. 155-174). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Almakhamreh, S., Zuhair Asfour, H., & Hutchinson, A. (2020). Negotiating patriarchal relationships to become economically active: An insight into the agency of Syrian refugee women in Jordan using frameworks of womanism and intersectionality. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*.

Alpes, M. J. (2014). Imagining a future in 'bush': Migration aspirations at times of crisis in Anglophone Cameroon. *Identities 21*(3), 259–274.

Alsop, R., Fitzsimons, A., Lennon, K., & Minsky, R. (2002). *Theorizing Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Altalli, R., & Codur, A.-M. (2015). The Syrian revolution as lived and led by Women activists. In M. M. Kurtz & L. R. Kurtz (Eds.), *Women, War, and Violence: Topography, Resistance, and Hope* (pp. 299-323). Westport: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Anani, G. (2013). Dimensions of gender-based violence against Syrian refugees in Lebanon. *Forced Migration Review, 44,* 75-78.

Appadurai, A. (2004). The capacity to aspire. In V. Reo & M. Walton (Eds.), *Culture and Public Action* (pp. 59-84). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Archer, M. S. (1988). *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Archer, M. S. (1995). *Realist social theory: The morphogenetic approach.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Archer, M. S. (2000). *Being Human: The Problem of Agency.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Archer, M. S. (2003). *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Archer, M. S. (2007). *Making Our Way through the World: Human Reflexivity and Social Mobility.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Archer, M. S. (2012). *The Reflexive Imperative in Late Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Arendt, H. (1943). We refugees. *Menorah Journal, 31*(1), 69–77.

Asaf, Y. (2017). Syrian women and the refugee crisis: Surviving the conflict, building peace, and taking new gender roles. *Social Sciences 6*, 110.

Assi, A. (2019, August 20) *International Politics of Syrian Refugee Return: The Case of Lebanon.* Middle East Institute.

Attaca, B., & Berry, J. W. (2002). Psychological, sociocultural, and marital adaptation of Turkish immigrant couples in Canada. *International Journal of Psychology, 37*(1), 13-26.

Avis, W. (2017). *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Lebanon*. [Report n. K4D 175]. Institute of Development Studies.

Ayoub, M. (2017). Gender, social class and exile. The case of Syrian women in Cairo. In J. Freedman, Z. Kivilcim & N. Özgür Baklacioglu (Eds.) *A Gendered Approach to the Syrian Refugee Crisis* (pp. 77-104). Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge.

Badran, M. (2009). *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences.* London: Oneworld Publications.

Bahari, S. F. (2010). Qualitative Versus Quantitative Research Strategies: Contrasting Epistemological and Ontological Assumptions. *Jurnal Teknologi, 52*, 17–28.

Bakewell, O. (2010). Some reflections on structure and agency in migration theory. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 36*(10), 1689-1708.

Bakewell, O., de Haas, H., & Kubal, A. (2012). Migration systems, pioneer migrants and the role of agency. *Journal of Critical Realism, 11*(4), 413-437.

Baldassar, L., & Merla, L. (2013). *Transnational Families, Migration and the Circulation of Care: Understanding Mobility and Absence in Family Life.* London: Routledge.

Baldassar, L., Nedelcu, M., Merla, L., & Wilding, R. (2016). ICT-based co-presence in transnational families and communities: Challenging the premise of face-to-face proximity in sustaining relationships'. *Global Networks 16*(2), 133– 144.

Baluja, K. F. (2003). *Gender Roles at Home and Abroad: The Adaptation of Bangladeshi Immigrants.* New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing.

Bandura, A. (2006). Toward a psychology of human agency. *Perspectives on psychological science, 1*(2), 164-80.

Barker, C. (2003). *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice.* London: Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Barnett, M. N. (2011). Humanitarianism, paternalism and the UNHCR. In A. Betts & G. Loescher (Eds.) *Refugees in International Relations* (pp. 105-132). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Baxter, A. & Britton, C. (2001). Risk, identity and change: Becoming a mature student. *International Studies in Sociology of Education, 11*(1), 87–104.

Bazeley, P. (2016). Mixed or merged? Integration as the real challenge for mixed methods. *Qualitative Research in Organisations and Management: An International Journal, 11*(3), 189-194.

Beck, U. (1992). *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity.* Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Behrman, S. (2014). Accidents, agency and asylum: Constructing the refugee subject. *Law Critique, 25*(3), 249-270.

Belliappa, J. L. (2013). *Gender, Class and Reflexive Modernity in India. Genders and Sexualities in the Social Sciences*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bemak, F., Chi-Ying Chung, R., Pedersen, P., & Pedersen, P. B. (2002). *Counseling Refugees: A Psychosocial Approach to Innovative Multicultural Interventions.* Westport: Praeger Publishers.

Benhabib, S., Butler, J., & Fraser, N. (1995). *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange.* New York: Routledge.

Berg, L., & Longhurst, R. (2003). Placing masculinities and geography. *Gender, Place and Culture, 10*(4), 351–360.

Bick, A. (2018). Right to family reunification in Germany. In R. Friedery, L. Manca & R. Ros (Eds.), *Family Reunification: International, European and National Perspectives* (pp. 95-118). Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag.

Bivand Erdal, M., & Pawlak, M. (2018). Reproducing, transforming and contesting gender relations and identities through migration and transnational ties. *Gender, Place & Culture, 2*(6), 882-898.

Black, R. (2001). Fifty years of refugee studies: From theory to policy. *The International Migration Review, 35*(1), 57–78.

Bloch, A. (1999). Carrying out a survey of refugees: Some methodological considerations and guidelines. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 12*(4), 367–83.

Bloch, A. (2007). Methodological challenges for national and multi-sited comparative survey research. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 20*(2), 230–47.

Bloch, A., & Schuster, L. (2002). Asylum and welfare: Contemporary debates. *Critical Social Policy, 22*(3), 393–414.

Blunt, A., & Dowling, R. (2006). *Home.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Bohan, J. S. (1993). Regarding gender: Essentialism, constructionism and feminist psychology. *Psychology of Women Quarterly 17*, 5-21.

Bojadzijev, M., & Römhild, R. (2014). Was kommt nachdem Transnational Turn? Perspektiven für eine kritische Migrationsforschung. In Labor Migration (Ed.) *Vom Rand ins Zentrum. Perspektiven einer kritischen Migrationsforschung.* Berlin: Panama.

Bolognani, M. (2007). The myth of return: Dismissal, survival or revival? A Bradford example of transnationalism as a political instrument. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 33*(1), 59-76.

Bommes, M. (2003). The shrinking inclusive capacity of the national welfare state: International migration and the deregulation of identity formation. In G. Brochman (Ed.), *The Multicultural Challenge* (pp. 43-67). Oslo: Elsevier.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (R. Nice Trans.). Cambridge: University Press. (Original work published 1972).

Bourdieu, P. (1977). Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. In K. J. and H. A. (Eds.), *Power and ideology in education* (pp. 487–511). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (R. Nice Trans.). Cambridge: Harvard University Press. (Original work published 1979).

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In R. J. G. (Ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241–58). New York: Greenwood Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1987) What makes a social class? On the theoretical and practical existence of groups. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology, 22*, 1-17.

Bourdieu, P. (2001). *Masculine Domination* (R. Nice Trans.). Stanford: Stanford University Press. (Original work published 1998).

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. (1990). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (2nd ed.). (R. Nice Trans.). London: Sage. (Original work published 1977).

Botchway, K. (2001). Paradox of empowerment: Reflections on a case study from Northern Ghana. *World Development, 29*(1), 135-153.

Boyd, M. (1989). Family and personal networks in international migration: Recent developments and new agendas. *International Migration Review, 23*(3), 638-670.

Boyle, P, & Halfacree, K. (1999). *Migration and Gender in the Developed World.* London: Routledge.

Bryman, A. (2007). Barriers to integrating quantitative and qualitative research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research 1*(1), 8-22.

Buber, M. (1970). *I and Thou.* Edinburgh: Clark.

Bughra, D., & Becker, M. A. (2005). Migration, cultural bereavement and cultural identity. *World Psychiatry, 4*(1), 18–24.

Bunch, C. (1990). Women's rights as human rights: Towards a re-vision of human rights. *Human Rights Quarterly, 12*(4), 486-498.

Burke, P. J. (2006). Men accessing education: gendered aspirations. *British Educational Research Journal, 32*(5), 719-733.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.

Bromley, V. (2012). *Feminisms Matter. Debates, Theories, Activism.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Brun, C. (2000). Making young displaced men visible. *Forced Migration Review 9*, 10-12.

Brun, C. (2003) Local citizens or internally displaced persons? Dilemmas of long term displacement in Sri Lanka. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 16* (4), 376–397.

Brun, C. & Fábos, A. (2015). Making home in limbo? A conceptual framework. *Refuge 31*(1), 5-17.

Brücker, H., Kosyakova, Y., & Schuß, E. (2020). Integration in Arbeitsmarkt und Bildungssystem macht weitere Fortschritte. Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung (IAB). [WP 4/20].

Bryant, C. G. A. (1992). Sociology without philosophy? The case of Giddens's structuration theory. *Sociological Theory 10*(2), 137-149.

Bryceson, D., & Vuorela, U. (2002). Transnational families in the twenty-first century. In D. Bryceson & U. Vuorela (Eds.), *The Transnational Family: New European Frontiers and Global Networks* (pp. 3–30). Oxford: Berg.

Bryman, A. (2007). Barriers to integrating quantitative and qualitative research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research 1*(1), 8-22.

Baerwaldt, N. (2018, March 20) The European Refugee Crisis: Crisis for Whom?. Border Criminology. Retrieved from https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2018/03/european-refugee.

Böcker, A., Goel, U., & Heft, K. (2010). Integration. In Nduka-Agwu A., & Lann Hornscheidt, A. (eds.) *Rassismus auf gut Deutsch - Ein kritisches Nachschlage-werk zu rassistischen Sprachhandlungen* (pp. 304–310). Frankfurt: Brandes & Apsel.

Böttcher, A. (2002). Islamic teaching among Sunni Women in Syria. In D. Bowen & E. Early (Eds.), Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East (2nd ed.) (pp. 290-299). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Caetano, A. (2016). Coping with life: A typology of personal reflexivity. *The Sociological Quarterly, 58(1), 32–50*.

Campbell, C. (2009). Distinguishing the power of agency from agentic power: A note on Weber and the 'black box' of personal agency. *Sociological Theory, 27*(4), 407-18.

Carle, S. D. (2005). Theorizing Agency. *American Journal of Sociology 55* (2), 307-394.

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

Carling, J. (2014). *The role of aspirations in migration*. International Migration Institute, University of Oxford. Retrieved from https://jorgencarling.files.wordpress.com/2014/09/carling-2014-the-role-of-aspirations-in-migration-2014-07.pdf.

Carling, J., & Schewel, K. (2018). Revisiting aspiration and ability in international migration, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 44*(6), 945-963.

Carpi, E. (2018). *Specchi scomodi. Etnografia delle migrazioni forzata nel Libano contemporaneo*. Milano-Udine: Mimesis.

Carpi, E. (2020a). Towards a neo-cosmetic humanitarianism: Refugee self-reliance as a social-cohesion regime in Lebanon's Halba, *Journal of Refugee Studies, 33*(1), 224–244.

Carpi, E. (2020b). On ethnographic confidence and the politics of knowledge in Lebanon. *Contemporary Levant*, *5*(2), 144-160.

Carpi E. & Şenoğuz, H. P. (2019). Refugee hospitality in Lebanon and Turkey. On making 'the other.' *International Migration, 57*(2), 126–42.

Castles, S. (2003). Towards a sociology of forced migration and social transformation. *Sociology, 37*(1), 13–34.

Castles, S. (2007). Twenty-first-century migration as a challenge to sociology. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *33*(3): 351–71.

Castles, S. (2010). Understanding migration: A social transformation perspective. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 36*(10), 1565–1586.

Castles, S., de Haas, H., & Miller, M. (2014). *The Age of Migration* (5th ed.). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Chalcraft, J. (2009). *Invisible cage. Syrian migrant workers in Lebanon*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Charles L, & Denman, K. (2013). Syrian and Palestinian Syrian refugees in Lebanon: The plight of women and children. *Journal of International Women Studies 14*, 96-111.

Chatty, D. (2018). Syria. In S. Joseph (Ed.), *Arab Family Studies: Critical Reviews* (pp. 233-246). Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Chimni, B. S. (2009). The birth of a 'discipline': From refugee to forced migration studies. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 22*(1), 11–29.

Chiseri-Strater, E. (1996). Turning in upon ourselves: Positionality, subjectivity and reflexivity in case study and ethnographic research. In P. Mortenson & G. E. Kirsch (Eds.), *Ethics and Representation in Qualitative Studies of Literacy* (pp. 115-132). Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.

Christophersen, M. (2014). *To Cope as Refugees, Syrian Women in Lebanon Cautiously Challenge Gender Stereotypes.* IPI The Global Observatory. Retrieved from https://theglobalobservatory.org/2014/05/to-cope-as-refugees-syrian-women-in-lebanon-cautiously-challenge-gender-stereotypes.

Christophersen, M., Thorleifsson, C. & Tiltnes, Å. (2013) *Ambivalent Hospitality. Coping Strategies and Local Responses to Syrian Refugees in Lebanon*. Fafo AIS. Retrieved from www.fafo.no/pub/rapp/20338/20338.pdf.

Ciftci, S. (2012). Islamophobia and threat perceptions: Explaining anti-Muslim sentiment in the West. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, 32*(3), 293-309.

Coffey, J., & Farrugia, D. (2014). Unpacking the black box: The problem of agency in the sociology of youth. *Journal of Youth Studies, 17*(4), 461-74.

Cohen, L. (2011). *Research Methods in Education*. London: Routledge.

Coleman, N. (2003). Non-Refoulement revised renewed review of the status of the principle of Non-Refoulement as customary international law. *Journal of Migration and Law, 5*(1), 23-68.

Colic-Peisker, V., & Tilbury, F. (2003). 'Active' and 'passive' resettlement: The influence of host culture, support services, and refugees' own resources on the choice of resettlement style. *International Migration, 41*(5), 61-91.

Collins, P. H. (1990). 2000. *Black Feminist Thought* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Coltrane, S. (2000). Research on household labor: Modeling and measuring the social embeddedness of routine family work. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 62*(4), 1208–33.

Connell, R. (1987). *Gender & Power*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Connell, R. (1995). *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Connell, R., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society, 19*(6), 829-859.

Courtenay, W. H. (2000). Constructions of masculinity and their influence on men's well-being: A theory of gender and health. *Social Science & Medicine, 50*, 1385-1401.

Craib, I. (1992). *Anthony Giddens.* London: Routledge.

Crawford, A. & Hutchinson, S. (2016). Mapping the contours of 'everyday security': Time, space and emotion. *The British Journal of Criminology, 56*, 1184–1202.

Crawley, H. & Skleparis, D. (2018). Refugees, migrants, neither, both: Categorical fetishism and the politics of bounding in Europe's 'migration crisis'. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 44*(1), 48-64.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). *Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics.* University of Chicago Legal Forum, [Vol. 1989 No. 1]. pp. 139-167. Retrieved from http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8.

Creswell, J. W. (2011). Controversies in mixed methods research. In N.K. Denzin, & Y.S. Lincoln (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 269-283). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Cronin-Furman, K., & Lake, M. (2018). Ethics abroad: Fieldwork in fragile and violent contexts. *Political Science and Politics, 51*(3), 607-614.

Culcasi, K. (2019). 'We are women and men now': Intimate spaces and coping labour for Syrian women refugees in Jordan. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers,* tran.12292.

Curtis, R. F. (1986). Households and families in theory on inequality. *American Sociological Review 51*(2), 168-183.

Da Lomba, S. (2010). Legal status and refugee integration: A UK perspective. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 23,* 415–436.

Dacrema, E. (Ed.). (2020, March 31). *After the Default: Lebanon at the Crossroads*. Milano: Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI).

Dhami, S. & Sheikh, A. (2000). The Muslim family. Predicament and promise. *Western Journal of Medicine 173*(5), 352–356.

Dahinden, J. (2016). A plea for the 'de-migranticization' of research on migration and integration. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 39*(13), 1–19.

Daminger, A. (2019). The cognitive dimension of household labor. *American Sociological Review, 84*(4), 609–633.

Damir-Geilsdorf, S. & Sabra, M. (2018). *Disrupted Families: The Gendered Impacts of Family Reunification Policies on Syrian Refugees in Germany.* UN Women discussion paper n. 23. Retrieved from https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/discussion-paper-disrupted-families-en.pdf?la=en&vs=4823.

Daniely, D. L., & Lederman, S. (2019). Gendered cultural differences and change in gender roles among displaced refugees. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies, 26*(3), 364–384.

Darvishpour, M. (2002). Immigrant women challenge the role of men: How the changing power relationship within Iranian families in Sweden intensifies family conflicts after immigration. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies 33*(2), 271-296.

Datta, A. (2009). "This is special humour": Visual narratives of Polish masculinities in London's building sites. In K. Burrell (ed.) *Polish Migration to the UK in the 'New' European Union* (pp. 189–210). Farnham: Ashgate.

De Genova, N. (2016). Detention, deportation, and waiting: Towards a theory of migrant detainability. *Global Detention Project* [Working paper n. 8], 1-10. Retrieved from https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/detention-deportation-waiting-toward-theory-migrant-detainability-gdp-working-paper-no-18.

de Haas, H. (2011). *The Determinants of International Migration, Conceptualising Policy, Origin and Destination Effects*. [IMI WP 32/2011]. International Migration Institute. Retrieved from https://www.migrationinstitute.org/publications/wp-32-11.

Deardorff Miller, S. (2017). *Political and Humanitarian Responses to Syrian Displacement*. London: Routledge.

Deaux, K. (1984). From individual differences to social categories: An analysis of a decade's research on gender". *American Psychologist 39*(2), 105-116.

DeJong, J., Sbeity, F., Schlecht, J., Harfouche, M., Yamout, R., Fouad, M. F., Manohar, S., & Robinson, C. (2017). Young lives disrupted: gender and well-being among adolescent Syrian refugees in Lebanon. *Conflict and Health 11*, 25-65.

Dekel, R., & Solomon, Z. (2006). Secondary traumatization among wives of Israeli POWs: The role of POWs' distress. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology, 41*(1), 27–33.

DeWalt, K. M. & DeWalt, B. R. (2011). *Participant Observation. A Guide for Fieldworkers*. Lanham: AltaMira Press.

Di Peri, R. (2009). *Il Libano contemporaneo. Storia, politica, società*. Roma: Carocci.

Di Peri, R. (2018). Speaking Secular, Acting Sectarian. Lebanese Women's Rights beyond the Constitution. *Oriente Moderno, 98*(2), 247-268.

Di Peri, R. & Carpi, E. (2019). Le Liban et la recherche internationale après les révoltes de 2011: une 'zone de confort'? *Africa e Orienti, 2*, 107-124.

Dick, E., & Reuschke, D. (2012). Multilocational Households in the Global South and North: Relevance, features and spatial implications. *DIE ERDE – Journal of the Geographical Society of Berlin, 143*(3), 177-194. Retrieved from https://www.die-erde.org/index.php/die-erde/article/view/13.

Dionigi, F. (2016). *The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon: State Fragility and Social Resilience*. [Paper series 15]. London School of Economics. Middle East Centre. Retrieved from http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/65565/1/Dionigi_Syrian_Refugees%20in%20Lebanon_Author_2016.pdf.

Dodd, P. C. (1973). Family honour and the forces of change in Arab society. *International Journal of Middle East Studies, 4*(1), 40-54.

Dorai, M. K. (2010). Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Migration, mobility and the urbanization process. In A. Knudsen & S. Hanafi. *Palestinian Refugees. Identity, Space and Place in the Levant* (pp. 67-80). London: Routledge.

Dubois, M. (2015). Ideology, sociology of. In J. D. Wright, (Ed.) *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioural Sciences* (pp. 573-587). Amsterdam: Elsevier.

Dworkin, G. (1972). Paternalism. *The Monist, 56*(1), 64–84.

Dykstra, P. A. & van Wissen, L. J. G. (1999). Introduction: The life course approach as an interdisciplinary framework for population studies. In L. J. G. van Wissen & P. A. Dykstra (Eds.) *Population Issues. The Plenum Series on Demographic Methods and Population Analysis* (pp. 1-22). Dordrecht: Springer.

Eagly, A. H. (1983). Gender and social influence: A social psychological analysis. *American Psychologist, 38*, 971-981.

Edmonda. (2018). Migrations' Changing Scenario: The New Balkan Route and the European Union. *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali, 85*(2), 189-206.

Edwards, A. (2010). Transitioning gender: Feminist engagement with international refugee law and policy 1950-2010. *Refugee Survey Quarterly, 9*(2), 21-45.

Eggebø, H. (2010). The problem of dependency: Immigration, gender, and the Welfare State. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society, 17*(3), 295–322.

Eid, I. M., & Diah, N. B. M. (2019), Coping mechanisms among Palestinian refugee families in Malaysia during the transition period. *International Journal of Migration, Health and Social Care, 15*(3), 191-200.

Eide, P., & Kahn, D. (2008). Ethical issues in the qualitative researcher-participant relationship. *Nursing Ethics, 15*(2), 199–207.

El-Asmar, F., Shawaf, N., & Mikdashi, N. (2019). *'No one asked...' Amplifying the voices of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon on their power to decide.* Oxfam International. Retrieved from https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/rr-no-one-asked-syrian-refugee-women-lebanon-051119-en.pdf.

El-Feki, S., Heilman, B. & Barker, B. (2017). *Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) - Middle East and North Africa.* Cairo and Washington, D.C.: UN Women and Promundo-US.

El-Masri, R., Harvey, C., & Garwood, R. (2013). *Shifting Sands: Changing Gender Roles among Refugees in Lebanon.* London: ABAAD – Resource Centre for Gender Equality and Oxfam GB. Retrieved from http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/rr-shifting-sands-lebanon-syria-refugees-gender-030913-summ-ar.pdf.

El-Mufti, K. (2014). *Official response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon, the disastrous policy of no-policy* (Report No. 01/10). Beirut: Civil Society Knowledge Centre, Lebanon Support. Retrieved from https://civilsociety-centre.org/pdf-generate/17211.

El-Said, M., Meari, L. & Pratt, N. (2015). Introduction. In M. El-Said, L. Meari & N. Pratt (Eds.), *Rethinking Gender in Revolutions and Resistance. Lessons from the Arab World*. London: Zed Books.

Elle, J. & Hess, S. (2018, August 9). Gender in the German refugee debate. Reflections on shortcomings, side-effects, and pitfalls. *Respond*. Retrieved from https://respondmigration.com/blog-1/sanliurfa-gzynz-rh3gn-rzyss.

Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What Is Agency? *American Journal of Sociology 103*(4), 962-1023.

Engels, B. (2008). *Gender und Konflikt: Die Kategorie Geschlecht in der Friedens und Konfliktforschung*. Saarbrücken: AV Akademikerverlag.

Enloe, C. H. (1991) 'Womenandchildren': Propaganda tools of patriarchy. In G. Bates (Ed.), *Mobilising Democracy: Changing the US Role in the Middle East* (pp. 89ff). Monroe: Common Courage Press.

Errighi, L. & Griesse, J. (2016). *The Syrian Refugee Crisis: Labour Market Implications in Jordan and Lebanon.* European Commission [Discussion Paper 029]. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/dp029_en.pdf.

'Esau, R. L. (2004). International migration from Tonga, South Pacific: A behavioral approach. *Geographical Review of Japan, 77*(5), 352-367.

Essed, P., Frerks, G., & Schrijvers, J. (Eds.) (2004). *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies: Agency, Policies, Ethics and Politics.* New York: Berghahn.

Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism.* Cambridge: Springer.

Evans, K. (2007). Concepts of bounded agency in education, work, and the personal lives of young adults. *International Journal of Psychology, 42*, 85-93.

Fakhoury, T., & Ozkul, D. (2019). Syrian refugees' return from Lebanon. *Forced Migration Review, 62*, 26-28. Retrieved from https://www.fmreview.org/sites/fmr/files/FMRdownloads/en/return/return.pdf.

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2010). "Ideal" refugee women and gender equality mainstreaming: "good practice" for whom? *Refugee Survey Quarterly 29*(2), 64–84.

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2014). Gender and forced migration. In E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, G. Loescher, K. Long, & N. Sigona (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies* (pp. 1-10). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2020). Introduction. In E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (Ed.), *Refuge in a Moving World: Refugee and Migrant Journeys across Disciplines.* London: UCL Press.

Findlay, A. M., & Li, F. L. N. (1999). Methodological Issues in Researching Migration. *The Professional Geographer, 51*(1), 50–59.

Fleischmann, F. & Höhne, J. (2013). Gender and migration on the labour market: Additive or interacting disadvantages in Germany? *Social Science Research*, *42*(5), 1325-1345.

Foner, N. & Richard, A. (2008). Immigrant Religion in the U.S. and Western Europe: Bridge or Barrier to Inclusion? *International Migration Review 42*(2), 360–392.

Fonseca, M. & Ormon, M. (2008). Defining 'family' and bringing it together: the ins and outs of family reunification in Portugal. In R. Grillo (Ed.), *The Family in Question: Immigrant and Ethnic Minorities in Multicultural Europe* (pp. 89–111). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Foroutan, N. (2016). Postmigrantische Gesellschaften. In H. U. Brinkmann & M. Sauer (Eds.), *Einwanderungsgesellschaft Deutschland* (pp. 227-225). Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Foroutan, N. (2019a). *Die postmigrantische Gesellschaft: Ein Versprechen der pluralen Demokratie.* Bielefeld: Transcript.

Foroutan, N. (2019b). The post-migrant paradigm. In J. J. Bock & S. Macdonald (Eds.), *Diverse Germany: Newcomers, Nationhood, and Negotiating Belonging* (pp. 142-167). Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books.

Fraser, N., & Gordon, L. (1994). A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State. *Signs, 19*(2), 309-336.

Fratzscher, M. & Junker, S. (2015). *Integrating Refugees: A Long-Term, Worthwhile Investment.* DIW Economic Bulletin, DIW Berlin, German Institute for Economic Research, [WP 5(45/46)], 612-616. Retrieved from https://d-nb.info/1152181173/34

Frederiks, M. (2015). Religion, Migration, and Identity. A Conceptual and Theoretical Exploration. In M. Frederiks & D. Nagy (Eds.), *Religion, Migration, and Identity Methodological and Theological Explorations.* Leiden, Boston: Brill.

Freedman, J. (2007). *Gendering the International Asylum and Refugee Debate.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Freedman, J. (2017). Women's experience of forced migration. In J. Freedman, Z. Kivilcim & N. Özgür Baklacioglu (Eds.) *A Gendered Approach to the Syrian Refugee Crisis* (pp. 125-141). Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge.

Freedman, J. (2019). The uses and abuses of 'vulnerability' in EU asylum and refugee protection: Protecting women or reducing autonomy? *Papeles del CEIC*, 1, 1-15.

Freedman, J., Kivilcim, Z., & Özgür Baklacioglu, N. (Eds.) (2017). *A Gendered Approach to the Syrian Refugee Crisis.* Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge.

Gabrielatos, C. & Baker, P. (2008). Fleeing, sneaking, flooding: A corpus analysis of discursive Constructions of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK Press, 1996-2005. *Journal of English Linguistics, 36*(5), 5-38.

Gallo, E. (2014). Introduction. South-East Asian Migration and Religious Pluralism in Europe. In E. Gallo (Ed.), *Religion and Migration in Europe: Comparative Perspectives on South-East Asian Experiences* (pp. 1–24). Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate.

Garcés-Mascareñas, B., & Penninx, R. (2016) Introduction: Integration as a three-way process approach? In B. Garcés-Mascareñas & R. Penninx (Eds), *Integration Processes and Policies in Europe* (pp. 1-9). IMISCOE Research Series. Cham: Springer.

Georgas, J., Mylonas, K., & Bafiti, T. (2001). Functional relationships in the nuclear and extended family: A 16-culture study. *International Journal of Psychology, 36*(5), 289–300.

Ghazzawi, R. (2014, April 8). *Seeing the Women in Revolutionary Syria*. Open Democracy. Retrieved from https://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/razan-ghazzawi/seeing-women-in-revolutionary-syria.

Ghorashi, H. (2005). Agents of change or passive victims: The impact of welfare states (the case of the Netherlands) on refugees. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 18*(2), 182-198.

Ghorashi, H., de Boer, M., & ten Holder, F. (2018). Unexpected agency on the threshold: Asylum seekers narrating from an asylum seeker centre. *Current Sociology, 66*(3), 373–391.

Giddens, A. (1979). *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Giddens, A. (1984). *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration.* University of California Press.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self-Identity.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Gilbert, G. (2015). Why Europe does not have a refugee crisis. *International Journal of Refugee Law, 27*(4), 531-535.

Gilbert, T., Farrand, P., Lankshear, G. (2013). 'I don't want to live like this anymore': Disrupted habitus in young people 'at risk' of diagnosis of personality disorder. *Youth & Society, 45*(3), 347–364.

Gill, D. S. & Matthews, B. (1995). Changes in the breadwinner role: Punjabi families in transition. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 26*(2), 255-263.

Gissi, A. (2019). What Does the Term Refugee Mean to You? Perspectives from Syrian Refugee Women in Lebanon. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 32* (4), 539–561.

Glick-Schiller, N., Basch, L., & Blanc-Szanton, C. (1992*). Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity and Nationalism Reconsidered.* New York: New York Academy of Science.

Glick-Schiller, N. & Çaglar, A. (2010). *Locating Migration. Rescaling Cities and Migrants.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press

Glynos, J., & D. Howarth. (2008). Structure, agency and power in political analysis: Beyond contextualised self-interpretations. *Political Studies Review, 6*(2), 155-169.

Gobo, G. (2015). The next challenge: From mixed to merged methods. *Qualitative Research in Organisations and Management, 10*(4), 329-331.

Gobo, G. (2016). Why 'merged' methods realize a higher integration than "mixed" methods. A reply. *Qualitative Research in Organisations and Management: An International Journal, 11*(3), 199-208.

Gold, M. (2019). Liminality and the asylum process in Switzerland. *Anthropology Today 35*(3), 16-19.

Golob, T. & Makarovič, M. (2019). Reflexivity and structural positions: The effects of generation, gender and education. *Social Sciences, 8*(9), 1-23..

Goodhand, J. (2000). Research in conflict zones: Ethics and accountability. *Forced Migration Review 8*, 12-15.

Goveas, J. & Coomarasamy, S. (2018). 'Why Am I Still Here?' The Impact of Survivor Guilt on the Mental Health and Settlement Process of Refugee Youth. In S. Pashang, N. Khanlou & J. Clarke (Eds.), *Today's Youth and Mental Health: Hope, Power, and Resilience* (pp. 101-117). Berlin: Springer.

Grace, B. L., (2019). Transnationalism and refugee extended families after resettlement. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 32*(1), 125–143.

Guarnizo, L., Portes, A., & Haller, W. (2003). Assimilation and transnationalism: Determinants of transnational political action among contemporary migrants. *American Journal of Sociology, 108*(6), 1211-1248.

Guntzviller, L. M. (2017). Cultural sensitivity in research. In M. Allen (Ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods* (pp. 317-320). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Haddad, F. (2019, March 20) Radio Hakaya Podcast, episode 7: Labeeba - the female shawish. *Open Democracy.* Retrieved from https://soundcloud.com/brush-bow/7-labeeba-the-female-shawisha-english.

Haddad, Z. (2014). How the crisis is altering women's roles in Syria. *Forced Migration Review 47*, 46-47.

Haddad, Y. Y., Smith, J. I., & Esposito, J. (2003). Introduction. Becoming American: Religion, identity, and institution building in the American mosaic. In Y. Y. Haddad, J. I. Smith & J. Esposito (Eds.), *Religion and Immigration: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Experiences in the United States* (pp. 1–18). Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

Hagan, J. M. (1998). Social networks, gender, and immigrant incorporation: Resources and Constraints. *American Sociological Review, 63*(1), 55-67.

Haile S. (2020). Voices to be heard? Reflections on refugees, strategic invisibility and the politics of voice. In E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (Ed.), *Refuge in a Moving World: Refugee and Migrant Journeys across Disciplines* (pp. 32-40). London: UCL Press.

Hajdukowski-Ahmed, M., Khanlou N. & Moussa, H. (2008). *Not Born a Refugee Woman. Contesting Identities, Rethinking Practices.* New York: Berghahn Books.

Hakli, J., & Kallio, K. P. (2014). Subject, action and polis: Theorizing political agency. *Progress in Human Geography, 38*(2), 181-200.

Halfacree, K. H. & Boyle, P. .J. (1993). The challenge facing migration research: The case for a biographical approach. *Progress in Human Geography*, *17*(3): 333–348.

Hammond, L. (2013). Somali transnational activism and integration in the UK: Mutually supporting strategies. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 39*(6), 1001–1017.

Hancock, A. -M. (2007). When multiplication doesn't equal quick addition: examining intersectionality as a research paradigm. *Perspectives on Politics, 5*(1), 63-79.

Hancock, A. -M. (2013). Empirical intersectionality: A tale of two approaches. *U.C. Irvine Law Review, 3*, 259-296. Retrieved from

Harders, C. & Clasen, S. (2011). Frieden und gender. In H. J Giessmann & B. Rinke (Eds.). *Handbuch Frieden* (pp. 324-335). Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Harrell-Bond, B. E. (1999) The experience of refugees as recipients of aid. In A. Ager (Ed.) *Refugees: Perspectives on the Experience of Forced Migration* (pp. 136–168). London: Pinter.

Harrell-Bond, B. E. & Voutira, E. (1992). Anthropology and the study of refugees. *Anthropology Today 8*(4), 6-10.

Harrell-Bond, B., & Voutira, E. (2007). In search of "invisible" actors: Barriers to access in refugee research. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 20*(2), 281-298.

Haslam, N. & Loughnan, S. (2014). Dehumanisation and infrahumanization. *Annual Review of Psychology 65*(1), 399–423.

Hay, C. (2002). *Political Analysis: A Critical Introduction*. Abingdon: Palgrave Macmillan.

Healey, R. L. (2006). Asylum-seekers and refugees: A structuration theory analysis of their experiences in the UK. *Population, Space and Place, 12*, 257-271.

Heck, G. & Hess, S. (2017). Tracing the effects of the EU-Turkey deal. The momentum of the multi-layered Turkish border Regime. *Movements, 3*(2), 35-57.

Hein J. (1993). Refugees, Immigrants, and the State. *Annual Review of Sociology, 19*, 43-59.

Heins, V. M., & Unrau, C. (2018). Refugees welcome: Arrival gifts, reciprocity, and the integration of forced migrants. *Journal of International Political Theory, 14*(2), 223–239.

Henkel, R. & Knippenberg, H. (2005). Secularisation and the rise of religious pluralism: Main features of the changing religious landscape of Europe. In H. Knippenberg (Ed.), *The Changing Religious Landscape of Europe* (pp. 1–13). Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis.

Henry, S. B., Smith, D. B., Archuleta, K. L., Sanders-Hahs, E., Goff, B. S. N., Reisbig, A. M. J., Schwerdtfeger, K. L., Bole, A., Hayes, E., Hoheisel, C. B., Nye, B., Osby-Williams, J., & Scheer, T. (2011). Trauma and couples: Mechanisms in dyadic functioning. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 37*(3), 319–332.

Hirsh H, Eizenberg E, & Jabareen Y. (2020). A new conceptual framework for understanding displacement: Bridging the gaps in displacement literature between the Global South and the Global North. *Journal of Planning Literature, 35*(4), 391-407.

Hitlin, S., & Elder, G. H. (2007). Time, self, and the curiously abstract concept of agency. *Sociological Theory 25*(2), 170-91.

Hoang, L. A. (2011). Gender identity and agency in migration decision-making: Evidence from Vietnam. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 37*(9), 1441-1457.

Hoffman, S. J., Tierney, J. D., & Robertson, C. L. (2017). Counter-narratives of coping and becoming: Karen refugee women's inside/outside figured worlds. *Gender, Place and Culture, 24*(9), 1346-1364.

Hojat, M., Shapourian, R., Foroughi, D., Nayerahmadi, H., Farzane, M., & Shafieyan, M. (2000). Gender differences in traditional attitudes toward marriage and the family. *Journal of Family Study, 27*(4), 419-434.

Hokayem, E. (2013). *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant*. New York: Routledge.

Holmes, A. G. D. (2020). Researcher positionality. A Consideration of its influence and place in qualitative research. A New Researcher Guide. *Shanlax International Journal of Education 8* (4), 1-10.

Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. (1992). Overcoming patriarchal constraints: The reconstruction of gender relations among Mexican immigrant women and men. *Gender & Society, 6*(3), 393-415.

Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. (1994). *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. (2003). Gender and immigration: A retrospective and introduction. In P. Hondagneu-Sotelo (Ed.), *Gender and U.S. Immigration: Contemporary Trends* (pp. 3–19). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hondagneu-Sotelo, P., & Avila, E. (1997). I'm here, but I'm there: The meanings of Latina transnational motherhood. *Gender & Society, 11*(5), 548–571.

Horvat McNamara, E. & Davis, J. E. (2011). Schools as sites for transformation: Exploring the contribution of habitus. *Youth & Society, 43*(1), 142–170.

Hunt, L. (2008). Women asylum seekers and refugees: Opportunities, constraints and the role of agency. *Social Policy and Society, 7*(3), 281-292.

Hyman, I., Mason, R., Guruge, S., Berman, H., Kanagaratnam, P., & Manuel, L. (2011). Perceptions of factors contributing to intimate partner violence among Sri Lankan Tamil immigrant women in Canada. *Health Care Women International, 32*(9), 779-94.

Hynes, P. (2009). Contemporary compulsory dispersal and the absence of space for the restoration of trust. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 22*(1), 97–121.

Içduygu, A. & Nimer, M. (2020). The politics of return: exploring the future of Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. *Third World Quarterly, 41*(3), 415-433.

Ilcan, S., & Rygiel, K. (2015). 'Resiliency humanitarianism': Responsibilizing refugees through humanitarian emergency governance in the camp. *International Political Sociology, 9*(4), 333–351.

ILO – International Labour Organisation. (2013). *Assessment of the Impact of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and their Employment Profile*. Retrieved from http://www.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_240134.pdf.

Indra, D. M. (1999). Not a 'room of one's own': Engendering forced migration and practice. In D. M. Indra (Ed.) *Engendering Forced Migration: Theory and Practice* (pp. 1–22). Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Inowlocki, I., & Lutz, H. (2000). The "biographical work" of a Turkish migrant woman in Germany. *European Journal of Women's Studies, 7*(3), 301-320.

Innes, A. J. (2014). Performing security absent the state: Encounters with a failed asylum seeker in the UK. *Security Dialogue, 45*(6), 565–581.

İnce Beqo, G. (2019). Women in here, women in there: Changing roles and lives of women migrants from Turkey in Italy. *Migration Letters*, *16*(4), 531-541.

IRC – International Rescue Committee. (2016) *Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugee Men in Lebanon.* Retrieved from https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/464/irclebanonrefugeemensvulner abilityassessment.pdf.

Jacobsen, K., & Landau, L. (2003). *Researching Refugees: Some Methodological and Ethical Considerations.* UNHCR. [WP n. 90. New Issues in Refugee Research]. Retrieved from https://www.unhcr.org/research/working/3f13bb967/researching-refugees-methodological-ethical-considerations-social-science.html.

Jamieson, L. (1998). *Intimacy: Personal Relationships in Modern Societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Jamieson, L. (2011). Intimacy as a concept: Explaining social change in the context of globalisation or another form of ethnocentricism? *Sociological Research Online, 16*(4).

Janmyr, M. (2016). Precarity in exile: The legal status of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. *Refugee Survey Quarterly, 35*, 58–78.

Janmyr, M. (2017). UNHCR and the Syrian refugee response: Negotiating status and registration in Lebanon. *The International Journal of Human Rights 22(3), 393-419.*

Janmyr, M. & Mourad, L. (2018). Modes of ordering: Labelling, classification and categorization in Lebanon's refugee response. *Journal of Refugee Studies 31(4),* 544-565.

Jenkins, R. (1994). Language, culture and sociology: Pierre Bourdieu in context. *History of the Human Sciences 7*(4), 95-104.

Johnson, P. (2018). War, Violence, Refugees, and Arab Families. In S. Joseph (Ed.), *Arab Family Studies: Critical Reviews* (pp. 467-481). Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Joseph, S. (1993a). Gender and relationality among Arab families in Lebanon. *Feminist Studies 19*(3), 465.

Joseph, S. (1993b). Connectivity and patriarchy among urban working-class Arab families in Lebanon. *Ethos: Journal of the Society for Psychological Anthropology, 21*(4), 452-484.

Joseph, S. (1996). Patriarchy and development in the Arab World. *Gender and Development, 4*(2), 14-19.

Joseph, S. (1997). The Public/Private – The Imagined Boundary in the Imagined Nation/State/Community: The Lebanese case. *Feminist Review, 57*(1), 73–92.

Joseph, S. (1999). *Intimate Selving: Gender, Self and Identity in Arab Families*. New York: Syracuse University Press.

Joseph, S. (Ed.). (2018). *Arab Family Studies*. Critical Reviews. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press.

Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. *Development and Change, 30*(3), 435-64.

Kabeer, N. (2000). *The Power to Choose: Bangladeshi Women and Labour Market Decisions in London and Dhaka.* London and New York: Verso.

Kabeer, N. (2005) Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third millennium development goal 1. *Gender & Development, 13*(1), 13-24.

Kagan, M. (2006). The beleaguered gatekeeper: Protection challenges posed by UNHCR refugee status determination. *International Journal of Refugee Law 18*(1), 1-29.

Kandiyoti, D. (1988). Bargaining with patriarchy. *Gender & Society, 2*(3), 274-290.

Kandiyoti, D. (1991). *Women, Islam, and the State.* London: Macmillan.

Kandiyoti, D. (2013, January 10). *Fear and fury: women and post-revolutionary violence.* Open Democracy. Retrieved from https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/fear-and-fury-women-and-post-revolutionary-violence.

Kapur, B. (2018). *Syrian Women in Political Processes.* Kvinna Till Kvinna Foundation. Retrieved from https://kvinnatillkvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/1-Syrian-women-in-political-processes.pdf.

Keedi, A., Yaghi, Z., & Barker, G. (2017). *'We Can Never Go Back to How Things Were Before.' A Qualitative Study on War, Masculinities, and Gender Relations with Lebanese and Syrian Refugee Men and Women.* Beirut, Lebanon: ABAAD, and Washington, D.C.: Promundo. Retrieved from https://promundoglobal.org/resources/understanding-masculinities-results-international-men-gender-equality-survey-images-middle-east-north-africa.

Keikelame, M. J., & Swartz, L. (2019). Decolonising research methodologies: Lessons from a qualitative research project, Cape Town, South Africa. *Glob Health Action 12*(1), 1561175. https://doi.org/10.1080/16549716.2018.1561175.

Kelly, S., & Breslin, J. (2010). *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress Amid Resistance.* Washington: Freedom House.

Khawaja, N.G., White, K. M., Schweitzer, R., & Greenslade J. (2008). Difficulties and coping strategies of Sudanese refugees: A qualitative approach. *Transcultural Psychiatry, 45*(3), 489-512.

Khazaei, F. (2019). Les violences conjugales à la marge: le cas des femmes migrantes en Suisse. *Cahiers du Genre, 66*(1), 71-90.

Khoday, A. (2012). Protecting those who go beyond the law: Contemplating refugee status for individuals who challenge oppression through resistance. *Georgetown Immigration Law Journal 25*, 571-645.

Khosravi, S. (2009). Displaced masculinity: Gender and ethnicity among Iranian men in Sweden. *Iranian Studies 42*(4), 591-609.

Kibreab, G. (1993). The myth of dependency among camp refugees in Somalia 1979-1989. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 6* (4), 321-349.

Kibreab, G. (1995). The African refugee regime with emphasis on Northeastern Africa: The emerging issues. In H. Adelman (ed.) *Legitimate and Illegitimate Discrimination: New Directions in Migration* (pp. 57–102). Toronto: York University Press.

Kibreab, G. (2004). Refugeehood, loss and social change: Eritrean refugees and returnees. In P. Essed, G. Frerks & J. Schrijvers (Eds.), *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies: Agency, Policies, Ethics and Politics* (pp. 19-30). New York: Berghahn.

Kimmel, M. (1994). Masculinity as homophobia: Fear, shame, and silence in the construction of gender identity. In H. Brod & M. Kaufman (Eds.), *Theorizing Masculinities* (pp. 213- 219). London: SAGE Publications.

King, A. (2000). Thinking with Bourdieu against Bourdieu: A "practical" critique of the habitus. *Sociological Theory, 18*(3), 417–433.

Kofman, E. (2004). Family-related migration: A critical review of European Studies. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 30*(2), 243-262.

Komito, L. (2011). Social Media and Migration: Virtual Community 2.0. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, 62*(6), 1075-1086.

Korotayev, A. V., Issaev, L. M., Shishkina, A. R. (2015). Female labour force participation rate, Islam, and Arab culture in cross-cultural perspective. *Cross-Cultural Research, 49*(1), 3-19.

Korteweg, A. C., & Yurdakul, G. (2014). *The Headscarf Debates: Conflict of Belonging in National Narratives.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Knudsen, A. (2009). Widening the protection gap: The 'politics of citizenship' for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, 1948–2008. *Journal of Refugee Studies 22*(1), 21–73.

Kraft, K. (2017). Religious exploration and conversion in forced displacement: A case study of Syrian Muslim refugees in Lebanon receiving assistance from Evangelical Christians. *Journal of Contemporary Religion 32*(2), 221-235.

Krause, U. (2014). Analysis of empowerment of refugee women in camps and settlements. *Journal of Internal Displacement, 4*(1), 29-52.

Krause, U. & Schmidt, H. (2020). Refugees as actors? Critical reflections on global refugee policies on self-reliance and resilience. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 33*(1), 22-41.

Kristiansen, M. H., (2014). Agency as an Empirical Concept. An Assessment of Theory and Operationalization. [Working Paper 2014/9]. Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI). Retrieved from https://www.nidi.nl/shared/content/output/papers/nidi-wp-2014-09.pdf.

Krueger, R. (1998). *Developing Questions for Focus Groups*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Kunuroglu, F., Yagmur, K., Van de Vijver, F., & Kroon, S. (2018). Motives for Turkish return migration from Western Europe: Home, sense of belonging, discrimination and transnationalism. *Turkish Studies, 19*(3), 422-450.

Kurien, P. (1998). Becoming American by becoming Hindu: Indian Americans taking their place at the multicultural table. In S. Warner & J. Wittner (Eds.), *Gatherings in the Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigrants* (pp. 37–70). Philadelphia: Templeton University Press.

Kyriakidou, O., & M. Özbilgin (2006). *Relational Perspectives in Organisational Studies.* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Labov, W. (1972). *Sociolinguistic Patterns.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Laliberté, D., Laplante, B., & Piché, V. (2003). The impact of forced migration on marital life in Chad. *European Journal of Population 19*, 413-435.

Leach, B. (2005). Agency and the gendered imagination: Women's actions and local culture in steelworker families. *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power, 12*(1), 1-22.

Lee, E. (1966). A theory of migration? *Demography 3*, 47–57.

Lee, E. M. & Kramer, R. (2013). Out with the old, in with the new? Habitus and social mobility at selective colleges. *Sociology of Education, 86*(1), 18–35.

Lee, R. L. M., (2006). Reinventing modernity: Reflexive modernization vs liquid modernity vs multiple modernities. *European Journal of Social Theory, 9*(3), 355–368.

Lefebvre, H. (2002). *Critique of Everyday Life.* London and New York: Verso.

Lehmann, W. (2014). Habitus transformation and hidden injuries: Successful working-class university students. *Sociology of Education, 87*(1), 1–15.

Lenette, C., Maror, A. & Manwaring, S. (2019). Mothers and daughters: Redefining cultural continuity through South Sudanese women's artistic practices. *Journal of Intercultural Studies, 40*(6), 751-771.

Levitt, P. (2001). *The Transnational Villagers.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Levitt, P. (2007). *God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the Changing American Religious Landscape*. New York: The New Press.

Li, J. (2008). Ethical challenges in participant observation: A reflection on ethnographic fieldwork. *The Qualitative Report, 13*(1), 100–15.

Lie, S. S. & Vogt, K. (2003). Islamization in Syria: Gender, Education and Ideology. *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, 36*(2), 22- 41.

Lippert, R. (1999). Governing refugees: The relevance of governmentality to understanding the international refugee regime. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political, 24*(3), 295-328.

Livingstone Smith, D. (2012). *Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others.* London: St. Martin's Griffin.

Lokot, M. (2018). Syrian refugees: thinking beyond gender stereotypes. *Forced Migration Review 57*, 33-35.

Long, N. (2001). *Development Sociology. Actor Perspectives*. London; New York: Routledge.

Lovell, T. (2000). Thinking feminism with and against Bourdieu. *Feminist Theory, 1*(1), 11-32.

Lubkemann, S. C. (2008). *Culture in Chaos. An Anthropology of the Social Condition in War.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lukunka, B. (2012). New big men: Refugee emasculation as a human security issue. *International Migration 50*(5), 130–141.

Madawi A. R. (1994). The myth of return: Iraqi Arab and Assyrian refugees in London. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 7*(2-3), 199–219.

Mahler, S. J. (2001) Transnational relationships: The struggle to communicate across borders. *Identities Global Studies in Culture and Power 7*(4), 583-619.

Maktabi, R. (2010). Gender, family law and citizenship in Syria. *Citizenship Studies, 14*(5).

Malkki, L. H. (1995) Refugees and exile: From 'refugee studies' to the national order of things. *Annual Review of Anthropology 24*, 495-523.

Malkki, L. H. (1996). Speechless emissaries: Refugees, humanitarianism, and dehistoricization. *Cultural Anthropology, 11*(3), 377-404.

Malthaner, S. (2014). Fieldwork in the context of violent conflict and authoritarian regimes. In D. Della Porta (Ed.), *Methodological Practice in Social Movement Research* (pp. 173-194) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mansour, K. (2019). Syrians abroad: The future of refugees and their return home. In E. Dacrema & V. Tablot (Eds.), *Rebuilding Syria. The Middle East's Next Power Game?* (pp. 117-136). Milano: Ledizioni.

Marcus, G. E. (1995). Ethnography in/of the world system: The emergence of multi-sited ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 24*, 95–117.

Marger, M. (2006). Transnationalism or integration? Patterns of socio-political adaptation among Canadian business immigrants. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 29*(5), 882–900.

Marini, F. (2014). Transnationalism and integration: What kind of relationship? Empirical evidence from the analysis of co-development's dynamics. *Migration and Development, 3*(2), 306–320.

Meriwether, M. L. (1999). *The Kin Who Count. Family and Society in Ottoman Aleppo, 1770-1840.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Markus, H., & Nurius, P. (1986). Possible selves. *American Psychologist, 41*(9), 954–969.

Marras, S. (2009). Falsi rifugiati? Pratiche di etichettamento di richiedenti asilo alla frontiera. *Mondi migranti, 3*, 83-101.

Marsh, D. (2017). A skin, not a sweater: Ontology and epistemology in political science. In V. Lowndes (Ed.), *Theory and Methods in Political Science* (pp. 17-41). London: Palgrave-Macmillan.

Marshall, V. W. (2005). Agency, events, and structure at the end of the life course. *Advances in Life Course Research, 10*(Complete), 57-91.

Martí, G. (2015). Religious reflexivity: The effect of continual novelty and diversity on individual religiosity. *Sociology of Religion, 76*(1), 1–13.

Massey, D. S., Arango, J., Hugo, G., Kouaouci, A., Pellegrino, A. & Taylor, J.E. (1998). *Worlds in Motion: Understanding International Migration at the End of the Millennium*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Matsuoka, A. & Sorenson J. (2008). Eritrean Canadian refugee households as sites of gender renegotiation. In D. Indra. (Ed.), *Engendering Forced Migration: Theory and Practice* (pp. 218-241). Ney York: Berghahn Books.

Mattes, L. (2018). *Syrian Civil Society Organisations in Lebanon: Assessment and Analysis of Existing Organisations and the Conditions under which they Operate.* (Opuscula, 115). Berlin: Maecenata Institut für Philanthropie und Zivilgesellschaft. Retrieved from https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-57383-2.

Mazzucato, V. (2008). The double engagement: Transnationalism and integration. Ghanaian migrants' lives between Ghana and the Netherlands. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 34*(2), 199–216.

McKenzie, D., & Rapoport, H. (2010). Self-selection patterns in Mexico-U.S. migration: The role of migration networks. *Review of Economics and Statistics, 92*(4), 811–821.

McSpadden, L. A. (2008). Negotiating masculinity in the reconstruction of social place: Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees in the United States and Sweden. In D. Indra. (Ed.), *Engendering Forced Migration: Theory and Practice* (pp. 242-260). Ney York: Berghahn Books.

Mead, L. (1997). *The New Paternalism. Supervisory Approaches to Poverty.* Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

Meertens, D. (2004). A life project out of turmoil: Displacement and gender in Colombia. In P. Essed, G. Frerks, J. Schrijvers (Eds.), *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies* (pp. 69-80). New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Meghji, A. (2021). *Decolonizing Sociology.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Mendelsohn J. B., T. Rhodes, P. Spiegel, M. Schilperoord, J. Wagacha Burton, S. Balasundaram, C. Wong, D. A. Ross. (2014). Bounded agency in humanitarian settings: A qualitative study of adherence to antiretroviral therapy among refugees situated in Kenya and Malaysia. *Social Science & Medicine 120*, 387-395.

Mernissi, F. (1987). *Beyond the Veil: Male-female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (3rd ed.). Bloomington: Indiana University Press. (Original work published 1975).

Messner, M. (1997). *Politics of Masculinities: Men in Movements.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.

Mhaissen, R. (2014). Redefining revolutions in the spaces of the tents. *Signs Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 40*(1), 74-79.

Millband, J. (2013). Sexual orientation and refugee status determination over the past 20 Years: Unsteady progress through standard sequences? In T. Spijkerboer (Ed.), *Fleeing Homophobia* (pp. 32–54). London: Routledge.

Min, P. G. (2005). Religion and maintenance of ethnicity among immigrants: A comparison of Indian Hindus and Korean protestants. In K. Leonard, A. Stepick, M. Vasquez & J. Holdaway (Eds.), *Immigrant Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America* (pp. 99–122). New York: Altamira Press.

Moghadam, V. M. (2004). Patriarchy in transition: Women and the changing family in the Middle East. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 35*(2), 137–162.

Moghissi, H., & Goodman, M. J. (1999). "Cultures of violence" and diaspora: Dislocation and gendered conflict in Iranian-Canadian communities. *Humanity & Society, 23*(4), 297–318.

Moliner C. (2020). Vulnerable Masculinities? Gender Identity Construction among Young Undocumented Sikh Migrants in Paris. *Religions*, 11(12), 680.

Moulin, C. (2012). Ungrateful subjects? Refugee protests and the logic of gratitude. In P. Nyers and K. Rygiel (Eds.),. *Citizenship, Migrant Activism and the Politics of Movement* (pp. 54-72). London: Routledge.

Moulton, V., Flouri, E., Joshi, H., & Sullivan A. (2015). The role of aspirations in young children's emotional and behavioural problems. *British Educational Research Journal 41*(6), 925-946.

Mourad, L. (2017). Inaction as policy-making: Understanding Lebanon's early response to the refugee influx. *Pompes Studies, 25*, 49-55.

Muchoki, S. (2017). *Intimacies, Citizenship and Refugee Men*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mukhopadhyay, C. C., & Higgins, P. J. (1988). Anthropological studies of women's status revisited: 1977–1987. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 17*, 461–495.

Muller, B. (2004). Globalization, security, paradox: Towards a refugee biopolitics. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 22(1), 49-57.

Muller, P. (2010). *Scattered families: Transnational family life of Afghan refugees in the Netherlands in the light of the human rights-based protection of the family*. Antwerp: Intersentia Publishers.

Müller-Funk, L. (2019). *Adapting to staying, or imagining futures elsewhere: Migration decision-making of Syrian refugees in Turkey*. [IMI WP 154/2019]. International Migration Institute. Retrieved from https://www.migrationinstitute.org/publications/adapting-to-staying-or-imagining-futures-elsewhere-migration-decision-making-of-syrian-refugees-in-turkey.

Müller-Funk, L. (2020). Research with refugees in fragile political contexts: How ethical reflections impact methodological choices. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, feaa013.

Müller-Funk, L., Alaa Aldien, O., Basrak, A., Ghabash, W., Hatip, M., Shamaa, R., and Tourkmani, M. (2019). *Researching urban forced migrants in Turkey and Lebanon:*

Alternative ways to study a vulnerable population in fragile political contexts. [IMI WP 151/2019]. International Migration Institute. Retrieved from https://www.migrationinstitute.org/publications/researching-urban-forced-migrants-in-turkey-and-lebanon-alternative-ways-to-study-a-vulnerable-population-in-fragile-political-contexts.

Müller-Funk, L. and Fransen, S. (2020). *Return aspirations and coerced return: A case study on Syrian refugees in Turkey and Lebanon.* [IMI WP 162/2020]. International Migration Institute. Retrieved from https://www.migrationinstitute.org/publications/return-aspirations-and-coerced-return-a-case-study-on-syrian-refugees-in-turkey-and-lebanon.

Mügge L. (2016). Transnationalism as a research paradigm and its relevance for integration. In R. Penninx & B. Garcés-Mascareñas (Eds.), *Integration Processes and Policies in Europe* (pp. 109-125). IMISCOE Research Series. Cham: Springer.

Mügge, L. M., & De Jong, S. (2013). Intersectionalizing European politics: bridging gender and ethnicity. *Politics, Groups and Identities, 1*(3).

Nash, J. C. (2008). Re-thinking intersectionality. *Feminist Review, 89* (1), 1-15.

Nassehi, A. (2015, October 5). Was jetzt zu tun ist – in zwölf Punkten. Die Welt. Retrieved from https://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article147191323/Die-Energie-der-vielen-jungen-Maenner-kanalisieren.html.

Naser-Eddine, N. (2017). Gender performativity in the diaspora. Syrian refugee women in the UN. In J. Freedman, Z. Kivilcim & N. Ö. Baklacioglu (Eds.), *A Gendered Approach to the Syrian Refugee Crisis* (pp. 190-203). London: Routledge.

Navarro, L. (2010). Islamophobia and sexism: Muslim women in the Western mass media. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge, 8*(2), Article 10. Retrieved from https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.1088.8376&rep=rep1&type=pdf.

Neal, D. L. (1988). Women as a social group: Recognizing sex-based persecution as a grounds of asylum. *Columbia Human Rights Law Review 20*(1), 203-220.

Nicholson, L. (1990). *Feminism/Postmodernism.* New York: Routledge.

Niemann, A. & Zaun, N. (2017). EU refugee policies and politics in times of crisis: Theoretical and empirical perspectives. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies, 56*(1), 3-22.

Nyers, P. (2006). *Rethinking Refugees: Beyond States of Emergency.* New York: Routledge.

O'Kane, M. (2005). *Borderlands and Women: Transversal Political Agency on the Burma-Thailand Border.* Canberra: Monash University Press.

Obeid, M. (2010). Friendship, kinship and socially in a Lebanon town. In A. Desai & E. Killick (Eds.), *The Ways of Friendship: Anthropological Perspectives* (pp. 93-113). New York: Berghahn Books.

Odeh, L. E. (2010). A comparative analysis of Global North and Global South economies. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa, 12*(3), 338-348.

Olivius, E. (2014). Displacing equality? Women's participation and humanitarian aid effectiveness in refugee camps. *Refugee Survey Quarterly, 33*(3), 93-117.

Olivius, E. (2016). Refugee men as perpetrators, allies or troublemakers? Emerging discourses on men and masculinities in humanitarian aid. *Women's Studies International Forum, 56*, 56-65.

Orloff, A. (1996). Gender in the Welfare State. *Annual Review of Sociology, 22*, 51-78.

Oskay, E. (2016). *The Refugee as an Agent: Insights from Structuration Theory.* (Unpublished Master's Thesis). McGill University, Montreal, Canada.

Opas, M. E., McMurray, D. A. (2015). Under the gaze of the State: ICT use and State surveillance of Eritrean refugees in Italy. *Refugee Survey Quarterly 34*(4), 105–125.

Owens, P. (2009). Reclaiming 'Bare Life'?: Against Agamben on Refugees. *International Relations, 23*(4), 567–582.

Pacherie, E. (2011). Nonconceptual representations for action and the limits of intentional control. *Social Psychology, 42*(1), 67–73.

Pepicelli, R. (2010). *Femminismo islamico: Corano, diritti, riforme.* Roma: Carocci.

Porpora, D. V. (1998). Four concepts of social structure. In M. Archer, R. Bhaskar, A. Collier, T. Lawson & A. Norrie (Eds.), *Critical Realism: Essential Readings*. London: Routledge.

Pupavac, V. (2008). Refugee advocacy, traumatic representations and political disenchantment. *Government and Opposition 43*(2), 270-292.

Rabo, A. (1996). Gender, state and civil society in Jordan and Syria. In C. Hann & E. D. Eds), *Civil Society. Challenging Western Models* (pp. 155-177). Abingdon, New York: Routledge.

Rabo, A. (2005). Family law in multicultural and multireligious Syria. In G. Collste (Ed.), *Possibilities of Religious Pluralism* (pp. 71-78). Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press.

Rabo, A. (2008). 'Doing family': Two cases in contemporary Syria. *Hawwa, 6*(2), 129-153.

Rapone, A. & Simpson, C. (2004). Refugee-generated return: The case of Guatemala. In P. Essed, G. Frerks, J. Schrijvers (Eds.) *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies* (pp. 135-150). New York; Oxford: Berghahn.

Rasborg K. (2017). From class society to the individualized society? A critical reassessment of individualization and class. *Irish Journal of Sociology 25*(3), 229-249.

Razack, S. H. (2004). Imperilled Muslim women, dangerous Muslim men and civilized Europeans: Legal and social responses to forced marriages. *Feminist Legal Studies, 12*(2), 129-174.

Reay, D. (2001). Finding or losing yourself? Working-class relationships to education. *Journal of Education Policy 16*(4), 333-346.

Reay, D. (2004). "It's All Becoming a Habitus": Beyond the habitual use of habitus in educational research. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 25*(4), 431–444.

Rizkalla, N., & Segal, S. P. (2019). War can harm intimacy: Consequences for refugees who escaped Syria. *Journal of Global Health, 9*(2), 020407.

Römhild, R. (2017). Beyond the bounds of the ethnic: For postmigrant cultural and social research. *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture, 9*(2), 69-75.

Sajjad T. (2018). What's in a name? 'Refugees', 'migrants' and the politics of labelling. *Race & Class, 60*(2), 40-62.

Salamandra, C. (2013). Sectarianism in Syria: Anthropological reflections. *Middle East Critique 22*(3), 303-306.

Saleh, F. (2020). Queer/Humanitarian Visibility: The Emergence of the Figure of 'The Suffering Syrian Gay Refugee,' *Middle East Critique 29*(1), 47-67.

Sarabwe, E., Richters, A., & Vysma, M. (2018). Marital conflict in the aftermath of genocide in Rwanda: An explorative study within the context of community based sociotherapy. *Intervention (Amstelveen) 16*, 14-21.

Sassen, S. (1988). *The Mobility of Labor and Capital: A Study in International Investment and Labor Flow.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sauer, L., Diabaté, S., Gabel, S., Halfar, Y., Kraus, E. K., & Wenzel, L. (2018). *Doing transnational family im Kontext von Flucht und Krisenmigration.* Stand der Forschung. Wiesbaden: Bundesinstitut für Bevölkerungsforschung. [BiB Working Paper 3/2018]. Retrieved from https://www.bib.bund.de/Publikation/2018/pdf/Doing-transnational-family-im-Kontext-von-Flucht-und-Krisenmigration-Stand-der-Forschung.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=5.

Savin-Baden, M., & Howell Major, C. (2013). *Qualitative Research: The Essential Guide to Theory and Practice.* Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Sayad, A. (2004). *The suffering of the immigrant.* Cambridge: Polity Publishing.

Sawah, W. & Kawakibi, S. (2014). Activism in Syria: Between nonviolence and armed resistance. In L. Khatib & E. Lust (Eds.), *Taking to the Streets: The Transformation of Arab Activism* (pp. 136–71). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Schewel, K. (2015). *Understanding the Aspiration to Stay: A Case Study of Young Adults in Senegal.* International Migration Institute. [IMI Working Paper 107]. Retrieved from https://www.migrationinstitute.org/publications/wp-107-15.

Schewel, K. (2020). Understanding Immobility: Moving Beyond the Mobility Bias in Migration Studies. *International Migration Review, 54*(2), 328–355.

Schilcher, L. S. (1985). *Families in Politics: Damascene Factions and Estates of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.* Stuttgart: Verlag.

Schindel, E. (2016). Migrantes y refugiados en las fronteras de Europa. Cualificación por el sufrimiento, nuda vida y agencias paradójicas. *Revista de Estudios Sociales 59*, 16-29.

Schlecht, J., Rowley, E., & Babirye, J. (2013). Early relationships and marriage in conflict and post-conflict settings: Vulnerability of youth in Uganda. *Reproductive Health Matters, 21*(41), 234–242.

Schutz, A. (1967). *The Phenomenology of the Social World.* Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.

Schaefer, M. T., & Olson, D. H. (1981). Assessing intimacy: The PAIR Inventory. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 7*(1), 47–60.

Seeleib-Kaiser, M. (2016). The end of the conservative German welfare state model. *Social Policy & Administration, 50*(2), 219–240.

Shacknove, A. E. (1985). Who is a refugee? *Ethics, 95*(2), 274-284.

Shanahan, M. J. (2000). Pathways to adulthood in changing societies: Variability and mechanisms in life course perspective. *Annual Review of Sociology, 26*(1), 667-692.

Shanahan, M. J., Elder, G. H., & Miech, R. A. (1997). History and agency in men's lives: Pathways to achievement in cohort perspective. *Sociology of Education, 70*(1), 54-67.

Sharabi, H. (1988). *Neopatriarchy. A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society.* Oxford: Oxford University Press

Shaw, S. A., Peacock, L., Ali, L. M., Pillai, V., & Husain, A. (2019). Religious coping and challenges among displaced Muslim female refugees. *Affilia, 34*(4), 518-534.

Shirpak, K. R., Maticka-Tyndale, E., & Chinichian, M. (2011). Post migration changes in Iranian immigrants' couple relationships in Canada. *Journal of Comparative Feminine Studies, 42*(6), 751-770.

Sigona, N. (2014). The politics of refugee voices: Representations, narratives, and memories. In E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, G. Loescher, K. Long & N. Sigona (Eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Sikes, P. (2004). *Methodology, Procedures and Ethical Concerns. Doing Educational Research: A Guide for First Time Researchers*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Sirkeci, I., & Cohen, J. (2016). Cultures of Migration and Conflict in Contemporary Human Mobility in Turkey. *European Review, 24*(3), 381-396.

Smith, T. L. (1978). Religion and ethnicity in America. *American Historical Review, 83*(5), 1155–1185.

Somers, M. R. (1998). Symposium on historical sociology and rational choice theory: 'We're No Angels': Realism, rational choice and relationality in social science. *The American Journal of Sociology, 104*(3), 722–784.

Squire, V. (2017). Unauthorised migration beyond structure/agency? Acts, interventions, effects. *Politics, 37*(3), 254–272.

Stedman, S., & F. Tanner (2003). *Refugee Manipulation: War, Politics, and the Abuse of Human Suffering.* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Stewart, M., Dennis, C. L., Kariwo, M., Kushner, K. E., Letourneau, N. L., Makumbe, N., Makwarimba, E., & Shizha, E. (2015). Challenges faced by refugee new parents from Africa in Canada. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health, 17(4), 1146–1156.*

Stotzer, R. (2012). *Comparison of Hate Crime Rates Across Protected and Unprotected Groups. An Update.* The Williams Institute. University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257606451_Comparison_of_Hate_Crime_Rat es_Across_Protected_and_Unprotected_Groups_-_An_Update.

Suerbaum, M. (2018a). Defining the other to masculinize oneself. Syrian men's negotiations of masculinity during displacement in Egypt. *Signs, Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 43*(3), 665-686.

Suerbaum, M. (2018b). Becoming and 'unbecoming' refugees: Making sense of masculinity and refugeness among Syrian refugee men in Egypt. *Men and Masculinities, 21*(3), 363–382.

Swartz, D. (1997). *Culture and Power: The sociology of Pierre Bourdieu.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Taha, D. (2020). "Like a tree without leaves": Syrian refugee women and the shifting meaning of marriage. *Mashriq & Mahjar 7*(1), 1-25.

Tatli, A., Vassilopoulou, J., Özbilgin, M., Forson, C. & Slutskaya, N. (2014). A Bourdieuan Relational Perspective for Entrepreneurship Research. *Journal of Small Business Management, 52*(4), 615-632.

Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2003). Major issues and controversies in the use of mixed methods in the social and behavioural sciences. In A. Tashakkori, & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioural Research* (pp. 3–50). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Thomson, S., Ansoms, An., & Murison, J. (2013). *Emotional and Ethical Challenges for Field Research in Africa.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Mcmillan.

Thompson, J. (2000). Introduction. In J. Thompson (Ed.), *Stretching the Academy: the Politics and Practice of Widening Participation in Higher Education.* Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.

Tiilikainen, M. (2015). Looking for a safe place: Security and transnational Somali Muslim families. *Journal of Religion in Europe, 8*, 51–72.

Tiilikainen, M. (2019). Raising children of Somali descent in Toronto: Challenges and struggles for everyday security and wellbeing. In M. Tiilikainen, M. Al-Sharmani, S. Mustasaari (Eds.) *Wellbeing of Transnational Muslim Families: Marriage, Law and Gender* (pp. 147-163). London: Routledge.

Toma, S. & Castagnone, E. (2002). What drives onward mobility within Europe? The case of Senegalese migration between France, Italy and Spain. *Population, 70*(1), 65–95.

Tometten, C. (2018). Resettlement, humanitarian admission, and family reunion: the intricacies of Germany's legal entry regimes for Syrian refugees. *Refugee Survey Quarterly, 37*, 187-203.

Trauner, F., & Turton, J. (2017). Welcome Culture (Willkommenskultur). *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft - Austrian Journal of Political Science, 46*(1), 33-42.

Tucker, K. H. (1998). *Anthony Giddens and Modern Social Theory*. New York: SAGE Publications.

Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2017). *Decolonizing Methodologies. Research and Indigenous People*. London: Zed Books Ltd.

Turner, L. (2016, November 29). Are Syrian men vulnerable too? Gendering the Syria refugee response. Middle East Institute. http://www.mei.edu/content/map/are-syrian-men-vulnerable-too-gendering-syria-refugee-response [Accessed 10 June 2020].

Turner, L. (2019a). Syrian refugee men as objects of humanitarian care. *International Feminist Journal of Politics, 21*(4), 595–616.

Turner, L. (2019b). The politics of labelling refugee men as "vulnerable". *Social Politics*, 1–23.

Turner, S. (1999). Angry young men in camps: gender, age and class relations among Burundian refugees in Tanzania. In *New issues in refugee research* (Vol. 9). United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Turner, S. (2000). Vindicating masculinity: The fate of promoting gender equality. *Forced Migration Review 9*, 8-9.

Turner, S. (2010). *Politics of Innocence. Hudu Identity, Conflict and Camp Life.* New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Turner, V. (1969). *The ritual process: Structures and anti-structures*. Chicago: Aldine Publications.

Turner, V. (1974). Liminal to liminoid, in play, flow, and ritual: An essay in comparative symbology. *Rice University Studies, 60*(3), 53-92.

Turner, V. (1982). *From Ritual to Theater: The Human Seriousness of Play.* New York: PAJ Publications.

Turton, D. (2005). The meaning of place in a world of movement: Lessons from long-term field research in Southern Ethiopia. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *18*(3), 258–280.

Tuzi, I. (2019). From insecurity to secondary migration: Bounded mobilities of Syrian and Eritrean refugees in Europe. *Migration Letters, 16*(4), 551–561.

Tirado Chase, A. (2016). *Routledge Handbook on Human Rights in the Middle East and North Africa.* London: Routledge.

Trombetta, L. (2014). *Siria. Dagli Ottomani agli Assad. E oltre*. Milano: Mondadori.

UNFPA – United Nation Population Fund. (2014). *Women and Girls in the Syria Crisis*. Amman: UNFPA. Retrieved from https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/UNFPA-FACTSANDFIGURES-5%5B4%5D.pdf.

UNHCR – The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2011). *Handbook and Guidelines on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status.* Geneva: UNHCR. Retrieved from https://www.refworld.org/docid/4f33c8d92.html.

UNHCR – The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2012). *Guidelines on International Protection No. 9: Claims to Refugee Status Based on Sexual Orientation And/or Gender Identity.* Geneva: UNHCR. Retrieved from https://www.unhcr.org/509136ca9.pdf.

UNHCR – The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2014). *Women Alone; The Fight for Survival of Syria's Refugee Women.* Geneva: UNHCR. Retrieved from https://www.refworld.org/docid/53be84aa4.html.

UNHCR – The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2019). *Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.* Geneva: UNHCR. Retrieved from file:///Users/Iry/Desktop/VASyR%202019%2018%20DEC%20digital%20version.pdf.

UN Women. (2018). *Unpacking Gendered Realities in Displacement: The Status of Syrian Refugee Women in Lebanon.* Lebanon: UN Women. Retrieved from https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/68233.pdf.

Usta, J., Masterson, A. R. & Farver, J. M. (2019). Violence Against Displaced Syrian Women in Lebanon. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 34*(18), 3767-3779.

Valji, N., de la Hunt, L. A. & Moffett, H. (2003). Where are the women? Gender discrimination in refugee policies and practices. *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity, 55,* 61-72.

van Eijk, E. (2016). *Family Law in Syria: Patriarchy, Pluralism and Personal Status Laws.* London; New York: I.B. Tauris.

van Heelsum, A. (2017). Aspirations and frustrations: Experiences of recent refugees in the Netherlands. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 40*(13), 2137–2150.

Vitikainen, A. (2019). LGBT rights and refugees: a case for prioritizing LGBT status in refugee admissions. *Ethics & Global Politics, 13*(1), 64-78.

Wachter, K., Horn, R., Friis, E., Falb, K., Ward, L., Apio, C., Wanjiku, S., & Puffer, E. (2018). Drivers of intimate partner violence against women in three refugee camps. *Violence Against Women, 24*(3), 286–306.

Walby, S. (1990). *Theorizing Patriarchy.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Wallace, R. (1996). Making the Refugee Convention gender sensitive: The Canadian Guidelines. *International and Comparative Law Quarterly, 45*(3), 702-711.

Weedon, C. (1987). *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Weininger, E. B. (2005). Foundations of Pierre Bourdieu's class analysis. In E. O. Wright (Ed.), *Approaches to Class Analysis* (pp. 82-118). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wendt, A. (1999). *Social Theory of International Politics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). "Doing Gender." *Gender and Society* 1 (2): 125–151.

White, S. C., (2010). Analysing wellbeing: A framework for development practice. *Development in Practice, 20*(2), 158–172.

Williams, F. (1996), "Race", welfare and community care: A historical perspective. In W. I.-U. Ahmad & K. Atkin (Eds.), *Race and Community Care* (pp. 15-38). Buckingham: Open University Press.

Willis, K., and Yeo, B. (2000). *Gender and Migration*. Cheltingham UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Wimmer, A., & Schiller, N. (2003). Methodological nationalism, the social sciences, and the study of Migration: An essay in historical epistemology. *The International Migration Review, 37*(3), 576-610.

Worbs S., Rother N., & Kreienbrink A. (2020). Demographic profile of Syrians in Germany and aspects of integration. In E. Carlson & N. Williams (Eds.), *Comparative Demography of the Syrian Diaspora: European and Middle Eastern Destinations. European Studies of Population*. Berlin: Springer.

Yahya M., Kassir, J., & El-Hariri, K. (2018). *Unheard Voices: What Syrian Refugees Need to Return Home*. Beirut: Carnegie Middle East Center.

Yasmine, R. & Moughalian, C. (2016). Systemic violence against Syrian refugee women and the myth of effective intrapersonal interventions. *Reproductive Health Matters, 24*(47), 27-35.

Yurdakul, G., & Korteweg, A. C. (2021). Boundary regimes and the gendered racialized production of Muslim masculinities: Cases from Canada and Germany. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies, 19*(1), 39-54,

Zetter, R. (1991). Labelling refugees: Forming and transforming a bureaucratic identity. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 4*(1), 39-62.

Zetter, R. (1999). Reconceptualizing the Myth of Return: Continuity and Transition Amongst the Greek-Cypriot Refugees of 1974. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 12*(1), 1–22.

Zhou, M., & Xiong, Y. S. (2005). The multifaceted American experiences of the children of Asian immigrants: Lessons for segmented assimilation. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 28*(6), 1119–1152.

Zimmermann, K. F. (1996). European migration: Push and pull. *International Regional Science Review, 19*(1–2), 95–128.

Ziter, E. (2015). *Political Performance in Syria: From the Six-Day War to the Syrian Uprising*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Zohar, A. (2009). *PostGender*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Özgür Baklacıoğlu, N. (2017). The violence of tolerated temporality: Syrian women refugees on the outskirts of Istanbul. In J. Freedman, Z. Kivilcim, & N. Özgür Baklacioglu (Eds.). *A Gendered Approach to the Syrian Refugee Crisis* (pp. 42-60). Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge.