

REFLECTING ON BELONGING, DIGNITY & TRUST:
STORIES OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN GERMANY

© 2024

By Kumali Schoen

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion
Of the Bachelor of Arts degree in International Studies
Croft Institute for International Studies
Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College
The University of Mississippi

University, Mississippi
May 2024

Approved:

Advisor: Dr. Oliver Dinius

Reader: Dr. Emily Fransee

Reader: Dr. Ian Gowan

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

Abstract

Chapter One: Historical & Political Context..... 6

Governmentality and Migration
Media
Oral History
Case Study Selection
Methodology
Theme Findings Allocated in Chapters

Chapter Two: Belonging..... 21

Stories of Belonging
Building Microcosms of Belonging
Berlin's Multicultural Landscape
Relationship with Authorities & Societal Perceptions
Chapter Conclusions

Chapter Three: Karama..... 36

Stories of Karama
Karama: Societal and Individual Contributors.
Rights, Respect, and Independence
Karama and Giving Back
Karama in Terms of the Collective
Karama and Adaptation
Chapter Conclusions

Chapter Four: Trust & Dialogue..... 49

Alleviating Distrust Through Dialogue

Conclusions..... 52

Bibliography..... 56

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Dinius, for his guidance and encouragement along my thesis writing. His support and patience across countries, time zones, COVID-19, and personal challenges, encouraged me to explore my curiosities and refine my skillsets with research and writing. My readers, Dr. Gowan and Dr. Fransee, were so supportive in their thoughtfulness and dedication, willing to make the extra time and put in thoughtful feedback. I also want to thank Dr. Schaaf for guiding me through my first research methods class. I reflect gratefully on the numerous after class sessions, where he helped me to refine this subject on refugee stories which I am so passionate about. This thesis has been difficult, for the patience and commitment it naturally required, but it has also allowed me to bridge the distance between my academics and how I can apply that care to global issues we all face on our collective international field. It is because of the care, patience, and faith of all these professors who have given me the strength and tools to do that. Thank you.

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates what shapes the Syrian refugee experience in Germany using an inductive thematic analysis. In this qualitative research method, I analyze five Syrian refugee interview films from “Archiv der Flucht,” or *Archive of Flight*— a digital German oral history archive of stories of refugees and other displaced peoples to Germany through a multistep coding process and interdisciplinary theoretical framework. After transcribing over 550 minutes of footage, I used the coding software, Taguette, to open-code— grouping phrases under simple topic headers. This is followed by axial coding, or connecting codes under categories or “axes;” and selective coding, or connecting categories into umbrella themes or theories. Belonging, dignity, and the relationships between trust and dialogue emerged as three core themes discovered in this research; and I analyze these patterns within three separate chapters using interdisciplinary theories as a framework. My first chapter explores how Syrian cultural values of interconnectedness influenced interviewees’ perceptions of belonging in Germany, and how they mitigated feelings of alienation by recreating intimate social networks in Germany, which I term “microcosms of belonging.” The following chapter investigates how interviewees sought karama, meaning dignity in Arabic, through self-actualization and social reciprocity. The last chapter on trust and dialogue delves into the dynamics of distrust between Syrian refugees and the German host community and dialogue as a potential solution to decaying distrust, drawing parallels to the UNESCO Story Circle Methodology. Although my small sample size and third-person observations limit generalizations, my findings reveal important social and policy implications of the digital oral archive format and in the methodology of highlighting refugee voices for decision-making within the Syrian refugee integration process in Germany. Future research could expound upon my project’s themes and investigate them from the perspective of the German bureaucracy to form more holistic solutions to integration that meet the needs of both parties.

CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICAL & POLITICAL CONTEXT

Political speeches, news, asylum hearings, protests... There are plenty of narratives told about refugees— their traumas, their motivations for fleeing, and their integration in the host country. What differentiates refugees from other migrants is the necessity of their flight from the country they once called home. It is often this lack of choice which defines their suffering and motivations to find choice, to find home, dignity, and trusting relationships in their new host country. Instead of generalizing refugees' experiences as one, it is necessary to understand the themes which appear to characterize their experiences integrating into the host society to strengthen their voices in the conversations about them. As these media and political narratives dominate the conversation of the refugee experience, the stories from the refugees themselves hardly have any voice in legal, political, and social matters given their vulnerabilities in these sectors. Therefore, this research seeks to understand what shapes the Syrian refugee experience in Germany from the voices of refugees themselves.

Historical & Political Context

The Syrian Civil War began in the spring of 2011 between the Bashar al-Assad regime and multiple other conflicting forces in Syria.¹ Thousands of Syrians fled to neighboring countries especially Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and Turkey as well as neighboring European ones.² In 2011, almost 9,000 Syrians applied for asylum in the EU.³ The sense of safety and

¹ Nicole Ostrand, “The Syrian Refugee Crisis: A Comparison of Responses by Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States,” *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 3, no. 3 (2015): 255.

² Ostrand, “The Syrian Refugee Crisis,” 257.

1. ³ Philippe Fargues and Christine Fandrich, “The European Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis: What Next?,” in *Migration Policy Center Report 2012/14*, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (San Domenico di Fiesole: European University Institute, 2012), 1.

security was shattered for millions. Refugees not only had to evacuate, leaving everything they knew, but they had to quickly assimilate, rebuilding their life and identity in an unfamiliar and sometimes hostile host country.

For host countries, the massive waves of immigration threatened their sense of border security and fueled fear about economic instability and cultural changes. In 2021, Germany had approximately 1.24 million recorded refugees, with about half being from Syria.⁴ Syrian refugees primarily took three types of routes to reach Europe: by land to Greece and Bulgaria, by airplane to an EU state, or by sea through the Mediterranean to reach Greece, Cyprus, Malta, or Italy.⁵ EU countries like Germany, Sweden, Belgium, the UK, and Austria experienced more asylum seekers than other EU members;⁶ yet the number of Syrians who made it to the EU, are significantly fewer than the amount fleeing Syria, demonstrating that European migration policy was not the most accommodating. Europe's policy dilemma between hospitality and national protection principles is an outward reflection of their internal tension. On the one hand, the region has contributed significant political, financial, and humanitarian support to mitigate the crisis. In 2012, the EU states collectively gave €230 million of humanitarian support for affected Syrians, placing it as one of the top international donors.⁷ The EU has taken political measures to push for democracy in Syria and institutions like the European Commission have funneled financial resources into UN agencies and NGOs to meet the crisis front.⁸ However, these external efforts are not reflected internally and may be a cover for neglecting hospitality at home.

⁴ "Refugee Statistics," United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), accessed April 19, 2024, <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>.

⁵ Fargues and Fandrich, "The European Response," 5.

⁶ Fargues and Fandrich, "The European Response," 6.

⁷ Fargues and Fandrich, "The European Response," 8.

⁸ Fargues and Fandrich, "The European Response," 8–10.

Simultaneously, Europe has constrained their borders. As if to both “assist and contain,” borders were secured, and asylum-seeking Syrians often received unequal protection treatment.⁹

Governmentality and Migration

Governments are often conflicted on how to treat refugees. A case study on refugees in South Africa found that the contradictory attitudes of the state towards refugees stems from various ideological, historical, sociological, and political logics.¹⁰ The ideal of universal human rights is sacrificed for concerns over identity and sovereignty; international pressure towards better treatment towards asylum seekers is fought with ingrained xenophobia and racism; rigid notions of asylum management and softer social development ideals conflict with each other; and finally, pragmatism clashes with populism.¹¹ Sovereign interests, international pressures, and internally conflicted attitudes towards refugees, clash in a complex dynamic that impacts both the nation-state and the lives of refugees.

Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, is renowned for collating this complexity in biopolitical theory. He focused on defining the relationship between previous philosophical concepts of the state of exception, form of life, and *homo sacer* in one of his most influential works, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. In debate with Michel Foucault biopolitical theories, Agamben argued that *homo sacer*, translated as ‘sacred man,’ represents the power of the sovereign to determine whether a person will be set aside from society, neither to be saved

⁹ Fargues and Fandrich, “The European Response,” 11.

1. ¹⁰ Didier Fassin, Matthew Wilhelm-Solomon, and Aurelia Segatti, “Asylum as a Form of Life: The Politics and Experience of Indeterminacy in South Africa,” *Current Anthropology* 58, no. 2 (2017): 160–187, <https://doi.org/10.1086/691162>.

¹¹ Fassin, Wilhelm-Solomon, and Segatti, “Asylum as a Form of Life,” 167–170.

nor killed.¹² The power over life is innately linked with sovereignty. In his book, he explained how the “state of exception,” or the state’s normalization of exceptions to the law for certain groups of people such as through their structural encampment, allows for human rights to be sacrificed to protect the state.¹³ Agamben uses the Nazi’s concentration camps as a case study for his argument, but his philosophy has also been foundational in refugee studies, especially for explaining the mistreatment in refugee camps. Without the protection offered by citizenship, refugees’ automatic statelessness and “otherness” leaves them vulnerable to human rights violations from the host state.

Contemporary scholars seek to develop Agamben’s abstract theories to better encompass the complexities of life in refugee camps. They claim refugee camps are more “sensitive spaces” rather than spaces of exception; places where there is burdened agency instead of simply bare life. The refugee camp is a sensitive space because the people are not simply reduced from the political to the bare life; rather, various powers compete in the sector, creating tension for those living in the refugee camp and those governing.¹⁴ The sensitivity results from competing governing powers such as the state, security forces, joint state initiatives and local and international humanitarian organizations.¹⁵ While bare life denotes refugees being stripped to biological functioning, burdened agency humanizes refugees as it describes how the refugees’ struggle to create a livelihood within abnormal conditions.¹⁶ Refugees are not powerless beings but create their own existential meaning by defining their own systems of stability within the

¹² Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 166–188.

¹³ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 166–188.

1. ¹⁴ Elizabeth C. Dunn and Jason Cons, “Aleatory Sovereignty and the Rule of Sensitive Spaces,” *Antipode* 46, no. 1 (2013): 95, <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12028>.

¹⁵ Dunn and Cons, “Aleatory Sovereignty,” 95.

¹⁶ Dunn and Cons, “Aleatory Sovereignty,” 93–94.

camp. This could look like establishing their own moral codes, businesses, and social networks within the confines of the encampment.

These critical insights highlight how being a refugee, inside or outside a camp, is a unique, challenging state of life—characterized by the burdened agency to create meaning within abnormal conditions of existential uncertainty. Unpredictably and ambiguously shaped by the law, life in asylum is in constant change as individuals simultaneously adapt and resist it.¹⁷ The separateness and dependence on the legal system combined with the uncertainty of being in asylum defines this life.¹⁸ Therefore, the experience of being a refugee is the attempt to survive the mental anguish of stateless uncertainty through strategies of adaptation or resistance.

Refugees are more vulnerable to human rights violations because of their limited bargaining power with the state. In an established state, citizens negotiate with the government under the “social contract” theory of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, where some rights and protections are earned in return for the relinquishment of some freedoms.¹⁹ With citizenship, human rights are often an assumed standard of return, encouraging governments to provide reasonable protections to afford the costs of their citizens’ freedom. However, without these privileges for negotiation, refugees are often seen as problems rather than partners of this social contract. Moreover, when states are weakened or corrupt, refugees are further deprived of both freedom and protection.²⁰ Treated as on the outskirts of society, their basic human rights could be sacrificed for state security. Without citizenship, there is limited negotiating power to advocate for human rights. Refugees are therefore fighting for the basic human protections without any

1. ¹⁷ Fassin, Wilhelm-Solomon, and Segatti, “Asylum as a Form of Life,” 160.

¹⁸ Fassin, Wilhelm-Solomon, and Segatti, “Asylum as a Form of Life,” 167.

¹⁹ Ryan Sim, “Into the Mind of the Refugee: Unpacking Modern Refugee Mental Health,” *Harvard International Review* 37, no. 4 (2016): 47, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26445618>.

²⁰ Sim, “Into the Mind,” 47.

bargaining chips against much larger, powerful forces whose sympathies and resources fluctuate according to the strength of their internal political climate.

This theoretical background on the state of exception, burdened agency, and on the social contract helps frame the unique threats refugees face in terms of their belonging, dignity, and trust relationships with the host state.

Media

The media, as a mirror to society, reflect Europe's conflict between offering protection and securing their border for fear of losing a sense of cultural or national identity. For Germany, a seesaw history of xenophobia as well as *Willkommenskultur* (welcoming culture) plays a determining role in the conflicted dynamics.²¹ For example, Germany once had strongly developed principles of asylum written in their constitution, but in response to immigration fears, have since amended Article 16 of their constitution in 1992 to further restrict asylum.²²

The media's narrative has influenced the narrative of refugee and host experiences. For example, scholars have investigated how the terminology of the "European refugee crisis" is considered Eurocentric and deceptive when it was created in 2015 as it emphasizes "crisis," or a temporary state of emergency, rather something connected to long-standing migration policies. Moreover, media representations of refugees are largely shaped for consumption of the insider German community. Using vivid and aggrandized images and narratives of flight evoke feelings of urgency, simultaneous demands for compassion or state securitization, and the need to intercede, but sometimes at the cost of objectifying suffering.²³

²¹ Seth Holmes and Heide Castaneda, "Representing the 'European Refugee Crisis' in Germany and Beyond: Deservingness and Difference, Life and Death," *American Ethnologist* 43, no. 1 (2016): 13.

²² Holmes and Castaneda, "Representing the 'European Refugee Crisis,'" 15–16.

²³ Varvantakis et al., "Critical Encounters," 2.

While media can spark a crucial urgency in the public to act, the stories can categorize the complex realities of Syrian refugees, thereby molding and reinforcing German societal perceptions. Researchers discovered how politics and media reflect European anxieties about identity changes onto immigrants, where the “deserving” and “undeserving” migrants are categorized and viewed as threatening.²⁴ Additionally, populist rhetoric of host countries that shun incoming refugees can be a large barrier for refugees seeking help for mental health issues because of the compounding and complex traumas they have faced.²⁵

As a major economic agent and leader in Europe, Germany’s state and media representations are particularly influential in Europe, with the famous example of former Chancellor Angela Merkel responding with “Wir schaffen das,” [We have got this] to criticisms of her open-door policy from her own party.²⁶ Immigration and the refugee crisis are big topics in politics— deep political dividers in German society that have erupted in the recent decade. Additionally, today’s unprecedented speedy and convenient distribution of information through media causes shared narratives to have a larger influence through the sheer scales of audience and timeline outreach.

Given how an incomplete narrative may further this societal divide, it is then important for all parties— local and international policymakers, the public, and refugees themselves to have access to a holistic conceptualization of these refugees’ experiences. Oral history archives, for example, provide a platform that can focus on the voices of Syrian refugees, balancing other third-person media narratives of their experience through the same digitization benefits of major outreach and timeless influence.

²⁴ Holmes and Castaneda, “Representing the ‘European Refugee Crisis,’” 13.

²⁵ Sim, “Into the Mind,” 46.

²⁶ Holmes and Castaneda, “Representing the ‘European Refugee Crisis,’” 14.

Oral History

With an interview structure predicated on interviewee agency, oral history projects can contribute to, dispute with, and help synthesize the vast media collage on the refugee “crisis” with the addition of refugee voices. Oral history is defined as the collection of recorded interviews on personal memories and observations regarding events or experiences for research or published publicly in formats like museum exhibitions, documentaries, and websites.²⁷ In more recent history, oral history grew with the establishment of presidential oral history archives, the founding of oral history programs at universities like The University of California at Berkeley’s in 1954, and the formation of national institutions like the Oral History Association formed in 1967 and the Oral History Society in Britain. In Britain, feminist and labor movements as well as the narratives of servicemen were given platforms in history through oral interviews.²⁸ Oral recordings became a way to preserve or empower voices in history who, at the time, were marginalized.

Yet, oral history has also come under scrutiny. Interviewees can be critiqued for selective and self-interested recollections and interviewers for their one-sidedness.²⁹ Oral history is also largely anecdotal, and while critics argue that the sample can sometimes be random or too specific to generalize, a collection of anecdotes can illuminate patterns and common experiences of a group.³⁰ The platform has the power to vitalize various voices in history and question the conclusions gained from written accounts. Writing itself does not make something truer than the

²⁷ Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: Third Edition* (New York: Oxford University, 2015), 1.

²⁸ Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 1.

²⁹ Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 111.

³⁰ Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 115–6.

same content verbalized.³¹ Production flaws, just like any other recording of history, depend on the competence, resources, and conduct of its originators.

Oral history distinguishes itself from written history with its added capacity for semiotic, nonverbal signals, interactive presence, and potential for depth, which can be particularly useful in clarifying complex and emotive situations or exploring them from multiple perspectives simultaneously. These dimensions can draw awareness to the emotionality of historical events. Undertaken with an inquisitive and competent interviewer, oral history could augment written evidence and elucidate complex situations and events that reveal research gaps.³² Therefore, the sensitive and holistic angle with which this research aims to understand what shapes the Syrian refugee experience in Germany is compatible with an oral history analysis.

Case Study Selection

I chose the oral history project “Archiv der Flucht,” translated as *archive of flight*, for analysis because of its credibility, structure which allocates agency to the refugee interviewee, and research potential. “Archiv der Flucht,” a German oral history archive of stories of refugees and other displaced peoples to Germany that is funded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation, describes their mission as developing “a digital memory site where (hi)stories of flight and displacement to Germany in the 20th and 21st century is preserved and reflected.”³³ The interviews are filmed in coordination with the journalist, Carolin Emcke; migration expert, Manuela Bojadžijev; filmmaker, Heidi Specogna; and a larger interdisciplinary team of professionals in philosophy, cultural sciences, law, neuroscience, journalism, and international

³¹ B.E. Lucas and M.M. Strain, “Keeping the Conversation Going: The Archive Thrives on Interviews and Oral History,” in *Working in the Archives: Practical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition*, ed. by Alexis E. Ramsey, Wendy B. Sharer, Barbara L'Eplattenier, and Lisa S. Mastrangelo (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010), 262.

³² Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 112.

³³ “About the Project,” Archiv der Flucht, accessed April 17, 2024, <https://archivderflucht.hkw.de/en/about-the-project/>.

affairs. The site also hosts 42 documentary film interviews with refugees from 27 countries who fled to Germany (or Federal Republic of Germany and GDR) from their home country between 1945 until 2016. The complete archive includes individuals of various socioeconomic classes between the ages of 19 and 87 years old, of which 18 are women, 23 are men, and four self-identify as LGBTQ+. ³⁴ The archive producers collaborate with the Humboldt University of Berlin, the University of Bremen, and Tempelhof-Schöneberg and Pankow city libraries to ensure these testimonies are available for public use, migration research, and for educational purposes. ³⁵

The documentary films are structured to focus exclusively on the voices of the refugees interviewed. The interviews are composed of a German interviewer and the refugee interviewee. However, the German interviewer's face and the filming committee are not shown, as the camera is focused on the refugee's face for the entire interview. The films are each titled, "Name of Refugee: In Conversation with Name of Interviewer," emphasizing the focus on the refugee and the conversational nature of the one-on-one interview. ³⁶ Moreover, while the films follow a basic timeline structure of: Life in Syria, experiences of flight, and life in Germany, there are no consistent pre-defined questionnaires or time constraints. Films vary in length from one to three hours as the refugee and German host interviewer engage in organic conversation. Pauses, tangents, long periods of silence from the interviewer, and lengthy side stories demonstrate this organic activity as refugees are given full range to discuss spontaneous memories that arise from some initial open-ended questions. The interviews are also conducted in the language most comfortable to the interviewee, in this case: Arabic, German, or English. These original

³⁴ Archiv der Flucht, "About the Project."

³⁵ Kathrin Hartmann and D. Vetter, "Vermittlung des Oral-History-Projekts 'Archiv der Flucht' durch Bibliotheken," accessed April 17, 2024, <https://opus4.kobv.de/opus4-bib-info/frontdoor/index/index/docId/18038>.

³⁶ "Archiv der Flucht," Archiv der Flucht, accessed April 17, 2024, <https://archivderflucht.hkw.de/en/>.

recordings are published alongside voice-overs and subtitle translations in German and English on their website to make the films more internationally accessible.

Lastly, there are few studies which investigate the oral history narrations of Syrian refugees in Germany in general; and furthermore, “Archiv der Flucht,” as a new and expanding archive, has not been researched by other scholars. Therefore, this research will not only contribute to the general scholarly conversation on the experiences of integration for Syrian refugees, but it will also be the first to analyze the question with video conversations sourced from “Archiv der Flucht.”

Methodology

Five out of the forty-two films in “Archiv der Flucht,” are on Syrian refugees in Germany, and all five are analyzed in this study. The limitations of the case study selection are primarily the sample size. While the five interviews on Syrian refugees add up to more than 550 minutes of dialogue, the small interviewee pool limits the generalization of the findings beyond the scope of this oral history archive. However, with the limited time to complete this bachelor thesis, I chose analytical depth over quantity. The goal was to dissect the interviews— thematizing the very content and rhetoric that refugees use. These findings are therefore limited in generalizations but provide a very strong foundation for further research on this platform and other archives. Another limitation is that these interviews were not self-conducted. While third person observation allows for more open-mindedness and compatibility with an inductive analysis, there are likely areas which may be left out of the conversation.

Background information found on the website for the five documentary films are as follows:

Interviewee (Refugee) Name	Year of Flight	Interviewer	Interview Language	Film Interview Length
Hayyan Al Yousouf	Not Given	Mohammad Sarhangi	Arabic	1:43:02
Mouna Aleek	2015	Ethel Matala de Mazza	Arabic	1:57:09
Yasmin Merei	2012	Joseph Vogl	English	02:36:44
Mira	2015	Carolin Emcke	Arabic	01:16:31
Saloua Nyazy	2015	Mohammad Sarhangi	Arabic	1:43:07

This research determined thematic analysis as the best suited qualitative research method to analyze the question: What shapes the Syrian refugee experience in Germany? Thematic analysis (TA) was a common, multidisciplinary research method which grew recently in prominence to become a now frequented and respected process.³⁷ TA is the qualitative exploration of thematic patterns in data, often field-derived, and examined through the analytic process of qualitative coding.³⁸

In consideration of refugee agency, this research also makes a methodological argument in its choice of the TA approach. TA has two main approaches or schools. A *deductive* approach analyzes data in terms of (dis)proving an established theory and hypothesis, while an *inductive* analysis, or data-derived method, approaches coding and thematizing data as an organic process to be revised throughout analysis.³⁹ I use an *inductive* thematic analysis methodology to draw conclusions from the choices refugees make in narrating their experiences in Germany rather

1. ³⁷ Gareth Terry, Nikki Hayfield, Victoria Clarke, and Virginia Brown, “Chapter 2: Thematic Analysis,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*, ed. Carla Willig and Wendy S. Rogers (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2017), 18.

³⁸ Kristy Williamson, Lisa M. Given, and Paul Scifleet, “Chapter 19: Qualitative Data Analysis,” in *Research Methods (Second Edition)*, ed. Kirsty Williamson and Graeme Johanson (Chandos Publishing, 2018), 453.

³⁹ Terry et al., “Chapter 2: Thematic Analysis,” 18–20.

than observing the data through a *deductive* lens, or pre-determined theory to frame the narrative and analysis.

Inductive TA is not a linear process, rather it is an iterative and recursive process with around six general phases: Familiarization with the data, creating codes, connecting codes with flexible themes, reviewing themes, specifying themes, and finally writing the analysis.⁴⁰ Coding is the process of openly observing the data and creating labels to capture the essence of research question-related segments, and theme development focuses on combining or splitting these initial codes into larger categories which reflect substantial patterns throughout the data.⁴¹ To answer the question of what shapes the refugee experience, this research not only codes for relevant themes in the data, but also applies an inductive methodology to allow the refugees' choices to speak for themselves.

The five interviews in the archive are loosely structured around three central interview subjects: *life in Syria before flight*, *experiences of flight*, and *life in Germany*. To answer the research question, only the sections of all five interviews about refugees' *lives in Germany* will be applicable for the scope of this research. This study uses the coding software program, *Taguette*, and a consistent multistep coding process to maintain the integrity of the inductive approach. The interviews are initially open-coded: the focus is on grouping and labeling most phrases and small paragraphs under simple descriptive headers, or codes. This is followed by axial coding, connecting codes under categories or "axes;" and selective coding, or connecting categories into umbrella themes or theories. Finally, these core themes and analysis of their interconnectedness provide the key findings of the research question: What shapes the Syrian refugee experience in Germany?

⁴⁰ Terry et al., "Chapter 2: Thematic Analysis," 22–25.

⁴¹ Terry et al., "Chapter 2: Thematic Analysis," 26–27.

Theme Findings Allocated as Chapters

The three core themes discovered in this research are sense of belonging, factors determining dignity, and the relationship between trust and dialogue. These will be thoroughly analyzed in three separate chapters of this thesis and situated in the context of theories in sociology, anthropology, and refugee studies for a richer contextual understanding of their implications. The first chapter identifies belonging and the challenges to it as a core theme in refugees' experiences in Germany. Using social science theories on belonging, the section will analyze the patterns refugees regard as contributing to and diminishing their sense of belonging in Germany. The following chapter will build upon the insights of belonging to explore how refugees relate to karama, meaning dignity in Arabic, and a core concept in Syrian identity and culture, once seeking asylum in Germany. Finally, this research will investigate the themes relating to trust identified across interviews and refugees' proposals for dialogue to assuage feelings of societal distrust.

CHAPTER TWO: BELONGING

It was simple, very simple in terms of the social structure...The basic social cell was the family. So, we only belong to our families. We used to live with our fathers and mothers, grandfathers, grandmothers, so you see generations of people in the same house. It was very warm. Very emotional... I used only to go to school and go to the house of my mother's parents. It was the only style of life: going to these two places. ("Birth, Family, and Childhood in Kalat Hassan, Syria," *Merei, Yasmin*)

Interviewers like Yasmin Merei, above, described a close, multi-generational family network from their life in Syria before flight. Saloua expounded how, "Family matters a lot for us Arabs... We don't want to lose sight of each other" ("Married Life," *Nyazy, Saloua*). Even with different family dynamics, most interviewees described a cultural emphasis on warm and interconnected familial bonds and social networks in Syria. They discussed how hardship strengthened this social fabric as families leaned on each other to survive. "We did not have much money; therefore, we were even closer because we always helped each other," explained Saloua ("Birth, Family, and Childhood in Syria," *Nyazy, Saloua*). Overall, repeated words like "simple" demonstrate the Syrian cultural normality and ease of fostering close-knit familial relations for both affective and functional motives.

Indeed, the first sentence of Encyclopedia Britannica's Syria's "Cultural Life" section states, that "family is the heart of Syrian social life."⁴² This is consistent with Syrian culture being regarded as collectivistic.⁴³ Whereas individualistic cultures favor the personal objectives over the groups', collectivistic cultures value the goals of the in-group over the self.⁴⁴ Individualistic and collectivistic norms and values in turn influence psychology, like the construction of self-image (self-construal), which in turn shapes behavior, such as communication styles.⁴⁵ For example, Hall's (1976) Information Theory ascribed different cultural communication styles as either high-context or low-context. High-context cultures, typically individualistic cultures like those in Northern Europe, tend to communicate directly; while low-context cultures, generally collectivist countries, were more implicit in their communication styles.⁴⁶ Yasmin and Saloua illustrated in their interviews how family was at the heart of their identity and values. Nurturing that social network was important during both times of peace and coping with stress. These narratives of interconnectedness in pre-flight Syria contextualize interviewees' later perceptions of belonging in the more low-context, individualistic German culture as refugees.

Refugees enter host countries as outsiders; therefore, they likely encounter additional and more severe challenges to belonging than other groups. Researchers composed a Challenged Sense of Belonging Scale (CSBS) scale and surveyed 3,783 adult refugees in Germany on threats

⁴² "Daily Life and Social Customs," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed April 17, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Syria/Daily-life-and-social-customs>.

⁴³ Rebecca S. Merkin and Reem Ramadan, "Communication practices in the US and Syria," *SpringerPlus* 5, no. 845 (2016): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40064-016-2486-9>.

⁴⁴ Theodore M. Singelis and William J. Brown, "Culture, Self, and Collectivist Communication: Linking Culture to Individual Behavior," *Human Communication Research* 21, no. 3 (1995): 357.

⁴⁵ H.R. Markus and S. Kitayama, "Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation." *Psychological Review* 98, 224-225.

1. ⁴⁶ Singelis and Brown, "Culture, Self, and Collectivist Communication," 361.

to four key criteria of belonging: Connection, participation, identification, and congruence.⁴⁷ *Identification* relates to the idea of being a good “fit” with their environment, and *participation* is the mutual feeling of acceptance and value when taking part in society.⁴⁸ Furthermore, *congruence* is the state of feeling aligned with society, and *connectedness* is the degree of having a place in the social, national, or geographical space.⁴⁹ Low CSBS scores, or minimal challenges to these criteria, were significantly associated with higher “social embeddedness,” or the ability to have close connections with Germans embodying friendship and emotional vulnerability.⁵⁰ Higher *social embeddedness* also led to better mental health and life satisfaction.⁵¹ In other words, it is effective to measure refugees’ overall sense of belonging, or social embeddedness, as proportional to the absence of threats to identification, participation, congruence, and connectedness with the German host community.

The CSBS’s cultural sensitivity and relevancy to belonging in a refugee context is a useful analytic tool for this research. The CSBS was developed for English, Arabic, and Farsi/Dari– speaking refugees in Germany and expands belonging theories to accommodate a forced migration context.⁵² The large sample size and situationally specific findings offer an analytical framework for the experiences of Syrian refugees in Germany, likely very similar to the backgrounds and perspectives of interviewees within this study. Therefore, this research will

⁴⁷ Lukas M. Fuchs et al., “The Challenged Sense of Belonging Scale (CSBS)—A Validation Study in English, Arabic, and Farsi/Dari Among Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Germany,” *Measurement Instruments for the Social Sciences* 3, no. 3 (2021): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42409-021-00021-y>.

⁴⁸ Fuchs et al., “The Challenged Sense of Belonging Scale,” 3.

⁴⁹ Fuchs et al., “The Challenged Sense of Belonging Scale,” 3-4.

⁵⁰ Fuchs et al., “The Challenged Sense of Belonging Scale,” 10-11.

⁵¹ Fuchs et al., “The Challenged Sense of Belonging Scale,” 10-11.

⁵² Fuchs et al., “The Challenged Sense of Belonging Scale,” 11.

present and analyze the refugees' stories of belonging through the scholarly lenses of identification, participation, congruence, and connection. Social connectedness and social assurance terminology will also frame my assessment of the internal and external variables in sense. By framing these theories within open-ended interviews, my study contextualizes what it means to belong in Germany as a Syrian refugee.

Stories of Belonging

Syrian values for family interconnectedness explain interviewees' struggles when separated from close family in Germany. The interviewees, who had family connections still in Syria, found it difficult to commit to life in Germany. Mouna felt torn between adapting to her new life and maintaining loyalty to her family in Syria. "I'm not really sure if I've completely arrived yet, to be honest," she professed. While she and family members who had made it to Germany, "did feel safe, and we [they] started to get used to things" in Germany, she "would only feel really happy if my [her] whole family were here," ("Feeling of Arriving," Aleek, Mouna). Without them, "my life is not quite complete," she said ("Missing the Family in Syria," Aleek, Mouna). It was challenging to build a new life in Germany, knowing it would exclude significant family. Mira, on the other hand, explained how she could feel "good here right from the beginning" and build a new life in Germany because she did not have "anyone left behind" ("Feeling of Arriving," Mira). Facebook was often their only connection back home, and interviewees described feeling torn between worlds as they heard news of family in Syria experiencing torture and threats to their life. Belonging could not be met if family safety had not been secured.

Interviewees trying to build community in Germany also faced culture shock regarding cultural differences in interconnectedness. Refugees' values for close connection with neighbors

were incongruent with the cultural differences they encountered in Germany, diminishing their sense of belonging even within the neighborhood. In Syria, Mouna described neighborly relations as intimate as family:

In Syria, if I ever got sick, my neighbor...would do everything I couldn't do... We don't know our neighbors at all here. Everyone lives separate lives... So, inviting the neighbors for coffee or something like that, it just doesn't happen... Some don't even say hello.... [In Syria], it's inconceivable that neighbors not greet one another... [Social ties] were much stronger there (Aleek, Mouna).

Mouna's failed attempts to connect with her German community stemmed largely from cultural disconnection. Once, she tried to connect with her German neighbors, and "they slammed the door in my [her] face." Forming relationships with her German community felt "like there's a wall" where everyone "lives all on their own." These rejections made her apprehensive "that they're not going to want you to talk to them," ("Social Contacts in Germany and Syria," Aleek, Mouna). Similarly, Yasmin compared how it was "very normal" to knock on your neighbors to borrow some kitchen ingredients in Syria, while "here, nobody knocks the door of nobody," ("Germany, Berlin," Merei, Yasmin). Interviewees interpreted the estranged relations with neighbors as falling short of the breadth and depth of Syrian values for interconnectedness, and this cultural disconnection exacerbated their alienation.

Vulnerabilities such as age and unhealed trauma compounded interviewees' alienation as additional barriers to social connectedness. Yasmin described how the elderly are especially at risk. "For a person who is 65... it's difficult. And I think we have a different understanding of dignity...of the value of the human being himself," she explained ("Germany, Berlin," Merei, Yasmin). The close-knit social fabric of Syrian culture was an essential part of life.

Reconfiguring their social identity in an unfamiliar world is harder, as the elderly may greatly rely on previously formed social connections and have potentially less resources than younger adults to establish new ones. Unhealed trauma can also further isolate Syrian refugees. While

Yasmin describes having “a lot of friends,” she doubts most Syrian refugees “were successful in terms of building a community, a real community.” She believes that “this generation” of Syrian adults who “arrived in Germany or arrived any place in the world... All of us have a lot of pain... A lot of us don’t feel balanced,” (“Germany, Berlin,” Merei, Yasmin). She identified her trauma from escaping war in Syria as a barrier to social connectedness, which emphasizes the vulnerable sharing of emotions. Even with the many friends she has, she lacks the intimacy or the ability to express the depth of her pain that is required for belonging.

Despite these challenges, interviewees envisioned a future of belonging where they lived in harmony with German society. Mira described her vision was “to live in peace and safety among people who like me, whom I like...without problems and complications,” she said (“Future Wishes and Dreams,” Mira). With this vision in mind, some interviewees developed a sense of belonging through mirroring the community experience they are skilled at developing. One of the most nurturing ways being finding small, intimate groups where they can build upon experiences of connection. Through the confidence gained from cultivating these “microcosms of belonging,” as I term these efforts, refugees could ladder their feelings of home from small settings to the larger German society.

Building Microcosms of Belonging

I found patterns where interviewees mitigated alienation through recreating intimate dynamics in Germany in what I term “microcosms of belonging.” Developing familial structures that cultivate a similar social embeddedness in Germany as in Syria, is an example of this microcosmic experience. Yasmin described how she had friends that embody “the atmosphere of families,” such as Sasha, who is a “very warm person” that “takes care of everything about my

life— administrative things,” (“Germany, Berlin,” Merei, Yasmin). Hayyan also found love and practical support through his friendships. “I’m lucky to be surrounded...by affection... European and British and American friends are there, and for me that is society. And I’ve been lucky to have a lot of support,” he explained, (“Racism and Media,” Al Yousouf, Hayyan) Finding a similar support network mitigates the loss of both the affective and functional roles of missing family members. As Hayyan explained, a close group of friends could provide him the social connectedness equivalent to belonging to a whole “society.”

The welcoming efforts of individual Germans also contributed to these microcosms of belonging. Invited to live with a German couple for a few years, Hayyan described his two primary stages of belonging. First, he struggled to meet basic needs for security like, “Where would I live? Where could I stay?” The couple’s consistent generosity; however, quelled those existential anxieties, and he could then begin emotionally connecting with Germany. “For the first time, I started to feel that I belong... This country has something to do with me. And I have something to do with it... A foundation, a family, and that was something very important for me,” he explained. Their welcoming efforts created an intimate experience of belonging, which Hayyan credited as “a clear step forward” in improving his confidence to participate in German society. “I was able to get to know German society personally and immediately without having to rely on what other people told me,” he explained (“Berlin,” Al Yousouf, Hayyan). Being socially embedded within a home environment gave him the safe space to reflect upon his own preconceptions of Germany, ones which he previously viewed as incongruent to his identity; and reshape them with positive first-hand experience.

Other German friends also welcomed him into social activities, making him feel connected. Hayyan was shocked by the openness of his German friends. We “became so close that I was surprised... There was still a language barrier, and I couldn’t express all of my

feelings...but nonetheless, we were friends,” he shared. Both parties’ open-mindedness overrode the language barrier to connection. Hayyan could begin sharing his feelings, a key marker of *social connectedness*. Even recent German acquaintances would make the effort to include him in intimate social activities. For instance, an acquaintance reached out to him on Facebook to invite Hayyan to his birthday party after just meeting each other once. “They invited me to their birthday even though I may have only met that person once,” Hayyan remarked, (“Berlin,” Al Yousouf, Hayyan). Germans’ open-minded efforts to include interviewees superseded the language barrier and risk of isolation—major threats to belonging.

Interviewees also initiated connection with Germans through social organizations—another example of a microcosm of belonging. At the Lu-Lu Café, Mouna could “meet people and chat a bit.” She participated in the social café for the next three and a half years, and this causal group evolved into a friendship circle that would go to “a lot of things together,” (“Lu-Lu Café Activities,” Aleek, Mouna). Mouna’s regular participation and long-term engagement demonstrates her identification with this social group and her commitment to connection. She described herself as “very sociable,” and having not just “lots of new friends” with “Palestinian, Syrians, even Afghanis,” but also engaged with German women at her local university. “I certainly don’t live an isolated life,” she said (“New Contacts and Friendships in Germany,” Mouna Aleek). Refugees pursued opportunities for community engagement in diverse settings, knowing that passiveness could lead to isolation. “I love to be with people... I hate to be alone and lonely. I also like to help people,” Saloua similarly expressed. This passion drove Saloua to participate in the Volkssolidarität’s sewing café, finding congruence with its social work, even though “this wasn’t my [her] profession.” She had committed to “stay in Germany” and took responsibility for the outcomes in her life. She “didn’t want to be alone,” so she focused on going to the sewing café “frequently and eventually every day” (“Germany,” Nyazy, Saloua).

These cases show patterns in refugees choosing to challenge themselves in building social connections within a foreign environment.

These microcosmic circles of belonging gave interviewees confidence that they could belong to the greater German society. Despite the language barrier and her older age, the sewing café became a source of confidence for Saloua— an “important anchor” to venture her German abilities and social confidence. Saloua credits her sense of belonging to Germany from the “great welcome” she had received at the sewing café. “I owe a lot to it directly or indirectly” and “maybe they didn’t even realize what kind of help they were giving me, but it mattered a lot,” she expressed (“Germany,” Nyazy, Saloua). Finding the connection and participation in the small-scale café gave her the confidence that she could belong beyond, too. The inclusion of Germans and the initiative of refugees to join social organizations shifted a sense of belonging from these intimate social circles to society at large.

Berlin’s Multicultural Landscape

Berlin’s multiculturalism empowered refugees to be constituents of a cosmopolitan landscape. Interviewees spoke admiringly of Berlin as home. One visit to Berlin, and Hayyan “knew. Here is a place where I [he] can live.” Being surrounded by so many people, he no longer felt isolated like he had felt in the rural village upon his arrival in Germany. “Even if I hadn’t got any friends there, I could go into a café...see people on the street. I went into underground stations just to be among people,” he described. In Berlin, he was not one of the few but one of the many. Hayyan felt so connected to Berlin, that he faced homesickness. “Whenever I [he] was away from Berlin after a week, I [he] wanted to go back,” he voiced, (“Berlin,” Al Yousouf, Hayyan).

Multicultural cities like Berlin also provided opportunities for microcosmic experiences of belonging, when refugees found cultural congruence with Arab communities. Berlin provided access to familiar resources and community norms, while rural areas with their more homogeneous German population felt isolating. Mouna could “feel a bit more at home” in Berlin with the “many Arab shops” which contrasts from the experiences of her brother in the countryside near Munich where “there are no Arab shops there, and you can’t necessarily find what you want to buy in German shops,” (“Differences Between Cities in Germany,” Aleek, Mouna). She mentioned how Berlin, with its “many Arabs, many Palestinians,” gave her a community to practice “our festivals, our traditions, our customs” and feel less estranged in a “country where the society doesn’t really know them.” (“Importance of Refugee Community,” Aleek, Mouna). This cultural congruence could be found in even the basic aspects of life, like grocery shopping. Mouna described how specific zucchini and vine leaves for Syrian meals were “not available in Germany,” but could be bought in specialized Arab grocery stores in Berlin (“Shopping for Household in Germany,” Aleek, Mouna). Congruence is about alignment with values and norms, and by identifying with the Arab community within the larger German one, the interviewees could conjure a sense of home.

Arab social organizations also became centers for the *identification* and *participation* component of belonging for refugees. Saloua worked in an Arab women's organization. There, she could identify with those who had the “same difficulties more or less” and felt safe sharing her struggles as a refugee. They shared common hobbies like the desire “to cook, to sew, to knit,” and organized events to support each other—advocating for mothers in the group “whose children were still in Syria,” as well as organizing community events like “swimming courses...ballet dancing for women, and... fashion shows in senior citizens homes.” Along with her leadership role at the municipality center, Saloua identified these groups as a key source of

her *social connectedness*. Her frequent participation helped her and other refugees there “to overcome our suffering and pain in order to forget what we had experienced in Syria,” (“Germany,” Nyazy, Saloua). Finding communities, they could identify with and participate in was monumental for interviewees in moving through trauma to social connectedness.

Despite cultural differences, refugees also identified congruent values, like the value for structure emphasized by Germany’s public transport system, which impelled them to want to belong in Germany. Regarding Berlin’s public transport system, Mouna expressed how it was something “I [she] could have never imagined before...like in a fantasy film or a comic.” It differed starkly to Syria’s more spontaneous transport structure. In Syria, “it’s just chaos,” she remarked, “there’s no order... You’re getting on the bus, and suddenly it comes and pushes you aside.” Mouna admired the “ordered and organized” structure throughout Germany. “If there’s a queue, you know when it’s your turn,” she described. The order established a level of trust and respect in the system. “That’s a real positive...reliable public order, and I like that,” she exclaimed (“Differences between Cities in Germany,” “New Things in Berlin” & “Neatness in Berlin,” Aleek, Mouna). This cultural framework inspired her and others to want to find a way to contribute. “I was afraid at first, but it's also well organized. And I immediately decided that I wanted to work here,” (“Germany,” Mira). Admiration for Germany’s public transportation, and its congruence with their own values of reliability and organization, overcame fear and inspired a motivation to want to participate in that, however different it might be.

Relationship with Authorities & Societal Perceptions

Developing a sense of belonging has both internal and external facets. Richard Lee and Steven Robbins (1995) proposed belonging could be measured by comparing dimensions of *social connectedness* and *social assurance*. *Social connectedness* explores the ability to be

emotionally vulnerable with others and to feel a sense of social unity.⁵³ This internal variable of belonging relates to its external counterpart of *social assurance*— the need for reassurance from others to achieve a sense of belonging.⁵⁴ Therefore, the external elements of public perception and relations with authorities also influenced interviewees’ sense of belonging.

Interviewees interpreted German authorities’ non-transparent communications over asylum status as a lack of social assurance, and it restricted their sense of belonging. Hayyan perceived his asylum selection process as unpredictable and alienating. “It took a whole year before I got a residence permit,” he divulged, yet “other people in the same home got a residence permit much quicker.” There was no communication as to why, and he had no control over hastening the process. Legally in limbo, Hayyan’s emotional stability was on the line. “It was an unclear situation... I didn’t know...if I’d be sent back,” he explained, (“Germany,” Al Yousouf, Hayyan). Hayyan did not have the social assurance he needed to connect with the country and plan his future. Considering the prioritization of the family unit in Syria, interviewee families that were divided by differing residency trajectories could not envision belonging without the immediate security of their family. Saloua’s husband, for example, had his asylum and residency approved for Germany, while she still did not have a word of her status. As her husband was having his four-hour asylum hearing, she did not know if she would “be allowed to stay or whether I’d [she’d] have to go back to Syria,” (“Germany,” Nyazy, Saloua). It took two and a half years before she got her residence permit. With neither legal assurance nor transparency, refugees like Saloua could not conceptualize belonging in a country that could not guarantee the security of their family unit.

⁵³ Richard Lee and Steven Robbins, “Measuring Belongingness: The Social Connectedness and the Social Assurance Scales,” *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 42 (1995): 239, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.42.2.232>.

⁵⁴ Lee and Robbins, “Measuring Belongingness,” 239.

However, a clear legal status contributed to the social assurance aspect of sense of belonging. Getting the residence permit, Mira meant that she could be “treated equally...like the Germans,” she described, (“Residence Status,” Mira). Hayyan’s “clear status” made him feel like he could “go to Berlin legally” and “start again” – choices he could finally make about life in Germany. “A few moments made up for a whole year of suffering,” he explained (“Berlin,” Al Yousouf, Hayyan). The uncertain abeyance of his legal status had been the agonizing barrier to belonging– not the realization he would have to start a new life.

Positive interactions with German authorities also gave interviewees the social assurance that they could belong as equals in society. After war-torn Syria and the police brutality they encountered in countries during their escape, interviewees were surprised to feel safe with the German police. When Mira was questioned if she feared violent police confrontation because of her refugee status and hijab, she responded, “I’m not afraid of the police.” She believed they would treat her with respect regardless. “If I get lost somewhere, I can ask a police officer, and they’ll tell me the way,” she elaborated, (“Headscarf, Fear, and Insecurity,” Mira). Hayyan described the police safety as a “pleasant surprise.” While crossing the border in Hungary, the police there had “held onto our shoulders and put a mask on us,” but “in Germany, you don’t have to be afraid of policemen... of being abused,” he compared (“Germany,” Al Yousouf, Hayyan). These positive reactions from authority figures, like police, acted socially assured interviewees that they could belong as equals in Germany.

Positive public perception in Berlin also gave interviewees the social assurance that they could be appreciated. “To be honest, I love Berlin,” said Yasmin, “It’s maybe the only place since I left Homs, where I feel comfortable and at some points, I try to lie to myself, saying I don’t have feelings for this city. But I do.” She credits this love to Berlin’s vast freedoms and well-treatment of her, which gave her the social assurance to develop a sense of belonging.

“Berlin offered me a lot of opportunities and a lot of recognition, and this is something, maybe, in depth, makes me feel satisfied,” she explained, (“Germany, Berlin,” Merei, Yasmin). Social assurance is the external security that refugees’ efforts to participate will be well-received and valued. Berlin’s capacity to grow their economic and social fabric through the challenges of diversity meant Syrian refugees were not viewed as outsiders but as constituents of that diverse landscape.

Legal refugee status provided social assurance, but for some, it also bore the paradox of public privilege and stigma. Yasmin describes this quandary. The legal status of being a refugee gives a public title to her reality– that she is “a person who is displaced;” however, the title was burdened with both “being stigmatized as refugees, and being privileged,” she said. Wavering between privilege and stigmatization hinges on the public perception of her role in German society. When applying to Humboldt University, for example, the administration guaranteed her admission if she had asylum status. Yasmin was conflicted, realizing the acceptance implied her incapability of university entrance without a refugee designation. Although legal recognition was validating, she felt demoralized by the feebleness it assumed. “Why should I be a refugee to accept me?.. If you see me as a capable person, why should I be a refugee?” she questioned (“Germany, Berlin,” Merei, Yasmin). The “privilege” of the refugee title meant having to identify with a public association of helplessness and need for modifications that overshadowed the inherent qualities and skills they, as educated and established people, carried. Yasmin hints at a larger social issue of belonging. Can one truly belong if society only accepts an aspect of your reality and not your whole self? Public perception attempts to set the external barometer for belonging.

Chapter Conclusions

The chapter explored how Syrian cultural values for interconnectedness influenced their sense of belonging in Germany. Using theories of belonging— identification, participation, congruence, and connection as well as social connectedness and social assurance, this study found that interviewees mirrored similar socially intimate dynamics in Germany in what I termed “microcosms of belonging.” This looked like nurturing familial structures in Germany with friends and host families. Alienation ensued when interviewees’ desire for connection with neighbors was incongruent with German cultural values. Individual vulnerabilities such as being elderly and carrying traumas exacerbated this isolation. Significantly, the inclusionary efforts of Germans combined with interviewees’ initiative to join social organizations, built confidence to about belonging in society at large. Multicultural cities like Berlin also provided opportunities for microcosmic experiences of belonging, when refugees found cultural congruence with Arab communities and aspects of German culture, like the orderliness of the public transportation system, which impelled them to want to contribute. Public perception and relations with authorities were external determinants of a sense of belonging. Authorities’ non-transparent communications over asylum status were interpreted as a lack of social assurance and barred the development of a sense of belonging. In contrast, positive interactions with authorities like police and clear legal status gave interviewees the social assurance that they could belong as equals in society.

CHAPTER THREE: KARAMA

Integration means that I can find my own flat. So, if I have guests who come to visit me, I can ask them to stay with me, not to leave at 9 p.m. because I am not allowed to have

guests after 9 p.m. at the accommodation center. (“Language and Integration,” Merei.Yasmin)

Above, Yasmin describes her vision of integration with a Syrian refugee man she was having a workshop with. At the time of the interviews, she was leading support workshops for refugees at a center and once had a conversation with an elderly man about what integration means to each of them. While she described to him wanting her own flat because it would bring her independence and freedom, the older man shared his interpretation of integration as being “free to learn the way to the nearest supermarket to get eggs and tomato and come back home,” and to be able to “say good morning” to “a nice German neighbor... That’s it,” (Language and Integration, Merei, Yasmin).

Yasmin and the man’s conversation about integration illustrate a yearning for self-sufficiency, freedom, and social connection. The man wanted to achieve a basic level of social interaction comparable to his life in Syria. The exchange of neighborly good mornings was a nod to his humanity, a recognition of his dignity. “For a person who is 65... It's difficult,” said Yasmin (Language and Integration, Merei, Yasmin). “We have different understanding of dignity... Of the value of the human being.” These patterns of self-actualization and yearning for social reciprocity could best be coded as a desire to restore dignity.

Dignity in Arabic means *karama*, and the term carries a historical symbolism about independence and honor. The term rose in prominence as a political motivator in the Arab Spring– uprisings which erupted after the death of street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia.⁵⁵ *Karama* was used in a viral video made by female Egyptian activist, Asmaa Mahfouz, where she advocated for demonstrations at Tahrir Square on January 25th of 2011 enlisting the public to

1. ⁵⁵ Zaynab El Bernoussi, *Dignity in the Egyptian Revolution: Protest and Demand During the Arab Uprisings* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 3.

stand up for their dignity against the government.⁵⁶ Mahfouz's discourse became a symbol of resistance and perseverance against the Mubrak government and of the larger push towards democracy and human rights.⁵⁷ Karama discourse became a political motivator to rebel against the Mubarak regime's deprivation of dignity.

In Arabic, karama is a dignity defined by inherent worth of all people regardless of their status.⁵⁸ As a result of its cultural significance, studies have found the prevalence of karama discourse in displaced Syrians abroad. Refugees have lost almost everything, and it is understandable that they are concerned with cultivating karama, an intrinsic dignity, independent of social status. Likewise, this study discovered a pattern in the discourse on dignity. Therefore, this chapter will analyze how refugees seek karama, identifying the factors which diminish and fulfill it.

Stories of Karama

Interviewees shared how cultural attributions of dignity resulted in culture shock. Yasmin provided a short story of the death of her older neighbor. She described her acquaintance with him as a compilation of simple, spontaneous interactions and misunderstandings:

I had an old neighbor. Sometimes he knocked the door to ask me help him wearing his socks because he can't bend. And he used to speak German loudly because I don't understand. And when he feels that I don't understand, he starts shouting, because maybe he thought that I will understand if he speaks loudly. One day, he knocked, asking me to pick up his key because he dropped it. (Memories of Homs and New Relation to Berlin, Merei, Yasmin).

Yasmin's social interactions with him were far from the close ties she had had with neighbors in Syria. His sudden absence had her wondering how he was.

⁵⁶ El Bernoussi, *Dignity in the Egyptian Revolution*, 4.

⁵⁷ El Bernoussi, *Dignity in the Egyptian Revolution*, 1–8.

⁵⁸ F. Grandi, K. Mansour, and K. Holloway, *Dignity and Displaced Syrians in Lebanon*. 'There is no Karama Here,' (Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute, 2018), 1–2.

Suddenly, I stopped seeing him. And after I asked, I knew that he passed away two months before. In Syria, if someone dies, they call on the mosques. They use speakers, so you hear that ‘X’ passed away. And they print papers... so people know and go to the farewell. Here death happens silently... Maybe it's a part of how cities, like Berlin, present themselves without sadness. I think it's always a happy, happy scene of the city... In Syria, it's very normal to see people carrying the body in a box, taking it to the mosque or to the church... It raises this question about this last year as a person spent here [year before death], without emotion and surrounding (Confrontation with Death in Syria and Germany, Merei, Yasmin).

Yasmin’s culture shock lies in the stark contrast between the physical and relative emotional proximity that she was accustomed to. This man was her neighbor, someone she would have invariably been close to in a Syria. In Germany, her neighbor was a stranger. Yasmin struggles with the idea of living with dignity in Germany, where the society views it differently– “without emotion and surrounding.”

Karama: Societal and Individual Contributors

Societal and individual components cultivate dignity. A study on Syrian refugees abroad, found three crucial factors for karama: *rights*, *respect*, and *independence*.⁵⁹ Dignity, in terms of *rights*, meant having a clear legal status and access to healthcare and education which protected them from abuses of authorities and society.⁶⁰ Legal rights validate and safeguard the intrinsic worth of the individual. Karama required *respect*, or a positive relationship with the host society; while indignity was characterized by being distrust and alienation from society.⁶¹ Finally, karama increased when Syrian refugees had the *independence* to make personal and economic choices, reach self-realization, and create a better future for their families.⁶² Examples included finding work and careers that match their educational qualifications as well as giving back to their host

⁵⁹ Grandi, Mansour, and Holloway, *Dignity and Displaced Syrians*, 9.

⁶⁰ Grandi, Mansour, and Holloway, *Dignity and Displaced Syrians*, 10-11.

⁶¹ Grandi, Mansour, and Holloway, *Dignity and Displaced Syrians*, 11.

⁶² Grandi, Mansour, and Holloway, *Dignity and Displaced Syrians*, 12.

communities.⁶³ Karama grows from a strong sense of self that is both internally cultivated and externally acknowledged.

Rights, Respect, and Independence

Interviewees showed how clear residency rights served as an external acknowledgment of dignity. Initial experiences of arrival clarify why official residency holds so much significance. Mouna described how her arrival in Germany consisted of multiple stops and separations from her fellow refugee travelers. The group of refugees she had arrived with were sent by police “to different places in the country, and everyone was put on a different bus,” (“First Arrival in Munich,” Aleek, Mouna). The group to Berlin was then further “divided up into different refugee hostels,” (“Move to Berlin,” Aleek, Mouna). Refugees felt they were losing their only social network. “The first shock was that we were separated. We wanted to stay together. We would have been able to cope with everything much better together... Then things got difficult,” remarked Hayyan (Registration at the Anchor Centre and Distribution, Hayyan Al Yousouf).

Along with this separation, interviewees described their disorientation upon relocation. When Mouna and her son arrived in Berlin, they “didn’t know anything. We [They] didn’t know anyone,” (Orientation in Berlin, Mouna Aleek). In a brief hearing, police told her she would live in the “Heim [Home].” Despite an interpreter being present, she struggled to understand the terminology of this relocation. “I didn’t even know what that word [Heim] means... didn’t know where it was!” Her overwhelm underscores the starting point of many refugees in Germany—choices about their future were completely in the hands of German authorities. These early experiences of helplessness prognosticate their desire to cultivate a sense of karama through attaining independence.

⁶³ Grandi, Mansour, and Holloway, *Dignity and Displaced Syrians*, 12–13.

Refugees continued to feel isolated and dependent on housing arrangements, as they felt they did not have the right to self-advocate under these conditions provided. Hayyan was moved to a rural village where learning German and engaging with the host community was a struggle. “There’s Lidl, and there’s Aldi... Even the church was shut. So, the idea of getting to know anyone or learning the language with anyone... There was none of that in the village,” (“Living in a Village and Isolation,” Al Yousouf, Hayyan). Few opportunities to connect with his outside world, meant more time to ruminate about Syria. He “had a mobile phone and could use Facebook, and that was it,” so he “followed the news from Syria about what IS had done now,” (“Experiencing Berlin,” Al Yousouf, Hayyan).

Likewise, Mira stayed silent about her discomfort in her early living arrangements, given her and other refugees’ dependence on that residency. Mira lived in a refugee center hostel with four female roommates. She “would have liked to live in a room on my [her] own,” but she was placed with mostly Russian-speaking women, with whom she, “couldn’t communicate with,” (“Life at the Asylum Home,” Mira). When her roommates invited men, Mira grew increasingly uncomfortable.

What I didn’t like was that the bathrooms were always mixed, and sometimes I would come into the bathroom and want to take a shower, and there’d be a man in the women’s bathroom– showering with a woman together. So then, I didn’t feel comfortable taking a shower, (“Life at the Asylum Home,” Mira).

When her roommate invited her boyfriend to frequent the shared space at night, Mira grew increasingly uncomfortable. From a culture she described in Syria, where “women and men who don’t know each other sleep separately,” she “felt very uncomfortable,” (“Move to a New Accommodation,” Mira). Yet, like the shower incidents, she felt she could not voice this discomfort, knowing that her refugee roommates also relied on this housing support. Instead, she stayed up alone late in the common area “until one or two or six in the morning” when the boyfriend would leave, (“Life at the Asylum Home,” Mira). “I didn’t want to tell on the

woman... Her to be thrown out. Where would she go?" she explained. Mira "somehow managed to get through that time" until she had her residence permit and her choices elevated. She was permitted to move into a women's hostel with bathrooms in suite. The residence permit gave her more rights, independence, and respect— the three key factors of karama.

Independence in mobility drastically improved the karama for other refugees as well. Once Hayyan got his residence permit, he could choose to leave the rural village. "Once I got my residence permit and moved to Berlin and could start learning German, I had the feeling that I am slowly becoming a part of society," he expressed ("Feeling of Relief, Stability and Arrival," Al Yousouf, Hayyan). The residence permit gave him more freedom to be part of society. He could make choices to reach a personal sense of dignity— moving to Berlin and improving his German.

Stable housing allows for future-making, which is a component of the independence aspect of karama. Yasmin is on a work visa unlike the other refugees, and she moves to a new flat every 6-12 months with each temporary job. She was in her 21st flat since she left her hometown of Homes, Syria. The temporary nature of her work and housing meant "looking at your [her] future" through a "very narrow horizon," ("Visa and Work in Germany," Merei, Yasmin). "You don't want to look 2 or 3 years further," she explained. Her ability to stay in Germany hinges on her success at finding acceptable job(s) within tight timeframes. Her example speaks to the existentialism many Syrian refugees face upon early entry in Germany— the inability to commit to future-making because they do not have choices in organizing their own sustainable living arrangements.

The ability to work or continue education, like housing mobility, helped interviewees gain the rights, respect, and independence needed for karama. Refugees arrive in Germany, often having to start from scratch. Yasmin said, "the biggest fear for me" is "to start in a new place. Start a new professional zero, a new social zero" ("Traveling to the USA and First Impressions,"

Merei, Yasmin). Former careers in Syria were once a source of dignity. In Germany, their German language abilities often determine their professional value. Yasmin provided examples of friends “who used to work as engineers, to work as doctors... For maybe 20 years or 23 years;” but in Germany, they have to “prove that you [they] deserve a position... And they may not be able to prove that because maybe they don’t learn the language well,” (“Language and Integration,” Merei, Yasmin). Their professional skills, often some of their greatest life-long achievements, are often non-transferable without language ability. Being a refugee is “not only about losing home,” expressed Yasmin. Rather, it is also the loss of dignity in society– the capacity to contribute and build ones’ own home.

The emotional consequences for not being able to self-actualize are severe. Saloua described how her son, a student, struggled at the requirement to complete his dentistry degree for the third time upon fleeing to Germany:

He suffered from depressions. He couldn't learn German either. He did not understand what was happening... For a whole year, he was completely lost, and he had no idea what would become of him. His psychological condition got worse and worse... He wanted to go back to Syria. Alas, he couldn't. He was lost, as many other Syrians, (“Working with Women Support Groups,” Nyazy, Saloua).

In contrast, Hayyan had the opportunity to complete his masters in Syria and is currently working on his doctorate in Germany, which is “what motivates me [him] at the moment. That’s really what’s missing,” (“What’s Missing,” Al Yousouf, Hayyan). The words “lost” and “missing” demonstrate how work or studies provide a sense of direction, a path to dignity.

Refugees identify financial independence as a barometer for having succeeded in Germany, for its demonstration of self-sufficiency and the ability to provide for the family. When Saloua’s husband was hired full-time at Al Jazeera, their family could afford their own apartment and no longer relied on governmental support. She described this liberation and sense of achievement as, “Finally all was well. We had made it... We were lucky,” she said (“Husband’s

Job at Al Jazeera,” Nyazy, Saloua). Interviewees could support their family in Syria through financial independence, going so far as to shift traditional gender roles. Yasmin’s family in Syria “depend on me [her],” (“Support for the Family in Syria from Here,” Merei, Yasmin). She describes how “as all the Syrian young girls,” she can “take care of them [her family] ...financially.” Gender roles shifted as Yasmin came to call herself, “The father of the family.” While her mother in Syria hopes Yasmin will have “a family, maybe with kids,” Yasmin finds it dignifying to be a breadwinner– to “know that they feel they can lay on me,” she said (“Contact with Mother,” Merei, Yasmin).

Karama and Giving Back

Karama has connotations of giving back and therefore relates with the theory of social reciprocity. Karama derives from the stem *karam*, meaning “generosity.”⁶⁴ American sociologist Alvin Gouldner first introduced the concept of a universal norm of reciprocity– or that people should help and not hurt those who helped them.⁶⁵ This social reciprocity is not unconditional and can vary amongst cultures in their institutionalization, but it is an essential feature of almost all moral codes and value systems.⁶⁶ Therefore, people tend to associate with those able to adequately reciprocate, and conflicts ensue when there is insufficient return, thereby dissuading social exploitation.⁶⁷ Even if repayment is not immediate, the recipient remains socially indebted.⁶⁸ In other words, social reciprocity fosters trust that relationships will be mutually

⁶⁴ El Bernoussi, *Dignity in the Egyptian Revolution*, 1–2.

1. ⁶⁵ Alvin W. Gouldner, “The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement,” *American Sociological Review* 25, no. 2 (1960): 171.

⁶⁶ Gouldner, “The Norm of Reciprocity,” 171.

⁶⁷ Gouldner, “The Norm of Reciprocity,” 174–177.

⁶⁸ Gouldner, “The Norm of Reciprocity,” 174.

beneficial. Karama is a key feature of identity and Syrian social life.⁶⁹ Therefore, refugees' ability to socially reciprocate the support they received in Germany can help foster karama.

Refugees described how they wanted to enlist their skill sets and give back to the German community. For example, Yasmin works with refugee women at accommodation centers in Berlin, documenting their asylum experiences. Likewise, Saloua got a job as a social worker in a refugee center at the Volkssolidarität. "I'm lucky... I'm glad that they have given me the opportunity since I don't have any qualification certificate to back me in this profession. However, all my friends said that I could do it if I wanted to and that they would help me," ("Difficulties with Entering the Society and Hopes," Nyazy, Saloua). Saloua feels grateful to have found meaningful work that has given her a purpose in society. With some emotional and financial support, refugees creatively contributed their unique skill sets to society— helping other refugees with their own transferable wisdom and experience.

Social reciprocity is evident in interviewees' desire to contribute. "Any activity was fine for me," Saloua said ("Working with Women Support Groups," Nyazy, Saloua). "This way I could be of use too," she said, "I didn't want to just sit around and do nothing. I didn't want to eat and drink at the expense of German society." Leading a women's refugee support group and helping at the local municipality center, Saloua became an active citizen in sectors of society like education, entertainment, and sports classes. Similarly, Mira explained, she wishes to repay the generosity of German society. "It was really nice that we were all treated equally...like the Germans, and that we got so much help. And to this day, I feel indebted, and I want to give back what I received here," she said ("Residence Status," Mira). Working was the best way she could

1. ⁶⁹ R. Wells et al., "An Ecological Model of Adaptation to Displacement: Individual, Cultural and Community Factors Affecting Psychosocial Adjustment Among Syrian Refugees in Jordan," *Global Mental Health* 5 (2018): 5, doi:10.1017/gmh.2018.30.

envision reciprocating. “I’d like to make myself useful...to work, so that I can give something back to Germany of what Germany did for us, while the Arab countries closed their doors to us.” she explained. She acknowledges that Germany’s help was a costly humanitarian choice, or else other countries might have chosen the same. Therefore, investing labor back into the economy is a tangible way for her to reciprocate.

This social reciprocity relates to another aspect of karama— finding purpose. Having found her purpose in society, Saloua wants to motivate other refugees who are lost. “No matter how old they [refugees] are, they can do something... That would be my message,” she said (“Difficulties with Entering the Society and Hopes,” Nyazy, Saloua). Contributing is not so much about the ‘what,’ rather it is about the ‘why.’ Becoming an active part of a new society is to be dignified. “They need to be part of German society... That's what we have to do. We must live together,” explained Saloua. She wants other refugees to know it will not be an easy transition, and that they may “have to use their hands and sign language to communicate in the beginning,” but “that's okay!” It is not about avoiding uncertainty, but about accepting that reality of, “we're here now,” and making the most of their opportunities to give back.

Karama in Terms of the Collective

Cultivating dignity in a collective sense is also important. Syrian refugees also focus on collective dignity, or the recognition of dignity to Syrian refugees as a group.⁷⁰ In these interviews, elderly refugees especially cultivate their sense of dignity not through self-actualization, but through creating a better future for their children. As Saloua said,

I don't know how my life will end. Whether it ends here or in another country... I don't even think that much about the future anymore, at least not about my own one. We Arabs have a certain way of thinking. We always try to give our children a good future, a better

⁷⁰ Grandi, Mansour, and Holloway, *Dignity and Displaced Syrians*, 9–10.

life. And that's what I did, ("Difficulties with Entering the Society and Hopes," Saloua Nyazy).

Hayyan has no children, but he sees his personal struggle within the larger context of society. His experience as a refugee has brought "bitterness and pain" but he addresses that pain with an "objective: to reduce the pain that people suffer, to give them hope," ("Wishes for Syria," Al Yousouf, Hayyan). He knows he is not the only one to suffer and sees his experience with these painful emotions as an avenue to support other refugees. As an individual, he can "do something that's good for Syria and for Germany." "I'm convinced that the more effort I make, the more I work on my own development, the better it is for me...and for society," he said. He views his karama not just as his attaining rights, respect, and independence but also through the collective development of the Syrian-German community.

Karama and Adaptation

The importance of karama also clarifies how refugees adapt in Germany. Certain behaviors and characteristics such as patience and strength in coping, demonstrating self-reliance through engaging in activities aligned with their values, or refusing assistance were seen as examples of protecting karama.⁷¹ In the interviews, the decision to commit to life in Germany was a powerful way of asserting ones' dignity in the face of few choices. Hayyan felt pressure from family back in Syria to create a good life in Germany, even if his reality was far from the self-sufficiency he imagined. As family members questioned, "How are you doing? Send us some pictures," ("Problems with Residence Permit and Bureaucracy and German Course," Al Yousouf, Hayyan). He couldn't bring himself to explain that, "things are going pretty bad. I'm alone. I don't feel at home. I'm thinking of turning around and going back." He particularly felt that his limited self-determination was a huge barrier to being part of society. "[I] couldn't get

⁷¹ Wells et al., "An Ecological Model," 5.

used to anything because I couldn't even choose where to live," he expressed ("Waiting and Frustration and the Thought of Going Back," Al Yousouf, Hayyan). However, after reaching a breaking point, Hayyan consciously committed to building a life in Germany. On his way to the foreigners' office to request to leave Germany, he had this shift in perspective:

I suddenly changed my mind... I didn't know if I wanted to stay in Germany or go back to Turkey until then. But then I thought: No, no, I'm going to stay here! You'll get through this. You've got through much worse things. You've lived without electricity, without water, without food. You've been shot at. You've had nowhere to live. And there's none of that here, so I decided to see it through— whatever happened. ("Waiting and Frustration and the Thought of Going Back," Al Yousouf, Hayyan).

Hayyan felt helpless to external factors, but he could start with making one internal choice:

commit to Germany. He reasserts his dignity through examples of past resilience to face the uncertainty in Germany.

To reach this commitment to Germany, refugees feel they must battle a loyalty to Syria. Investing in Germany raises fears of abandoning their home country. Yasmin is working on her education, but her "long term projects" bring "fears about the future" ("Final Words," Merei, Yasmin). Building a future in Germany "means that going back is a question mark." Her internal conflict to embrace a future in Germany consists of grieving the hope to return to Syria. Yasmin separates her dignity from the future of her homeland, acknowledging letting go is "a reality that I have [she has] to deal with."

Other interviewees deliberately made the choice to commit to Germany in the face of existential uncertainty. Mira avoids thinking of Syria. "I don't just want to try and forget. I want to forget," she said ("Changes and Differences," Mira). While in Germany, she does feel "a sense of uncertainty about the future;" however, she sees returning to Syria as more frightening. "Where I could possibly stay there [in Syria]? Where I could live there? And I can't come up with anything," she said. She thinks Germany is her only option. "I don't want to focus on that [Syria] at all. I want to make a new start... A new life." While refugees have few choices, their

conscious “choosing” of Germany and letting go of hopes for Syria is a fundamental assertion of their dignity. It is a mental shift from the past to the present and a viewing of Germany not as a continuation of the suffering which made them a victim, but as a place for potential survivorship.

Chapter Conclusions

Interviewee anecdotes illustrate a deeper yearning for self-actualization and social reciprocity— and could best be coded as a desire to restore dignity, or karama. In terms of rights, clear residency status served as a societal acknowledgment of dignity. Without it, refugees felt they did not have the right to advocate on behalf of themselves on challenges related to provided housing. The attainment of stable housing and the ability to work or continue education in Germany were markers of independence and interviewees identified financial independence as a barometer for success in Germany. Being a refugee is not only about losing home, it is also the loss of dignity to be able to contribute to society— the capacity to build one’s own home. As karama derives from the stem meaning “generosity,” I also connected karama with the theory of social reciprocity. Cultivating dignity in a collective sense— of being of worth to German society— was described important. Interviewees recalled examples of how they would like to give back to the community, such as through working or helping other refugees. Finally, in adapting to Germany, Syrian refugees’ decision to commit to building a life in Germany was a powerful way of asserting ones’ dignity in the face of few choices.

CHAPTER FOUR: TRUST & DIALOGUE

In the end, the authorities decided... he would be deported. We called in a lawyer. We filed an objection. Three times all in all. The third time, the lawyer said that our son...would not be deported. We trusted the lawyer, but when our son went to the office...the police arrested him... Two policemen accompanied him to the plane as if he was a criminal... I still don't understand why they treat people this way, ("Working with Women Support Groups," Nyazy, Saloua).

Saloua's son had been living alone as a refugee in Egypt and Spain and sought to join his family who'd received asylum in Germany. However, as she describes above, he was abruptly separated from his family and deported back to Spain— his Schengen country of entry under the Dublin Regulation. Saloua described being "shocked" when her son's promised legal safety was suddenly betrayed. Interview anecdotes like this demonstrate distrust between the German and refugee communities. Saloua's son's abrupt deportation capsized the trust in the German authorities and legal system with a painful realization: As refugees, they were not guaranteed human dignity. Their legal fate was not a collaborative measure, but a continuous towing of the line between asylum and deportation at the hands of those who could abruptly decide their destiny.

Like Saloua, interviews recalled lost trust in German institutions through experiences of bureaucratic betrayal— when expectations of institutional safety and trustworthiness were shattered. Hayyan felt betrayed by the German bureaucracy in the lack of transparency in acquiring his residence permit. He was placed in a rural village upon arrival, and it took him a year before he received his residence permit. Without it, he could not relocate or take German classes reserved for refugees. His attempts to get an update on his residency process got progressively desperate— from approaching security to even climbing the building wall and going to court. Yet, his question "“Why have I not got an appointment?”" only resulted in him being "sent away again," ("Problems with Residence Permit and Bureaucracy and German Course," Al Yousouf, Hayyan). Described as inefficient at best, and exclusionary at worst;

Saloua and Hayyan both shared examples of interactions with German bureaucracy that resulted in betrayals of trust.

However, interviewees also acknowledged Germans' distrust towards Syrian refugees. "Sometimes people gave us dirty looks... They were afraid of me, and that really bothered me," said Mouna ('Disappointments,' Aleek, Mouna). about her interactions with Germans. Similarly, Mira's attempts to socialize with some older German women in language cafés were dissuaded when they seemed to "respond to us with fear," ("Changes and Differences," Mira). Anti-migrant demonstrations were even more overt "I wanted to make a new start here, but I'm no longer sure what I'm facing," said Mira ("Headscarf, Fear and Insecurity," Mira). After continued experiences of rejection and anger "in the streets," Saloua concluded that there are some Germans "who truly hate us," ("Xenophobia in Germany," Nyazy, Saloua). Their distrust left her with the painful unanswered questions, "How come?.. Why do you treat me this way?"

Alleviating Distrust Through Dialogue

Some interviewees argued that media stories about the interactions between Syrian refugees and Germans could factor into the distrustful relations. Having formerly worked in journalism, Hayyan believes stereotypes formed in the media contribute to the fear of the 'other.' "I have the feeling that the media presents things badly if there is a problem between a refugee and a German," explained Hayyan ("Racism and Media," Al Yousouf, Hayyan). He elaborated how, "There's a catalog of 20 characteristics that refugees have... There's another catalog for the Germans... You get sorted into these boxes, but everyone's an individual." German's society's fear could include protective prejudices, unchallenged by a lack of exposure to individual stories that would dispute negative preconceptions of Syrian refugees as a group.

Research indicates that individual stories could be key to removing these “boxes” placed on refugees and Germans through trust-building. Scholars have identified two primary forms of trust. Trust is either predictive, or trust constructed by expectations satisfied from evidential past behaviors; or affective, the belief that efforts to share vulnerability and trust will be reciprocated.⁷² Trust is cultivated through communication between people.⁷³ Therefore, factors which influence communication, such as emotional expression and skillful sharing, are essential for trust building.⁷⁴ Moreover, building trust requires an understanding of the vulnerabilities of the people engaged.⁷⁵ If vulnerable sharing furthers trust, then practices which can exemplify vulnerability, like sharing emotions and personal stories, can contribute to affective trust-building.

Story Circles provides a practical example of the relationship between storytelling and trust-building. In 2020, Dr. Darla Deardorff published the Manual for Developing Intercultural Competencies for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,⁷⁶ introducing a seminal Story Circle methodology that would develop a replicable intercultural communication framework for the world to use.⁷⁷ The methodology aims to combat global social issues like extremism, refugee crises, and populism through facilitated storytelling. In small groups, called Story Circles, personal anecdotes are shared and compiled on a related

1. ⁷² R.A. Stern, “‘Trust is Basic’: Løgstrup on the Priority of Trust,” in *The Philosophy of Trust*, ed. P. Faulkner and T. Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University, 2017), 5–7.

⁷³ Krzysztof Konecki, “Trust in Symbolic Interactionist Research and in Phenomenological Investigation,” *Polish Sociological Review*, no. 207 (2019): 283.

⁷⁴ Konecki, “Trust in Symbolic,” 283.

1. ⁷⁵ Mateja Celestina, “Between Trust and Distrust in Research with Participants in Conflict Context,” *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 21, no. 3 (2018): 374.

⁷⁶ “Building Resilience through the Development of Intercultural Competencies,” UNESCO, accessed April 17, 2024, <https://en.unesco.org/themes/intercultural-dialogue/competencies#manual>.

⁷⁷ UNESCO, “Building Resilience.”

theme.⁷⁸ Organizations and universities around the world have since adopted the Story Circle methodology to counteract local negative perceptions of marginalized peoples. These include universities like Cornell's Office of Global Learning and The U.S. Department of Arts and Culture. Institutions researching best practices in global education, such as The Global Education Benchmark Group (GEBG), have also promoted UNESCO Story Circle curriculums.⁷⁹ Story Circles are seen as a resourceful and flexible methodology across social sectors, accredited to improve cultural competency through deliberate dialogue.

The distrust between Syrian refugees and the German community reflects the social issues addressed by Story Circles. Indeed, interviewees expressed that opportunities to share their stories built trust in the German community. Mouna and Saloua took part in the Berlin Free University's book project aimed at articulating female refugee stories. Mouna was first distrustful of the publications' intentions, but after her questions and concerns were thoroughly discussed, she enjoyed the opportunity to share her narrative and connect with the German student interviewers. Saloua believed that her voice in the book would fight society's distrust of Syrian refugees. "This was a great opportunity" to combat the "strange ideas about us," she said ("The Book Project," Nyazy, Saloua). "I never wanted to live at the expense of this society, and that's why I wanted to tell my story." The book gave her an opportunity to add her voice to a societal discussion already fixed on the 'what' and 'why' of being a refugee. Furthermore, she hoped the written dialogue would rebuild her trust with those in the German community whose negative preconceptions had her struggling to "forgive them." She wants "to make people

⁷⁸ Darla K. Deardorff, *Manual for Developing Intercultural Competencies: Story Circles* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 20-21.

1. ⁷⁹ "Navigating Global Education in Schools," Global Education Benchmark Group, accessed April 17, 2024, <https://gebg.org/>.

understand,” that being a refugee in Germany “wasn’t my [her] choice,” and “if it’s only one or two of them who change their minds, it’s worthwhile.”

Hayyan had an opportunity to share his story when invited to exhibit his photography in Berlin. It was his first chance to speak to a German public. “I spoke mainly about the difficulties that I couldn’t live where I wanted to live. I wanted to come to Berlin,” he said (“Positive Change of Life,” Al Yousouf, Hayyan). That vulnerability opened a door to building a close relationship with a German family. A kind couple in the audience welcomed him to live with them in Berlin— the start of years of dinner table conversations which helped him grow trust in German society.

I had a few clichés about Germany and the Germans... No doubt, Germans have some clichés about the Middle East, about Syrians, and about us. But, because we lived together as a family, we had breakfast together, went for walks together, talked... I was able to correct my ideas about Germany, (“Feeling of Relief, Stability and Arrival,” Al Yousouf, Hayyan).

A once “negative idea of the Germans,” that “they’re just working machines,” and that, “you can’t really have a German as a friend... changed completely,” (“Feeling of Relief, Stability and Arrival,” Al Yousouf, Hayyan). For example, he now views Germans not as “working machines,” rather as people who “recognize its [work’s] value.” Moreover, he witnessed how Germans are “friendly,” “polite with each other,” and “keep their temper under control.” The dinner table conversations, like informal Story Circles, established trust about the values and intentions of German people, once perceived alien from his own.

Interviewees also discussed the importance of Germans having the opportunity to share their fear and distrust with Syrian refugees directly. Yasmin sees Germans’ distrust as a “natural reaction” for “when a lot of people come from different culture, different place, to your country.” The “huge debates— about refugees, about identity, about demographic changes, about Islamophobia,” she thinks, are topics that Germans “have the right to address because it’s about

their future,” she said. Their fear is legitimate and should be recognized before it develops into dangerous forms of distrust like Islamophobia. Hayyan too empathizes with the German community and anticipated their fears. “People perhaps are afraid that we’ll change this society, and we don’t want to do that... That there’ll be more crime,” (“Final Words,” Al Yousouf, Hayyan). Interviewees expressed willingness to take leadership in empathetic dialogue. “We should sit down and talk about our fears,” said Hayyan, “Ask why there is this fear?.. Take a step towards each other. And if you start talking about things, then perhaps a lot of these fears would end up disappearing.”

Yet, Hayyan cannot be the only one. He calls for collective conversations that provide opportunities for intimacy and vulnerability, inspired by his own dinner table Story Circle. Everyone must “contribute something and bring in their own ideas and not just rely on things that they read or hear somewhere,” he said (“Final Words,” Al Yousouf, Hayyan). Engaging in respectful dialogue is a group responsibility:

I had this opportunity. People have shown understanding for me... of my culture, my education, and how I understand things. I would wish everyone to have an opportunity like that and be able to express themselves... That there’s a dialogue. And that dialogue will continue, (“Racism and Media,” Al Yousouf, Hayyan).

CONCLUSIONS

What shapes the Syrian refugee experience in Germany? Few studies investigate the oral history narrations of Syrian refugees, and my research is the first to analyze the question with video conversations sourced from “Archiv der Flucht.” I also make a methodological argument. While a *deductive* thematic analysis uses a pre-determined theory to analyze qualitative data, this research uses an *inductive* thematic analysis to draw conclusions from the choices refugees make in narration. After transcribing the footage of five separate interview films, I used the coding

software program, Taguette, to open code, axial code, and finally selectively code the data about their life in Germany. From this multistep coding process emerged the core themes of belonging, dignity, and trust; and I frame my analysis in three separate chapters of content analysis with a variety of interdisciplinary theories.

My first chapter on belonging explores how Syrian cultural values for interconnectedness influenced interviewees' later perceptions of belonging in Germany as refugees. Using current sociological theories, this study found that interviewees seek to mitigate feelings of alienation through recreating similar intimate dynamics in Germany in what I termed "microcosms of belonging." Significantly, combined inclusion efforts of Germans as well as refugees' initiative to join social organizations, built confidence to expand a sense of belonging from these intimate social circles to society at large. This stresses the importance of contextualizing cultural context in perceptions of belonging. Syrian refugees value interconnectedness, and on top of layers of trauma and familial separation, they struggle with integrating in Germany where the standards for connectedness are different. However, intimate connections like host families and social clubs are enough to foster a sense of belonging with Germany, and these interviews provide policymakers and NGOs with anecdotal evidence of that success.

The following chapter explores the pattern of Syrian refugees seeking karama (كرامة) in Germany which previous studies have not assessed in the context of Syrian refugees in Germany. Anecdotes from my research corroborate that rights, respect, and independence were markers of dignity. Interviewees' internal decision to commit to building life in Germany became a powerful choice of asserting ones' dignity in the face of few choices. My research also synthesizes karama with the theory of social reciprocity, given the stem of karam— meaning "generosity." Dignity was viewed by interviewees in a collective sense— of being of worth to German society through giving back to the community. This chapter also expands on the internal and external parameters

for integration in Germany. Refugees' external support in terms of residency rights were just as important as internal interpretations of independence. Policymakers may hasten the process of integration by supporting refugees in achieving independent, sustainable work and housing rather than on only short-term aid. Refugees emphasize the importance of creating avenues to reciprocate, as it empowers a sense of dignity under the cultural context of karama.

My last chapter interprets the relationship between trust-building and storytelling. Anecdotes reveal distrust between the German and Syrian refugee communities. Syrian refugees particularly lost trust in German institutions when expectations of institutional safety and trustworthiness were broken. Interviewees also acknowledged German society's distrust towards Syrian refugees, some arguing that media narratives factor into harmful stereotyping. In contrast, interviewees observed that telling their stories through university book projects, photography exhibitions, dinner table conversations helped them to develop trust in the German community. My analysis drew parallels between interviewees' suggestions for dialogue and the UNESCO Story Circle methodology as a potential solution to decaying trust.

A limitation of this case study is the sample size, and the small interviewee pool limits generalizations. However, this bachelor's thesis prioritized analytical depth over quantity, and the five interviews on Syrian refugees add up to more than 550 minutes of dialogue data. Another limitation is that the interviews were not self-conducted. Although my third person observation allows for the open-mindedness conducive for an inductive analysis, I had no control over the interview structure which could lead to untouched areas of exploration. Future research can expound upon the themes of dignity, belonging, and trust detected in this project to delve deeper into the complex nuances and variables of what defines Syrian refugee stories in Germany.

There are significant policy implications of my research. As media and politics often narrate the refugee experience for the public, this analysis highlights the stories and choices of refugees—often overlooked given their political and social vulnerability. My inductive thematic analysis is a bottom-up methodology. Anecdotes highlight interviewees’ pertinent struggles, as well as the experiences in Germany that have made a positive impact on their integration, thereby synthesizing key areas for policy improvement from the viewpoint of Syrian refugees. Future research could focus on how these same themes are considered from the perspective of the German bureaucracy, which could add to forming more holistic solutions to integration that meet the needs of both parties.

This digital oral history platform also has social implications. As oral history became a way to preserve or empower voices in history who, at the time, were marginalized, “Archiv der Flucht” is a potentially empowering platform for refugees to become equal creators of published history—balancing other third person mainstream media narratives. Oral history’s capacity for nonverbal signals, interactivity, and emotional depth are useful in clarifying the complex and emotive situations of this research question and exploring them from multiple perspectives simultaneously. Finally, the digitization of archives like “Archiv der Flucht,” provides a permanent platform for pedagogical purposes, widespread outreach, and timeless influence... just like its own Story Circle.

Bibliography

- Akgül, Hanife, Ahmet Zeki Güven, Sibel Güven, and Müyesser Ceylan. 2023. "Loneliness, Social Support, Social Trust, and Subjective Wellness in Low-Income Children: A Longitudinal Approach." *Children* 10, no. 9: <https://doi.org/10.3390/children10091433>.
- Aleek, Mouna. "Mouna Aleek." Interview by Ethel Matala de Mazza. *Archiv der Flucht*. Video. <https://archivderflucht.hkw.de/en/mouna-aleek/>.
- Al Yousouf, Hayyan. "Hayyan Al Yousouf." Interview by Mohammad A.S. Sarhangi. *Archiv der Flucht*. Video. <https://archivderflucht.hkw.de/hayyan-al-yousouf/>.
- Anderson, Katie E. 2010. "Chapter 28: Storytelling." In *21st Century Anthropology: A Reference Handbook*, edited by H. James Birx, 1-26. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Agamben, Giorgio. 1998. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen, 1-228. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Archiv der Flucht. n.d. "Archiv Der Flucht." Accessed February 19, 2024. <https://archivderflucht.hkw.de/en/>.
- Bacharach, Michael and Diego Gambetta. 2001. "Trust in Signs." In *Trust in Society*, edited by Karen Cook, 48-183. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Baldini, Simona B. 2019. "Digital Storytelling with Refugees: Analysis of Communication Setting from the Capability Approach Perspective." *Migrants and Migrations en SIC* 17.
- Baldini, Simona B. 2019. "Narrative Capability: Self-Recognition and Mutual Recognition in Refugees' Storytelling." *Journal of Information Policy* 9:132-147.
- Bhabha, Homi. K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge.

- Celestina, Mateja. 2018. "Between Trust and Distrust in Research with Participants in Conflict Context." *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 21, no. 3: 373-383.
- Communicating in the Third Space*, 2009, edited by Karin Ikas & Gerhard Wagner. New York: Routledge.
- Corbin, Juliet M., and Anselm Strauss. 1990. "Grounded Theory Research: Procedures, Canons, and Evaluative Criteria." *Qualitative Sociology* 13, no. 1: 3-21.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00988593>.
- Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History. n.d. "UNESCO Story Circles with Duke University." Accessed February 19, 2024.
<https://www.danvillemuseum.org/events/details/id/913/unesco-story-circles-with-duke-universit>.
- Deardorff, Darla. K. 2020. *Manual for Developing Intercultural Competencies: Story Circles*. New York: Routledge.
- Dunn, Elizabeth Cullen, and Jason Cons. 2013. "Aleatory Sovereignty and the Rule of Sensitive Spaces." *Antipode* 46, no. 1: 92-109. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12028>.
- El Bernoussi, Zaynab. 2021. *Dignity in the Egyptian Revolution: Protest and Demand during the Arab Uprisings*. UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Encyclopedia Britannica. n.d. "Daily Life and Social Customs." Accessed February 19, 2024.
<https://www.britannica.com/place/Syria/Daily-life-and-social-customs>.
- European Social Survey. August 8, 2016. "Source Questionnaire Round 8 2016/2017." Accessed February 19, 2024.

https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/round8/fieldwork/source/ESS8_source_questionnaires.pdf.

Fargues, Philippe, and Christine Fandrich. 2012. “The European Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis: What Next?” *Migration Policy Center Report 2012/14*, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, San Domenico di Fiesole (FI): European University Institute: 1-35.

Fassin, Didier, Matthew Wilhelm-Solomon, and Aurelia Segatti. 2017. “Asylum as a Form of Life: The Politics and Experience of Indeterminacy in South Africa.” *Current Anthropology* 58, no. 2:160–187. <https://doi.org/10.1086/691162>.

Fuchs, Lukas M., Jannes Jacobsen, Lena Walther, Eric Hahn, Thi Minh Tam Ta, Malek Bajbouj, and Christian von Scheve. 2021. “The Challenged Sense of Belonging Scale (CSBS)—A Validation Study in English, Arabic, and Farsi/Dari Among Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Germany.” *Measurement Instruments for the Social Sciences* 3, no. 3: 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42409-021-00021-y>.

Global Cornell. n.d. “Story Circles: Intercultural Understanding Workshops.” Accessed February 19, 2024. <https://global.cornell.edu/about/advocacy/story-circles-intercultural-understanding-works> hp.

Global Education Benchmark Group. n.d. “Navigating Global Education in Schools.” Accessed February 19, 2024. <https://gebg.org/>.

Gouldner. Alvin W.. 1960. “The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement.” *American Sociological Review* 25, no. 2.

- Grandi, F., Mansour, K., & Holloway, K. 2018. "There is no Karama Here." *Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG)*. Overseas Development Institute (ODI).
<https://www.odi.org/publications/11236-dignity-and-displaced-syrians-lebanon>.
- Hartmann, Kathrin and D. Vetter. 2022. "Vermittlung des Oral-History-Projekts 'Archiv der Flucht' durch Bibliotheken." Accessed February 19, 2024. <https://opus4.kobv.de/opus4-bib-info/frontdoor/index/index/docId/18038>.
- Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. 2023. "Loneliness and the Need for Belonging and Trust." Accessed March 8, 2024. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/health-happiness/2023/11/01/loneliness-and-the-need-for-belonging-and-trust/>.
- Holmes, Seth, and Heide Castaneda. 2016. "Representing the "European refugee crisis" in Germany and Beyond: Deservingness and Difference, Life and Death." *American Ethnologist* 43, no. 1:12-23.
- Konecki, Krzysztof. 2019. "Trust in Symbolic Interactionist Research and in Phenomenological Investigation." *Polish Sociological Review*, no. 207: 271–88.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26785935>.
- Kyriakides, Christopher. 2017. "Words Don't Come Easy: Al Jazeera's Migrant–Refugee Distinction and the European Culture of (Mis)Trust." *Current Sociology* 65, no. 7: 933–952. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392116658089>.
- Kyriakides, Christopher, Arthur McLuhan, Karen Anderson, Lubna Bajjali, and Noheir Elgendy. 2019. "(Mis)Trusted Contact: Resettlement Knowledge Assets and the Third Space of Refugee Reception." *Refuge* 35, no. 2: 24-35.

- Lee, Richard and Steven Robbins. (1995). "Measuring Belongingness: The Social Connectedness and the Social Assurance Scales." *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 42: 232-241. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.42.2.232>.
- Lucas, B.E., and M.M. Strain. 2010. "Keeping the Conversation Going: The Archive Thrives on Interviews and Oral history." In *Working in the Archives: Practical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition*, edited by Alexis E. Ramsey, Wendy B. Sharer, Barbara L'Eplattenier, and Lisa S. Mastrangelo, 259-277. Southern Illinois University Press.
- Markus, H.R. and Kitayama S. 1991. "Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation." *Psychological Review* 98: 224-253. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.98.2.224>.
- Merei, Yasmin. "Yasmin Merei." Interview by Joseph Vogl. *Archiv der Flucht*. Video. <https://archivderflucht.hkw.de/yasmin-merei/>.
- Merkin, Rebecca S., and Reem Ramadan. 2016. "Communication practices in the US and Syria." *SpringerPlus* 5, no. 845: 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40064-016-2486-9>.
- Mira. "Mira." Interview by Carolin Emcke. *Archiv der Flucht*. Video. <https://archivderflucht.hkw.de/mira/>.
- Nyazy, Saloua. "Saloua Nyazy." Interview by Mohammad A.S. Sarhangi. *Archiv der Flucht*. Video. <https://archivderflucht.hkw.de/saloua-nyazy/>.
- Ostrand, Nicole. 2015. "The Syrian Refugee Crisis: A Comparison of Responses by Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States." *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 3, no. 3: 255-279.

- Paskey, Stephen. 2016. "Telling Refugee Stories: Trauma, Credibility and the Adversarial Adjudication of Claims for Asylum." *Santa Clara Law Review* 6, no.3: 456-530.
<https://digitalcommons.law.scu.edu/lawreview/vol56/iss3/1>.
- Ritchie, Donald A. 2015. *Doing Oral History: Third Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Seawright, Jason, and John Gerring. 2008. "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options." *Political Research Quarterly* 61, no. 2: 294-308.
- Sim, Ryan. 2016. "Into the Mind of the Refugee: Unpacking Modern Refugee Mental Health." *Harvard International Review* 37, no. 4: 46–48. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26445618>.
- Singelis, Theodore M., and William J. Brown. 1995. "Culture, Self, and Collectivist Communication: Linking Culture to Individual Behavior." *Human Communication Research* 21, no. 3: 354-390. Sage Periodicals Press
- Stern, Robert. A. 2017. "'Trust is Basic': Løgstrup on the Priority of Trust." In *The Philosophy of Trust*, edited by Faulkner, P. and Simpson, T., 272-294. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- StoryCenter. 2019. "Stories of Home: Building Solidarity Among Women Immigrants, Refugees, and Artists." Youtube Video, August 6, 2019.
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2zMrq22-Y2s5YhnFtwspcdsLwX_MsS6C.
- "Story Circles: Intercultural Understanding Workshops." *Global Cornell*. Accessed March 8, 2024. <https://global.cornell.edu/about/advocacy/story-circles-intercultural-understanding-workshp>.

Storytelling and Ethics: Literature, Visual Arts and the Power of Narrative, 2017, edited by Hanna Meretoja and Colin Davis. New York: Routledge.

Terry, Gareth, Nikki Hayfield, Victoria Clarke, and Virginia Brown. 2017. "Chapter 2: Thematic Analysis." In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*, edited by Carla Willig and Wendy Stainton Rogers, 18-37. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

UNESCO. n.d. "Building Resilience through the Development of Intercultural Competencies." Accessed February 19, 2024. <https://en.unesco.org/themes/intercultural-dialogue/competencies#manual>.

"UNESCO Story Circles with Duke University." *Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History*.

Accessed March 8, 2024.

<https://www.danvillemuseum.org/events/details/id/913/unesco-story-circles-with-duke-universit>.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). n.d. "Refugee Statistics." Accessed February 19, 2024. <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>.

U.S. Department of Arts and Culture. n.d. "We Believe That We Will Win: The People's State of the Union 2022." Accessed February 19, 2024. <https://usdac.us/psotu>.

Varvantakis, Christos, Katerina Rozakou, Ifigeneia Anastasiadi, Pafsanias Karathanasis, and Konstantinos Aivaliotis. 2019. "Critical Encounters: The 'European Refugee Crisis.'" *Journal of Anthropological Films* 3, no. 2:1-4. <https://doi.org/10.15845/jaf.v3i02.2902>.

"We Believe That We Will Win: The People's State of the Union 2022." *U.S. Department of Arts and Culture*. Accessed March 8, 2024. <https://usdac.us/psotu>.

Wells, Ruth, Catalina Lawsin, Caroline Hunt, Omar Said Youssef, Fayzeh Abujado, and Zachary Steel. 2018. "An Ecological Model of Adaptation to Displacement: Individual, Cultural

and Community Factors Affecting Psychosocial Adjustment among Syrian Refugees in Jordan.” *Global Mental Health* 5. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gmh.2018.30>.

Williamson, Kirsty, Lisa M. Given, and Paul Scifleet. 2018. “Chapter 19: Qualitative Data Analysis.” *In Research Methods (Second Edition)*, edited by Kirsty Williamson and Graeme Johanson, 453-476. Chandos Publishing.

World Health Organization. n.d. “Refugee and Migrant Health.” Accessed February 19, 2024. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/refugee-and-migrant-health>.

Zhang, Yao, Yushu Zhang, Yan Wu, and Frank Krueger. 2023. "Default Matters in Trust and Reciprocity." *Games* 14, no. 1. <https://doi.org/10.3390/g14010008.k>