



**BEING IN LIMBO:**

**Digital Habitus and Contemporary Colonialism in the Case of Syrian  
Refugees in Turkey, Greece, and Germany**

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as a thesis for the degree of  
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Signature: ..... *Barış ÖKTEM* .....

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## ABSTRACT

This study discusses Syrian refugees' migration trajectories and narratives, based on the fieldwork conducted among Syrian refugees in Turkey, Greece, and Germany as three major geo-political countries particularly concerning Syrian refugee communities. The research adopts a qualitative research map, using the Grounded Theory research approach, ethnography and semi-structured interview methods, in six cities and eight refugee protection centres and camps.

The research findings obtained and generated during the field studies are evaluated and analysed using theoretical toolboxes derived from sociology and political science. Especially important are three theoretical frameworks: Power Relations, Digital Habitus, and Political and Social Subjectivities, through which I analysed the Syrian refugees' practices of mobilities, migration routes, and perception of targeted countries in detail. These theoretical frameworks assist in understanding the implications and limitations of power relations in refugees' lives, as well as refugees' use of the internet and media and the influence of these uses on their refugee's perceptions and desires while being in limbo in refugee camps. Also, the importance of varying capital forms and women refugee's gender experiences in forced migration and displacement are foregrounded and evaluated.

The research proposes a new methodological system that helps to understand contemporary colonialism while addressing current colonial and exploitation relations - Semi-Autonomous Colonialism. This system considers three mechanisms as (co)-operating drivers: Power relations as pushing and formative forces, Subjectivity as individuals' agencies, actions, and representations within the scope of their own capacity and capital, and Digital Habitus as a new connecting interface, that assist in understanding refugees' use of the internet and media and its influence of on the refugee's perception and desires.

In the research, in which the active participation of individuals by consenting to the changing and digitalising systems is discussed, semi-autonomy stands out as a unique character. Contemporary colonialism appears in peoples' agenda even in the daily practices and decisions, particularly when they immigrate, establish a new life and become unseen actors in economic and social relationships. Consequently, Semi-Autonomous Colonialism is a model of modern colonialism in which the strategies and mechanisms of exploitation become invisible.

**Keywords:** *Migration, Forced Displacement, Syrian Refugees, Colonialism, Habitus, Power Relations, Subjectivity*

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## 1) INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

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This empty space left above is to encourage readers to remember the observations, comments and thoughts they have about the feelings and experiences of refugees they have met in their life. The reason for this is the attempt to emphasise certain feelings that refugees experience due to external factors, which I have observed to be widespread, rather than only highlighting the experiences of the refugees I interviewed within the scope of my research. In particular, my attempt to highlight both the reader's emotions as well as to portray the feelings of the refugees through the reader is to reveal the potential for empathy and partnership with the feelings and thoughts of Syrian refugees discussed in this study. Simultaneously, it is also about empowering both readers and participants to engage better in this research.

### 1.1) Research Questions, Objectives and Aims

#### *Research Aims*

This research aims to show Syrian refugees' changing perceptions and opinions on their mobility in three specific countries, Turkey, Greece, and Germany. This study deals with the Syrian Refugee Crisis and Migration by explicitly focusing on forcibly displaced Syrian refugees who lost their homes and are now living in insecurity and limbo. The Syrian Refugee Crisis and the mass migration of Syrian people are recent

social phenomena. Syrians now constitute the largest refugee population in the world. I study this research subject by using the lenses and methods of sociology and political science. Undoubtedly not all sociological facts are independent of their historical development. Hence, when considering the Syrian refugees' migration, I approach this socio-political phenomenon as an ongoing migration that emerged with the erupted conflicts in 2011 in Syria.

Migration is not a new phenomenon. On the contrary, people have been migrating for different reasons in every part of the world for thousands of years. Bearing in mind the historical mobility of humans, I examine the unique and novel conditions and developments of Syrian refugees living in refugee camps and camp setting places, especially within their migration trajectories. This contrasts with many studies with similar scopes, which approach more specific, narrower fields with micro perspectives. Through this approach, I aim to gain detailed insight into Syrian refugees' migrations and situations with a broader perspective. Relatedly, this research aims *to investigate the reasons and factors that migration phenomena occur chiefly from East to West, focusing on the particular case of Syrian refugees.*

### ***Research Objectives***

The objectives of this research are as follows:

- *Studying Syrian refugees' perceptions, desires, and thoughts about others and particularly the West.* This objective explores the formative social and political power relations over Syrian refugees' status and conditions, as well as Syrian refugees' opinions and thoughts about these power relations.
- *Exploring Syrian refugees' engagement with media technologies and the internet within the boundaries of a new digital age and the environment of refugee camps where a new habitus appears.* This objective delves into the influence and role of complex new media relations, such as social media, on Syrian refugees' perceptions and desire.
- *Investigating Syrian refugees' social, economic, and educational backgrounds and capital in relation to their practices and the realisation of their plans.* This objective

mainly formulates the capacity and limits of Syrian refugees' practices and mobilities, such as affordability of long-distance migration.

- *Discovering Syrian refugees' transformation and empowerment of gender roles and norms prior to and during the migration.* This objective scrutinises the impact and role of gender relations in migration and refugee-ness, as well as the importance of individual subjectivities.

### **Research Questions**

I formulated my primary research question and sub-questions in light of these research objectives and sought answers during the research. I started to research the answers to the following research questions, especially after 2015, with the mass migration attempts of Syrian refugees to Europe and the focus of the world media on this issue. Although I formulate the first question as a primary research question, these research materials and findings also answer the subsequent research questions presented below.

*Primary Research Question:*

*“Considering the influences of new media relations on perceptions and desires, why do Syrian refugees migrate long distances, taking more risks and investing more time and money to reach Europe despite finding a safe refuge in neighbouring countries, and what is the relationship of these migration movements to colonialism?”*

*Secondary Research Questions:*

*“When analysing the immigration of Syrian refugees to Europe as a structural benchmark, what novel and unique contemporary migration determinant elements are present in the specific case of Syrian refugees' migration to Europe? How do these differ from other migration mobilities?”*

*“Are these determinant elements fundamental to the individual cases, or are they part of a wider systemic formulation, such as new forms of colonialism and*

*exploitation, based on other migration movements of people with similar circumstances?”*

### **Research Hypothesis**

The sociological and political science perspectives used in this study will be associated with the fact that new media tools and extensive internet use are a new phenomenon and one of the most significant components of daily life, especially for refugees staying in camps. In this context, especially for refugees and potential immigrants looking for a new settlement place, the effect of media content and usage on perceptions and desires will be evaluated with mass migrations of Syrian refugees as a new factor. In addition to a powerful contemporary instrument such as the new media technology, power relations as a broader basis will also be taken into account as a limiting or supportive element on legal, economic, political and social identities and individual mobility. Apart from these two elements, the media and power relations, the importance of refugees' actions, decisions, and agencies will be emphasised to empower the refugees' subjectivity and bring it to the foreground. These three essential perspectives will be thought of as complementary mechanisms of a wider system, and a more general analysis of the functionality of these three mechanisms will be examined.

In order to explore a priori answers to stated research objectives and questions, I conducted fieldworks with Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees for more than five months in Turkey, Greece and Germany. The next section will introduce both the contextual and historical discussion in the field of refugee and migration studies and the Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees who participated in the fieldwork.

## **1.2) The Contextual and Historical Framework of the Research Subjects**

### **1.2.1) An Introduction to Refugee Studies**

*‘Migration, forced displacement and refugees’* are not new phenomena, neither terminologically nor phenomenologically. Studies concerning these concepts have attracted more attention, especially since the early twentieth century, and have been

included in states' social and political agendas. However, the terms refugee, immigration, asylum seeker and displaced person have been defined in recent decades (Cohen, 1997; Kibreab, 1997). Throughout history, migration and refugees have existed due to socio-political persecution and violence, military conflicts, trade, colonialism, and economic relations (Chimni, 2009; 13). The most common causes of forced migration and displacement are violence and repression caused by external powers, such as precarious political, military, social, economic and recently climatic factors, colonisation and other factors (Chimni, *ibid*; 11).

Nowadays, people are displaced mainly due to humanitarian reasons, such as oppression, violence, conflict, and natural reasons such as environmental pollution and natural disasters. According to the data shared by UNCHR, at least 79.5 million people in the world have been forcibly displaced, and 26 million of this population are considered as refugees (UNCHR, 2020). So, *how are refugees and displaced people defined internationally? What kinds of elements and reasons determine the legal and humanitarian status of these people?*

The most commonly used definition for refugees is described by the 1951 Geneva Convention, which framed the term refugee as, “*someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion*” (UNCHR, 2020; Shacknove, 1985; 274)<sup>1</sup>. Although *refugee* and *immigrant* may sometimes be used interchangeably (Goodman and Speer, 2007; 165), there is a critical legal and social difference between these two terms. An immigrant is someone who *consciously* chooses to leave their country for a better life elsewhere. Immigrants can get information about where they want to go, learn the language and explore job opportunities before deciding to leave their country (Flahaux and De Hass, 2016; 5). In contrast, refugees are *forced* to leave their country because they are at risk of, or have experienced persecution, or cannot return to their home country and must seek safety in other countries (Hathaway, 2005; Nyers, 2015). Yet, there is still no clear consensus on what the term refugee

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.refugeelaidinformation.org/1951-convention> [last access date on 25.05.2021]

should or should not cover, which is problematic in terms of who the term should refer to.

### **1.2.2) Historical Development of Refugee Studies in Politics and Academia**

The first international organisation to focus specifically on refugee work and all aspects of refugees' life was the International Refugee Organization (IRO), founded in 1947. This institution was followed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR), which was established in 1950. Both institutions relied on the expansion and development of international relations and the institutionalisation of the League of Nations and subsequently the United Nations (UN). Although IRO and UNCHR were the first humanitarian aid and assistance organisations to be formed as a result of global cooperation and collaboration between different nations and states, they were composed of structures designed to function within smaller geographic limits. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), for instance, established in 1943, was a structure that prioritised the millions of Europeans and people in surrounding countries displaced by World War II (Mallki, 1995; Black, 2001).

Although these institutions were established after World War II, the legal framework for displaced people and refugees, mostly with the assistance and initiatives of national government policies, grew out of academic studies. In 1939, for example, a special issue of the *American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* was essentially about refugees and related notions. Almost half of the articles in the special issue explored and defined '*possible ways out*' as regards refugee issues (Black, 2001; 58). Holborn (1939), from his analysis on the decisions of the League of Nations and its policies, emphasised that displaced people, later referred to as *refugees*, may bring socio-economic benefits. Hence, it was believed that a more '*liberal*' and '*tolerant*' immigration policy could be adopted by the United States. Alongside Holborn, Grattan (1939) and Ostrolenk (1939) also emphasised that there are many policies regarding economic benefits rather than humanitarian approaches

when concerning refugees (Black, 2001; 59). This situation can be acknowledged as an illustration of the intersection of government policies and academic studies on refugees with the legal and political decisions that began to be implemented at that time.

This period was followed by the institutionalisation of national and international foundations specifically focused on refugees. Shortly after, studies and policies were drafted concerning people displaced by governments and academic studies. As a result, more comprehensive studies and policies have been developed regarding displaced people, mainly after World War II. While the issue of the displaced people and refugees has gained importance globally, the number of legal regulations increased, especially after the establishment of UNCHR, when more academic disciplines have paid attention to refugees. These attentions in academia have led to the formation of an extensive body of literature devoted to refugee studies. A great amount of research concerning refugees has been produced since the institutionalisation of refugee-oriented organisations, such as UNCHR. These academic studies have appeared in disciplinary journals and publications in various social science fields, including geography (Black, 1991), sociology (Hein, 1993), and anthropology (Malkii, 1995). Black (2001; 62) emphasizes that these studies have not necessarily cross-referenced to ensure an overview of the field. Instead, they have approached the studies of refugees as a review of the '*art of the state*' that is somewhat problematic through the states' policies. However, when refugee studies developed in the academic literature, the main point of interest was placed on the state policies towards refugees, such as national identity, citizenship, and asylum-seeking, and not on ghettoization, integration, identity conflict and diaspora (Geddes and Scholten, 2016; 171-172).

In the introduction to an editorial in an issue from 1988 of the *Journal of Refugee Studies*, it was specifically indicated that the term '*refugee*' is an increasingly used term in popular discourse over the last century (Zetter, 1988). Zetter defined the term refugee as *up-rootedness* and *exile* (ibid; 1). It frequently supposes a dependence on humanitarian intervention and a rupture of '*normal*' social, economic, and cultural relations (Black, 2001). There is still no comprehensive conceptualisation of

refugees, in terms of the theoretical framework to apply to any particular situation or person's conditions, beyond the laws and law proposals relating to a refugee's legal process. As Malkii (1995; 496) argues, from a more realistic perspective: "*The term refugee has analytical usefulness, not as a label for special, generalizable 'kind' or 'type' of person or situation, but only a broad legal or descriptive rubric that includes within it a world of socio-economic statuses, personal histories, and psychological or spiritual situations.*"

Many studies relating to refugees have largely engaged with the notion of forced displacement as a common cause of refugee status (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003), and its potential impacts on institutions, local governments and international institutions (Içduygu, 2015). There have been studies on a wide range of topics related to refugees, including Syrian refugees, such as their health and nutrition (Ekmekci 2017; Bilukha et al. 2014), legal protection and status (Yanmyr, 2016) or their integration in host countries (İçduygu and Millet, 2016; Gericke et al. 2018). However, these studies mainly aim to improve the approach and programs implemented by UNCHR, WFP, WHO (Cherri, González and Delgado, 2016) and similar organisations. These studies cannot adequately explain the personal and collective tendencies, thoughts and perceptions of the refugees, although they are the main subjects of these studies.

Over the last few decades, the refugee crisis, especially the Syrian crisis, has been one of the main topics in the discussions of conservative and nationalist parties in the media, news and everyday life (De Cleen et al. 2017; Gianfreda, 2018). Despite this, there is very little known about Syrian refugees' perceptions, narratives, and motivations, whose mobility has increased gradually. There have been many essential studies concerning particularly Syrian refugees, such as their contribution and impact to the national economy (Esen and Binatlı, 2017), unemployment and labour market relations (Fakih and Ibrahim, 2016), integration difficulties (Bucken-Knapp, Fakih and Spehar, 2019), a new diasporic community (Ragab, Rahmeier and Siegel, 2017) and other domains. Still, why these people migrated or attempted to migrate to particular countries and what kind of motivations support their migrations continue to be inadequately researched in the related literature. Therefore, my



research focuses on understanding the Syrian refugees' imagined future, perceptions, desires, and thoughts. Also, my research aims to contribute to the relevant literature on how these factors affect migration routes, migration motivation and actions. Thus, this research completes a deficiency in this field by presenting all the stages through which the perspectives of refugees went through three major migration routes, Turkey, Greece, and Germany. In doing so, ethnographic research methods are used to a great extent to grasp the thoughts, perception, desire or imaginations of refugees.

### **1.2.3) A Brief Ahistorical Overview to the Syrian Civil War and the Role of External Forces**

The civil war, which continued at different scales in Syria from 2011 until today, gave its first sparks with uprisings in Arab countries, later named Arab Spring (Bhardwaj, 2012; Lynch, 2013). The reasons that triggered these uprisings were mainly against the outcast long-serving leaders, such as Muammar Muhammad al-Gaddafi in Libya or Bashar al-Assad in Syria, who demanded changes in social, economic and political structures of life. These uprisings started in late 2010 and early 2011 left behind a spectacle of utterly devastating wreckage in some countries; in others, positive steps have been taken in the direction of demand and change.

The protests against Bashar Assad, whose family had ruled Syria since the 1970s, became very violent as the uprisings were suppressed by extreme means of violence, which then led to a deadly civil war in the country. The supports of the opposition forces in Syria, especially by different states and international coalitions such as NATO, and the protests and subsequent armed resistance became one of the bloodiest and most destructive periods in the history of Syria.

The armed conflicts in Syria were later widely proclaimed as a series of overlapping proxy wars between regional and world powers, mainly between the United States and Russia as well as between Iran and Saudi Arabia (Phillips and Valbjørn, 2018; 415). The Assad regime has been openly supported militarily and politically, primarily by Russia, Iran, and Lebanese Hezbollah forces (Antonyan, 2017; Sinkaya, 2021). Russia, the only foreign power that has openly and legally deployed its military assets in Syria since September 2015, sided with the Syrian government and carried

out an intense air campaign against the anti-government forces in Syria. Against the support of Russia and Iran to the Assad government, Syrian opposition forces also received financial, military, and logistical supports, especially from major Sunni countries, for example, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey.

After the harsh response of Assad's government to the opposition forces, the failure of the weakened state institutions and the unprovided territorial security became the breeding ground for different terrorist groups, especially the Islamic State (IS) (Vikash and Singh, 2019; 381). The Kurdish people became the forces that waged an effective war against IS with the aid and support of international coalitions and states. Kurdish people succeeded in maintaining political and military stability in the first years of the civil war in North-East Syria, known as Rojava. Later they got involved in the war due to IS attacks and Turkey's military interventions. The Syrian Democratic Forces of the Rojava administration have received military and logistic support from some NATO countries, principally from the US. Alongside these international forces, from the early stages of the war in Syria, other major European countries such as France and Britain provided political, military, and logistical support to the opposition in Syria and its associated rebel groups. Other than the forces fighting with the Assad government, the local or international forces that started to fight each other turned the Syrian territory into a war arena, causing over 500,000 deaths and internally and externally displacement of more than 10 million from 2011 to 2020 (McIntyre, 2020; Krishnan et al. 2020). An international war in which countries such as Russia, the USA, Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia were decisive and positioned in different groups took place within the borders of Syria.

All interviews presented in this research were carried out mainly with forcibly displaced Syrian refugees due to the brutal war waged by these external forces and different terrorist groups in these refugees' homes, villages and cities. It has turned into a fierce and enigmatic war that many interviewees had difficulty describing and did not know which countries support whom, what role and mission they are involved in the civil war in Syria, except to mention their names. In later chapters, these military, political and operational interventions, roles and missions of states and coalitions as a structural and theoretical framework will be referred to as power relations and actors. In this sense, power relations will be used to express the

institutional, military and political powers that have a transcendental influence and decisiveness on the agency of individuals who were the exact subjects of life in Syria.

#### **1.2.4) The Emergence of the Syrian Refugee Crisis**

The emergence of the Syrian refugee crisis is a consequence of the Syrian Civil War, which broke out due to tension between the Bashar al-Assad central government and many other opposition forces in the spring of 2011 in Syria. To be more precise, the beginning of the Syrian Civil War resulted from a violent government crackdown on public demonstrations in support of a group of teenagers who were arrested for anti-government graffiti in the town of Daraa. The conflict between protestors, opposition groups and the central government of Bashar al-Assad began on 15 March 2011 with demonstrations, marches and protests. These protests were similar to protests and demonstrations carried out in other Arab countries, such as Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, which have subsequently been named the Arab Spring (see Bhardwaj, 2012; Heydemann, 2013). To put it simply, protesters in Syria demanded the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad. Since the Assad family has been in the presidency in Syria for more than 40 years, Bashar Assad rejected the demand of protesters and opposition forces. In addition, as the majority of Assad's supporters are Shia and the majority of the opposition forces are Sunni, the spark of conflicts ready to grow easily escalated (Pierret, 2014; 8). According to various sources, in April 2011, Bashar Assad's Syrian Army started to quash protests by using disproportionate force across the country (HRW, 2011). In the following few months, heavily-armed conflicts between opposition military forces and the central government's army took place, which turned into an armed rebellion which has lasted almost a decade.

The conflict continued to displace people within the country and across the region (Ostrand, 2015; 256). As a result, the intense violence experienced by almost every individual Syrian in their daily lives forced them to leave their once secure homes to seek safety in the closest neighbouring countries across the region. By July 2018, more than 6.6 million Syrians were considered refugees, mostly in Turkey, Lebanon,

Jordan, the Arab Republic of Egypt, and Iraq<sup>2</sup>. Another 6.7 million were driven from their homes but remain trapped inside the country and so are counted as internally displaced persons (IDP)<sup>3</sup>. These statistical numbers particularly grasp attention when comparing to the whole population of Syria, which was less than 17 million by the end of 2018<sup>4</sup>. Considering the number of people forcibly displaced from their home, Azevedo, Inan and Yang (2016: 2) stated that the Syrian Refugee Crisis is the only recent period in history in which the world has faced and experienced such a large number of refugee groups only from a single country.

### **1.2.5) A Brief Narrative of Syrian Refugees Since the Syrian Civil War**

A narrative of the contextual background to the extensive migration mobility in the countries where the field study was conducted, and of the recent developments concerning the Syrian refugees in these countries, may assist the reader to better understand the migration trajectories pursued in this research.

As of March 2011, Syrians began to flee their homes and move out of Syria. In the beginning, displaced Syrians forcibly crossed the borders of neighbouring countries such as Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan, particularly to save their lives. In the years 2014-2015, there were already more than 2.5 million Syrian refugees in Turkey. Even by that time, some of these refugees who arrived in Turkey did not wish to stay and had already started to migrate to European countries. According to statistics that estimate the registered numbers, the number of Syrian refugees who entered Greece in the first six months of 2015 was more than 230,000 (Pursay, 2015). From there, Syrian refugees migrated to other European countries by different smuggling and irregular methods, primarily through Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, and Austria. This later became well-known as the *Balkan Route* to countries such as Germany (Mandic, 2017).

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/getinvolved/fundraising/5c11287c4/12-month-impact-global-shelter-coalition.html?query=Registered%20Syrian%20Refugees> [last access date on 25.05.2021]

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/> [last access date on 25.05.2021]

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/syria-population/> [last access date on 25.05.2021]

In the early years of the Syrian refugee crisis, regional or international governments did not have a proper legislative system to offer a lifeline because the unexpectedly high numbers of refugees, which reached millions, was a situation that neither neighbouring countries nor European countries wanted to handle alone. By responding to the Syrian refugee crisis, Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel uttered the phrase that “*Wir schaffen das*” (We can do this!) which had a significant impact on the advancement of the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Europe. Germany’s open border implementations towards mainly Syrian refugees had become a policy that other European countries did not confirm and follow. As a result, the German government had to take a step back in the face of the arriving refugees whose numbers reached hundreds of thousands in almost a year (Ostrand, 2015; Funk, 2016). The fact that the EU legal frameworks and international law responded to the crisis and its collective opposition to the moderate and supportive approach of the German government to refugees led to the re-examination and revision of the decisions taken within the scope of the Dublin Regulation, which was signed in Dublin, Ireland on 15 June 1990.

The Dublin Regulation (known as Dublin Convention) is an article of European Union (EU) legislation. This legislation determines which EU Member State is accountable for the asylum application examination submitted by refugees seeking international protection under the Geneva Convention. In other words, the first EU Member State, where refugees’ or asylum seekers’ fingerprints are collected, or an asylum application is lodged, is responsible for examining the asylum application. However, the Dublin Convention threatened to break down following the Syrian Refugee crisis after 2015, when the EU member states faced a high influx of refugees. Eventually, the European Court of Justice gave the right to EU member states to transfer refugees to the first EU country of entry by reaffirming the Dublin Regulation and declaring that it is still valid (Maani, 2018).

After the European Court of Justice ruling, a decision process regarding Syrian refugees began mainly in the triangle of Turkey, Greece and Germany. As a result of ongoing negotiations since November 2015, the EU and Turkey reached an

agreement in March 2016<sup>5</sup>. This agreement determined that Turkey keeps Syrian refugees in its territory, and the European Union shares the economic burden with Turkey (Rygiel, Baban and Ilcan, 2016). Consequently, the agreement made between the EU and Turkey alongside the Dublin Convention is of utmost importance for the three countries in which fieldwork was conducted. The steps taken under these agreements can be listed as follows: Turkey started to share the refugees' economic expenditures with the EU, continued to accommodate Syrian refugees within its borders and began to increase control and oversight over irregular migration (Heck and Hess, 2017). Greece increased its border security and strived to stop the irregular influx. Besides, Greece started not to take official transactions and fingerprints of refugees who entered Greek borders irregularly. Germany and other EU countries have also begun to return refugees who have entered their country's borders but who were fingerprinted and registered in another EU country.

### **1.2.6) The Responses and Roles of Fieldwork Countries to the Syrian Refugee Crisis**

#### ***Turkey***

Turkey is a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol, maintaining the geographical limitation to the 1951 Convention (Szałańska, 2017). However, after the uncontrolled and unexpected flow of Syrian refugees, Turkey has constituted legal and institutional reforms to create an effective national asylum system made following international standards. Turkey's first-time asylum law, named the *Foreigners and International Protection Act*, was adopted by Parliament in April 2013 and entered into force in April 2014. Along with this law, the foundations of Turkey's national asylum system and, in particular, the relationship with Syrian refugees were defined in the legal frame. The Turkish Directorate General of Migration Management (Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü - DGMM)<sup>6</sup> has been

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/#> [last access date on 25.05.2021]

<sup>6</sup> The Directorate General for Migration Management has been established under the Ministry of Interior with a view to implement policies and strategies related to migration; ensure coordination between the related agencies and organizations in these matters; carry out the tasks and procedures related to foreigners' entry into, stay in, exit and removal from Turkey, international protection, temporary protection and protection of victims of human trafficking (İçduygu and Diker, 2017; 16)

established in 2013. DGMM was authorised as the main body responsible for policymaking and procedures for all foreign nationals in the country (İçduygu and Diker, 2017; 16). Additionally, and more importantly, Turkey adopted the *Temporary Protection Regulation* in October 2014, which regulates the rights, obligations and procedures, particularly for those granted temporary protection in Turkey. Syrian refugees in Turkey are granted this status (Rygiel, Baban and Ilcan, 2016; 316). It is clear that this status granted by the Turkish government to Syrian refugees is inferior to the internationally accepted refugee status and rights. When considering Syria's borders with Turkey, which is more than 900 kilometres, and the number of Syrian refugees residing in Turkey, so to speak, Turkey is second Syria for Syrians. When considering the distribution of Syrian refugees according to provinces in Turkey, we see that the greatest density of populations lies extending along the borders. As a matter of fact, 74.78% of the total population of the Kilis province consists of Syrians, as does 21.78% of the population of Gaziantep province, for example (DGMM, 2020).

### **Greece**

In terms of the research focus, instead of centring on Syrian refugees as a whole, those Syrian refugees who left Turkey to go to European countries were considered as the main sample group. Therefore, Greece, as the most widely used and adopted migration route for those Syrian refugees leaving Turkey with the intention of migrating to European countries, was preferred as the second fieldwork country. As declared by the UN Refugee Agency, approximately 860,000 refugees and migrants without travel documents had entered Greece by sea in 2015 (Spathara, 2018). The Greek islands became the main gateway to the European Union. Most refugees were men (45%), children (35%), and women (20%), mainly from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq (Giannakopoulos and Anagnostopoulos, 2016; 1271). Jeanne Park (2015; 1) stated that the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has determined Europe as the most dangerous destination within the scope of irregular migration globally, and the Mediterranean and Aegean regions and seas are the world's most dangerous border crossing points. Since 1993, more than 22,394 (United Against

Racism 2015) people are known to have died attempting to enter Europe. The actual figure is likely to be much higher (El-Enany, 2016; 13).

Research has shown that (Geddes and Scholten, 2017; Fine, 2018; Diken and Laustsen, 2002), Greece has been functionalised as a transition country. The number of registered Syrian refugees in Greece is only 16% of the total Syrian refugee populations in the country (İçduygu and Millet, 2016; 214-215). Nevertheless, as Ismini A. Lamb (2016; 67) noted: “The Greek economic crisis has segued into the Greek refugee crisis. The two phenomena are linked in ways that highlight Greek relations with the rest of Europe and European relations with the Islamic world.” For this reason, Greece was not in a position to cope with the refugees in terms of integration and accommodation. This is a social fact that is known by the refugees using Greece as a transition country. Therefore, Greece’s laws and integration, asylum and support policies regarding refugees are not exclusively among the priorities of this study. Rather, I consider Greece as a gateway country for immigration, but not a place sought by refugees to apply for asylum.

### ***Germany***

Within this research framework, refugees who arrived in Germany have played the role of a control group of the study, particularly compared with the fieldwork in Turkey and Greece. In this sense, as one of the research’s focal points, a Western European country and the final destination of the largest Syrian refugee population in Europe, Germany was chosen as the final location of the fieldwork. Germany, apart from being one of the first world countries in terms of economy and high standards of living conditions (Munck, 2009), the 4th largest economy globally (Neuts, 2020), has also become one of the most preferred migration destinations. At the end of 2014, Germany became the country that provided protection and security to the greatest number of Syrian refugees in the European continent (Ostrand, 2015; 255). In the years following 2014, there was a significant increase in the number of Syrian refugees accepted by Germany. As of the end of 2017, the estimated number of Syrian refugees in Germany was more than 600,000. Since the beginning of the migration of Syrian refugees, the increase in Syrian refugee numbers has reached 1200% in total over the years. The open border policy of Germany during 2015



became an aspiration for most Syrians. As Momin (2017; 66) stated, in 2015, Germany accepted around 326,900 Syrian refugees, and it was expected to welcome around 300,000 in 2016. Germany's decision to open its borders to Syrian refugees came mainly in response to the refugee crisis in Europe.

In the following sections, I examine and detail Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees as the chosen sample groups in this research.

### **1.2.7) Syrian Arab and Kurdish Refugees in This Research**

When I began this study and discussed Syrian refugees as a research topic, I realised that these people are collectively referred to as Syrian refugees in the relevant literature. However, thanks to the interviews and ethnographies made during the fieldwork, I apprehended that these people's ethnic, religious, and gender differences are as effective and determining factors as their socio-economic class and capital forms. Therefore, I focus on the two primary ethnic groups that came out of this country. Consequently, in my research, ethnicity and cultural differences of Syrian refugees are taken into consideration. The reason for this is to understand how ethnicity, and the different cultural backgrounds it entails, affects the world view, images of the future, desires, and perceptions. In particular, I compare how ethnicity produces solidarity between specific ethnic groups during the migration, how it affects their migration experience and their vision of the places they want to go. By making two distinctions between Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees, I aim to contribute to the related literature. Thus, I briefly touch upon the history and socio-political developments of Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees instead of only focusing on Syrian refugees as a whole. I will discuss what similarities and differences exist between these two different ethnic groups' refugee experiences in detail in the fieldwork analysis chapters. While doing this, I will focus specifically on the relationships between solidarity and cooperation, sense of community and togetherness among Syrian Arabs, and Kurdish refugees.

#### ***Syrian Arabs***

'Arab' is a cultural and linguistic term, which commonly refers to those who speak *Arabic* as their first language (Tamari, 2008; 1). Arabs, despite their variations and diversities, are united by culture and history (Hitti, 1996). However, socio-culturally and politically, the notion of Arab points to a particular religion, culture and geography rather than Arabic speakers. As a subject of widespread debate, there are essential elements that can differentiate between the concepts of language, ethnicity and nation and the dominant identity. For instance, not everyone who speaks Arabic is Arab, or not everyone who is a Muslim is Arab. The opposite of these proposals is also accurate. Additionally, although most Arabs are Muslim, there are also millions of *Christian Arabs* and hundreds of thousands of *Jewish Arabs* (Masters, 2004). This section discusses and presents *Syrian Arabs* as half of the sample group in this research.

Ethnicity and religion are intertwined in Syria, as commonly in other countries. There are also non-sectarian, supra-ethnic and supra-religious political identities like Syrian nationalism, as Migliorino (2008) presents in relation to Syrian Armenians in Syria. The vast majority of these identities, such as Syrian Armenians, are in minority status in Syria (White, 2012). In this sense, by the term *Syrian Arab*, I draw the frame as a nation that is the majority in Syria rather than ethnic origin, even if they are of different religions and ethnic origins. The sections entitled with Syrian Arab frame in the following chapters are associated with Syrians who introduce her/himself as Syrian Arab and speak the Arabic language as a mother tongue. Although the Syrian Arabs interviewees might have ethnic or religious minority identities, they did not put it in the foreground. To clarify this better, all the refugees interviewed during fieldwork identified as Syrians, except those who introduced and identified as Kurdish.

Additionally, unlike other fieldwork countries Greece and Germany, the social, legal and political situation of Syrian refugees in Turkey should be evaluated within the framework of historical and political relations between Turkey and Syria. The main reasons for this are as follows: the two countries have a shared religion, share their longest land borders, share common historical and political values, have similar cultural norms and values. None of these features are shared by the other fieldwork countries, Greece and Germany. Since the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the

political relations of Turkey with Syria have been very hostile, especially the periods of 1921-1998. Both countries have criticised each other for different reasons. While it was for Syrian Arabs, “*Turks have exploited us for 400 years*”; for Turks, it was “*The Arabs betrayed us, stabbed us in the back*” (Aslan, 2008: 23). While Syria was an ‘*enemy*’ country for Turkey due to playing a host country for ‘*terrorism*’, making trouble on sharing water sources (Euphrates River) and encroaching on Turkey’s integrity in terms of geography; on the other hand, Turkey was an ‘*enemy*’ country for Syria due to not fairly sharing water sources, being a supporter of Western countries and claiming rights over Syria’s territory (referring to Hatay province) (Benek, 2016;172). In 1998, with the Adana Treaty between Turkey and Syria, the relationships between the two countries improved for a short time (1998-2011) (Benek, 2016). However, with the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, the relationship between the two countries became tense again. The period of twelve-years between 1998-2011 was the only time in which there existed a positive relationship between Syria and Turkey. The relations between Turkey and Syria, especially in the last decade, has shown variabilities in very intensive and complicated manners. In the next section, I detail the historical, political and social relations regarding the Syrian Kurdish refugees.

### ***Syrian Kurds***

The majority of Kurdish people in the Middle East live in the historical Kurdistan region (Meintjes, 2017) which is split between Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Even though there was no major unity among all these parts in history, nor was there any significant border or division among them. The apparent division in terms of borders came into force during the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. After the *Sykes-Picot Agreement*<sup>7</sup>, which was agreed primarily between the British and French Empire in 1916, Kurds were divided between four countries, each representing different cultures, concepts of nation, ethnicity, and government (Ottoway, 2015). It can be

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<sup>7</sup> The Sykes-Picot Agreement was a secret agreement between the United Kingdom and the French Empire signed on 16 May 1916 for a share and control of the Middle East lands, to which Russia assented. While the main agreement on the territorial sharing was predominantly on the Anatolian region, the new border lines, which were determined beyond the borders of the Anatolian region, divided the Kurds into four different parts: Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria (see Fitzgerald, 1994; Danforth, 2015).

argued that particularly since the Sykes-Picot Agreement came into force, Kurdish communities in each country have been on the social and political agenda of these countries. Even though each countries' responses to Kurdish questions have varied through different methods such as political or military interventions, Kurdish societies eventually have been known as one of the world's largest nations without their own state (Gunes, 2019; 211; Gurses, 2014).

The most prominent minority community in Syria is the Kurdish community, and it is the second largest ethnic group (Gambill, 2004; 3). Kurds in Syria are estimated to have an approximate population of 2.5 to 4 million, making up 10% of the country's population<sup>8910</sup>. Concerning the socio-political conditions and existence of Kurdish people in Syria, the civil, political and cultural rights of Kurds have been controversial. Kerim Yildiz (2005; 91) summarizes it thus: "*The Kurds resident in Syria have been described as a migrant population from Turkey and Iraq that has largely assimilated to Syrian Arab culture. In this way, the Syrian state portrays the Kurds as comprising a dispersed ethnic minority in Syria with no historical claim to the land. This portrayal highlights the effect of the Arabization policy that has been implemented both in Syria and other states with Arab populations.*"

Kurds in Syria have faced oppression and were confronted with particular assimilation politics ordained by the Syrian central government. Moreover, "*legal Arabization policies*"<sup>11</sup> in the 1960s and 70s have caused reciprocally many adverse socio-politic and socio-economic effects on the Kurds in relation to the Syrian central government and their policies (Tejel, 2009; 120) for a long time. These include revoking Kurds' citizenship, confiscating their lands and handicapping access to public services such as education, health, and official employment and leading to biased redistribution of lands taken from Kurdish landowners (Yildiz,

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8 <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/iraq-population/> last access date on 25.05.2021

9 <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/turkey-population/> last access date on 25.05.2021

10 <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/syria-s-kurds-struggle-within-struggle> last access date on 25.05.2021

11 After the Al-Hasakah Census in 1962, the Arab Belt policy and associated land reforms started in the second part of the 1960s with the perceived threat of separatism from Kurds. The Syrian government has implemented the enforced disintegration of the Kurdish groups by parting the region with the relocation of many refugee Arabs from different countries in the Kurdish region.

2005), unrecognition of civil and political rights of Kurds (Bengio, 2014), neglect and disavowal of the existence of Kurds by the legal system (Tastekin, 2016).

In his book, Benedict Anderson (1983; 6-7) discusses the concept of '*Imagined Communities*' and portrays a nation as a socially or politically formed community, perceived by the people who imagine themselves as part of that nation. Relatedly, it can be asserted that such socio-political and economic maltreatment, hostile and assimilating policies implemented by the Syrian central government indirectly strengthen the socio-political relations, ties, solidarity and cooperation established among Kurds. Although they have not been living together officially and politically for more than 100 years within the same borderlines, Kurdish people have had transborder social, political and military associations and solidarity among themselves (Tejel, 2020; Arslan, 2019). Kurdish groups build an '*imagined community*' among themselves as co-citizens of a country they do not own (Poplewell, 2017; Mahmud, 2016).

When considering historical social and political relationships between Kurdish people from Syria and Turkey, it is worth mentioning that communities from these two regions share the same dialect of the Kurdish language -*Kurmanji*-, very similar culture and traditions, history, and values that kept a strong bond in between them (Tejel, 2009). However, the borderline drawn between Turkey and Syria has divided families and relatives in this region who kept passing the borders to maintain relationships. In the words of Dawn Chatty (2010; 233): "*Wire mesh fencing, minefields, and air surveillance make it difficult for people to cross frontiers other than at official border crossings*". Kurdish people in these two regions have historically been able to preserve their kinship, trade, social and political relations. After the Syrian Civil War in 2011, when they were displaced and fled to Turkey, these maintained relationships have become a connection and assisting instruments for Syrian Kurdish refugees. Relatedly, I argue that kinship and imagined community have an effect on migration route and decision.

### **1.2.8) Refugee Camps as Fieldwork Places and The Notion of Being in Limbo**

Here I explain the question of '*why specifically refugee camps or camp setting places are chosen as fieldwork sites in this research?*' While answering this question to help readers to engage better with the research, I more stress on the notion of *being in limbo* as a metaphoric analogy to refugee camps.

The refugee camp is a temporary facility provided by national or international authorities to provide emergency protection and assistance to people forced to flee due to conflict, violence and persecution (Diken, 2004). Refugee camps are normally not intended to provide permanent and sustainable solutions; rather, these places offer a '*safe haven*' for refugees to receive medical treatment, food, shelter, and other basic services during emergencies (d'Orsi, 2015). Refugee camps are *structurally and ontologically* a living environment that embodies the metaphor of *being in limbo*. The main reason for this firstly is that the refugees staying in the camps are aware that they reside there temporarily. The spatial and temporal restrictions of camps are the part that structurally corresponds to being in limbo. Therefore, generally refugees staying in camps do not tend to get used to and settle in camps where they stay temporarily. This situation causes them continuously to think of leaving the camps as the main priority. On the one hand, refugees constantly face the reality of their past that caused them to become refugees; on the other, they seek opportunities and ways out to leave camps for their future,. This temporal fracture presents the feeling and experience of ontologically being in limbo on the past-future dilemma.

Additionally, while commonly refugee camps provide security, the sense of security is fractured by the presence of bureaucratic and security staff and continuous surveillance in the camps. Hence, the ambivalence of space, the dilemma of past-future perception and the sense of distrust and surveillance generate the feeling of *being in limbo*. These analyses and arguments are based on observations and experiences of ethnography during the fieldwork. There are currently studies on the intercorrelation of being a refugee, being in camps and being in limbo (Abdi, 2005; Hightower, 2015; Hoffman, 2012 see also: Boochani 2018a; 2018b). The

biographical work *'No Friends, But the Mountains'* (2018) by Kurdish journalist and writer Behrouz Boochani, who was also a refugee and stayed in a refugee camp for many years, perfectly define the concept of being in limbo: "I have always despised waiting. Waiting is a mechanism of torture used in the dungeon of time." The ambivalence of time and the past-future dilemma, *waiting* with the words of Boochani, are the determinant characters of being in limbo.

The main epistemological focus of my research is on the Syrian refugees' imagined future, thoughts, and perceptions about the places they want to go and the way these thoughts are formed and shaped. In this sense, the refugees staying in the camps are much more fragile, uncertain, and vulnerable than refugees who live in the city and get involved and socialise with at least a bit of daily life. During my ethnography in Greece, for instance, a young refugee staying in Lavrion described living in camps as follows: "*Camps are a place that gives you a feeling like you will be leaving at any moment if possible. Thus, you can neither adopt it nor leave it whenever you want. It is a situation of being stuck in time and space.*" The reason for choosing *refugee camps or camp setting places* as the fieldwork sites can be understood by the words of this young refugee. Refugee camps better fit for generating data and content particularly regarding my research questions. When people lose their possessions and are stuck in a restricted place temporarily, these people primarily prioritize their further mobilities. In such conditions and places, I essentially sought reasons and answers from these people about their images of the future, plans, desires, and thoughts. Thus, I found refugee camps more appropriate as a space to investigate the perspectives and interests that my research subject aims at and conceptualizes. In other words, I chose the camps to ensure that the epistemologically abstract content of the research was obtained in a more robust and more reliable way.

### **1.3) Theories and Conceptual Perspectives of the Research**

One of the main distinguishing peculiarities of this research is that it obtains and generates data thanks to the sociological and political lenses I carried to the field with myself when I started doing fieldwork. With the guiding light of the fieldwork data and findings obtained and generated in the field, the research theories that enable processing the raw data embedded in the field throughout field notes, interviews and

observations used in this study, have been identified. As I will discuss in detail in the methodology section, *doing fieldwork without theory and generating theory from the field* (Strauss and Glaser, 1967; Gasson, 2004), which Grounded Theory suggests as an approach, has been adopted as a motto in this study. After embracing this motto, fieldwork findings and results pointed to three fundamental theoretical concepts that specifically determine the framework and boundaries of research objectives through categorisation and coding. These theoretical concepts are as follow: Power Relations, Digital Habitus and Socio-Political Subjectivities. Adopting these three theoretical approaches and evaluating fieldwork findings and results through these theories provides more detailed and broader assessments of the topics investigated concerning Syrian refugees. In addition, I gain a multi-layered analysis of research topics appraised through three different theoretical approaches, as well as arguing that these three theoretical approaches are intertwined mechanisms of a major system. In the following sections, we will focus on these three theoretical concepts gradually. While doing this, first of all, the intersection of these concepts with the research subject, refugee studies and migration, will be discussed and then it will be evaluated with a more detailed perspective.

### **1.3.1) Power Relations**

*“When elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers!”*

***African proverb***

#### **1.3.1.1) As an Introduction to Power Relations**

In studies particularly where external forces and factors are determinants such as those on refugees and forced displacement, these external forces and drivers should be determined and defined precisely. Although I aimed to bring the subjectivity of the people participating in the study to the fore through their words, expressions, emotions, and circumstances, in the end, the main subject of powers that causes these people to become refugees is determined externally. In other words, the power relations are transcendental to the subjectivity of individuals, especially in the case of vulnerable groups such as refugees. These external drivers and forces are considered as *pushing forces* in refugee and migration studies (Kunz, 1973;



Richmond, 1993). Put otherwise, “*drivers can be understood as forces leading to the inception of migration and the perpetuation of movement*” (Van Hear, Bakewell and Long, 2017; 927). For example, one of the pushing forces focused on in the framework of this study for Syrian refugees is the destructive Syrian Civil War. These pushing forces continue in different fields even after Syrian citizens became *refugees*. Even being officially identified as a refugee is itself an example of pushing and exclusive power relations. The word refugee commonly refers to the deprivation of certain rights of individuals (Foster, 2007), the application of geographical limitations (Yıldız and Uzgören, 2016), and the narrowing of the ability to act socially, politically, and economically within the territory of a foreign country (Agnew, 1999). All these external, imposed forces can be considered within the framework of *power relations*. Power Relations, one of the first theoretical approaches adopted in this study, is used and appreciated as an answer to one of the research objectives: ‘*Studying Syrian refugees’ perceptions, desires, and thoughts about others and particularly the West*’.

I narrow down the boundaries of power relations in my research as follow: all structural, institutional, ideological, and characteristic external forces that have a radical and formative influence on Syrian refugees’ lives are different representations and manifestations of power relations. These formative and radical influences of power relations are varied: political, economic, juridical, social, cultural, aesthetic, and formative (Swartz, 2013; 83). The manifestations of power relations in these different spheres on Syrian refugees can be framed as forced displacement and uprootedness of them, loss of almost everything they had, elimination of their individual and societal identities and agencies. On the other hand, structural, institutional, intellectual, and characteristic power relations and representations also have positive connotations as *pulling forces*. In the case of Syrian refugees for instance, after the forced displacement and loss of possessions of Syrian refugees, the formative and directive pulling forces on their actions and practices, such as their imagined futures, desires, actions, are the other facets of these power relations. These pulling forces are especially manifested and observed in aspects of power relations in Syrian refugees’ perceptions and thoughts of possible migration destinations, desired lifestyle, and better living standards.

The concept of power is often used in an equivalent sense to the term authority. Authority frequently corresponds to the institutionalization of power and its legitimate perception by the social structure (Bevir, 1999). Foucault (1977; 93) indicated the intertwined concepts of power: *“Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.”* Even though they emerge in such distinct domains as politics, economy, social and military, the manifestations of power operate on the basis of multiple intersections and relationalities. Emerson (1962; 31) outlines the emergence of power relations: *“A simple theory of power relations is developed in an effort to resolve some of the ambiguities surrounding power, authority, legitimacy, and power structures, through bringing them together in a coherent scheme.”* Hence, power relations are associations in which one person, institution, ideology, state authority, or representative has formative powers over another in varying fields. Although the purposes and practices of power and relationships built concerning power are different, individuals and masses are the targets of these relationships. In individuals or masses, the formative power over one another is built through varying means, such as surveillance, control, manipulation, governance, and ultimately utility.

Power relations as a theoretical framework is not a new phenomenon. Many studies discuss and relate to its function, foundation, relationality in several disciplines, mainly in social sciences, such as political science, history, and sociology. For instance, Immanuel Wallerstein (1974; 1979; 1983; 2004) discusses power relations in the form of a world-system theory as an approach in social analysis and as formative forces on social and political (Sorinel, 2010; 220). Eric Hobsbawm also considered power relations as a system in several works through historical analysis (1999; 2000). Besides, one of the prominent scholars in the field of power analysis, Michel Foucault, showed the structure and function of power in relation to key concepts, such as governmentality, medicine, knowledge, sexuality or religion (1961; 1963; 1975; 1976). Alongside all these leading and well-known scholars, numerous studies have conceptualised the power relations with their diverse impacts and relations (Edwards, 2006; Emerson, 1962; Cohen, 1969).

Even though power relations are already widely and comprehensively discussed in varying literature, I argue that power relations as a theoretical concept are still not adequately addressed in *media* and *internet-based digitality* studies as recently developed fields. Further exploration of the fields between media and power relations, in particular, will make it possible to systematically address the internet-based media tools and their effects from a macro perspective that have come to the fore in this study. Therefore, in addition to the areas where power relations are mentioned earlier, power relations and actors through media and digital lenses are discussed as a new field in the next section.

### **1.3.1.2) Power Relations: Major Actors and Their Representations in Digital Relationalities**

The element I am engaged in with the subject of power relations is how subjects, as actors of power relations, constitute a change of formation on the masses' perception, action, and apprehension. I consider the awareness and connection of Syrian refugees, especially through digital relations, as the main new *e-territory*. This is because power relations have transmuted into a new phase due to the relationality of it in the modern and digital era. The meaning I attribute to power relations in terms of structure, function and scope differs structurally and functionally from *classical* power relations. I consider it classical because I argue that power relationships transcend a *unidirectional* relationship, which refers to a relationship that has one side exposed to the consequences of the power implementation as *passive* and the other as its enforcer *active*. However, in our high-technological age, the recent media instruments have shifted unilateral interactions. These days, the individuals as users and consumers who were subjected to these power relations now can take a role as producer and content creator, which has displaced the classical power dynamics. In other words, new media instruments, such as internet-based social media platforms, not only transmit the content produced and controlled by the monopoly of power elites, media companies, and governments, but also create space for almost every single internet user/consumer to produce and circulate their own opinions, news and other media content.

In today's *liquid modern world*, as Zygmunt Bauman (1999) describes, with the advent of internet-based media, governance, manipulation, surveillance, and eventually, control of perception, desire, and consumption began to change form in an unprecedented way. In this new form, the tracks and moves of daily life are mobile, highly optional and flexible; however, the smallest details of our daily lives are tracked, checked and recorded more closely and comprehensively than ever before (Bauman and Lyon, 2012; 6). As Didier Bigo (2008) highlights, such new and highly developed security systems operate by tracking, controlling, checking, and recording '*everything that moves*', including products, information, capital, and humanity (Bauman and Lyon, *ibid*; 11). Therefore, surveillance, controlling, tracking and being aware of this *everything that moves* transcend the limitations of space and time. The system works at a distance and flows fluidly. I describe the new habits and power dynamics that this system has spread to almost every field of life and created as *Digital Habitus*, which will be the subject of the subsequent theoretical discussion.

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Power relations frame a global network that operates either together or separately with the consideration of economic, political, humanitarian, and social benefits. Referring back to Foucault to formulate his analysis of power into power relations, as he frames: 'it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society (1977; 93)' and this conceptualization for power relations would be: '*Power is not an institution, and not a structure... but it is the name that one attributes to complex and intertwined strategical relations in a particular society, state and finally in globe*'. Zinkina et al. describe the new formation and complex relations in the globe as: "*New technologies formed new material networks that gradually spanned the whole world, leading global connectivity to a new level. These networks were filled with new types of content, both material and non-material (2019; 229).*" The developments in transportation and global connectivity directly intensified the relationships and the mobility of actors, goods, and information. The turning point

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<sup>12</sup> Digital Habitus briefly is a conceptual term that indicates the presence and transference of social, emotional, political, economic, and financial lifestyle factors on online and internet-based platforms, interacting with and informing reality.

may be considered a modern technological revolution that brought profound and persistently changing and modificatory adjustments to almost all aspects of life.

While formulating the boundaries of power relations, the representations in which these relations become visible and the masses are aware of primarily manifest through the subjects, then through identities, symbols, brands, and characters of the institutions, entities and structures. Therefore, power relations contain major actors to manifest themselves, to exemplify them in very determinative stratification: *politicians* such as presidents, bureaucrats, party leaders in political domains; *capitalists/capital owners* such as big corporations like Walmart, Amazon, China Petroleum, and many other in economic domains; *humanitarian structures and institutions* such as Red Cross, United Nations, WHO and others in social environments. These power relation actors and structures usually have voice and power over masses of people, primarily within domestic borders and then globally. There are many other domains where power relations exist with different purposes: ideology, education, science, health, technology, media, and art industries. All these key domains and representations are most likely to cooperate or to be in relation to each other for various reasons. These actors are those people, institutions, representatives, and other similar agencies who are most likely to have prestige, popularity, recognition, wealth and, accordingly, power and voice in local and global relations.

Michel Foucault's works can be examined separately to understand how power relations structurally and functionally establish individual and social control, surveillance and administration through institutions and state bodies (1961; 1963;1975; 1976). Each of his books may be said to constitute a case study of how power relations have conditioned, invested, and fabricated specific human experiences such as madness, discipline, punishment, and sexuality. In doing so, they have positively produced effects of *truth in reality* (Deacon, 2002; 90). Nevertheless, power relations or the concepts discussed while utilising power can often be perceived as abstract concepts. For example, all the structures we call institutions or state bodies are a neutral, ontologically. These structures are only a

tool, so that power can be applied. Those who actively exercise this power are the actors embodied in human forces.

I emphasise that the representations embodied in these human forces are multiplying and changing, especially through digital media. To illustrate this, major actors may differ in varying fields, and they could easily be a social media influencer<sup>13</sup>, a politician<sup>14</sup>, a product brand<sup>15</sup>, a symbol of a company<sup>16</sup>, a country<sup>17</sup>, an ideology<sup>18</sup> or a social media platform<sup>19</sup>. The principal reason for emphasising these characters, institutions, structures, and companies, even in abstract forms, is that the possibility that these representations are more concentrated, intertwined, communicated, and complexed with each other. This means an incredible increase in the speed of spreading a thought, ideology, advertisement, campaign, propaganda and thus the power of influence over thoughts, perceptions, and desires. While creating this theoretical framework, the essential function and meaning attributed to power relations are that these characters and structures' capability to influence others is primarily through digital representations. I argue that for such formations of power relations, we are at a reasonably new stage in understanding the intended use of these digital tools by the users and the scope of impact they are exposed to while using them. There are already many studies on the correlation between media and power relations. For example, the impact of social media use on individual and social decision making (Diga and Kelleher, 2009); the power of public relations in media (Cho, 2006); media and power (Curran, 2002). There are also many studies such as media texts and the (re)construction of power relations

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13 As an example, Cristiano Ronaldo has 245 million followers on Instagram. Every single social media content that Ronaldo shares has a potential formative power that emerges in the digital fields of 245 million people. This digital system and logic have the same function for the samples stated below.

14 As an example, former United States of America President Barack Obama has more than 125 million followers on Twitter.

15 As an example, Apple company, when searched on Google search engine the word 'Apple company', 3,850,000,000 results come out in 0.98 seconds. This is an example for *e-territory*.

16 As an example, Mercedes or McDonald's, which the symbols of these companies are well known worldwide.

17 As an example, France receives more than 80 million visitors each year, <https://www.movehub.com/blog/popular-countries-map/> last access date on 25.05.2021

18 As an example, liberalism or conservatism which people perceive and interpret such abstract forms through lifestyles or discourses.

19 As an example, Facebook has 1.69 billion users worldwide, which means Facebook as a company has access to 1.69 billion people directly with their data where they can interact.

(Risberg, Tienari and Vaara, 2003). In addition to these, more fundamental studies such as the use of media tools as an ideological device of the state (Althusser, 1970), the transformation of the media into a tool of manipulation (Chomsky, 1988; 1997), the relationship between media, simulation and reality (Baudrillard, 1994) are also known. Although these studies deal with power and media relations separately, they do not particularly address the formation of new actors as a new habitus created through media devices.

The relation of the power relation with/in digital realms to my research is that *when it becomes easier to imagine, empathize, desire, to be enthusiastic about a place, lifestyle, wealth, living standards, then it becomes a 'pulling' factor in migration and mobilities*. Power relations play a role in these intertwined and interactive relations of people. The more apparency of the major actors in daily life habits through mainly media means has shifted people's plans, imaginations, and perception concerning others, including people, society, product, state, state and lifestyle. The reason for this is more about the advanced technology in transportation, accessibility to information, and accelerated mobility. When people have more means to realise their dreams, desires and plans, they use them. This is particularly valid in the case of immigrants and refugees.

Long-term lives in refugee camps can be outlined as being in limbo, as I will elaborate in my discussions on the selection of camp sites in the methodology section. As Abdi (2005; 2) put it: "... *encampment and protracted refugee situations leave thousands of men, women, and children living in limbo, resulting in wasted human capacity and deprivations of human dignity.*" All the authorities that prohibit, restrict, control the exit of refugees from the camp areas, and issue temporary ID cards can be shown as examples of power relations. For instance, within the scope of power relations, I will examine the statements of refugees staying in the camps that European countries are better in all aspects of life, as well as their thoughts and perceptions that support these words, and the images, histories, politics, economies, which constitute these perceptions. Also, I will discuss the relations of refugees who did not have work permits, passports, legal permissions and had to live in camps, with regard to external formative forces through discussions of power relations. As

opposed to the identification of wars, ignorance, uncivilised or undeveloped societies with Eastern countries (meaning mainly Middle East countries), I will discuss the correlations between the civilised, developed, modernised and educated ideas identified with Western countries (representing primarily Western European countries) within the context of power relations.

As the main subject of the next section, I explain and discuss the most visible daily life practices of refugees that were media and internet usage among refugees in the fieldwork areas where these power relations circumscribed, within the scope of Digital Habitus theory.

### **1.3.2) Digital Habitus**

*'We become what we behold. We shape our tools,  
and thereafter our tools shape us.'*  
**Marshall McLuhan**

During fieldwork, the central theme that ethnography allowed me to conceptualise was a *new habitus* created by the refugees' limited and controlled lives within the camp and camp settings. The daily habits and routines produced by this habitus can be observed mainly in camps and in areas where uncertainty and protracted lives are in question. The most salient and obvious of these habits and routines is the use of social media and other internet platforms where refugees spend time, especially on smartphones, tablets, and computers. These new habitus and media usages, which I have observed saliently and tangibly, especially in the camps, are included in this study as Digital Habitus referring to a new theoretical concept. As another critical theory of this research, Digital Habitus is conceptualised and developed to respond to another research objective: *Exploring Syrian refugees' engagement with media technologies and the internet within the boundaries of a new digital age and the environment of refugee camps where a new habitus appears'*. In the following section, I develop the theory of Digital Habitus first through the discussions on digitality, then a comparison of the Habitus theory with the Digital Habitus, and finally, the structure and functionality of the Digital Habitus.



### 1.3.2.1) Digitality: Intertwinement of the Real with Simulation

Bourdieu clarifies the difference between habit and habitus in a footnote to *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977: 218, note 47) and explains: “One of the reasons for the use of the term *habitus* is the wish to set aside the common conception of *habit* as a mechanical assembly or preformed programme, as Hegel does when in the *Phenomenology of Mind*, he speaks of ‘habit as dexterity’”. Habit is more than just a mechanical assembly or a pre-formed program, it is more decisive both in an abstract and concrete sense, the socialities built by behaviour, action, thought stimulus-response reflexes. As Nick Crossley wrote in his work on the notions of habit and habitus: “...*habitus* implies a flexible disposition which, though pre-reflective, remains commensurate with purposive action and in no way precludes intelligence, understanding, strategy or knowledge on the part of the actor” (2013; 139). Common daily acts of almost all the refugees I beheld in the camp sites prompted me to detail the habitus of camp setting places. The common peculiarity of these habits was about the behaviours performed through images, information and sounds simulated on the phone screens, which were carried out over the phone, which were held still while the fingers moved. Put simply, the refugees were using the phone and computers between 250 minutes and 400 minutes every day, 4 to 7 hours on average, while it was measured that the average daily social media usage of internet users worldwide increased from 90 minutes in 2012 to 145 minutes as of 2020<sup>20</sup>. Thus, the digital relationships on which these habits are carried out appear as a new facet and interface of life that regulates, influences, and shapes the interactions and perceptions of people, and, so to speak, becomes obligatory and addictive.

Digital Habitus is an attempt to understand the new field and aspect of life that is shaped and expanded on the common behaviours and habits of billions of people around the world. *What then, is the digital that defines the new borderlines of our time?* The digital in the broadest sense refers to any piece of technology that connects people and machines or information. It re-configures people’s relationships

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/433871/daily-social-media-usage-worldwide/> last access date on 25.05.2021

with each other, with the digital and with data. Marshall McLuhan (1964; 90-92), in his pathfinder work in media studies, *Understanding Media*, states that “*All technologies are extensions of our physical and nervous systems to increase power and speed... as limitless, interactive and multi-sensory*”. Elaborating on McLuhan’s approach and definition that technologies are an extension of our physical presence, the tools we use both metaphorically and literally have become our extensions. For instance, wheels extend our feet, telephones extend our voice, televisions extend our eyes and ears, computers extend our brain, and nowadays a combination of most of these in the form of internet media, in general, extends our central nervous system (Bobbitt, 2011; 2).

Digitality, which is also being referred to as *digitalism*, connotes the condition of living in a digital culture. Digitality as a term and concept has been described by numerous scholars as “*the new realism*” (Bowen and Giannini, 2014; 324; Hassan, 2020). Jonathan Bowen and Tula Giannini (2014) evaluate digitality or digitalism as “*an inevitable progression from real to digital*” which is “*increasingly a force that is unstoppable, irresistible... so that which can be digital will be digital*” (ibid; 328; Bluma, 2016; 10). The term is derived from the book of Nicholas Negroponte entitled ‘*Being Digital*’ (1995), which is considered in relation to modernity and post-modernity (Hassan, 2020). To comprehend the novelty that this concept indicates and the process it corresponds to in our daily life, we can consider the following statistics concerning the growth of digitalism: almost *5 billion* videos are watched on YouTube every day (Agarwal et al. 2017; 586). As of May 2019, more than *500 hours* of video were uploaded to YouTube every minute. There are, on average, *8 billion* video views daily from *500 million* users on Facebook<sup>21</sup> (McNamee, 2020). Google averages nearly *3 billion* searches per day (Arora, McKee and Stuckler, 2019; 338). Every day around *500 million* tweets are tweeted on Twitter (Güngör, Erdem and Doğru, 2019; 898). Growing wearable technology and mobile trends have led to the prediction that there will be 28.5 billion networked devices and connections by 2022<sup>22</sup>. According to statistics on a website that shares technology-focused

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21 <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/facebook-stats-for-marketers/> [last access date on 25.05.2021]

22 <https://sysgen.ca/three-facts-internet/> [last access date on 25.05.2021]

information, around 35 billion IoT devices will be installed around the world by 2021<sup>23</sup>.

The statistical information above is, so to speak, incomprehensibly complex and contains excessively difficult data to comprehend. These data, in fact, explain the interactions performed on digital platforms as a joint action of hundreds of millions or even billions of internet users every day in statistical linguistics. Hence, *what does this new space, where billions of people are simultaneously and mutually related, correspond to in the life of active internet users, us? How have these digital relationships, that are independent of this physical contact but feel as real as physical contact, spread over our lives, and how have they developed? More importantly, how has it created new economies, power relations, societies, subjectivity, and habitus at such an unprecedented pace?*

A wide range of studies has been conducted on the emergence, development and spread of media in various disciplines. These studies have reached various conclusions, such as that the media is a medium between economics and governmentality (Phelan, 2014; Castro, 2016); that the information disseminated through media has an ideological and manipulative function (Carpentier, 2011); that those tools are used to produce media content, such as culture and entertainment; that creates a new economic industry, politics, and relationalities (Straubhaar, LaRose and Davenport, 2013; Hassan, 2020). Each study has built very successful and explanatory approaches regarding the economic, social, political, ideological, and governmental relations experienced in-during its period. Despite this, the studies on the internet-based media remain incapable of establishing its relationship with a macro and functioning system, particularly considering the transformation of digital relationships that surround us as spider networks that have spread to almost every area of life. The sociability and habits created by this new high-tech digital age have reached an important stage, and the devices used in everyday life are somehow determinant in the digital environment. The transformation of all these developments and devices that operate together into a new structure, I argue, goes beyond the

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23 Internet of Things (IoT) developed as a concept approximately 20 years ago and has been now trending around the world day by day. Basically, these numbers refer to various types of devices, machines, and sensors, including smartphones and computers that exist everywhere in our modern and technological world.

scope of most studies in related literature. The postmodern semiotic theory of *hyperreality* was coined by the French sociologist Jean Baudrillard's guiding work in *Simulacra and Simulation* (Pavlik-Malone, 2019; 35). Baudrillard described hyperreality as "*the generation by models of a real without origin or reality*" (1994; 1). Thus, Baudrillard's notions of *hyperreality*, *hyperspace*, *simulacrum*, *reality* and *virtuality* concerning the ambiguous domain between reality and fiction can be used as a reference to interpret the new meanings and relationships generated by today's digital relationships. In other words, the non-use value reality has replaced reality, and the masses, on the other hand, are experiencing this internalised simulation and reality process more passively in a fictionalised reality. In this non-use value reality or internalised simulation, it is vital to understand that those who have control over media tools and their content use them for their own political, economic or social benefits. In this context, the ideology of the media is identified with the ideology of the interest groups served by the information it produces. We can reformulate Karl Marx's statement formulated for economics and superstructures: "The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it (Marx; 1968; 21)"; *The class which has the means of media production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production!*

Baudrillard expressed that: "The whole of the human being, his [sic] biological, muscular, animal physicality has been transferred to mechanical prostheses. Not even our brain has remained within us but is now floating in the countless Hertzian waves and networks surrounding us. This is by no means science fiction but merely the generalisation of McLuhan's theory about the *extension of man [sic]*" (Baudrillard 1989, 114; cited in Gözen, 2020; 52). In his early works, Baudrillard started to form the theory of simulation (1968; 1970), in which he argued that societies started to experience severe deterioration due to advancing modern and media technologies. In the context of this argument, Baudrillard declared the *disruption* of the subject, political economy, meaning, reality and social formations of existing societies (Gözen, *ibid*), mainly through the structural and epistemological relations to digitality. Baudrillard's arguments are understandable in his explanations of knowledge and

the digitisation of knowledge. He had observed precisely that transformation from the tactile to the digital was a primary fact about the contemporary world.

I define the current high-level of digitality as a recently developing and pioneering mechanism, especially in the economic and political fields, and I argue that there are new relationships, industries and socialities designed around digitality, which have both *structural* and *epistemological* functions. Despite this, in this study, I focus particularly on the impact of these structures and epistemology on daily life relations and perceptions of people. I identify this situation as a significant subject because I argue these new relationships have created a new habitus. This habitus has a decisive power and role. Also, I argue that even though the term digital habitus has been emphasized in various studies, the meaning I attribute to digital habitus with a more comprehensive conceptualisation is emphasized for the first time in academic literature. I refer to the notion of habitus as an origin for the conceptualisation of digital habitus. The following section provides an introduction to and a discussion of the notion of habitus as a foundation for digital habitus, specifically in reference to sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.

### **1.3.2.2) A Brief Comparative Discussion of Habitus and Digital Habitus**

Habitus signifies the deeply ingrained habits, skills, dispositions, and logic of practices that we have throughout our life experiences (Bourdieu, 1980, 1982). In Stan Houston's words, "*habitus is literally embodied within the physical presentation, movement and gesture*" (2002; 162). Bourdieu described habitus as a property of social agents, whether individuals, groups, or institutions, that are comprised of a "*structured and structuring structure*" (1994: 170). The *structured* feature implies one's past and present conditions: family upbringing, educational backgrounds, and social environments. The *structuring* structure is more about forming one's present and future capacity, practices and works. In this context, the *structure* by itself depicts an array in which it constructs a system containing the formations of one's life. In other words, the structure is not random or un-patterned (Grenfell, 2014; 51), but it is in order and harmony. Bourdieu in his further works referred to the concept of structure and stated: "*the structure embodies a disposition system that generates perceptions, appreciations and practices*" (Bourdieu; 1990: 53; Grenfell; *ibid*; 51).

Habitus means sociality that social agencies internalise as schemes of perception, feeling, thinking, and acting (Bourdieu, 1982; 37-38). According to this, habitus is the internal structure that structures all social practices of social agencies, from daily life to politics, from cultural tastes to speaking style (Bourdieu, 1980). The objective conditions of existence that each individual internalises in her/his own body during her/his socialisation process constitute the permanent and transferable habitus for that individual (Bourdieu, 1983; 113). In this sense, when applying the theoretical construction of Bourdieu's sociological concept in the digital field with similar methodological patterns and tools to determine the limits and capacity of digital habitus, I can betoken the following arguments.

Firstly, digital habitus is the structure that the individual builds with her/his consent or obligation, which they are a part of, and digital relations constitute almost all social practices on the digital networks. To be more precise, these digital relationships in networks operate and process on or in conjunction with the Internet. Thus, the new societal and social boundaries that individuals personalise as patterns of perception, feeling, thinking, and practising with/in digital settings determine the digital habitus. To define more precisely, *Digital Habitus designates the presence and transference of altering domains of the social, political, economic, and financial set of circumstance elements on internet-based platforms, communicating with and informing the reality*. Secondly, digital habitus is a new setting that enables almost everyone to practice in accordance with social, economic, political, and individual resources that support and empower people on the basis of Internet connectivity.

Thanks to habitus, the individual's actions become mutually recognised and familiar with the social sphere in which they are located. For example, in the first year of primary school, children learn new rules of behaviour in the classroom, the way of speaking and engaging in dialogue with the teacher. Still, once they learn and internalise classroom life's objective conditions, these objective conditions become permanent in them as an internalised subjective structure. Then, in the following years in classes, this student habitus gains validity by reproducing itself in every context without question. Similarly, although the duration of use and association with any type of digital platform, relationalities, web-based interactions, digital habitus

occurs over a much shorter duration than a student's first year of education and can vary from users to users. As a parallel example to the development of habitus in digital frames, a user who starts using Facebook usually spends time learning the ways of using all concepts, settings and rules that are generally written in the terms and conditions, which the user is asked to agree with at the beginning. This example applies to almost all other digital fields. For example, online banking, online education, social media platforms, websites, telecommunication networks, online shopping, and other *e-fields*. Every single one of them provides services through determined rules and regulations. These processes of encountering and engagement with this new digital habitus that operate through social, economic, education, health, administration, bureaucracy, entertainment, games draw the limits of potential habitus(es) appearing in our lives.

What the section above shows, and this is Bourdieu's point too, is that habitus is constituted through *time, upbringing, education, and disposition* (Reay, 2004; 433). The formation of the habitus spreads over long periods in the time period when these elements are built and structured together. However, within the scope of this study, first habitat and then habitus formed within the boundaries of camp areas and conditions can easily re-formulate the refugee individual's previous habitus elements. In this new habitat and habitus, the habits and routines of refugee individuals undergo structural change at an unexpected speed, even though refugees usually spend a few years in camps. This change is also stimulated by *being in limbo*. The formation of new habitus, which is accelerated by being in limbo and living in camp conditions, and then the change of the basic decisive elements of the habitus formation, such as the replacement of education by media and internet, reveals the development of digital habitus with all its bareness.

I consider these new relationalities and interactions as a foundation for the digital habitus as a new system that transformed from the embodiment of habitus in physical presentation and movement to the digital embodiments of mainly social, economic, governmental and entertainment purposes. I argue that we live in a new habitus in which the internet connection is the new priority for both human use and mechanical operation of our times. Therefore, the understanding of the structures

and operation of digital habitus is very significant. The following section presents related discussions about the structure and operation of digital habitus, in which the reader can envision digital habitus more concretely.

### **1.3.2.3) Media Content as an Extension of Our Physical and Nervous Systems: The Structure and Operation of Digital Habitus**

Digital networks surround almost every aspect of life. These networks either by cooperation or separately create structures and functionalities in life. Digital habitus is a *new interface* that intersects, inter-works and provides a complementary feature to these structures and functionalities in life. This new interface, which brings together the relationships, needs and services in different aspects of life, is digital habitus. As an interface, digital habitus is an up-to-date means that facilitates life, provides benefits and functionality, and generates meaning through the functionalities and services it offers. In the development of such broad relationships of the fastest growing industry and aspect of life, the operation of digital habitus is built on *relationality*, which Bourdieu also considers in his engagement with sociology (Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron, 2011). Bourdieu's approach in sociology is relational (Schinkel, 2007; 707), but he does not focus on social relations, rather on social networks or an interactional order (Bottero, 2009; 399). Bourdieu's interpretation of relationality is based on social interactions as a space of relations (Bourdieu 1985: 725). Considering Bourdieu's understanding of relationality, the new digital structures interact, intersect, cooperate, and function within or upon each other, which is the digital relationality. Relationality as an approach can help in mapping the structure and fields of the digital habitus.

Although it has interactive and relational qualities, digital habitus ontologically and structurally has a *neutral* nature. Let's give an example based on a different analogy: a school building structurally is neutral, until lectures for educational and teaching purposes are delivered and utilised. Likewise, internet and media means have a neutral structure, especially in terms of infrastructures and hardware. The main component that makes this structure subjective and functional are *media content* and *services*. In this sense, the effect triggered by the content, which this digital system provides as its principal functionality, on its users is one of the objects of this



study. The main basis of my development of the digital habitus theory as a new phenomenon is to emphasize the common effects on users triggered by media content operating through this new system.

Nevertheless, one of the distinct features of digital habitus is that *digital fields are not passive*. On the contrary, they have their aims, programs, duties to complete and function through, although there are multiple actors and structures varying in different areas and sectors and therefore have different purposes. To illustrate with an analogy, there have been two central communication and interaction forms among humans; first *the material-based interactions* and then for a few decades now, *digital-based interactions* (Jung and Stolterman, 2012). The first one frames the interactions with materials and tools, which, due to their nature, cannot have an aim but a function for being used and interacted with. For example, consider a car or a chair, which awaits there without its aim or purpose in a passive form. Digital-based interactions are new invisible networks, platforms, and websites that have functions and purposes different from materials and tools. For instance, these networks, applications, and websites can send a notification to bring the user's attention or analyse the user's online history to promote relevant advertisements or related content without asking for it. Digital habitus is not only a habitus that users establish among themselves, but also it is a *new* and *mechanical* social feature that did not exist before in our lives. This is the artificial intelligence (AI) of the material tools we use to communicate.

Internet-based companies, such as Google or Facebook, have more information about individuals and societies than has ever been imagined in human history. All this information is data that internet users are constantly pouring out. This data is being supported by these companies' systems that almost have no human supervision anymore. These systems with the most updated version of algorithms make *better* and *better* and *better* predictions about what we are going to do and actually about who we are. Tristan Harris, activist<sup>24</sup> and computer scientist, explains<sup>25</sup> that the Information Technologies (IT), software departments and

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24 <https://www.humanetech.com/> last access date on 25.05.2021

25 <https://www.humanetech.com/the-social-dilemma> last access date on 25.05.2021

engineers of these companies (Google, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc.) work on their systems with three principal goals. These goals are first *the engagement goal*, which is to drive up the usage of the internet users, to keep them scrolling their screens; then *the growth goal*, which is to keep the users coming back to the systems and indirectly convincing them to invite more people as friends to expand the systems; and finally, *the advertising goals*, which is to manage all these happenings to gain economic profits, make money out of the users and benefit as much as possible economically.

Digital content largely takes shape in the formations of texts, sounds, images, and the combination of these. However, the impact of this content achieves functionality and sense in more abstract extents as thought, emotion, desire, ideology, advertisement, which are aimed to be transmitted through these formations. I recognise this media content as a *new power actor and relation* due to the potential power it has. As an example, consider the programs shown on TV in the form of movies, commercials, clips, news; or social media content in the form of images, photographs, videos, personal or public posts; or Internet content in all specified formats. In this sense, the media content becomes an extension of the user's feelings and thoughts which has potential effects on the other users who view this content. If we remember the most essential criterion that we take when defining power relations, '*...the external forces that have a radical and formative influence on one another*', in this sense media content has the power of formative influence on others. We do not have the power to control the context or theme of broadcast content, although we have the capacity to personally monitor, prefer, or conversely eliminate or block, the channels and platforms on which media content is broadcast. Thus, media content is potentially an *external force* that can influence others.

We will see how contexts, themes, and subjects, which I have defined as *media content*, have the power of influence in this study concerning Syrian refugees who are associated with and affected by this content. For example, we will see how a comment under content posted on Facebook, which is undeniably far from reality, has a radical effect on the perception and desire of a refugee staying in one of the camps in Greece. Furthermore, we will see what impact social media has on a young

refugee who succeeded in arriving in Germany, resulting in hundreds of other refugees staying in different countries contacting him on social media and requesting information. Finally, we will discuss the fact that another refugee staying at the camp in Turkey emphasises that access to the Internet is as essential as bread and water, and the relation between this essential need and camp and refugee conditions and how digital habitus develops correspondingly. Additionally, we will discuss how the interactions that digital habitus broadcasts, provides access and enables and influences individuals. This is a new digital interface that exceeds the limits of media propaganda, manipulation, and content control.

Social and political subjectivity is the third theoretical perspective of this research. First, within the scope of the research subject, I correlate and discuss Syrian refugees with their mobility capacity, the capital they have, the importance of their gender norms and roles, the decisions they make and the actions they practice. The discussion of subjectivity indirectly highlights the potential dynamics of the decisions, actions, and practices we deal with individually as internet users and media content producers and consumers. Power relations and digital habitus are the first two mechanisms of a major system that shape and affect the decisions, actions and perceptions of individuals and masses, as we will examine in more detail in the chapters where fieldwork analyses are conveyed. I discuss the theory of political and social subjectivity as the third mechanism in the next section.

### **1.3.3) Political and Social Subjectivities**

*As the ego cogito, subjectivity is the consciousness that represents something, relates this representation back to itself, and so gathers with itself.*

**Martin Heidegger**

As the third set of essential theories considered in this research, in this section I address the concepts of *political* and *social subjectivities* due to their inherent qualities in response to my doctoral research's two fundamental objectives. These are firstly, '*Syrian refugees' social, economic, and educational backgrounds and capital in relation to their practices and the realisation of their plans*' and secondly, '*Syrian refugees' transformation and empowerment of gender roles and norms in prior to and during the migration*'. The answers sought to these two research points

aim to empower the refugees' subjectivity and to note that the refugees' subjectivities are not passive. In doing so, political and social subjectivities are presented as complementary mechanisms of power relations and digital habitus, namely *the third mechanism of a major system*. Thus, I first develop a discussion around the meaning and formation of subjectivity, and then how subjectivity is formed in my research, and finally, what political and social subjectivity means in a major system as a complementary mechanism of power relations and digital habitus.

### **1.3.3.1) Subjectivity, Political Subjectivity, and the Subjectivity of Refugees**

The scope of subjectivity has been dealt with predominantly from philosophical and sociological perspectives. While the philosophical approach correlates subjectivity with the individual's representation and existence, the sociological approach focuses on the social dimensions and relations of the individual's agency and representation. The meaning attributed to subjectivity in this research can be grasped with a more interwoven and intricate perspective, especially in the context of Syrian refugees. Hence, the concept of subjectivity requires an interdisciplinary point of view when it comes to refugees. Therefore, first, I examine the function and meaning of subjectivity in this research through these philosophical and sociological approaches. Then, with a perspective that transcends the scope of the philosophical and sociological approaches, I explain political subjectivity by linking it with the refugees.

Subjectivity, as a phenomenon has been at the core of many philosophical approaches that concern the subject's position as a being (Henrich, 2003; Chiesa, 2007; Zahavi, 2008). A subject means an individual who has conscious experiences such as subjective perspectives, feelings, and beliefs, which is commonly considered an entity (Metzinger, 2000). The innermost essence of subjectivity in philosophical debates, as Slavoj Zizek<sup>26</sup> puts it, "*...resides in a unique act of what Fichte baptised self-positing. Here, each subject is a point of absolute autonomy,*

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<sup>26</sup><https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/the-fall-that-makes-us-like-god-part-i/> from the debate titled 'The Fall That Makes Us Like God, Part I' last access date on 25.05.2021

Also see, Zizek, Slavoj (1999) *The ticklish subject: The absent centre of political ontology*. Verso.

*which means that it cannot be reduced to a moment in the network of causes and effects.*” Regarding the capacity, potentiality, and uniqueness of the subjectivity, Hannah Arendt also considered the subject’s positioning from a different angle by specifying the uniqueness and unexpectedness as follows: *“It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started. This cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before. This character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings. The fact that man is capable of action means the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable (1973; 177-178).”* In philosophical approaches, subjectivity is commonly considered as an entity. It can be argued that an entity has a representation, exclusivity, privilege, and positionality that is unique to it by its nature. Blackman et al. (2008; 7) address subjectivity through an individual’s distinctiveness and write: “The imperative for such a philosophical attempt at understanding subjectivity as maintaining its own distinctive, ‘*non-derivative*’ ontology is to be found in a moment of crisis”. Here a moment of crisis in an individual’s case may be formulated into the refugee-ness as a social crisis appearing in each refugee’s life.

In addition to the philosophical approach, the sociological evaluation of the subject and subjectivity also draw attention to another *central approach* in social sciences (Blackman et al. 2008; 10). Subjectivity is generally a social relationship that arises through interactional perspectives (Domingues, 1995) in the society in which the individual lives and is inherently social. Jermier (2008; 468) noted that “*Subjectivity is a sociological concept that refers to interior states of being experienced by human actors. These states can be shared or individuated and result from relations of power.*” The human actor does not develop in a self-sufficient environment as stated in philosophical approaches, on the contrary, subjectivity develops with the interactions and relationships that occur in the world surrounding the individual (Domingues, 1995). This is a reciprocal relationship, as the continually changing culture, as well as other key structures such as economy, political and social relationships, influence the individual, while in return, the subjectivity of the individual re-shapes them.

Even though the notion of subjectivity has been widely theorised through philosophical and sociological perspectives, the notion of *political subjectivity* requires further explanation and discussion. Sadeq Rahimi reviews the relations between the political and subjectivity and states: “The notion of political subjectivity dramatically widens the scope of *politicality* to understand the subject itself as a political event,” and continues: “*Politicality*, in this sense, is not an added aspect of the subject, but indeed the mode of being of the subject, that is, precisely what the subject is” (2015; 8). The agency and more importantly, the political representation of the subject have even more significance in subaltern and post-colonial studies. To exemplify it in various research areas: Issues of female subjectivity and subaltern agency (Loomba, 1993), women’s empowerment and subaltern consciousness (Leve, 2007), ethnic nationalism and political subaltern identity (Cockell, 2000), political subjectivity of religious communities (Beshara, 2018) can be stated.

While inextricable from sociological and philosophical approaches as the predominant methods, the political subjectivity considered in this study is at the same time transcendental, particularly in understanding refugees’ subjectivities. This is because, while *refugee-ness* is a given identity and status that organises refugees’ relationships in many aspects such as bureaucracy, economy, and sociality; at the same time, it is very political to act within the limits determined by this identity status while re-gaining the subjectivity. Following the rapid increase in the number of refugees and displaced communities worldwide in the past few decades, the form of subjectivity, especially the concepts of political subjectivity, has attracted particular attention in refugee and migration research. The number of studies in this field is increasing day by day. Considering the refugees as the *subjected subjects*, they have significantly narrowed and limited agencies and experience the encounters with bureaucracy (Åsa and Wikström, 2014), humanitarian borders (Kallio, Häkli and Pascucci, 2019), legal processes and documentation (Aberman, 2014), dangerous migration routes and fatal struggles (Fontanari, 2018). In my research, the subjectivity and agency of refugees have appeared on the agenda through the mobility, agency, actions and capabilities of Syrian refugees, which varied in Turkey, Greece and Germany. I consider the notion of agency in the case of Syrian refugees

as *actors* of their life who choose to act concerning their plans, desires, decisions, and gender relations.

Bourdieu strongly objected the *Rational Choice Theory* when he explained his understanding of subject and actor. Rational choice theory suggests a set of guidelines that assist in understanding the economic and social behaviour of subjects concerning (Blume and Easley, 1982, 1984). Bourdieu, in discussions of habitus and field theory, particularly in the social field, considers *not subjects or actors, but agents* as determined by habitus and disposition (Bourdieu, 2020). He evaluates agents and states that they (agents) do not perpetually estimate and behave according to precise rational and economic principles. Instead, Bourdieu argues that (social) agents operate according to an inherent and certain practical logic, a practical sense and bodily dispositions (Hilgers and Mangez, 2014; 23). On the other hand, in this study, however, the arguments about subjectivity argue that although the individual's capital forms and gender for instance, are particularly in mind as determinants, the decisions, actions, and practices of the subject are not solely determined by the subject's dispositions and by habitus.

In the following section, I indicate the reflection of the fieldwork regarding Syrian refugees' performed subjectivities in conformity with their socio-economic background and gender empowerments. I particularly offer the social subjectivity notion in this regard alongside political subjectivity.

### **1.3.3.2) Political and Social Subjectivity of Syrians: Refugee-ness as a New Agency**

A wide variety of academic research has already been conducted on the correlations of migration and economics, social and educational status (Van Hear, 2014; Erel, 2010; Gosnell and Abrams, 2011). The intersection of the main emphasis of these studies and the argument concerning political subjectivity that I discuss in this chapter is that various forms of capital in reference to Bourdieu (1986) are among the main determining dynamics on the actions, capabilities, and practices of individuals. This is also accurate for Syrian refugees who strive to realise their political subjectivity through migration mobilities in parallel with their thoughts,

decisions, desires, plans and imaginations. If we formulate: *More substantial social, economic and cultural capital and upbringing patterns strengthen and enable individuals to act upon and practice more comprehensively in different ways of taking action; whereas less and weaker capital prevents and disables individuals in their practices.*

In addition to the various forms of refugees' capital, gender empowerment and transformation play a critical role in the discussion of political subjectivity (Gibson-Graham, 2020; Aretxaga, 2021). Krause and Schramm in their work (2011; 115) particularly focus on the empowerment of subjectivity through the lenses of gender relations and diasporic minority communities' agencies. They write: "The analytical concept of political subjectivity helps to understand how people relate to governance and authorities. It denotes how a single person, or a group of actors is brought into a position to stake claims, to have a voice, and to be recognizable by authorities." In the last decades, when the number of women's studies started to increase, the importance of gender in migration studies also accelerated. Studies were conducted on both positive and negative aspects of being a woman in international mobility, illegal immigration and refugee-ness (Pedraza, 1991; Boyd and Grieco, 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Cranford, 2006). The main point where most of the studies on the gender and migration relationship and particularly in gender transformation in Syrian refugees before and during migration intersect is essentially on men's experiences where women's perspective on the issue is neglected. However, apart from the challenges of being a woman in the scope of gender relations, it is also a question of how *gender roles* and *hierarchies* affect the migration possibilities of women and men at every stage of the migration process and produce different migration results (Boyd and Grieco, 2003; 28). The control and oppression of women came onto the agenda of fieldwork studies primarily as a consequence of the patriarchy and male-dominant mentality. That is, particularly in the more collective communities, male dominance and patriarchy can be more influential and penetrating, particularly as a restrictive reason to prevent women's subjectivity and agency (Allen, 2009; 341, 359). Therefore, while setting and clarifying the borders of gender dynamics in the political subjectivity of Syrian refugees, we can reach the following formulation: *As the social pressure on women negatively exposed to*



*gender roles decreases, their subjectivity becomes more visible in individual encouragement, empowerment, and public relations.* In this sense, the part where political subjectivity intersects chiefly with gender debates and concerns Syrian women refugees can be discussed by the fact that female refugees whose subjectivity has become more strengthened, have a voice, are recognised by the authorities and are more visible in their collective communities. The evaluated fieldwork findings in Turkey, compared with the conclusions from fieldwork in Greece and Germany from gender perspectives, will detail this argument.

In addition to *political subjectivity*, I refer to the notion of *social subjectivity* that should be taken into account especially in the case of Syrian refugees. The subjectivity and individual agency of a refugee can and often is different from how they are perceived by their *host communities*. This gap between subjectivity and perception causes ambivalence and potential conflict in the representation of the individual. In many cases the host perception informs the individual's subjectivity and dictates their agency. This situation surfaces in ambivalence and reluctance to share the personal identity, status, and imaginings of the future - all of which are challenged. By social subjectivity I mean *the subjectivity created by displaying performance in accordance with social anticipations in the host country, through newly appropriated social traditions, norms, and roles of people of a particular race, religion, or ethnicity.*

Forced displacement and the subsequent wearing down and loss of the possessed material and moral values make it difficult for refugees to adapt to the given identities, which naturally creates a subjectivity problem. In this sense, social subjectivity for refugees requires a process of re-construction of their representations, agency, and of regaining their voice. The public opinion and image of a refugee who seeks a safe place and escapes from a destructive force such as war draws the portrait of a *helpless* and *poor* individual. Thus, a refugee might find her/himself in a new situation of subjectivity. Either a refugee recounts the life story expected and demanded of her/him over and over again or s/he has a personal conflict in these encounters to reconstruct her/his identity, representation and subjectivity against what is expected and demanded. I call this personal conflict process imposed by others, *social subjectivity*.

In the context of both political and social subjectivity debate, fieldwork findings and results will be evaluated primarily by the participants' capital, activism and capabilities, and lastly, by their gender roles. To illustrate, the compulsion of refugees staying in the Kahramanmaraş Temporary Protection Center (Kahramanmaraş Geçici Koruma Merkezi - KTPC) in Turkey to stay in the camp as a result of their lack of capital, will be discussed through the lens of subjectivity. In addition, the empowerment of refugee women staying in camps in Greece and taking social, legal, and educational responsibilities, thereby becoming much more visible in the public sphere, will detail the gender-related aspects of subjectivity. Finally, we will address the political and social subjectivity of a medical doctor refugee participant who immigrated to Germany but cannot perform her profession solely because of her refugee status, and how this situation affected the social, economic, and cultural respectability and agency of this refugee.

#### **1.3.4) The Theoretical Hypothesis of the Research: Semi-Autonomous Colonialism**

Nowadays, we live in a *global capitalist, modern and technological* era where minds are more valuable than bodily forces. Intellectual power began to become more specific and important in the domain that has emerged as a result of mechanisation and technology replacing the body power. Also, we are faced with intertwined and complex systems parallel to increasing new means and systems mainly accelerated by technological developments. Thus, I argue that sociological and political conceptualisations cannot adequately explain this new era's formation and development phase by looking through the lenses of current theories. A new intellectual toolbox is needed to understand the transformation in recent history by the central power axes, and those historically hold colonial sovereignty, power, and ascertainment. As a young scholar, I see in the current transformation of the existing power centres adorned with global capitalist, modern and technological tools are now improved into a system that can bring together the best minds, intellects, and qualifications of the world with the perception, desire, and consent it can create in individuals. The current method of collecting these good intellects and qualified people together is to offer opportunities, generate higher living standards, become a

place where desires can be realised and be attractive. These living standards, opportunities and desires apply to both economic, social, and political areas.

The forced displacement and subsequent migration trajectories of Syrian refugees are a powerful example for understanding the course and motivations of people in building a new life when they are faced with external pushing forces. In particular, mass migration mobilities and dispositions provide robust suggestions and data about the perceptions and desires of people in general, especially to those who perform such movements. The narratives and circumstances of the changing perceptions, desires and thoughts of Syrian refugees during migration is considered as a basis for sculpting a larger system that also includes Syrian refugees' immigration and mobility. In this sense, the theoretical frames discussed in the above sections are considered as the foundation of this more comprehensive system. To be more precise, when considering power relations as external forces, digital habitus as a new interface and means, and subjectivity as decisions made and practices carried out by individuals, these mechanisms as a whole manifest a model of a system. This system is *Semi-Autonomous Colonialism*. The main reason why I call this system colonialism is that I observe that this system, in particular, has similar foundations and connections to the establishment and operating patterns of historical colonialism. I categorise these similarities within the four main features of the classical colonial system from its establishment to its consequences. These are *political and legal domination over an alien society* (Merry, 1991; Craven, 2012), *economic relations and political dependence* (Santos, 1970; Fieldhouse, 1999), *exploitation relations* (Spangen et al. 2015; Marchal, 2017), and *cultural and ethnic or racial inequalities* (Samson, 2003, 2013, 2020; Shin, 2011; Weiner, 2014). Within the scope of these four basic features, I re-formulate these fundamental attributes of classical colonialism into an up-to-date system. This reformulation manifests to the reader, in particular, how colonialism as a system, so to speak, as the contemporary and widely encompassing version of colonialism has the functioning and structure.

The migration movements of Syrian refugees were triggered first by the *pushing force*, chiefly by the Syrian Civil War, but later their migration directions and extents were determined by the *pulling forces*, by the idea, perception, and desire of better

life standards. Thus, the parties and actors of both pushing and pulling forces, which I have emphasised in *power relations* theoretical discussion, also serve us to better understand the semi-autonomous character of current colonial relationships. When colonialism was at its strongest as a system, there was a mobility of exploitation and profit. This mobility was more predominantly managed, controlled, and administered by the powerful side of this system, by the colonisers. The mobility created by this exploitation and profit is still happening in similar actions today. Based on these research arguments, my argument is that these movements continue within the framework of the semi-autonomous decisions and practices of the parties. The most striking difference about this system is that this system achieves its ends *semi-autonomously*, unlike all previous versions.

Nevertheless, when considering invisible movements triggered by pulling forces instead of pushing forces that usually bring the movement's problem onto the socio-political agenda, individual or mass migrations, for instance, are almost exclusively triggered by *pulling forces* and tend to increase day by day. Moreover, when compared with forced migration, this less visible or less problematic individual/mass immigration, for instance, economically benefits the host countries. The formulation of the semi-autonomous colonial system, which is currently operative and practical, directly reveals the long-term migration tendencies of Syrian refugees, the patterns and motives of their migration directions, reasons for migrating and behaviour. In other words, semi-autonomous colonialism is of great importance and assistance in understanding the occurrence of movements such as *brain drain* or *qualified immigration* and the socio-political and economic background of these movements, as well as a new viewpoint on the invisible *economic contribution* of these people to their host countries.

The semi-autonomous colonial system is the government of historical colonial powers' identities, political, social and economic powers, the prestige that they have built during the colonial period to generate surplus-value through this triangular mechanism and function this system through the others. In my research, Syrian refugees and their next generations, who will be born and integrated into the host countries' systems, are just examples of *others*. Despite their forthcoming integration

through culture, education and orientation, they will always be considered *'other,'* as cogs which reinforce this surplus formulation. The most prominent and differentiating feature of this system is that it has *semi-autonomous* parts. The semi-autonomous character of this system is the responsibility of individuals and masses for their choices and actions based on the formation of their consent, perceptions, and desires.

The forces that are another part of this system and that benefit from this system, generating surplus value and developing new instruments, are not the main ones wholly responsible for the operation of this system, but only are the parties that *profits* from this system. The other party is the side that generates the surplus value and keeps the system enduring and in constant growth. In other words, the consent and desires generated by largely digital habitus, which I see as a new tool and theoretical framework, and the practice of these desires and thoughts are carried out by individuals or masses with their own will and initiative. Considering Syrian refugees migrating to European countries, even though they were forcibly displaced by external forces, such as war and political instability, they carry out such dangerous and risky migrations by relying on their own decisions and capital. Here, rather than regarding Syrian refugees as entirely dependent victims by taking their agencies away, I embrace an approach that maintains, strengthens, and highlights the subjectivity of Syrian refugees, which connects their representation back to them. This is strongly associated with the *semi-autonomy* of the contemporary world.

#### **1.4) Outline of the Following Chapters**

In the next, that is, Chapter 2, I present the Methodological Framework of the Research. Although I engaged with particular perspectives and concepts in a theoretical sense prior to undertaking the research, I preferred not to approach the field with a theoretical presupposition, as Grounded Theory's theoretical proposition suggests (Strauss and Glaser, 1967). Instead, I chose to form a theoretical hypothesis as a result of the comparison, categorisation and analysis of the data I obtained and generated during the fieldwork. In Chapter 2, I extensively discuss the qualitative research methods (Berg, 2008) that determine the methodological and epistemological limits and approach of this research. Subsequently, I examine

Grounded Theory as preparation for fieldwork, the challenges faced, and especially as a decisive systematic methodology. In this chapter, I will answer the questions of why semi-structured interviews, participant observation and ethnography were preferred as data collection methods.

After the Methodological Framework of the Research chapter, within the scope of Chapter 3, I present to the readers the findings and related discussions obtained and generated through the methodological and epistemological approaches of *Grounded Theory* in the first fieldwork site, KTPC, in Turkey. In doing this, I first discuss the ethnographic and interview analyses with the Syrian Arab refugees at the Kahramanmaraş Temporary Protection Centre (KTPC). While discussing these analyses, I structurally follow the focal points of the research. Firstly, these focal points are *the perception of participants regarding the others*; then, *their internet and media use*; then, *their varying forms of capital*, such as economic or cultural, and finally, *female participants' subjectivities* in the frame of gender discussions. The second part of Chapter 5 includes the analysis of interviews and ethnographies with Syrian Kurdish refugees in Diyarbakır and Mardin. Also, structurally I follow the focal points of the research as mentioned about Syrian Arab refugees. At the end of this chapter, I make a comparative analysis of the findings concerning Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees in Turkey.

In Chapter 4, the fieldwork analysis, discussions, and findings in Greece are presented to the readers as the *second stage of the field research*. Firstly, I deal with the ethnography and interviews conducted in the Sounio camp in Sounio town, where Syrian Arab refugees resided. Later in the second part of the chapter, I discuss the research's focal points within the scope of the information obtained and generated in the Lavrio camp in the city of Lavrio [also known as Laurium], where the field study was conducted with Syrian Kurdish refugees. In the last part, I present the similarities and differences to the readers in a comparative manner regarding these two different fieldwork sites and sample groups, as touched upon in 3rd Chapter.

As the last fieldwork research, Chapter 5 offers the interviews and ethnography conducted in Berlin, Germany. In this context, I present the findings and results that

I obtained in 5 different refugee accommodation centres in Berlin according to the research focal points. Hence, I bring up the discussions in parallel with the findings of Syrian Arab refugees first. In the second part of the chapter, I then evaluate the findings with respect to Syrian Kurdish refugees. Finally, I also make a comparison of the two sample groups.

Chapter 6 is the section where I discuss the theoretical concepts that are pointed out by the data and the conclusions reached in these three different fieldwork sites. I re-touch upon the digital habitus theory. Then, I formulate the theory of *Semi-Autonomous Colonialism* in light of the concepts of power relations, digital habitus and subjectivity, as a new macro system proposal. In this chapter, I discuss first of all why I relate this system to colonialism. In elaborating this argument, I specifically provide a comparative case of the four phases that classical colonialism gradually followed in the establishment process and their counterparts in the semi-autonomous colonial system. These four steps are briefly discussed as *political and legal domination*, then *economic relations and political dependence*, then *exploitation relations*, and finally, *cultural and ethnic or racial inequalities*. After these comparative analyses and discussions, I explain what semi-autonomous colonialism implies, especially in the context of Syrian refugees.

The last chapter in this research, Chapter 7, is the conclusion.

## 2) CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

*Knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting!*

**Michel Foucault**

This chapter explains the methodological perspectives and approaches of the research. First, I address Grounded Theory as the approach used in the research. Then, I detail the relationship between theory, epistemology, and qualitative research. Later, I discuss the methodological techniques, semi-structured interviews and participant observations, which are preferred in this study, together with the reasons for choosing these. I also present in table form the demographic characteristics of the 52 interviewees who were collaborated with specifically in this research and explain the desired criteria. In the last two sections, I also discuss the difficulties faced during fieldwork and I present my motivations, experiences and positionality as a researcher.

#### 2.1) Grounded Theory

*Everything is data!*

**Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser**

In social sciences, the methodological approaches used by researchers have the most fundamental and decisive importance in understanding societal and social phenomena of the research subjects (Oakley, 1998). The theoretical development and foundations of a methodological technique are the main tools that guide a reliable conclusion on the suitability of the research to the subject, obtaining the data and the feasibility and practicality of the research (Kothari, 2004). *Grounded Theory* as a systematic approach was used in this research for its qualities, such as involvement in data collection and analysis (Lawrence and Tar, 2013) and construction of analytic codes and categories from data (Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014).

Grounded Theory is a qualitative methodological research concept developed in the field of behavioural sciences by sociologists Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser in



the 1960s and is especially used in social anthropology. Grounded Theory has become one of the most dominant methods used by qualitative researchers over time (Thomas and James, 2006; 767-768). This research method suggests that the field should be considered as the main element that *generates* theory, rather than using the field to *test* theory (Charmaz and Mitchell, 2001; Charmaz and Belgrave, 2007). Despite this, one of the common critical perceptions about Grounded Theory is that this approach is a *theory without theory*. However, Grounded Theory offers perspectives and methods about theory formation as a systematic procedure. It aims to approach field data with an analytical perspective and reach theoretical generalizations in light of the generated and gathered data. Grounded Theory is inherent to the field and expects researchers to use these research methods to explore potential theories most connected to the research subjects (Strauss and Glaser, 1967; Kurt, 2017; 20).

American Sociologist Charles Wright Mills' '*The Sociological Imagination*' (1959) is an engaging theory. Mills suggests that we can engage with social phenomena for a better understanding if we study them from the perspective of the interactions between three dimensions, which are *individual biographies, history, and social structure* (Covan, 2010; 59). Grounded Theory is based on the principle of perpetual comparison of the data collected during the field study by considering the *uniqueness* of the field and supporting it with theoretical discussions. In order not to reduce and simplify the observed facts and subjects and to not interpret them with existing theories in the literature, it is necessary to disengage from the perspectives of these theories.

In the following section, I examine the methodological techniques used in Grounded Theory and its feasibility in my research.

### **2.1.1) The Functionality of Grounded Theory in My Fieldwork**

In the field study, the Grounded Theory method takes place in four gradual steps. These can be formulated as follows: *First*, to analyse the data by comparing them systematically; *second*, to identify and categorise the similarities and differences that arise among these analyses; *third*, to determine the boundaries of a possible

theoretical frame and to relate the resulting categories to these theoretical limits, and *finally*, to develop the theory that the data points to (Strauss and Corbin, 1994; 274; Locke, 2003; 100). As a result of the implementation of this process, a developed systematic approach is formed. Likewise, this developed systematic approach has a transparent operation through the techniques such as making *constant comparisons* and *dissociating the similarities and differences* in generated data with coding and the creation of categories. Following the steps of making constant comparisons, disassociating similarities and differences in data and finally deriving new meanings from the data, enables the possible formation of themes and theories along with the data generated based on fieldwork, rather than testing the previously determined theoretical approaches (Conrad, 1978; 102-103). In other words, the theory emerges from the social phenomenon itself, which *is inherent to the data* (Kurt, 2017; 25).

So, *what is the benefit of using these methods* recommended by Grounded Theory for the researcher? The essential answer to this question is that we can say it allows the data obtained from the field to be analysed critically. The step that enables critical analysis for the research is that the researcher can put a more objective distance between herself/himself and the field during the constant comparison and theoretical sampling processes. A researcher, by applying these steps, can potentially add *flexibility* to the research subject, *get rid of personal prejudices* towards the subject and field, and *enable the field data to guide* herself/himself instead of approaching the field with a theoretical frame. In that case, *how did these Grounded Theory methodological approaches, which I discussed theoretically and functionally, correspond in my fieldwork?*

I approached the fieldwork with the categorical and conceptual titles and theoretical limitations that I had previously identified, mainly related to colonialism and historical migration forms and methods concerning colonialism. However, most of these categories and concepts have transformed and developed during fieldwork and formed new ideas and categories. While I pre-determined notions and concepts in mind which aimed to correlate field data on colonial history and its East-West historical contrast, I apprehended that I should give more weight to media studies,

gender debates and subjectivity formations among refugees. Besides, in the beginning, when I started to do the field study, I considered Syrian Refugees as the sample group as a whole regardless of their ethnic or religious background, just one nation who have been forcibly displaced. However, only two weeks of field experience and observation demonstrated that I should re-formulate my sample group to contain broader refugees' perspectives by considering the ethnic origins of Syrian refugees that affect their relations with world views, gender roles, politics, and sense of belongings in communities. The maturation process of these field experiences and observations suggested re-formulating the sample groups. To illustrate this, the intersection points that arose in the notes I took at the end of each interview and each day, in my daily observations, writings of the field and identifications of common issues that remain in my mind from the interviews, have directed me to an updated research theme.

In long-term studies such as doctoral research in social sciences, a blurry field may occur between the researcher's personal life and his/her identity and research contents. These blurry and overlapping daily life practices and experiences have had a function that often nourishes, supports, and helps my research personally. To exemplify that, regarding the field research techniques, a few of my daily life habits in my personal life have had a positive impact in ways of analysing and re-encoding research data. For example, the yoga and meditation practices I was doing before going to bed at the end of the day helped me to remember and interpret the data during the research. Particularly, the *remembering meditation* was very beneficial. Because the remembering meditation is based on chronologically re-enacting and recalling daily practices such as my daily actions, conversations, and interactions. During my field studies, I continued to practice this meditation as one of my daily routines, mainly for my mind and body health rather than because it can be used as a field research method. However, after a while, thanks to this meditation technique, I realised that I am often not aware of subtle and crucial details while observing or interviewing in the daytime. The extra notes I wrote down about the field research after the awareness that occurred after these meditations have helped my research. Although my personal daily habits and actions are not a common research method and technique, the methodological strategies, such as categorisation, constant

comparison, and deriving new meaning, recommended by Grounded Theory towards the field research and obtained data, was very useful.

## **2.2) Theory, Epistemology, Methods and Qualitative Research**

The formation of knowledge in natural sciences is constructed through evident, correlated, and repetitive patterns between things, events, and objects (Schutz, 1962; Golinski, 2008; Longino, 2020). The rules and assumptions about these procedures are considered comprehensively universal (Blaikie, 2007). In social sciences, unlike in the natural sciences, universal validity of rules and relations cannot be specified (Campbell, 1988). The reason for this is not that valid information cannot be produced in social sciences, as in natural sciences, or that the objects, subjects and topics it investigates act in an irregular, non-repetitive or irrational manner. Evidence, relationships, repetitive patterns and the process of producing knowledge between the things, events and objects in the social sciences are also considered (Blaikie, 2007; 111). Though, the ways in which the natural sciences and social sciences obtain knowledge differ from each other. This separation goes through the theory and method process.

The research aims to gather *new information* that makes a good contribution to the body of knowledge (Stinson, 1995). Therefore, the formation of the *theory* takes place through the research process. Tavallaei and Talib (2010; 570) state the importance of theory thus: “In qualitative inquiry process, the role of theory in the field of social science and where it situates in the research framework has always created a challenge for the researchers”. Considering the statement of Tavallaei and Talib, therefore Grounded Theory was adopted in this study. I deemed the Grounded Theory approach as suitable, not only to evade challenges that might be faced but also to highlight the originality and importance of fieldwork and to create new room for theories that field data could potentially suggest. At the same time, since this study investigates social phenomena concerning Syrian refugees, such as their perception, desires, mobilities and conception of migration, the theory to be recommended by field study data has become a priority. Therefore, I give room for the fieldwork process and its findings to conceptualise the extent and importance of

theory in research. Though, in this case, the methods used in the field study gain importance.

According to Nachmias and Nachmias (1987; 22) : “*it is possible to interpret methodology as a demarcation criterion between the scientific approaches to obtain knowledge and non-scientific forms of search.*” Moreover, methodology specifies ‘a general frame and approach to studying research topic’; on the other hand, method refers to ‘*a specific research path that is the best way to practice through*’ (Silverman, 1993; 1). Therefore, the consistency of the research scope and the information generated by the research are based on certain methodological themes and theoretical principles. This is necessary for conducted research to obtain and generate reliable and valid data. It is more appropriate to address an approach and method formed during the study and whose suitability is influenced by the study’s nature. As Bryman (1984; 76) stated, it is important to emphasize that the method chosen to carry out the research should be appropriate for the epistemological scope, the sensitivity of research’s nature, and the research subject.

The considerations of research methods and techniques in the social sciences also are most fundamentally concerned with the definition of *ontology*, *epistemology*, and *human nature* (Morgan and Smircich, 1980; 492). Many social science scholars specify the importance of the methods adopted to carry out the research and state that the method should fit the *epistemological focus*, the *research subject and the field* (Bryman, 1984; 76; Bhattacharjee, 2012; Newing, 2010). Epistemology is about the nature, origin, and scope of knowledge. Epistemology is concerned with ways of learning and knowing about the world and focuses on issues such as how we can learn about reality (Ormston et al. 2014; 6). Goertz and Mahoney (2012; 206) discuss the nature of epistemology comparatively in quantitative and qualitative research methods and express the following: “In quantitative approaches, the challenges of knowledge generation are closely linked to ‘*error*’. The whole field of statistics is concerned with producing valid knowledge in a context in which error is present. By contrast, in the qualitative tradition, the challenges of knowledge generation are linked to ‘*fuzziness*’, understood in the sense that cases might have partial degrees of membership in conceptual sets.” The existence of epistemology within the scope

of error and fuzziness is related to the existence and importance of knowledge in scientific methods. For example, although the problem of *error* and *fuzziness* may seem like very similar concepts to each other, the difference between these two concepts explains the relationship between the two main research approaches with knowledge. While natural sciences and quantitative methods give priority to the *repeatability* and *testability* of information and the reproducibility of the same result, in social sciences, more weight is given to the *epistemological consequences of knowledge* as an ontological claim (ibid).

In this sense, the qualitative method gains importance in direct relation to both theory and epistemology. So, '*What is the qualitative method?*' Ambert, Adler and Detzner (1995; 881) indicated the functionality and practicality of the qualitative methods: "The qualitative method deals with research processes as well as with structural issues. In doing so, the main motivation of the study is to discover rather than verification of the hypothesis." In comparison to quantitative research, qualitative research methods are undisputedly more attentive in clarifying their hypothesis, particularly in the field of refugees. Both Miller and Rasco (2004) and Bracken (2001) are very clear in summarizing their methodological approaches on refugee studies by stressing the idea that the reader of the conducted field research results is directed and led to more in-depth discussions in comparison to some more common approaches to qualitative studies. Schweitzer and Steel (2008; 9) pointed out such specific qualitative research methods for studies conducted with refugees such as *narrative analysis* (Bamberg, 2012), *consensual qualitative research* (Hill et al. 2005), and the *grounded theory* (Lawrence et al. 2013). The use of qualitative research approaches is important to adequately interpret the refugees' conditions and also might provide a deep understanding of the '*full richness and complexity*' of the refugee experience (Schweitzer and Steel, 2008; 8). Moreover, as Liamputtong (2007) and Schweitzer (2008; 9) indicated, 'the methodologies used precisely get hold of the participants' experiences and perspectives, specifically in those situations and conditions were research crosses the line of cultural division.'

### 2.3) Preparation for Fieldwork and Reasons for Fieldwork Countries

Approximately one year after I started my doctorate, I began to complete the necessary preparations to implement the fieldwork of my research. I detail this preparatory process below. In addition, I justify why Turkey, Greece and Germany are chosen as fieldwork sites. The most essential of these preparations started with the ethics permission from the University of Exeter ethics committee. Since my research includes people, especially refugees as a group in vulnerable positions, I went through a detailed process of justification and explication of the following crucial phases: What methods will be used in the research; how I will approach the interviewees; and how I will manage these methods and approaches by following the *no-harm rule* (Hernández et al. 2013) and *gaining the consent* of the participants (Speer and Stokoe, 2014). Later, the semi-structured face-to-face interview questions used in the fieldwork were prepared in English and then translated into Arabic and Kurdish.

While I obtained the ethics permission from the university, I applied for the necessary official permission and bureaucratic papers from the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) and the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidencies (AFAD - Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı) in Turkey. When I had permission to conduct my research at the Kahramanmaraş Temporary Protection Center (KTCP - Kahramanmaraş Geçici Koruma Merkezi) in Turkey, I spent a total of three weeks in the camp, starting at the end of September 2018. Since it was not officially possible for me to stay in the KTCP, I had only been in the camp between working hours 8 am and 5 pm. Since mainly Turkmen and Arab Syrian refugees resided in the KTCP, I interviewed Syrian Kurdish refugees in Diyarbakır and Mardin for about two weeks from mid-October. I used the snowball method for the interviews.

The fundamental reasons for choosing Turkey as the first fieldwork site country are as follows: Turkey is the country hosting the highest number of Syrian refugees in the world, with a population of 3,671,761 Syrian refugees in total<sup>27</sup>. Turkey is one of Syria's neighbouring countries. The land border between these two countries is

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638> last access on 05.06.2021

about 911 kilometres. One of the main reasons why the largest number of Syrian refugees are in Turkey is this geographical proximity. Therefore, considering the fact of immigration to neighbouring countries as a general tendency in cases of forced displacement (Ibáñez, 2014), I decided to do the first phase of the fieldwork with Syrian refugees in Turkey. In addition to these, I have identified Turkey as the first field site for the mass of Syrian refugees migrating from the east to the west since this study aims to show the changing perceptions and opinions of Syrian refugees on the move in different countries.

I started the second phase of the fieldwork in Greece in early November 2018. It took me a few days to establish my own contacts and network, since none of my previous official applications for entry to the camps in Greece were answered. To do this, I specifically contacted the Kurdish Association in Athens and got permission to visit the Lavrion camp. As of November 5th, I started to stay in the Lavrion camp in the city of Lavrion. Since the refugees in this camp were Kurdish from different countries, I conducted part of my fieldwork about the Syrian Kurdish refugees in there. While I stayed in Lavrion camp, I got permission from the Sounio camp administration to carry out the research in the Sounio camp, which is located about half an hour away from Lavrion. There were many ethnically different refugees from many countries in the Sounio camp. I interviewed Syrian Arab refugees in this camp. I spent the whole of November in these two camps and used the snowball method to find the interviewees.

The reason for selecting Greece as the second fieldwork country is due to its geopolitical location in one of the most used migration intersections throughout history (King and Christou, 2010; Godin and Donà, 2020). Since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, Greece is one of the countries with the most critical importance in terms of determining politics and geography, especially among Syrian refugees migrating to European countries (Crawley et al. 2016). Also, though the numbers of migrants and refugees fleeing to Greece are still relatively high, Greece is not a country where refugees, including Syrians, go to settle and seek asylum. Rather, Greece has become a transition country used especially to reach Western European countries with higher living and economic standards, such as Germany, France and



Sweden. Therefore, Greece, where Syrian refugees were generally stuck for months after leaving Turkey, is preferred as the second site of fieldwork country.

After two months of intense fieldwork, I had a break from my fieldwork for about three months and returned to Exeter to organise the data I obtained. During this period, I collected the necessary documents to apply for the permits required to enter the refugee protection centres in Berlin for the last phase of the fieldwork. I got my permission before going to Germany. I went to Berlin at the end of March 2019 and started fieldwork at that time. I conducted interviews in more than five different refugee protection centres in Berlin. As Syrian refugees did not remain in separate accommodation according to their ethnic background, as in Greece or as it was the case partly in Turkey, I went to different protection centres to conduct ethnography and interviews with both ethnic groups from Syria. I also used the snowball method for my interviews in Berlin.

In Europe, Germany has been the country where Syrian refugees migrated the most and applied for asylum since the beginning of the civil war in Syria. By the end of 2016, the total number of Syrian refugees in Germany reached 637,845. Additionally, in 2015 when the Syrian refugees' immigration reached its peak, there were more than more than 890,000 asylum applicants in Germany, mainly consisting of Syrian refugees<sup>28</sup>. The main reason for this is the policies implemented by Germany against mass refugee immigration particularly observed after 2014. Also, Germany is a country with a pulling effect in the migration literature due to the highest level of economic development in the world, and therefore high living standards and opportunities (Steinmann and Ulrich, 2013). Following the fieldwork carried out in Turkey and Greece, Germany, which is determinant in the migration destination preferences of Syrian refugees, was chosen as the third fieldwork country. The preference of these countries as field study sites is elaborated and explained in more detail in fieldwork analysis chapters.

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<sup>28</sup><https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1221/umfrage/anzahl-der-auslaender-in-deutschland-nach-herkunftsland/> last access on 05.06.2021

## 2.4) Profile of the Interviewees

	Turkey	Greece	Germany	Total
	n.19	n.17	n.16	<b>52</b>
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
Arab Refugees	10	8	8	<b>26</b>
Kurdish Refugees	9	9	8	<b>26</b>
<b>Age (average)</b>	30	28	29	
18-28	8	9	10	
29-39	5	6	3	
40-50	6	2	3	
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	10	9	8	<b>27</b>
Female	9	8	8	<b>25</b>
<b>Marital status</b>				
Single	10	5	8	<b>23</b>
Married	9	11	6	<b>26</b>
Divorced or Widow	-	1	2	<b>3</b>
<b>Education</b>				
Secondary and below	7	5	3	<b>15</b>
High school or equivalence	3	2	4	<b>9</b>
Bachelor and above	9	10	9	<b>28</b>

Table 1. Demonstrates the profiles of Syrian refugees in three different countries.

As can be seen in Table.1, I use 52 in-depth and face-to-face interviews as data in this study. While doing this, I paid great attention to certain demographic characteristics and the follow-up of these characteristics in every fieldwork country. These demographic features are criteria that can affect social and individual perceptions and thoughts such as *ethnicity*, *gender*, *age*, *educational status*, and *marital status*. First, one of the most decisive criteria in determining the sample group was the determination of Syrian Arab and Kurdish in order to reveal that Syrian refugees are a diverse community, especially as regards essential sociological differences such as *ethnicity* and *culture*. The main reason for me to do this was to reveal what role ethnicity and cultural differences have in forcibly displaced

communities. Therefore, I came to the conclusion that it would be suitable to consider the two most prominent and majority groups of Syrian society in comparison. For example, the separation in perception and social relations between the Kurdish refugees and Syrian Arab refugees came onto the agenda in diaspora relationships, imagined community perception, solidarity, and political imagination, which can be considered as an argument justifying the preference of ethnicity in the sample group.

Second, the *gender* criterion is about seeking to understand the importance of gender roles in worldview, mobility, social change and actions of refugees and forming a comparison among these. In order to understand the transformation and decisiveness of the gender roles and norms, notably in individual and social movements such as migration and refugee-ness, it is an essential criterion to consider gender difference (McDowell, 1992). Third, since the sample group was Syrian refugees, I emphasised the *age* factor to understand the determinants that age and age-related experiences can play and find meaning by comparing these variables (Kaur, 2013). For example, while I observed that young refugees between the ages of 18-28 were more interested and knowledgeable about internet and social media devices, I noted that refugees between the ages of 40-50 had more limited relations with these devices.

The fourth basic demographic criterion sought in the field study was the *education* status of participants. The reason for this is to explain better how education plays a role in the migration route and migration motivation in social movements in which variables can be highly diversified. To illustrate, interviewees' educational background remaining in the KTCP in Turkey was relatively lower than interviewees in Greece and Germany. Such comparisons in specific criteria such as education serve to readers to fathom out that among the refugees, those with higher education levels are more likely to migrate further distances. The last demographic criterion sought in sample group was the *marital status* of the interviewees. This is to better comprehend the correlation between group migration, such as with family members, and individual migration in dangerous situations, which can be encountered especially in illegal migration. In other words, it is a criterion for a comparison

between the responsibility and anxiety that individuals can take in individual migrations and levels of responsibility and anxiety of displaced persons with family members. For example, Syrian refugees, who migrated to Greece and from there to Germany, were mostly young and single and young, which can offer an argument that for long-distance illegal migrations, individual migration is the predominant case.

Although I have had more than 70 face-to-face interviews, I discuss and highlight only 52 of them. I explain the reason for this in section 2.7, titled fieldwork challenges. Considering that each interview is an in-depth interview of at least one hour and the average transcription of one hour interview is considered to be more than 20 pages, I made a transcription of approximately 1000 pages. Since I conducted the research alone and without any financial support, the number of people interviewed may be paucity.

### **2.5) The Semi-Structured Interview**

An interview as a research technique is a conversation for collecting information (Drever, 2006). In other words, interviewing is a central method of collecting data mainly in qualitative studies to direct the interviewer(s) in responding to a particular research question (Stuckey, 2013; 56). Frequently, a research interview requires, at least, an interviewer who leads the conversation process and asks or guides questions, and at least an interviewee who answers and deals with directed questions. In studies conducted with qualitative research methods in social sciences, three principal interview methods are considered. These are structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Qu and Dumay, 2011; Mason, 1996). A well-organized and flexible research technique for more in-depth questions and discussions, the interview has a better understanding of the research context and focus on the research subject (Darke, 1998; 275; Cavaye, 1996). This is a substantially explorative reciprocal conversation between the participant and the researcher. As Adams shows, conducted conversationally with one respondent at a time, the semi-structured interview (SSI) employs a blend of closed- and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up why or how questions (2015; 492). The most preferred way to conduct semi-structured interviews are face-to-face interviews (David Silverman, 2011). Jason Orne, Bell, and Raboin (2015) specified that the

face-to-face interview method is the best suitable technique for all types of interviews.

In socio-political studies, the perspective and position of the researcher and how active the researcher participates in the research are very important factors (Rose, 1997). Linda McDowell (1992; 409), for example, wrote that “*we must recognize and take account of our own position, as well as that of our research participants, and write this into our research practice*”. This is because of the scope of the political ideas and theoretical base of the research. Additionally, the primary purpose of the researchers can be easily manipulated and misled by the interviewees. (Blum-Kulka and Weizman, 2003;110). Jennifer Mason (1996; 36) also stressed that “it is more accurate and reliable to speak of ‘*generating*’ data than ‘*collecting*’ data, definitely because the majority of qualitative studies would deny the ‘idea that a researcher can be an entirely neutral ‘*collector*’ of information about the social world”. Therefore, field research is a creative and formative process in which the process itself can teach the researcher new perspectives and experiences to redirect the study, thus Mason names this generating data rather than collecting.

One of the other inherent advantages of the semi-structured interview technique is that the critical points of the discussion between the researcher and the participants through mutual comments are broadening the interview framework with open-ended questions and comments. The *open-ended* form of questions empowers the participant to interpret the question with a broad sense and in parallel, the participant can contribute as much detailed information as they wish (Turner, 2010; 4). Additionally, the power dynamics between the researcher and the participant of the research is considered to be balanced and well-adjusted in the sense of interactional benefit and efficiency regarding both preventing the harm of each other and contributing the content of the work mutually. In this sense, the preference for qualitative research methods provoked me as a researcher to consider the cultural and gender sensitivities of interviewees. The utmost attention I have paid to these sensitivities has provided me with the opportunity to manage the answers to the questions I asked and to give more room for follow-up why or how questions thanks to the flexibility of the semi-structured interview method. In interviews with individuals

in vulnerable groups such as refugees, making them feel that their subjectivity and opinions are important creates ground for the participants to be empowered during the interviews. In this sense, I was careful not to interrupt the voices of the participants in all the interviews held in the camps and paid attention to highlight their answers and emphasize that what they said is important and valuable. One of the main determining factors that allowed me to practice these was undeniably the semi-structured interview technique.

I organized the interview questions under four different headings. The *first* of these headings is the section coded as *power relations* in the research, which aims to understand the Syrian refugees' perceptions of the world, the countries they want to go to, and their thoughts about other societies and communities as the other. The questions gathered under the *second* heading are the part that aims to understand the media and internet relations in the habitus that Syrian refugees reconstructed and were exposed to in camp conditions. Especially thanks to the data I obtained from this section, I developed the conceptualisation of *Digital Habitus*. The questions in the *third* part are specifically about the social, economic, and cultural capital of the interviewees. The questions asked in this framework were especially directed to investigate how refugees mobilities such as migration are affected. In this context, the results indicated by the data obtained have helped to determine the boundaries of the *subjectivity* discussion specifically. The final section was prepared and aimed to understand the subjectivity of female Syrian refugees and their relationship with gender roles, responsibilities and actions. The data I obtained through the questions in this section helped me to ground the relationship between the *subjectivity debate and gender*.

## **2.6) Ethnography and Participant Observation**

Although ethnography was used in this research as one of the main methods, I find it accurate to state here that I used ethnography as a methodological approach rather than ethnography being a discipline. I chose to use ethnography in this study by using it in a narrow frame, in particular, practising its main technique, that of participatory observation. The reason for this is that ethnography as a discipline examines and investigates cultures, interactions, and relationships by analysing,

particularly comparing them. However, in this research, I adopted ethnography to understand certain concepts better, to make sense of and elaborate the development of phenomena within the framework of my own research focus. As I discuss in the Grounded Theory section, I attach more importance to the functional and practical aspects of ethnography. As Tim Ingold (2014; 383) states in his paper, “...to attribute ‘ethnographicness’ to encounters with those among whom we carry on our research, or more generally to fieldwork, is to undermine both the ontological commitment and the educational purpose of anthropology as a discipline, and of its principal way of working—namely participant observation.” Therefore, I believe that it is more reasonable to emphasize the engaged principle of ethnography and to give details about the methodological method of participatory observation.

So, *what is observation, how is it applied, and how appropriate is it in this research?* Marshall and Rossman (1989; 79) described observation as “*the systematic description of events, behaviours, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study*”. Furthermore, Schensul and LeCompte (1999; 91) introduced the concept of participant observation as “*the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting*”. Participant observations create an angle for the researcher to define existing situations using the five senses, ensuring a ‘*written photograph*’ of the situation under research (Kawulich, 2005; 3). Participant observation based on regular and systematic attendance in the field research also sets regular reports and analysis, which can be seen as a piece of the full puzzle at the end of fieldwork. Observation is an unobtrusive method with a wide perspective and instrument through numerous impromptu natural techniques. For instance, listening to daily life conversations, observing social events and structure, being part of the community sense, recording the social and human interactions can be listed as daily life techniques.

Moreover, participant observation is about knowing more about others, being aware of the propensity to feel culture shock and to make mistakes, not being biased about social cohesion, being an attentive observer and a good listener (DeWalt and DeWalt, 1998). This research approach reminds researchers of the criterion by

which the researcher should consider her/his position and refers to the standard of objectivity. In this sense, participatory observation can also be defined as not losing objectivity while being part of the community and social reality but observing others' behaviour and activities. Stocking (1983; 101) classified participant observation as an ethnographic research method of data collection into three stages: *participation*, *observation*, and *interrogation*. Each stage follows different parts of data collection and deals with various meanings that establish the different layers of the data.

During ethnographic study, the relationships established with the sample group in which the research is conducted can originate by forming unpredictable new connections and networks with the participants during the fieldwork. I found these unforeseen and natural experiences such as events, activities, and situations very useful in my own work. To illustrate, while I was in KTCP, there was a wedding organised among Syrian refugees in the camp, and I was invited to the celebration. Since I know the traditional dances of the region, I could keep pace with them while they were dancing. Simply being able to participate in traditional dances opened a channel to be accepted by almost all the interviewees. Another instance is from Lavrio refugee camp: One of the refugees' mother passed away during my visit to the camp, and suddenly other refugees gathered for condolence, which has certain rituals to follow. I was already familiar with such rituals of funerals from my cultural experiences, and I took place in praying and other practices in the organised condolence. Taking place next to refugees during such cultural practices afterwards created a base for many refugees to engage with me more freely and openly.

While I noted daily life relationships and habits that can be seen and observed with sense organs thanks to ethnography, I was more able to investigate abstract phenomena such as emotion, thought, desire and perception thanks to the interviews. I focused especially on the daily routines of refugees in the camps, which later allowed me to create common categories among different fieldwork sites. These categories can be exemplified as observable fields such as media relationships, gender roles, economic status, consumption and others. To indicate more, I also observed the strong relations of participants with their phones and social media platforms; the fact that all married male interviewees attended the interviews alone



and, on the contrary, that all married female interviewees came to interviews with their children or a companion; and the division of work and roles between male and female refugees in the camps. At the same time, I observed common points in the daily conversations, such as the initial reactions of the interviewees who learned that I came from England, asking how I was able to go to England, questioning the refugee conditions and laws there.

Also, it needs to be stressed here for clarification that the narratives, anecdotes, and experiences I witnessed, noted, and observed about the refugees I interviewed were ethnographically presented at the beginning of each chapter in a formulation that gives clues about the content of the discussions to be held in that chapter. The personal experiences of the interviewees about migration and becoming a refugee, the hardships they encountered, the states of being in limbo in the camps have been the main elements that I ethnographically engaged and presented. Due to the subject of the research theme, which is mainly related to the imaginations, perceptions, plans and experiences of the refugees, it was preferred not to include the campsites and conditions in which they lived in detail. Although the detailed description of the camp conditions and physical limitations they live in may indirectly give traces of how their perceptions, dreams, and desires may be shaped and influenced, the migration trajectories and narratives of interviewee refugees are kept in the foreground in this study.

## **2.7) Challenges Faced While Conducting the Fieldwork**

The use of the interview technique may in fact be more beneficial after the first few interviews than the theoretical preparations for the fieldwork. I have conducted more than 70 face-to-face interviews in total, and I use 52 of them in this research. The reason for this was the problem and uneasiness refugees had about recording the interviews with the recording device during the interviews. Even though their consent was requested before the interviews, several participants changed their minds at the end. In addition, some of the interviewees who gave approvals before starting the interview, as a result of their discontent with their responses at the end of the

interview or their uneasiness about the questions asked, asked me to delete all the recordings and withdrew their consent.

The general profiles of the interviewees are given in Table 1 in detail according to the fieldwork countries and their ethnic background, gender, age, and education. I conducted more than 25 interviews in Turkey, in KTCP, Diyarbakır and Mardin. However, I use 19 of them in the research. The main challenges that I faced in Turkey during the fieldwork can be summarized as follows: First of all, my sensitivity, care and self-regulation against the *do-no-harm* rules were overpowering and unbalanced, since the KTCP was my first fieldwork experience, and I was working with refugees for the first time. Also, I had to redesign interview questions, the duration of interview, the length and number of questions after the first few interviews. Due to the limited time allowed to enter the camp, my observations and ethnography were not satisfactory. In addition to these, since the societal character in terms of gender roles among Syrian Arab refugees were more pronounced in a patriarchal form, the Syrian Arab women refugees usually had someone - husband, cousin, brother, relative, friend etc - accompanying them in during the interviews, which negatively influenced the nature of the in-depth of the interviews. In addition to this, it can be added that the conducted interviews in Diyarbakır and Mardin did not take place in the camps, and the participatory observation and ethnography were unsatisfactory due to the distracting public environment and the arrangement of interview places.

I had conducted more than 25 interviews in total in the Lavrion and Sounio camps in Greece, but I only use 17 of them, due to very similar reasons stated about the fieldwork in Turkey. Thanks to the experience I gained in Turkey, I conducted field studies in Greece in a more capable, concentrated, controlled and adapted manner. However, the network and social circle I used while obtaining the necessary permissions to enter the camps was quite time-consuming. The main problems I have experienced during my research in the Lavrion and Sounio camps are as follows: Since Kurdish refugees staying in the Lavrion camp are a group that is highly

politicised<sup>29</sup> and trying to comply with certain organisational living standards, my adaptation in and acceptance by the refugee community was compelling. Since I was not allowed to stay in the Sounio camp and was only enter and exit during working hours - 10 am to 5 pm -, since visual documentation was not allowed - photography or video - the observation and ethnography were challenging. In many cases, Syrian Arab female interviewees needed to have their husbands or father's permission to participate in the research and they had to be accompanied during the interviews in the Sounio camp.

I had more than 20 interviews in total in Berlin, but I only use 15 of these interviews in my work. The main problems I had while conducting the fieldwork in Berlin were the difficulties that I had in finding sufficient, willing interviewees to include in the research due to the low capacity of the refugee protection centre. In addition, the feeling of insufficient ethnographic and participatory observation can be stated for reasons such as the limited entrance and exit hours to the protection centres in Berlin since I was not allowed to stay in these centres. Also, since Berlin is such a large city, commuting between the protection centres was challenging. In general, public spaces, such as cafes and restaurants were requested by the interviewees for the meetings and interviews. Hence, the presence of distracting external factors in the interviews was onerous during the meetings.

## **2.8) My Positionality as a Researcher in the Field of Migration and Refugees**

The next chapters are fieldwork chapters in which I have elaborated and discussed the main arguments of this study. Therefore, before moving on to the fieldwork chapters, I briefly share individual life-story in this section, which may answer the question of, *what are the experiences and motivations?* from which this study has been personally nurtured.

My early memories about displacement, exile or uprooted people are about the Kurdish peasants, who were forcibly displaced and moved to our neighbourhood in

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<sup>29</sup> In the section where the interviews at the Lavrion camp are discussed, I explain the politicisation of the Kurdish people in more detail.

the Kurdish city of Diyarbakir in 1998-99. The cause for the displacement of Kurdish peasants was the combat between the Turkish state and the Kurdish revolt in the early 1980s. Turkish Armed Forces forcibly displaced Kurdish rural communities in the 1980s and 1990s, specifically to battle the Kurdish armed forces, principally the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). According to different statistical figures, the *internally displaced population* (IDPs) reached approximately *3 million people* during this period (see Ayata and Yüксеker, 2005; Müller and Linzey, 2007). During this period, I first encountered IDP children in my neighbourhood, who would later become my classmates. The statements I can remember about my friends from this childhood period describing their situation are: "*we lost our homes and will never be able to go back*". At that time, although I could not fully grasp what it meant to lose the home or never to be able to go back again, these words have been among my childhood memories that I could never forget.

In the following years, I came across the immigration forms carried out for various reasons. For instance, during my bachelor's degree years, some of my foreign classmates and professors, were African immigrants working as street sellers, and Afghani or Pakistani workers in shops. These people were not *legally* refugees, yet I observed that long-distance immigration, adaptation and integration problems, cultural conflicts could be experienced by different statuses, such as exchange students, foreign academics, illegal migrants, and worker immigrants.

My experiences with Syrian refugees, in particular, were with Syrian Kurdish communities that migrated to Diyarbakır in 2013 and 2014. Hoşhîn, Berîvan, Gûlîstan, Rizgar, Mîzgîn are several of my friends from that times that I can remember easily. They are all Syrian Kurds. Most of them were either studying or working in places provided by pro-Kurdish local municipalities in Diyarbakır. In their stories, the general theme was about their *homes* as well, which were no longer nearby, and it was uncertain whether they could go back ever again. My first emotional understanding of the concept of *the home*, where it was left behind, albeit with a different identity, was in 2014-2015, when I started studying in the United States of America. When I first learned the concept of *homesickness*, for instance, I immediately remembered Berîvan and Gûlîstan. Then, only then, I understood that

their long-politicised statements expressing their uncontrollable anger with political arguments surely corresponded to homesickness as a feeling and emotion. I still remember the questions some of these friends asked me very clearly, especially about how they can go abroad. They were telling me that “*you succeeded to go Europe, please help us... give us some advice... guide us...*” They had stated their unwillingness to stay in Turkey or to back to Syria and the war; rather, they wished to go somewhere better to continue their education and career. Hoşhîn and Berîvan currently live in Germany. They told me long ago that Rizgar made it to France and Mîzgîn to the Netherlands. All of them went to these countries via *the back of a lorry*, illegally. In addition to all these, in early September 2015, when I started my master’s degree in England, I read the news about 3-year-old Aylan Kurdi, whose lifeless body washed ashore in Turkey. The first thing I felt was the anger it aroused in me, both emotionally and politically, and the curiosity I had trouble giving meaning to. So to speak, a description that can best express a search that was triggered by the death of Aylan Kurdi and guided by my anger and curiosity may be the subject of this doctoral research.

During the year I spent in the United States of America and then my master's and doctoral studies in England, I had the chance to observe how both the governmental systems and societies of these most immigrated countries approach immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers and foreigners in general. In addition to the xenophobic and discriminative attitudes, discourses and actions that I personally encountered, I noticed that there were differences between the lives that immigrants, refugees or asylum seekers in these countries have in comparison with what they imagined, expected, or hoped for before migrating. However, on the other hand, when I returned from the United States or England to Turkey in 2015 and following years, many people I knew or met before approached me not as a subject but as an object that has succeeded in going to these countries. The questions that they were constantly asking me about these countries, notably as if they were endeavouring to confirm that the fact that these countries are *better*, brought my attention to the historical East-West, or Orientalism-Occidentalism equations. Afterwards, I remember long conversations with my professors from my master’s degree about the new colonialism, exploitation, and the West as a simulation by relating to the

Syrian Refugee Crisis. I considered myself to be in an in-between position from which I could comprehend both sides in the east-west or oriental-occidental equation. On the one hand, I experienced and witnessed the Western life desired by the majority of refugees [at least in my research]. On the other, I could clearly understand the reasons and motivations of those people who asked me lots of questions about migrating or going to these countries. Therefore, I began to engage better with essential readings related to concepts of Orientalism, Occidentalism, Eurocentrism, and Colonialism. Without knowing exactly what I was searching for, I studied these notions concerning migration, displacement, refugees, or immigrants.

I should point out that my personal backgrounds turned into an advantage during the research and made it easier to carry out. I am a Kurdish person from Turkey and can speak Kurdish. Therefore, in my determination of two different ethnic groups as the research subjects, Syrian Arab and Kurdish, my background played a functional and helpful role. For instance, during the fieldwork, all Syrian Kurdish refugees, who learned that I am Kurdish, did not hesitate to be interviewed by me. Also, being able to speak Kurdish eliminated the need for an interpreter in interviews. In addition to that, me coming from a common Muslim habitus helped me to engage with Syrian Arab refugees more closely.

### **3) CHAPTER 3**

#### **FIELDWORK IN TURKEY: Appearance of External Forces: Power Relations**

While discussing the fieldwork in the analysis sections, I essentially evaluate it within two different sets. These sets distinguish between Syrian Arab refugees and Syrian Kurdish refugees. The reason I prefer such a path as a scheme, is that it will help the reader to follow the Syrian refugees' experiences through two different ethnic groups from the same nation more clearly and explicitly, and to draw a framework to follow the structure of the chapter more easily.

This chapter primarily begins with the arrival of Syrian refugees in Turkey and the socio-politics related to this, mainly to remind the reader of the substrates concerning refugees in Turkey. After discussing the socio-political background, it continues with the section where I formulate Syrian refugees' perceptions about the others and about their futures. In this section, I analyse the views of Syrian refugees on Turkey and Turkish societies by linking them with power relations and their actors. In the following, I explain what the digital habitus conceptualisation corresponds to in the field study in the context of Internet and media relations of Syrian Arab refugees staying in the camp. Later, it continues with why Syrian Arab refugees stayed in the Kahramanmaraş Temporary Protection Centre (hereafter KTPC), which sets a foundation for understanding the importance of socio-economic capital and gender norms regarding subjectivity limits. Finally, I evaluate the experiences, changes, and transformations of Syrian female Arab refugees in KTPC, especially within the subjectivity frame.

#### **3.1) Arrival of Syrian Refugees in Turkey and Turkey's Policy Towards Refugees**

Research data at end of 2020 shows that globally more than 80 million people were forced to leave their homes, 1% of the global population (UNCHR, 2020). These people were forced to leave their homes and continue to live elsewhere, mostly by factors depending on environmental issues related to climate change, socio-political conflicts, persecutions, and severe human rights violations (Sirkeci et al. 2017; 129). It seems apparent that in Turkey as in many other countries, national and international migration both legally and illegally has become more observable and

evident, politically notable, and much more controversial than ever before (ibid; 214). The Syrian Civil War has appeared due to the influences of other revolutions/conflicts in Arab countries, called by many scholars *the Arab Spring* (Bhardwaj, 2012: 5), and has had a horrific human cost. In November 2011, as a result of the civil war reaching the Turkish border in the northern areas of Syria, about 7,000 Syrian refugees crossed the Turkish border. In November 2014, Turkey was providing a secure place as a host country to more than 1.5 million refugees (Akgunduz et al. 2018). By December 2018, the official number of Syrians in Turkey reached more than 3.6 million. However, including unregistered migrants, the estimated number of Syrians in Turkey is more than 4 million (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Interior Directorate General of Migration Management -DGMM)<sup>30</sup>.

The consequences of Turkey's open-door policy and Turkey as a host neighbouring country for more than 4 million '*temporary protected Syrian refugees*' as of the year-2018 (DGMM, 2019), were presumably unpredictable. Turkey implemented an '*open door*' policy for Syrian refugees during the period from 2011, when the devastating civil war broke out in Syria, to 2016 (Koca, 2015; Bayir and Aksu, 2020). This policy describes the laws and policies regarding the reception and accommodation of refugees across the country. From the moment of the outbreak of the Syrian refugee crisis at the beginning of 2011, Turkey has followed their open-door policy towards the unexpected humanitarian crisis of Syrians and has allowed every Syrian citizen who wants to pass the border to enter the country. Even though various research stated that the established refugee camps in several provinces in Turkey near the Syrian border and the praise received by these camps in national and international media played an encouraging role for more Syrians to flee to Turkey (Yıldız and Uzgören, 2016; Memisoglu and Ilgit, 2017); the fact that as the neighbouring countries with the longest shared borderline, Syrians fled from a devastating war en masse to Turkey due to the convenience of the geography rather than the quality of the camps. As a result of the policies implemented by Turkey and continued political instability in Syria, which acted as a pushing force, there was a regular increase in the number of Syrians entering the country starting in 2011. As of 2021, temporary

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<sup>30</sup><https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638> last access on 31.05.2021



protected Syrian refugees are present in all of the 81 provinces of Turkey<sup>31</sup> with the 3,670,717 Syrians.

The legal status of the Syrian refugees in Turkey constitutes one of the most discussed and controversial dimensions of the issue. There have been controversial and confusing discussions due the legal and social definitions of *refugee*, *asylum seeker* and '*temporary protected refugee*' [Geçici Koruma in Turkish] in terms of specific identity created for Syrians. A refugee has been identified by UNCHR as:

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

The fundamental basis of the refugee legislation relating to the status of refugees in the Turkish constitution was formed by the 1951 Geneva Convention. Turkey was party to this agreement by the criterion of '*geographical restriction*', which states:

*“Turkey maintains the provisions of the declaration, made in Geneva on 28 July 1951, according to which it applies the Convention only to persons who have become refugees as a result of events occurring in Europe”* (Refugee Convention, 1951: Article 1(B)).

Therefore, while Syrians were not eligible for refugee status, Turkey has passed new legislation and circulars in favour of Syrians and applied '*special regulations*' (Kap, 2014; 32) and defined the '*temporary protected refugee*' in favour of Syrian refugees, which is framed as:

*“Temporary protection* is a sui generis status for asylum seekers who are not eligible for Convention refugee status but are nonetheless compelled to leave their country

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<sup>31</sup><https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638> last access on 31.05.2021

to which they cannot return and are seeking ‘*urgent and temporary*’ asylum in Turkey in the context of a mass population movement” (Dalkıran, 2016; 3).<sup>32</sup>

In other words, temporary protection is the protection status established by the ‘Temporary Protection Regulation’ dated 22 October 2014. According to this regulation, the status is applied to foreigners who: – were forced to leave their country; – cannot return to the country they left; – arrived at or crossed Turkish borders en masse or individually; – will not have their international protection needs adjudicated under an individual procedure (Turkey, Refugee Rights, 2017). Also, according to the policies of Turkey regarding refugees, those who flee to Turkey from outside of the European countries, can only be recognized as a ‘*temporary protected refugee*’ in Turkey. These people are conditional refugees who shall be allowed to reside in Turkey temporarily until they are resettled to a third country (Dalkıran, 2016; 3). Therefore, those Syrians who migrated to Turkey, are not *refugees* but *temporary protected refugees* (Gokalp Aras et al. 2015, 2018). Those Syrian refugees who fall under the *law of temporary protection*, have temporary rights of asylum and permission *for a reasonable length of stay in Turkey*<sup>33</sup>, until they are accepted as refugees by a third country (Gokalp Aras et al. 2018). In other words, temporary protection is the protection status recognised for those Syrian nationals as well as refugees and stateless persons from Syria who arrived in Turkey individually or en masse.<sup>34</sup>

Turkey’s response and efforts regarding the Syrian refugees since the war broke out in Syria have been intense and relatively successful. With the lead of the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (hereafter AFAD - Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı), international institutions, NGOs, and governments have participated in the solution process of the Syrian crisis in Turkey both financially and bureaucratically. As of August 2017, in Turkey, there were 22 temporary protection

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<sup>32</sup> <https://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/turkey-istanbul-governorate-to-enforce-movement-restrictions-on-syrians-under-temporary-protection/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CTemporary%20protection%E2%80%9D%20is%20a%20sui.of%20a%20mass%20population%20movement> last access on 31.05.2021

<sup>33</sup> However, in the re-regulated policies related to the status of temporary protected refugees, still do not specify the exact duration of for a reasonable length of stay in Turkey, which is very vague and differs according to individual cases.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.mhd.org.tr/images/yayinlar/MHM-2.pdf> last access on 05.06.2021

centres in 10 different provinces coordinated and controlled by AFAD. These protection centres were home to over 233,000 Syrians. There were 10 tent and 12 container camps in the following provinces: Adana, Adiyaman, Gaziantep, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Kilis, Malatya, Mardin, Osmaniye, and Şanlıurfa. A total of 31,860 tents and reinforced concrete partitions, and 30,898 containers were available for the use of Syrian refugees who fled their country and came to Turkey (AFAD, 2017; Inan and Korgavus, 2017). However, based on the recent data and research results, Turkey's recent politics of sending Syrians back to reclaimed areas has had efficient outcomes. At the end of 2018, more than 220,000 Syrians were sent to and located in safe areas in Syria in which Turkey and some coalition forces, such as France, America and Germany, ensure protection and security. In relation to the numbers of returned Syrians, the number of Syrians living in camps has reduced accordingly. According to the recent numbers shared by Directorate General of Migration Management in 2019, 143,049 Syrian refugees stay in 13 temporary protection centres located in 8 cities, and 9 protection centres were shut. Those who returned to Syria were mostly refugees who lived in the camps which were shut down last year. Even if none of the data specifies the ethnic background of Syrians who stay in refugee camps, the fieldwork interviews and ethnography in KTPC have revealed that majority of inhabitants in camps are Syrian Arabs and Turkmens. The main reason for this, which will be detailed further in the section on Kurdish refugees in Turkey, is that since the Kurdish question has been raised in Turkey, Kurds in other regions such as Syria, Iraq and Iran prefer not to have any official relations with Turkish government.

It is very challenging to make robust predictions of possible developments regarding Syrian refugees in the near future, particularly when considering the facts that the ambiguity of the Syrian Civil War and the Syrian refugees who already settled in Turkey. In the next section, Syrian refugees' opinions about Turkey and Turkish society after their arrival and settlement in Turkey will be discussed.

### 3.2) The Embodiment of Being in Limbo: Syrian Arab Refugees in Turkey

#### 3.2.1) Syrian Arab Refugees Opinions about Turkey: *There are good and bad people, like everywhere!*

Official definitions, figures, institutional organizations such as UNCHR, temporary protection, refugee convention, the Turkish state, NGOs and other relevant determinants actors and entities are external factors that affect and determine the presence of Syrian refugees in Turkey. These structures and their relationships, which are discussed in section 1.3.1 on *Power relations*, and whose limits are drawn as formative power, can be considered as the actors and factors that determine the lives and future of the Syrian refugees. Notably, in the period when the civil war has been experienced intensely, so to speak, when saving their life was the most important issue, the open-border policy of Turkey as a neighbouring country for Syrian refugees was seen as a saviour. This was expressed by Syrian refugees in the interviews. Additionally, historical similarities and common memories of Syria and Turkey regarding religion, common cultural and traditional features, language resemblance between Arabic and Turkish, and particularly between Arabs and Turks, have created a strong bond (Benek; 2016).

In this sense, in the first years of their arrival in Turkey, the fact of saving their lives from the war, alongside the services and aid provided by Turkey and other international entities, have considerably influenced Syrian refugees' perception and perspectives about Turkey. However, in the following years, Syrian refugees' perceptions and thoughts began to change, as they considered their future in European countries better, due to the dramatic increase in the Syrians refugee population, alongside the condescending, xenophobic, and discriminatory approaches and discourses of Turkish society towards the Syrians (Yitmen and Verkuyten, 2018; Kavaklı, 2018). The quotes<sup>35</sup> from my interviews show that Syrian refugees' opinions about Turkey and Turkish society were very emphatic and affirmative at the beginning of their resettlement. Despite this, over time, the

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<sup>35</sup> I consciously prefer to use quotations from more than one interviewee at the same time in sections where fieldwork analysis is presented. The reason for this is to be able to convey the words and thoughts of all the interviewees in large numbers and to be able to catch common patterns on the same subject and combine them with arguments.

uncertainty of their future and the difficulties they faced, such as challenges in integration and in obtaining an official status, caused their opinions to begin to change. The following three different interviewees' answers to the following question help us understand the issue from the ground in relation to the power relations and actors that influence their lives: *"If you express your opinions about Turkey before coming and after being here [Turkey], what would you like to say?"*

*"I knew things about Turkey, like religion, Atatürk, cuisine culture, TV series, many other things. Of course, after coming here, we learned that there are many common things, like culture, language [specifies several common words in between Turkish and Arabic]. We have been here for more than 5 years, we could not establish a proper life, we want to go somewhere else, try in there. But Turkish people are nice, there are good and bad ones, like everywhere [smiles]." [Interview 1, 38 years old, mother of 3, KTPC, 01.10.2018]*

*"There was always a relation between Turkey and Syria. When Turkey accepted millions of Syrians, I understood that there is a religion brotherhood in between our countries... Turkey is good, we appreciate for everything, but we want to go to Germany now. There is no job, we are still in the camps, you know, we have to start a life again, here in the camps we cannot. We see our relatives in Germany, they have better life in there and at least they have better documents. Here we do know what kind of status we have [smiles]." [Interview 4, 34 years old, mother of 4, KTPC, 02.10. 2018]*

*"Of course, I knew things about Turkish culture and religion, we are neighbours [smiles]. I learned more about it after coming here. Turkey is more advanced and less religious; I sometimes criticize that to be honest. Why do Turkish people not experience and practice the religion as we do? I do not want to say something bad, there are good and bad people." [Interview 5, 42 years old, former teacher, KTPC, 05.10. 2018]*

One of the common issues, particularly I observed and felt during the interviews was that when interviewees made a judgment in a negative or critical sense about Turkey, there was an obvious timidity as if they were refraining from something<sup>36</sup>. As soon as they stated any criticism about Turkey, interviewees often followed a similar structure that in a manner the criticism can put out of the sight by asserting this sentence: *'There are good and bad people, like everywhere!'* The interviewees' general opinions and perceptions about Turkey were related to social and cultural knowledge, such as both countries' similar history, cuisine, religion, politics, alongside the media channels as TV series and programs. Besides these, those

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<sup>36</sup> This timidity was expressed by interviewees more clearly in the interviews held in Greece and Germany, which will be detailed in Greece and Germany fieldwork chapters.

interviewees expressed that they wish to leave Turkey, which almost all of them stated in their answers to different questions, citing as reasons legal and future uncertainties, the difficulty or failure of establishing a long-term life in Turkey, and the attractiveness of better life conditions somewhere else, mainly where their relatives have gone.

The gender differences of the interviewees had a feature that could also identify common themes and emphasis in their responses. Woman Arab interviewees [interviews 1, 2, 3, 4 and 19] specifically expressed their opinions about Turkey through the TV series, kitchen and food programs, social representation of women [ex. scarf] as common themes. On the other hand, male interviewees [interviews 5 to 8 and 18] generally preferred to indicate their opinions through themes such as politics, common history, religious brotherhood, well-known politicians such as Atatürk or Erdoğan. In fact, this is one of the main arguments emphasized in studies on gender roles and determination in the Middle East (Tucker, 1998). As Rabo (1996; 155) stated in her work, state authority develops with the formation of gender roles while structuring the *private* and *public sphere* and gender roles and performances, especially in Syria, are determined in these two areas.

The points that I would like to highlight in this section are how these interviewees define the structures, authorities, countries or societies that are effective in their lives. It is related to their knowledge of Turkey and especially how the content of information is formed, shaped, affected by gender, and how these structures and actors, as power relations, are manifested in their lives. For example, if these interviewees were interviewed once more after a few years, what the interviewees would say and how they would take positions would obviously change. This is because the effects of individual experiences, the policies they are exposed to, and the societies' impact on individuals' perceptions are externally determinative. However, the fact that what these interviewees knew about Turkey before fleeing to Turkey was more influenced by media, history, and similar culture, confirms the argument on the formation of knowledge about the others.

### 3.2.2) Turkey as an Intermediate Western Country for Syrians

While examining increasing migration movements in their study in 2009, Benson and O'Reilly name these movements, particularly as lifestyle migration. This form of migration records an emerging field of research in migration, mainly framing people with relatively better economic capital that empower them for part-time or full-time, permanent, or temporary migration to other countries (2009; 621; 2014). This migration phenomenon differs from other migration research subjects as more studied and investigated forms of migration, such as labour or refugee migrations. In recent decades, these research topics have amplified into a research field of inquiry that generated its corpus of literature (Benson and O'Reilly, 2014; 1).

Those Syrian refugees who did not want to stay in Turkey or would migrate to European countries if they had opportunities, were not only motivated by of inadequate living conditions of Turkey. They also stated that they wished to migrate because of the desire and possibility of a better life which they might live elsewhere. In other words, the pushing or pulling migration forces were not about the conditions that they could have in Turkey. The interview notes I mentioned below explain this better.

*“Turkey is kind of European countries, I mean the law system, bureaucracy, working conditions, economy. My relatives and friends in Europe tell me the similarities and differences in between Turkey and European countries. I believe there are not so many differences. The main difference for me is how I feel here, which I am not happy. What I see about my relatives, friends in Europe shows me more freedom. Here, the culture, religion and the community do not allow to have this freedom. That’s why I want to leave.”* [Interview 4, 33 years old, mother of 6, KTPC, 29.10.2018]

*“To be honest I wanted to go to European countries many times but then I realized being in Turkey is also good, pretty close to my home country, if we can return one day it would be easy. Most importantly there are many similarities between Turkey and Syria. Turkey is like an intermediate country for me, kind of European and kind of Syrian. Also, I do not want to change my life radically, like from oppression, war, restriction in Syria and then full of freedom in Europe. I want to stay in Turkey because it is in between.”* [Interview 8, 20 years old, the only single interviewee, KTPC, 09.10.2018]

The point to be considered in the words of these interviewees is that the main factors that triggered them to want to leave from Turkey may be assessed as an abstract concept in the form of *a better life* and *the desire to live more freely*. Several

interviewees expressed it as freedom [interviews 4, 6 and 8] and several of them as having a life in contrast of Syria [interviews 5,7 and 18]. A *'better way of living'* as a concept and expectation (see Benson and Osbaldiston, 2014), which we will encounter in the following sections as well, is one of the main points that should be considered in detail. We should investigate in-depth the perceptions and thoughts of those Syrian Arab refugees who consider the conditions in Turkey are equivalent to conditions in Europe, although they have not been in any European country. To explain better, it can be argued that the diversifying and new life aspects experienced in relation to living standards and conditions, legal system, infrastructure, governmentality, and secularity that refugees experience in Turkey, indirectly encourage them to imagine and wish to migrate somewhere else, where they think that they have/find a *better life* (see Benson and O'Reilly, 2016a and 2016b). Turkey is defined by the interviewees as an intermediate version of a European country. As such, it offers a taster of conditions further west and so indirectly strengthens the refugees' perceptions concerning the possibility of a better life elsewhere. In order to better understand this argument, I asked the interviewees *'What can you say about Turkey if you compare with your home country?'* The answers to the question in fact provide many details about the perceptions of Syrian Arab refugees who fled to Turkey and wished to go to Europe from Turkey, which we can understand in terms of a three-step migration.

*"The religion, culture, family relations are almost the same. But there are obvious differences like development of living standards, modernization, daily life means/instruments that people can reach, education and other things different in Turkey than Syria. I mean here is like in Europe. [Father of 3 children, 42 years old, KTPC, 4.10.2018]*

*"Turkey is also a Muslim country; this is the same. History of these countries is the same too, like Ottoman times. But Turkey after Ottoman followed a different way, like European countries. Also, there are many things different, like language, human rights. Level of living standards and things that people can buy. Also, women in Turkey are different than Syrians, they are more like Western women. [40 years old, farmer KTPC, 5.10.2018]*

On the issues that refugees thought differentiate Syria from Turkey, they frequently expressed *'westernised, European, modern, advanced'* notions for Turkey, which says a lot about how they perceive and experience Turkey. Likewise, their answers to the questions I asked about the differences between Syria and European countries similarly expressed common features such as *'better economy, more*



*modern, less traditional, better human rights, more advanced*'. The information that this three-step comparison between Syria, Turkey and European countries [as a general concept of West] provides the reader with is that even though the Syrian Arab refugees think there are common and similar features between Turkey and the European countries, their desires to go to the West/Europe were always more *dominant* and *prominent*. I explicate and evaluate this desire and the will to go as follows: 'They came from Syria to Turkey, and they have accessed or witnessed certain living standards. However, staying in Turkey in the long term, especially for those staying in the refugee camps, does not assure enough sense of security to establish a new future'. The reason they can imagine and think about this assurance in European countries is derives from what they have been told by their acquaintances, especially those who have gone to European countries, as well as their family ties, which reflect that these European countries have more stable political, economic, military, and social lives.

One of the questions I asked in order to dig into this situation better was "*How do you make yourself sure that you will have a better life when you go to European countries?*" Their answers to the question were as follows:

*"Because there is no war and death. When did you hear people were killing each other in Europe, you tell me? I check the news and the internet every day, and I do not see any conflict instead positive developments like better technology, economy and welfare!"* [Interview 6, 40 years old, father of 3, KTPC, 05.10.2018]

*"I check how Syrians' life in different countries and European countries seem the best one for Syrian people. Also, there is clearly a level and quality of life attained in there, especially away from wars and deaths."* [Interview 8, 20 years old, bachelor's in economics, KTPC, 9.10.2018]

The answers and reasons given by the participants contain very reasonable justifications for a better life model. I do not dispute their opinions. Instead, I follow the migration route and journey of Syrian refugees in three countries, asking almost the same updated questions. I bring the answers participants provided, and the data generated through ethnography in three different countries together at the end of the research, which shows the differing and changing opinions. However, when assessing the field data within the scope of Turkey, Syrian Arab refugees consider Turkey as a good place of refuge, at least during the period of the field research.

When considering the Syrian refugee population, Turkey is the country where the Syrians migrated the most and still reside. While stating this, we should keep in mind the legally restricting sanctions on any potential further migration and mobilities of Syrians, obstacles on their free travels – even within the country -, the convenience of Turkey as the neighbouring country which stimulated more migration, and besides all these, that the proportion of the population that is economically capable of migrating corresponds to a small proportion of the total population. While this chapter shows that Turkey's intervention in Syria and its humanitarian approaches towards Syrian refugees were well-received, on the other hand, it raises the question: *Why does the West [Europe] as historically ruling, dominating and pioneering power on human rights, which has written the laws and regulations accordingly and imposed these laws on the rest of the world as the universal law (Samson, 2020), remain inadequate on the Syrian refugee crisis to take enough responsibility?*

In the next section, I discuss the field and interview notes of the participants, who stated that they especially want to go to Europe, on the daily life practices concerning the media and internet usage. I investigate the data and observations conducted about new internet platforms such as social media and how the concept of *better* respecting European countries is shaped and strengthened within the participants' internet usages. I also mention how the idea and theory of *digital habitus* evolved in this section.

### **3.2.3) The Use of Media and the Internet among Syrian Arab Refugees in KTPC**

One of the main pillars and arguments of this research is to understand the formation, development and change of perception/conception and thoughts of Syrian refugees about the others, and relatedly, especially I formulate that through Syrian refugees' migration, mobility, and future imaginations.

According to various sources, as of January 2021, 4.66 billion people were using the internet, which increased by 316 million (7.3%) new users from last year during the same period (Sica et al. 2021; 1)<sup>37</sup>. Smartphones, or other portable devices such as

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<sup>37</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/> last access on 31.05.2021

tablets or smartwatches, have become the most significant way of accessing the internet globally, since mobile internet users account for 91 per cent of total internet users<sup>38</sup>. The participants and the refugees in KTPC, in general, are just a very small sample of the global group represented by these numbers.

I argue that refugees staying in the camps *perceive* and *engage* with the information, images, dreams, and manipulations conveyed by the internet tools more deeply and intensely. This is because of the conditions of the camps that I have defined before as *being in limbo*, and due to the situations cause refugees to consider and prioritize the *reconstruction of their future*. Additionally, while doing all these, they live in a spatially restricted environment and sociality (see Öktem, 2020; Maitland and Xu, 2015). As I have emphasized in my previous discussions on the concept of habitus, it is surrounded and developed by time, upbringing, dispositions, and education (Bourdieu, 1982; Reay, 2004). The impact of the limited physical environment of refugee camps on refugees' lives and perceptions, a significant amount of time spent on the Internet, and newly built dispositions all together naturally builds a new habitus for refugees in the camp setting places. Among such new habitus, the most obvious and the most effective one as far as I could observe is the digital habitus.

In the interviews held at KTPC, the average duration of internet and phone usage of the interviewees corresponded to a period varying between 4 and 6 hours<sup>39</sup>. Everyone I spoke to in KTPC stated that they have smartphones with which they can connect to the internet. Some interviewees also stated that they own tablets or laptops. Each interviewee stated that they use at least two different social media platforms. The most preferred platforms were specified as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. Apart from these, all interviewees emphasized that they use messaging applications such as WhatsApp and Messenger. They added that these platforms and applications are used regularly on a daily basis. It was also stated that these

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<sup>38</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/#:~:text=Almost%204.66%20billion%20people%20were,percent%20of%20the%20global%20population> last access on 31.05.2021

<sup>39</sup> According to statistics, people spend an average of 3 hours and 15 minutes on their phones in 2020 with a rapid increase of 30% from just two years prior. In 2018, it was less than 3 hours. However, it should be noted that this research was conducted at the end of 2018, the data I have expressed should be evaluated within that period. Because in 2018, the duration of internet and phone usage in the global sense has changed significantly compared to 2020-2021, which can be considered valid for refugees as well.

platforms comprised most of the time they spent on the Internet. It was stated that there was no problem with Internet access and that the KTPC central administration provided free Wi-Fi access to refugees staying in the camp. So, in other words, there was uninterrupted internet access, as in many places of the contemporary world.

In one of my talks with officials, the vice-manager of the KTPC my question regarding what kind of services the camp provides to the refugees, using the following statements which reveals his opinion on refugees' relations with the internet:

*“As you can see, this is a living space, we provide the most basic needs, such as security, water, food, electricity, sewage, shelter, and health services... Ah, and also, we provide free internet access, this is one of the most vital services [smiles]. Let me tell you why it is vital: Sometimes, when there is a problem with the electricity transformer, some section [a neighbourhood in KTPC] may remain without electricity or there may be a water problem. But one of the issues we are most sensitive to is not interrupting internet access. Internet is something like breathing for refugees in camps! They can stay without water or electricity, but never without the internet, they will destroy this place [smiles]... Also, we usually get in contact with refugees through the internet too, like doing an announcement on Facebook, you know what I mean.”* [Field note, KTPC, 06.10.2018]

These words of the KTPC officer confirm how the internet as a facility is of vital importance in refugees' life, which has been clearly confirmed by almost every single participant in the camps. One of the most fundamental observations was that age ranges and gender were factors affecting refugees' use and relationships with the phone and the internet. As of 2019, *half of the online users worldwide* were aged between 18 and 34 years (Clement, 2020). As the Internet of Things (IoT) has diversified, – the smartphone is one of the most common ones – access is easier, the rate of internet usage *increases*, and the average age of the internet users *decreases*. One particularly obvious observation was that families used phone apps and internet content, such as video, to keep their children entertained, busy, and playing. Here is the note of my conversation with one of the three mothers of three children about this situation:

*“When I was a child, we were always wondering about each other's house while playing games with our friends on the street in our neighbourhood, like wondering what kind of house, furniture and things the friends' families have. We used to visit each other and play games at home... In the camp, this has disappeared now, our children's games are now independent of homes, furniture, and curiosity. Their only request is to play and spend time on the phones, on the internet. We are also guilty, actually, how many times I told my husband that when children cry, do not give the phone to their hands to silence them. Now*

*when they cry if we do not give the phone or show the video they want, they cry more and more... No more outside playing games, they are playing games on the phone in their heads. I do not know if this is good or bad, God help us!* [Interview 1, KTPC, 01.10.2018]

When we think of the concept of digital habitus, it would be more realistic to think of it as a habitus that started to build and surround us more and more every day while interacting with the media rather than as something already completed. The anxiety this participant as a mother feels about her children, the new socialities she strives to make sense of, and the habitus built by these socialities are now in the life of children who grow up with the phone and the Internet, although it may seem unfamiliar to this mother. Moreover, this is digital habitus as an inherent feature in the life of particularly Generation Z, children of today who have almost no memories of not having the internet; however, digital habitus as an actuality is being shaped and grown in the life of this mother.

It should be noted here that the degree of appearance of digital habitus and the development of its determinants are not the same for everyone, for every age and gender groups. The childhood years and sociability that this mother describes from her own life and the habitus of children growing up in an area such as a camp – where all houses are the same, and restrictive external factors are apparent – are of course not the same. The main points emphasised by this chapter and the interviewees are the essence of Internet relations in our lives as an almost inevitable advanced tool. Digital habitus corresponds as a developing field, particularly as an inherent and embedded field and reality in the lives of generations known as the *millennials* or *Generation Z* (see Desai and Lele, 2017). To formulate this argument better, the new developments that we call changes and progress among today's generations are one of the most fundamental keystones that build future generations' lives. Digital habitus, which we observe to be still developing and growing today, will be an indispensable and core foundation of people in the near future, when just modestly considering today's elements and instruments. Therefore, I uncomplicatedly observed how the relations of refugees with the internet and how these relations affect their perceptions, especially in limited areas such as refugee camps and when time is abundant. These observable effects on refugees' perceptions were the main trigger that I later transformed into a theoretical concept

as digital habitus, which is one of the most defining and distinct characteristics of our modern and technological era.

In the next section, the socio-economic and educational demography of the refugees staying in KTPC will be specified and I will discuss why such forms of capital play essential roles in this study as a foundation to the concept of subjectivity.

### **3.2.4) The Decisiveness of Capital Forms in Refugees' Life in Camps**

The capacity to act and take steps in accordance with the choices and thoughts that I have emphasised within the framework of the subjectivity discussions in 1.3.3 sections is directly related to the different forms of capital of individuals. In this section, I draw the attention of the reader to the refugees staying in the KTPC, why they stay in the camps, and the refugee groups' demographic characteristics staying in the camps. Demonstrating how refugees' economic, social and cultural capital affects the realities of their lives assists readers to understand the significance of the relationships between enabled or empowered subjectivity and capital. In addition, the ability and capacity of individuals to act and practice within the boundaries of their capital forms and thoughts nourish us in explaining the determinant factors of the refugees' subjectivity, as emphasised in the discussions of subjectivity.

I conducted face-to-face interviews with 10 Syrian Arab refugees at the KTPC and almost all interviewees described themselves as *economically poor* and as having *lost their assets*. All the interviewees stated that they came from regions with *smaller populations*, that they had a *self-sufficient life* in rural areas, but they had to leave everything they had because of the destructive effect of the war. Correspondingly, they clearly demonstrated that they did not have enough '*money*' as the main reason for their stay in the camp. They also stated that if they ever have enough income or money to be economically self-sufficient, they will leave the KTPC and rent an apartment in the city and they want to be more involved in social life. Demographically, the average age of my interviewees in the KTPC was 36, they were all married and had children, except one 20-year-old young man. Education status was primary school or secondary school, except one who had a bachelor's degree. All my female interviewees were housewives, and all the male interviewees

were working part-time or unemployed. So those who stayed in the camp were mostly families. The words of the interviewees I cite below show the direct relationship between economic capital and camps, mobility and living standards.

*“...Why would someone who has money, who can rent a house, buy two pieces of bread and eat in that house, stay in a place like a camp? We are one of those who do not have money... Now I am working, saving money, hopefully, we'll get out of here as soon as possible. Then we will work harder, save more money and, God willing, we will go to Sweden, where my wife's uncles live...”* [Interview 5, 42 years old, former teacher, 04.10.2018]

*“... There are not many young people here, they can find a job somehow, they can stay at home together in a crowded way. But there are not many options for poor families like us outside the camps... I said that if I had the opportunity, I would go to Germany with my relatives, it is not something that will happen if I do not work and save money and create it myself, this is the truth of life...”* [Interview 7, Father of 2, 42 years old, plumber, 09.10.2018]

The situation that the interviewees emphasise as a factor that determines the living standards and prevents their mobility is *economic capital*. As Van Hear (2014; 100) points out regarding this: *“The capacity to mobilise those – economic or network-based – resources is largely determined by socioeconomic background or class, which, drawing on Bourdieu, can be conceived in terms of the disposal of different amounts and forms of capital – economic, social, cultural, symbolic...”* To remember Bourdieu's understanding of different forms of capital:

*“Firstly, economic capital, in various kinds; secondly, cultural capital or better, informational capital, again in various kinds; and thirdly two forms of capital that are very strongly correlated, social capital, which consists of resources based on connections and group membership, and symbolic capital, which is the form the different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate”* (Bourdieu, 1987:4).

The forms of capital that Bourdieu formulated through relational sociology (Bourdieu, 2020; Dépelteau, 2018) are understood more clearly when the Syrian refugees remaining in the KTPC are examined as follows: Participants' *economic capital* was poor, *cultural capital* was not very developed depending on their educational, occupational, and economic conditions. Their limit of their *social capital* was defined by the traditional life in more rural areas within the scope of the determination of economic and cultural capital. Although the refugees staying in KTPC were aware of the international resettlement of refugees in a third country, which was carried out

with the lead of the UNCHR, they evaluated their qualifications, in other words, their social capital was not enough for this. The words of the 20-year-old interviewee pointed to this issue by stating the following:

*“As I said before, we could not go to Germany because of money issues. Many of our relatives are gone, maybe they were lucky too. We have applied for the UN resettlement and now we are waiting for results. But the other day I read it on Facebook, people say ‘why should a strong and rich country accept a refugee with no education and no qualification into their own country?’ That is, those countries decide who to select and take. Let’s be honest, if I were them [those countries], I would not choose people like us in this camp, since there is neither education nor culture.”* [Interview 8, KTPC, 09.10.2018]

The words of this interviewee emphasise that, apart from noting that the lack of economic capital influences their mobility, the lack of social and cultural capital is not enough for re-placement in the third country. In its official statements<sup>40</sup>, UNHCR states that the most vulnerable people will be given priority rather than criteria such as education, profession, the economy in the process of replacing them in the third country, although the concept of vulnerability is subjective and open to interpretation. The comment of the interviewee about the information he learned from Facebook draws attention to the importance of forms of capital such as education, social status, and profession, even though the reliability of the information is open to discussion.

Considering all these factors and effects, the capital forms that circumscribe the capacity of a refugee staying in the KTPC to leave the camp, integrate with social life, go to another country in their plans or dreams, in other words, limit their subjectivity, are very determinant. Consequently, based on what these interviewees indicated as well as the ethnography conducted at KTPC, economic capital becomes the most fundamental criterion for realising an economically costly movement such as migration. In addition, social and cultural capital are decisive in their future imaginations, decisions and ultimately their actions. In addition, patriarchal gender relations based on gender roles and norms, in which traditional and religious teachings are determinant, were also one of the main characters of the KTPC. Therefore, I formulate this situation as another important factor we should consider

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<sup>40</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/ucuncu-ulkeye-yerlestirme> last access on 05.06.2021



when dealing with the subjectivity debate and the questioning of gender norms and roles in the next section.

### **3.2.5) Gender Transformation of Syrian Arab Female Refugees: Being Women and Refugees and Mother are the Worst Thing to Happen**

One of the most central ethnographic observations that *Grounded Theory* as a research method assisted me to formulate in the fieldwork and brought forth was the *transformation* and *change* that both Syrian Arab and Kurdish women refugees experienced through the refugee and immigration process. This section mainly uses interviews with Syrian Arab women refugees in KTPC. Although I carried out ethnography, my observations of refugee women were very limited due to the reflection of the dominant gender roles in social and daily domains. The reason for this was that women were not very visible in social and public spaces, since usually they were in their own container houses as a more private living space. In this sense, the main gender matters that the fieldwork and interviews point to concern women living in a collective community, being subjected to the common gender roles and norms of the community, and also gender roles and responsibilities externally generated by the refugee position and camp conditions.

At the KTPC, all of my female interviewees were married, and all had children ranging from 3 to 6. They were all housewives. Educational level varied between no education and secondary school. All the interviewees defined themselves as Muslims and religious. None of them had work experience, except one who worked as a midwife nurse for a short period. In other words, all the interviewees were economically dependent on their husbands. Family relationships were prominently limited by patriarchal roles and norms. While their husbands were working with jobs outside the home [in Syria] or camps [in Turkey], they were responsible for housework. For instance, taking care of the children and housework were the women's responsibility as wife or mother. As far as I observed, I can state that the main reason why women were not seen in the public sphere was gender roles prevailing within these social, religious, cultural, and economic boundaries. The words of a 32-year-old interviewee, mother of 3 children, may assist to explain better:

*“I can imagine that it is very challenging to get used to life in Germany. I know from my relatives who live there. Despite this, I want to leave here because there is always a third eye that puts me in a situation that I am struggling... My neighbour, she is very religious and tells me all these things that I have to do, I have to accept as wife, mother, daughter. But she does not see that we are vulnerable here, we already have to accept many things compulsorily because of what we have had in the last years. She does not see as women we already struggle a lot... I just want to get away from eyes that check and control on me. When my relatives in Europe say that they feel much free and stronger because there are not many Syrians, then I want to go there.” [Interview 2, KTPC, 02.10.2018]*

The words of this interviewee highlight an issue that will be emphasized in the Greece and Germany field research chapters as well. This issue is related to the gender-based pressures produced by the collective community and to the positions of women who are exposed to these pressures in refugee camps. Other female interviewees also emphasized similar gender-based pressures in different manners. This is mainly due to this being a community that originated in the countryside and continued to practice dominantly patriarchal religious teachings and gender roles. I should mention here that I want to draw a frame about a Muslim Syrian refugee community in KTPC that its roots are constructed and shaped by Muslim habitus, rather than a very radical religious community. In describing the correlation between religious values and gender relations in KTPC, I want to emphasize the dominant gender roles and norms in the community.

Apart from the issue that I have emphasized and stated that the character of the collective community has a negative impact on gender roles, the gender-based division of labour and the extra responsibilities put on women in camp conditions should be essentially considered as other gender-based troubles in KTPC. Beside the challenge of these roles and responsibilities, the public role and representations of Turkish women in society in Turkey can be elaborated as a factor that caused female interviewees to question their own values and traditions. Below notes from the interviews indicate these two situations.

*“Turkish women are a bit different, like... how to say, they have more freedom in society. But this is not good sometimes, girls are freer, and they can forget their responsibilities, which is not good. For example, they get married late... Though I can't say it's better in our culture but... I do not know. I do not want my daughters to have same life as mine, they should be stronger.” [Interview 3, Mother of 4, 34 years old, KTPC, 02.10. 2018]*

*“Life in here is very difficult especially for us [meaning women-mothers]. We have to do everything by ourselves. In Syria, my husband was going to work, earning money, taking care of us. But here he is home all the time and does not help with anything, so when I ask him to help me, he gets angry... I hardly find some time for myself to think all these things happened [means Syrian War], we ended up here, lost everything, do not know what tomorrow will bring... Being women and refugees and mother are the worst thing to happen, I do not know how to explain.”* [Interview 19, Mother of 4, 38 years old, 31.10.2018]

These two interviewees' statements are very summarising for framing the general issues that arise due to gender issues in refugee camps. The words of the mother of 4 children points out the refugee camps' daily life practices as the roles and responsibilities shared in the home between man and woman as wife and husband. However, what she points at is that they do not live in a house anymore, it is a camp and also husband does not work as he used to do back in their place. This is the point where gender norms are being questioned by the interviewee. Additionally, her words reveal the extra work to be done in the camp that keeps her very busy, that even prevents her from the understanding and realisation from her point of view as an individual. The other interviewee indicates the confusion that is caused or sparked by the encounter of different gender roles and representations in the society, particularly by giving her understanding of Turkish and Syrian women roles as a comparative case. Even though her words were critical, I could easily sense her confusion in her expression that she evaluates new gender representations through the future projections of her daughters as she wants them to be stronger.

There were gender roles and norms questionings and confusions that were manifested by obvious factors such as the difficulties the refugee women in the camps faced, the new gender roles they encountered, the social pressure they were subjected to. These questionings and confusions will appear in more transforming and practised forms, especially in Greece and Germany. For this reason, the gender-centred issues emphasized by female interviewees in KTPC can be thought of as the subjectivity mobilized by the Syrian refugee women against these pressures in Greece and Germany. I argue that this transforming and practised gender relations should be evaluated as subjectivity of the refugee woman. The social appearances of refugee women, their questioning of the dominant gender codes and the roles they think are wrong, and the decisions and steps they take, the new practices to

change the norm are the characteristics of their predominantly empowered subjectivity. This section provides the basis for an introduction to the transformation of Syrian women refugees' gender roles and norms, which this research has adopted as an objective concerning the subjectivity discussions. In other gender discussion sections, readers will understand how the challenges faced by women refugees discussed in this section trigger an alteration in gender codes for Syrian women refugees with similar backgrounds.

In the next section, the field study with Syrian Kurdish refugees in predominantly Kurdish cities Diyarbakır and Mardin will be presented.

### **3.3) The Imagined Community: Syrian Kurdish Refugees in Diyarbakır and Mardin**

While two gendarmes were holding both my arms to take me out of the temporary protection centre with the order of a nationalistic senior captain, who was shouting “*There are no Kurds, we are living in Turkey, this is the land of Turks. You can speak about Kurds back in England but not here!*” It was afternoon when the sun was shining in all its warmth over the reinforced concrete camp. My translator, Ali, in his own words, ‘an assimilated Kurdish man’, accompanied to me with an embarrassed face while the gendarmes pushing me out of the camp area surrounded by wire-mesh walls. Once, while chatting about Syrian Kurds staying at the protection centre, I remembered the advice my translator gave me.

*“Baris, my friend, do you want me to get in trouble? Even talking about Kurds in this area is a reason to be kicked out from here... There are some families in the camp, they are Kurdish, but they would not say this to you because they are even afraid of reminding themselves. You know how things work in this country, being Kurdish is a burden, it is naturally political my friend. Kurdish refugees already knew about this, that is why they are not in refugee camps. I heard many times from these families that their relatives are mainly in Kurdish cities where they can speak the language, can be accepted by the other Kurdish people. Go there, go to your hometown (Diyarbakır). You will easily meet many of them.”*  
[Field Notes, 14 October 2018]

#### **3.3.1) Seeking Power Relations in Perceptions and Thoughts on the Other: The Perceptions of Syrian Kurds about Turkey and West**

What I examine within the scope of this section is how the authority, power, and transformative influence of power relations and actors are perceived, interpreted, and acted upon accordingly, especially by Syrian Kurdish refugees. In this sense, the investigation of Syrian Kurdish refugees’ images, perceptions, and attitudes about the *Kurdish question/Kurdish conflict*, which has a long-standing history in Turkey, offers very detailed points about Turkey/the Turkish State and Syrian Kurdish refugees. In this context, we need to dig into the process of *positionality*, *actuality*, and *subjectivity* that Syrian refugees have taken about an ‘*other*’ – in this case Turkey – that can be a determinant in their lives. Operation Shield Euphrates that the Turkish State initiated in August 2016 to prevent the unification of the Kurdish regions between Menbic and Afrin Cantons and detract ISIS from its border heightened the political and military tensions between Turkey and Rojava. Subsequently, such military operations as *Operation Olive Branch* in January 2018, *Operation Peace Spring* in October 2019, and *Operation Spring Shield* in February 2020, were launched at different times for varying purposes. These military

operations and, afterwards, political and institutional initiations in the regions by Turkey have compounded the unrest, insecurity, and uneasiness of Syrian Kurdish refugees living in Turkey (see Al-Hilu, 2019; Gürcan, 2019).

In this section, the determinant power relations and actors in the relationship between Turkey and Syrian Kurds can be named primarily *political* and *military* domains. In order to better figure out the perceptions and thoughts of Syrian Kurdish refugees about Turkey prior to, during and after migration, I asked open ended interview questions, such as ‘*What do you think about Turkey?*’ Analysing the answer given to this question by the 26-year-old, sociology-studying, construction worker interviewee I quoted below will help us understand the relationship between Syrian Kurdish refugees and Turkey.

*“Turkey comes into being in the Kurdish people’s life in two ways, which are mainly military and political interventions. Since my childhood, I have always heard the stories from our family elders that Turkey as a country, nation, state is kind of a bogeyman to be feared. The way I ended up here confirms such stories. I am talking about Kobane attacks, and Turkey’s support for ISIS against Kurds, closure of its borders to Kurds... Is there any Kurdish place Turkey has not attacked yet, you tell me? It repeatedly intervened to all Kurdistan regions. Even if Kurds go to the moon, Turkey finds excuses to interfere with. Tragicomic but this is how Kurds feel!”* [Interview 11, Diyarbakır, 23.10.2018]

The interviewee is from Kobane city in Syria and had expressed that he had to flee to Turkey illegally when ISIS attacked there with all its forces in 2015 (see Hinnebusch, 2015; Ciordia, 2018). Consequently, the interviewee stated that the reason he was in Turkey was due to Turkey's indirect support for ISIS and sealing the borders to Kurdish people. As can be understood from the interviewee's words, Turkey does not exactly correspond to a ‘*safe haven*’ where they can feel secure and protected. Besides this interviewee, other interviewees also indicated that being in Turkey as a refugee does not satisfy their need for security, on the contrary they associated being in Turkey with the feelings of anxiety, fear and insecurity. When considering this encounter within the scope of power relations, while the relations between the parties of power relations are commonly formed through more media, social, and public representations, this situation emerges between Turkey-Syrian Kurds more through military intervention and political pressures. One of the questions I formed during the interviews to understand this situation further was,

*“How were your perceptions, attitude and positionality about Turkey formed, and through which instruments?”* The words of the interviewee stated below are noteworthy to grasp the formation of the Syrian Kurds’ perceptions of Turkey:

*“Ever since I knew myself, I know about Turkey, but it is not because I want it. Turkey was more inherent in my life. I grew up in the villages just below the Mardin border. When I saw a warplane for the first time, I was 4-5 years old, excited, happy, you know I was a child after all. But when I asked my mom what it was, she started crying, all she said was ‘stay away from it’. Later I learned that her brother was martyred by a Turkish warplane bomb while fighting in the PKK side... Turkey comes into our lives, even if we do not want!”* [Interview 12, 20 years old, Bachelor student in law, Diyarbakır, 25.10.2018]

*“Normally, people follow their own country more on TV, internet, news, right? But since I was little, I remember that Turkish TV channels were also watched in our house, especially the news. Because even though we live in Syria, it was feared from Turkey. That is why my parents would follow Turkey's politics. Which I still think so, because people try to be cautious about what they are afraid of, is not it?”* [Interview 13, 22 years old, Building worker, Diyarbakır, 26.10.2018]

Interviewees pointed to the Turkish state’s policies and practices that exist, affect and put sanctions in their lives in a way even before the forced displacement. This situation is also a result and extension of the problems and conflicts that Kurdish people experienced while living in Turkey for many years. *Nationalist policies* that do not recognize or include ethnic differences caused the political and military tension and conflicts between Kurds and Turkey, and *cross-border operations* and *joint political agreements* with the Turkish governments and neighbouring countries have also become a problem for Kurds living in the surrounding countries, such as in Syria, as the interviewees indicated with their life stories. Solidarity and cooperation among Kurdish people, which I will discuss in the next section, in fact explains the concept of *‘imagined community’* that emerges after the common traumas, discrimination and marginalization among Kurds created by the historical political, social and military practices and which has strengthened day by day. In a bigger scale, Syrian Kurdish refugees’ perceptions and thoughts of the *‘other’*, in particular about the West’ had a much more political and critical frame, especially when compared to Syrian Arab refugees. For example, many of the interviewees, when asked *‘what the concept of the west corresponds to, how they interpret it’*, used a more rigid discourse to explain

their opinions. The two interviewees' words I have cited below, used expressions with a historical, sociological and political framework in content:

*"If someone use the term 'West', I think of Europe. But nowadays west is more than Europe, like if we think America [United States] or Canada, they are also West. The original West, European countries are those occupant/invader countries, like Britain, France, Spain, the Netherlands."* [Interview 9, 25 years old, NGO worker, Diyarbakır, 16 October 2018]

*"The West is, you know, those wealthy, modern, technologically advanced countries, where life is easy, comfortable, many jobs out there. But I also know that they reached this point thanks to other countries, like you know France benefited from the wealth of Syria, or Britain controlled half of the world and got all those things!"* [Interview 14, 32 years old, translator, Mardin, 27 October 2018]

In the interviews held in Greece, in the questions I asked the interviewees about Greece, they indicated that Greece is not the west for them, they referred to Western European countries as the original West as the interviewee above stated. The term '*original*' that interviewee stated is noteworthy to delve into its historical and political roots. In order to do this, when I asked how his ideas about the west or the original west were formed, he particularly emphasized the characters of power relations in fundamental external terms such as *media, history, global politics, military* and *economy*. However, being exposed to a structure, power, representation to know or be aware of them was another common emphasis by many interviewees. It can be argued that the common emphasis on *being exposed* to external structures or representations may be related to the proliferation of global media tools, global macro politics and economics, and the reduction of individuals by such supra-institutional structures, which have been gradually disabling active subjectivity. At the same time, it can be argued that increased awareness, interests, and easy access to information can lead to *indirect passivation* or *loss of active subjectivity*. The analogy established by a young 23-year-old female interviewee can be shown as an example of power relations, the power of external entities that dominate this active subjectivity:

*"Let me give you such an example: Do you think anyone here in Mardin does not know the Turkish government or Istanbul or Ankara? This is not about everyone wanting to know Istanbul or Ankara. Sometimes we are more exposed and thus we learn. People watch a TV series, and it is in Istanbul, and they learn about it! So, people in Mardin indirectly learn about Istanbul, right? It is the same, people in the world learn/know about the West from*



*movies, news, politics, and other things, indirectly or directly.*" [Interview 15, Waitress, Mardin, 28 October 2018]

Analysing the response given by the interviewee, it can be argued that the conception of people that how they learn and imagine the West was influenced by the role and functioning of the media. Additionally, the effects of the visual media productions, such as movies, television shows or series, and other related videos have played a crucial role in shaping the image and imagination of Syrian Kurdish refugees. Ann Marie Barry (1997, 2002) in her works, elaborates the brain functions, and how the function of brain relates to logical reasonings and feelings, and how it reacts to the visual world, in general. Barry explains that seeing and perceiving the world that surrounds us in visual forms through neurological information processing has stronger effects on the perception of long-term memory (p.92-94). Therefore, the interviewees commonly responded to *'how their images and understandings of the West are formed'* by emphasizing the function of the media, the effect of the visual media, the representations of power actors and structures in media.

In the following section, I discuss the solidarity, cooperation and close relationship among Kurds from Turkey and Syria, which the reader can consider in relation to the concept of *imagined community*.

### **3.3.2) Solidarity and Imagined Community: What makes Kurds a nation is not ethnicity, but the common experiences!**

In the recent history of the Kurds, within the boundaries of four different nation-states – Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria –, there have been social, political, economic and psychological experiences that were socially common or similar. The main reason for these associable experiences is that they have different ethnic, cultural, and social relations from the elements that constitute the dominant identity of the countries within which they live. In this sense, even though they are basically divided between the boundaries of four countries, they have created a *transboundary community sense* because of both their ethnicity and their shared experiences. We can express this transboundary sense with the words of Anderson (1991; 5): *"Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.... Finally, [the nation] is imagined as a community,*

*because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”*

Due to the reasons that constitute a sense of imagined community and the marginalizing policies of the countries that the Kurds live in, their positionality has also become dynamic. I recommend using the concept of *trans-locational positionality* to better imagine this dynamism. As Anthias (2002; 502) formulates this concept: *“The concept of trans-locational positionality recognizes that issues of exclusion, political mobilization on the basis of collective identity and narrations of belonging and otherness cannot be addressed adequately unless they are located within other constructions of difference and identity, particularly around gender and class.”* We can detail the trans-locational positionality argument that serves to think and understand the political relation of Kurds with the concept of imagined community through the actual solidarity and cooperation that took place among Turkish and Syrian Kurds in Diyarbakır and Mardin.

In that sense, the trans-locational positionality argument that helps us better imagine and understand the political relationality of Kurds within the concept of imagined community can be exemplified and tested through the solidarity realised among Syrian Kurdish refugees and Turkish Kurdish community in Diyarbakır and Mardin. I mainly carried out the ethnography in these two cities by spending time in certain neighbourhoods and districts, such as Bağlar and Huzurevleri in Diyarbakır and Nusaybin and Kiziltepe in Mardin where more Syrian Kurdish refugees reside. To be able to grasp the daily interactions of Syrian Kurds with local Kurds, I visited many *kıraathane* (traditional coffee house) where mainly men go and socialize, and many slightly more gender-balanced coffee houses, and public places. In these places, I met with both local and Syrian Kurds and had conversations about the relationship between Syrian and local Kurds. The following stated thoughts are from both local and Syrian Kurds about each other:

*“Having a border in between [Turkey and Syria] does not make us separated or different. The other day there was a wedding, groom is from Derik [a Kurdish district in Rojava] and bride is from Lice [a district in Diyarbakır]. This shows how we are united.”* [Waiter from Turkey, Bağlar/ Diyarbakır, 21.10.2018]

*“We Kurds always say that Kurds are one, united and together regardless the borders. I believe this situation [the displacement and migration of Kurds] proved that if there is no border between us, we live together peacefully and together as all the other nations do. [Kurd from Turkey, a shop owner, Huzurevleri/ Diyarbakır, 22.10.2018]*

*“Actually, the question you ask, the issue of ‘how are Syrian and Turkish Kurds’ relationships’ is a question like asking Turks living in Ankara and Istanbul, how are the relationship between Turks from Ankara and Istanbul? Just as their relationships are, the relationship between Qamishli and Diyarbakır is like that. The only difference is they put a border between us by force!” [36-year-old from Syria, Kızıltepe/Mardin, 28.10.2018]*

*“I think the main thing that makes Kurds a nation is not ethnicity, but the common painful experiences, oppressions, massacres they go through. Kurds are a people in the same geography, speaking the same language and having the same culture. At the time, the country where you are studying at university<sup>41</sup>, England and a few other European countries, after taking their interests from this region, decided to cut the geography where the Kurds live as if cutting a cake. Now we are trying to prove the truth that we Kurds are a nation in the world.” [33 years old from Syria, Nusaybin/Mardin, 29.10.2018]*

The main thing that the reader must understand from these words is that the Kurds are a good model and representation of the concepts of *imagined community* or *trans-locational positionality* that we use in attempting to conceptualize the solidarities among them. The most emphasized issue is, first, the fact that it is larger Kurdish geography divided by borders, and then that Kurds have had similar experiences within different boundaries. The interviews I made on these topics contained confirming and similar highlights. Common positive concepts emphasized in my observations and daily conversations with locals as well were also emphasized the Syrian Kurdish interviewees. For example, togetherness, one nation, solidarity, and same language are the most highlighted ones.

When I asked about how common feelings and expressions correspond in practical terms, how they feel solidarity, and how they were accommodated by locals, several key points were stated. It was stated that these were provisions, clothing, basic household goods and financial aids provided to them. It was also noted that these solidarities and assistances were carried out under the leadership of metropolitan municipalities and local institutions, especially under the administration of the pro-

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<sup>41</sup> The participant refers to my explanation about the research that I introduced myself before the conversation. He pointed out the Sykes-Picot Agreement by mentioning the England and other European countries that cut the Kurdish geography.

Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP). It was also stressed that when searching for an apartment to rent and looking for jobs, the local people helped them, and they sometimes ignore official documents and permits to make it easy for them. The interviewee's words I quoted below express his views on the Kurdish cities and the local people:

*"Turkey is modern country, economically strong and well-developed, and has a great history, but these are valid if you are a Turkish! Look at Diyarbakır, it is one of the major cities in Turkey, but there is no economic investment by the government, that is why local people go to other cities to earn money. But despite this, I feel appreciative to our people, they shared what they have and helped us."* [Interview 14, Lawyer-translator, Mardin, 27 October 2018]

I will review once again the solidarity established by the Kurds among themselves, especially in the axis of a small camp community established by the Kurds who were displaced from different countries in the Lavrion camp in Greece. In the next section, I discuss the internet and social media usages of Syrian Kurdish refugees.

### **3.3.3) Syrian Kurdish Refugees' Media and Internet Use: Images makes me happy and excited, then I remember them more clearly.**

All interviewees stated that they own a smartphone, tablet, or laptop and that they connect to the internet every day with one or more of these tools. They emphasized that the reason for using the internet is primarily access to social media accounts, then communication with family and relatives, and then access to daily news, and other reasons. However, since all interviewees were working in different jobs for a large part of the week, they stated that they use their social media or related internet tools, mainly during the evening hours. However, the answer of an interviewee, 26 years old, a construction worker and master's degree student to the question: *'How much time do you spend with media and internet tools a day?'* is noteworthy:

*"Media is a very comprehensive concept; I think you should state what you mean more clearly [smiles]. For example, aren't they the advertisements we see on TV, newspapers, radio and even street media billboards? If we consider all of these, I think we spend more than 6-7 hours a day with these media tools. But if you are just referring to websites and social media that we connect to via phone, I probably spend 2-3 hours in a day."* [Interview 10, Diyarbakır, 20.10.2018]

What this interviewee indicates about the concept of media and the variety of its tools is of great importance. Although my question was principally about phone and internet tools, in fact the duration of time spent on media changes drastically when we include classical media tools. When I clarified to the interviewer that what I mean by media was particularly the interrelation between the effect, manipulation, advertising of an image, sound, idea, lifestyle, especially via image-based, video, text, audio forms, and users/audiences, he replied:

*“So, let me tell you about my daily routine that I usually have when going to college: When I leave the house, I usually see advertising brochures in the building. I see ads on billboards at the minibus station. I see news or advertisements on the small TV screen in the minibus. I check the news on the phone in the minibus, or my messages, notifications, social media accounts. I see music clips on televisions in the faculty canteen. In the same way, I return home. In the evening I look at the TV, the movie, or the discussion show. Now you calculate how much time I spend or am exposed? [smiles]” [Interview 10, Diyarbakır, 20.10.2018]*

Considering the comprehensiveness of media content and tools that the interviewee has pointed out, in fact, we need to think about circumstances such as continuous advertising, being in communication everywhere, connectedness, which are one of the most basic features of daily life in the modern technological age. Although the interviewee emphasizes the existence of media tools in his life that he encounters during his daily routine, in fact, in the scope of this research, I am specifically interested in the relationship between the users and media tools, which operate over the internet and platforms that run through the consent and preferences of individuals. The main difference of these platforms, namely video-sharing or personalized online applications such as social media platforms, search engines, YouTube, is that these platforms appeal to users' interests and attract more attention through content related to these interests. In addition, these platforms have their own independent operating systems, goals, and objectives that work especially through the consent of users, such as the notifications that we encounter tens-hundreds of times every day. In this sense, the digital content that the user restricts and determines through his own preferences and interests find more provisions in the user's perception, thoughts, and desires. The answers given to the question *‘What are the most persistent contents generally in your mind after using the internet?’* gives hints as to what this digital content might be:

*“An interesting question... For example, I looked at Instagram and Facebook before the interview today, let me tell you what I remember about them: I remembered a video shared by a friend, a photo shared by a page I follow. Also, I do not know if it happens to you, sometimes something crosses my mind and the first ad that I encountered on the internet is related to this thing in my mind as if there is an internet-connected to our mind. [smiles].”* [Interview 14, 32 years old, single, translator, Mardin, 27.10.2018]

*“Most social media is based on photos and videos, so what remains in my mind is images, either someone’s photo or video. But I do not remember all of them, of course, the more remaining in my mind... I guess when it is something that makes me happy, excited or what I want to do, I remember these images more clearly.”* [interview 17, 21 years old, female, babysitter, Mardin, 29.10.2018]

The common content emphasized by both interviewees was the content based on images in either photo or video form. In addition to the words of the interviewees, the general observations that I obtained as a result of looking at the timeline contents in their social media accounts were to confirm what the interviewees stated. In other words, the main contents on social media platforms were more image-based as photo and video. To illustrate the image-based platforms, all interviewees had Facebook and Instagram accounts as well as other social media platforms such as TikTok, Pinterest. All interviewees reported that they used YouTube frequently. The contents that I commonly observed in the timelines of the interviewees’ Facebook and Instagram accounts were the profile pictures and videos of their friends and the pages they follow or like, in which all content could be coded as ‘positive’. What I mean by positive content is the content that includes smiles, or gets compliments, likes, thumbs and appreciations as a response from other users. The reason I emphasize this is that besides seeing content based on users’ preferences and interests, the social media accounts they use are functional or the most preferred way of using, which is based on positive content sharing and gaining more compliments, likes and appreciations.

Therefore, digital habitus, which develops, diversifies, and grows especially through social media platforms as one of the most used internet tools, is supported and shaped by positive content included media posts. Another consequence of this situation is, in the words of one of the interviewees, *“when something makes me happy and excited or I want to do, I remember these images more clearly”*, this is a digital structure of the social media that generates or corresponds to desires. All my

interviewees stated that they had family members, relatives or friends who had migrated to different countries in Europe, and they also stated that they were in contact with these people, especially through social media. In other words, this positive content in the form of photos or videos that these interviewees see in their social media accounts are also the content shared by people they know in Europe. I will discuss it in more detail in the following sections, the *posts* that these acquaintances do in the forms of photo, video or text are very impressive and influential on refugees who wish to migrate.

The points that I underlined in the scope of interviews held in KTPC and later in Diyarbakır and Mardin regarding the media and internet means show the importance and functionality of these tools in refugees' daily lives life practices. These discussions on media and the internet that I have presented will focus on media content rather than its functionality, especially in the context of the Greek and German fieldwork sites. Media content will show readers how they affect the interviewees' desires, perceptions, and actions. The next section introduces the subjectivity discussion of research concerning the demographics and capital of participants.

#### **3.3.4) Political Fear Replacing Socio-Economic and Cultural Capital: “What If I Get Caught?”**

One of the most prominent differences between Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees was the ways and processes of migration of these two different ethnic groups. Particularly since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, the people who were forcibly displaced were primarily Syrian Arab areas such as *Aleppo, Idlib, Hama, Homs, and Deir-Ez-Zor*<sup>42</sup>. Ethnic groups that were found to be the majority in these regions were primarily *Arabs* and then differentiated ethnic groups (Kennedy, 2006), such as *Turkman, Kurdish, Druze, and others*<sup>43</sup>. The violence and destructive effects of the Syrian Civil War, which started in March 2011, until the ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) period, which declared its independence in Syria in June 2014, were not

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.ecoi.net/en/countries/syrian-arab-republic/maps/> last accessed 31.05.2021

<sup>43</sup> [https://www.reddit.com/r/MapPorn/comments/gtpq13/demographic\\_map\\_of\\_syria\\_20102018/](https://www.reddit.com/r/MapPorn/comments/gtpq13/demographic_map_of_syria_20102018/) last accessed 31.05.2021

seen in the Kurdish regions, such as *Qamishli, Al-Hasakah, Afrin, Kobane*. However, after the ISIS's attacks on the Kurdish region, Syrian Kurds have seen and predicted the arrival of the war violence, and they slowly sent their family members to other safe places in Rojava or to Turkey. In addition, families who wanted to avoid mandatory military service (Al-Jabassini, 2017; 104), which started with the inclusion of the Kurdish forces in the Syrian War, preferred to send their young children out of Syria (Danish Immigration Service, 2015; 16-17). It should be noted here once again that it is very difficult to give the statistical equivalent of these in numbers that how many Syrian Kurds have crossed the Turkish borders before or after the violence erupted in the region. In this section, the demographic information of the sample group is given that consists of those who preferred to settle in Kurdish cities coming to Turkey particularly after 2014. In this sense, it would not be a correct comparison to generalize the demography represented by this sample group or to compare it with Syrian Arab refugees staying in KTPC. Despite this rather, it is essential to understand the migration route and tendencies of Kurdish refugees in Greece and Germany.

The interviews held in Diyarbakır and Mardin were selected and reached using the snowball sampling method. The average age of the 9 interviewees was 25 years old. All interviewees were single. Although I aimed to reach married participants, some families did not accept my request for security reasons, and some rejected the interviews for other reasons. Therefore, I was only able to reach a certain network with a certain age range. The education status of the interviewees was 2 master's degrees, 5 bachelor's degrees and 2 high school graduates. All interviewees were working in different professional areas, such as NGO worker, construction workers, babysitter, painter, translator, and waitress. 5 interviewees defined the economic situation as medium and above, while 4 stated as middle or lower class. All the interviewees were staying either with family members they came with or alone in apartments they rented.

Such a demographic profile provides the reader with the following information: Syrian Kurdish refugees in Diyarbakır and Mardin were able to economically cover expenses such as housing and daily expenses, and even though partially, they were



able to meet their social and education expenses themselves. In addition, thanks to social solidarity networks with local Kurdish groups, it was easier for them to find jobs. Therefore, the significant limitation of economic capital on migration and social mobility, as was seen among Syrian Arabs in KTPC, becoming there the most fundamental factor when making future plans, was not the main determinant factor for interviewees in Diyarbakır and Mardin. The capabilities and possibilities provided by economic capital have been replaced by more political concerns and restrictions caused by these concerns. These concerns were mainly stated by interviewees as follows: The prejudice of the Turkish state about Kurdish people, its nationalist policies, and Turkey's restrictive policies on Syrian refugees even within its borders. Here is what interviewees stated in relation to these subjects:

*"I have been in Diyarbakır for about 3 years, and I set up a life order here. I work, I have friends, I speak the same language as the people here. I previously stayed in Izmir [metropolitan city in the western extremity of Anatolia] for 3 months and had quite a hard time. I could not find a job. I was discriminated against while searching for a house. I could not communicate with the local people. I have been thinking of going to my relatives in Sweden since the last year, but I am still afraid to go there illegally. What if I get caught, I am both Kurdish and Syrian, do you understand?"* [Interview 9, 25 years old, NGO worker, Diyarbakır, 16.10.2018]

*"I am doing a master's degree here, waiting for my school to finish, then I think about going to Germany. To be honest I am afraid of getting caught. This is a very serious decision for me because I came here illegally... It [crossing the border illegally] took two hours, even that was so scary! A migration that may potentially last for months and even years, after my 4 years of life here, is very scary to me."* [Interview 17, 33 years old, artist, Mardin, 29.10.2018]

Both interviewees planned to leave Turkey and to go to European countries. However, the main reason why they did not realise this was the uncertainty of the illegal migration process, the possibility that the journey could take a long time, as well as *political fears of being caught*. At the same time, the solidarity that the interviewees established with the local people, the integration they carried out and the life order they established were other reasons why they did not implement these plans. Still, they had no economic, socio-cultural, or educational capital concerns as a reason for not being eligible or capable to migrate, in contrast to the vital reasons of Syrian Arab refugees staying in KTPC. In this sense, the points that Bourdieu emphasized regarding the determination and limitation of the capital forms, which I

formulated as the disempowerment of subjectivity related to Syrian Arabs in KTPC, were not valid for Syrian Kurds. However, political fears, the difficulty of migration, their reluctance to give up the social groups they are integrated with and the life they establish can be thought of as a different constraint for subjectivity, instead of economic and cultural capital.

The following section is about the gender, refugee, and migration discussions with Kurdish female interviewees on the axis of interviews and observations.

### **3.3.5) Gender Transformation of Syrian Arab Female Refugees: “A Revolution Does Not Happen Like This!”**

In Google searches made with the keywords *Kurdish-Woman*, politically and ideologically ‘a progressive movement’ emerges in the first images, websites, or news sources that the user comes across<sup>44</sup>. The main reason for this is that the Kurdish women in Kurdish societies, particularly in North and East Syria [known as *Rojava*] have drawn a highly prominent charisma by improving their social standing in the social, political, and military fields. Especially in the period of political and military instability and war in Syria, various Kurdish political and armed movements gained global recognition and legitimacy in the struggles against ISIS in the region where Kurds live. For instance, the Women’s Protection Units (Kurdish, *Yekîneyên Parastina Jinê*; YPJ) and the women’s military wing of the PKK, *Yekîneyên Jinên Azad ên Star* (YJA-Star), within the Kurdish societies have challenged traditional gender roles (see Düzgün, 2016; Open, 2013). This socio-political acquisition gave Kurdish women a changing and promising progressive attitude, political awareness and positionality towards gender and traditional patriarchy, even if Syrian female Kurdish interviewees in this research did not take part specifically in these political, military or social structures (see Al-Ali and Tas, 2018). In this sense, the Syrian female Kurdish refugees that I present in this chapter were highly aware, interested and connected in these progressive movements and structures from a political and gender perspective. The reason I highlight this is to help the reader recognise what the political and ideological expressions emphasized by the interviewees correspond

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<sup>44</sup><https://www.google.com/search?q=kurdish+woman&oq=kurdish+woman&aqs=chrome.0.69i59j35i39j46i395j0i395l2j69i60j69i61j69i60.1257j1j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8> last access on 05.06.2021

to, where they are influenced and nurtured while doing the gender-based discussion of refugee and migration below.

All the female interviewees were single, employed, and stated that they were not religious. I used *Kurmanji* [Kurdish] as a common language in all the interviews and this situation eliminated the need for translator/interpreter. In all my interviews, the Kurdish female interviewees came alone, unlike Syrian female Arab refugees in KTPC where someone accompanied them during the interviews in order not to be alone with a male researcher. In this sense, a feminist attitude with an ideological and social awareness was the subject of Kurdish female interviewees, which was also the case in Greece and Germany. To further elaborate this, we can analyse in more detail the answers given by two young refugee women, one 21 years old and one 23 years old, to the questions I asked about their migration experiences and reasons:

*“I came alone about 3 years ago. My mother was opposed, but my father supported me because he wanted me to get a good education and become an independent woman... I know my father’s support for me is a political attitude, he is actually quite patriarchal, but he remained so long among our female friends at ‘our party’ that he supports me as a woman even though he does not know why [smiles]. Now I am working, continuing my education, standing on my own feet.”* [Interview 15, Waitress, single, Mardin, 28.10.2018]

*“My brother and cousin had arrived here before I came. When I came, I stayed with them for the first few months. But then I rented an apartment alone. All my family opposed my decision. But I do not have to pick up after my brother, tidy up the home alone, prepare his meal just because I am a woman. ‘Our party’, with which they fought for its purposes, honestly preaches exactly the opposite. They say women will make the Kurds’ revolution, but then they still wait for the woman to prepare dinner at home. A revolution does not happen like this!”* [Interview 16, Babysitter, single, Mardin, 28.10.2018]

The common point that the two interviewees emphasized was the structure they pointed to as *‘our party’*. When I asked what they mean by this, they pointed out the PKK and the women’s organizations associated with it. Both interviewees were aware of the ideological approach and expectations of these structures to women, and this was very influential in their engagement with gender. The examples that the father of the first interviewee supported her but his mother confronted her as a woman, and the other interviewee was going against the anticipation of gender roles between her brother and herself illustrate these interviewees’ perspectives and attitudes about gender roles. The fact that the circumstances of working

experiences, living with friends of their choice rather than family members, and their awareness of gender norms show their empowered subjectivity and put it into practice. Kurdish women, particularly in Rojava, after recent conflicts and achievements, have attracted attention in many fields, such as *cinema* (Koçer, 2014), *literature* (Muhamad, 2018), *art* (Schäfers, 2018) and other domains. In this sense, many studies that can be a reference to the subjectivity and gender discussion in relation to Kurdish women have already been conducted (see Düzgün, 2016; Bengio, 2016; Tank, 2017). In addition to these, the statements of another interviewee about the relationality of being a refugee and being a woman, the difficulty and awareness of being a refugee woman are worth noting:

*“Being a refugee is hard at the very beginning. Being a woman refugee is doubling this difficulty. Knowing that we come from Syria, some men try to offer help and approach in a way that as if we need help at any moment just because we are refugees. But I understand their intentions immediately, they are not in good faith... It is as if being a Syrian woman is identified with being religious, head-scarfed, not being modern. So sometimes I have to justify myself, why do I not have a scarf, why do not I seem religious?”* [Interview 14, 32 years old, single, Diyarbakır, 27.10.2018]

The experiences of this interviewee about being a refugee woman correspond to the discussions I formulated and presented as social subjectivity in the literature review section. Let’s recall how I defined this concept: *‘It is the subjectivity created by displaying performance in accordance with the anticipations of other people that have been shaped or reappeared about the social norms, roles, traditions of people in a particular race, religion or region’*. What is expected from being a Syrian and, moreover, from a Syrian refugee woman, and to impose on them the expected performances are essentially the generated social subjectivity that Syrian or Syrian refugee woman have to respond. However, this social subjectivity of refugee women that this interviewee emphasizes requires being able to look from a gender perspective.

### **3.4) Comparison of the Results Relating to Syrian Arab and Kurdish Participants in Turkey**

This research elaborately argues that Syrian refugees are not homogenous as an ethnic or religious group, and they should be attentively elaborated according to their diverse backgrounds, particularly when it comes to understanding people's perceptions, thoughts, imaginations and evaluation of others. Based on the fieldwork in Turkey presented through the sections on Syrian Arabs and Kurdish refugees, I bring a brief comparison of the fieldwork results in this section, particularly by emphasizing their similarities and differences. While emphasizing these similarities and differences, I prefer to go through an assessment focused on four different research scopes. First of all, on the axis of their thoughts and perceptions about another, namely about Turkey and the West; then on the axis of media usage and relations with media tools within the developing digital habitus concept; then on the axis of their demographic stories in relation to their capital; and finally, on the axis of gender roles, norms and transformation.

#### **3.4.1) A Comparison as a Basis for Understanding Power Relations and Actors in the Scope of Perceptions and Thoughts about the Other**

The emphasis so far on Power relations and actors, here in this section, is being presented through Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees' perceptions, thoughts and images primarily about the Turkish Government and society, and then about the West to better grasp the formation of perceptions about the 'Others'. Firstly, the opinions of these two ethnically different refugee groups towards Turkey were both jointly intersected and differentiated. However, in the thoughts of these two groups, differences are more prominent than similarities. To list them briefly, while Syrian Arab interviewees have positively emphasized that Turkey is strong, modern, advanced, and westernised; Syrian Kurds, with a more political and ideological perspective and discourse, have pointed out that in a military and political sense that Turkey is a repressive, nationalist and interventionist country. In addition, while Syrian Arabs were quite *pleased* and *happy* with Turkey's roles in the Syrian War, with the open-border policy for Syrian refugees and as a host country; Syrian Kurds were very *critical* and *unsatisfied* particularly due to Turkey's interventionist politics

and military operations in Rojava region against Kurds which were mainly started after 2015.

Moreover, on the one hand, Syrian Arabs noted positive thoughts about Turkish society on religious brotherhood and common history over the Ottoman Empire discourses; they at the same time, made more open-ended comments in general about Turkish society – *there are good and bad people, like everywhere* – as if avoiding stressing negative opinions. Syrian Kurds were very positive, especially from the perspective of solidarity, benevolence, and the imagined community established with local Kurdish communities in the predominantly Kurdish cities of Diyarbakır and Mardin. However, regarding Turkish society, they were critical and distanced due to the mainly nationalist and irreconcilable policies towards the Turkish Kurdish people. The views of these two groups about the concept of the West and European countries also differed from each other. While Syrian Arabs expressed their positive opinions about the secular, liberal, modern, development aspects of the west; Syrian Kurds have been critical of the west historically, politically and sociologically through an ideological point of view, and emphasized those countries' invasive, capitalist, and expansionist policies.

There are similar patterns in these groups' answers; both groups have stated that Turkish society approaches Syrian refugees through an underrating perspective, which creates superior and inferior relationships. These two groups' answers have been very similar in regard to questions that strive to detail the formation, development and process of their perceptions about both Turkey, the West and European countries. Both groups emphasized, in particular, the role of the media in their lives, the images of these countries' representations in media as modern, secular, economically well-developed and socially well-off. Therefore, the countries they wanted to go to in terms of future aspirations, long-term settlement places, and desired lifestyles were very similar in both groups. In addition, it turned out that both groups wish to go to European countries, such as Germany, Sweden, Netherland, and others where their relatives or families already live, especially if they have the opportunity, conditions, and capital.

### **3.4.2) A Comparison as a Basis for Understanding Digital Habitus through the Intensified Relationship with Media Devices and the Internet**

In this section, I introduce the comparisons of media use, the connection with media tools and the interaction with social media platforms, applications and the internet of Syrian Arabs staying in KTPC and Syrian Kurdish refugees living in Kurdish cities. While the similar and different attitudes and usage patterns of these two groups in these comparisons are highlighted, readers are advised to consider these relationships with media and internet as '*a new formation of habitus*'.

First of all, with the data provided by ethnography and interviews, Syrian Arabs had more free time due to staying in the camp, but as a result of their living in a restricted area, the time they spent on the internet and social media platforms was very intensive. It has been noted that this use corresponds to a time period varying between 4 and 6 hours on average. However, it was observed that the duration of media and internet usage was less among Syrian Kurdish refugees due to living in cities, employment, and the continuation of their education. It was stated by the interviewees that this usage varied between 2 and 4 hours. As one of the main reasons for this difference in usage, the average age of interviewees can be considered as a factor. The average age of Syrian Arabs in the KTPC was 36. However, Syrian Kurdish interviewees' average age was 25. While Syrian Arabs refugees' media and internet usage durations and relations differed between female and male interviewees, this variation was not noticed among Syrian Kurdish refugees. I discussed in more detail the reasons for this situation in the sections on gender roles and norms. The noteworthy point of this observation is that Syrian Arab women refugees had less time and worse conditions due to the responsibilities of being a mother and a housewife in camp conditions. On the other hand, all Syrian Kurdish interviewees were single and all-female interviewees were working. Thus, I cannot make a comparison between female Arab and Kurdish interviewees.

As I highlighted above, the variety of social media platforms among Syrian Kurdish refugees was more comprehensive because of the age difference between these two groups because as it is almost a fact that young people tend to use social media platforms more than other age groups. The most used platforms in both groups were

observed to be Facebook and Instagram. In addition, the basic reasons for the two groups to engage with media tools and the internet and social media platforms were stated as staying in touch with their families, friends, and relatives, being aware of each other and informing and following each other.

On the axis of these similarities and differences, as we users who begin to spend almost one-fourth of a day with these media tools in a day, I conceptualize these new relationships and practices with which we relate, create meanings, shape our lives and are being influenced by, as digital habitus as a new field. The reader is encouraged to think and discuss this concept, which will come up against media, content and internet usage discussions in the following chapters, with this perspective.

### **3.4.3) A Comparison as a Basis for Understanding Subjectivity through Socio-Economic and Educational Capital**

Here is a brief comparison of the demographic characteristics of the interviewees, as well as their economic and educational situation; While Syrian Arab interviewees' educational backgrounds were 5 secondary, 3 high school certificates and 2 no education; Syrian Kurdish refugees' education were 2 high school certificates, 5 bachelor's degrees and 2 master's degrees. All Syrian Arab refugees defined their economic status as poor, need help economically, and stated that they had a self-sufficient life while living in Syria, and that they came from more rural areas with religious upbringings. On the other hand, Syrian Kurdish interviewees stated that their economic conditions were averagely close to the middle class; they were living with their families in cities before migrating to Turkey; their families generally have a good economic situation; and indicated that they received economic support from their families when they decided to move to Turkey. While all Syrian Arab interviewees were married and had children except one, all Syrian Kurdish interviewees were single.

I discussed the relation of social, economic, educational, and cultural capital with subjectivity, especially with references to the work of Pierre Bourdieu. We can better understand this case, especially from these two different ethnic refugee groups, that



different forms of capital can determine the practices, actions, mobility, and capacity of the individual as a fundamental factor. *Syrian Arab* interviewees emphasized that insufficient economic capital was the most determinant reason for their stay in the camp, as well as the most determining reason for their inability to go to countries such as Germany and Sweden where their relatives, family and friends migrated and settled. Whereas Syrian Kurdish interviewees stated that they consider migrating to European countries when they have opportunities, conditions, and suitable times. However, the main reasons why they did do this were political fear, the difficulty of the reintegration process, the long duration of the migration process rather than any economic inadequacy, which were reasons that we could define in terms of with social and cultural capital.

The similarity between these two groups is that they emphasized the different forms of capital that caused them not to go where they want to go, even though these forms of capital differed. The main difference is that their capital forms and amounts are effective on their movements, mobilities and potential migration initiatives. However, although I, as a researcher, approached both groups from a certain distance and observed their actions, thoughts, and plans, I can say that the inadequacy of economic capital in the life of Syrian Arab refugees in the KTPC had much more decisive importance. While stating this, I do not disregard vital importance of the political fear, and insecurity concerns that Syrian Kurdish refugees had in Turkey. I state that economic deficiency and incapability are much more visible and determinant if it is to point out which forms of capital are more decisive on pricey mobilities such as illegal immigration.

The main points that the reader should understand from this comparison are as follows: Migration is a mobility form that requires a certain capability and amount in economic terms. Therefore, it is much more difficult for those who lack economic capital to realize this mobility. When we consider the general populations that are already displaced in the world, we can say that the segment that can travel long distances and meet their expenses is the economically middle and upper-class members, socially more educated and status-rich people. Large divisions of the remaining displaced communities migrate to and settle in neighbouring countries. Only if we remember the Syrian refugees' population in neighbouring countries, there

are more than 3.6 million in Turkey, more than 1.5 million in Lebanon, more than 660 thousand in Jordan, around 250 thousand in Iraq; whereas the whole Syrian refugee population in Europe is less than 1 million.

The reader should connect that socio-economic, educational and cultural capital is of fundamental importance for refugees directly related to subjectivity. In addition, it should be comprehended that, refugees are already surrounded by the legal, social, economic, and politic boundaries and the disempowerment of their subjectivities is further increased when they lack these forms of capital. Therefore, in the lack of capital, it is much more difficult for them to obtain or regain their social and political subjectivities.

#### **3.4.4) A Comparison as a Basis for Understanding Subjectivity through Gender Roles, Norms and Transformation**

One of the most prominent pillars of this research is that the gender transformations of both Arab and Kurdish Syrian female refugees are more potent, visible, and reflected in practice. The reader is encouraged to associate this discussion and the transformation process with female refugees' subjectivities, and to interpret gender roles, norms and changes that are strengthened and prominent. Since the fieldwork in Turkey was the first phase of this research, it would not be very accurate to compare gender codes, roles, transformation of Syrian female refugees as we do not know their subjectivities in gender relations before the displacement. Although we do not know female interviewees gender subjectivities in Syria, in the analysis made on the basis of their own words voiced by the female interviewees in the interviews, a discussion through social and political subjectivities can be presented since their gender features have become prominent, changing and visible.

In fact, the discussions and analysis made in this section will become clearer when compared with the next field study. Nevertheless, we can compare the main points that Syrian Arab and Kurdish interviewees made and emphasize the similarities and differences; While female Arab interviewees expressed the difficulties that they faced in fulfilling the expectations created by deteriorated responsibility in camp conditions, they pointed out the traditional, cultural roles that collective groups and socialities

regenerated. It is underlined by the interviewees that being a mother, being a housewife, being a refugee and living in camp conditions are one of the worst combinations that can be experienced. Whereas female Kurdish refugees answered the questions more consciously about gender, as a result of the '*progressive Kurdish women's movements*' they were exposed to politically and socially or preferably taking parts. Female Kurdish interviewees emphasized the patriarchal aspect of gender codes and the negative impact of traditional and cultural roles on gender norms in their lives. Female Arab interviewees also stressed the negative effects of collective groups and social relations on them as well as the public representation of women in Turkey they encounter that caused inner questioning about gender roles, and complaints about the inability of traditional husband and wife roles to meet their needs in camp conditions. On the other hand, female Kurdish interviewees pointed to patriarchal roles in their family relationships, conflicts and disagreements between the political missions assigned to women and the roles they are expected to perform, and to the empowerments brought about by their economic freedom and, as they call it '*standing on their own feet*'. In this sense, the reader should see that there are gender questionings and actions in the two groups, which are in different degrees and with different discourses. Migration and displacement have a double impact on women, part of which is questioning gender roles and norms. Thus, it is recommended to establish a direct link between gender questionings and actions and empowered gender subjectivities.

#### 4) CHAPTER 4

##### FIELDWORK IN GREECE: The Evolving Digital Habitus in Standby and Transition

*“I and my friend came to Turkey together, experiencing the danger of drowning in the Tigris River between Cizre [a Kurdish town in Şırnak province in Turkey] and Qamishli [a Kurdish city in Rojava]. We not only escaped from the war, and also from our families who were against us going to Turkey. But we did, with broken hearts and tears for a long time... We usually worked illegally, in a café, restaurant, as a carrier in fruit markets, days and nights in Diyarbakır. We planned to save money to pay smugglers who could help us to cross Greece. We worked with all efforts. After several months of working, we finally saved enough money to go to Bodrum, and then Akyarlar village [on the Aegean coast], illegally. Illegally means that no documents to legally be in Turkey and means the fear of being caught by security forces while travelling by bus. Luckily, we arrived in Bodrum, the beautiful city with thousands of tourists who came from countries where we wanted to go. My friend told me ‘I promise you; we will come back to this town and stay in 5-stars hotels one day.’*

*“It took us a few days to arrange things with smugglers. We set the day and time for departure. Two days before, my father’s cousin found us. My father’s cousin asked me to go back with him because since I left my family two of my brothers [younger 17 and 19 years] had participated in the Kurdish armed protection forces in Qamishli. My mom and younger sister [14 years] were alone and needed to be taken care of. I had to decide; either to go with my friend to freedom and a new start or to go back to my family... Eventually, I could not do it, my friend decided to go alone and then he left. He had these excited and confused feelings when I saw him for the last time; on the way to a new start and leaving me behind who accompanied him since we left home.*

*“Two days later I heard that my friend could not make it. With him, 17 more people drowned that day! There are a phrase Kurdish people use, ‘Freedom has a price!’ Since then, I question, why did we want to go to Europe? What did it offer for us? We create an image and then we convince ourselves to believe in this image!” [Field notes, Diyarbakır, 15.10.2018]*

This is a story of a young female Syrian Kurdish refugee (21 years) and her friend (24 years) who sacrificed many things in their lives. I met her as an interviewee while doing fieldwork in Diyarbakır. She did not allow me to record and did not answer my interview questions, rather she wanted to tell her personal story, during which she minimally permitted me to take notes. Most of the interviewees in question in the following sections have gone through a similar process. I listened to the stories of the siblings, the uncles, the children of some of the interviewees who drowned while trying to cross the sea. If the 24-year-old Kurdish guy in the story mentioned above did not drown, he might have been one of the interviewees whose words I present

in the following sections. In a way, we will seek answers to the questions in the story of *'Why did we want to go to Europe? What did it offer for us?'*

This chapter is about those refugees who had or created prospects and conditions to leave Turkey and migrate to Greece. In this section, I present a similar structure to the previous section, with discussions on the perception of Syrian refugees, media use, forms of capital, and gender transformations. Readers will be able to better understand the results and findings of fieldwork conducted in KTRPC and Kurdish cities in Turkey, particularly after reading the fieldwork discussions in the Greece chapter. In addition, readers will see in which areas the findings and results of these two different field studies are compatible or different from each other. The fieldwork in Greece serves the reader to follow the long-term migration process in which Syrian refugees are in transit and limbo before reaching their main destination within the three-step migration trajectory. The discussions of being in limbo and migration provide detailed answers and insights into how the lives, perceptions and imagined futures of Syrian refugees are affected by this process. With discussions based on fieldwork in Greece, the reader witnesses how Syrian refugees' perceptions, thoughts, and desires change in the country where different social, legal and political processes operate. In this chapter, first, it is discussed that Greece functions as a transit country on the migration path of refugees. This discussion explains to the reader why immigrants and refugees do not choose to stay in Greece. In the continuation, on the axis of ethnography and interviews, a similar scheme and structure are followed. First, I introduce and discuss Syrian Arab refugees staying in the Sounio camp and Syrian Kurdish refugees staying in the Lavrion camp in the second half. Finally, at the end of the chapter, a comparison of all presented sections between these two sample groups is provided.

#### **4.1) Temporary Communities in Transition: Greece as a Pending Place**

One of the most striking features during the fieldwork in Greece was that the refugees did not choose to stay in Greece and instead continued to endure the difficult migration process, although they had managed to reach the European borders. In this sense, despite their arrival in Greece, the refugees who applied for asylum or preferred to settle in there constituted the smallest part of the total refugee

population, even though in the last few years there has been a continuous increase in asylum applications<sup>45</sup>. The main reason for this increase can be considered as a consequence of the EU-Turkey deal signed in 2016 and strengthened border controls as well as negative amendments to the asylum and refugee policies and laws of destination countries. In other words, Greece has been the main transition passage for hundreds of thousands of refugees (Papadopoulou, 2004; Schuster, 2011), in the last decade particularly for Syrian refugees (Park, 2015). Understanding the reasons for this situation explains to us the process of migration between the origin and destination country; what these two different points mean on both the East-West axis; and also explains that the place implied and denoted by the concept of the West has different dimensions beyond being simply a geographical place. The geopolitical location of Greece plays a crucial role in choosing it as a transition country into Europe (Dokos, 2016; 48). The proximity of the Greek Islands in the Aegean Sea to Turkish territory may be counted as one of the most convenient reasons for migration to Greece as a first destination country from Turkey.

When considering Syrian refugees in this scope, it is possible to make a comparison as follows: In terms of financial costs and hardship, crossing the border from Turkey to Greece is both more expensive and more difficult than crossing the border between Syria and Turkey. As the main argument in support of this statement, we can show that every year thousands of migrants and refugees die on immigration routes to reach Europe. In this sense, when we make use of statistics: they show that more than 3,100 refugees died in 2017<sup>46</sup>, as of September 2018 more than 1,500 refugees and migrants have died<sup>47</sup>, as of October 2019 more than 1000 have

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<sup>45</sup> <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece/statistics/>  
<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179> last accessed 31.05.2021

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/01/06/576223035/more-than-3-100-migrants-died-crossing-mediterranean-in-2017?t=1573131757385> last accessed 31.05.2021

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/09/03/migrant-death-rate-mediterranean-rises-despite-fewer-crossings/> last accessed 31.05.2021

died or gone missing<sup>48</sup>, and since the year 2000 the number is approximately 33,000 people<sup>49</sup>.

All interviewees in Greece indicated that they were aware of the dangers they can encounter while trying to cross the Turkey-Greece borders with illegal methods. I aim to precisely understand the dynamic that emerges in the dilemma between these refugees being aware of the risks they may face and taking action despite everything. Moreover, I aim to understand the push-pull factors that may cause death risk while taking action accordingly. For these purposes, Greece has a very crucial location and function within this research. The discussions in the following sections comprise the community relations, which we can call transition as the time between the migration start and endpoint, and which is limited by the daily relations experienced in it, but which we can evaluate as temporary. When we formulate it differently; the continuity that refugees experience both time and space-wise until they arrive at their intended destination country, this change of movement and places can be conceptualised as *'temporary communities in transition'*. I argue that this concept should be explored through an interdisciplinary approach. The specificity of this concept may have been already partly studied by a few similar concepts, such as the Social Solidarity (Nyers, 2008; Baldwin, 2019 (1910)), Cooperation among the Excluded (Belloni, 2016), and Part-time Integration and Adaptation (Feldman, 2007; Alencar, 2018). Commonly, these different notions and perspectives point out a shared process of collaboration and help amongst refugees. However, although I believe that the temporary communities in transition as a concept already covers this collaboration and help amongst refugees, it should also be addressed in the refugees' relations with time *and* place, integration and adaptation processes, and temporary community relations. What defines these refugees as temporary and in transition exclusively rather than by other research concepts, as an example, can be further explored with refugees temporarily residing in Greece. In particular, the many diverse ethnic, national, and religious groups that stayed at the Sounio camp were establishing a pattern among themselves on a more specific basis. This specific

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<sup>48</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/the-refugee-brief-2-october-2019/> last accessed 31.05.2021

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/01/06/576223035/more-than-3-100-migrants-died-crossing-mediterranean-in-2017?t=1573131757385> last accessed 31.05.2021

basis was that they could make identification of themselves in each other. In other words, regardless of their name, gender, religion and nation, the refugee as a status without an identity assisted to create a relationship and sociality that they knew they were in the temporary and in a transition process. Moreover, the main point that differentiates these relationships and interactions between Syrian refugees from individual immigration can be addressed as the similarity of their recent past experiences and their familiarity with each other's future imaginations. In collective mass migration processes, the concept of temporary communities in transition can be further investigated.

It can be argued that similar community relationships may potentially emerge more in collective mass migrations, which has the potential to transform into the diaspora, especially due to a large number of refugee masses and the existence of common social values and characters. In the Syrian refugee context, the diasporic relations have already started in the places to which they have migrated in masses. This has been an interesting point of scholars especially in Turkey (Sirkeci, 2016), Germany (Ragab et al. 2017, Jordan (Achilli, 2015) and Lebanon (Tolia-Kelly, 2019). Although the temporary relationships in these transition processes have the potential to evolve into diasporic relations, the possibility of these relations to break and become discontinuous is also distinguished from diasporas. On the other hand, while diasporic relationships are more established and capable of evolution when community relations are more settled, temporary community relations in transition correspond to the process before a settled life. In other words, solidarity and cooperation in diasporic relationships are more grounded and require continuity and persistence, unlike the communities in transition.

This brief introduction serves us as a preparation for further discussions, interviews, and ethnography. Contents discussed in this section will be pointed out and referenced again in the following sections.



## **4.2) Dispersing Community: Syrian Arab Refugees in Sounio Camp:**

### **4.2.1) Power Relations and Opinions about the Other: “*Is Greece a Western Country?*”**

In all the interviews held in Greece, the first issue that came to the fore was that the refugees did not come to Greece permanently. In other words, no refugee, by reaching Greece, arrived where they wanted to go. Another key issue that emerged during the interviews was that they had passed the first and most dangerous stage they had to go through to go to destinations they wanted to go, namely Western European countries. So much so that, apart from knowing the place they have arrived was Greece, they had almost no knowledge of the country. Although they did not have any great expectations and plans regarding Greece, the interviewees stated that they had pictures and expectations formed in their perceptions naturally because they knew that Greece was a European country. However, although they did not have clear pictures and expectations in their perceptions, it turned out that they were not satisfied with the situation they encountered due to reasons such as not being involved in social life in Greece, staying in camps established mostly on the outskirts of the cities, and the valuable currency of the country. Besides, I believe that the economic crisis experienced in the early 2010s in Greece, the high unemployment rates and the refugee system and policies of the country caused disappointment and confusion for Syrian refugees.

Therefore, shortly after the refugees took their first steps in the country, reasons such as the living conditions they faced, the reality of the isolated camps, and the uncertainty of their future caused the refugees to gradually become critical, reactive, and disappointed about the ‘*glorious West*’ in their deep down inside perception. The question highlighted in the title of this chapter ‘*Is Greece a real Western country?*’ was a question many refugees stated that they asked themselves. The reason for this was not only ignoring the harsh actuality, and also not losing the motivation to move further and arrive where they desire and want. The following interview questions, ‘*What can you say about Greece? What does Greece mean to you?*’ aimed to grasp the image and understanding of Greece in the perception of Syrian refugees. The given answer to this question also indirectly expresses how the image

and perception of any power relations or actors, which has an important role in refugees' life, is formed.

*"I don't know many things about Greece to be honest. It is a country in Europe I know, they use Euro. It does not matter that this country is called Greece or anything else because I have nothing to do with it. I want to go to Germany and many of my relatives did the same, they came to Greece and went further."* [Interview 25, An engineer and mechanic, Sounio, 14.11.2018]

*"I didn't know anything; I just followed my family. I did what they said. If they said we were going to China, I would do [smiles]. But if you asked me about Germany, Sweden, or the Netherlands, I could tell you more things because I have many relatives and friends there. I saw and read lots about these countries on the internet. Greece is just like a country that we have to pass through."* [Interview 33, 28 years old, divorced, engineer, Sounio, 23.11.2018]

These answers show that although Greece is a country where all interviewees had to migrate through, since they did not intend to stay, their interest in the country and therefore their knowledge was very limited. The emphasised words of the interviewee that *'if you asked me about Germany, Sweden, or the Netherlands, I could tell you more things...'* explain that Greece does not take place among the countries that come across in her *digital habitus*, which have shaped her interests regarding the countries she knew. Then we understand that Greece is a stop on their transitional process, yet a place that they sometimes spend years waiting. To comprehend this situation in more depth, I asked: *'Although you knew you will pass through Greece, didn't you wonder what this country is like?'* The answer to the question explains better what I aim to express in the previous sentence.

*"I mean, we knew we would come to Greece, but since we didn't think to stay here, I didn't wonder at all. I also knew that since none of my relatives who had been here stayed here, they didn't say much about it, I just had to pass here. For example, I have to go through Serbia and Hungary to go to Germany, but I don't know anything about these countries either."* [Interview 33]

The relatives mentioned by the interviewee also passed in transit in Greece. However, they did not stay there and did not specify anything about the country, which determined the interest and curiosity of those who used the same route. The expression I used that *'they did not come across in their digital habitus'* is related to this point. If we assume that a refugee who migrated to Greece and stayed in the country and applied for asylum. If this refugee had shared images, ideas, and news

about Greece in her/his own digital habitus – rather than those who post content about and from camps, s/he would probably have indirect influences on the opinions of other refugees who came to Greece afterwards.

Apart from the refugees' personal interests or plans, external conditions also have a great effect on the refugees' difficulty in adapting to or learning about the country. What Syrian refugees in Turkey knew about the country was also influenced and shaped by external factors, such as similar historical backgrounds, the same religion, and similar cultural values, and being the neighbouring country. However, this was not the case for Greece. Syrian refugees were very much a stranger to the Greek language and culture, did not share the same religious values, had almost no historically and politically close relationships, at least not stated by any of the interviewees. In addition to these, the impression the Greek government left on the refugees was also defective, as governmental services were limited and the representation was inadequate. The interviewees' words quoted below express their opinions on this situation:

*"I don't adapt here at all. I don't want to stay here so why should I do that. I have been here more than a year already and I don't know even one single Greek word. I want to save my energy for Sweden, there will be language education, integration programs, better conditions so here I am just on pending. [Interview 25, 31 years old, artist and building worker, Sounio, 15.11.2018]*

*"Actually, I considered a few times to learn basic Greek but there was no education. The Greek government doesn't want to keep us here, so why should they teach us their language, right? They don't want us to get in their life. They know that we want to go somewhere else. We want to leave as soon as possible; they want us to go too. So how can I get used to here? [Interview 33, 28 years old, female, Sounio, 23.11.2018]*

The inability to adapt to Greece, which the interviewees underlined, can be also related to the refugee camps' locations. Commonly, most refugees who crossed the borders from Turkey to Greece firstly arrived at the Greek islands located just a few kilometres from the Turkish coasts. Then, they were transported either to the camps on the islands or later by the Greek government to camps on the country's mainland. Most of these camps in Greece's mainland were located slightly outside of cities and

in more isolated areas<sup>50</sup>. Therefore, during the pending time they spent in Greece, they were living in a more isolated way than social life. One of my ethnographic observations was that this adaptation process was progressing slowly and insufficiently. After forced displacement, it can be argued that refugees have experienced the disorientation and adaptation complications (Keyes and Kane, 2004; 809) during their time in the camps due to the more in-depth issues caused by psychological traumas, loss of their loved ones, spatial change, and the difficulties of daily life (Papadopoulos, 2007; 301).

Oishi (2010), addressing refugees' disorientation and adaptation complications with a different formulation, explains the concept he defines as the '*psychology of residential mobility*'. Oishi discusses the term: "*Residential mobility can be defined as the frequency with which individuals change their residence,*" (p.6) and "*the frequency of mobility also influences the adaptation to the place, social relations and the self*" (p.7). When considering this concept for Syrian refugees in Greece, in fact, this disorientation and the situation that we can consider as alienation in the following processes is a process that starts after being forcibly displaced. Hence, besides determining factors and experiences they went through in Greece, such as lack of governmental social services and the close relationship that cannot be established with the reality of daily life with local people; the past happenings, memories, and experiences as refugees they confronted in Turkey are also decisive difficulties in their adaptation.

Alongside the Syrian refugees' prospective frequent mobilities in an insecure way, unable to adapt to settled life, the idea of migrating to another country in their thoughts and plans can create an unbalanced relationship between the refugee individual and her/his environment and sociality. I indicate the words of a refugee below who experienced the frequent change of locations, displacement, and therefore inability in the adaptation, which caused him to strengthen his defence mechanism. His words and experience may assist us in understanding what residential mobility corresponds to in Syrian refugees' life.

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<sup>50</sup><https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1B64TAhuL46HGymRuNmiRaMhtsUs&ll=36.537688938806724%2C25.31861898198802&z=7> last access 31.05.2021

*“While staying in Turkey, we were transferred to other camps a few times. This is a very tiring thing. I have met and encountered so many people, after a while, I gave up making friends because everything becomes temporary... I understood that I will move again and again, and I will have to make friends again. That’s why it is difficult to adapt each time. I have a quieter and calm time here [in Sounio]. I decided to live like this until I arrive in Sweden. Whenever I settle in a permanent place, then I will start to be more adaptable and social. I promised myself like that [smiles]. I know sounds awkward but believe me, it’s better for mental health.”* [Interview 34, 39 years old, father of 2, Sounio, 23.11.2018]

Forced displacements or nondiscretionary mobilities, we can fathom out, intrinsically provoke a defence mechanism toward the situation. In the case of Syrian refugees, they were aware of their temporariness and because of the realities of not being fixed in one place, they experienced disorientation, difficulty in adaptation, and alienation as a further phase. Interviewee’s attitudes and behaviours such as not making friends, not managing to adapt, not socializing, as a defence and protection mechanism, explain this subject more clearly. If we remember the discussions of Syrian Kurdish refugees’ strong solidarity, rapid integration and cooperation they have established in Kurdish cities, and if we conceive of this group as a control group; we can argue the following: *‘Whenever two foreign groups meet, if the common language, culture, value and sense of community features arise among them, then a faster adaptation, integration and solidarity among them can occur’*. When referring to different studies that support this argument, we can consider the adaptation process of Syrian Armenians after migrating to Armenia (Călin-Ștefan, 2014; Thomas et al. 2020). In the scope of these examples, we can conclude that the most significant factors are a common language, religion, common supra-identity, imagined community, common traumas, and experiences.

In addition to these discussions, after the departure of the Syrian Arab refugees from Turkey, it is noteworthy to consider what they state about Turkey. During the fieldwork in Greece, when I asked their opinions about Turkey in general, I noted two common attitudes among Syrian Arab refugees. These were either they were very critical about Turkey by giving negative personal experiences, or they did not want to specify any ideas about it due to the concerns and fears they had, even though they were not in Turkey any longer. The words of the two interviewees mentioned below illustrate this situation more clearly:

*“To be honest, there was no freedom when we were in refugee camps and the government tried to control us all the time because we became Erdogan’s political tool against Europe. Also, there was heavy surveillance on us. We didn’t feel free or safe because there were many stories that refugees easily can be sent back to Syria. [Interview 27, 31 years old, married, male, Sounio, 15.11.2018]*

*“Once I gave an interview to a local newspaper about refugees. Even though I didn’t say very critical things about Turkey but just complained about something, a few days after police found me and asked account of it... I was almost being arrested for no reason. So how can I state my real opinions afterwards? Many people here can tell many critics about Turkey now because they have had enough of playing three monkeys!” [Interview 34, 39 years old, Sounio, 23.11.2018]*

What these interviewers stated was also expressed by other interviewees that they had psychologically severe fears such as *being constantly observed, controlled, not feeling free, being sent back or arrested* at any moment. When evaluating that the Syrian Arab refugees staying in KTPC perceived Turkey as a country or state in the form of a power actor playing a vital role in their life, all the positive statements they stated about Turkey had radically changed in Greece. In this sense, when considering the representations of countries as power relations and actors, we can claim that these representations are not stable and constant. Based on these discussions, I sought to answer the following question: *‘Why do the discourses change when they arrive in Greece?’* Based on research experience, I can argue that temporal positionality required such a survival strategy, so they took a more conserved position and would not create any social or political problems for themselves. However, in a more secure and distant place from Turkey, such as in Greece, the *agencies* of the refugees speak and come to the fore. Therefore, refugees’ statements about Turkey in Greece were more sensible.

Thanks to the different field study countries of this research, readers can observe how the opinions, perceptions and interpretations of the sample groups coming from the same ethnic, national and cultural background shift gradually in different geographies, cultures and administrative understandings. In the next chapter, I discuss how Syrian Arab refugees’ media and internet usage became more intense when being in limbo.

#### **4.2.2) Simulation and Provoking Desire: “The Swedish government provides a car, a house, a job if we go there!”**

One of the most notable points in the fieldwork conducted in Greece was the intense and frequent internet use of refugees in the camps. They stated that they have an average of more than 6 hours of internet usage per day, and while noting they do not include the phone calls they make in this usage. Here, the point that the reader specifically should pay attention to is that this media and internet usage time is more than the average usage time as well as that this usage takes place in the camps. In the previous chapters, the negative effect of the restricting and privative peculiarities of camp conditions on the daily interactive and sociality of life between individuals was mentioned. I argue that in these conditions, the impact and shaping severity of intense media usage on perceptions of refugees is more than the way non-refugees are exposed as internet users. In addition, it should be remembered that media functions as an extension of dreams, plans and perceptions through media and the internet for refugees in particular due to many fundamental factors, such as the incomplete fulfilment of physical and social needs and uncertain future plans. I have specifically touched upon this subject in the literature review, where the camps are explained structurally and functionally with the metaphor of being in limbo. All interviewees in the Sounio camp stated that they have devices such as smartphones, tablets, and laptops as media hardware which McLuhan (1964) defined as an extension of consciousness that media content can be provided through.

In this regard, in the title of this section, I refer to Baudrillard's concept of simulation. The reason for this is that I argue that digital representations, which substitute for reality during the time refugees spend by using the internet extensively in restricted physical spaces, particularly on social media platforms, design a version of the simulation. Baudrillard has defined the simulation as “*the substitution of signs of the real for the real*” (1981; 4) which is very revealing for the Syrian Arab refugees staying in the Sounio camp. In fact, the proposition of substitution of signs of the real is very descriptive to know the formative and constructive visual and contextual elements behind the migration motivations that refugees have to reach in order to

the possess the living standards and styles of life they imagine in the destination places. So, '*what exactly does this substitution of signs of the real correspond to in refugees' media and internet usage?*'

It corresponds to the representations, such as images, information, internet content about the life that they think they will potentially live and experience when they arrive at the migration destination, which refugees interact with and in return that shapes their thinking and perception. In this sense, if we consider all these internet contents as a representation by generalizing, these representations form and portray the identities to signify the content of the representations. I apply the concept of identity in a simpler sense that the represented content builds an identity about the others, which can be a style of life, or the experiences an individual lives and has. For example, all content that can cause refugees to imagine life and people in Germany from afar, such as living means, transportation, urban design, a German man or a woman, are the identities that construct what a refugee can imagine about Germany. Most of these identity formations find their counterparts in a more positive and biased form, especially for refugees who are vulnerable and urgently in search of a new resettlement. Such relationships with the media have an indirect effect that generates desire in general (Öktem, 2020). Objects or in this case digital content that constitutes desire, due to the nature of desire, have a positive reference and connotation. I consider the concept of desire that was shaped, influenced and formed as a result of the media relations of refugees, in a Deleuzian sense; Deleuze's approach to desire is much broader than other scholars and refers not only to humans but also to animals, objects and social institutions (Gao, 2013; 406). Deleuze argues that desire is not a psychic existence or absence, but an active and positive reality, a positive vital force (see Deleuze, 2004; Deleuze and Guattari, 1996; Smith, 2011). The subject of media and production of desire has been an area of concern for academic studies for many years, especially during the last two decades when media studies have accelerated. For further discussion, related literature can be reviewed (see Coetzee, 1980; Helstein, 2003; Berger, 2017).

If we consider this discussion in terms of the determinants of migration, which we previously expressed as *pull* and *push factors*, Syrian refugees have already been



displaced by push factors. In other words, the main factors that cause them to become a refugee can be coded as push factors. In this study, we specifically focus on the other factor, the pull factor. In this sense, linking back to the discussion of represented content and formed identities about the destination places, I argue that these identities, which are potentially deficient and biased built through social media and the internet positively, can be considered as pull factors. To paraphrase this, this internet content that forms, affects, and shapes all the positive thoughts and perceptions that Syrian refugees expressed about the places they want to go, can actually be interpreted as pull factors. This argument becomes more important, especially on the subject of Syrian refugees, because as they can be 'users' of the generated content, they also can be the 'producers' of the content. Therefore, the contents we encoded as pull factors were also reproduced by them and disseminated and circulated amongst themselves using social media and other communication tools. In short, as a result of my ethnography and interviews, I noticed that refugees tend to accept information about places they think is better in their minds without questioning it and being able to test its truth. The main reasons for this were to get rid of the unsatisfying and inadequate social and economic conditions in which they lived.

Referring back to Baudrillard's definition, this replacement of real and actuality by the *substitutions of signs of the real* gains meaning that refugees want to believe in what these particularly positive identities embodied in digital contents. In other words, the source or accuracy of the information that are the elements of pull factor begins to weaken, and rather Syrian refugees believed in what they want to believe in. So, at some point, they can start to be interested in only positive images and information as a conscious choice. To better comprehend these arguments, the following interviews notes stated by a young Syrian refugee to the question "*What are your motivations for taking all these risks to migrate all the distances to arrive somewhere further than here?*" gives many hints and grounded reasons to the point I express concerning simulation.

*"Basically, to have a better life! Despite my young age, I have faced so many difficulties in life and I believe I deserve a better one for the rest."* [Interview 26, 22 years old, male and single, Sounio, 15.11.2018]

Then I asked a buffer question to take the discussion further: *“But how can you be very sure that you will have a better life in where you want to go?”*

*“This is what I want to believe... Otherwise, there are hundreds of negative information about Germany on the internet, but I prefer to ignore them. And I'm more confident in the ideas I have about Germany already. I will go and experience personally if there is the other side of the coin...”*

I did not state any opinion to what he stated but after a pause, he continued:

*“Do you really think that I don't know how difficult and challenging life in Germany can be? Believe me, I have read enough of the difficulties I might face when I go. For instance, I know how long the documentation and all the bureaucracy takes. I know the German language is compulsory... But what I remind myself every day is how happy I will be there. I don't want to depress myself in these very bad conditions [means camp], why should I do this to myself? Don't I deserve to be happy at least in my dreams?”*

The point emphasised by the interviewee, in other words, as I mentioned above, is consciously ignoring the other side of the coin in which the main motivation for this is to take care of himself and to feel better under the bad conditions of camps. Considering this point from a psychological perspective, it is actually a defence mechanism created by the refugee to protect himself. It should also be considered that as well as the defence mechanism, it was also determinant that the potential difficulties in Germany are not life-threatening and relatively comfortable when comparing to the Syrian war in their home country. We can understand this psychology more clearly with the following words:

*“You really think that people [refers to refugees] believe in all of these dreams, like The American Dream? No, they just want to make an image that might be possible for their future...Once one of the middle aged Syrian men told me that the Swedish government provides a car, a house, a job if we go there! Yes, exactly like this. I asked how he knows about this, and he answered: ‘on Facebook, in the comments of a post.’ I said that I do not have an idea, because why would I want to destroy the dream of someone? He knew that what he asked was not real nor correct but wanted to believe in that... Do you understand now? At least we have our dream, is it a fault to create such dreams which is the only thing we have left to treat ourselves nicely!” [Interview 26, Sounio, 15.11.2018]*

The reader can perceive the words of the interviewee as an insight to the feelings, way of thinking and imaginations of Syrian refugees through the interpretation of a young member of them. I explain the main reasons for this way of thinking, feelings,

and imaginations with two interrelated causations: first being a refugee and second correlatively living in limbo. If we follow the intensive use of media and the internet, which are more understandable and visible in terms of refugees, and thus the effects of these uses on perceptions over a more large-scale formulation: The interaction and exposure to an object, place, lifestyle or thought through more intense and frequent positive images, contents, and information, as a result, creates a positive perception in the user. Considering the findings of the field study of this research, I formulate discussed arguments simply with the digital habitus discussion that it can be argued that positive digital contents as images, photos, videos, and information are more dominant in the digital habitus of Syrian refugees staying in the camps. This argument can be interpreted as follows: Syrian refugees prefer to connect with positive characters among the digital content appearing on their digital habitus.

#### **4.2.3) The Role of Capital Forms: “Being able to arrive in Greece cost the price of a house in Syria!”**

After the forced displacement, the longer-term migration with individual-collective choices or further push factors becomes an economically costly movement, especially when it comes to intercontinental or international migrations (Sjaastad, 1962; Van Hear et al.2012). In one of the interviews at the Sounio camp, the interviewee had stated that being able to arrive in Greece from Turkey with his family, cost them the price of their house in Syria. The main reason for this great economic expense is that the migrations are made illegally. In the case of Syrian Arab refugees, when they decide to migrate from Turkey to Greece, they needed to find and negotiate with smugglers. In many situations, the smugglers use this tragedy and human mobility as an economic opportunity and trade benefit, particularly when there is more demand for migration. Smugglers manage this demand accordingly by increasing the price, which is defined as the *migration industry* by Gammeltoft-Hansen and Nyberg Sørensen (2013).

The main issue I want to draw attention to in this section is that although migration is costly mobility, there are refugees with a capital form that can afford it. In fact, it can be evaluated that illegal migration from Turkey to Greece, especially after the border controls compressed after the 2016 EU-Turkey deal, acted as a socio-

economic filter among Syrian. This becomes clear particularly when we take into consideration this argument for Syrian Arab refugees staying at KTPC that refugees in KTPC had clearly defined their economic status as poor and in need of help. In contrast, Syrian Arab refugees staying in the Sounio camp indicated their economic conditions were good and their main worries in the migration process were not economic costs. In their own words, when I asked about their economic conditions, the following answers given by interviewees to summarize their economic capital:

*“When we were living back in Syria, I had 3 houses in the city, a house in the village, 2 cars and 2 shops in the city centre. Thank God, we had everything we need. Otherwise, we couldn’t make it until here.”* [Interview 25, 50 years old, father of 3, Sounio, 14.11.2018]

*“Before I got married, my family’s economic situation was very good. We had whatever we needed. My husband’s family was also very wealthy, and my husband had many shops... But not anymore, all our money is gone... Migrating as a refugee makes everything double the price!”* [Interview 30, Married, 25 years old, 19.11.2018]

*“I was okay, I had what I needed, a house, a truck, a bit of land in the village. Before I left Syria, I sold everything because I understood there will no future for us in Syria. The money I got from selling my home only took me here...”* [Interview 36, 34 years old, no kids, Sounio, 25.11.2018]

Most of the other interviewees made similar statements to those of the interviewees quoted here. One of the common highlights was that they sold their assets in Syria and were able to afford their lives with the income they earned from there. I have also addressed the relationship between economic income and educational status, and therefore social status. The education level of the members of the families with good economic income and conditions is generally also higher (Stockfelt, 2016; Cheng and Kaplowitz, 2016).

When we approach this subject from the Bourdieusian perspective, Sullivan (2001; 893) interprets the correlation between economic capital and education as follows: *“According to Bourdieu’s theory of cultural reproduction, children from middle-class families are advantaged in gaining educational credentials due to their possession of cultural capital.”* This argument for Syrian Arab interviewees staying at Sounio camp pointed out that the social and educational status of Syrian refugees was seemingly tied to their economic background. The more economically strong they were in the upper classes; their educational levels and social status were

correspondingly higher. In Sounio camp, among 9 interviewees, there were 5 bachelors and above degrees, 3 high school diplomas and 1 secondary school diploma. However, when it came to the question of social status in correlation with their economic status, even those who had high school degrees described themselves as having prestigious jobs or respected positions in their communities. The relationship that the reader should establish with the Syrian Arab refugees staying in Sounio in the light of this demographic and socio-economic information should be as follows: When it comes to refugees' subjectivity it can be analysed through capital forms as determining and strengthening factors, which empowered their decision to emigrate from Turkey to Greece, take an action in accordance, and to reach the destination countries they plan or dream of.

In the next section, Syrian female Arab refugees in the Sounio camp are discussed in relation to their gender roles and norms, transformations, and changes.

#### **4.2.4) Empowerment of Female Refugees: “My husband feels weaker here because the administration supports women more!”**

Although there are more similarities among refugee camps in general in terms of structure and function, the geographical locations of the camps were also determinant in the research findings. Although the Syrians staying in refugee camps in Turkey, for instance, had uncertainties and anxieties about the future, they were more accustomed to the conditions they were in because of the long waiting periods (see Kirişci, 2014; İçduygu, 2015). However, Syrian refugees staying in camps in Greece essentially spent their time remembering that they used there as a transit country, planning to leave at any moment and attempting to go elsewhere, as well as being aware of the reality of no cultural affinities with local communities.

In the basic comparison between these two countries, for refugees who were in standby mode in Greece, their daily practices turned into a more habitual, repetitive routine, focused on spending time until the standby mode was over. However, in Turkey, despite Syrian refugees staying in camps, at the same time, they were giving more importance to their adaptation and integration, job searching, and getting work permits. Alexandra Greene (2019; 735-736), in her study analysing the situation of

refugee women staying in a camp in Greece, emphasizes that women spend their routine work using media that women do not use much. Greene draws attention to the changes refugee women go through in their daily routines. I can verify this argument with a comparison of the fieldwork findings and results in Turkey and Greece. It was emphasized that refugee women staying in KTPC engaged in less media usage due to their gender-based work division and responsibilities.

The increasing use of the internet and media by Syrian refugee women provides the reader with the following information: Refugee women in the Sounio camp enhanced their individual interests, personal development, and future dreams more powerfully. In other words, the more active activism and practices of women who are more conscious of gender roles, as one of the prominent factors in the subjectivity discussions, was one of the characteristics observed among the women in the Sounio camp. Although the annual reports prepared by the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) draw attention to the victimization of women and their exposure to unseen violence in their reports on Syrian refugee women; these reports also refer to the successes and transformation refugee women have gone through over the years and to their achievements in different fields, such as business and non-governmental organizations. Besides, Freedman, Kivilcim and Baklacioğlu (2017) approached the Syrian refugee crisis from a gender perspective and drew attention to the rights violations and challenges faced by women and LGBTI+ groups. On the other hand, they also refer to the changes and developments women went through by emphasizing their experiences in different countries. In this sense, in my interviews I noted the fundamental changes that occurred with refugee women in the Sounio camp in Greece, as follow: First, the pressure created by the demands and expectations of the collective community regarding Syrian Arab refugee women eased. Then, their gender awareness through gender-based training and seminars in the camps increased, such as sexual gender-based violence training (Botsi et al. 2018), gender equality programs (Grabska, 2011) and sexual abuse and sex educations (Digidiki and Bhabha, 2018). Also, they became more aware of their legal rights, and the gender roles and responsibilities in their families loosened. Finally, thanks to the responsibilities given to women in the leadership of NGOs inside the Sounio camp, Syrian refugee women's public visibility increased, and these

responsibilities and public visibility directly empowered them. The readers can understand these conclusions more clearly thanks to the answers given by the interviewees to the question: *'How would you describe your experiences of being a refugee and woman in Turkey and Greece?'*

*"In Turkey, we lived in a neighbourhood, where mainly were Syrians. So we had to pay attention to what we were saying and what we were doing. Because there is such a perception that even if we are refugee, we should protect our values more and represent even better to others. That's why everybody seemed to control each other... We are with fewer Syrians here, we talk, we are friends, but nobody judges anyone or checks. There are some trainings only for women here, they constantly tell us how strong we are as women. My husband once told me that I have been more assertive and conversational ever since I started going to these seminars. I think this is a good thing [smiles]"*. [Interview 33, 28 years old, mother of 2, 23.11.2018]

*"In Turkey, I couldn't defend myself, because our relatives were involving in our family relationships... But now I know my rights better. He would always be right in our discussions with my husband before, I would be quiet, but now I am talking too... I think the most obvious change is that my husband feels weaker here because the administration here supports women more, at least he says that."* [Interview 35, 20 years old, mother of 1, 24.11.2018]

In the interviews I conducted in the Sounio camp, activities within the scope of *'empowerment of women'* were mentioned very often. In this sense, it can be stated that subjects such as *increasing awareness* regarding policies, women rights, sexual education and violence, gender relations and roles for Syrian refugee women were visibly influential in their lives in Sounio. The interviewee's transfer of her husband's words lays the groundwork for our following analysis: The migration process also deconstructs traditional gender roles where men feel vulnerable and threatened as they are disempowered because of their refugee status, and gender equality is more emphasised.

In particular, it can be noted that increased gender awareness influenced domestic family gender roles, norms and dynamics, Syrian female Arab refugees felt stronger, more conscious and educated. On the axis of these discussions, while collective community pressures decreased, gender-based education and awareness increased, and this situation positively affected women's self-representation, public visibility, and gender relations. In other words, while emphasizing the correlation between education and economic capital in the previous section, we can say that by adapting Bourdieu's cultural capital analysis, works that support and strengthen

cultural capital such as seminars, workshops, and education have strengthened Syrian female Arab interviewees' subjectivities.

In the next section, fieldwork-based discussions on the Syrian Kurdish refugees staying in Lavrion camp will be presented.



### 4.3) Politicisation of Perception and Worldviews: Syrian Kurdish Refugees in Greece

While the cold breeze coming from the Aegean Sea was caressing us on our faces, I was smoking a cigarette with Kurdish Syrian refugees on the cold stairs of a building. The camp was older than fifty years where tens of thousands of political prisoners and asylum seekers had been coming and passing through between East and West. The excitement and anxiety of the Kurdish father, who was sitting next to me and smoking cigarette one after another, was obvious. He was quiet and thinking of his wife who was giving birth inside a few meters behind us in the building. During the silence right before the birth, the harshness of the wind blowing on our faces had intensified even more and the rain started to drizzle slowly. Inside the building, one of the doors swiftly opened and they gave the news of the new-born baby. Everybody suddenly cheered up and hugged each other, and then giving hugs and kisses to father to congratulate him. The father accepted all the greetings and congratulations. As if he could hide the tears into the raindrops, the father began to cry lightly. Then with tears in his eyes, he sat exactly at the same spot on the stairs and started to speak:

*“Would we go to experience these things too? In the turmoil of the world, I have no idea where we have been thrown, what we have experienced... What will happen now? What am I going to tell the baby when the baby grows up? But even that baby is more fortunate and stronger than us, although he was just born. Because even if the baby cannot speak, cannot say who s/he is or what s/he wants, s/he will be recognized, taken as the interlocutor, and s/he will have an identity as soon as possible... Look at us; We can know how to talk, who we are and what we want, why we came here. But nobody hears, sees, pays attention to us. We are like a ghost as if we never existed...”*

When the father stopped talking, there was only silence and drizzling raindrops that came from the sea, where many of refugees had lost their lives while fleeing to safer places in their mind, where refugees in camps could not look directly due to the fear of as they might see the souls of the deceased. After the father gave up the weight of the patriarchy, he cried a little more and continued to speak while lighting another cigarette:

*“We now live in a world where babies have more rights and recognition than their parents... I am happy that my baby will have better conditions than us, but this life made a father jealous of his new-born baby. I am ashamed of myself!”* [Field notes, Lavrion Refugee Camp, 16.07.2019]

During my fieldwork, I witnessed a wedding ceremony in KTPC, a baby born in Lavrion, and a refugee who lost her mother while staying in the camp. When I came across this father, whom I sat on the cold stair steps when the wife gave birth the next day in the camp's canteen. We chatted again. I asked him what exactly he meant by the words I quoted above. As he explains, since they are Syrian refugees, if any baby is born while staying in the camp, the UN officially recognizes the baby and issues a document, even if the parents of the baby do not have official status or documents.

The father's grievances and the final words that he said, "*I am ashamed of myself*", in fact, are about the bureaucracy that they were obliged to deal with, and about the recognition of and interest shown to a new-born baby in a camp not being shown or provided to the parents of the baby. In other words, when considering the desperation of the father, his own subjectivity and representation were not recognized by any official institution. However, a new-born baby who cannot even represent the self, as the father described, can easily and much faster obtain the documents that those parents struggle to obtain. That was the dilemma which made the father say that he feels jealous of his new-born baby.

#### **4.3.1) Lavrion Refugee Camp: Realization of the Imagined Community in Wire Mesh Walls**

One of the main focuses of this research is to take into account Syrian refugees' ethnic difference and to understand the impact of ethnic heterogeneity on perceptions and communities. Within the scope of fieldwork conducted in Turkey, the presented and discussed concept and perception of *imagined community* and *solidarity among Kurdish people* has appeared in the Lavrion camp in a much more visible, observable and practical form. In this chapter, I elaborate on the solidarities and imagined community debate among Kurds in an ideological perspective that emerges specifically from the structure and operation of the Lavrion camp. In doing so, I first present the information about the Lavrion camp in a descriptive manner and then discuss the association and relationships of the Kurdish refugees in this camp.

Lavrion city is located in the southeast part of the Attica region in Greece, approximately 30-35 miles away from the Greek capital. Its convenient location, as a harbour city close to both Turkey and Bulgaria, and its geopolitical location within Greece makes it optimum. The Lavrion<sup>51</sup> refugee camp was established approximately 60 years ago by the Greek government with the cooperation of the United Nations (UN) in the centre of the city, just next to the harbour. The camp has

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<sup>51</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/08/23/world/camp-in-greece-a-halfway-point-for-refugees.html> last accessed on 31.05.2021

been in use since World War II<sup>52</sup>. At the time the camp was established, it was intended to host or be a shelter for refugees, mostly political, from the former USSR. However, in the meantime, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the high intensity of political conflicts between Kurdish people and Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria have changed the profile of refugees who stay in Lavrion camp. At the same time, the Lavrion camp turned into a centre for essentially political leftist groups escaped from Turkey in the 1980s and 90s<sup>53</sup>, and over time, the refugee associated with the PKK became dominant in the camp, and the camp served as an ideological training camp<sup>54</sup>. Later, there have been many other Kurdish refugees other than only political refugees, mainly due to the Syrian war started in 2011, which changed the profile of refugees staying in the Lavrion camp<sup>55</sup>.

Until late 2017, the Greek government with the help of the UN had provided daily aid and assistance to refugees staying in the camp. After that date, mainly due to political pressure from Turkey on the Greek government, all government services and aid were terminated. Also, as came out in conversations with the owner of local shops surrounding the camp, the initiative of large companies that want to destroy the camp and demolish the camp buildings due to the economic and functional position of the location of the camp had impacts on the decision to remove the legal status of the camp. The Lavrion refugee camp became self-governed and self-financed<sup>56</sup> by the habitants of the camp through established committees for various everyday essential services. All those staying at the camp were Kurdish people from different countries, mainly from Turkey, those who escaped from the political persecutions, as they described. When asked about the situation of the camp to the person who introduced himself as in charge of the camp, he answered:

*“The camp has a capacity of approximately 350-400 people and has been controlled by the Kurdish movements for the past few years. Therefore, for those who want to*

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<sup>52</sup> <https://www.fraterinternacional.org/en/greece-mission-visit-refugee-camp/> last accessed on 31.05.2021

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/02/09/world/flow-of-turkish-refugees-a-strain-for-greece.html> last accessed on 31.05.2021

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/news/inside-kurdish-refugee-camp-run-its-residents-1798704513> last accessed on 31.05.2021

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2014/7/56ec1e638/crossing-to-safety-and-heartache.html> last accessed on 31.05.2021

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.kedistan.net/2018/03/07/lavrion-self-governed-camp-kurdish-exiles/> last accessed on 31.05.2021

*stay in the camp, we have our own criteria, such as being Kurdish. The reason for this is both to protect our association and to use our limited resources effectively for our people. Some voluntary institutions help, both financially and with health and education services... This [camp] is a small Kurdistan for us, for the first time our people from four parts of Kurdistan live together.”* [Field notes, Lavrion, 10.11.2018]

During my ethnography in Lavrion camp, the solidarity and collectiveness of Kurds was the main observation, although the feelings of longings of loved ones, of being in exile, being a refugee and desperately looking for a way to leave Greece to go to destination countries were also observed. Togetherness, solidarity and collaboration of Kurdish people were clearly blossoming. However, in such a refugee camp in Greece which is very far from their home, many Kurdish refugees expressed that they feel at *'home'*, meaning being together with other Kurdish people.

Although we have already discussed what the imagined community concept means to Kurds, the solidarity and togetherness of Kurds in the Lavrion camp were also closely related to the way the camp was governed and organized. Through the seminars, education and responsibilities organized by the camp administration and organization, the ideological principles and perspective of the PKK, the Kurdish armed political movement, became a part of the daily life of all refugees in the camp. This situation was predominantly determinant on refugees' worldview, political attitude and perception of who came to the camp or was accepted because of only being Kurdish. Therefore, the concept of the imagined community that the Kurds envisioned came true in a way, supported by ideological doctrines. The Syrian Kurdish refugees' opinions regarding being in Lavrion camp, whose words I quoted below, has a supportive feature regarding these arguments.

*“Here in the camp, everybody is a kind of relative to each other. It is the first time I am not afraid to loudly announce that I am proud to be a Kurdish person in public. It is a good example of a small Kurdistan for me, you can find four parts in one even though in a strange place [refers to refugee camp]. None of this was possible in Turkey.”* [Interview 28, 24 years old, mother of 1, Lavrion, 17.11.2018]

*“I always had a dream of seeing my people from four parts living together. Now I feel like my dream became true... Here, I start the day with the anthem of the PKK, this is what has changed in my life since I left Turkey!”* [Interview 31, 34 years old, father of 3, Lavrion, 20.11.2018]

It can be argued that the PKK's ideological doctrines were the political and social foundations of a practised and founded imagined community and solidarity, as we will see in the following discussions. As far as these interviewees indicated and I could ethnographically observe the daily routines, socialisation and solidarity of the refugees staying in the camp, the unity and solidarity of the Kurdish refugees was established on substantially a political ground. For example, the way refugees address each other in the camp was with the Kurdish word '*heval*', which literally means *friend* in English but is used for the word *comrade*. Besides, the roles and responsibilities of women refugees in the administration of the camp stemmed from the Kurdish movements' co-chairmanship political organization system, where one man and woman share the responsibility (see Van Bruinessen, 2016; Halhalli, 2018), which I will especially mention in the section where I will discuss Kurdish female refugees in gender. Everyday essential works in the camp were carried out by those selected among the camp residents. These divisions of responsibilities were performed in different committees such as education, health, food, bakery, cleaning, seminars, documentation, and others. One man and one woman had to take responsibility in each committee as the co-chairmanship system proposes. However, some female refugees uttered that they had to undertake multiple responsibilities and roles since the majority of those staying in the camp were men. Although the Kurds expressed their satisfaction with being together, they compared the experience with the identity and positions of Kurdish people in Turkey, as in the two interviewees' statements above. As if, as well as going to the countries they want to go to, there was a feeling of satisfaction and comfort because of having left Turkey. This point has been discussed both in the theoretical background information given about Syrian refugees in the literature review and also in the Turkey chapter. It also shows the historical effects of political and military tension and conflict between Turkey and Kurdish people even though they were not in Turkey anymore.

In the next section, I discuss the effects of the ideologically radical leftist and pro-women political understanding in the Lavrion camp on the Syrian Kurdish refugees' view of the world, their attitudes and perceptions about the western concept and the places they want to go.

### 4.3.2) Lavrion Camp as an Ideological Training Camp: Refugees' Politicized Perceptions and Ideological Criticisms of the West

In this section, I first touch upon the interviews conducted on Syrian Kurdish refugees' perceptions and knowledge of the places they intend to go. Later, during their stay in Lavrion camp, I refer to a contradiction that emerged regarding the images and information about places they want to go due to the ideological perspectives and doctrines that either they were subjected to or with which they were voluntarily involved. In this context of contradiction, I consider the effects of the principles, perspectives, and ideology of a political and armed political entity (PKK) on the Syrian Kurdish refugees' perceptions and worldview in the scope of power relations and actors.

In addition to the face-to-face interviews conducted in the Lavrion camp, I observed that Syrian Kurdish refugees were affected by the seminars and trainings they participated in during their stay in the camp in the scope of the data I obtained during ethnography. Although all interviewees expressed themselves by involving Kurdish identities, they stated that they were actually influenced by the Kurdish political movements, but they were not really aware of the ideological formations of these movements in detail. In other words, interviewees were mostly not politicized and stated that they learned their Kurdishness as an identity more by being *marginalized* and *excluded*, mostly due to the state repression implemented upon them.

However, I realised that the perspectives refugees learned in the camp, especially in the light of PKK ideology and doctrines, were influential in their perceptions and world views. To further elaborate this argument expressed above, one of the questions I asked in interviews was: *'What does Kurdishness mean to you?'* The interviewees' answers below, both single and under 30 years old, with bachelor's degrees, are noteworthy.

*"Being Kurdish actually means being a nation, but unlike other nations, we don't have an independent state. That's why we learn to be Kurdish with the experiences of exclusion, assimilation and suppression implementations of the states we live in it. When a nation is stateless, it cannot learn its history and its culture. Kurdish people become separatist or terrorist in the eyes of states when they try to learn their history, culture, and language."*  
[Interview 20, Lavrion, 06.11.2018]

*“Let me explain with an example: Imagine you meet someone, but they don’t ask you what your name is. They directly tell you that you are Kurdish. But if they don't tell me, I'm Kurdish, I'd identify myself by my name. That's why I learn that I am Kurdish before identifying my name... I define Kurdish people as a nation that lives in the borders of states telling us that we are not Kurds, but Arab, Turk, Iranian.”* [interview 32, Lavrion, 22.11.2018]

The common point emphasized by these two interviewees is that *Kurdishness* is defined externally, that is, the dominant identity of the powerful party is being tried to be imposed on Kurds. Although the expressions of interviewees and the way of introducing themselves are directly associated with a robust political discourse, the habitus of these interviewees in Syria, their upbringing, environments, social relations, dominance of PKK ideology have been decisive on their perception of Kurdish identities. The management and organization prevailing in the Lavrion refugee camp had an approach based on Kurdish identity. Therefore, the refugees who stayed in the camp had a chance to experience their Kurdishness apart from the identity of the dominant group imposed on them until they got there. The Lavrion camp, as a small community of the Kurdish people, so to speak, served as a camp where refugees were told to be Kurdish. Like other Kurdish people from other countries, Syrian Kurdish refugees were also able to perform their Kurdish identities, without seeing pressure, and in a way they imagined. However, the striking part here is that Syrian Kurdish refugees acknowledged their identity as Kurdish, especially with the ideologically dominant, radical political understanding, structure and living and apparently with their consent. So, *‘how did this happen? How has this radical political understanding and living taken place and performed?’*

In a previous section, an interviewee said: *“I start the day with the anthem of the PKK!”*<sup>57</sup> This ideological understanding and political living took place among refugees through such acts as: Starting the day with a political anthem, by addressing ‘comrade’ to each other as the common identity in communication with everyone staying in the camp, and by establishing committees for the everyday essential work in the camp and designating a female and a male representative in

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<sup>57</sup> As far as I learned from the different refugees staying in the camp, when the Lavrion camp was an ideological training camp, the political marches were a part of the daily routine in a very organized and disciplined manner. Although the interviewee above emphasized, he starts his days with the anthem of the PKK; I did not come across these anthems sang collectively by refugees during my stay in the camp.

each committee to represent the co-chairmanship system. Moreover, it was performed periodically by giving seminars and trainings on topics such as Kurdistan history, women's history and value, equality and democratic life, ecological life and modernity, as stated by many participants. Therefore, Kurdish identity, with more political discourse and perspective, was explained and taught to Kurdish refugees in the Lavrion camp.

However, I also witnessed that these politicized teachings and worldviews could strikingly become confusing for Syrian refugees as regards where they wanted to go. In other words, for example, a Syrian Kurdish refugee who wanted to go to Germany started to have critical and sceptical thoughts about Germany due to these seminars, shared responsibilities and organizing ways. This example is particularly applicable to Western or European countries and concepts in general. The interviewees' words quoted below become more understandable concerning the argument above.

*"... I always wanted to go to France, I don't know why, since I was a kid, I wanted to see France and Paris. But I learned at the seminars here that France is a very cruel country. They were very unfair to other nations; they killed many people. I don't like France anymore as I did before."* [Interview 22, 25 years old, teacher, Lavrion, 07.11.2018]

*"My opinions have changed a lot especially after arriving at our camp. Here my comrades have given me many courses on history, politics, and other things. Now I know that economically rich, strong and developed European countries actually created these living standards by exploiting and colonizing other third world countries."* [Interview 24, 26 years old, father of 1, Lavrion, 14.11.2018]

The main emphasis in the words of these interviewees is that what they learned about the concepts they did not know in detail before was influential on what they knew. During my time in the camp, most of the refugees I socialized with expressed their opinions and reasons for the European countries they wanted to go to. Afterwards, they emphasized that they were questioning whether Western societies are really consumerist, capitalist and hegemonic as if they wanted to test it. The point that the reader should pay attention to here is that these expressions almost entirely have a political discourse and attitude.



The political change and transformation Syrian Kurdish refugees went through during their time in the Lavrion camp is actually a good example for the power relations and actor discussion. In that discussion, I had emphasized that power relations are a matter of power and influence that one entity, structure, person, character, or an ideology that has the formative effects in thought and perception of one another. In this sense, the transformative effect of the ideologies of Kurdish movements on Syrian Kurdish refugees' thoughts, perceptions and political world views can also be considered as a formative effect.

Nonetheless, I argue that power relations and actor's forms, representations and influence have reached a new format via media and the internet in which I have emphasized in this study. Lavrion camp has a formative form of influence that can be observed to be effective and operates through signs and symbols, such as party flags, photos and pictures and representations of political characters, books of political characters, or training and seminars. I just intersect the digital habitus with power relations. Thus, I draw attention to the fact that these classical power relations and actors' formative effects have begun to be digitalized as well as the digitalized communication, interaction and socialization relations.

In the next part, I present the internet and media uses of Syrian Kurdish refugees who have started to have a political discourse and worldview.

#### **4.3.3) Reflections of Politicized Perceptions in the Digital Habitus: “*I want to go to Italy because I can protest freely!*”**

In the previous section, I explained that during their stay in the Lavrion camp, Syrian Kurdish refugees' thoughts and perceptions about the places they wanted to go has started to change and became politically critical and sceptical. As they progress through their migration routes and transitions, they also become more experienced and informed about the challenges of arriving and living in Europe. I elaborated on the process of becoming politically critical and sceptical which caused them confusion regarding the place to migrate. In this section, I discuss Syrian Kurdish refugees' media and internet usage. In doing so, I argue that despite the politicized perspectives that make them more critical and sceptical, the content in their digital

habitus still has a positive and aspirational impact as a pull factor in migration narratives.

Similar to the internet and media usage of Syrian Arab refugees staying in the Sounio camp, the internet usage of Syrian Kurdish refugees staying in Lavrion camp was around 5-6 hours on average per day. Both groups had similar internet usage engagements and encounters since the digital content with which they were linked on the Internet was structurally positive. The platforms widely used in both groups were mostly mainstream and well-known social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. Previously the solidarity and Kurdishness as the supra-identity among Kurds was mentioned, thus, almost all refugee individuals who stayed in the Lavrion camp and left to other countries afterwards got in touch, connected, and socialised with each other through social media. It can be understood more clearly what I mean by the words of the young refugee, who was cheerful and had a sense of humour, stating that he stayed in the Lavrion camp for about 2 years:

*“When I stayed here [in camp] for a long time, I had the chance to meet the people coming and going. I’ve been friends with everyone. I have over 2000 friends on Facebook, most of them are comrades who came here and then left. Actually, nobody has 2000 friends when you think about it in real life, right? [smiles] Now there are comrades I know in 10 different countries in Europe, thanks to them, I have learned these countries well... When I first came to the camp, I had in mind to go to Sweden, but now I am thinking of going to Switzerland or Denmark, I saw that the comrades going there are happier and more peaceful, I mean I saw that on their social media accounts.”* [Interview 20, 26 years old, Lavrion, 06.11.2018]

We find the opportunity to verify the following arguments from the words of this interviewee: It is stated that the Lavrion camp was used temporarily in Greece and the intended places where the refugees who came there want to go are other European countries. At the same time, the Lavrion camp conditions and lifestyle created a strong relationship and communication between the refugees who stayed there. This relationship and communication also took place, especially in a digital space. However, one of the points I want to draw attention to in this regard is the relationality, connectedness, and the sense of awareness that digital communication creates in users indirectly. Communications or engagement with the social media content that take place in a digital environment is no longer up close and personal

among users. Rather, the way that the information shared by the users on their social media accounts as a public domain has changed the way other users perceive and associate with the shared information. It is a new communication model for a user who spends time, for example, on Facebook or Instagram to interpret the content, posts, and pictures he sees as communicating with the user who shares this content (Cho, 2013). The words of the interviewee can be a good example to better understand this new communication and engagement model: “... now I am thinking of going to Switzerland or Denmark, I saw that the comrades going there are happier and more peaceful, I mean I saw that on their social media accounts.” If we evaluate the words of this person, in particular, the social media content that he reads, encounters or sees can now be a source of information or reference to trust when he spends time on social media.

Although the internet usage forms and platforms of Syrian Arabs and Kurdish refugees in Greece were similar, their interpretation of and interaction with the content were different from each other. The main difference was the change of content that reproduced their desires about the West, especially the countries they wanted to go to, evoked sympathy and invoked positive connotations in their perceptions. Several Syrian Kurdish interviewees in the Lavrion camp stated that their consideration and expectation with the countries they wanted to go to has been affected by their political worldview. For instance, it is noteworthy to analyse the following words of a refugee who was spending time on his phone in the canteen of the camp, and suddenly approached me and showed a video on his phone, on his Facebook account and said:

*“You were asking questions about the countries we wanted to go to recently, look how comrades do a demonstration in this video, they carry PKK flags, pennants, pictures... This is Italy. I want to go there because I want to do protests for our people, struggle and strive. I have never heard of any comrade who was detained because of any protests about Kurdistan or Kurdistan in Italy. I believe it is a comfortable place, I mean there is freedom of expression and freedom of protests.”* [Field notes, Lavrion, 09.11.2018]

The point emphasized by this participant in his words can be analysed as follows: A refugee seeking answers to his needs and expectations in the axis of politicised perception and political perspective can find positive contents in her/his digital

habitus. In other words, media contents emerging in digital habitus may differ in parallel with the user's preferences, sensitivities, political preferences and expectations, but due to the structure of social media, the content that the user is interested in and encountered can potentially be positive. Let's analyse this argument via a comparison: In the section where I discussed the media and internet usage of Syrian Arab refugees staying in Sounio camp, who saw a post in the comment section on Facebook saying that: *'The Swedish government provides a car, a house, a job if we go there!'* We can say that this refugee may have greater economic expectations of the country he intends to immigrate to. Therefore, the content he takes notice of in his digital habitus can influence and determine his perception and interpretation of what he sees on the axis of his needs and expectations. On the other hand, the interviewee I mentioned above may prioritise the expectation of the country of destination to correspond *'to act freely, to engage in political struggle, have the freedom of expression or protest'* in the axis of his political imaginations and expectations. These two examples explicate to the reader that the digital content that refugees engage with or pay attention to in their digital habitus, especially while staying in camps and planning to migrate to other countries, are related to the expectations and priorities of these refugees concerning the countries they want to go to. I am not implying that Kurdish refugees do not have economic concerns. Although these concerns were not primarily on their agenda and priorities in the interviews, they had concerns and expectations regarding economic gains in the countries they wanted to reach. Nevertheless, compared to Syrian Arab refugees, I can argue that Kurdish refugees are more sensitive and more activist to freedom issues due to pressure and displacement they experienced due to their Kurdish identity.

In the next section, I demonstrate the socio-economic and educational backgrounds of Syrian Kurdish refugees concerning the subjectivity debate.

#### **4.3.4) Mobilizing Subjectivity with Capital: "Nobody can do anything without money, especially when going on a long journey illegally!"**

Understanding the demographic characteristics of the refugees I interviewed in the Lavrion camp provides a foundation for a better understanding of the demographic

characteristics of the interviewees held in Germany. The demonstrated social, economic, and educational backgrounds of Syrian Kurdish refugees in Turkey coincided with the demographics of refugees remaining in Lavrion camp in certain subjects. These were the interviewees' average age and education levels. I conducted 9 interviewees and the average age of the interviewees was 26 years old. 5 of them held undergraduate degrees and above, 3 were high school graduates and one was a secondary school graduate. 3 of these interviewees were single, 6 were married and had between 1 and 3 children.

Besides the similarities in the average age and educational capital of the Syrian Kurdish refugees in Turkey and Greece, their indicators of economic capitals displayed common features. The majority of the interviewees described themselves as middle- and upper-class in economic terms. However, they emphasized that the financial support required for immigration to Greece and the process they spent in the camp was provided by family members who migrated to Europe before them. Considering these demographic features, the subject that the reader should interpret is as follows: Their economic conditions, level of education and the matters of their family members' immigration to European countries before them, are indicators of the economic, social, and cultural capital of the interviewees. This relationship explains to us once again the correlation between *subjectivities* and *capital forms* in the international migration process. One of the questions I asked during the interviews was: *'What are the main circumstances that enable you to immigrate to Greece?'* We can analyse the answers of two young interviewees, one married and the other single, but almost the same age, regarding this question which aimed to grasp the importance of essential capital forms in international migration:

*"We have many relatives migrated to Europe. Our conversations with them and what we observed about them were very influential. But our migration experience is strictly related to our economic and educational situation. The economical part is that we can cover our expenses during this process, which our families supported us a lot. The educational side is about the capacity and knowledge that enable us to be able to compare the conditions and other things between Turkey and other countries."* [Interview 24, 26 years old, father of 1, Lavrion, 14.11.2018]

*“Unfortunately, nobody can do anything without money, especially when going on a long journey illegally. That is why money is definitely crucial. Thank God, we had some money and my family supported us, they still do.”* [Interview 31, 34 years old, father of 2, 20.11.2018]

Both interviewees indicate that the economy is the fundamental factor, that is, if we paraphrase, economic capital enabled them to migrate. However, it is also worth noting what this first interviewee pointed out about education which the reader might interpret as social and cultural capital. This interviewee assessed it as a condition that, thanks to education, allowed him to compare the countries in which he lives and intends to go. The question I asked below as a buffer question to the same interviewee and the answer given by the interviewee is helpful to detail this discussion.

*“When comparing yourself with your family, friend and relatives living in Turkey but who consider migrating somewhere else, how do you see the difference between your capacity to migrate and their incapability to migrate?”*

*“It is an interesting question, because almost all my friends, my relatives who I know also want to go to Europe. But they’ve been there for years, either they can’t or don’t want to go, I don’t know. I don’t deny that economy is very decisive for migrating, maybe they don’t have. For me, I could not get used to Turkey and did not want to live there... To be honest, most of my friends just say they want to go. They see the easy side of life in places on the internet, in movies, and they only focus on the beautiful side. But when it got serious, most of them didn’t know exactly where they wanted to go, why they wanted to go. That’s why I said education is also essential, to your previous question. For example, I studied law, so I looked at the refugee and asylum policies of the countries I want to go to, that’s what I mean by education.”* [Interview 24, 26 years old, Lavrion, 14.11.2018]

These interviewees’ words show us the importance of economic capital regarding the correlation between migration and subjectivity. It also addresses the function and impact of education as social and cultural capital. His opinions about his friends who only see the easy and beautiful side of life refer to the relationship of the internet as a determinant factor and an individual’s desires, images of the future and expectations. In other words, he emphasized that the information, images, and resources provided and displayed by digital habitus are more effective and preferred especially through their attractive, pulling, and positive aspects. The correlations and links made between these forms of capital and the subjectivities of the interviewees are very decisive and influential on migration. As a more general interpretation, I understand that subjectivities can be determined by the forms of capital, it is highly

correlated. Despite this, those refugees who attempted to migrate to Greece from Turkey and succeeded, no matter what the reasons are, I argue that they strengthened and practised their subjectivities somehow. In Lavrion, I met many refugees who lacked the demographic capacities I presented on average about Syrian refugees' capital, but still managed to migrate. In other words, regardless of their economic, social or educational status, poor, uneducated, unemployed, lonely or with their family, many refugees migrated. The reason for this is that I principally discuss the general profile and background information of the data I have generated and obtained from the field study, due to the scope of the research and the variety and differences of the subjects on which it focuses. Otherwise, more diverse and detailed causes, elements and factors could be achieved significantly if further research is conducted, especially focusing on the socio-economic capital and subjectivity of refugees.

The next section presents a discussion in the context of interviews with Syrian female Kurdish refugees and observations made on them.

#### **4.3.5) Gender Transformation and Subjectivity: “*We will liberate women in the Middle East!*”**

There have been many striking and attention-grabbing studies on refugee women remaining in refugee camps, for example, on the empowerment of refugee women through vocational training programs (Jabbar and Zaza, 2016), daily life responsibilities and self-representations (Culcasi, 2019; 471) and gender-oriented seminars and educations (Hajdukowski, Khanlou and Moussa, 2008). However, studies on the transformation and empowerment of refugee women on the grounds of ethnic origin and culture are still lacking. The political, military, and social empowerment of women in Kurdish societies has been under the spotlight of many different disciplines in recent history, for instance, Jineology as a new Kurdish women's movement and ideology (Düzgün, 2016), Kurdish women fighters and their vital role in Rojava (Bengio, 2016), the media representation and coverage of Kurdish women (Toivanen and Baser, 2016). In face-to-face interviews with refugee women, my being 'a male researcher' was an obstacle in my meetings with Syrian Arab refugee women in both KTPC and Sounio camps, especially due to the

influence of social, cultural, and religious motifs and doctrines in their lives. However, as I have emphasized before in the interviews held in Diyarbakır and Mardin, all interviews with Syrian Kurdish refugee women took place in much more easy and comfortable conditions. I was also able to reach out to more interviewees. Even from this ethnographic observation alone, clues can be found regarding the gender representation and empowerment debate between the two groups.

I interviewed a total of 5 Kurdish refugee women in the Lavrion camp. 4 of these interviewees were married and 1 was single, and all the married women had 1 or 2 children. The average age of the interviewees was 26. Before discussing the impact of pro-gendered ideologies and teachings on these interviewees in the Lavrion camp, as stated in the previous chapters, we can consider their answers to the following question: *'How would you explain the gender issue in your community?'*

*"I was ignorant about my gender, very traditional and conservative when I was a teenager. But when I met the Kurdish movement, it empowered me in many ways. When I was in Qamishli, I was co-chair in a local office... We will liberate women in the Middle East [smiles]."* [Interview 21, 35 years old, lost her husband in the war, Lavrion, 06.11.2018]

*"When someone talks about Rojava, the first thing that comes to mind is women's struggle. I believe that summarizes the gender issue in Kurdish societies [smiles]. For me, the most liberated and empowered women in the Middle East are Kurdish women and politically and ideologically the strongest in the world."* [Interview 29, 30 years old, mother of 2, Lavrion, 18.11.2018]

*"... I am a Yazidi woman; we [Yazidi communities] got our share from the attacks and massacres of the Islamic communities. But when we think of Kurdish women, they have an ideology that is independent of religion and more liberal... There is not even one Muslim community in the world that prioritizes women's rights and movements as much as the Kurdish people do. This is only thanks to the Kurdish movement."* [Interview 28, 24 years old, Lavrion, 17.11. 2018]

The common emphasis in these interviewees' approaches and opinions to the gender subject and their association with Kurdish society is that they consider the gender movements from a political point of view. The emphasis on the fact that the first interviewee had a traditional and conservative background and later became co-chairman of an institution thanks to the Kurdish political movement can be considered as an example of the relationship between gender empowerment and the Kurdish movement. Additionally, the second interviewee establishing a direct link



between Rojava and Kurdish women and the words of *'the most liberated and empowered women in the Middle East'*, show the politicized and taught perspective on gender. At the same time, as political empowerment and responsibility, the political imaginations and future visions of women interviewees involve a broader and more purposeful discourse, not just in the context of *Kurdishness* and the gender debate. Consider, for instance, their words: *'We will liberate women in the Middle East'* or the stress on *the empowerment of Kurdish women in Muslim communities.'*

Although all interviewees had a certain level of gender awareness, their answers to the questions I asked about *'whether the Lavrion camp had an impact on their lives, especially within the scope of the gender debate, and if so'*, confirm the argument of the Lavrion as an ideological training camp.

*"Kurdish societies have become very important for women's leadership, equality and struggle. The comrades in Lavrion also know it [Lavrion] is strategically important. During our stay here, we somehow take responsibility in committees and attend seminars. This responsibility increases the speaking and representation ability of female comrades at meetings. So, this is where women take responsibility and practice rather than just say they are important."* [Interview 32, 19 years old, single, migrated to Greece alone, Lavrion, 22.11.2018]

*"We have female friends who stay as volunteers in the camp. These friends have visas, residence permits in different countries, but they stay here, just to train us and share their experiences with us. This is a very valuable thing. These trainings are also a situation that increases our awareness and responsibility as women."* [Interview 22, 25 years old, mother of 2, teacher, Lavrion, 07.11.2018]

Both interviewees stated that they participated in the training and seminars given in the camp. These trainings and seminars were especially gender-oriented, women empowerment and ideologically gender-focused contents. For example, when I asked the interviewees what these trainings or seminars were, they said they had titles such as *'Jineology, Women and Revolution, Women's history'*. Although they have content focused on raising awareness such as trainings and seminars, in fact, the practices that women participated in and took part in to organize their daily life needs during their stay in the camp were also very determinant. The subjectivity that develops and becomes stronger based on these roles is worth discussion. The practices required for the development and strengthening of agency can be explained by the fact that refugee women speak and represent themselves in the

committees they are included in, do the work they need to be done, and increase the visibility in the areas that we can describe as public space.

#### **4.4.) Comparison of the Results Relating to Syrian Arab and Kurdish Participants in Greece**

After the fieldwork in Turkey, the fieldwork in Lavrion and Sounio refugee camps in Greece played a vital role in navigating and interlocking the continuity of the research. Particularly for a better understanding of changing perceptions, practices, and imaginations of Syrian refugees before going to the intended countries, the fieldwork in Greece demonstrates the broader perspective of the research focuses on the migration journey. In addition, the research draws a broad picture of Syrian refugees' migration with pull and push factors alongside the individual inspirations, aspirations, and mobilities thanks to the gradual fieldwork. Greece geopolitically is on very significant location in a very considerable intersection of continents, cultures, and politics, which I name as '*a gateway to Europe*', by meaning the Schengen area and European continent (Oikonomakis, 2018; Kalogeraki, 2018). In this sense, the time Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees spent in Greece, where they waited for a long time in pending mode before going to the country they intended to go to, should be addressed from certain perspectives. These perspectives can be formulated as refugees' perceptions, different capital forms and refugees' demographics, their use and engagement with media and internet, and finally, gender. In this section, I show the similarities and differences between the Syrian Arab refugees in the Sounio camp and the Syrian Kurdish refugees in the Lavrion camp in these four different basic perspectives.

##### **4.4.1) A Comparison of Politicized Perceptions and Unsatisfied Expectations about the West**

This section introduces a comparison of the perceptions, thoughts and imaginations of Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees who left Turkey and wanted to use Greece as a transit country, regarding the places they wish to arrive. In doing so, I first present the opinions of Syrian Arab refugees staying in the Sounio camp about Greece and then the countries they want to go to. Later, I follow the same structure for the Kurdish refugees staying in Lavrion.

By linking the fieldwork done in Turkey, almost all Syrian Arabs refugees interviewed at the KTPC had very optimistic, hopeful and positive opinions about European

countries. For this purpose, they left Turkey and fled to Greece. The majority of Arab participants in the Sounio camp were still optimistic and hopeful regarding their imaginations and projections about the places where they wish to arrive, such as Germany, Sweden or Netherlands. However, Arab refugees started complaining and being pessimistic and critical due to the long waiting time they spent in Greece as well as the insufficiency of or dissatisfaction with the facilities and services offered by the Greek state. In addition, during their stay in the camps, they were unable to communicate with local people due to the lack of a common language and could not involve themselves in social life and complete their economic and social integration, which at the end provoked these complaints and critical attitudes. On the one hand, they knew that Greece was a Western and Schengen zone country, and their expectation was higher even if none of them had planned to settle there. On the other hand, they were still hopeful and positive regarding the further western countries. It was revealed that most images and ideas they had in mind regarding the Western societies and countries were not regarding Greece but more about further Western European countries. Regarding the formation of the future imaginations about those countries where they still strongly desire to go was primarily related to their family bonds as well as the usage of media and its (in)direct effect on their thoughts and desires. While for Syrian Arabs, these factors did not surface apparent differences regarding the notion and images of the Western countries and societies, Syrian Kurds have stressed politically very strong and critical opinions.

Syrian Kurdish interviewees staying at Lavrion refugee camp were strongly ideologized and politicized either by choice or due to their being obliged by their surroundings. This change was reflected in their answers not only as regards their perception towards the Western countries but also the lifestyles in those countries, such as capitalistic, consumerist, individualist, or hegemonic. The main reason for this is that their worldviews and perspectives have begun to change and politicize as a result of their involvement in training and seminars during their stay in Lavrion camp. Daily life practised in the light of these training and seminars is predominantly linked to political Kurdish movements, namely the PKK, which maintain the leftist, anti-capitalist, and collective doctrines. As a result, their views on the countries they

were aiming to reach became politically critical and sceptical. However, like the Syrian Arab refugees, they continued to aim not to stay in Greece, but to reach the countries they had in mind.

As a result of the abolition of the official status of the Lavrion camp, the help of the Greek state and international institutions was discontinued, which had an impact on the Kurdish refugees' opinions about Greece. In addition, like the Arab refugees, Kurdish refugees also sought to go to countries with high standards and conditions in their visions, especially where the Kurdish diaspora is strong, such as Germany, Switzerland, and Sweden. The point to note here is that although similar changes and thoughts began to occur in both groups, the reasons that trigger these thoughts and changes are different.

#### **4.4.2) A Comparison of Media and Internet Use in Sounio and Lavrion Camps**

The most striking feature of the media and internet usage comparison of these two groups was that both groups had more than 5-6 hours of usage in a day. These usage rates are well above the average media usage rates. The social media platforms, websites, and applications that both groups spent time were similar. These were, in particular, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Google. Within the scope of these similarities, the reasons for spending intense time on the internet in refugee camps can be stated as follows: Both groups spent a long time in the standby mode in Greece; they did not have official work permits; they did not know Greek to communicate with locals, and the locations of the camps did not provide opportunities to be included in the social life of the local people. If we compare the daily life practices of these two groups within the scope of the digital habitus debate, we can say that the digital habitus, which they have already started to build long years ago, was much more active, expanded, grown, and developed in Greece while being in the pending mood in the camps.

I have discussed before the uncertainty of the future and being in limbo spatially for the concept of the refugee camps. By approaching the concept of being in limbo through the media and internet use of refugees in terms of time, we can discuss the

relation and exposure to active, intense, and continuous media content on the internet in trilogy time concepts: '*past-present-future*'. All the events and factors that caused Syrian refugees to end up in Greece were experienced in the past and can be named as mainly pushing power relations and actors. After their displacement, Syrian refugees, again looking for a long-term settlement, considered and imagined their resettlement destinations for their future, which can be considered as subjectivities that enable or unable them to do it. However, due to the limitation of the camps and the lack of social life in Greece where they were experiencing the present, I observed that they mainly experience and live their present time by actively and permanently associating with the media content that might potentially be their future. The intense engagement and association with the internet can be the digital habitus stage, where they constantly found themselves in their imaginations about the future.

It was stated that both groups continued to communicate with other refugees they met, especially during their stay in camps, on digital platforms. In other words, while the interviewees continued to stay in the camps, they continued to stay in touch, communicate and follow each other over social media platforms with other refugees who reached the places they wanted to go. Therefore, most interviewees witnessed the lives of other refugees who had migrated and settled in many different countries in Europe from a distance. This has influenced the interviewees' ideas about the places they want to go, as well as their desires.

Apart from the similarities of these two groups, Syrian Kurdish refugees were especially influenced by ideology and political worldviews that were dominant in Lavrion camp and this situation was reflected in their internet usage. They started to interpret the media content they were related to on the internet in a more political way. Their political sensibilities were further activated and practised with the training and seminars they received. Therefore, they started to prefer countries, places and lifestyles that are more suitable for their political imaginations, plans among the media content.

#### **4.4.3) A Comparison of the Socio-Economic and Cultural Capital of Syrian Arab and Kurdish Refugees**

In this section, I present the comparison of the economic, social, and cultural capital of these two groups that enabled them to leave Turkey and flee to Greece. Although migration from Turkey to Greece has played a role in filtering the diversity of socio-economic classes among Syrian refugees, when considering these groups within their demographics and profiles, it should be noted that there is no sample group with the same class or social status. Rather, I point out the intersection and common grounds of these sample groups. If we generalize to make a classification on the economic capitals of the two groups, I can state that the Syrian Kurds and Arabs who succeeded to arrive in Greece were mainly from the middle and upper classes. Another point that the two groups indicated about their economic situation was that their families living in the countries they intended to go to were supporting them economically. This point was stated by interviewees in the interviews held in Diyarbakır and Mardin, but the refugees staying in the KTPC camp did not mention this issue at all.

In light of the data obtained as a result of fieldwork done in Turkey, I have stressed that Syrian Arabs in KTPC and Kurdish refugees in Kurdish cities had different social and cultural backgrounds, particularly when considering their educational achievements. However, the education degrees, their social status, and occupational groups of the two groups staying in the Lavrion and Sounio camp were similar. More than half of the interviewees in the Sounio camp had bachelors and above and the rest held either high school or secondary school degrees. The educational backgrounds of the interviewees at the Lavrion camp were almost the same. Based on these similarities in economic and educational capital, the following argument can be defended: It is highly probable that there is a correlation between the social and cultural capitals of two different groups that show similarities between their economic capital.

For the similarities between social and cultural capitals, apart from the similarities of educational level, the thoughts, dreams and plans of the interviewees about the places they aspire to go can also be shown. Although Kurdish refugees critically

evaluate the historical and political developments in Western or European countries with a more ideological and political discourse, nevertheless, the countries they intended to go to and their willingness to go were similar to those of Syrian Arab refugees. This is mainly due to common experiences of being a refugee living in limbo and staying in refugee camps, as well as being held in Greece for a long time. At the same time, as the other reason, it can be said that the similarities of media usage and content have created common grounds for the places they want to go, which I discussed in the previous section.

In addition to comparing the capital of these two groups, it can be emphasized that the similar and different aspects of the Lavrion and Sounio camps where the two groups stayed, was influential on the perceptions and thoughts of the interviewees. While the Sounio camp was supported and financed by the state and international institutions and NGOs, the Lavrion camp's official camp status was removed a few years ago. Therefore, the formation of Kurdish refugees more homogeneously in the Lavrion camp and the imagined community and solidarity was realized as a political imagination produced by this homogeneity. In contrast, no collective identity or solidarity formation could be observed since there were refugees from different ethnic and religious groups staying in the Sounio camp, such as Congolese, Iranian, Sudanese, Afghan, Iraqi or Syrian, rather than only one. Rather, it can be said that the Syrian refugee interviewees and other refugees in the Sounio camp were going through a calmer and quieter pending process as they did not plan to stay in Greece.

#### **4.4.4) A Comparison of Gender Subjectivity: Decreased Pressures, Increased Empowerment and Awareness**

One of the most important findings of the fieldwork conducted in Greece concerned the transformations and changes that Syrian women refugees experienced. Arab women interviewees staying in the Sounio camp firstly stated the decreased social pressures that they experienced due to the expectations and pressures triggered by the collective community in Turkey. It can be emphasized that the pressures that women refugees are subjected to who have started to be individualized or associated with smaller groups are beginning to decrease. Besides, it can be emphasized that the roles and expectations that others expect from refugees, which



I have discussed before with the concept of '*social subjectivity*', do not need to be performed in small camp areas in Greece. Another reason for this is that the communication with the local people was limited, the contact was less, and the others who stayed in the camps were also refugees. Therefore, the roles and expectations assumed from being women and Syrian refugee decreased. Another important finding in the Sounio camp was the encouragement and empowerment of refugee women as a result of training, seminars and workshops organized by NGOs that focus on women. The women interviewees emphasized that these training and workshops had positive results from a gender perspective in their lives. At the same time, especially when compared with Syrian Arab refugee women staying in KTPC, it was observed that female refugees in the Sounio camp used the internet and media more intensely. The reason for this can be pointed out that Arab refugee women did not have many roles and expectations expected of them in Sounio, thus, they were able to spare time for themselves.

Syrian Kurdish refugee women staying in the Lavrion camp stated that they had an empowered and encouraged process due to different motivations and factors. We can say that the first of these motivations is about the social and political position and value of women in the Kurdish communities. This social and political significance took place through pro-gender ideology-oriented training and seminars in the Lavrion camp, which were given for women-centred empowerment. During their stay in the camp, women's self-representation and their public visibility in the roles shared by men and women increased in a very positive sense. In addition, women interviewees stated that the training and seminars they received were very influential in their lives and that their relations with Kurdishness as a political imagination were powerful. At the same time, they stated that these relationships bear responsibility, not only in terms of individual female status and representation but also in terms of women's liberation for larger purposes. The visibility of all their practices, roles and representations in the camp was even more pronounced and empowered by their ideological representation.

## 5) CHAPTER 5

### FIELDWORK IN GERMANY: Confronting Subjectivity: Decisions and Actions, No Further West to Migrate

*“In a dream separate, even contradictory, truths can be entwined. A thing may be two things at the same time. A table of wood and a sledge. A hook and a beak.”*

*“The migrant is in several other ways an 'ideal' worker. He is eager to work overtime. He is willing to do shift work at night. He arrives politically innocent - that is to say without any proletarian experience. Those who apply for work at Citroen are often asked to show their tickets to prove that they have just arrived in France.”*

**John Berger, *The Seventh Man*, 1975**

Sitting on the balcony of Hashim's house, a man from Qamishli working in a refugee protection centre in Berlin as a translator and social worker, while smiling to his daughter, 3-year-old Celine, he turned to me and started to talk:

*“What's going to be the destiny of this little angel [referring to his daughter-Celine]? Is she going to be a Kurd from Rojava or a German woman? I don't mean only ethnically, and also culturally, historically, traditionally! Should I appreciate the German government for letting us in, or should I just be angry at all the other countries that didn't even care about us? To me what Germany did is a humanitarian responsibility and a must-do a response to a humanitarian crisis, not a heroic response to the situation. But what other countries did was just to ignore people's death. Instead of showing compliments to Germany, I think people should react to other countries.”*

After pausing, he continued to speak: *“What will her [daughter Celine] future be like? Let me tell you: German people get old day by day. I mean, their new generations don't reproduce enough and therefore cannot continue to do their country's business and services. So, they [Germany] need more young workers, labourers, because there is a gap which needs to be filled in the workforces. Germans are rational and clever, you know, that's why they see this gap too. What they did is to open borders for Syrians, mainly young people, like me, like my wife. So, in the end, they became a hero by helping us and kind of sorted out their near-future needs. You also see how refugees are being forced into their integration programs in protection centres by mandatorily teaching their language, culture, and systems. They kind of forcibly do this because they did not want to have another closed community like a Turkish one... We [Syrians] will do the needed jobs soon. To be honest, it is a win-win negotiation, we needed a safe place and they needed human force... This is how I see my daughter's future. She will live and work here but she will always remember that she is not originally from here, I mean she will be in between. This is the most effective way of disciplining immigrants, right?”* [Field notes, Berlin, 05 April 2019]

It is attention-grabbing to notice the expressions and concerns expressed by Hashim regarding his daughter Celine, especially the demographic and economic developments in Germany and the refugee's situations in Germany concerning these factors. Hashim stated that he migrated to Germany with great hope and enthusiasm, but he revealed that he had a highly critical and sceptical perspective after his first year in Germany. Hashim's statements give the reader a clue to the data to be discussed in this chapter.

In this chapter, the experiences of the interviewees after their arrival in Germany will be discussed as well as their whole migration experiences in Turkey and Greece. Within the points Hashim emphasised, primarily refugee policies of Germany and Syrian refugees relationship are presented. In doing so, first, I address background information on Germany as a final destination country for Syrian refugees. In light of this information, it will be more understandable how Syrian refugees, who considered Germany as the final destination, were welcomed by Germany, and Germany's implemented integration programs involving Syrian refugees.

Following this, the discussions on Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees are presented in detail. Thus, a similar discussion structure as presented in Turkey and Greece chapters is followed. Firstly, Syrian Arab refugees' words are given in addition to my fieldwork observations along the axis of the *four main focal points* of the research. Later, the same discussion structure is followed for the Syrian Kurdish refugees. In the last part of this chapter, again, the similarities and differences of these two groups are discussed in a comparative way.

### **5.1) Germany as Final Destination Country: Background Information for Final Fieldwork**

Before discussing the fieldwork notes and interviews on the subject of Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees, I will describe Germany's recent developments on refugees to provide readers with a background to how Syrian refugees were accommodated and hosted by the German government. This introduction is relevant for the readers to understand the detailed discussions made within the context of Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees, their experiences and opinions.

In contemporary European economics and politics, Germany is the *largest economy*, and *second most populous* country with more than 80 million residents, after Russia. Germany, one of the leading countries in political decisions and contributing the most to the economic budget of the European Union, has been a safe country for immigrants and refugees for more than half a century (see Schoeller, 2019). Germany has economically and politically assumed the utmost responsibilities among the EU countries in answer to the Syrian refugee crisis, and also has been one of the major final destination countries for Syrian refugees, particularly after Syria's neighbouring countries. Germany has experienced the largest migration among the western European countries, especially during and after the end of the WW2 with more than 12 million Germans returning from neighbouring countries, particularly from eastern Europe (Connor, 2007).

After the division of Germany into West and East, West Germany faced a labour shortage and began to seek additional workers from other countries. Between 1955 and 1977, more than 14 million guest workers were recruited by the German government (Schmidt, 1997)<sup>58</sup>. There have been many different worker recruitment agreements between the German authorities and several countries, mainly European, such as with Italy since 1955, Greece since 1960, Turkey since 1961, Portugal since 1964, Tunisia since 1965 (Blackshire-Belay, 1991; 4). In this sense, Germany is familiar with immigration and immigrants in its recent history. Despite this, major parts of these immigration influxes were under the control of the German authorities, even if many of the temporarily recruited labourers did not repatriate to their home countries after the expiry of their German government employment contracts (Martin, 1981).

For several decades, especially after the 1960s, Germany has played the role of a *pull factor* in migration destinations for hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees (Joppke, 1999). However, particularly after 2015, Germany's refugee policies have changed the main migration routes of Syrian refugees, particularly from the neighbouring countries, such as Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon. As I elaborated on Syrian refugees in *'The Reactions and Roles of the Conducted Field Research*

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<sup>58</sup> [http://www.ghs-mh.de/migration/projects/timeline/tl\\_ge\\_7.htm](http://www.ghs-mh.de/migration/projects/timeline/tl_ge_7.htm) last accessed on 31.05.2021

*Countries to the Syrian Refugee Crisis*' section, the approach of the German government towards the refugee crisis has been operative and effective after 2015. At the commencement of this process, the image of a drowned 3-year-old Kurdish boy, *Aylan Kurdi*, who strived to illegally migrate to Greece from Turkey with his family, which became to be viral on a global scale, has played a very influential role, which also was mentioned at the beginning of the research.

In the first nine months of 2015, more than 487,000 people, mainly undocumented refugees and illegal refugees and immigrants, arrived on the Mediterranean coasts of European countries (Banulescu-Bogdan and Fratzke, 2015), which was almost double the numbers of 2014. The largest part of these arrivals consisted of Syrian refugees. Representing the highest number in the Syrian refugee crisis, more than 429,000 Syrian refugees have applied for asylum in different European countries (UNCHR, 2015; Holmes and Castaneda, 2015; 12). Since then, Germany hosts more than 600,000 Syrian refugees as the largest number in the European continent<sup>59</sup> (Kaya and Orchard, 2020). In this research, Germany as a major and well-known migration destination in Europe for decades plays a vital role when mapping Syrian refugees' migration.

## **5.2) A Brief Introduction to Fieldwork and Integration Programs in Germany**

*"... You have to be careful about choosing specific terms for your research. I checked your application for permission to enter refugee accommodations, but there is one thing that you need to change on your paper; we do not have any refugee camps in Germany. The term 'camp' is not used here any longer. We are very careful about the use of this term because it can remind people of horrible times. When you say refugee camp, people might think of something else, especially if we consider that there is an example like Auschwitz a little further from here..."* [Field notes, Press Office Representative of State Office for Refugee Affairs, Berlin, 02.04.2019]

The above quote belongs to one of the high-ranking officials from whom I have obtained the necessary permissions to conduct my fieldwork in Berlin. The official's words give a lot of clues about the sensitivity of the German government not only about the camps but also about the refugees, which I elaborate on in the following sections. All the refugee protection centres, shelters, houses were under the

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<sup>59</sup> <https://wenr.wes.org/2019/08/the-state-of-refugee-integration-in-germany-in-2019> last accessed on 31.05.2021

authority of the German government, more specifically the State Office for Refugee Affairs [*Landesamt für Flüchtlingsangelegenheiten*]. After obtaining the necessary permits, I visited 5 different refugee shelters with different capacities and concepts to accommodate refugees. For instance, Tempelhof-Schöneberg refugee accommodation consisted mainly of Syrian refugees with other refugees from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan and Libya. Refugee resettlement was managed according to the ethnic and religious background of the refugees. They were allocated different rooms, floors or even buildings. I inquired as to what the main reasons for this ethnic distribution were as far as I could interpret. I then confirmed this with the State Office for Refugee Affairs officer in our second meeting, as her words indicated below. The reasons addressed were mainly to create a linguistically heterogeneous environment to encourage refugees to use German more as a common language among themselves. In addition, dividing, spreading, and separating refugees from the same ethnic and national background to place them in different settlements, it was stated with the conscious policy of the German government, it was to prevent the formation of a possible new diaspora.

*“Our government could not predict very well what the implications and consequences of their policies about immigrants, labour forces would be back in time. However, we are very sure now that we do not want any other diasporas here, rather we want more integrated, and adapted communities, including Syrian refugees. This is one of the main reasons to answer your question about why we separate Syrian refugees from each other. Because we do not want to have a Syrian diaspora, like Turkish one or any other!”* [Field notes, Press Office Representative of State Office for Refugee Affairs, Berlin, 05.04.2019]

The words of this officer at the Refugee Affairs department explain the main motivation for the German government's implemented integration programs, which is that *they do not want any new diasporic community*. In this sense, it is important to elaborate on the integration programs that the German government performed to prevent the formation of any diasporic community. Although I was not allowed to stay in the refugee centres which I regularly visited in Berlin, I obtained fundamental observations about the integration programs from the visits I made during the day. I present this integration program under three different headings, which are documentation, accommodation, and language. These headings explain to the reader the programs Germany has implemented to prevent the formation of a new

diasporic community, as well as the fundamental complaints and disappointments of the Syrian refugees, which I will discuss in the following sections.

### **5.3) The German Integration Process: Documentation, Accommodation and Language**

The first stage of the German integration process was *documentation* which can be articulated as the German government's recognition of refugees in their registration system. Second, the placement of refugees in official *accommodation* which was funded and organised by the German government. The final stage was the start of *language* training with high priority as soon as possible. Nevertheless, as far as I observed and comprehended from the interviewees' words, the implementation of this integration process operated as a complementary circle. For instance, while documentation of refugees was taking place, they could learn the German language, or while being placed in their chosen accommodation, their documentation could be followed. The following interviewees' answers are given to demonstrate the registration and operation process of refugees, specifically in Berlin, as different regions might differ from each other.

*"When we arrived at the border, we were taken by the security forces to a building for basic documents and records, the place is called BAMF [Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge - Federal Office for Migration and Refugees]. With all my children, after such a long journey, we were taken into a small building and given a small room. Two days after staying in the place, we were asked to participate in German language classes. It took me more than 2 years to get rid of these courses. Imagine, I am a basic truck driver, and this is what I needed to go through, I cannot even imagine students, God help them!"* [Interview 39, 34 years old, father of 7, Berlin, 03.04.2019]

*"When I arrived in Linz [in Austria], my brother-in-law came to pick me and my children up to take us to Munich where he was living. Then we went to an official place to register as a refugee but they [German officers] said that I had to go to Berlin because in Munich there wasn't a quota for newcomers at the time. I was sent to Berlin, I was given a room in a building with other refugees, and a few days later I was taken to the German language classes, which I am still taking."* [Interview 42, 28 years old, mother of 3, widow, Berlin, 06.04.2019]

German-language education was mandatory for all refugees, including Syrians, until a stage at which the refugees wanted to continue or not. However, at the level where lessons were no longer compulsory, it depended on what the refugee wanted to do with the language certificate they obtained. For instance, if a refugee wants to get a

job with experience, soft skills, and talent, such as a cook, waitress, security, social worker, or public service officer, then B1 [level three on the scale of six] would be a sufficient level of language to leave education in order to apply for a job if the refugee in question has a work permit as well. On the other hand, if a refugee wants to continue her/his education at university, again B1 is the minimum standard required, but B2 and C1 [levels 4-5 out of 6] is the expected level. However, in most cases, proficiency was expected at an advanced level, depending on the degree one wishes to study.

In Berlin alone, there were more than 90 different accommodation locations for refugees, including Syrians which could host more than 30,000 people with full capacity<sup>60</sup>. As I mentioned briefly above, I realised that in order to strengthen integration and encourage them to speak German as a common language, the German government attaches great importance to distributing and resettling refugees of the same ethnic origin in different living spaces. In the same building, there could be 3 to 5 rooms varying on any floor, for example, this was the case in the Tempelhof-Schöneberg protection centre. These rooms usually had capacities ranging from 1 to 5 people, and generally, refugees from varying nationalities were brought together in these rooms. For example, in one of the rooms I visited, an Iraqi, an Afghan, and a Nigerian refugee were staying together. This system was carried according to an intentional policy. Refugees stated that they could request to change the rooms they stayed in, but the refugees' backgrounds in the rooms where they were to be relocated were important. In addition, gender or age distribution was used as another strategy to bring together refugees from different backgrounds. For example, the Wilmersdorf protection centre was only for women and non-adult refugees. The only criterion for grouping these refugees was whether they were women or adults, which naturally brought together many different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

In all my interviews in Berlin, each of the interviewees emphasized that the German bureaucracy and the documentation process is one of the most difficult and coercive

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<sup>60</sup> <https://www.berlin.de/laf/wohnen/allgemeine-informationen/ueberblick-fluechtlingsunterkuenfte/artikel.629241.php> last accessed on 31.05.2021



processes they had to go through. It has been stated that there are many different types of documents that refugees have to deal with, such as registration, asylum, equivalence, as well as to be carried out in accordance with their individual preferences and requests. For instance, asylum documents and processes; residence permit documents; work permit documents; social benefits and services; accommodation; an ID or passport registration; language courses; obtaining equivalence of diplomas, driving licenses, social skills training, certificates; monthly payments; childcare benefits; children's education and other similar documents.

The main point that the reader should interpret from this section is that after arrival in Germany, there were necessary integration programs and stages that the refugees had to deal with and go through for long periods, usually years. More detailed information about these processes will be given in the following sections. In the next section, Syrian Arab refugees' experiences in Germany are discussed.

## **5.4) Growing Diasporic or Integrated Community: Syrian Arab Refugees in Berlin**

### **5.4.1) Reality Check of the Perception: Satisfied Expectations vs Disappointments of Syrian Arabs in Berlin**

This chapter answers one of the four key research themes of my doctoral research, concerning refugees' perceptions of the other, the West and Europe. As a continuation of the fieldwork conducted in Turkey and Greece, the investigation of the thoughts and perceptions of Syrian Arab refugees who left Turkey with the intention of migrating to Germany as a desired country, is a very crucial in this phase. Let's briefly recall the answers of interviewees in Turkey and Greece regarding the same theme: Arab refugees staying in the KTPC in Turkey had stated their opinions about Western countries completely positive, as an object of desire, and as the country that they wanted to reach. Interviewees defined these emphases with terms such as of '*modern, developed, better life, or civilized*'. On the other hand, Arab refugees staying in the Sounio camp in Greece started to be critical and to complain about Western and European countries due to reasons such as the camp standards, not being able to socialize with the local people and ultimately not thinking about remaining in Greece but being stuck in limbo. However, they still maintained their hopeful, high expectations and positive images and thoughts about the destination countries they wanted to reach. In this sense, Syrian Arab refugees' perceptions, thoughts, and experiences regarding Germany play a vital role in mapping out the entire migration route as a complementary part of the fieldwork. In addition, the fieldwork conducted in Germany and the opinions of the interviewees are of vital importance for the justification of the discussion concerning the West or Europe in this study, of the thoughts and perceptions of Syrian refugees in Turkey and Greece.

I present the analysis which shows that refugees build up pictures of the West and of Germany which are based on media, social media, and all sorts of idealised perceptions on the internet. However, at the end of the migration journey, the perceptions of refugees entailed a significant degree of *satisfaction in their expectation* as well as *disappointments*. I address these satisfied expectations and disappointments based on two main dynamics. Satisfied expectations are mainly

related to the possession of economic and everyday necessities and the living standards that refugees were provided with and helped to obtain. To begin with satisfied expectations, as I will elaborate in the section where I discuss Syrian refugees' socio-economic and cultural capital, all the interviewees stated that they have a certain standard of living and that the governmental support and aid meets their needs at a minimum level, particularly in economic terms. Syrian refugees in Turkey and Greece have experienced tangible economic difficulties due to the insufficient economic support of these states and the weakness of their social welfare systems. However, in a country like Germany, which has one of the best economic standards in the world, the economic opportunities and high social welfare services offered by the state have minimally responded to the daily economic needs of Syrian refugees. The two interviewees' words indicated below explain the satisfied expectations argument.

*“Germany is a very rich country and supports those living within its borders. They support us in such as accommodation, a certain amount of money per month, free transportation pass cards. This helps me a lot until I adapt here.”* [Interview 37, 25 years old, single, 31.03.2019]

*“Although we do not work here, the state regularly provides economic support to us. We do not get rich with the money the state gives, but we can meet our basic needs. They also pay separately for our children... These supports have not been done in other countries; I appreciate that a lot.”* [Interview 38, 43 years old, father of 3, construction worker, Berlin, 02.04.2019]

There were many other interviewees who intersected with the words of these two interviewees and expressed their satisfaction with the help and services offered by the German state. Many of them emphasized the *powerful, developed, modern* and *liberal* terms for Germany. In this sense, we can state that the positive opinions about the West or Germany previously stated are valid and verified particularly for economic aspects.

When considering the disappointments and unsatisfied expectations of Syrian Arab refugees, I also examine them through two different aspects. The *first aspect* is mainly about the lengthy bureaucratic and documentation processes they were involved in or exposed to while striving to settle down and adapt, and the challenges these processes create. The *second aspect* is more related to the fundamentally

incompatible social characters and sociability of Syrians and German societies. In other words, this aspect designates other factors such as dissatisfaction occurring in Syrian refugees' social relations, socialization, difficulties experienced in the adaptation process, and cultural differences between theirs and German society. In order to understand and analyse the first aspect in more detail, we can explore a single 21-year-old interviewee's answer to the questions I asked about what they thought before they arrived in Germany and what they think after their arrival.

*"I thought I come here, I will be happy, go to university, earn money, have a better life. At least, the way we saw or heard before coming here... I was thinking to learn some dances, travel other countries, and go to parties, enjoy life, you know what I mean. None of them have come true! I am still here [means the protection centre]. Germany is a free country if you obey all their rules... But the reality of living here is very difficult because life is different, and we don't know it. We have to learn their language, culture, system, and all these things. I feel like a child, as if I know nothing and need to learn all!"* [Interview 41, Berlin, 04.04.2019]

With great hope and expectations, Syrian refugees had very severe disappointments and difficulties in their self-positionality, adaptation and integration after their arrival in Germany, mainly due to following factors: A long process of documentation and official records, long term compulsory German language classes, German society's reactions, attitudes, and perceptions towards refugees, long stays in refugee accommodation, shelters, or protection centres, difficulty finding an apartment or house to move in, and the most importantly the images and high expectations which did not meet with the reality of the country and life.

The catchword emphasized by the interviewee that *"We have to learn their language, culture, system, and all these things,"* actually summarizes the factors I have given as disappointments and difficulties. It is also one of the arguments that we should dwell on the interviewee's words *"I feel like a child as if I know nothing"*. Although not with the same words in the answers of other interviewees, I realized that the attempts of the state to direct, control, educate and adapt refugees generated the feeling and thought of *'as if they did not have any life experiences'* on refugees. Although the main factors that come to the fore and can be observed are disappointment, confusion and dissatisfaction as I have put in words above; I interpret these difficulties and disappointments of Syrian refugee participants in Germany as the conflict of individual and collective social norms and values. This is

an encounter between the Syrian and German societies, which also emerges in social characters and socialities.

The points that I correlated between the individual and collective societal features and Syrian refugee participants in Germany are, when expressed from a sociological perspective, the following: In Western societies, such as Germany, *individuality* is dominant, and social, bureaucratic, and economic relations are organized on the basis of the individual and the life limits of the individual (see Hofstede, 1984; Simmel, 2011). In eastern societies, such as Syrian, where the sense of *collective society* is dominant, the individual's social and economic boundaries are more intensely organized within the boundaries of the ethnic, religious, cultural, and familial groups of which the Syrian refugees are members (see Cohen, Wu, and Miller, 2016; Kağıtçıbaşı, 1997).

Based on my ethnography, Syrian refugees, who are from a society dominated by collective social relations, witnessing and learning about a life dominated by individuality in images, thoughts and representations shaped in their perceptions regarding Germany or the West in general. However, until the point that a Syrian refugee individual does not participate in these relationships and cannot experience the life that creates a desire and is attractive to her/him in her/his personal perception, the images and thoughts in their perceptions continue to be positive. This difference in social structure between Germany and Syria is an obvious dilemma that refugee individuals experience, although they cannot identify precisely during their adaptation and integration process. The points emphasized by the interviewee, quoted below, give insights into the difficulties in adaptation and integration created by the difference in an individual and collective social structure.

*"I was so focused on just coming here, was so excited about the life here but I forgot to think about whether the lifestyle that excited me was really what I wanted, the life that suits me... I will give you an example: I have some of my acquaintances living here. We gathered a few times when I arrived. We are in the same city, probably half an hour far from here. For example, if I call them now and ask for a meeting, they will tell me, we can meet a day next week at a certain time. I know... I want to express that here people live alone in their own world. Life is like this here, but do I want to live like this, absolutely not. But now I am forced to live a lifestyle I don't want. We were not like that in Syria, but we lived with our neighbours, relatives and friends."* [Interview 51, 46 years old, father of 5, Berlin, 20.04.2019]

The fact that this interviewee feels compelled to live the dominant lifestyle around him is related to the forms of socialisation and relationship in collective societies as he defines it. Therefore, the sociability experienced by a Syrian refugee in Germany is also directly related to individual life and social norms and values generated by it. To summarize, on the one hand, Syrian Arab participants stated that the positive images and thoughts formed in their perceptions about the West were met and satisfied and happy with in terms of the economic aspects. Within these economic standards, on the other, they were unsatisfied and unhappy with the socialities and social structure with which they were associated and dominated.

In other words, this is the conflict situation that arises as a result of the encounter between the social experiences and relations generated by two different societal cultures. When pondering this situation within the context of power relations, we can argue that the way images of Germany are perceived and represented by refugees, especially the economic aspects of life, corresponds to the refugees' opinions. In this sense, characteristics of Germany and German society such as *developed economy, modern state, social welfare* were verified by Syrian refugees' reality checks after their arrivals. However, although Syrian refugees were economically satisfied and happy in Germany, they were in a very disappointed and unsatisfied state due to the fact that they were not able to live as they imagined, the challenges they faced, and the different cultural values and societies. In other words, Syrian refugees neglected to question whether, when they reach Germany, they could live and experience the life that appeared in their digital habitus in the forms of media representations and images they saw. Even if these representations and images about Germany are correct, there is an uneasiness, dissatisfaction and disappointment caused by the inability to have this lifestyle and social relations.

#### **5.4.2) Media Usage of Syrian Arabs in Berlin: “I deleted my old social media accounts, opened new accounts!”**

Media and internet usage of Syrian refugees in Germany has crucial importance for contemplating the presented sections on media and on the internet usage in the Turkey and Greece chapters. The concept of content often highlighted in the digital habitus discussions and this content as having an impressive and shaping effect on

refugees' perceptions can be endorsed with the content that Syrian refugees who arrived in Germany have reproduced and created. Most participants in Berlin expressed the following: *'We are happy and comfortable to be in Germany'*. These statements were not the statements of Syrian refugees either in Turkey or Greece particularly to indicate how they feel to be in these countries. In other words, the statements, views, online posts, which a refugee in Germany stated about being happy and comfortable can be considered as indications about the way many other Syrian refugees have formed the concept of better concerning European countries. When a Syrian refugee in Germany expresses his happiness and comfort with positive connotations and content in his posts about himself and his life, this content potentially becomes an object of desire, a pull factor, or perceptions in the concept of better for other refugees who are not satisfied or happy in the places where they live. Therefore, it is more important to focus on media contents rather than media usage in the field case of Germany.

In the internet usage and media relations of Syrian Arab participants in Berlin, I recognised there were two main tendencies in general: First, there are those refugees who were engaged with less internet and who have considerably decreased social media, communication, and internet usage in order to integrate and adapt to more social life. The second is the refugees who, after coming to Germany and settling in, continued their intensive and regular interaction in social media and internet usage especially due to the interest that was shown in their social media content through positive feedback (see Ghaisani et al. 2017) from Syrian refugees in other countries. In this sense, the daily social media and internet usage of the participants who met the first criterion was around 3 hours a day. They stated that they usually spent time on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. These refugees peculiarly stated that their internet and social media use was reasonably high within the time period of migration from Turkey to Germany. They stated that the reason for the decline of these uses in Germany is that they do not need to be in touch anymore, learn something new, communicate with someone else in this regard. On the other hand, other refugees, whose internet usage was over 4-5 hours a day, stated that they continue their intense internet usage due to the interests, communication and demands of other refugees. As an internet user,

those refugees mentioned that the main reason for their intense use of social media was due to other refugees' direct engagements such as direct messages, questions, calls or indirect engagements with their social media posts through likes, retweets, or comments. The words of the interviewees below help us understand both tendencies.

*"... Soon after I came to Berlin, when I posted a photo on Facebook or Instagram, I realized that more people comment and like it than before. I like it too, so I shared more photos than before. There were also people who asked questions, and I shared information with them. Now I have more than 4000 followers on Instagram, mostly Syrians..."* [Interview 37, 25 years old, male, single, 31.03.2019]

*"... I've had over 2000 friends on Facebook. Honestly, I didn't know maybe 90% of them. Most of them were other refugees who I met in this or that country, heard from someone, I was only friends with to get information while migrating here. When I got here, I didn't want to use social media anymore. I didn't need any more. That's why I deleted my old social media accounts, opened new ones, just to stay in touch with my family and close friends..."* [Interview 52, 33 years old, single, bachelor's degree, 21.04.2019]

These two interviewees clarify two main different approaches of Syrian Arab refugees' engagement with social media and the internet in general. In addition to these stated reasons, as far as I observed during the times I visited refugee centres, the spatial limitations of the refugee camps, future uncertainty and lack of integration in social life in Turkey and Greece made Syrian refugees spend more time on the internet. This was not the case for the Syrian Arab refugees in Germany. The reason for this is that the refugee centres were not restrictive and located in the city, social activities and language education places were outside the refugee centres, therefore, Syrian Arab interviewees were more involved in social life. Therefore, the time they spent on the internet was getting less. In addition, other factors such as the average age of social media users and the usage trends of different generations should be taken into account (Duggan and Brenner, 2013; Perrin, 2015). In other words, the social media and internet usage of young interviewees, below 30 years old, was noticed to be obviously more, especially when compared to interviewees over 40 years old.



### **5.4.3) Expansion of Digital Habitus and Exploring Digital Content: “After years I feel like I am breathing!”**

The fieldwork in Turkey and Greece demonstrated that Syrian refugees have very affirmative images and ideas about the West, principally using terms like *‘better life, better conditions, better economy, better state services, better education’*, though, rarely giving details of these *‘better’* standards. The concept of better regarding Europe, as a common expression of interviewees in all fieldwork fields, finds a response in the identity, lifestyle or countries represented by especially the images and other content forms represented by media means. That is why Baudrillard’s formulation that signs and symbols as substitutions of the reality as Simulation, can be understood through the comparison of the images in the perception of refugees who migrated to Germany with the life they actually experienced. In addition, even if s/he is a refugee living in Germany, the information s/he produced and shared about Germany with her/his own camera, phone and social media images can become content to simulate the better for another refugee.

To better comprehend this argument and obtain data, I conducted an ethnography about the way interviewees use their social media accounts, what they share, and who comments or interacts. All Syrian Arab interviewees had at least two different social media accounts. I paid more attention to the common Facebook and Instagram platforms. The notes I got from my observations are as follows: Each interviewee was actively using these social media accounts for at least one hour daily. They were actively sharing content such as photos, articles, videos, and news links. We can classify these contents into two basic categories. These were visual content such as photographs and videos about their own lives, and especially content related to Syria in other forms of content such as reports or news links.

If I elaborate on the first of these categories of content, namely visual content about their lives: this content, which I encoded as positive content, was a pull factor for other refugees who were considering migrating to Germany, and these contents included daily life images they shared about their lives, which could potentially become a desire in the perceptions of others. For example, these were images of their personal lives, such as selfies while eating, or sitting in the park, using the city

image as a background, as well as images depicting the city structure and architecture, such as buildings, streets, parks. Although the basic indicators that allow these images to be perceived positively are in the form of images, the presentation of the images can be very decisive as well. For example, the posts that two different interviewees wrote to the photos they shared on Facebook were:

*“After years I feel like I’m breathing ...”*

*“I remembered what it means to live like a human. May God help our people that remained behind, to help them to see the light of day.”*

*“My car which I bought with my monthly salary!”<sup>61</sup>*

Notably, the content that provided positive indicators, such as these posts described above, were the most commented and liked posts of the users. Most of the comments or likes were made by Syrians. As far as the interviewees clarified, the posts were liked or commented on by refugees living in other countries instead of refugees in Germany. In relation to these observations, the answers they gave to the questions I asked the interviewees indicated below demonstrate the potency of this content:

*‘Do you know many people who want to come to Germany? What do you say when they ask you your opinion on this matter?’*

*“I think if the borders are open, all other Syrians will come here. Because they are not happy where they stay. Although we are not very happy either, we left our home, our country... For example, when I post something on Facebook, they send me messages and ask me something. Then I usually advise them to come here, life is better here.”* [Interview 38, 43 years old, Berlin, 02.04.2019]

*“Yes, my many friends and relatives want to come. They ask me how much money I spent the most until I got here, which ways I came from... They don’t ask me anything about specifically here because they know life here better than me. I know this from myself because I read, watched and saw a lot of things on the internet until I was able to arrive here. Everyone is sharing something, after all. Now I share, hundreds and thousands of people see.”* [Interview 40, 24 years old, single, male, Berlin, 04.04.2019]

The points highlighted by these two interviewees are the comments and interactions made by other refugees regarding their internet shares. At the same time, when I asked to whichever of the interviewees the question *“Do you know many people who*

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<sup>61</sup> All the posts of the interviewees were in Arabic. These posts were translated into English by the interpreter.

*want to come to Germany?”*, all interviewees mentioned that they have relatives, friends, or family members that want to come.

Besides these, another of my ethnographic observations was as follow: In all field research countries, all interviewees were encouraged to use social media and other digital platforms such as emails, by government officials, institutions such as NGOs and UNCHR, especially for being updated about announcements made by them. For example, the interviewees staying in KTPC in Turkey stated that the Turkish officials advised them to use social media platforms to be aware of any announcements, aid, support, and also to perform any transactions or official applications through e-government<sup>62</sup> database channels, websites, applications. It was also stated that every refugee who arrives in Germany is asked about their emails, phone numbers, whether they have social media accounts, and they are asked to open an email account. It is recommended to use digital platforms over the internet, such as the bank accounts given to them or in order to be able to follow an official application made.

When linking these observations and notes to the digital habitus discussion, refugees who previously had limited relations with the internet and media tools have also started to develop these mandatory digital relationships that are advised to them by the officials. Although digital habitus is a part of life mostly through individual participation and interests, internet-based services of states or institutions also increase the scope and formation of digital habitus in individuals' lives. Rather than being an encouragement and suggestion that only advises internet usage, this situation has also enabled digital habitus to associate and develop with different platforms and channels instead of only engaging with social media platforms or communication channels.

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<sup>62</sup>E-government (e-devlet) implies the provision of services provided to citizens by the state in the electronic setting.

#### **5.4.4) Subjectivity Discussion through Capital Forms and Differing Cultural Capital Roles: “*I am a lawyer but now I work as a waitress!*”**

This section presents the economic, social, and cultural capital of Syrian Arab refugees in Berlin as a continuation of the subjectivity discussions that I have discussed in the Turkey and Greece chapters. To briefly recall, while Syrian Arab refugees staying in KTPC in Turkey were economically poor, poorly educated, and culturally less capitalized, the fieldwork in the Sounio camp in Greece displayed that the economic, social, and cultural capital of Syrian Arab were refugees relatively better. However, the field study findings generated and obtained in Berlin with Syrian Arab refugees did not depict an overall profile as in Turkey and Greece. It rather drew a profile that interviewees’ capital was diverse in all forms in Berlin.

To give basic background information about the demographics of the interviewees: I conducted face-to-face interviews with 8 Syrian Arab refugees in total. There were 4 female and 4 male interviewees, which consisted of 2 single refugees, 2 widows, and 4 married refugees with 1 to 5 children. Their educational status was as follows: 2 secondary and 3 high schools graduates and 3 bachelor’s degrees. To describe their economic conditions, there were interviewees of varying backgrounds. Some stated, for instance that they were very poor or that they were very rich and owned a market chain in Syria. The main reason for this is that hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees migrated in large masses in a very short time, especially in the period of 2014-15. One of the common features that can be found in mass migrations is that it consists of individuals from widely different backgrounds (White, 2016). In this case, the cross-border or international migration I have presented earlier as a costly movement becomes an exception or this argument is more applicable to the smaller scale, individual immigration or mass migration movements consisting of the same ethnic, national groups.

Based on my observations of Syrian Arab interviewees with these demographic features and capitals, I can draw the following inferences: There were two different attributes among the interviewees. The first one was more widespread among the interviewees who stated that they were economically from lower and middle class, with poorer cultural capital, that is, their education was lower. With this capital, they

were a social group of Syrian refugees who were very happy with the economic benefits that the government was providing them and were happy to work and earn more money on whatever jobs they found [e.g., cleaner, waitress, delivery]. This social group had a common peculiarity in that they were faster to adapt and integrate, complained less, and aimed at increasing their economic incomes. The statements emphasized by the following interviewees support this observation and inference:

*“... It has been about 7 years since we were displaced from our home and country. We were in Turkey for years and then a long time spent on the road. God bless, we are better here. We have an income. Usually, those who have a job here are not hungry, they have enough money for a living... Hopefully, soon we'll get out of here [centre] and find a house and settle down better...”* [Interview 38, 43 years old, construction worker, Berlin, 02.04.2019]

*“... It is not easy to take care of my 3 children alone, but still, thank be to God, we can meet our needs. I go to house cleaning 3-days a week. The state also has a pension for me and my children. When the children grow up a little bit more, hopefully, we will find an apartment and our conditions will improve...”* [Interview 42, 28 years old, Widow, High school, 06.04.2019]

The education, economic and social status of both interviewees [one was a seasonal worker, and the other was a housewife in Syria] were lower compared to the other interviewees. Despite this, both interviewees stated that they were satisfied with their situation, the money they earned was sufficient, and they would not have any problems if they left the refugee centre and settled in a house. As their words show, they were more hopeful, grateful, and positive about the future. These interviewees' economic capital forms were more proportional to their correlations of satisfaction, adaptation, and integration when considering the other social group.

The other social group of Syrian Arab interviewees had more capital, particularly in social and cultural forms. That is, they were more prioritizing going to college, continuing to practice their profession, getting the qualifications' equivalence certificates, in order to build their own future. However, refugee policies, integration and reception programs in Germany were much more challenging, especially for refugees with these characters and priorities. For instance, they had to get high scores in German language exams to go to university or continue. Obtaining the equivalence certificates of their qualifications required them to go through long-term processes such as bureaucracy, paperwork, work permits. Therefore, their

adaptation, integration and relatedly satisfaction and happiness were also very difficult and worrying, especially for refugees with high social and cultural capital.

The statements of interviewees quoted below, both of whom have a bachelor's degree, one is single and the other is widow, support these arguments.

*"... I obtained an economy degree in Turkey. I came here 2 years ago. Then I realized my diplomas, work experience, certificates, qualifications have no value and benefit here... They [means the state] say that if you want to study, you can go to university free of charge, but I have to pass language exams and other exams. I have been going to a German course for two years, but I still have not passed the exams they wanted... I understood that they do not want qualified refugees here, they want refugees to do more simple work and daily work and they have better jobs for themselves. How can I integrate if I cannot do my own profession?"* [Interview 43, 26 years old, delivery worker, Berlin, 07.04.2019]

*"... Life and adaptation here are very good and comfortable, especially for refugees who are poor, uneducated and doing whatever jobs. Because these people were already living and working in difficult conditions. Here at least they earn money when they work, the conditions are better. But there are also refugees like me on the other side of the coin. I am a lawyer but now I work as a waitress. Our economy was good in Syria, but now I am staying here in the refugee centre... I understood that if I want to work as a lawyer here, I have to go to university again. That is, starting over everything from zero! Then they ask me if I adapt here..."* [Interview 46, 31 years old, mother of one, Berlin, 12.04.2019]

The points that the two interviewees jointly emphasize is that the integration and adaptation processes are difficult and long for refugees with good social and cultural backgrounds. Another point is that the obstacles to qualified and educated refugees practicing their own profession reduce socio-cultural capital to the same level as other refugees who have fewer qualifications and less capital. If we compare the statements of these two different social groups of Syrian Arab refugees, we can reach the following conclusion: Social and cultural capital can be considered as a criterion for the integration and adaptation process among refugees in Germany. While refugees with low cultural capital started to work in different jobs and integrate with social life faster, for those refugees who want to continue their education and practice their own profession the integration period takes longer. Therefore, uneasiness, complaints and disappointments arise due to the long integration process.

Another noteworthy finding in economic terms is that interviewees stated that they had the support of their families before; however, the support of families was cut

after reaching Germany. They stated that the reason for this was that their families thought they could live with the minimum financial support provided by the German state and left them alone. In addition, the financial support provided by the German state is not sufficient for refugees to rent a house and live. Therefore, the refugees staying in the refugee centres were in a way forced to stay in the centre until they obtained a work permit and found a job and earned their own income in order to move out and rent an apartment for themselves. In other words, refugees from the middle or upper classes in their own societies were dependent on state support in Germany. So to speak, they were forced to stay in the centre and eventually turned into members of the lower-class.

If we consider these arguments within the scope of the subjectivity debate: The readers can interpret that the capital forms that I discussed in the context of Bourdieu's concepts and that the arguments of enabled or empowered subjectivity, are deconstructed in the case of socio-culturally qualified Syrian refugees due to bureaucracy, documentation, and legal restrictions in Germany. In other words, the difficulties, legal obligations, and exams faced by refugees with higher education levels and stronger social capital disempower them.

According to the statistics, 80% of Syrian refugees arriving in Germany have their education level below the bachelor's degree; and around one-third of the 1 million migrants and refugees who arrived in Germany as of 2015 were under the age of 25<sup>63</sup>. According to the statistics of the Institute for Employment Research, refugee unemployment (including Syrian) has dropped abruptly from 50.5% to 40.5% in mid-2018<sup>64</sup>. Within the scope of these two basic statistical data, the interviews, and ethnography, I can argue that the inclusion of the refugee individual in the economic life occurs in the professions that do not require qualifications and high cultural capital, so to speak, those requiring body forces. To paraphrase this, Syrian refugees who are young and have low educational status correspond to the workforce sought for such jobs. However, for refugees with more educational, cultural, and social capital, migrating to Germany and making their own professions is more difficult and

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<sup>63</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/> last accessed on 31.05.2021

<sup>64</sup> <https://borgenproject.org/syrian-refugees-living-conditions-in-germany/> last accessed on 31.05.2021

complex. In this sense, we can argue that while the refugee policies of the German government economically encourage and support Syrian refugees, that is, empowering subjectivity in economic terms, at the same time, it disempowers refugees with strong and high social and cultural capital.

However, considering these statistics and the integration and refugee policies of the German government, that compel refugees with strong social and cultural capital, it can be argued that this is a pre-considered and planned system. In this case, it justifies the interviewee who expressed the above statement: *“I understood that they do not want qualified refugees here, they want refugees to do more simple work and daily work and they have better jobs for themselves!”* Since generalizing this interviewee’s words would be a oversimplify, it would be more accurate to make the following inferences. The long-standing bureaucracy, documents, equivalence of degrees and qualifications, and compulsory language training processes of the German government have created a great deal of frustration for refugees. Because the statuses, education degrees, qualifications, and experiences refugees have already built are not reciprocated and recognised, forcing them to start living almost from scratch, that is another reason for such frustrations.

In the next section, I present the gender transformation and subjectivity discussion within the scope of Syrian female Arab participants.

#### **5.4.5) Gender Transformation and Empowerment of Syrian Arab Women in Berlin: *“Now I am both a mother and a father...”***

Three of the four key focal points of fieldwork, which are Syrian refugees’ perceptions about others, their internet and media use, and capital forms in relation to their subjectivities, have been presented in accordance with three field countries. As the fourth subject of the research, I explicated the Syrian female refugees’ gender transformation and empowerments in relation to the subjectivity discussions in the Turkey and Greece chapters. In this section, I discuss the gender transformation and change of Syrian Arab women refugees in the context of their experiences after their arrival in Germany. In doing so, I provide analysis based on mainly field observations and findings. The first one was the transformation and empowerment generated by



a decrease in the collective community/group pressure and strengthening individuality that I examined in the Greece fieldwork chapter. Another one is the *'enhanced gender awareness, their visibility in public, taking roles and responsibilities'*, which were strengthened by women-focused educational, and social events for legal support.

A total of 4 interviews was conducted with Syrian Arab female refugees in Berlin. The average age of these interviewees was 26. Two of the interviewees were single, the other two were widows, one of which had 1 child while the other had 3 children. Two interviewees were high school graduates and the other two had bachelor's degrees. The main common feature of the female refugees with these demographic characteristics was that they were all alone. In other words, they had to deal with and struggle with all their responsibilities and needs in life by themselves without their husbands and other family members especially after arriving in Germany. My basic understanding of this change is that it is more about re-regulated power dynamics in the social living of these refugees, especially when compared to previous field research places. From social relations that started to dissolve, and segregate emerged individual responsibilities and these new power dynamics. This refers to the subject of changes and transformations that strengthen subjectivity, such as public visibility and taking responsibility that occurs with these power dynamics. The words of the two interviewees below, who shared their experiences and encounters as women after their arrival in Germany, help us to understand the arguments I have stated above.

*"... Among the experiences I have lived here, the most challenging but empowering part is the economic support provided by the state for me and my children. The difficult part is about to get by with this money, to pay attention to our expenses, to save to make our future. These are very difficult things for me because my husband always took responsibility and dealt with before, but now I am both a mother and a father... But dealing with these difficulties makes me stronger at the same time. I feel stronger when I go out, when I go to work, when talking to other people..."* [Interview 42, 28 years old, mother of 3, house cleaner, Berlin, 06.04.2019]

*"...Until arriving in Germany, I was with my family [in Turkey and Greece]. My father and brother decided and did everything in the family. In Greece, when my brothers got arrested and deported back to Turkey, I had to fight against life by myself, and at that time I had to take real responsibilities... Now here, I work and study and take care of my family [sends*

money to her family]. *My mom always warns me to be careful about men, she means not to become fully a European woman... I am standing on my feet and taking care of myself. Also, seeing and studying with women here taught me a lot about myself.*" [Interview 43, 23 years old, waitress, studying bachelor's, Berlin, 07.04.2019]

Both interviewees touched on common points through a comparison of their current and previous experiences. The responsibility that they needed to take both economically and socially, standing and struggling alone, their migration and work experiences all reflected a very positive transformation and empowerment regarding gender identity. Especially the empowerment and self-confidence that the responsibilities and experiences brought about by the economic income that the two interviewees underlined – either work or state aid – is remarkable. The fact that both interviewees realise the roles of men in their lives – as a husband, father, or brother – and emphasize being alone in their lives in Germany, and taking responsibilities attributed to men in social terms are decisive for these empowerments. In addition to the roles played by the economy as an empowering dynamic in the lives of the interviewees, the freedom, autonomy, social interactions, encounters and experiences it provides have been very effective and socially illuminating. The words of the interviewees below explain how they make inferences that strengthen their subjectivities when they compare their gender and social values with roles which they experience in social life.

*"When I see all the German women around us, how they dress, how they talk, how they are self-confident and comfortable, my self-confidence increases. Because in our society, actually women constantly empathize with each other, try to understand and support each other. Realizing that women are strong here also gives me strength. If they can work, I can work too. If they can walk home alone at night, I can too."* [Interview 46, 31 years old, mother of 1, Bachelor's in law, Berlin, 12.04.2019]

*"One evening when I was returning to camp, three young men were standing in the corner on my way. They said something while passing by them, I didn't understand very much. When I walked, they kept talking behind me, I was scared, of course, I could not say anything. I am familiar with such things; I encountered many times in Syria and Turkey. But a woman who was walking towards me saw the situation and the fear on my face. She yelled at all the men in such a way that they had to leave before they could say anything... After that day I feel stronger. It didn't happen to me later anything similar but even if I experience it again, I am not afraid as before."* [Interview 50, 22 years old, single, high school, 19.04.2019]

My analysis of the words of these interviewees as follows: Subjectivity with empowered gender perception is more concerning refugee women's learning about gender roles by experiencing them in social life, witnessing, and starting to change or transform conservative or traditional gender norms. The interactions, observations, and representation of other women in the social lives of refugee women play a very important role in this change and transformation. In addition, all interviewees emphasized the seminars, events, and their increased gender awareness through legal and social support. This training, awareness-raising and legal backup, run by the German state or non-governmental organizations, have found a positive response in the lives of the interviewees, particularly in social and economic terms. Therefore, I observed that the continuation of these pro-gender activities that refugee women participated in in the Sounio camp in Greece had an impact on refugee women's gender awareness and empowerment. At the same time, the decreasing social pressure, collective whole and increasing individualization processes also played a role in strengthening the subjectivity of women refugees. In the next section, the Syrian Kurdish refugees in Berlin will be presented.

## **5.5) Enhanced Socio-Political Community Identity: Syrian Kurdish Refugees in Berlin**

### **5.5.1) Syrian Kurds' Perceptions about the West and Germany: *Dengê defê ji dûr ve xweş e!***

Being a refugee is not just about being able to move to another safe country and live-in security. Refugee as an identity and status presents the main difficulties in integration and adaptation to the system, and there are barriers and expectations that are difficult to anticipate since they are not experienced yet. After the Syrian refugees reached Germany, the security and minimum financial conditions provided by the state met the basic needs in the process of adaptation into life. However, although they have already obtained security and a certain status in a second country, Syrian refugees, still who migrated to another country for better conditions and the expectations and desires to be realized, were not satisfied with just the security and financial assistance provided to them. Therefore, Germany is the phase in this research where the perception of Syrian refugees reveals its foundations and formation process thanks to their expectations and realised experiences.

Like the Syrian Arab interviewees, Syrian Kurdish interviewees in Berlin also indicated their positive opinions and realised experiences after arriving and settling in Germany as well as the disappointments and unrealised dreams and expectations. As the Syrian Arab refugees emphasized, so too Syrian Kurdish interviewees stated that they have sustainable and minimum welfare living standards, especially due to the economic support and social services of the German state. In addition, they stated that Germany has a developed infrastructure and modern development level, and Germany has strong and satisfying economic standards, and having these conditions makes them satisfied and happy. However, the *gleaming and attractive lifestyle* appearing on the digital devices' screens of refugees that becomes the desire and motivation to migrate to Germany is a life that is difficult to reach and realize and is a complex and unfamiliar life to refugees. The main reason for this, as I discussed and argued in the Syrian Arab case, is the difference in cultural and societal life that causes conflicts and uneasiness when it comes to performing and being part of it.

Another reason that causes these conflicts and uneasiness is the long and difficult process of providing refugee documents and rights that can make it easier for refugees to become part of life bureaucratically and functionally. However, almost all Syrian Kurdish interviewees stated that they had no prior knowledge that this process would be so difficult, complex, and long. This situation is also related to the lack of content that affects the perceptions of Syrian refugees in their digital habitus which portrays more dominantly positive and attractive aspects of life. The two young Kurdish interviewees' words that I quoted below avail to understand this argument better:

*“Before coming here, I thought as if everything will improve at once when I get to Germany. Then, I thought I will be able to reach the life and the conditions I had in mind. You know, we have a phrase like, ‘Dengê defê ji dûr ve xweş e’ [equivalent to the idiom in English: the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence]. Therefore, for 3 years, I still have not met the required full criteria for properly continuing to university. No one had told me that this process would take that long. It is obvious that I have not researched in detail either.”* [Interview 41, 21 years old, single, male, Berlin, 04.04.2019]

*“I had met the comrades here on social media before I came, I asked them about many things. For some reason, nobody gave me very detailed information. When I arrived, I had to learn everything from the very beginning by experiencing it on my own, I guess this is my best method, right? Whereas in Germany I thought that I would visit historical places, go camping, have fun, travel because I saw and heard it that way. So, there are those who do what I want to do, Germans for instance. But they are not refugees, I am not German either. I could not think if I could do these things that I wanted to do, I thought as if getting up here would be enough for everything to be fine. Dreams and realities...”* [Interview 50, 21 years old, female, bachelor's student, Berlin, 19.04.2019]

The main points that the readers need to analyse in the words of these interviewees are that what they imagined and thought before coming to Germany and what they experienced after coming to Germany do not correspond with each other. Both interviewees state that they thought that it would be enough just to succeed in migrating to Germany, for realising and reaching the ideas and plans they desired and imagined. However, they associated their inability to realize these dreams or plans with the long duration of processes such as integration, language education, documentation, which we can basically call external causes. In addition, the two interviewees emphasized that they had friends, comrades, and families with whom they communicated via social media or the internet before coming to Germany. Like

these two interviewees, many other interviewees stated that the people they knew before they arrived in Germany did not give them sufficient or accurate. The images and information about others they encounter or the shared, provided information and images to them by others in their digital habitus have been the determinant in the perceptions of these interviewees regarding the images and information. In the case of Syrian refugee interviewees, it can be argued that the formation and foundations of perception about the other take place in this way. To exemplify the potential others in the frame of context, Germany as a country, life in European countries, lifestyle or socialisation of these societies can be counted as others. In addition to these causes for the disappointment or dissatisfaction, refugees' positionality, subjectivity and actions are also decisive. The words of the interviewees below, which can be interpreted as self-criticism, explain better their inexperience and passivity during this process of integration and living in Germany.

*“For me, the main reason why I have difficulty adapting here is the endless process of being a refugee. But of course, I also have shortcomings, for example, I did not know what to do and how. More importantly, I could not be sure what I wanted to do, what I liked, what I wanted to deal with... When I came here, the state took care of me, thought about everything, guided me so that whenever someone did not tell me to do this, I didn't know what to do. I felt like a child.”* [Interview 45, 33 years old, female, single, director, 10.04.2019]

*“... For years I fought for my people. I didn't turn to myself one day to wonder what I personally wanted because there were always people I ran and fought to help them. Then I came here and this time the state took care of me, gave me money, taught the language, gave me accommodation, gave me seminars, even clothes, food... I mean, I found myself here in a life where others take care of me, and I do not have to do anything or to be active. Then they asked me, now you can do whatever you want to do as an individual. But I realized that as an individual I did not know who I was because I learned better who my society was.”* [Interview 48, 28 years old, single, male, 15.04.2019]

As one Syrian Arab interviewee emphasized, these interviewees particularly used the metaphor of *'feeling like a child or being treated as a child'*. The situation with which they associated these metaphors is that they do not actively engage with life practices rather become more passive. Also, the German state's support and assistance, which can be hyper-attentive and redundant, seem to trigger passivity for refugees. Thus, we can state that while the German state responds to the needs of refugees, guides them, acts sensitively, at the same time, these engagements and treatments cause Syrian refugees to weaken their agencies as individuals. As I

will reconsider in the subjectivity discussions, in the case of Syrian refugee participants, dynamic engagement or effective activism is the act of the refugee individual in line with his own wishes and thoughts, but more than adequate attention, services, assistances or over-control can trigger unexpected negative consequences. The individual and collective societal characters and cultures which I have detailed and discussed in the Syrian Arab interviewees' sections regarding the conflicts, dissatisfaction, and disappointments they expressed, should also be addressed in the case of Syrian Kurdish refugees in Germany.

The last interviewee's words I mentioned above pointed out that *collective group belongingness* as a societal character and cultural way of living is also valid as a political struggle. "*I didn't turn to myself one day to wonder what I personally wanted because there were always people I ran and fought to help them*", this statement can be interpreted as an external cause that can override the individuality and interests of the Kurdish individual who is involved in a collective struggle. This Syrian Kurdish individual exemplifies the argument for individuality vs collective societal conflict when he is left alone in a country such as Germany where individuality, individual responsibility, freedom, and the liberal lifestyle predominate. Regarding this argument, I argue that as an alternative subject of research and a hypothesis that should be investigated: In the conflict that emerges in the confrontation of individual and collective cultural norms and lifestyles as well as the inability to participate in social relations, if there is a diaspora formed earlier in the place where the refugees go, these newcomer refugees are likely to be involved in these diasporic relationships. To verify that, all Syrian Kurdish interviewees were aware that there was a large Kurdish diaspora existing in Berlin. All interviewees stated that they are engaged in this diaspora and are involved in demonstrations, protests, solidarity, and cooperation that take place from time to time. Kurdish political and armed movements and entities, such as PKK, were especially discussed in the context of my research in the Lavrion camp, I also noticed its unifying and formative effect among Syrian Kurdish refugees and the Kurdish diaspora living in Berlin.

In the next section, I discuss my ethnographic observations and interviews on the internet and the social media use of Syrian Kurdish interviewees.

### **5.5.2) Solidarity and Imagined Community among Kurds: “I am a Syrian on the paper, but Kurdish in daily life.”**

As the largest nation with no proper state of their own as an independent in the world (King, 2013), the importance of Syrian Kurds and their political unity and identity have been stressed through the progress of their migration route in Turkey and Greece. In contrast, Syrian Arab refugees did not reflect and present such political association among themselves by relying on their ethnic background. The solidarity, cooperation and imagined community that Syrian Kurdish refugees established with Kurdish people from other countries were discussed in the previous sections. In addition to the previous discussions, it is necessary to express, in particular, that the legal recognition of refugees, the processes of registration in host countries, generally speaking, is evaluated by the status of the country from which they come as a national identity and recognition rather than by the refugees' ethnic, religious or gender backgrounds. In short, even though there were many varied and separated opinions and positionalities amongst Syrian Arabs and Kurds, due to legal obligations and documentations, they are all classified only by their nation, that is, as Syrians. Nonetheless, I did not observe any complaints from Syrian Arab or other ethnic origins, such as Turkman, Druze, or refugees, about being Syrian. However, this was an obvious political and social issue among Syrian Kurdish refugees. To put it more simply, the Syrian Kurdish interviewees preferred to present themselves as Kurdish rather than Syrian. Despite this, they were still officially registered as Syrians.

During the fieldwork in Turkey and Greece, this fact was discussed and detailed, and in Germany, it was once again verified. On the documents and paperwork made by the German authorities, both Syrian Arabs and Kurds were recognized as Syrians, with no attention paid to ethnic nuances. Despite this, Syrian Kurdish refugees in their daily lives strongly distinguished themselves by clarifying their ethnicity or identity that *'we are not Syrian by meaning not Arab'*. On the contrary, for Syrian Arabs, there was no single specific clarification by any of the interviewees regarding their ethnic background, but just saying that *'we are from Syria'* or *'we are Syrians'*. However, when Syrian Kurds left Syria and then Turkey, the main and strongest



identity of Syrian Kurds became only Kurdish. Especially in Turkey, the interviewees were hesitant to express this for political reasons.

The togetherness of Kurdish refugees and the solidarity argument, which I discussed in the previous chapters both within the framework of the imagined community concept and within the scope of ideological doctrines in the Lavrion camp, also appeared in Berlin. The definition of Kurdish refugees not on their ethnic identity but on the basis of the national, i.e., the dominant identity of the countries from which they came, has turned into a legal instrument that is strategically used by Kurdish refugees. Thus, Kurds from different countries used the non-recognition of their ethnic background and being recognized as Syrian, Iraqi, Irani or Turkish, to request to stay together with other Kurds from different countries. This was the case I encountered in one of the protection centres, namely in the Tempelhof-Schöneberg refugee centre where in one room, 3 Kurdish refugees cohabited the same place. They were all Kurds though one was from Syria, and the others were from Iraq and Iran. The following words of interviewee indicate the gap in the policy of the German government and show the solidarity and togetherness in the identity of Kurds amongst each other.

*“... I have been here [Germany] for more than 3 years and I am still staying in the camps because there is a real issue in finding an apartment in Berlin to move out into. But here, I am happy that I am staying with my people [means Kurdish people]. You know, the administration here pay extra attention to which countries we are coming from, and they do not want to put us together with others from the same country. This is because they want to make us speak the German as the common language between all migrants. But on the system, I am Syrian, my friends [in the room] are from Iraq and Iran. If they don't recognize us the way we see ourselves, we can play their game against them [smiles].” [Interview 40, 24 years old, single, male, Berlin, 04.04.2019]*

In the words of this interviewee, the main point that the reader should pay attention to is the imagined community sense established by the Kurdish people among themselves and the effort they make that serve for the political and social community identity. Furthermore, as far as I observed, Syrian Kurdish and Arabs were usually not socializing together, the language which Syrian Kurdish refugees were speaking among each other was Kurdish. They specially paid attention to not speak Arabic. They stated that this is a political attitude to pay respect and attention to their mother

tongue since they are not obliged to speak the national language of the countries they came from. More importantly, this research presents to readers the argument that the solidarity that Syrian Arabs and Kurds experienced in Turkey and Greece, by sharing the same identity as refugees, seemingly ceased to exist on their arrival Germany. Also, one of the other observations that indicate the political togetherness of Kurdish refugees was that in the room where the interview took place with this interviewee mentioned above, there was only one flag representing the Kurdish political movement. When I asked about the flag, the following answer was given:

*“This flag is our flag to be united around. I never accepted the Syrian flag as mine and never felt it represents me. It’s the same reason for my comrades, they said the same thing for the Iraqi and Iranian flags... I am a Syrian on the paper, but Kurdish in daily life”* [Interview 40, Berlin, 04.04.2019]

Many answers given by Syrian Kurdish people throughout the fieldwork sites were political and emphasized the political identity of Kurds by, for instance, only speaking Kurdish amongst each other, explaining that they were not Arab but Kurdish. However, Syrian Arabs did not refer to their ethnic background, the importance of their language, or social cooperation with other Arabs from different countries. These distinctions show that the social and political identity and construction of Kurds were relatively different from the construction of Syrian Arabs.

In the next section, I discuss the media and internet use of Syrian Kurdish refugees in Berlin within the framework of digital habitus, especially in a comparison between the dreams they want to realize after arriving in Germany and the realities they experience.

### **5.5.3) The Moment of Truth, Imagination vs Realities: “It was just the heaven I created and wanted to believe!”**

The conceptualization of *simulation* and *simulacra* [as the plural version of *simulacrum*] has been discussed in previous chapters. What I mean by these theoretical concepts becomes better understood in the discussion presented in the Germany sections. To recall the words of Baudrillard (1998; 4): *“Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal... It is no longer a question of*

*imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real”.*

Both satisfied expectations and disappointments discussed in the Syrian Arab interviewees, here in relation to media discussions can be thought of within the framework of the simulation concept. The perceptions and expectations of Syrian refugees about a place, culture and country [Germany in this case] that they have never visited and experienced before shaped and formed especially through media representations, and the disappointing realities they experienced after arriving in Germany can be evaluated as an example for the simulation which substituted reality.

Although most of the Kurdish refugees interviewed within the scope of this research had a critical view for the concepts of the West or Europe, they ultimately pointed to European countries as the place they wanted to go and settle in. Nevertheless, the development and evolution of the thinking expressed by the Syrian Kurdish interviewees in Berlin about Germany provide a basis for an up-to-date discussion of the simulation debate. After their arrival, they encountered the reality in and of Germany, which can be considered as the verification of the created simulation through the models, representations, substitutions, and signs that shaped the perception about the reality in their minds. Most Kurdish interviewees particularly indicated that the picture and perception they had in their mind regarding Germany was rather their own imagined reality mainly based on the media representations. They also specified as a self-critique that this imagined reality at the end did not match with the experience they have been going through in Germany. On a practical scale, what this argument refers to can be interpreted better with the following words of interviewee.

*“I had a kind of depression when I was in Lavrion. I tried 7 times to pass to Italy, Germany or France; 7 times! Once I asked myself, what is the purpose of these efforts; why don't I just stay in Greece or just give up? I could not answer this question... Do you know the concept of heaven? In heaven concept, there are no negative things about it, at all. So, when you are on the way to heaven, you forget everything and focus on only your time in heaven... But when I arrived the heaven, I realized it was not heaven at all, it was just the heaven I created and wanted to believe. Otherwise, how could I spend almost 2 years on the way to reach here?” [Interview 45, 33 years old, single, female, Berlin, 10.04.2019]*

If we analyse the expressions of this interviewee with the concept of simulation, the statement that *“it was just the heaven I created and wanted to believe”*, is noteworthy. This statement expresses: Individual or mass subjectivity in relation to the simulation is to create an unreal image, a thought, a place, and insisting on a migration that can take years in order to realise this created image. The elements and nourishment of this created image, as emphasized many times, are formed with what media devices and content manifest. That is, it is to subjectively deconstruct what the media representations and images point to and create the simulation that you want to believe.

I conducted digital ethnography with Syrian Arab interviewees to analyse the timeline of other users regarding their shares and their engagements in social media accounts. I also did this with Syrian Kurdish interviewees. As I discussed in the *Expansion of Digital Habitus and Exploring Digital Content*, section 5.4.3 on Syrian Arab interviewees, the digital ethnography on the social media content of Syrian Kurdish interviewees can also be handled in two different categories. The first commonly included personal sharing of photos, videos, posts, and content about their lives. Videos or photographs of everyday life interactions in the city (i.e., in the subway, in the park, on the street, in restaurants), selfies with the image of the city as a background, photographs from everyday life [i.e., dining, walking in the park, meeting with others] were images that were more widely shared. As I have emphasized in the Syrian Arab interviewees' sections, the vast majority of these personal images are the most commented, liked, and interacted with content. Stories and images featuring the personal life of the users who share this content have a more positive foundation due to the function and way of using social media platforms. Therefore, it is possible for readers to reach such a formulation: For example, if a Syrian refugee sharing a photo on Facebook is expressing a happy or positive expression, even though it does not directly emphasize where it is, other users can interpret it as follows: *‘This person is happy because he is in Germany!’*

The second is the sharing of political, military, and social problems that Kurdish people experienced. These posts included protest images, news content about Kurds, and images and information about actions and political activities. The notable

part here is that while Syrian Arab interviewees were mostly engaging with media content about Syria, for the Syrian Kurdish interviewees, the common subject was more about Rojava. The reader can conclude from this comparison: that the imagined community perception among Kurdish people also finds a response in the digital habitus of Kurdish refugees.

Another important point that should be stressed is that among the images and news about the countries to be migrated to for the refugees who previously stayed in the Lavrion camp, political and ideological content such as being able to protest freely and express their opinions was attractive. I had marked this content as a pull factor. In this sense, Kurdish politics and identity-focused content shared by Syrian Kurdish interviewees in Berlin from their social media accounts have a positive indicator, pull factor and desired place connotation for Syrian Kurdish refugees in Greece or other countries.

This situation, that is, social media sharing concerning Kurdishness, Kurdish identity and politics in the digital habitus of Kurdish refugees, draws an external and indirect picture of life in Germany. This picture builds a profile with freedom of speech or expression, as *'Germany is a free country'* and *'Kurdish people can act freely and openly'*. This profile of Germany, although not intentionally and purposely aimed, reconstructs the political representation of Germany, that is, its influence and representation in terms of power relations and actors. From this example, we can better understand the relationship between digital habitus and power relations.

In the next section, I discuss the Syrian Kurdish refugees' subjectivity in accordance with their capital forms.

**5.5.4) Political and Social Subjectivity Discussion with Capital Forms: “*I won't be able to cross the road from one side to other, if that voice in the traffic lights, 'now you can cross' does not instruct me.*”**

In this section, I explain the correlation of Syrian Kurdish interviewees between their capital forms and their life in Berlin by linking them with political and social subjectivity discussions. In doing so, first, I present the demographic information of the interviewees to the reader. Then, I remind the readers again of the explanations

with which I conceptualised and approached these concepts in the political and social subjectivity chapter. Then I analyse what the interviewees express by relating to these explanations.

The average age of the 8 interviewees I examined face to face was 25. I interviewed 4 women and 4 men in total. Apart from one interviewee who graduated with a secondary school degree, all the rest were bachelor's degree holders or were continuing a bachelor's program. 3 of the participants were married and had children ranging from 1 to 3, and 5 were single. Half of the interviewees stated that their economic capital was middle level, and the remaining that it was low. In the light of these demographics, the social capital of these interviewees was relatively higher than Syrian Arab interviewees due to their high education degrees, having different occupational groups [i.e., medical doctor, engineer, student, elderly care staff, sports coach, translator]. This demographic information provides a basis for the subjectivity discussion.

Sadeq Rahimi associates the political aspects with subjectivity and writes: "The notion of political subjectivity dramatically widens the scope of politicality to understand the subject itself as a political event... *Politicality*, in this sense, is not an added aspect of the subject, but indeed the mode of being of the subject, that is, precisely what the subject is" (2015; 8). Based on this definition, being a refugee as an identity and status is the foundation of politicality in subjectivity discussions. The point where this identity and status corresponds in the life of Syrian individuals is as follows: It is a matter that the social and cultural capital they have as individuals cannot be practised and performed due to the restriction of the identity entitled to them. In addition, the fact that the given refugee identity and status are legal boundaries that ignore and reduce the capital of these individuals, is another sanction of the political subjectivity of being a refugee. The statements of the two interviewees I cite below, one from a medical doctor and the other from a director, are explanatory for the political subjectivity discussion:

*"... Ever since we were forcibly displaced from our country, the most constraining and depressing issue for me when I think of is this: Think about it, after years of education, I come to a position, status and gain recognition and respect. Then I lost everything because of a war started by others, whatever the reason. I do not just mean I lost what I had*

*economically, but also my profession, status, respect and recognition... I fully understood this situation when receiving the refugee ID card that the government gave me, which determined what I could do after I came here, settled, and get organized my life. This ID card says 'you are a refugee, and you are not the former you anymore. That's why you cannot do what former you could do anymore...'"* [Interview 45, 33 years old, single, Berlin, 10.04.2019]

*"... It is really difficult to get rid of the thought of being a refugee. I am a doctor, someone who specialises in the anatomy of the human. The phenomena we define as illness are objective situations that are independent of ethnic identity, race, or religion. My profession is to develop solutions against some of these illnesses and to help people with these issues. But I am no longer a doctor, I am a refugee. Being a refugee means that everything I have acquired and owned is ignored and reduced to the same category as all other refugees."* [Interview 49, 42 years old, mother of 2, Berlin, 17.04.2019]

What the two interviewees expressed is fairly to describe the political subjectivity discussion with different words by relating it to the refugees. In other words, the interviewees point to the problem of reducing their social identities such as uniqueness, status, profession, and personal identities such as gender, age, ethnicity, and race to a certain status only after they become a refugee. The reason why I associate these expressions with political subjectivity is due to the fact that we realise ourselves through the legally and politically constructed identities in order to represent ourselves in the social relations we live in as individuals. I argue that the limitation of these individual representations by the identity and status of the refugee form a societal and social hierarchy.

This hierarchy can be explained, for example, by comparing what an individual who is a citizen of a country and an individual who is a refugee can reach, can do, and represent, that is, by their subjectivities. In other words, while a German citizen and a Syrian refugee represent themselves in different aspects of the bureaucratic, political, professional, educational, and social senses, they do not have the same statuses, eligibilities, and accessibilities. The conflict and problematic issues emerging from this (un)ordinary situation as a hierarchy are related to the political subjectivities of refugees. As a continuation of these legal and political statuses and the identities that cause problematic issues, we can make it more understandable when revising another representation problem faced by Syrian refugees within the scope of social subjectivity.

Regarding social subjectivity what I wrote before was that *'it is the subjectivity created by displaying performance in accordance with the anticipations of other people that have been shaped or reappeared by the social traditions, roles, norms of people in a particular race, religion, or region'*. The interviewees, whose words I have mentioned below, will help us understand this concept better.

*"Here [Germany] we are treated like children. We are approached as if we have never lived on our own before, they try to teach us everything. After a while one gets stunned. I feel like I won't be able to cross the road from one side to other, if that voice in the traffic lights does not instruct me, saying 'now you can cross'<sup>65</sup>. I mean, the extreme sensitivity they exhibited in order to help us to overcome our difficulties, I, who can easily deal with even if the traffic is very dense, now became a sensitive refugee who is depended on the instructions."* [Interview 41, 21 years old, student in programming, Berlin, 04.04.2019]

*"This country considers everything that the individuals may need. For example, clothes, goods, language education, social rights, social services are all free, they also give monthly money. Now even having such economically minimal conditions provide me comfortableness, but I don't know what to do anymore, that's the real problem. My family, my friends are not here, so there is no life that I know and become familiar with here... Life is fine when you look at it on the phone, but when it comes to living, it's harder. Besides, especially when other people tell or instruct me what to do also makes life difficult to live that I dream of when I come here. I don't know exactly how to explain... but now I have a hard time between being a refugee and being myself."* [Interview 44, 29 years old, married, bachelor's in literature, Berlin, 09.04.2019]

The common emphases of the interviewees intersect in two main points, which are: First, the state's attention and services to them, even if with good intention and sensitivity, remind them that they are a refugee. Second, being a refugee draws the limits of a life-potency that makes the performativity and representation of the refugees difficult to realise, which also unable the reflection of the uniqueness of an individual. Moreover, the analysis of individual and collective societal differences I emphasized in the context of Syrian Arab interviewees is also valid for Syrian Kurdish interviewees. Especially, after having a minimum standard of living, the social life and the dominant culture that Syrian Kurdish refugees endeavoured to adapt, triggered the confrontation between what the refugee individual wanted to do and being able to do what they wanted.

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<sup>65</sup> The interview with this interviewee was mostly done in Kurmanji, and partly in English. The interviewee said the phrase 'now you can cross' in English.



The statement of the second interviewee, *“Life is fine when you look at it on the phone, but when it comes to living, it’s harder,”* is related to their digital habitus. This is related to the digital habitus, which I have discussed in the context of the media content of Syrian refugees affecting and shaping their perceptions of Germany and the life they want to live. As I mentioned in the section on Syrian Kurdish interviewees’ perceptions and thoughts about Germany, desiring to have a life(style) that has not been experienced before is a situation where visual media and digital socialisation are very influential and shaping. In the context of Syrian refugees, their contentment and satisfaction or their disappointments and unsatisfied expectations with their life in Germany support this argument. However, this is the point where I connect the subjectivity debate with the forms of capital they have. Syrians are not any more Syrian citizens – essentially – rather they are Syrian refugees and living in Germany with this identity.

As well as the subjectivity discussion concerning the capital forms, in the next section, I approach and demonstrate the subjectivities of Syrian Kurdish women interviewees through their gender transformations.

#### **5.5.5) Transformation of Gender Roles and Tracing Women’s Empowerment: *“Everyone lives their own life.”***

In this section, I discuss the gender transformation of women refugees by presenting my field notes and interview data on Syrian Kurdish female refugees in Berlin. As I organised the discussion concerning the Syrian Arab female refugees in Germany through two dynamics by relating to the fieldwork in Greece, I also explain this section by establishing a relationship with the fieldwork in Greece and Germany. In my fieldwork in Greece, I had manifested pro-gender ideological doctrines and empowerment of politicization as the central determining factor within the scope of Syrian Kurdish refugee women. As a secondary factor, I had argued to consider the increased public visibility, responsibility, and social empowerment, as a consequence of the pro-gendered ideology that was taught and introduced in seminars, courses and events. As the predominant factors in relation to gender debates in interviews and ethnography in Germany, I consider the visibility of women in stronger social relationships, their work experiences, economic support of the

German state and gender-focused workshops and instructions. Thus, in this section, I bring into question the Syrian Kurdish female participants gender transformation and empowerment within the scope of these dynamics.

I interviewed 4 Kurdish refugee women in total. The average age of these interviewees was 31. Two of the interviewees were single and the other two were married, and one had two children. 3 of the interviewees had a bachelor's degree and one was studying for her bachelor's. Transformation and changes in gender roles and norms of Kurdish female refugees, who have these demographic features, have been highly determinant in the strengthening of their subjectivity as women. Kurdish female refugees, while they experienced male-dominated or oriented cultural and social relations in Syria even though encouraged by pro-gender political doctrines and supports, they have felt a relatively more liberal and secular culture and social relations in Turkey. However, the pro-gender ideology and doctrines, taking responsibilities in social organization and public roles they experienced in Lavrion camp in Greece have been the determining dynamics in the background of their gender transformations. In Germany, on the other hand, in addition to these background dynamics, social changes and transformations such as individualization tendencies, economic independence that they have begun to experience are the subjects of discussion. The interviewees' experiences especially in these three countries, whose words I have quoted below, are brief pictures of the development of this process.

*“My family is very strongly political that's why they always supported me. There is a specific support for women in Kurdish communities, they usually act upon positive discrimination for women. But still countries like Syria or Turkey are very man dominated, even though feminist movements are getting stronger. We can see the gender roles in daily life, for example, women cook, take care of babies; and men work, and become macho... Regarding in Greece or Germany, as far as I observe visibility of women in the public is more, gender roles in the family and mentality of states are different, not very man dominated. Actually, here in Germany, I participated many events that support women and teach their rights... [Interview 45, 33 years old, single, director, Berlin, 10.04.2019]*

*“... In Turkey, life for women is not very easy, because of religious motives, patriarchal culture, and the state's very conservative policies that do not care about women... We haven't stayed long in Greece, so I don't know the situation of women there very much. But Greece is a European Union country after all, so its laws must be good for women... Women in Germany are stronger, they do every job, everyone respects each other. However, family*

*and social relations are not very strong here. Everyone lives their own life... My experience here is very good because the conditions are actually better for female refugees. For example, there are refugee centres only for women but not for men. Or, while there are seminars and events that teach and strengthen women's rights for women, men are exposed to the opposite. That is, they teach culture lessons saying men that they cannot do that, cannot do this, cannot treat women like that and so on. I know from my husband..."*  
[Interview 49, 42 years old, mother of 2, Berlin, 17.04.2019]

The emphases of these two interviewees concerning the gender subjectivity and roles in Turkey, Greece and Germany address similar points and support each other. If we paraphrase these emphases, they describe that women are supported in the Kurdish communities due to political/ideological doctrines; Turkey has socially and politically conservative policies and a man-dominated culture towards women; the visibility and participation of women in social and economic life in Germany are much better, while comments and observations about women in Greece do not go deeper because interviewees did not get involved in life there. The experiences and observations of other female interviewees were in line with these statements. A notable issue in the observations and experiences of the interviewees is that their practicality, visibility, and empowerment of their gender subjectivity has gradually increased. In addition, especially the second interviewee's emphasized statement: *"Everyone lives their own life"*, can be considered as the character of individuality. The transition to a more individual social form from the collective societal form can be evaluated with this statement of the interviewee. This is a process that is not only women-specific, but one that male interviewees also experience and go through, as I discussed in other sections, for instance, particularly regarding the unfulfillable and unsatisfied expectations and experiences about life in Germany.

I argue that the transition from this collective societal form to individuality has a positive response, especially for female refugees concerning gender roles and empowerment of their subjectivities. This is because, in the collective societal life, the social pressure faced by women, the reproduction of the surveillance and patriarchal gender roles transform into more liberalisation of women visibility and decreasing social pressure with the transition to individualization. The practical equivalent of this process is as follows: Women who do not work due to gender codes and lifestyle in their societies, cannot continue their education, are watched,

now can be included in public representation, and working life with pro-gender support, particularly as a result of the reduction of external social pressure. That is gender empowerment and strong subjectivity. In this regard, each interviewee stated that they manage to stand on their own feet, control their economic income, make their own future plans, and act with their own wishes and thoughts. This is the practical equivalent of this gender transformation process. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the second interviewee made a comparison between herself and her husband and emphasized that while women were supported, men were disempowered. The integration and cultural education programs of the German state on supporting women in the integration programs and the holding down of men's masculinity backup the arguments I have presented above.

In the next section, I present a comparison of the similarities and differences between the interviews with Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees in Berlin.

## **5.6) Comparison of the Results Relating to Syrian Arab and Kurdish Participants in Germany**

Although all the countries where the field studies were conducted have their own unique geopolitical and social aspects concerning Syrian refugees' migration, the findings and the generated data in the fieldwork conducted in Germany have particular importance. The main reason for this is that Germany is the country where the inferences and hypothesis about the statements of interviewed Syrian refugees in Turkey and Greece can be tested. Therefore, the relations, similarities and differences of the discussions made separately within the scope of Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees in the above sections are of vital importance for us to comprehend the arguments of this research as a whole.

In the following sections, there are comparative findings and results that I have organized and presented according to four research focuses. First, I discuss the changes in Syrian refugees' perceptions and opinions before and after their arrival in Germany, through common intersections and distinctive aspects.

### **5.6.1) A Comparison of Participants' Perceptions and Experiences of the Other**

As one of the most central focal points in this research, learning Syrian refugees' perceptions and thoughts, especially of European societies and countries, serves to show us the motivations and aims for, so to speak, their migration that has a risk of death. The satisfaction, challenges and faced realities experienced by Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees who arrived in Berlin and stayed in different refugee centres are considerably similar. The satisfaction, complaints and disappointments of both groups intersect at certain points. I explain these points by considering two categories: First, the contentment and met expectations are discussed in both groups regarding the economic aid, social services, and accommodation facilities that the German state provides to refugees on a regular basis. This is because the long migration journey that Syrian refugees went through after being forcibly displaced from their homes had created an economic burden for all interviewees. In other words, the expenses they made to meet their own needs, especially during the illegal migration process, economically had put many interviewees in a difficult

position. However, their arrival in Germany essentially eliminated the possibility of further migration. This has prevented the fact that the interviewees might have to make more economic expenditure for any possible migration. In addition, the financial support of the state, social services and assistance satisfied the expectations of the refugees in the first phase, albeit for a short time. Based on this contentment, it can be argued that the better life, better conditions, and better services, which are the reasons why the interviewees migrated to Germany, have been verified. Relatedly, the interviewees made positive comments stating that Germany is an economically developed, modern, strong, and a welfare state. That is, as a kind of *pull factor*, the economic development of Germany has met with the expectations of the interviewees. These arguments have been made by both Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees.

Secondly, other aspects that do not correspond to their expectations, triggered disappointments and dissatisfactions that are more complicated. We can explain these aspects by considering them in two different categories: First, there are reasons such as the long duration of the integration process, the complexity and lengthy documentation and bureaucracy procedures, the necessity of German language education, and the continuation of staying in the refugee centres. The fact that these reasons do not match the positive images in the perceptions of the interviewees about Germany and the unfulfillment of their dreams to be accomplished can be stated as the most basic disappointments. The second set of disappointments related to the problem of adaptation and integration faced by refugees due to the mismatch between social characteristics, socialization, and experiences between German and Syrian societies, which can be considered the cause of other disappointments. This problem is particularly essential to our understanding of expected the lifestyle, standard and sociality that Syrian interviewees imagined and desired, and the experiences they underwent. Both Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees' societal form that they had in their habitus was collective, the German society on the contrary is highly individualistic.

If I express this in a different frame, although Syrian refugees were in a safe country in Turkey, they could not reach the life experiences they expected after a long migration to Germany for a better life and aspirations. I argue that the origins of these

unpredictable differences in social life they desired are laid on these refugees' digital habitus with which they were constantly and intensely involved while they were in Turkey and Greece. As has been clarified and exemplified several times, the digital content in the form of information and images that these refugees learned or were exposed to in their digital habitus eventually generated a false or distorted perception. In particular, the fact that the perception created by this digital content, which is composed of fragmentary pieces of individual internet users' lives and does not create a full picture but generates a very positive opinion and a desire, is a fact that refugees cannot realize without experiencing it.

The research finding showing another intersection between these Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees is that the interviewees stated that the German state is hyper-attentive and has a controlling, instructing approach while striving to integrate them. The metaphoric analogy that points to this finding, which was discussed before, is *'feeling like a child'*, or *'being treated as a child'*. This approach of the German state, which has been shown to cause the interviewees to not being able to take part in the social life and to tend to be passive, was also indirectly the grounds for disappointment and dissatisfaction of the interviewees.

The primary research finding that distinguishes Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees was, as previously detailed in the Turkey and Greece chapters, the imagined community perception and created solidarity among Kurdish refugees were observed in the fieldwork in Berlin as well. The official recognition of Syrian refugees by the German state was a recognition of their national identity rather than their ethnic recognition. Therefore, the basic identity and status at registration were refugees from Syria, as Syrian refugees. The legal restriction on the preferred Kurdish identity that this official recognition has created for Kurdish refugees, has been used as a reversed strategy for the coexistence of Kurdish refugees from different countries. Kurdish refugees registered with different national identities, for example, Iranian, Iraqi, or Syrian, used the German government's policy of not staying together with refugees from the same country in refugee centres to their advantage. Kurdish refugees, who can stay together as a result of this strategic approach, can be perceived as a reaffirmation of the political unity and imagined community perception of the refugees who previously stayed in the Lavrion camp.

On the other hand, although there was no significant association or community sense among Syrian Arab refugees, I observed that they spend time together in their daily life until they learn German, socialize with local people, or fully settle. Also, Syrian Arab interviewees stated that they had friends or acquaintances with whom they come together sometimes in Berlin. Therefore, the strong bond among Syrian Arab refugees was a social unity rather than a political unity and solidarity.

### **5.6.2) A Comparison of Media and Internet Usage of Participants**

As the findings of the fieldwork in Berlin illustrate, the media and internet interaction of the interviewees were similar in both times spent and usage. Both Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees emphasized that their internet and phone usage, which they stated was very intense before they arrived in Germany, decreased significantly after they arrived in Germany. Even though less often when compared with interviewees' usage and interaction with the media and internet in Turkey and Greece, the interaction of the interviewees with these tools in Berlin exposes two different trends in itself. The first of that was that interviewees who stated that they use the phone and the internet for 3-4 hours a day, engage with these tools to communicate with people, in addition to the continued use of social media. These uses mostly corresponded to their socializing on well-known social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram or YouTube. In my digital ethnography about the use of social media of these interviewees, they commonly used two main types of media content, primarily personal expressions such as photography, video, opinion, and then social and political news such as media content related to the Syrian war or the Kurdish struggle.

The second usage trend was about interviewees who stated they use their phone and internet more around 4-5 hours a day, particularly due to the interest and positive feedback from other users in social media after their arrival in Germany. The social media content of the interviewees was similar to those of the previous users. In addition to the visual and opinion-based content related to their personal life, social content concerning political and social contexts related to Syrian refugees, the Syrian war and being a refugee, were also predominant in their media content. In particular, the social media engagements of these interviewees provide the reader



with subtext information so that the tendencies of other Syrian refugees who wish to migrate to Germany or other European countries can be understood. Readers now can better comprehend the perceptions and desires of the Syrian refugees about European countries who particularly aspire to migrate these countries, which I theoretically discussed within the scope of the concept of Simulation as the perception created and affected by media content. Besides, the simulation conceptualization serves to support an understanding of the unsatisfied expectation, disappointments, and dissatisfaction that the interviewees in Berlin experienced in comparison with what they imagined and expected.

As I mentioned, the interviewees shared images and opinions from their own lives in their media posts as social media users. I do not make any analysis as to the accuracy of the meaning of this media content. Rather, I draw the attention of readers to the fact that this content usually reflects certain aspects of life and that the desires and attractions created by these aspects are difficult to reach by others. I argue that the observations and analyses I have made regarding the difficulty of this situation arise mostly from the differences between the societal structures and characters of the Syrian refugees and the societies of countries they wish to go to.

When I formulate it differently: Refugee media users – *a potential influencer due to the nature of media* – who express that they are satisfied, have better standards and are happy as an expression on their social media content, trigger the desire to be happy, satisfied and better in other users who are associated with this content. However, other refugee users who want to realize these desires as a result of this interaction, perceive this content as an association with the country, culture and standards of the user live in rather than a perception concerning individual user's life. Therefore, when a Syrian refugee who has begun living in Germany shares content stating that s/he is happy, the other refugee users who interact with this content can potentially think they can be happy if they go to Germany.

I analyse the main problem here as follows: There are conceivably inabilities to adapt a new life and struggles that can potentially be caused by abstract phenomena that are difficult to foresee but understandable when experienced, for instance, cultures, lifestyle, and societal features. This inability to adapt and conflict also brings

disappointments and dissatisfaction. This situation appeared in the Syrian refugees as follows: The differences in individual and collective social structures and the restrictions created by being a refugee that hinder the imaginations and desires they want to realize when they arrive in Germany are the issues. Therefore, the conceptualization of digital habitus gains more importance for a better understanding of the formation of desires and imaginations of refugees regarding the countries they wish to migrate. Although the influence of media on perceptions and desires is not a new subject, *'the creation and development of digital habitus are fairly new phenomena'* because of the emergence of instantly applicable instruments such as social media, the ability of everyone to be a content user, producer and consumer, and the more roles and functions of digital means that replace the practicality of life.

### **5.6.3) A Comparison of Capital Forms and Subjectivities**

In my interviews with both Arab and Kurdish refugees in Berlin, there were more complex and varying capital forms, rather than the similar capital of interviewees that we encountered in previous fieldwork countries. The main reason for this is the mass migration of more than half a million Syrian refugees by the end of 2015 consisted of socio-economically and culturally more heterogeneous individuals from different classes and capital forms. Therefore, the interviews were made up of Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees who had varying capital forms from different economic classes and occupational groups. Thus, Syrian Arab and Kurdish interviewees have more similar and common aspects with each other than dissimilar features.

All interviewees from both groups emphasized that they had standards that could meet their needs economically, and relatedly expressed a certain level of satisfaction, fulfilment, and positive opinions. The main reason for this was the minimum level of economic prosperity created by the regular economic aids, social services and accommodation services provided by the German state to the refugees. Besides, the importance of economic capital, which was the most emphasized form of capital in the previous fieldwork countries, has lost its importance to a certain extent for interviewees who have reached at least minimum living standards in Berlin. Because the situations for whom economic capital was basically determinant came to the fore as migrating other countries or moving out from camps to rent an

apartment in the cities. However, the interviewees in Berlin did not consider migrating to different countries. In addition, state aid minimally relieved the welfare level of the interlocutors in economic terms.

In addition, these common and similar aspects of interviewees were more prominent, especially with regard to interviewees' cultural and social forms of capital. Interviewees stated that they had more complaints and disappointment about their social and cultural capital, which claimed to be unqualified and ignored by the German state's policies and the refugee status. These complaints and disappointments were also closely related to the arguments of not being able to accomplish their subjectivities in their life in Berlin. So, *'what are the common arguments in the expressions of the interviewees from these two groups, in terms of their social and cultural capital?'*

In a condition where economic worries have decreased, then social and cultural capital have become more important for refugees. What I mean by social and cultural capital is simply the educational status of the interviewees, their professions, their social status and relationships in relation to their qualifications. The problem of these capital forms for interviewees concerns the official paperwork process that they needed to go through, for instance, to receive the equivalent of their qualifications, such as diplomas and certifications. This can be thought of as the first obstacle and difficulty. Even if they were willing to complete this paperwork process, another difficult process such as language training that refugees must achieve presents a secondary obstacle.

In addition, the main situation that made them submerged in this process was being a refugee. Being a refugee simply means no longer having opportunities and access as citizens of their home countries where they used to live, which is the fundamental base of the sense of security. The basic disappointment caused by this reality is that refugees whose social and economic capital are high and accomplished are ignored and treated as a kind of unqualified. As I mentioned in the sections where I discuss the capital forms of the interviewees, usually the subjectivities of the refugees are supported by these forms of capital. However, especially the approach of integration and adaptation programs to refugees, treating them *'as a child or as if they have*

*never lived on their own*' before, indirectly caused them to feel more passive and dependent, as the interviewees emphasized.

#### **5.6.4) A Comparison of Transformation of Gender Norms and Empowerment of Subjectivities**

Many studies focusing on Refugee women draw attention to the challenges of *'being a woman refugee'* (Asaf, 2017; 5). These studies approach the issue of being a woman refugee from many fields such as health, cultural encounters, gender roles, integration, and other fields. In this research, while Syrian refugee interviewees position themselves, endeavour to survive and experience migration in several countries until reaching their destination countries, they observe that these experiences indirectly empowered them and the relationship of their subjectivities with gender roles and norms. In order to generate these findings, I applied field study data obtained through ethnography and approximately 25 face-to-face interviews with Syrian refugee women. However, it would be incomplete to make the following inference by generalizing the research findings and the subjective experiences of the interviewees: *'Women refugees who experience forced displacement and illegal migration are indirectly empowered and relatedly their subjectivities are strengthened.'* On the contrary, many studies have shown that women's experiences of illegal migration (Asaf, *ibid*; Gerard and Pickering, 2016), being a refugee (Baird, 2012), and remaining in camps (Pittaway and Bartolomei, 2001) are challenging and difficult, particularly due to their genders. Despite this, I circumstantially emphasize the empowerment and the subjectivity of a small sample group of Syrian refugee women in accordance with the change of cultural and societal characters in the process of migration as well as challenging and difficult experiences they faced.

In the interviews with 8 different women interviewees in Berlin, the similarities between the experiences of Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugee women stood out more than the issues that differentiated them from each other. The main common characteristics of the women in the two groups were that they were segregated from the collective groups they had previously lived with and were mostly alone. I deal with this situation by referring to the section where I discussed the collective and individual societal structure characters. For the women interviewees, being alone

prompted the disappearance of the *'third eye'* that the interviewees had stated they felt checking, managing, and controlling them in society while staying in collective groups, and which we encountered in the previous chapters. On the other hand, being alone also meant an increase in the responsibilities they had to assume.

Before arriving in Germany, the economic and social responsibilities that were undertaken by family members, such as fathers, brothers, or husbands, turned into responsibilities that both singles and married or widow interviewees had to assume. On the one hand, although they stated that they had difficulties due to increased individual, economic or social responsibilities in their daily lives, all interviewees affirmed that these responsibilities strengthened them and increased their confidence to stand on their own feet. This empowerment occurred especially by being more visible in the public sphere, by working, socializing, being included in women's support programs or thoroughly dealing with the responsibilities of their children by themselves. Especially being more visible in the public sphere, that is, their work, socialization, involvement in social life, at the same time enabled the interviewees to observe the roles, norms, and gender relations of women from different cultures, ethnicities or identities as friends, co-workers, officials and in other positions. In the interviews, the interviewees brought attention to the positive effects of these observations on their lives in various aspects, which I name the empowerment and strengthening subjectivities of the refugee women.

Another common feature emerging in relation to the Syrian Arab and Kurdish female interviewees is the pro-women support training, seminars and workshops aimed at empowering women they are involved in in Germany or in previous countries they had been. It has been emphasized by the interviewees that these social, legal or gender focused programs are highly influential in the change and transformation of the interviewees' own gender roles, perceptions, and norms. For example, programs that aim to empower and strengthen women interviewees such as increasing their awareness of legal rights, being given priority in business or social support and assistance programs, and through awareness raising in gender perspective, have yielded very positive results. In the statements in which the interviewees gradually evaluated Syria, Turkey, Greece, and Germany from the gender perspective, such a mapping of gender roles and norms emerged. While it was specified that Syria and

Turkey have dominantly patriarchal and religious doctrines that oppress women rights and their visibilities in public; particular regarding Germany, it was emphasized that the role of women in working life, their public visibility and social roles, the support of the German state for women, and women's economic independence are much better than in other countries. However, while statements regarding Greece remained obscure, especially due to the interviewees' lack of experiences and observations in social life, but they assumed that women's rights in Greece were good since Greece was an EU member. In addition to these findings, there was a specific difference between Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees, as emphasized in previous fieldwork discussions, where political and ideological gender awareness among the Kurds interviewed was more prominent and supported than Arab interviewers. The reason for this can be related, in addition to the political, social, economic, and military accomplishments of women, especially in Kurdish societies and regions, to the pro-gender political movements' support for women.

In the next chapter, I tentatively offer a theoretical conceptualization as a proposal for a new macro-perspective system that combines and interweaves the theoretical discussions presented in the literature review and the data and findings reviewed in these field study chapters.

## **6) CHAPTER 6**

### **FROM FIELDWORK TO THE THEORETICAL FORMATION OF THE THESIS: SEMI-AUTONOMOUS COLONIALISM**

Until now, I have reviewed the key thoughts and concepts relevant to the research findings and analysis, as well as fieldwork chapters in detail. In doing so, I elementarily benefited from Grounded theory, which suggests the methodological approach '*from fieldwork to theoretical formation*'. Therefore, I have situated the primary concepts of power relations, digital habitus, and subjectivity in a theoretical framework on the basis of the data generated and obtained during the field study. I additionally discussed the effects of these concepts with(in) the daily life practices, thoughts, and desires of Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees in the context of the fieldwork chapters.

Still, power relations and subjectivity studies are topics that are already covered in disciplines such as sociology, political science, and economics as theoretical approaches and concepts, which are profoundly elaborated on. However, unlike these two concepts, Digital Habitus is one of the pillar findings of this research as a newly coined theoretical framework. Within the scope of this chapter, I first focus on the concept of Digital Habitus and then emphasise its function and formation as a complementary and interface structure between power relations and subjectivity. Then, I point out that the concept of Digital Habitus, operated with power relations and subjectivity, is the fundamental character of a macro system and order, both functionally and structurally. Finally, I consider the way these three conceptualisations operate together to form an alternative system and a proposal for a macro approach. I call this system '*Semi-Autonomous Colonialism*'. Finally, I defend the Semi-Autonomous Colonialism theoretical concept utilising Digital Habitus as the mechanism that functions as the central bond and interface of a contemporary comprehensive system.

#### **6.1) As a Pillar Finding of the Research: Digital Habitus**

We live in a digital age, and accordingly, we live in a nascent habitus that we consistently shape and develop concerning our relationalities and interactions. The continuity and intensity of these relationalities have hit the peak level, particularly

with the portable devices we can continuously carry with ourselves physically and continually use in every moment of life for altering purposes. The principal devices that allow this new digital media era to expand and function can be listed as smartphones, tablets, laptops, smartwatches, and other portable electronic devices. These devices enable us to establish permanent connections regardless of location and time. This era that we physically cannot touch upon, but which we live in, provides the groundwork for the digital habitus. In other words, this enormously broad-ranged and expanded new digital life with its set of rules, services, interactions, systems, morals, and values are the stages that make up the steps of digital habitus. Therefore, digital habitus has become the essential element of the new living way of modern man. To define it more precisely, *'digital habitus is a virtual system that feeds on reality and has interaction through the transference and emergence of social, emotional, political, economic, and financial lifestyle factors on online and internet-based digital platforms'*. The main character that makes this argument and hypothesis unconventional and significant is that the concept and formation of digital habitus reveals a facet of technological life that has not been well and thoroughly explored by other researchers.

The configuration of digital habitus has started as *'an extension of man's central nervous system'* (McLuhan, 1994) in the form of alternative life purposes such as facilitating core life services in bureaucracy, education, administration, health, and transportation; and creating new social domains for communication, and entertainment in telecommunication and media. Every single one of these sectors, platforms and applications develops their *e-fields*, that is in Bourdieusian sense, the foundation of habitus (Bourdieu, 2005; 30). With the definition and formation of varying and developing (e)-fields, (digital) habitus begins to exist, and it turns into a form of managing the (e)-fields. This new order that we adapt with meteoric speed inevitably enforces people to participate in it.

Although we adapt this order with a meteoric speed, on the other hand, as users and consumers, we desire the latest models and updated versions of systems and devices that potential capitalist markets and manufacturers offer us. However, this is not a new rise or disposition, especially when considering the historical spreads



of media-based companies and media relations that have developed in the last century and are today's most extensive capitalist area.

Before ascertaining its relation to the semi-autonomous colonial system, I consider it will be helpful to discuss what digital habitus corresponds to in the context of Syrian refugees as the research's subjects in this study. Understanding digital habitus in the context of Syrian refugees will be more understandable when it relates to the macro system, colonialism, as a more general hypothesis. The emphasis on the relationship between Syrian refugees and digital habitus turns out to be, in fact, generalisable, especially when acknowledging the function and structure of digital habitus as an interface mechanism between power relations and subjectivity. Therefore, within the scope of the next section, I evaluate digital habitus structurally and functionally within the scope of Syrian refugees. While doing this, I associate it with power relations and subjectivity discussions so that what the digital habitus corresponds to as an interface can be understood more clearly.

## **6.2) Digital Habitus as an Interface Mechanism in between Power Relations and Subjectivity**

Habitus in the Bourdieusian sense is carved out through time, upbringing, education, and disposition (Reay, 2004). The habitus is formed through and by the accumulated experiences and occurrences of people in different fields (Bourdieu, 1990). In this research, the emergence of digital habitus has become especially evident in refugee camps. Refugee camps are like limbo. In the period until refugees reach the camps, the habitus they have built or been subjected to so far is damaged. The structural deterioration of their habitus and the construction process of the new one starts in camps. Creating a new habitual base in these limbos is directly related to formation of digital habitus in this research. Therefore, as an example, e-fields on digital networks, where refugee children are associated with an indispensable need from an early age, is a new experience that replaces education in the classic sense. Or, in camp conditions, the intense and dominant upbringings, concept and conception of time cause the deconstruction of the elements that built the former habitus, building a new habitus. Digital habitus is an area that builds habits and needs, which is most dominant and determinant in this new habitus, clearly observable in camp conditions. Despite this, I realised that digital habitus is more applicable and valid to

everyone who has at least association with digital networks rather than being a phenomenon that is unique to refugees or camp conditions. I came to the conclusion that digital habitus is a current phenomenon that includes almost all of us, not just refugees in the camps, principally after acknowledging and noting the e-fields engagements and dispositions of people in various fields such as education, finance, entertainment, economy, bureaucracy, social media. Therefore, the observable effects of daily habits and digital relationships on refugees' perception in camp areas, demonstrated in a more intense and accelerated version, were the first triggering causes of the digital habitus theory.

I observed and developed the concept of digital habitus among Syrian refugees as communication means, personal internet explorations, social interactions with others, as well as the effects of intensified digital relations on their perceptions and desires. I focused primarily on the relations and effects of digital habitus among and on those Syrian refugees who managed to migrate to Turkey, Greece, and Germany. Many studies show that social media and internet use are the dominant and determinant new element among refugees (Dekker et al. 2018; Kutscher and Kreß, 2018; Alencar, 2018; Gintova, 2019). These studies investigate through more micro perspectives how these new elements correspond to refugees' lives in migration, integration, adaptation, and communication research areas. As Dekker et al. stated in their study on the use of social media by Syrian refugees in the Netherlands: "The use of a smartphone was essential to a refugee to stay in contact with family and friends in Syria, to receive advice from his brother who was already living in Sweden, and to communicate with others whom he met on his journey to Europe while crossing 10 borders" (2018; 1).

After discussing what potentially digital habitus and its limits correspond to in a structural sense, it is crucial to explain operationally what role it plays between power relations and subjectivity. Refugees re-remember and re-acknowledge almost every day that the reasons for staying in the camps are the transcendental power relationships that exceed their individual power and authority limits. The limited camp conditions, host countries' policies and practices concerning refugees, international aid and assistance, security and official forces assisting them, manifest in their lives

as power relations and actors, which are basic illustrations of varying determinant power groups. The common feature of all these actors is that they are more dominant and significantly formative and influential than refugees' individual or collective strengths, mobilities, legal, and possible practices. On the other hand, the subjectivity of the refugees is limited by the determinant drivers such as the strength of their capital forms, their genders, and education. They put into practice the dreams, plans, decisions and actions they want to realise within the limits of what these drivers allow and make possible.

The effect and operation of digital habitus find a response and capacity between these two determining areas, power relations and subjectivity. For example, Syrian refugees in Turkey cannot legally leave Turkey unless certain conditions are met. This is an example of power relations as restricting and determining external forces. These refugees cannot go to other countries they want to migrate to legally. Nevertheless, they can realise this action illegally, especially if their economic capitals can decisively meet these potential costs and conditions of migration. Most of the refugees we come across from news or different media content are refugees who carry out such illegal migrations. For these refugees, digital habitus appears in the following areas, especially among refugees who can perform this economically costly migration: It appears as a field that affects their perceptions, desires and thoughts about where and how they can go, what they can do when they go, and with whom they can communicate, as well as for personal interests, hobbies, professions and other reasons. In other words, digital habitus is a new field consisting of invisible networks that provide information when needed, enable communication, and offer possible alternative applications. This field corresponds to a new habitus that creates striking and observable effects in the daily lives of individuals, determines movement and disposition, and can change the level of education or culture.

Although digital habitus has a neutral nature structurally and functionally, it has a very influential role on perceptions and thoughts. This influence on refugees particularly can be observed because the use of digital habitus primarily generates the consent of its users and triggers desires regarding the places where they may wish to migrate. The fundamental elements that enable the manufacturing of

individual consent are the content that can be effective on perceptions in the forms of information about the places they want to migrate, or images, individual or public posts, and other form digital contents. In other words, for instance when a refugee living in a camp encounters content that advocates the proposition that '*Germany is one of the world's best countries for quality of life*', this directly triggers the individual's desire to realise or reach that. Relatedly, to be able to accomplish this, the consent is fundamentally needed. This is because such mobilities as migration or crossing borders illegally necessitate actions within the possibility of capitals of whoever wish to realise that.

In this research, I demonstrate the long-term movements and narratives of refugees who committed such actions. And especially the migration routes are towards western countries where a colonial rule is observed, such as England or Germany. However, semi-autonomous coloniality takes place predominantly in the national territory of these countries, rather than administering cross-border lands and people. In other words, people first migrate to the colonialist countries with their will and decisions, and then the colonial approaches of the states can be observed. Accordingly, the full functionality of contemporary colonial countries is based on generating the consent of individuals that they can rule, exploit, and control within their borders with the colonial administration. The generation of this consent primarily occurs when individuals begin to think and desire that they will have better standards and conditions elsewhere. Migration of individuals or masses with their consent refers to the action as a result of these consents.

One of the conceptual discussions that should be emphasised and criticised here is the association of *modernity* with Western countries, especially Europe, as a life model, level of welfare and standard. In the interviews I conducted, one of the central concepts that the interviewees expressed when comparing the eastern and western societies was that Europe was defined by *modern* and eastern countries by *backwardness* and *non-modern*. This evaluation made within the context of east-west contrast has, in fact, been one of the main focal points of different studies in recent history (Schmidt, 2006; Thompson, 1995; Ichijo, 2011; Bhambra, 2007). This is because, in the process of constructing the portrayal of Europe and modernity as

unified or coherent entities, alternative narratives are not only excluded but not fully acknowledged (Mussell, 2007; 801).

In this sense, the lifestyle, social relations, welfare level, secular or liberal life relations defined as modernity by the interviewees is substantially a dichotomy that European countries, societies embraced and reflected it as if it is *'the life that how should be'*. For instance, concerning this discussion, Gurminder Bhambra's (2007) book deals with the concept of modernity. By deconstructing modernity from a sociological perspective through re-evaluation and reviving the colonialism, postcolonialism, Eurocentrism, and modernisation debates, she argues that possible modern life is formed by shared history and sociological formations (Bhambra, 2007; Mussell, 2007; 800). However, modernity has commonly been identified and presented especially with Europe and later with European colonies such as the US, Australia, Canada, which has appeared as a concept that corresponds to a desired and demanded life among Syrian refugees as well. I argue that the main reason for this is that they consider the lifestyle, gender relations, consumption habits concerning the media content that they encounter in their digital habitus, which commonly has very high popularity because they are western and well-promoted, advertised and presented in the movies, clips, promotions, brands, for example. Then the images and ideas they relate to the West become similar to those countries they wish to migrate to.

Bhambra (2007) argues that we should remember global and collective sociology, which has a long history and interaction, and which has greatly expanded and increased even before the French Revolution or the Enlightenment, which is widely regarded as a cornerstone in the development of modernity. She emphasizes that the thoughts, practices and lifestyles that are thought to build and nurture modernity should be embraced as a broader cultural heritage rather than being confined to specific geography, meaning Europe. In this sense, considering the existence of *multiple modernities*, instead of addressing only one modernity, both prevents a hierarchical social formation and enables us to re-engage with and think about the concept of better. Refugees' desire to migrate to Europe because they think it is better causes them to think about the social norms, values and life they come from in a negative hierarchical stratification scale.

In the presence of Syrian refugees as a narrow sample group, I have shown the operation and function of digital habitus as an interface through its influence and determinant elements. As two various fields involving almost all people, power relations and subjectivity merge into a new field with digital habitus and turn into a powerful and designing system. This system's power of gaining surplus-value and long-term benefits resembles an order with colonialism, which was previously operative and visible in different areas of life such as economic profit, political-social prestige, privilege, and identity. Therefore, I call this system *semi-autonomous colonialism*. The feature that makes this system colonial is that it is characterised by *the production of the consent* of individuals, which enables individuals to have stronger subjectivities than subjugation to it.

### **6.3) Why Semi-Autonomous Colonialism?**

Colonialism is not a modern phenomenon, nor is it limited to a particular time or place. Just simply reviewing world history, it is replete instances of one society gradually expanding and growing by essentially comprising adjacent neighbouring territory and ruling its land and people by the use of military, politics, religion or other methods. As a few well-known examples from colonial history, the ancient Greeks established colonies as the Romans, the Ottomans, the British and French did and exploited, benefited, and ruled in varying aspects, mainly economic<sup>66</sup>. In the last century, the debates, perspectives and morphing titles related to colonialism have attained their places in literature, such as settler colonialism, neo-colonialism, post-colonialism, modern colonialism, internal colonialism, etc. As with numerous theories in related disciplines' literature, the limits and functionality of the term '*colonialism*' have been described by various scholars in distinct approaches and not always harmoniously (Fieldhouse, 1981; Césaire, 2001; Samson, 2020). Yet, 'Colonialism', as a term commonly noted as '... is a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another' (Kohn and Reddy, 2006; 1; Zalta, 2014).

Colonialism discussions correspond to a wide spectrum of disciplines and fields. Despite this, its limits and framework in this research are limited to *migration* as a

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<sup>66</sup> With these examples I particularly emphasize historically known expanded and grown empires. Otherwise, I am aware of the difference between imperialism and colonialism, it is just matter of similar methods used.

form of mobility parameters in relation to the *desires* and *perceptions* of individuals as a current socio-political and economic phenomenon in the case of Syrian refugees. Even so within these parameters, studies associated with colonialism have a considerable weight in the literature (Emmer, 2012; Jafri, 2013; Bhambra, 2017; Mayblin, 2017). Many scholars from different perspectives and disciplines have dealt with refugees, migration, and asylum subjects by associating them with colonialism (Mayblin, 2017; Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2018; Chimni, 2009). However, in most of these studies, the decisions, orientations and migration movements taken by individuals and masses of their own *free will* are not seen as a solid basis within the scope of subjectivity discussions. The *semi*-side of semi-autonomous colonialism is based precisely on the will and actions of individuals themselves. While doing this, *semi*- refers to the fact that individuals migrate within the scope of their capital and opportunities to countries with colonial history and still have an ongoing colonial administration and system, even if most refugees are forcibly displaced from their home country. Therefore, the most decisive aspect that distinguishes contemporary colonialism from the other models and perspectives is about individuals' perceptions, decisions, and actions as a political subjectivity and agency.

With Syrian refugees' urgent need of humanitarian assistance and becoming the largest refugee population, the socio-political subjects of refugee, immigration, nation-state borders remain hot on the agenda of particularly highly emigrated European countries such as France, Germany, England, Greece, Turkey and others. Gurinder K. Bhambra (2017) discusses the refugee crisis relating to European countries and asserted universal human rights, cosmopolitanism, and policies, and she turns the reality of cosmopolitanism down. Bhambra in fact reminds us how the colonial mentality and administration still overrule these countries and that they do not take any responsibility towards the refugees because *asserted* universal human rights are not applicable for the *others*. Bhambra, however, takes the matter differently and writes: "Extending the concept of the state and its associated political community to be congruent with imperial boundaries would change the way in which those we label as 'migrant' or 'other' are treated. For example, Habermas associates the phenomenon of multiculturalism with what he calls 'postcolonial immigrant societies', that is, with those 'others' who are seen to migrate to Europe" (Bhambra,

2017; 396). To back up the argument of Bhambra, it is of great importance to remember the following statistical facts: Europe is the most prosperous continent on the planet yet accommodates the smallest portion of the world's refugees. The statistics regarding the 'Refugee Crisis' debate, the total opposite of one of the most severely used arguments in far-right, conservative, and nationalist politics in European countries, are in fact striking and surprising: *Developing countries host more than 80% of the world's refugees, while European countries receive 6% in total* (UNCHR, 2017). This striking reality and statistics in fact show us how the countries -as examples to power relations and actors- turn into a political argument to describe the other embodied in refugee, migrant or asylum personas. I argue that the reason for this is the colonial understanding and system that could not be completely overcome. This understanding and systems often reveal themselves in the immigration, border, nation discourses and policies of the countries, in which they portray the boundaries of the others. For example, Nadine El-Enany, in her book '(B)ordering Britain' (2020), reveals the continuing colonialism by investigating the British immigration system and its complex way of operating. While doing so, El-Enany details the historic and contemporary migration to Britain through the lens of race and empire. The axiom of her book argues that Britain is a white supremacist society, even as it defends and asserts human rights and equality under its constitutional laws and regulations. In addition, British colonialism proceeds to exist within its subtle law and politics and maintains as a "racial power regime" maintained by the remnants of the empire (Ginsburg, 2021; 150). In other words, El-Enany simply indicates that it is de facto that nonwhite migrants, residents of Britain, that is, mainly non-Europeans, but those from colonised or undeveloped countries, are less secure with their residency and rights, even if they hold legal citizenship. Hence, the British immigration policy forms and distinguishes British society into essentially white legal citizens and nonwhite third-country nationals as others, such as migrant workers, refugees, asylum seekers and other precarious residents (El-Enany, 2020; Davies, 2020, Ginsburg, 2021). Furthermore, the book of Lucy Mayblin (2017) also analyses Great Britain's border, immigration, refugee policies through post-colonial and de-colonial lenses. Mayblin sociologically reveals that Great Britain's immigration and border control system and administration began to tighten and



restrict the entries of those others after the 1990s and it became discriminative, exclusionary, and exploitative. Mayblin in her book defines the refugee as “*the embodiment of the darker side of modernity and of the global fallout of colonialism*” (2017; 3). Mayblin’s book also exhibits how the UK government stopped people from migrating, working, or living in the cities they choose.

Similarly, Germany’s ‘*prevention of new diasporic communities*’ policies, which I illustrated in my fieldwork in Germany, have a colonial rule in this sense. Attempt to bring together people of different ethnicities and nationalities in refugee protection centres and make German a compulsory common language among them; also, approaches towards refugees who have been distributed to many cities of Germany and forced into compulsory integration in a sense are colonial. These policies and practices towards refugees and immigrants are not just in Great Britain or Germany, but rather a general approach of the European Union (EU). In other words, the securitisation of the EU’s external borders and authoritarian immigration policies, with Foucault's perspective, *bio-politically* dominate and restrain the refugees and immigrants (Pfeifer, 2018; 459). Most of these debates and arguments are structural and bureaucratic, so to speak, related to states' political, social or economic policies. In other words, these discussions are included in the *power relations and actors* mechanism of semi-autonomous colonialism.

Especially the policies and approaches of European countries with a colonial history against non-European bodies are colonialist. The stressed arguments by Bhabra (2017), El-Enany (2020) and Mayblin (2017) within the scope of the UK, and in my research, the practices and policies of Germany are colonialist. In a sense, that instead of invading and subordinating the territory of the Other, there is a phenomenon of colonial rule within the territory of the colonialist country itself. This colonial rule manifests itself through the colonial order in the pragmatist selection of refugees or migrants, the economic exploitation of immigrants and refugees, or the cultural colonisation of Others through assimilationist integration policies. However, there is a new factor that changes perspective, which is the digital habitus. Digital habitus in this phase serves as a platform that conveys particular images, representations, information about colonial countries, images created both by subaltern as well as colonial subjects. Within the scope of these data, refugees or

subalterns can exercise their political subjectivity and agency. Highlighting the digital habitus and subjectivity as connected mechanisms which extend the working system of semi-autonomous colonialism differentiates from other colonialism discussions and perspectives.

Therefore, considering and taking into account the reality of digital habitus as a new phenomenon and powerful mechanism in global politics and economy, the migration, disposition and actions of individuals or masses in the modern era require a new system evaluation. Because although it is vital to reveal the approaches of these countries, which I consider as power relations, and to label them as colonialist, it is also relevant to indicate that these countries do not have a militarist, authoritarian, coercive colonial approach as they were. Instead, their laws, regulations, and practices are visible and valid within their national borders, which we name colonial. At this very point, I argue that we need to revive the argument, which has become Spivak's manifesto, "*Can Subaltern Speak?*" (2003) discussions and think in terms of perception-action-migration and colonality equation, especially considering current communication and transportation technologies. Therefore, I propose a new system structure with semi-autonomous colonialism operating with three mechanisms in which one of the primary components is built on the subjectivity of subaltern refugees.

The colonial literature, which has adopted subjectivity studies, in particular, has a wide scope. The subjectivity of those subjected subjects in and among coloniser and colonised (Memmi, 2013), the legacy of coloniser among colonised people (De L'Estoile, 2008), the postcolonial authoritarianism in colonies (Schneider, 2006), subjected words as an impulse of colonality in the language of colonised (Irvine, 2008), psychoanalysis of colonialism (Frosh, 2013) and many other studies conducted with a particularly micro perspective are noteworthy. Despite this, political subjectivity framework differs from these studies, especially concerning the cross-border migration and practices in targeted countries in immigration.

In this study, migration as a form of physical mobility and the individual decisions, actions, capitals and preferences of those who carry out this action has been the primary criteria for determining the limits of the subjectivity framework. Therefore,

although the fact that countries with a colonialist history, operation, administration and understanding are colonialist stands aside, the subjectivity of those who want to immigrate to these countries is almost the primary determinant and complementary part of this colonialism. The subjectivity of these people is also very decisive for strengthening the subaltern's position by amplifying their actions and comprehending the authenticity of contemporary colonialism with its changing borders and form. In other words, if people do not migrate to these countries by becoming aware of the coloniality of such countries, the colonialism cannot act within their border limitations.

#### **6.4) A Brief Analysis of the Establishment Stages of Classical and Semi-Autonomous Colonialism**

As with numerous theories in global politics, the limits and functionality of the term '*colonialism*' have been described by various scholars in distinct approaches and not always harmoniously (Fieldhouse, 1981; Césaire, 2001; Samson, 2020). The element I bring attention to in this section is to explicate the novelty of semi-autonomous colonialism.

The implicit and manipulative strategies used by classical colonialism in the establishment, expansion, and utility processes bear a resemblance to the development and growth processes of semi-autonomous colonialism. These similarities can be discussed especially when considering these strategies implemented during the expansion of colonial powers across political, economic, and social dimensions and relations in the colonisation periods. Although still the effects of various forms of colonialism, including the classical, are on the agenda of many disciplines such as postcolonialism or decolonisation (Butt, 2013; Ziltener and Künzler, 2013), I rather draw more attention to the transformation that has appeared and differentiated in the expansion and control of this new system.

As far as I analyse, I address colonialism that has evolved as an economic and social industry and was indirectly driven by particularly media-based technological developments, and whose functionality still serves certain developed countries, including the former colonial countries. To put it more clearly, even though colonisation has operated through the domination of one side over another for

certain power centres and goals throughout history, today the operation of these goals is maintained by the decisions and practices of individuals and masses with(in) the influence of external power forces. Semi-autonomous colonialism is a system in which both sides, potential coloniser and colonised, play a role, and the consent of both sides is required. To be able to deepen the argument, in following sections, I examine the similarities and differences that cross over certain characteristics attributed to classical colonialism in comparison with semi-autonomous colonialism. These characters are '*political and legal domination over an alien society, economic relations and political dependence, exploitation relations, and cultural and ethnic or racial inequalities*'. As a result of the following brief comparisons, I discuss the transformation in the instruments used by the classic colonial system and illustrate the differences and similarities between the two systems.

#### **6.4.1) Political and Legal Domination**

In the history of colonialism, one of the most prominent features at the beginning of the relations between the two sides is the political and legal encounters. This is the establishment of the colonisers' domination over the exploited ones at the beginning of the long-term process. This process usually ensues primarily with political and economic quests and initiatives between two or more parties. The political encounters and initiatives here can be observed as cultural, religious, economic, or social approaches. The forms in which these encounters and initiatives take shape appear more as wars, conflicts, power expansions, occupations, and then as economic and political conclusions. The domination process begins after these encounters, and the character that makes this domination legitimate, acceptable, and more importantly sustainable is to gain a statutory legitimacy. With the accomplishment of statutory legitimacy, it paves the way for the emergence of continuity and more specific objectives, which were often directed towards '*economic benefits*', which is the actual target intended. The main point is that it was the dominance of a certain mentality and objective that ensured that these colonial relations were controlled and serve certain purposes that will warrant continuity.

On the other hand, in semi-autonomous colonialism, these encountering relations are no longer based on wars, visible and traceable dominations, but rather

particularly digitalised media forms where the mechanisms of influence and control over people's perceptions are developed. This new formation of colonialism, in which perceptions can be influenced and manipulated through more apparatuses such as media, laws, human rights, or desires, continues through a new system. The main operation of this system creates an impact on the people's perceptions even in distanced geographies, on their lifestyles and standards they wish to possess, and on their desires and dreams about the future. Since these effects, manipulation and control mechanisms are not in a direct and observable form, there is no longer a need for political and legal legitimacy in between parties in this new process. Political and legal legitimacy change their form and methods.

The main reason why wars, occupations and dominations are not visible anymore in current systems is the potentially to be effective in control and management from farther distances. The physical visibility of the colonial process was substituted by soft powers throughout the control and management of the perceptions of individuals and societies wherever they live, rather than physical control and political domination in actuality. Thus, to illustrate hypothetically, as one of new superpowers and largest economies today, Germany<sup>67</sup> does not have to occupy Syria in order to reach the necessary masses, as Syrians, for economic growth, scientific progress, technological development and other potential improvements. On the contrary, its state identity construction as anti-militarist, liberal, egalitarian, prosperous, and lawful, and the desires and demands that these identities will potentially create are metaphorically new attempts at occupation. The circulation of these identities, especially in the digital habitus, will be sufficient for Germany to acquire individuals with human power, intellectual and qualified personalities to conduct scientific, technological, and academic studies.

Although there were two sides such as Germany and Syria, just as an example, in the classical colonial process, the economic benefits and developments, human power, intellectual and qualified people that Germany potentially need, necessarily required physical encounters. In other words, physical encounters such as war,

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<sup>67</sup> I emphasize Germany in this example because it is already overemphasized in the context of the research, and the reader is familiar with it. Otherwise, this equation is just an example, and instead of Germany, other countries such as England, France, United States, Canada, Australia can also be highlighted.

occupation and domination were the most fundamental feature, especially for building the first stage of colonisation, which is political and legal domination. I define such studies and developments as the central locomotive powers of current colonial relationships, which is to develop better and grow stronger.

#### **6.4.2) *Economic Relations and Political Dependence***

Another essential stage built after political and legal domination during the colonisation process is the long-term economic relations and political dependence of the colonised parties (see Memmi, 2013; Ocheni and Nwankwo, 2012). The formation and creation of the economic relations and political dependence process enable the colonial powers to settle in their colonies and make plans in the long-term (see Veracini, 2010). Commonly, political dependency and economic relations, which commenced after political and legal domination, were the stage in which the most fundamental objective of the colonisation process were built. That was the '*economic exploitation*' of the colonies and the key foundation of benefiting from it. This stage mattered not only for economic exploitation but also for the basis for the operability of policies in line with the cultural, social, and political goals of the colonising powers. At the stage of establishment of economic relations and political dependency, the foremost determining element was power elites. Such power elites, which could be in the form of empire, kingdom, state, army, company, aimed to build economic relations, political continuity, and dependency in factually occupied colonies. This stage also was very necessary and crucial particularly to secure the continuity of these relations within the framework of the colonisers' objectives and programs (Frankema and Buelens, 2013). These objectives and programs were usually the stages in which long-term relationships were established that were in favour of the colonizer powers and that made their further actions and policies acceptable through instituted dependencies. In other words, it was the process in which the colonizer power groups are institutionalised by means of economy, politics, and social policies, especially after war, occupation and domination (Césaire, 1972). Again, as in the first stage, these initiatives and established policies have responsible, visible and traceable parties.

Nonetheless, the determination of economic relations and political dependence in the encounters with two-sided parties in semi-autonomous colonialism are more about generating the individual and then collective consent. This is to spread new world views, alternative ideologies, desires, and policies that can direct societal demands, and in the last instance, people's perceptions. Therefore, the economic relations and political dependencies, that is, the economic and political operability of digital habitus is the main determining function. Institutions and establishments built in the classical colonial process have now been replaced by overseas companies, digital marketing, and global relations. To illustrate that, the companies that the British Empire ruled for economic and political purposes (see Tharoor, 2016), previously known as the East India Company (EIC) or later the British East India Company (BEIC), have now evolved into online overseas companies. The advertisements and marketing programs of these overseas companies, which was previously represented by the EIC in the name of the British Empire, nowadays represent Great Britain digitally. One of the main reasons that prompt digital habitus to expand, spread and become necessary is the digitalisation of these political and economic relations after colonialism.

In addition, the encounters and relations that took place in classical colonialism among the parties of the colonisation process were mainly based on manufacturing social consent with military and political domination. Consent generated through these political and military dominations was the legitimacy of prolonged colonial relations in the occupied lands. To illustrate that, global political forces and entities such as the UN, the bindingness of international treaties and conventions such as the Geneva Convention and IMF, universal standards based on human rights and essential laws, such as the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and other binding agreements and consensus. These new instruments due to the nature of comprehensive bindingness restricted the applicability of the means used by classical colonialism at the present time, as well as the economic and political expansions. Therefore, as a result, the strategies of generating social consent used by states to obtain certain economic, political, military, and social benefits have begun to change. In order to establish and expand economic relations and political dependence, the foremost new instruments used in the semi-autonomous

colonialism are depended more on the creation of demands, consent and desires. To be able to create such grounds for particularly economic, political and social relations, so to speak, advertising, campaigning, influencing, manipulating and controlling people's perceptions and demands are the new methods. Even though these methods are not specifically very recent, as an advanced interface, digital habitus has changed all dynamics.

The prevalence and acceptance of these new strategies and methods have already been on the agenda of various disciplines. For instance, manipulation of the perception and manufacturing the consent via media instruments find wide coverage in media studies, political science, and sociology. Moreover, the development of international trade, trans-national companies (TNCs), the expansion of foreign direct investment (FDI), marketing and advertisement strategies, greater trade in goods and services and other related necessary policies have been reviewed in the literature of economics, law, and political science. In this sense, nowadays, such large capitalist monopolies, transnational corporations and other institutions and companies present their policies and strategies as inevitable and most needed tools of modern times. To legitimize these policies and strategies they present, they construct a new system of semi-autonomous functioning that gives individuals more choice and scope for action. To build this argument on solid ground, all but one of the top 10 companies in the list of the most valuable publicly traded companies in the world, all of them are *'media, entertainment, social network, software development, and e-commerce companies'*<sup>68</sup>. In other words, as a capitalist sector, internet services and telecommunications companies are today's fastest growing and richest business monopolies through rapidly growing companies such as Facebook, Google, Apple, Amazon, and Microsoft. This is a new capitalism since colonial goals cannot be viewed separately from economic growth and capitalism.

#### **6.4.3) Exploitation Relations**

As the third stage, theoretically a very controversial subject on colonisation, *'the main purpose of the colonisation'*, and *'the main goal to be achieved'* is the stage in which

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<sup>68</sup> <https://fxssi.com/top-10-most-valuable-companies-in-the-world> last access on 05.06.2021



I evaluate as exploitation of the colonised in various aspects. I demonstrate the colonization process by schematizing it thus: Suppose there are two parties to the colonisation, A and B. The first stage, political and legal domination, relates to the process designating the encounter between A and B. The second stage, economic relations and political dependence, concerns the establishment of control and domination of A over B through economic and political relations that were sought to be legitimised. The exploitation of the colonised in various forms describes the original purpose and intention for the first two stages that occurred between A and B. We can make comprehensible the origination of this purpose, that is, the process that starts with the attempt of A and leads it to the encounter with B. The main intention and goal of, for instance, a state, a business, a university (technically referring to current universities where economic relations are involved and decisive), or even a family as a social form that reflects greater relationships, is *'growth'* and *'evolution'*. Conceptually, growth and evolution are natural phenomena. These phenomena can be handled within the life stage of living creatures. As Ibn Khaldun, an Arab scholar of Islam and social scientist pointed out in his analogy between states and humans: "... *states, dynasties, nations, and civilizations are like humans in that they are born, grow, mature, and die*" (Khaldun, 2015; Önder and Ulaşan, 2018; 234). As emphasized by Khaldun, this natural process is unique to living things, and has begun to be attributed to structural and institutional functions as a social phenomenon and process. Therefore, as a social phenomenon that becomes a purpose to succeed, growth and evolution not only occur in territorial form, but also in political, social and, in my opinion most importantly, economic form. This growth and evolution can be analysed through *horizontal*, which may be territorial and economic, and *vertical*, which may be social, cultural, scientific, and political, dimensions. Eventually, both horizontal and vertical growth and evolution have operated in connection with each other.

When considering historical progress, the growth and expansion of colonisation has radically been territorial and economic. Arguments such as geographical discoveries, missionary, bringing improvement and service are a few of attention-grabbing and justifying arguments as the main stems for the emergence of colonialism (see Schneider, 2017; Wariboko, 2018; Kohn and Reddy, 2006). But

simply, the credited formulation recorded in academic and social sources for the core understanding of colonialism is the territorial expansion and economic gain arguments (see Manning, 2004; Samson, 2003, 2013). In other words, in the formulation I have schematized, as the main impulse of the stages of economic and political dependencies as well as the built relationships after the encounter between A and B, we can say that A originally aims to achieve more growth and expansion by exploiting B in various forms. In the colonisation process, exploitation in various forms can be explained as the economic aims of colonisers in conquering a foreign society and country to benefit from its *human force* as labour and its *natural resources and materials* as economic capital. From the definition of exploitation in various forms, I indicate the root cause of the colonial mentality and system. These forms were principally visible in economic exploitation and then in human forces through slavery, social, cultural and intellectual exploitation.

On the other hand, to comprehend the exploitation relations in semi-autonomous colonialism, we must consider the economic operation of the digital habitus, its profits and which countries, powers, and understandings profit from such exploitation relationships. If I formulate the schema in the current colonial system: A refers to the colonisers and B to the colonised, we need to consider C as a new element where the encountering field of A and B take place. C largely operates through digital habitus. Although it is a digital form, we need to consider all the relationships included by digital habitus as e-territory/online territory, e-commerce, e-social and e-political fields. All these e-fields are structures that enable the formation of a semi-autonomous colonialism. So, *'what kind of exploitation relations does C as a new element create in these new colonial relationships?'*

We live in an exclusively capitalist, modern, and technological age. In this age rules based on human rights and freedoms are determinative. Fast and instantaneous communication networks are already established, and more importantly, intellectual, and mental power is more valuable than the body forces of the human. Considering the exploitation relations in horizontal and vertical dimensions as mentioned in classic colonialism, it can now be considered as the growth and evolution process on e-territory, e-commerce, and other e-fields. *What does this mean?*

When considering the area and size of digital fields as a new e-territory, I argue that the powers that occupy and cover the most space on this e-territory and obtain income and benefit are especially the actors of classical colonialism, such as England or France, and of the new colonial system, such as the United States. For instance, online pursuing of presidential elections taking place in the United States of America all over the world, the news in the media of almost all countries are just one example of the power relations in this new e-territory. Or it is the socio-political equivalent that an attack in the UK to instantly find a place in global news, media contents and posts. Or, any social catastrophe in France, such as Notre Dame Cathedral's burning, is being displayed as a common value of the whole world, and its wide coverage in media content can be considered as social growth and evolution in the e-territory. Moreover, a brief analysis conducted in 2020 stated that 25.9% of the media content on the internet was in English<sup>69</sup>. As an expanding e-territory, a parallel analogy can be considered between English being the common language of media content on e-territories and the English language of the colonies occupied in the colonial period. The point I want to emphasize on these random examples is that if digital habitus can be structurally identified with a territory, the new exploitation relations over this territory find their counterparts in different forms by growth and involvement in these territories. The economic, social, cultural, and intellectual equivalents of these examples can also be augmentable.

In addition to all these, relating to my research subject, the technological and transportation facilities provided by the age we live in and especially the increasing social and economic mobilities, such as immigration, fed by the widespread contents of the digital habitus are the subjects of discussion. According to the International Organization Migration (IOM) 2020 report, there are more than '270 million immigrants' in the world and this number is increasing day by day<sup>70</sup>. In other words, according to current data, approximately 3.5 to 4% of the world population migrate due to different reasons, which is a rapid increase in comparison with the rate of 2.8% in 2000<sup>71</sup>. This 4% population consists of *brain drain* from all over the world,

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<sup>69</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/262946/share-of-the-most-common-languages-on-the-internet/> last access on 28.05.2021

<sup>70</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/11/1052331> last accessed on 31.05.2021

<sup>71</sup> [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml\\_34\\_glossary.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf) last accessed on 31.05.2021

skilled labourers, qualified individuals as well as the other migrants, whose number increases with each passing day. The striking point here is that the vast majority of these populations migrate or wish to migrate to the economies in the world with the best economies, such as Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom, which are best known politically and socially and have relatively better standards. These countries, which contain the best brains, skilled and qualified people of the world, logically and naturally develop their systems to be better, stronger, and more profitable.

As a new field, digital habitus evolves with content that enables individuals to easily compare their conditions with the living standards and conditions elsewhere. In other words, the standards and conditions implied by the information, content, and images of country A now have a potential that an individual living in the country B can desire and migrate to achieve. The possibility of reflecting the bias, deficiencies and especially the positive aspects of the information about country A is much higher. Even though digital habitus has the capacity to contain all aspects in terms of content, the usage of fields in digital habitus is more prone to showing positive content to users. In this sense, it is very reasonable that we may ask the following questions:

- *Should country A be held responsible for the desires and perceptions indirectly created by its representations and content in digital fields?*
- *Who should be held responsible for the perception of individuals living in country B whose perception is affected and desire is formed by the content and information they encounter in digital habitus?*
- *Is the individual himself responsible for taking the action?*
- *Or is it country B because of the standards that the country's insufficient conditions cannot meet with the expectations of the individual?*

Exploitation relationships continue to heterogeneously *re-exist* in contemporary colonialism through different tools and strategies. The character that I have emphasised with semi-autonomous colonialism is that these exploitation relations continue to occur not only within the boundaries determined by the dominant side-

the colonisers, but also through the initiatives, decisions, desires and actions of individuals. While these relationships take place, individuals can find a certain extent of satisfaction and contentment as a result of their own decisions and actions, which for instance, can be immigration as an action or decision. However, this does not alter the fact that these individuals continue to benefit certain power elites, capitalist and colonial institutions, states, and subjects. Consequently, the functioning of the semi-autonomous colonial system is enacted by the parties of this system and within their responsibilities. This explains why the system is referred to as semi-autonomous.

#### **6.4.4) Cultural and Ethnic or Racial Inequalities**

The stage that I discuss and present to the attention of the reader in this section are inequalities, discriminations, injustice, and hierarchical stratifications, which emerged as an almost inevitable consequence in the establishment phase of the colonisation process. The most obvious of these structural and social injustices and inequalities are races, cultures, religions, and languages. The cultural and racial inequalities that originated as a result of the colonisation and exploitation process can be interpreted as the last stage of classical colonialism. The establishment of colonisation naturally confronted two different parties. In this confrontation, the strong party's dominance of the weak and its rule has revealed the inequalities and discriminations between the powerful and the weak in social terms. As stated in one of the core ideas of the growth and evolution hypothesis, the strong party's race, culture, language, and religion survive longer by eliminating the weak party. I consider this last stage of colonisation and such inequality and discrimination as almost inevitable consequences.

The rights, legal reforms and developments experienced over the past century have drastically changed injustices, inequalities, and discrimination, especially of race, ethnicity, religion, or language. As I mentioned very briefly before, we live in an era dominated by *universal values* and *legal rights*. However, this does not mean that we no longer face injustice and discrimination. On the contrary, in classic

colonialism, clearly and observable discrimination and inequalities are experienced in different forms in contemporary colonialism. The visibility or severity of the discrimination of the inequality experienced worldwide is no longer limited only to the societies or geographies where these experiences take place. For example, against a problem that takes place on the other side of the world, worldwide solidarity and cooperation make inequality or parties of the problem more visible and accountable. Digital habitus is the primary platform that enables this established solidarity and cooperation to be visible and permits the involvement of actors on the other side of the world. Digital habitus not only enables the establishment of solidarity and the ability to struggle together but also helps to carry the problem of experienced discrimination and inequality to political, social, and economic agendas. At the same time, the remembering and circulating human rights on a global scale to prevent these problems become potentially evident thanks to digital habitus.

The principal and noticeable difference between classic colonialism and semi-autonomous colonialism, regarding cultural and racial inequalities, can be expressed as follows: In the practices of historical colonialism, racial and cultural discrimination, inequality and humiliation policies, which colonial powers did not need to hide, have gained an official dimension and took part in official records. However, today, inequalities based on races or cultures cannot be implemented anymore and cannot be recorded in official records due to the laws that have international binding and sanctions that all people claim to enjoy equal and equivalent rights. Instead, inequalities such as the oppression of the oppositions created by collective identities, which are mainly formed at individual and social levels, on each other, as well as discrimination, exclusion, and conflict, are more visible. This situation again consists of the productions of individual and societal consent, the ability to influence and manipulate perceptions and then to be organised collectively against the others. Additionally, the development of digital habitus as the primary determining and differentiating element in the new colonial system draws attention once again. Digital habitus, which has a strengthening function such as increased awareness regarding the problems experienced in different parts of the world, involvement and taking action in accordance with the sensitivity of the problems, creating solidarity regardless of the distances, come to the fore today. However, although there are

decreasing racism and discrimination, and polarisation, on the other hand, are increasing on digital habitus. As a result, more abstract hierarchical structures such as identities, citizenships, nationalities, living standards, and lifestyles come into question. To put it very simply, being American, English, French, and German are the new identities that are today's privileges, desired to reach, and be owned. These identities are now in a form that is free of historical determinants such as gender, religion, and race. However, the living standards, economic and social statuses, legal and political privileges that these identities correspond to are the fundamental grounds of the formed hierarchies. Although media tools have been in people's lives for almost a century, in the last two decades, internet-based media that individual users can access and produce the content they prefer are the stages constituting these grounds.

Being informed and aware of the problems caused by the period and system we live in also brings to the agenda how we should take a position, decision, and action against these problems as individuals. For example, being aware of the problems in countries with inadequate economic and social conditions in Africa and knowing almost all the details influences how we play a role in solving these problems and how we stand politically and socially. Hypothetically, increasing the level of sensitivity demonstrated to countries with these economic and social problems means taking steps to solve these problems potentially. Although digital habitus increases the perception and awareness of individuals functionally and structurally, it strengthens or weakens the individuals' subjectivity in line with their actions, positions, and decisions. Therefore, the function and influence of digital habitus as an interface between power relations and subjectivities, highlighted in the first three stages discussed in the comparison of classic and semi-autonomous colonialism, also has a decisive role, especially at the ethnic, cultural, and racial inequalities stage.

### **6.5) Semi-Autonomous System in the Case of Syrian Refugees**

I start this section by delivering a lengthy quotation from a 30-year-old Kurdish woman, a very good-humoured mother of two, a former English teacher, who lost her husband in the war. This interviewee details her regular daily life by touching upon the conflicts that refugees usually face, their hopes, dreams, images, and

wishes about the future. The long quotation from this interviewee perfectly identifies the importance of the economy, social status, and gender, as the different forms of capital in parallel to Bourdieu's formulations of the notion of capital. Besides, this interviewee's daily routine illuminates the interwoven cogs of power relations, digital habitus and their subjectivities concerning the everyday experiences of refugees. Afterwards, through the analysis of the interviewee's words, the reader can establish the link between the interrelations and cooperation of these three mechanisms as a system corresponding to refugees' lives.

*"The days pass like the same, sometimes too slow, sometimes too fast. I usually start the day early. Although the kids also have a significant influence on this, I got used to it. I usually play a bit with the kids when I wake up. I loved to listen to their dreams, but now when I get up, I see them playing games or watching videos on the phone or tablet; they do not remember their dreams anymore [smiles].*

*I also check my phone to see if there is a call or message. To see whether there is a new development, the world has come to an end [smiles]. Then I prepare breakfast, and we eat something together. The children go out, and I stay in the room because there is not much to do. I return to my phone. I browse the Internet, check the news in my country, see what those insatiable politicians, wealthy capitalists say, what they do, how they continue to influence our lives.*

*I use Facebook in general, sometimes for calls, messages, and sometimes just for spending time. I learn the news about or from these politicians, wealthy, famous people on Facebook. If children are back in between, or if I have a task in the camp, I go out. Otherwise, I prefer to stay in the room. Because when I leave the room, wherever I look around, I see other versions of myself in the camp. That is not a pleasant sight, because some friends have been staying at the camp for almost three years. This situation always makes me question what we will be; whether we will stay here too long, what will happen to my children, what will happen to me? The days pass with these questions and worries in my mind.*

*... I sometimes think, if I were a man, then everything would be different, or if my husband were alive and with us. The difficulties and limitations of being a woman are definitely much tighter and determinant than other things. What I mean is not to be a man, but to have the convenience and conditions of being a man. We need money as well, no need to stress it even. That is the main reason we are still here, not having enough money to go farther.*

*... Then it is evening, the children are on the corners, the phones in their hands. They watch the photographs and videos shared by relatives in Europe. Then they start to ask, 'mother, when we will go there?' For them, Germany, France, England,*



*Sweden [their relatives live in these countries] are like heaven. They think that everything will be good there. I also think so. At least it will be better than here, and we will have a life. We only live here, it is like we live but do not have a life... Children are not wrong either; everything about these countries on the Internet is always better. They watch celebrities, movies, video clips on the Internet. Well, there are always rich lives and lives of other people. Then kids think we will be very rich when we go there, we will have everything... We turn off the lights and sleep slowly under the light of the phone screens; we wait to hear some news and then to get out of here and go somewhere [smiles].” [Interview 29, Lavrion/Greece, 18.11.2018]*

This lengthy passage concisely describes how the three mechanisms I have presented in detail correspond with their intersection and interactions in a refugee’s daily life. Based on the above statements of the interviewee, when I consider these three stages together, I come to the following conclusion: Power relations and actors cause the displacement of an individual as a result of the extreme violence and oppression this refugee is subjected to and is very determinant. Considering the circumstances of this refugee after her forcible displacement, her association with digital habitus occurs in the function of the media and the media content in building her future. Within this two-element equation, the legal, social, gender and economic realities, status, and capital of the refugee, namely the decisions she makes and the practices she implements, are determinative within the scope of its subjectivity.

The embodiment of power relations and actors in the lives of refugees, particularly more vivid and observable in the camps, can be understood through the interviewee’s words: “... *I browse the Internet, check the news in my country, see what those insatiable politicians, wealthy capitalists say, what they do, how they continue to influence our lives...*” Also, the interviewee stated: “*Children are on the corners, the phones in their hands. They watch the photographs and videos shared by relatives in Europe... They watch celebrities, movies, video clips on the Internet. Well, there are always rich lives and lives of other people...*” Each character in these statements, such as politicians, capitalists, celebrities, and relatives in Europe, can simply be coded as power actors who can influence refugees, at least in the interviewee’s case. Therefore, the contents with great potentials, which I introduced as the representations of the major actors or power relations, create a circulation

among themselves. This cycle gains explicitly more attention when this content is responded to by others who state something notable and influential through them.

I argue that it is a system that can reliably be considered in *sign*, *signifier*, and *signified* forms, as in the context of semiotics (See Saussure, 2011, and Barthes, 1977). These three components are phases of the formation of meaning. As three different mechanisms of a system: Power relations have a function that can externally affect, shape and transform the lives of individuals. Subjectivity is the inherent and acquired characteristics that determine the capacity of individuals to realize their personal decisions and actions. Digital habitus is a new mechanism that enables these two different mechanisms to work in accordance.

### **6.6) On the Potential Consequences of Semi-Autonomous Colonialism**

Historian Yuval Noah Harari, the author of *Homo Sapiens*, describes the historical development of world capitalism with its rapidly rising evolution with science that transformed into a world hegemony, and writes:

“The global centre of power shifted to Europe only between 1750 and 1850, when Europeans humiliated the Asian powers in a series of wars and conquered large parts of Asia. By 1900 Europeans firmly controlled the world’s economy and most of its territory. In 1950 western Europe and the United States together accounted for more than half of global production, whereas China’s portion had been reduced to 5 per cent. Under the European aegis, a new global order and global culture emerged. Today all humans are, to a much greater extent than they usually want to admit, European in dress, thought and taste. They may be fiercely anti-European in their rhetoric, but almost everyone on the planet views politics, medicine, war and economics through European eyes, and listens to music written in European modes with words in European languages. Even today’s burgeoning Chinese economy, which may soon regain its global primacy, is built on a European model of production and finance” (2014; 286).

With the question ‘*Why Europe?*’ in a chapter in his book, Harari describes the West as geography and power as a result of intersecting relations of science, imperialism, industrialism and capitalist economy of the approximately last 150-200 years of world

history. In these intersecting relations of the recent world history, we can find the clues of the current political, social, cultural, and specifically economic world hegemony, which is capitalism in other words. The concept and role of *capitalism*, which I avoided discussing and mentioning in order not to expand the scope and content of the research, is actually the most basic foundation and element of semi-autonomous colonialism. In this sense, the words of influential French thinker and historian, Fernand Braudel, on the development of capitalism are impressive: *“Capitalism only triumphs when it becomes identified with the state, when it is the state”* (1977; 64-65). Another French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, one of the leading and best-known theorists of the century, in his short article titled *‘Postscript on the Societies of Control’*, provides a remarkable analysis of the form in which capitalism evolves. The part I cite below can be considered as a current analysis, considering the effect and role of media tools in an up-to-date form:

*“But in the present situation, capitalism is no longer involved in the production, which it often relegates to the Third World, even for the complex forms of textiles, metallurgy, or oil production. It is a capitalism of higher-order production. It no longer buys raw materials and no longer sells the finished products: it buys the finished products or assembles parts. What it wants to sell is services but what it wants to buy is stocks. This is no longer a capitalism for production but for the product, which is to say, for being sold or marketed”* (1992; 6).

What Braudel and Deleuze say about the development, efficiency and transformation of capitalism is very important for us to evaluate current economic relations, especially from political and sociological perspectives. Semi-autonomous colonialism, which currently has a complex and embrangled history, necessitates a different study to analyse it from an economic perspective concerning capitalism. However, capitalism, about which we can argue whether it has transformed into a control society or a state form, is in a highly embedded and intertwined form within this new system. Among the power relations and actors, there are pure capitalist corporations and businesses, as well as the companies whose foundations are built for capitalist purposes to operate and develop digital habitus. Even though capitalism has not fully nationalized structurally, it develops in a highly institutionalized and

regulated process. Therefore, semi-autonomous colonialism, which I theoretically formulated as a system proposal in the light of fieldwork and findings, should be considered as a continuation and transformation of previous structural and institutional processes, not in relation to but within capitalism.

I describe the framework and boundaries of this semi-autonomous functionality as an operational system, in which the majority of the world population somehow take part at various levels and conditions. The operation of this complex socio-political and economic system as a new colonial system can also be evaluated within the scope of '*individual migration*'. The number of people who seek a new home, safe refuge, better conditions, and life increase day by day. The routes of these people, their perceptions about the places they want to go, how these perceptions are formed, and their capacity to realise them can also be understood through this system analysis. The main consequence that this system will naturally lead to will be that the countries with the highest immigration will encounter more demand from collective or individual migrants. This consequence is about the equation of *supply* and *demand* where demand comes from people to migrate to certain countries, and supply refers to these countries' responses to these demands. One of the current global policies stemming from precisely this reason is concerning the immigration, border control, work, residence permits and other related policies. Lately, this situation seems to serve in favour of the conservative and right-wing states that reproduce xenophobia within their territories and governments. In short, I point out that the countries where the world's very much qualified individuals – both intellectual and talented – and labour forces aim to migrate for various reasons will naturally cause complications due to the displaced masses' migration and individual immigration that will tend to increase in the near future. To be able to make a judgment on the ethical, moral, and legal conceptions of the semi-autonomous colonial system, this research necessitates further research.

### **6.7) Understanding Semi-Autonomous Colonialism through An Analogical Comparison**

I consider presenting these three mechanisms in an analogical form: *Economic Equation: Product-Marketing-Demand*. In the economic system, this equation

means: The more successful the advertisement is when marketing a product, the higher the demand rate for that product.

*'What does this economical equation mean in a socio-political process?'* We can formulate it as a Socio-Political Equation: Power Relations-Digital Habitus-Subjectivity. Power relations can be considered as a *product* in the form of identity, lifestyle, goods, brands, ideas, countries, and other forms. Digital Habitus in this equation corresponds to *marketing* through the means of media, the internet, social media, advertisement, and other means. Lastly, subjectivity is the created *demand* after the marketing of the product, which can be thought of as the human force, immigrants, various forms of gained benefits, and created desires.

In this formulation, there is movement and migration that emerged with the forced displacement of Syrian refugees. This also corresponds to a displacement of labour force. Let's apply this system to these displaced Syrian refugees: There has been a population of nearly 1 million refugees and immigrants who migrated to Germany in the last years. Germany as a power actor can be considered the *product* in this analogical equation. The widespread perception about Germany, created by classical media in the recent past, corresponds to the *marketing* stage of the equation, through its worldwide respected economy and politics, its images in social media content, and its higher and better living standards. This is the digital habitus. The desire of immigrants and refugees, who started to see and learn Germany better in their digital habitus as a *product*, to go there, that is, the masses who demand this product and migrate to reach the product, corresponds to the subjectivity part. In the economic equation, no matter how good a product is, how well it is advertised, no benefit can be obtained from the product without the consumers demanding that product. This means the system would not operate in this case. In this research, individuals and masses that are formulated and discussed as subjectivity, are presented in an empowered form. This is because I want to portray individuals and masses as the real power and decisive segment in this equation. If I point to semi-autonomous colonialism in this formulation: Syrian refugees who recently migrated to Germany and particularly the upcoming generation who will grow and will be better adapted to contribute to the country and provide benefits in many aspects. These benefits can be thought of both as services and as intellectual contributions. A good

example is that two scientists Uğur Şahin and Özlem Türeci<sup>72</sup>, who found one of the major vaccines against COVID-19, are originally from the immigrant family background. This is both a scientific, academic, and economic contribution to Germany both domestically and internationally.

This system has started to become colonialist because the construction of this product-marketing-demand system is already operating over a more unbalanced and unfair history. I will show what I mean by this argument with a simple hypothetical comparison: Suppose there is a brand that has already been expanding for years and has gained the experience and profits in producing, marketing, and selling its product. On the other hand, there is a new brand that strives to market its product, find a market, and make a profit by competing with the previous brand. The historical and economic experiences between these two different brands are where this system is in imbalance. In the socio-political sense, in recent history, especially the imbalance and inequality between countries created by the colonial process is a matter of question. For example, there are consequences that come out of being more popular, more familiar, better in many domains. To exemplify this among economically and socially first-world countries, Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, or the United States of America are much more well-known, recognised, and respected globally. In other words, the level of development, recognition and respect of these countries in economic and social terms is closely related to how these countries are represented and promoted in the media. Therefore, media users consciously or unconsciously know about these countries in some ways. This is the new growth and evolution in e-territories and is not constructed on a fair foundation.

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<sup>72</sup> <https://biontech.de/our-dna/leadership> last access on 05.06.2021

## 7) CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

“The virtuality and discontinuity of imperial sovereignty, however, do not minimise the effectiveness of its force; on the contrary, those very characteristics serve to reinforce its apparatus, demonstrating its effectiveness in the contemporary historical context and its legitimate force to resolve world problems in the final instance.”

***Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, Empire***

Migration is not a new phenomenon. On the contrary, it is a phenomenon that humans have encountered in the economic, social, and political domains for millennia. The legal status of individuals, such as citizens, refugees, and stateless people, who migrate for different reasons, such as pulling or pushing forces, had started to be defined, particularly when the national borders of countries became more obvious and restrictive. Notably, after WW2, such definitions as a refugee, immigrant, and international protection were established under the leadership of the UN and were globally acknowledged. These terms have taken their place in the literature with institutionalisations and agreements that regulate the socio-political and economic relations concerning the mobilities of individuals. Therefore, in many different periods of recent history, vulnerabilities and disempowerments caused by sociological, political, economic, and environmental circumstances termed refugee crises are in question.

This research explores the migration experiences and trajectories of those Syrian refugees who were forcibly displaced by the Syrian Civil War, which constitutes the *largest refugee population* from a single country in the world. In this axis, as one of the migration forms, the predispositions, and perceptions of forcibly displaced Syrian refugees regarding their movements are analysed through different focus points. Although there are thousands of studies focusing on Syrian refugees and reviewing their situation from varying perspectives, the contribution of this research to the relevant literature is to grasp more abstract phenomena such as perception, desire, thought, and tendencies of Syrian refugees and to set these at the core of the research. The reason for this is the effort to respond positively to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s argument that ‘*Can the subaltern speak?*’ (2008). This effort is strengthened by the social, political, economic and individualities that put the subjectivity of the

individuals in the foreground as the main subject of the movements and transformations experienced by Syrian refugees.

In the age we live in, the works in refugee and migration studies have increased considerably, in parallel to the development of academia, science, and research methods. Despite this, as an interdisciplinary researcher with sociology and political science backgrounds, I observe that the dominant approaches in these studies have a quantitative character and that studies with these methodological approaches are lacking in evaluating social experiences. In other words, I am of the opinion that analyses involving Syrian refugees, in general, disempower Syrian refugees' subjectivities as research objects. Also, their experiences are reviewed through the external determinants within statistics and numbers, which remain incapable of explicating very individualistic social facts. Therefore, with this research, I assessed the results and findings of the conducted field studies by highlighting what and how Syrian refugees' thoughts, feelings, desires, and perceptions were the main subjects of the research. In this context, I sought answers to the following primary and secondary research questions:

- *Considering the influences of new media relations on perceptions and desires, why do Syrian refugees migrate long distances, taking more risks and investing more time and money to reach Europe despite finding a safe refuge in neighbouring countries, and what is the relationship of these migration movements to colonialism?*
- *When analysing the immigration of Syrian refugees to Europe as a structural benchmark, what novel and unique contemporary migration determinant elements are present in the specific case of Syrian refugees' migration to Europe? How do these differ from other migration mobilities?*
- *Are these determinant elements fundamental to the individual cases, or are they part of a wider systemic formulation, such as new forms of colonialism and exploitation, based on other migration movements of people with similar circumstances?*



Hence, it is essential to emphasise the methodological approaches adopted in the research. The *qualitative method* was applied in particular due to the preferred research subject and the sample group's circumstances. I adopted the qualitative method because conducting the qualitative method in this research is about discovering and generating data that reveals the research phenomenon's motivations and dispositions, rather than verifying the predetermined research hypotheses. Therefore, essentially Syrian refugees' daily life practices, subjectivity, actions, and social relations in camp setting places were explored through in-depth interviews and ethnographic research methods.

Epistemologically, theoretical abstraction has been used in order to interpret the dynamics of the field study in light of the information generated and obtained in the field. In this context, the determining systematic method applied in the field study has been *Grounded Theory* due both to its methodological and epistemological scope. This systematic methodology argues that a theoretical presupposition may pose a barrier in the field, particularly concerning potential research themes that may arise in the field and their implications and contributions in research. Therefore, Grounded Theory is formulated on the comparative analysis, categorisation, coding, and classification of data obtained from the field, and accordingly, the research theory should be derived from field data. Grounded Theory also argues that instead of basing research on the theoretical debates already made on the studied subjects, it is necessary for the researcher to focus on the emerging themes in which the theory should be derived from the field. Power Relations, Digital Habitus and Subjectivity, as the primary theoretical frameworks produced and adopted in this research, have been obtained as a result of the '*doing fieldwork without theory and generating theory from the field*'. Moreover, due to the categorisation and coding of the data obtained during fieldwork, priority was given to four main focal points, and these focal points shaped the field study discussions. These four focal points, which were formulated by the theoretical discussions as Grounded Theory systematic suggests, are as follows:

a) Understanding Syrian refugees' perceptions, desires, and thoughts concerning migration destination places, countries, and societies;

- b) Understanding of Syrian refugees' use of internet-media tools and digital content;
- c) Understanding the social, economic, and cultural capital of Syrian refugees;
- d) Understanding of transformation of Syrian women refugees' gender roles and norms before and during migration.

These research categories were formed through the obtained and generated field data over about 5 months in three different countries: Turkey, Greece, and Germany. I carried out the field studies in 6 different cities: *Kahramanmaraş*, *Diyarbakır*, *Mardin* in Turkey, *Lavrion*, *Sounio* in Greece, and *Berlin* in Germany, and in 8 different refugee camps and protection centres. More than 70 face-to-face interviews were conducted in total, and I used 52 of them in the research. All interviews were held with interviewees over the age of 18, and 27 of them were men and 25 were women. Since the research concept aims to grasp abstract phenomena, I mainly conducted ethnography and interviews with *Syrian Arab* and *Syrian Kurdish* refugees to further enrich the research findings, as these are the two major ethnic and cultural groups in Syria. Consistently pursuing the research with these two ethnic groups in three different countries helped me to determine the differences and similarities through ethnic and cultural comparison of these sample groups and the gradual change and transformation of these groups within themselves. When evaluating the research findings according to migration routes and destination countries, the findings and conclusions are as follows:

Syrian Arab refugees staying at the Kahramanmaraş Temporary Protection Center (KTPC) particularly used expressions with highly positive connotations regarding the notion of the West, mainly referring to Western European countries with terms such as *civilised*, *developed*, *better life* and *standards*. All interviewees stated that they desire to migrate to European countries if possible. However, these interviewees had to continue to stay in the camp because they did not have strong economic and other capital, which showed the decisiveness of the economic capital. Moreover, I observed that internet and media usage was considerably high due to the restrictive conditions of the camp and free time. Additionally, due to the isolation and the natural tendency and possibility of preserving the traditional roles within the spatial limits, I

noted that Syrian female Arab refugees in KTPC maintained strongly traditional and patriarchal gender personalities or they were subjected to such societal characters. Therefore, a cycle with knock-on effects, such as economic capital, spatial determinism, reproduction of gender roles, and European countries as a preference for potential new migration destinations for the future, has been identified among Syrian Arab refugees in Turkey.

On the other hand, in the interviews held in the Kurdish cities of Diyarbakır and Mardin, the different economic or social capital forms of Syrian Kurdish refugees were relatively *better* than Arab refugees remaining in KTPC. Therefore, interviewees stayed at their own financed accommodations in the cities. Another reason for living in these pre-dominantly Kurdish cities was that Kurdish people have a sense of solidarity and imagined community among the Kurdish people as a connecting identity. I also easily noticed that all interviewees use social media and keep in close contact with relatives and friends who live in Europe via photos, posts, and other media content forms. While the politicised worldviews of these interviewees strikingly criticized the historical and political experiences of Europe, which they labelled as capitalist, consumerist, and individualist, they also had very affirmative perceptions about European countries in other aspects. The research findings also portrayed that they have the determination and desire to migrate to Europe. Although they have economic conditions to realise this, they stated that they fear to migrate due to political and ideological reasons. Both ethnography and interviews have confirmed that Syrian female Kurdish refugees have a highly progressive and ideologically pro-gender understanding. The reason for this is that women are politically supported, encouraged, and share in public responsibilities in Kurdish communities. The most obvious contrasts between Syrian Arab and Kurdish refugees in Turkey were that they had different capital forms and women had different gender awareness and norms. In addition to these, both sample groups' perceptions of European countries were quite *similar*. Also, Syrian Arab refugees evidently tended to use more internet and social media, as they stayed in the camp and had more time.

The research findings in Turkey differ from the findings of fieldwork conducted with interviewees in Greece. Of almost all Syrian Arab refugees staying in the Souino camp, it was noted that their economic, social, and educational levels were *moderate* or *above*. A common research finding suggests that illegal migration from Turkey to Greece itself played a filter role to distinguish the economic capital of Syrian refugees. In other words, international migrations are economically an expensive social and physical movement. All Arabs interviewed stated that their views and opinions about European countries have begun to lose their positivity. They were more *sceptical*, but still kept their positive hopes for the destination countries to which they want to migrate. The reasons that caused them to lose their belief about Europe were mainly due to the poor conditions of refugee camps, insufficient services and facilities of the state, communication that cannot be performed with the local people, inadequate social life, and prolonged bureaucratic processes in Greece. In addition, one of the most fundamental changes observed in Sounio camp was the empowered performativity of Syrian female Arab refugees and their gender norms. The transition from collective social relations to more individual relationships, gender education, state support, and responsibilities given to women in the camp increased the public visibility and awareness of the female refugees, and relatedly supported their subjectivity.

On the other hand, although Syrian Kurdish refugees in Lavrion camp displayed similarities with Syrian Arab refugees, their ideological and political involvement or indoctrinated training differed notably in gender and perception regarding the idea of Europe. All interviewees stated that they aimed to go to Western and Northern European countries, such as Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Sweden, but politically they emphasized that these countries are capitalist and hegemonic, using the terms negatively to mean consumerist and materialistic. Despite these political disagreements, they remained optimistic regarding the destination countries they had in mind to arrive, like the Arab refugees. I noted that European countries' politics and approaches to the Kurdish identity and struggle became a prioritised criterion for Kurdish participants for further migration due to their ideological standpoints. Even though the economic capital of Kurdish refugees in the Lavrion camp was *average*, they stated that they were able to sustain themselves with the economic

support of family members, especially those who arrived and settled in Europe. Besides, due to the abolition of the official status of the Lavrion camp a few years ago and the ideologically pro-Kurdish control of the camp, pro-women seminars, ideological and political training, and roles could be discerned in the camp. This feature played a very *encouraging* role for women refugees. The practicality of co-chair administration in the work to be done and the sharing of roles, the increase in public visibility, and their ideologically increased awareness have been decisive in this empowerment. In addition, the internet and social media usage of both sample groups were observed to be an average of over 6 hours a day. This time includes only social media use, such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and not the classical uses of media devices, such as TV. Social media use particularly constituted especially personal interests, entertainment, migration, laws, news-related content. Hence, the effect of media contents on perceptions, desires and thoughts has become easier to observe in daily life interactions. Since this research has focused on analysing Syrian refugees' perceptions, future imaginations and migration tendencies, the conditions of refugees in different countries have enabled me to realise their gradually changing opinions. For instance, While the Syrian female interviewees staying in the KTPC had very traditional, patriarchal, and subjected gender roles, the Arab women in the Sounio camp painted a highly empowered, legally backed and educationally supported picture. At the same time, Kurdish refugees in Diyarbakır and Mardin refrained from expressing their opinions due to their political fear and hesitation about Turkey, but Kurdish refugees staying in the Lavrion camp criticized Turkey very openly and comfortably.

After Turkey and Greece, the research conducted in Germany played an important role in our understanding of this gradual change and the factors causing changes. Thanks to the interviews and ethnography made in 5 different refugee accommodation centres in Berlin, it was revealed that both interviewee groups have thoughts polarizing in two areas about Germany. I primarily categorised them as disappointments and dissatisfaction, and to a minimum of met expectations and satisfactions. The satisfaction of Syrian Arab refugees with state aid, services and facilities was one of the first issues highlighted. This also validated the argument that European countries have higher and better standards and conditions. However, I

recorded that this minimum economic satisfaction revealed unforeseen uneasiness and conflicts in public and social relations, which were the ground for disappointments voiced by the interviewees. Moreover, I drew a conclusion that these disappointments and dissatisfaction stem especially from the fact that Syrian refugees have a collective social character, socialisation routines, and daily life habits. However, German society has very individualistic living standards and habits. The incompatibility of societal characters, socialization and living habits between these two societies has been explored as one of the invisible main drivers of impediments in integration, adaptation and orientation.

Regarding media use, I observed that among several interviewees the intense use of the internet during the migration process decreased when arriving at the destination country. However, interactions such as gaining more social media fans and receiving more feedback, on the contrary, motivated and encouraged other interviewees to engage with social media more. Thanks to digital ethnography, I revealed that the interviewees had two main digital contents that they shared on their social media platforms. These were primarily constituted by their personal life moments such as socialising, using public facilities, and their interactions with the public space, such as transportation, parks, city space. I also noted that these contents were mainly nourished by positive steers. Syrian female Arab refugees after leaving Turkey had started to experience individualisation, reduced social worry, increased public visibility and responsibilities, as well as supportive pro-women training seminars and educations. In Berlin, all-female participants demonstrated and represented such confident and strong women awareness and roles.

On the other hand, Syrian Kurdish refugees in Berlin also asserted similar complaints and uneasiness as well as similarly experienced satisfactions. It has been noted that the living standards and conditions of Germany are apparently strong in economic terms, and state aid and facilities are highly satisfactory. However, the most emphasized disappointments and dissatisfactions were about work, education and other legal permissions to obtain, alongside the long-term documentation, bureaucracy, language education, and gaining certifications. These challenges have created disappointments as all Syrian Arab refugees also emphasized. Although it

is argued that these services were applied by the German state for the rapid integration and adaptation of refugees, I noted that the long duration of these processes blocks and slows down the integration and adaptation of the interviewees. Besides, Syrian Kurdish refugees had relations with other Kurdish communities and diasporas in Berlin. This observation is parallel with the perception of *solidarity* and *imagined community* in previous field study countries, which means that Kurdish refugees and communities in Berlin had strong community relations and networks. Similarly, Syrian Kurdish refugees' internet and social media usage periods and forms were very similar to those of Syrian Arab refugees. I witnessed that especially young refugees were more interested in and invested their time on social media. In addition to these, especially politically and ideologically, Syrian female Kurdish interviewees' amplified gender awareness, increased social life roles and economic independence were the subjects of research findings.

Three-steps of gradual investigation of firstly forced and then voluntary migration experiences of Syrian refugees provide readers with supporting arguments for the following conclusions: In addition to economic capital, social and cultural capital has decisive effects on migration and the capacity to practice this, especially in cases of cross-border migrations. For those who have the capacity to realise this economically costly migration, the migration route has a direction in which family, kinship and social environment relations are determinant in choices of destination countries. The influence of these social relationships on individuals' perceptions and desires may be directly through communication and experience sharing. Such influences also may appear indirectly through the new digital relationships that almost every individual has from a very young age in the contemporary world. The areas where these digital relationships are most visible can be specified as relatively recent internet-based fields, such as social media and communication platforms, and intensified internet content. These internet-based fields and content generate desires and attractions directly or indirectly, as well as generating consent for the fulfilment of desires and attractions. Desires generated by communication and interactions between individuals are a new phenomenon, which has been evolving for less than a decade in parallel with the advancement of industries concerning communication and the internet. Generation of desire as a new research theme has

been neglected by studies of the production of consent, manipulation, and media control. The production of desire is not only related to the material world and consumption anymore, but rather to non-tangible beings, for example lifestyles, being a part or member of an ideal society, possessing better life qualities and other abstract desirable phenomena. The observable effects of these fields on perceptions consist of their influence on desires and imagined futures. In this sense, migration movements such as individual immigration or forced displacements realised by people whose desires and future imaginations can be influenced and shaped, particularly take place towards Europe.

To better recognise these findings, it should be remembered how the feelings and thoughts of the refugees have been formed. Being a refugee is simply to stay in limbo for a long time. Staying in limbo means not having feelings of confidence, protection, safe habitation, and certainty. This research displays the perceptions of Syrian refugees who experienced the long-term state of being in limbo, the movements between safe countries and their changing perceptions during these movements. Long-term and intense media interaction is the observable part of this changing perception process. However, the insecurity and the search for safe re-settlement places caused by being in limbo brings the perceptions, thoughts, and desires of the refugees to a more fragile and vulnerable position. For refugees who want to get out of limbo, *'everything can be real and reliable'*, so to speak.

Additionally, *'being a refugee'* is not an identity and status that is desired or achieved. Refugee-ness is a situation that is commonly triggered by external power relations and actors generally occurring against refugees' own consent and will. Therefore, pushed and displaced individuals, that is, potential, refugees, seek new safe refuge places. During this search, they instinctively wish to go to places they think are better, within the limits of their capital and conditions. For example, Western European countries have better standards and conditions, which is a fact in many aspects, such as economy, social welfare, state aid, infrastructure, business opportunity and other aspects. The fact that these better standards and conditions quickly become information content, especially in the digital age, in the form of biased and incomplete content. However, perhaps the point to remember at this point is this: Those countries



with these better standards and conditions when establishing and developing such better standards and conditions, *'what are the benefits and contributions of refugees or immigrants during the development of these standards?'*

For instance, statistics on these countries which are among the world's top five economies are remarkable: Immigrants consist of 14.1 per cent (9.5 million) of the United Kingdom population, 15.1 per cent (50.6 million) of the United States of America population, 15.7 per cent (13.1 million) of the population of Germany, and 12.8 per cent (8.3 million) of the population of France. This information does not include those who have already acquired citizenship. To interpret the data and clarify the argument, we can draw the following conclusion: Millions of immigrants currently in these countries also have families, relatives, friends in their home countries. Millions of immigrants and refugees in these countries have a pulling force effect on potential immigrant and refugees. These pulling factors are formed very quickly and largely thanks to the content that can be spread over internet-based media tools today. These pulling force effects occur much faster but invisibly through interactions and communications between individuals, alongside the facts on social, political, and economic development levels of countries that play the pulling force role.

Any potential refugee or immigrant is conceivably a labour force, skilled and qualified person and potentially people who can contribute to the countries they live in. There is a wide and general misconception and incomplete perception that refugees are the group that is perceived not to work at all and receive continued state support in a dependent manner. The refutation of these misconceptions and incomplete perceptions is a subject of the extensive literature that shows the contributions of the refugees to the host countries they are in, both in economic and social, academic, scientific, and artistic terms. The structures that ignore the contributions and services that these people will provide to the countries they are in soon and evaluate them with discriminating discourse and political arguments, instead of showing appreciation, should better understand the system they live in.

As a conclusion of my research, I theoretically propose a system scheme within the scope of the subjectivity of Syrian refugees, digital habitus and power relations. The

system I have called '*Semi-Autonomous Colonialism*' operates with these three mechanisms: Power relations as a determinant and formative order, the most intensified and interacted newly formed Digital Habitus, and empowered subjectivity. The reason I call this system a new formation of colonialism is essentially because it illustrates parallelism with the fundamental development of classic colonization. It appears that colonisation, as a system spreading through territorial growth and material exploitation, has started to decline recently. To evaluate from a metaphorical analogy, historically the colonization was huge machines that produced and took advantage of surplus-value. These machines operated with the growth of territories and exploitation of materials and expanded as they gained more functionality through the benefits of colonization. As it expanded, the surplus-value the colonization machine produced, that is, its economic and political gains, increased. However, at some point, the capacity and operation of these machines began to change towards intellect and knowledge-based expansion and processing, rather than material and territorial sources. The main reason for this was increased global awareness, and perhaps the pressure of global response and accountability to an ongoing colonisation process. The development of this global awareness has developed especially with worldwide media tools and networks. Thus, it started to transform from territorial growth and material exploitation to a machine that obtains more value from intelligence and knowledge-based services. This is a contemporary comprehensive system. If we remember the way Deleuze conceptualized the change in the system of capitalism: "*It is a capitalism of higher-order production. It no-longer buys raw materials and no longer sells the finished products: it buys the finished products or assembles parts...* (1992; 6)." The origin of the change was related to the facilitation of mobility between both people and knowledge. The long-distance movements and awareness about the others in many aspects, which have been facilitated more rapidly especially in the last few decades, have started to bring the operation of this intellect and knowledge-based machine to its pinnacle. The reason for this can be considered as a cycle, which this intellect and knowledge as a source in the form of human body and mind or digital data have started to come and work together much easier and faster in recent history. This coexistence has produced a new process.

I consider it to be very useful what Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt stated about the development and growth of *'Empire'* as a large system depicted in their joint work, *Empire* (2001). Hardt and Negri's later books, *'Multitude'* (2004), *'Commonwealth'* (2009) and *'Declaration'* (2012) are also decisive for understanding Empire as a multi-layered system. However, although their emphases in other books are particularly decisive on the construction, the development of resistance mechanisms, and the probability of collective networks of the mass struggle concerning Empire, the *Empire* book provides a strong basis for understanding the Semi-Autonomous Colonialism system. They state: *"Empire is emerging today as the centre that supports the globalisation of productive networks and casts its widely inclusive net to try to envelop all power relations within its world order — and yet at the same time it deploys a powerful police function against the new barbarians and the rebellious slaves who threaten its order"* (2001; 20). Hardt and Negri detail their conceptions besetting constitutions, global war, and class and other dynamics. Consequently, in their depiction, Empire is formed by a monarchy (particularly by pointing to the United States and the G8, and international organisations as NATO, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Trade Organization (WTO). The main difference between Empire and Semi-Autonomous Colonialism concerns individuals who directly or indirectly operate in the functioning of these systems. I describe a system in which consent is generated rather than forcibly gained, where individuals and masses are persuaded, encapsulated in every field, and where individuals are actively involved through advanced technological new tools such as manipulation and advertising. However, on the contrary, Empire considers the power and existence of individuals and masses structurally and functionally in the running of the system. Hence, so to speak, it has a de-subjectified approach. Semi-autonomous colonialism continues to re-establish colonial exploitation relations with new relations in a contemporary format.

Although I aim to engage with assertive and powerful arguments and theories and offer a proposal for a worldwide operating system, these arguments are open and needy for further discussions and studies. Alongside these, although I particularly have benefited from sociology and political science literature and theories, further studies are needed to explore the existing forms of exploitation and colonial relations

in an interdisciplinary context. Therefore, I very much hope this study to be a foundation, spark or inspiration for future studies.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AFAD</b>	Disaster and Emergency Management Presidencies ( <i>Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı</i> )
<b>AI</b>	Artificial Intelligence
<b>BAMF</b>	Federal Office for Migration and Refugees ( <i>Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge</i> )
<b>DGMM</b>	The Turkish Directorate General of Migration Management ( <i>Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü</i> )
<b>ECJ</b>	The European Court of Justice
<b>ECHR</b>	European Convention on Human Rights
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>HDP</b>	Peoples' Democratic Party ( <i>Halkların Demokratik Partisi</i> )
<b>HRW</b>	Human Rights Watch
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced People
<b>IT</b>	Information Technologies
<b>IoT</b>	Internet of Things
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>IRO</b>	International Refugee Organization
<b>KTPC</b>	Kahramanmaraş Temporary Protection Center ( <i>Kahramanmaraş Geçici Koruma Merkezi</i> )
<b>LAF</b>	State Office for Refugee Affairs Berlin ( <i>Landesamt für Flüchtlingsangelegenheiten</i> )
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>PKK</b>	The Kurdistan Workers' Party ( <i>Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan</i> )
<b>UNRRA</b>	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCHR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation
<b>WRC</b>	Women's Refugee Commission
<b>YPJ</b>	Women's Protection Units ( <i>Yekîneyên Parastina Jinê</i> )

## APPENDIXES

### Ethics Approval Form



### COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Ethics Committee [ssis-ethics@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:ssis-ethics@exeter.ac.uk)

#### CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Academic Unit: Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies  
Title of Project: Reformulation of Colonialism and its Effects  
on Refugees: the comparative case of  
refugees in Turkey, Greece and Germany  
Research Team Member(s): Baris Oktem  
  
Project Contact Point: bo243@exeter.ac.uk  
  
Supervisor(s): Prof. William Gallois  
Dr. Clemence Scalbert-Yucel  
  
This project has been  
approved for the period: From: 01.09.2018  
To: 15.01.2019  
  
Ethics Committee  
approval reference: Date: 24.08.2018

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stephen Skinner". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Stephen Skinner  
Chair, SSIS College Ethics Committee

## List of Interviewees

### Interviewees in KTCP, Diyarbakir and Batman in Turkey

**Interview 1)** Female – 01.10.2018 – Kahramanmaraş KTPC- Arab

Halep – 38 years old – Married, 3 children – Primary school – Housewife

**Interview 2)** Female – 02.10.2018 – Kahramanmaraş KTPC - Arab

Afrin – 32 years old – Married, 6 children – Secondary school – Housewife

**Interview 3)** Female – 02.10.2018 – Kahramanmaraş KTPC - Arab

Homs – 34 years old – Married, 4 children – Secondary school – Housewife

**Interview 4)** Female – 03.10.2018 – Kahramanmaraş KTPC - Arab

Idlib – 33 years old – Married, 6 children – Secondary school – Housewife

**Interview 5)** Male – 04.10.2018 – Kahramanmaraş KTPC -Arab

Laskiye – 42 years old – Married, 3 children – Bachelor's in education – Teacher

**Interview 6)** Male – 05.10.2018 – Kahramanmaraş KTPC - Arab

Hama – 40 years old – Married, 3 children – Secondary school – Farmer

**Interview 7)** Male – 09.10.2018 – Kahramanmaraş KTPC - Arab

Hama – 49 years old – Married, 2 children, 9 died – no education – Plumber

**Interview 8)** Male – 09.10.2018 – Kahramanmaraş KTPC - Arab

Halep – 20 years old – Single – Bachelor's student in economics

**Interview 9)** Male – 16.10.2018 – Diyarbakir – Kurdish

Cizire – 25 years old – Single – Bachelor's student in engineering – NGO worker

**Interview 10)** Male – 20.10.2018 – Diyarbakir – Kurdish

Qamishli – 26 years old – Single – Master's in History – Building worker

**Interview 11)** Male – 23.10.2018 – Diyarbakir – Kurdish

Kobane – 26 years old – Single – Bachelor's student in Sociology – Building worker

**Interview 12)** Female – 25.10.2018 – Diyarbakir – Kurdish

Cizire – 20 years old – Single – Bachelor's Student in law – Lifeguard

**Interview 13)** Male – 26.10.2018 – Diyarbakir - Kurdish

Damascus – 22 years old – Single – High school – Building worker

**Interview 14)** Female – 27.10.2018 – Mardin - Kurdish

Qamishli – 32 years old – Single – Bachelor's in law – Translator and teacher

**Interview 15):** Female, 28.10.2018 – Mardin - Kurdish



Qamishli - 23 years old, Single, High school, waitress,

**Interview 16:** Female, 28.10.2018 – Mardin - Kurdish

Derik - 21 years old, Bachelor, single, Child development expertise helper/babysitter

**Interview 17:** Female – 29.10.2018 – Mardin - Kurdish

Kobane - 33 years old, single, Master's in art (design), artist (painter)

**Interview 18:** Male, 31.10.2018 – Kahramanmaraş - Arab

Homs - 29 years old, Bachelor, married, 2 kids, security guard,

**Interview 19:** Female, 31.10.2018 – Kahramanmaraş - Arab

38 years old, married, 4 children, secondary school, Housewife,

### **Interviewees in Lavrion and Sounio in Greece**

**Interview 20)** Male – 06.11.2018 – Lavrion Camp – Kurdish

Afrin – 26 years old – Single – Bachelor's in Economy – Teacher

**Interview 21)** Female – 06.11.2018 – Lavrion Camp – Kurdish

Qamishli – 35 years old – Married, 2 children – Secondary School – Cashier

**Interview 22)** Female – 07.11.2018 – Lavrion Camp – Kurdish

Qamishli – 25 years old – Married, 2 children – Bachelor's in education – Teacher

**Interview 23)** Male – 07.11.2018 – Lavrion Camp – Kurdish

Kobane – 23 years old – Married, 2 children – Primary school – Body shop worker

**Interview 24)** Male – 14.11.2018 – Lavrion Camp – Kurdish

Afrin – 26 years old – Married, 1 child – Student in law – building worker

**Interview 25)** Male – 14.11.2018 – Sounio Camp - Arab

Deir ez-Zor – 50 years old – Married, 3 children – Bachelor's in Engineering –  
Mechanic worker

**Interview 26)** Male – 15.11.2018 – Sounio Camp - Arab

Damascus – 22 years old – Single – Student in law

**Interview 27)** Male – 15.11.2018 – Sounio Camp - Arab

Afrin – 31 years old – Married, 3 children – Student in law – Artists and building  
worker

**Interview 28)** Female – 17.11.2018 – Lavrion Camp – Kurdish

Afrin – 24 years old – Married, 1 child – Secondary school – Yezidi – housewife

**Interview 29)** Female – 18.11.2018 – Lavrion Camp – Kurdish

Qamishli – 30 years old – Married, 2 children – Bachelor’s in English – Cashier

**Interview 30)** Female – 19.11.2018 – Sounio Camp - Arab

Raqqa – 25 Years old – Married, no child – Secondary school – House wife

**Interview 31)** Male – 20.11.2018 – Lavrion Camp – Kurdish

Afrin – 34 Years old – Married, 3 children – Primary school – worker and farmer

**Interview 32:** Female, 22.11.2018 - Lavrion Camp – Kurdish

Afrin - 19 years old, single, high school

**Interview 33:** Female, 23.11.2018 - Sounio Camp - Arab

Raqqa - 28 years old - mother of 2 children, Divorced, Bachelor’s in engineering

**Interview 34:** Male, 23.11.2018 – Sounio Camp - Arab

Dear el zor - 39 years old, high school, married, 2 children, business

**Interview 35:** Female - 24.11.2018 – Sounio Camp - Arab

Homs- 20 years old, high school, married, 1 kid, housewife

**Interview 36:** Male, 25.11.2018 – Sounio Camp - Arab

Raqqa - 34 years old, Bachelor’s degree, married, no kids, business

### **Interviewees in Berlin -Germany**

**Interview 37)** Male- 31.03.2019 – Berlin Tempelhof-Schoeneberg - Arab

Haseke – 25 years old – Single - 2 years university graduate – Anesthesia Technician

**Interview 38)** Male – 02.04.2019 – Berlin Tempelhof-Schoeneberg - Arab

Damascus – 43 years old – Married, 3 children - Secondary school - Construction worker

**Interview 39)** Male – 03.04.2019 – Berlin Tempelhof-Schoeneberg - Arab

Halep - 34 years old – Married, 7 children – High school – Truck driver

**Interview 40)** Male – 04.04.2019 – Berlin- Tempelhof-Schoeneberg - Kurdish

Afrin – 24 years old – Single – Bachelor’s degree – Engineering

**Interview 41)** Male – 04.04.2019 – Berlin - Tempelhof-Schoeneberg - Kurdish

Derik – 21 Years old – Single – Bachelor’s degree – Informatic/programming

**Interview 42)** Female – 06.04.2019 – Berlin - Neukölln - Arab

Raqqa – 28 years old – Widow, 3 children – High school – Housewife/ now cleaner

**Interview 43)** (Female) – 07.04.2019 – Berlin - Neukölln - Arab

Homs – 23 years old – Single – Bachelor's degree – Finance/ now waitress

**Interview 44)** (Female) - 09.04.2019 – Berlin - Neukölln - Kurdish

Qamishli – 29 years old – Married – Bachelor's degree – Literature – Teacher

**Interview 45)** (Female) – 10.04.2019 – Berlin - Zehlendorf - Kurdish

Kobane – 33 years old - Single – Bachelor's degree – Cinema/director

**Interview 46)** (Female) – 12.04.2019 – Berlin - Zehlendorf - Arab

Dear el zor – 31 years old – Widow, 1 child - Bachelor's in Law – Assistant

**Interview 47)** Male – 14.04.2019 – Berlin - Zehlendorf - Kurdish

Qamishli – 29 years old – Married, 1 child – high school in Syria, Bachelor's in old care in Germany – Technician.

**Interview 48)** Male – 15.04.2019 – Berlin - Schoeneberg -Kurdish

Kobane – 28 years old – Single – Secondary school – Sport coach for children

**Interview 49)** Female – 17.04.2019 – Berlin - Schoeneberg -Kurdish

Haseke – 42 years old – Married, 2 children – Bachelor's in medicine – Doctor in Syria, translator

**Interview 50)** Female - 19.04.2019 – Berlin Wilmersdorf - Kurdish

Aziziye – 21 years old – Single – High school in Syria, bachelor's in programing in Germany – student

**Interview 51)** Male – 20.04.2019 – Berlin Wilmersdorf- Arab

46 years old – Married, 5 children – Primary school – Owner of shops chain in Syria (cosmetics) – Taxi driver

**Interview 52)** - Female - 21.04.2019 – Berlin Neukolln - Arab

Damascus - 33 years old - single-- Bachelor's in politics