The Changing Role of Gender in the Syrian Diaspora to Germany: Re-configuring Community, Identity and Sexuality through New Policing Mechanisms

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Abstract

This research follows feminist decolonial methodology to express the voices of women refugees, in particular subaltern Syrian refugee women living in diaspora in Germany since 2011. The project draws upon a feminist approach to decolonizing knowledge production in order to center the experiences and narratives of Muslim women refugees who are largely marginalized within the literature on migration history and new forced migrations from the Middle East. I trace the emergence of small diasporic communities in Germany and focus on the narratives of Syrian women and their experiences with respect to the reconfiguration of their communities in diaspora, amidst a plethora of factors that reshape their identities and gender dynamics within their families. My analysis is based on twelve interviews with Syrian women and men from communities in several German cities. I analyze the changes within the diasporic community and the accompanying establishment of social norms that police young members of the community and especially women. These gendered norms intertwine with the Syrian and the German patriarchal norms to generate multi-layered policing mechanisms that target women who disregard societal norms. Nevertheless, I observed patterns of hybrid practices of resistance utilized by women and community members to adjust to the changes in the community and notions of integration, as exemplified by certain practices related to dating, matchmaking, and marriage.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research. It contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgement is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word counts for this thesis are accurate:

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Signed: _____ (Abduhalim Albakkor)

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My father (1955-2012)

My brother (1980-2013)

To my beloved mom, hope you forgive my absence

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Introduction

Shortly after I arrived in the city of Greifswald in the province of Mecklenburg in Germany, I went to interview an elderly Syrian woman who worked as a teacher for more than three decades in Syria in the city of Homs. Upon arriving to her place, she welcomed me with a warm smile and offered me something to drink. As she prepared the traditional Syrian coffee, she added in cardamom as it typical for the way it is served in Syria, and the sweet aroma filled the kitchen. Opening a Damascene handmade wooden box, she offered me *Mamoul*[1], a traditional (Middle Eastern/Syrian) cookie stuffed with cashews or dates.[2] She served the cookies in a wooden box that represented the finest Syrian craftsmanship in order to show her hospitality as a gracious host. After she was settled in the seat in front of me, she began to tell me about her experience of teaching in Syria:

> "Son, I worked as a teacher in Syria for more than three decades, not a single one of my classes was not diverse, and that's how Syria was in reality, just like the mosaic on this wooden box but on a human scale. Now, this diversity is gone, the war made us intolerant to each other."[3]

As she reproduced a narrative of diversity that reminded me with the regime's narrative of diversity in Syria, especially with the use of the word 'mosaic' I could not help but think of the ways in which the Ba'athist regime have pushed for the Arab identity of the country and how other ways of identification have been crushed or silenced.[4] Leaving only the narrative of the Ba'athist

[1] Mamoul, special kind of cookies made out of dough and stuffed with dates or cashews, it is mostly prepared during the religious celebration of Eid al-Fitr at the end of fasting in Ramadan or for Eid al-Adha or the sacrifice season for Muslims. The cookies are usually served with tea or coffee and for diasporic communities it serves as a connection to traditions back at home and mostly connected with nostalgic narratives of life in the good old times.
[2] Sawsan Abu Farha, "Semolina Ma'amoul : Stuffed Cookies with Dates and Nuts," *Chef in Disguise*, August 7, 2013, https://chefindisguise.com/2013/08/07/semolina-maamoul-stuffed-cookies-with-dates-and-nuts/
[3] Interview transcripts translated by the author Abduhalim Albakkor, Interview with Author, Greifswald, July the 17th, 2018.
[4] Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*, (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1999), 27.

regime that was transformed into the national historical narrative, which left a room for pretentious diversity as a makeup for the brutal killing machine, which to a large extent fits with Eric Davis' analysis of the construction of historical memory in Iraq that promoted only the narrative of ethnic, tribal and religious group that controlled the country, in the case of Iraq it was Sunni elites.[5]

Syria's fragile democracy thrived after independence from France in 1946,[6] only to be crushed by the first military coup in the aftermath of the regional conflict that resulted in the establishment of the state of Israel. The transition from under the French Mandate government to independence was by no means smooth, and Syria's first democratically elected president of the country Shukri al-Quwwatli was overthrown in 1949.[7] From this point on, the country's future lay in the hands of military generals who fought for power and executed their nation-building projects through violent military coups. The most notorious of these coups was in 1963 coup when the Arab Socialist al-Ba'ath Party (ASBP) took control as the new government party in power.[8] Ba'athist officers conspired against one another until the infamous dictator of Syria Hafez al-Assad executed his own coup in 1970.[9] The Syrian dictator, Hafez al-Assad ruled the country with an iron fist until his death in 2000, paving the way for his son, the current dictator Bashar al-Assad, to rule the country and to create what many consider to be an Assad presidential monarchy.[10] Coming to power with much support, the young dictator deceived not only Syrians but also the international community, and the short-lived hope of democratic change marked the end of a false spring in Damascus.[11] The Syrian uprising in 2011 marked the end of the Assad reign as we know it and the

[5] Eric Davies, Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq, (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2005), 21.
[6] John McHugo, *Syria: A History of the Last Hundred Years*, (New York: New Press, 2015), 110.
[7] Mchugo. *Syria*, 123.
[8] Ibid, 144.
[9] Ibid, 153.
[10] Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *Syria: Revolution From Above*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 142.
[11] Eyal Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar Al-Asad and the First Years in Power*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 77.

instability in the country led to an unprecedented wave of Syrians who were forced to leave home to seek refuge in neighboring countries and eventually to settle in Europe, North America, and Australia.

My project addresses the formation of recent Syrian diasporic communities after 2011 in the Germany where many Syrians have sought asylum as a result of the conflict. The aim of the thesis is to analyze the changing role of gender in the Syrian diaspora and how the introduction, formation, and resurrection of certain policing mechanisms are reconceived in diaspora. My focus in the thesis is on the narratives of Syrian women who have fled the current conflict in order to understand their perception of themselves and their reflections on their communities, both at home and in Germany. In so doing, I hope to contribute to current trends in migration scholarship that show the differences between the experiences of women and men in diaspora. On the other hand, I analyze the narratives of Syrian men regarding the changes that the community has experienced over the past decade in order to analyze the discourses that the community uses to police its members. I trace the formation of a double consciousness in the community through its connection to the homeland and their new home. By drawing upon the experiences of Syrian women in particular, I will examine the multi-layered identities of the diasporic individual within a Euro-centric German integration system that fails to accommodate the plurality of identities and affiliations of diasporic communities in the country.

The purpose of my research is to understand how policing mechanisms in new communities of Syrian refugees shape the way that women migrants negotiate their identity and place in German society. The focus of these policing mechanisms is women within these Syrian communities, and in particular young women in their twenties. I argue that the fact that refugees are stuck in a state of immobility and inactivity for uncertain periods of time mean that its members tend to focus their

energy upon settling in Germany on intra-community affairs such as seeking help through learning from the experiences of other Syrian refugees in finding a house or learning German. Based on women's experiences of what they feel is the excessive policing within diasporic communities that seek to 'preserve' the values of the community and promote 'piety' and 'modesty' amongst young and unmarried women. As my final chapter will show, marriage is a central focus of the policing of women, since in diaspora women have to 'prove' that they can be a 'good wife'. Furthermore, the use of gossip in order to moderate the behavior of women on social media platforms (including religious networks) was a common problem that many of the women discussed in their interviews. I examine in the chapters how community formation is connected to new knowledge production as migrants find ways to navigate the challenges of their new lives in Germany.

The current political environment in Germany reveals a polarization in the population with respect to migration into Germany and in Europe in general. Migrants and refugees find themselves at a difficult divergence where they seek to stay close to their friends and families upon settlement but find this to be impossible given the geographical location of their state-funded housing in addition to limitations on their mobility imposed by the German authorities. As I will discuss with regards to Greifswald, many Syrians are settled in former Eastern-bloc housing that is located far from major industry and cities where they could most easily find work. By focusing on integrating refugees and supply labor for certain industries, the German Government prioritizes its own needs such as –supplying labor for the care industry and young students for vocational schools – which makes it harder for refugees to seek what they want to study or even move to different town. Lastly, the research aims to examine how Syrian families in diaspora negotiate within newly reformulated social hierarchies after 2013.

Historiography

This thesis draws upon reflexive feminist literature from the field of migration and refugee studies that includes the experiences of women without neglecting the experiences of men. In addition to utilizing an intersectional analysis of diaspora studies, most notably the work of historians on the topics that intersect gender, race and migrant communities in diaspora without privileging the experiences of men and drifts away from a neo-colonial feminist perspective that either depicted Muslim women as 'passive' or 'submissive' need protection and failed to see the cultural differences and the ways through which those women has utilized their cultural norms to exert their agency.[12] Drawing from the work of migration scholars such as Suzanne Sinke and others, this thesis takes seriously the category of gender in order to explore how historical narratives are made and unmade in diaspora.[13] Furthermore, the study of migration using historical analysis allows for the narratives of women to be explored without the use or the excessive use of jargonized language in this thesis.[14] I sincerely hope that this project will contribute to the current literature in a way that helps and supports Syrian diasporic communities not only in Germany and Europe, but also across the world.

This research is an exploration of the lived experiences of Syrian women who are struggling to remake their lives amidst an Islamophobic and xenophobic atmosphere that constructs Muslim as the dangerous 'Other' in Europe.[15] In this research, I draw from the examples of Caroline Nagel, Yvonne Haddad and others who deviate from an essentializing and a reductionist depiction of Islam as a single homogenous category in order to demonstrate the

[12] Amba Pande, *Women in the Indian Diaspora: Historical Narratives and Contemporary Challenges*, (Singapore: Springer, 2018), 18.
[13] Suzanne M. Sinke, "Gender and Migration: Historical Perspectives," *International Migration Review* 40, no. 1 (2006): 83.
[14] Sinke, 'Gender and Migration', 84.
[15] Cara Aitchison, Peter Hopkins, and Mei-Po Kwan, eds., *Geographies of Muslim Identities: Diaspora, Gender and Belonging*, (New York, Routledge, 2016), 1.

plurality of symbols used by Syrians to demarcate belonging through resistance in the host country.[16] By problematizing the politics of religion within growing diasporic communities of Syrians, I show the interconnectedness of temporality, migration, and identity formation. I further analyze the process of reproduction, negotiation and reconciliation of identities by Syrians and how the opportunities and trajectories of lives in Germany are shaped and influenced by the state's integration policies towards Syrian refugees.

Nagel observes that "it is difficult to find a group of women that has generated similar degree of scrutiny and interest" as Muslim women.[17] As Nadje Al-Ali argues in her foundational work on Iraqi women in diaspora, women's bodies are sites upon which ideologies are contested, and the policing of women contributes to anxieties about dress-codes and morality. In order to preserve homeland traditions, women are often pressured to at once negotiate the ideals of traditions in the homeland with new demands for 'progressiveness' associated with German civil society[18] I connect the formation of diasporic community to the fear of unfamiliar life that the community is facing upon arrival and regulations in the host country. The desire to familiarize oneself with the host country prompt excessive socialization with community members. But the extensive intra-community socialization is also connected to the marginalization and exclusion that the community faces in the host country.[19] Membership in the diasporic community signifies resistance and pride in the dual or multi-layered connections that the community maintains within Germany and to other settled communities of Syrians across Europe. Women take part in recreating home in diaspora while the new life abroad challenge gender dynamics within the family structure

[16] Aitchison et al., Geographies, 2.
[17] Ibid., 4.
[18] Nadje Sadig Al-Ali, *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories From 1948 to the Present*, (London: Zed Books, 2013), 223.
[19] Haideh Moghissi, *Muslim Diaspora: Gender, Culture, and Identity*, (London: Routledge, 2009), 14.

and the community in general.[20] Haideh Moghissis argues that the challenge to gender dynamics threatens the positions of power that conservative Muslim men enjoyed previously in Syria. Men experience a loss of status and economic potential that frequently leads to a lack of self-worth, depression, and in some cases an increase in domestic violence incidents in the community.[21]

A significant part of the literature in migration studies is focused on forced migrations that result from the sudden changes in land borders of the nation-state.[22] Within this literature is a debate regarding the perception of migration before 1945 as being mainly something that men attempted in order to escape their situations of misery? As John Torpey has argued, the idea of 'travel' is itself a privilege since a number of legal documents are required before you can cross borders. In the case of myself and many other Syrian men, we were forced to illegally cross borders in order to find refuge because we did not possess the required documentation and the world responded to the crisis in Syria by restricting each year the number of refugees that could be resettled through the UNHCR. As Torpey describes it, nation-states penetrate and dominate those states who are less powerful, and as a result of Syria's loss of status internationally, many of its citizens have lost access to identifying documents that could help them seek asylum In addition, it is also worth noting that many Syrian refugees have been forced to flee without the benefit of packing their belongings, and many chose to leave behind their documents for fear that they could not seek asylum.[23]

Following from Torpey's analysis, the Assad regime has systematically punished Syrians by blocking them from obtaining legal documents and travel documents that allow them to escape

[20] Pande, *Women in the Indian Diaspora,* 2.
[21] Moghissi, *Muslim Diaspora,* 14.
[22] Sinke, 'Gender and Migration', 94.
[23] John Torpey, "Coming and Going: On the State Monopolization of the Legitimate "Means of Movement,"" *Sociological Theory* 16, 3 (November 1998), 241.

from the country legally. Aside from the difficulty of obtaining a valid passport from such an oppressive regime, getting a visa in the current situation of the country would be difficult, if not impossible. Torpey further elaborates how entry requirements by nation-states such as the visa has become a tactic to control who is entering the country in order to restrict what are considered to be undesirable migrants.[24] Torpey further included Michel Foucault's contribution on that issue with respect to the act of disciplining that states may exert on the citizens or the residents within their territory.[25] Indeed bio-politics is an essential part of this research with respect to the ways that the state incorporates and integrates a new category of people into its population.[26] The mechanisms of disciplining refugee bodies, governs the surveillance of their movements and activities, and it also allows the state to deprive migrants of documents that would allow them to prove their identity.[27]

In the Origins of Totalitarianism ,Hannah Arendt examines how the Nazi regime governed through a politics of racial hierarchies and an extensive bureaucracy for the purpose of managing foreign bodies .[28] The connection I draw here is that bureaucracy plays an essential role as an instrument to manage refugees and to transform them into docile bodies that further serve the interests of the state without necessarily considering those refugees as full members of the society. Furthermore, these 'Others' cannot be accepted by the wider society as 'citizens'. In addition, the practices and the neoliberal migration policies that led to the creation of an international apartheid regime are examined by Nandita Sharma. I draw upon their analysis in order to understand how

[24] Torpey, "Coming and Going, 252.
[25] Ibid, 247.
[26] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (Penguin, 2008), 139.
[27] Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault." *Choice Reviews Online*26, no. 04 (1988), 4.
[28] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism. New Ed. with Added Prefaces*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 185.

the category of illegality relating to refugees is produced and reproduced as a means of restricting or denying the rights of migrants as residents of the state.[29]

Since the war on terror the category of the 'other' in Europe changed. As a result, the category contains brown bodies that does not fit with the imagined European look or appearance. The cultural practices or even dress code of members of that category regarded as the 'other' became threat to the so called 'European values' headscarf is one of those 'threats' that disturb the harmony and co-existence in the EU. The recent ban on any symbols that reflected the religious, philosophical and political standings of workers at workplace is one of those measures to keep the harmony in the EU.[30] In Germany, the law even allows the employer to fire workers who reject to remove their headscarves, which is a violation of the Universal Charter of Human Rights with respect to the right to believe.[31] The results of such law are even more controversial, since most Muslim women do wear a headscarf and assign huge values to head cover as a religious and political identity. The law puts Muslim women at a great divergence of choosing between giving up their headscarves to fit in the profile of a good European citizen, while on the other hand, giving up that head cover will certainly have consequences on their membership to their diasporic communities. The experiences of these Muslim women resonate with the statement of the Saudi scholar Amani Hamdan in which she argues that Arab Muslim women who migrated to Canada 'or any other Western country' are depicted as if they were 'emancipated' through westernization and adaptation of the country's norms. However, the author rejects this narrative and simply argues that those women shifted from one patriarchal space to another and the Canadian women

[29] Nandita Sharma, "Anti-Trafficking Rhetoric and the Making of a Global Apartheid," *NWSA Journal*17, no. 3 (2005):105.
[30] "EU Workplace Headscarf Ban 'can Be Legal', Says ECJ," BBC News, last modified March 14, 2017, Accessed August 08, 2019. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39264845.
[31] "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," United Nations, accessed August 08, 2019, http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/.

themselves are not necessarily 'emancipated', which she elaborated through the narratives of Arab Muslim women in the Canadian context.[32]

Since 1945, the European migration regime since its inception aimed to facilitate the movement of goods and professionals across its borders. The growth of the European Economic zone into a unified political entity has created a ready supply of labor and professionally trained workers that contribute to the development of European economies. It is in this situation that rescaling the alien becomes a significant and a crucial piece for my work, as the migrant country adopts measures of rescaling the migrant, as a result the rights of migrants as well as that of their families and kids change too. In the end, the governments change the lives of migrants and their families without giving them the legal and political representation.[33] Even though those migrants are legal residents of the country and contribute to its economy with their labor and taxes being extracted from their salaries.

Countries that ratified the 1951 Geneva Convention are bound by their obligation to grant asylum to those who have fled from political persecution or who are unable to return to their home state for fear of violence against them or their families..[34] Upon receiving asylum , refugees restart their lives and either start work or integration courses depending on the country of residence and its migration policies. Nevertheless, the process of claiming asylum has become increasingly difficult throughout Europe, and the waiting times of refugees are prolonged as time goes on, which leads to further exclusion of those asylum seekers. Therefore, the illegality of some migrants

[32] Amani Hamdan, "Arab Muslim Women in Canada: The Untold Narratives," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*27, no. 1 (2007): 134.
[33] Monica W. Varsanyi, "Rescaling the "Alien," Rescaling Personhood: Neoliberalism, Immigration, and the State," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 98, no. 4 (2008): 879.
[34] Marlou Schrover, Joanne Van Der Leun, Leo Lucassen, and Chris Quispel, eds, *Illegal Migration and Gender in a Global and Historical Perspective*. (Amsterdam University Press, April 15, 2009), 22.

may last for a long period of time that it creates a legal limbo for the migrant and leads to the interruption of normal daily life with the new reality of a prolonged state of illegality. I draw upon the work of Nicolas DeGenova who has theorized and addressed categories of illegality and how migration regimes place refugees in a constant state of fear that they will be deported. In my own case, the lack of documentation meant I had to navigate borders illegally, and was not thus able to apply through the legal channels for asylum in Germany with my family.[35] Without the necessary documentation to 'prove' eligibility for asylum, Susan Biber Coutin addresses to erasure of migrant personhood that is shaped by the division of powerful and weak states within which migrants from "spaces of non-existence" remain undocumented and unable to integrate into 'spaces of existence', thus preventing them from reaching citizenship in Europe or elsewhere.[36]

The works of De Genova and Coutin are crucial with respect to the creation of 'migration regimes' in which the reality of asylum seekers are governed by their state of legal limbo and uncertainty. Not only is the mobility of refugees who have submitted claims for asylum limited, so too is their access to social services and financial assistance, which prevents them from addressing their immediate and longer-term needs. Similar to the behavior of other migrant communities in diaspora, newcomers seek to regain their economic independence to rebuild their lives.[37] The work of De Genova on the inclusion through exclusion is therefore a crucial tool to analyze the lived experiences of refugees and their realities as they attempt to join the German civil society. Refugees live under restricted mobility, structural racism, and systemic undervaluing

[35] Nicholas P. De Genova, "Migrant "Illegality" and Deportability in Everyday Life," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31, no. 1 (2002): 439.
[36] Susan Bibler Coutin, "Illegality, Borderlands, and the Space of Nonexistence," In *Globalization under Construction: Govermentality, Law, and Identity,* Perry Richard Warren and Maurer Bill, eds, (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 173.
[37] Colin Wayne Leach and Donna R. Gabaccia, "An afterword The work and the wonder in studying immigrant life across the disciplines," in Immigrant Life in the U.S. Multi-disciplinary perspectives, Donna R. Gabaccia and Colin Wayne Leach eds., (London : Routledge, 2004), 189.

of their studies and experiences. Given the restrictions on mobility coupled with the lack of access to services, a significant number of refugees are forced to drop out of the welfare support system in order to relocate or to find better employment alternatives beyond their fixed residence as allocated by the state. Ultimately, Syrian migrants are expected to perform the duties of full-citizens in the state of Germany, even though they don't enjoy the rights of full-citizens.

Syrians in diaspora begin the integration process by immersing themselves first into an already existing diasporic communities of Muslims and Arabs in Germany. Building on the work of Homi K. Bhabha, Syrians have been peripheral to identity construction in Syria due to the Ba'ath government's project of creating a single narrative of history imposed by the state and denying other narratives, while in Germany, they are newcomers to an already established set of identities and symbols of belonging by the German society or other diasporic communities in Germany. However, after settlement in Germany and gradual interaction with established diasporic communities Syrians curry the meanings of culture in both sites Syria and Germany,[38] but Syrians are in the relocated location as Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek argues the case of Hungarian Jewish diasporic community in Canada.[39] As a result, the Syrian diasproic community gradually establishes its own hybrid atmosphere within its community by mixing both the cultural symbols of home and the host country.

Psychologist and cultural critic Franz Fanon's concept of the 'Manichaean delirium' is a useful foundation for a discussion of how colonial spaces are split as a result of the presence of the brown bodies in white spaces.[40] Refugees conceived as 'Other' face daily interactions with German

[38] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture: Critical Theory and the Postcolonial Perspective*, (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 1991), 56.
[39] Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, I-Chun Wang, and Hsiao-yu Sun, *Perspectives on Identity, Migration, and Displacement*, Kaohsiung: Humanities and Social Sciences Series, (National Sun Yat-sen University, 2010), 86.
[40] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 62.

citizens in which they are under constant surveillance of their commitment to integration. Citizens and refugees are positioned within power dynamics that function as reminder of the superiority of one group and inferiority of one another. Amidst that unbalanced power balance that Syrians are reconfiguring their identities to make sense of their presence in Germany.

Fanon in his book black skin, white Masks described the notion of invisibility of that woman in the space of extreme physical visibility. The contradiction in Fanon's argument lies in the discussion on the act of negotiation of identity in the colonial space where the migrant woman invisibility is tied to the visibility of gazing person. As Bhamba puts it 'the racist, masculinist gaze that disavows her presence'[41] Similarly, Muslim Syrian women are extremely visible in a space that may or may not be welcoming and the consequences as in the case of Samar, Syrian woman from Damascus and a refugee in Germany since 2015 and due to her visibility as a woman wearing headscarf, she was exposed to Islamophobic and xenophobic attacks in public.

In the case of refugee Syrian women in diaspora, not only they deal with the gaze of the German men who may or may not have a racist masculinist gaze at them. These women are equally judged and gazed at by Syrian men in the community, in addition to the gaze of other women in the community. The gaze by different actors that also work as policing social measures, those women are policed for violating and transgressing the social norms of the Syrian community. Equally speaking, they are gazed at for dressing differently in the public space in Germany and probably faced harassment because of that. These women, I argue are the ultimate in-between group in the community, they are expected to behave in a way that meets the expectations of women and men of the Syrian community. On the other hand, the Germany society's expectations

[41] Ibid., 67.

of the integration of the newcomers are mostly targeted towards women. Since the European woman as Hilma Lutz argues has been constructed as the bar excellence example of civility and independence, which migrant women and especially the Muslim ones are expected to follow.[42] In reality the identities of Muslim Syrian women are transforming reaching a hybrid identity of Syrian diasporic women.

Diaspora, according to Syrian born Armenian-American scholar Kachig Tölölyan is defined by six characteristics: forced dispersion, cultural unity, collective memory, strong community boundaries, links between different centers of community, and ties to historical location.[43] Tölölyan's definition and that of other diaspora scholars pays more attention to the definition of the term and reduces diaspora to the study of people's movements rather than their behavior and ability to create hybrid culture in the spaces they occupy.[44] Therefore, in this research I borrow the definition from his work in order to identify how the agency of the diasporic communities through their ability to relate to two different societies, and navigate two sets of cultural norms and laws produces a hybrid culture of past and present identities.[45]

The presence of Syrians as well as multiple other migrant communities in several German cities necessitates the investigation of the German identity. The factors are shaped and formed the notions of belonging in the German society and how these notions have changed with time following the end of WWII. I draw upon the work of Rogers Brubaker who traces the formation of the idea of belonging or 'Germanness', which is based either on belonging to the territory of

[42]Helma Lutz, "The Limits of European-ness: Immigrant Women in Fortress Europe," *Feminist Review* 57, no. 1 (1997): 97.
[43] Denise Helly, "Diaspora: History of an idea," in *Muslim Diaspora: Gender, Culture, and Identity*, ed. Moghissi, Haideh. (London: Routledge, 2009), 9.
[44] Helly, *Diaspora*, 10.
[45] Ibid., 6.

(*ius solis*) or by descending from Germans ancestors (*ius sanguini*). According to Brubaker, the notion of Germanness is founded on the belief there is a common culture and ethnicity, making the notion of belonging in Germany to be a community-based and an ethnic one and excludes those who don't have the same roots.[46]

The conflict in Syria has resulted in the deteriorating of human rights and protections in the country, and it has significantly restricted the role of women in Syrian society. In the early months of the conflict, the insecurities of Syrians were manipulated by the regime who used tactics of fear-mongering and the spreading of rumors about possible attacks that resulted in the restriction of the movement of in particular women by men in their families. However, as the conflict worsened, there was a gradual shift in the gendered dynamics of public and private spaces, as random arrests and disappearances of men led them to remain indoors, and this meant women had to take a more central role in managing family businesses or in dealing with the state bureaucracy. This sudden and extreme visibility of women in the Syrian context as a result of security threats shifted gender dynamics within families. In the aftermath of conflict, forced dispersal, and settlement in Germany Syrian migrant men have started to push back for their 'rights' and reclaim a central role in the public sphere. In some cases, as I will discuss in the last chapter, men are pushing for more conservative norms in women's daily conduct that did not exist in the society before the war.

Nour Abu-Assab has referred to these changes in Syrian society as a process of destabilizing gender dynamics. She traces the gradual participation in the demonstrations against the Assad regime by young women in university who defied their family and left their houses to

[46] Rogers Brubaker *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), 122.

join the demonstrations knowing that they will be judged by the neighbors, and probably they will be targeted by security forces more than men, to set an example out of them. Abu-Assab uses Sharabi's term 'neopatriarcy' which he used to refer to the family structure that came to focus more on nuclear family not the individual. This is not restricted to the Arab countries, but it is used by Sharabi to describe how security regimes in the Middle East and North Africa focused their efforts on undermining men as primary providers for their families.[47]

Abu-Assab argued that the Syrian conflict has broken the neo-patriarchal structure in the Syrian society, as a result of prolonged period of social instability and unrest. Gender roles remain in flux with the continual shifting of the current conflict.[48] Furthermore, the break of neo-patriarchal structures in society led to the worsening (these existed previously) of social problems, Such as gender based violence which has always been seen as a part of the domestic sphere.[49] The use of rape as a weapon of war has been implemented by the Syrian regime to terrorize both men and women into submission. Many cases have been reported of receiving calls to the family home threatening the safety of the women, and resulting in the panicked dispersal of families despite the uncertainty and difficulty of the journey to Europe. And as Abu-Assab reminds us, no matter what the conditions during which a woman has been raped, she is stigmatized and often ostracized by society in Syria and in the diaspora.[50]

Abu-Assab further tackles the issue of state feminism as a set of policies implemented by the stats to establish a kind of equal platform for men and women in society. Abu-Assab argued that these policies were just a façade that helped the state hide its patriarchal and phallocentric

[47] Jane Freedman, Zeynep Kivilcim, and Nurcan Özgür Baklacıoğlu, eds. *A Gendered Approach to the Syrian Refugee Crisis.* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 20.
[48] Freedman et al, *A Gendered Approach to the Syrian Refugee Crisis,* 20.
[49] Ibid., 21.
[50] Ibid., 23.

policies, which not only used women but also created divides according to sectarianism, religion, and regional affiliations.[51] The state selected those who fit with this agenda and hired them as part of the growing bureaucracy to give the impression to the international community that Syria was implementing progressive policies. However, as others have documented, neo-patriarchal structure have informed economic, social, and religious factors that restrict the capacity of Syrian women to be as active in society on many aspects.[52]

In my research, I build on the work of the Iraqi-German scholar Nadje Al-Ali, who wrote in details about the experiences of women in diaspora and the effects that successive wars have had on Iraqi women, including how those wars shaped their identities and migration, resulting in their resettlement. With regards to identity, Al-Ali and others have demonstrated how women migrants in their narratives express a kind of hyphenated identity Since They are no longer either fully Iraqi nor fully locals of the host country. Nevertheless women migrants strive to create what they think is home for them and what they remember to be home.[53] Furthermore, the work of my supervisor, Nadia Jones-Gailani, who is an Iraqi Welsh scholar has been a great help in understanding the ways in which Iraqi women have utilized the use of metaphors and symbols to convey the intricate meanings of their narratives such as the aesthetics of serving coffee. Understanding the intricacies of the culture through lived experience is part of a new focus on including refugee narratives as part of a knowledge-building exercise that takes seriously the meanings of the metaphors and gestures that inform the gendered narratives of Syrian women.[54]

[51] Ibid., 21.
[52] Ibid., 23.
[53] Nadje Sadig Al-Ali, *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present*, (New York and London: Zed Books, 2007), 17.
[54] Nadia Jones-Gailani, *Transnational Identity and Memory Making in the Lives of Iraqi Women in Diaspora: Case Studies from Toronto, Amman, and Detroit, 1979-2012,*

The first chapter give a detailed historical context to better understand the forces that shaped the history of Syria from the First World War to the recent uprising. The importance of this context is show the relationship between migration patterns of Syrians to the local and international changes like the rise of the Assad regime and the Arab Spring. I explain my methodology and fieldwork in the second chapter. In the third chapter I describe the arrival of refugees in Germany and reconfiguration of the Syrian communities across Germany. The welcoming scene with 'refugee welcome' banners soon changed, and the country's migration policies became strict with the German Chancellor Angela Merkel losing its constituency as a result of the 'unwise decision' she took regarding refugees. My fourth chapter tackles an interesting case that changed over the time of the conflict and migration to Germany, the case of marriage in diaspora and the transformation of the practice since the conflict. The chapter gives a detailed description of the practice of marriage with its various stages and how the economic burdens of the war made it less hyperbolic. Syrians tended to facilitate marriage after the conflict-which was not that common-then in diaspora they resorted to innovative techniques to find a potential mate. Finally, I explain across the chapter on marriage the importance of policing mechanisms that the Syrian community in Germany has and still been using to police its young members. The hope of this policing is simply to preserves what men feel to have lost, their dominant position in society in light of social, geographical, economic and structural changes that undermined that position of men. The act of policing is accompanied with the evaluation of how 'good' 'pious' or 'modest' a woman is. This evaluation is done not only by men but also by senior women in the community and it is by far a huge burden on any woman in the community and would definitely have consequences of the lives of young women in the community. Because it questions her membership to the community and isolate those who don't follow the norms or dare to transgress.

Chapter One: Historical Context

In this chapter, I analyze the emergence of political life in Syria since the beginning of the twentieth century. The French colonization of Syria relied on the principle of divide and rule, which fostered sectarian cleavages in the country. In this chapter, I trace the rise of the Arab Socialist al-Ba'ath Party (ASBP) which came to power in a military coup in 1963. Tracing the rise of the Assad regime through the 1970 coup that landed Hafez al-Assad as the absolute ruler of Syria, this chapter examines how life was shaped by these two events. The importance of these two events lies in the censorship exerted on all aspects of life in the country and most importantly on the instrumentalization of a sectarian 'divide and conquer' policies to eliminate a class of Sunni elites that dominated the political life in Syria.

Patterns of Syrian migration changed with the rise of the Assad family to power in Syria. Early waves of migrants sought refuge in North America due to economic reasons in the early 20th century. Later waves of migrants sought refuge in Europe for political support and academic studies as many Syrian students studied in Paris as it was the case of the founders of the Ba'ath party.[55] Then with the rise of the Arab nationalist project and the Arab-Israeli conflict, western states were framed as the enemy of Pan-Arabism and the nationalist projects for independence in the Middle East. The internal turmoil that the Assad regime faced in 1982 coincided with the Lebanese civil war and the Iraqi-Iranian war, making countries like Saudi Arabia and other Gulf

[55]M. B. and H. G. L, Syria and Lebanon: The States of the Levant under French Mandate," *Bulletin of International News*, Vol. 17, No. 14 (1940), 843.

countries better destination for Syrians for political support and for economic reasons. With Camp David Accords Egypt lost its leading role in the Arab nationalist project.[56]

The Arab Renaissance that took place around the end of the 19th century in Syria led to the country becoming s one of the centers of cultural and scholarly activisms – a period known in Arabic as 'al-Nahdha al-Arabia'.[57] The scholarly and academic activities that took place in many Arab cities including Damascus and Cairo resulted in a diverse ideological debate about the future of the region and the mode of governance envisioned for the future of the Arab regions.[58] However, the Pan-Arabism movement began to unravel as a result of the growing nationalist internal movements in Egypt, Syria and Iraq.[59]

The First World War Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 divided the Levant region into mandates controlled by the British and French forces. Greater Syria (Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Israel and Lebanon) witnessed the emergence of newly independent states that included the Arab Kingdom of Syria led by King Faisal I, which was declared an independent state in 1918.[60] Nevertheless, the French and British imperial forces had different plans to capitalize on the regional economic growth. The newly independent state known as the Arab Kingdom of Syria was then colonized by France in 1920 after the French Army crushed the small and ill-equipped army of the Kingdom, killing most of its soldiers and its leader Yusuf al-Azma.[61] The colonial 'Mandate' rule aimed to 'help' Syrians to rise to the level of a 'nation-state,' and began with the invasion of

[56] William B. Quandt, "Camp David and Peacemaking in the Middle East," *Political Science Quarterly,* Vol. 101, No. 3 (1986), 370.
[57] George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement,* (New York: Rutledge, 2015), 54.
[58] Antonius, *Arab Awakening,* 64.
[59] Ibid., 105.
[60] Malcom B. Russell, *First Modern Arab State: Syria and Faysal, 1918-1920,* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1985), 5.
[61] Eliezer Tauber, The Formation of Modern Iraq and Syria (New York, Routledge, 1995), 218.

Damascus by French General Henri Gouraud.[62] The French invasion put an end to the first independent Syrian state and made the country a colony ruled from the center of Empire - Paris - and increased the numbers of Syrian migrants and students travelling to France.

The French colonization of Syria utilized policies of divide and conquer in order to minimize the chances of having a unified resistance in the country. Modern-day Syria was divided into small faith-based states that were ruled by the French Commissioner in Damascus.[63] Despite these policies, the scholarly activism under the French occupation thrived and became much more consolidated.[64] The nationalist movements in the country became stronger and gained more support in the country's urban centers. Given the political turmoil in France, several successive changes of governments in Paris drew focus away from their colonies. A new High Commissioner was sent to the French colonies in Levant (Syria and Lebanon) General Maurice Sarrail took control of Syria in 1924, and abolished many repressive policies that his predecessor put in place to manage Syrians.[65]

The first democratic elections in Syria took place in 1943 which brought to power Shukri al-Quwwatil as the first president of Syria. Al-Quwwatli along with other politicians in the country pushed for a constitutional amendment to gain control over the armed forces which were until this point under French control.[66] As tensions rose, the French Commissioner ordered a total bombardment of Damascus in order to disrupt the Parliament while they were gathered to discuss the amendment.[67] The incident prompted British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to send troops

[62] Russell, *First Modern Arab State*, 186.
[63] John McHugo, *Syria: A History of the Last Hundred Years*, (New York: New Press, 2015), 75.
[64] Idir Ouahes, Brian Brock, and Susan F. Parsons, eds., *Syria and Lebanon Under the French Mandate: Cultural Imperialism and the Workings of Empire*, (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 28.
[65] McHugo, *Syria*, 80.
[66] Ibid., 108.
[67] Ibid., 110.

from Jordan that escorted the French troops to their garrisons. This marked the end of the French occupation of Syria and after the French failure to contain Syrian nationalist, French troops withdrew from the country in 1946.[68] Newly independent Syria had a very vibrant political and academic atmosphere, with an army founded by France that was predominantly formed of conscripts form the country's religious minorities. The nationalist bloc formation in Parliament brought about a generational split between the two opposition parties.[69]

The rise of Islamic revivalist ideology prevailed in the formation of the Muslim Brotherhood which was originally founded by Hasan al-Banna in Egypt, and closely followed by a Syrian version led by Mostafa al-Sibai.[70] Secular ideologies were equally influential, and its social project reached out to the masses. The Communist Party in Syria was founded in 1936 by a young Kurdish lawyer from an elite family in Hama, Khaled Baqdash.[71] Even though the Communist Party was small and could not compete with the already popular parties like the National Party and People's Party, the background of the founder, Khaled Baqdash granted him the support of not only the Kurdish people in Syria, but also people from his birthplace, the city of Hama.[72] These ideologies paved the way for new migration patterns to the Soviet Union and other socialist countries as well as to Egypt as the leading Arab country at the time. As a result, small Syrian diasporic communities emerged across the Arab world, in the former Soviet Union and in several European countries, these communities were then utilized to facilitate migration of Syrians escaping the conflict in the country after 2011.

[68] Ibid., 110.
[69]Ibid., 114.
[70] Ibid., 116.
[71] Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. "Khalid Bakdash"
[72] McHugo, *Syria,* 116.

1.1 The Rise of the Assad Regime

The ASBP ruled Syria under the state of emergency, which is the equivalent to Marshal Laws.[73] Life in Syria after the activation of emergency law meant that the state had control over all knowledge sources and was able to censor any media outlets in the country. The Ba'athist officers who led the 1963 coup ruled the country through a military committee that took decisions about political, social and economic life in the country. As it was expected, the junta of military officers began fighting to seize power in the country.[74] The last two of them competing for power were Salah Jadid and Hafez al-Assad.[75] In 1970 Assad made his own coup known as the 'Corrective Movement' which toppled down Salah Jadid,[76] the head of the military committee and the president at the time Nureddin al-Atassi. Both men were sent to prison where they spent the rest of their lives.

Assad's reign of Syria began with refashioning the Arab Socialist al-Ba'ath Party and the gradual creation of his personality cult following the example of the Stalinist regime. In order to reach the full control over the country, he massively recruited Alawites from his city and through them he controlled the joints of the military and secret services in the country. His consolidation of power was not smooth and was met with opposition from several groups. The most important of those groups was the Muslim Brotherhoods who received support from Saddam Hussein at the time and they fell easily and stupidly to the trap made by Assad regime in 1982, when a group of the Muslim Brotherhood decided to start an armed rebellion against the Assad regime. The armed rebellion of the Muslim Brotherhoods was centered in the city of Hama where the Assad forces

[73] Ibid., 145.
[74] Ibid., 146.
[75] Ibid., 152.
[76] Ibid., 153.

besieged the city and bombarded it for 28 days starting from the 2nd of February 1982.[77] The result of this military campaign was a massive destruction of the city of Hama, tens of thousands of victims and similar number of people were imprisoned and the total defeat of the Muslim brotherhoods in Syria.[78] This incident led to an exodus of Syrians who escaped the country because of their connections to the Muslim Brotherhoods or rejection to serve the mandatory military service in the Syrian army and its also resulted in Small Syrian communities in Jordan, Turkey and Gulf Countries.

Hafez al-Assad ruled Syrian till his death in 2000 during thirty years of his reign he managed to silence the Syrian intellectuals and opposition either by imprisonment or by assassination, he manipulated the Palestinian cause and isolated Syria from other Arab countries through allying with Iran. Lisa Wedeen argues that in the first decade of his reign, Hafez al-Assad created its cult of personality, he consolidated his power and equated himself to the state and distancing himself as a 'sacred figure', a 'knight' and a 'father figure'.[79] Wedeen further continues in her book on the symbolic demonstration of loyalty to the regime, which according to Wedeen made Syrians complicit in the reinforcement of the regime's symbolic power in public, through politics of 'as if' in which citizens performed spectacles of believe in the regime's rhetoric in public, despite their disbelieve, which the regime tolerate only in their private space.[80] Furthermore, Assad passed the country's presidency to his son Bashar al-Assad, the current dictator of Syria after consolidating his 'presidential monarchy' to pass to his son.[81] Building on

[77]Raphael Lefevre, *Ashes of Hama: The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 59.
[78] Lefever, *Ashes of Hama*, 59.
[79] Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*, (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1999), 17.
[80] Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination*, 38.
[81] Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *Syria: Revolution From Above*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 142.

Wedeen's analysis of the performativity of loyalty to the regime in public, and disbelieve in private, which led to sense of mistrust amongst Syrians in daily life.[82] I argue that Syrians have internalized this performance by time in other aspects, leading for men and women to perform the adherence to social norms and expectations despite not actually believing in these norms.

1.2 False Spring in Damascus 2000-2001

Since 2000 and after one of the most dystopian scenes in the history of Syria, became the president after the constitution of the country was tailored to fit him in less than thirty minutes.[83] The ten years that followed the rise of Bashar al-Assad to power were called the 'opening' in Syria, which was also known as Damascus Spring or 'Rabea Dimashq'.[84] The hopes of Syrians to have a country that respects their rights and works for the wellbeing of its citizens faded away after years of disappointment in which those dreams were completely crushed by the beginning of the Syrian revolution in 2011.[85]

The Syrian Revolution gradually transformed into an armed conflict in which the regime is responsible for the forced migration and deaths of millions of its citizens. During the uprisings against the regime's oppressive tactics, protestors were consistently branded s as mercenaries at times and as Islamist jihadist at other times.[86] The Assad regime withdrew its forces from many regions in the country to focus on controlling the strategic regions and urban centers. This created a power vacuum in those regions and with the release of most of the jihadists who fought in Afghanistan and Iraq from the notorious prison of Seydnayya in the first year of the Revolution.[87]

[82] Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination*, 82.
[83] Emile Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant*, (Routledge: New York, 2013), 15.
[84] Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising*, 22-23.
[85] Ibid., 14.
[86] Kathy Gilsinan, "How Syria's Uprising Spawned a Jihad: Five years ago, the opposition to Bashar al-Assad was mostly peaceful and secular. What happened?," *The Atlantic*, March 13, 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com.
[87] Gilsinan, "How Syria's Uprising Spawned a Jihad."

The rise of radical groups and the prevalence of insecurity in the country was a significant push factor for Syrians to flee from the country to neighboring countries as an initial stage and waiting for resettlement in European countries or US and Canada.

1.3 Syrian Migration to Europe and North America

From 2011 onwards, Syria has been devastated by the armed conflict and the intrusion of international powers. Syrians lacked the basic necessities of life and security, which triggered a massive exodus of Syrians into neighboring countries.[88] My family and I sought refuge in Turkey amongst the growing communities of Syrian refugees. Over time, the number of Syrians seeking asylum in the EU that are processed in Turkey has risen exponentially, whereas the support provided by the UNHCR has proved to be lacking given the resources needed to settle so many people. These patterns of forced migration through Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon to find a secondary settlement site is similar in many ways to the previous migrations from Iraq that began after 2003.

Historically speaking, Syrians migrated to South and North America more than hundred years ago. Little Syria in Manhattan left a plethora of archival evidence even after the total destruction of the Syrian-quarter in 1940 to make a way for entrance to the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel.[89] South America on the other hand is another example of a very successful diasporic experience that Syrians had. The difference between the two patterns is that Syrians in South America have voluntary assimilated into the countries and communities they settled in. One example of that assimilation would be the Argentinian president Carlos Menem who is a second

[88] Dawn Chatty, *Syria: The Making and Unmaking of a Refuge State*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 226.
[89] Allison Meier, "Remembering Little Syria, a Forgotten Manhattan Neighborhood," *Haperallergic*, October 19, 2016, https://hyperallergic.com/330286/remembering-little-syria-a-forgotten-manhattan-neighborhood/.

generation Syrian and his parents originally migrated from the city of Yabroud near Damascus.[90] Migration patterns of Syrians changed with the independence of the country. Ideas of pan-Arab nationalism and Islamic revivalism in addition to economic factors made the rich Gulf countries a favorable place for Syrians, with the uprising in 2011, many Syrians migrated till several countries in the Gulf implemented visa restrictions or simply made it harder for Syrians to travel there.[91]

The shifts in political regimes ruling Syria had its influence on migration patterns from the country. The continuities of those patterns happened sporadically. From travelling far to the Americas at the second half of the nineteenth century to travelling to Europe in the early twentieth century due to economic, political and academic reasons. Then we notice new patterns that emerged with the independence of the country which were influenced with the Arab nationalist project. Then patterns migration prompted by political oppression of the Ba'ath regimes and finally the recent waves of migration that is mostly characterized by illegal border crossing though the legal crossing is also a significant part. Nevertheless, the fact that a huge part of the recent migration is categorized as 'illegal' made Europe a favorable destination due to its asylum policies and its role in supporting the uprising.

There are many factors that triggered the insecurity of Syrians living in neighboring counties and in the Arabian Gulf. The most important of those factors would be the lack of legal guarantees for their rights and the uncertainty with respect to future plans considering that none of the Arab countries in the Gulf would be willing to grant citizenships to Syrians. As a matter of fact, most of the Syrians living nowadays in Saudi Arabia for example have had families and kids who

[90] Amy Tikkanen, "Carlos Menem President of Argentina," *Encyclopedia Britanica*, June 28, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Carlos-Menem.
[91] "Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates: Work and residence permits; citizenship rights for children born to Syrians in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates," *Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada*, August 13, 2014, https://www.refworld.org/country,,,,SAU,,540420f61,0.html.

were born there and still living on the basis of residence cards that they need to renew every year. The irony comes from the fact that those who were born in Saudi Arabia and had been living there for decades did not receive a citizenship card nor a permanent residence permit, while a social humanoid robot named Sophia was the first ever being to receive a Saudi citizenship.[92]

The result of these insecurity that Syrians experienced in neighboring countries and other Arab countries was the surge in numbers of Syrians seeking asylum in the EU. Countries like Sweden and Germany were the destination for many Syrians who crossed the Mediterranean and walked for weeks to seek asylum there.[93] My family crossed the Aegean Sea in 2015 and walked the Balkan Route to reach to Germany while one of my brothers was crossed from Algeria to Morocco to reach to Spain and the destination for them was Germany. The sudden loss of home in Syria and the realization that life in neighboring countries is less likely to provide a sense of stability for the long term resulted in a new pattern to travel to the EU where there is a great opportunity to get citizenship or a permanent residence permit in five to ten years. Indeed that is an element of continuity in patterns of migration that Syrians have taken over the past decades, nevertheless, the recent patterns prompted by the uprising is different with respect to the fact that the majority of Syrians don't have the option of going home with the current regime in power.

[92] Jane Kinninmont, "Citizenship in the Gulf" in *The Gulf States and the Arab Uprisings*, ed. Ana Echagüe (Spain: FRIDE, 2013), 51.
[93] European Parliamentary Research Services, "Migration and Asylum," European Parliament, www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/infographics/migration/public/index.html?page=intro.

Chapter Two: Methodology

This research follows a feminist decolonial methodological approach to express the voices of women refugees, and in particular subaltern Syrian refugee women living in diaspora in Germany since 2011. The importance of this research does not come merely from the fact that it is written by a Syrian researcher, nor from the fact that it conveys the narratives, experiences and feelings of those who are marginalized within the German migration regime. Most importantly, the research draws upon a feminist approach to decolonize knowledge production, and to center the experiences and narratives of Muslim women refugees who are largely marginalized within the literature on migration history and new forced migrations from the Middle East.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's work is essential to establishing my methodology because she centers the voices of those women who are marginalized within the context of Empire. Mohanty is one of the strongest voices to challenge the dominant image of Muslim and brown women as passive, submissive and victims that need to be saved from brown men.[94] Mohanty's work also helps us to deconstruct an equally poisonous image that neo-colonials feminists have contributed to after the War on Terror, where the western media promoted the idea that Afghan and Iraqi women suffer from "an oppressive Muslim culture".[95] Therefore, I adhere to a decolonial and a democratic approach to knowledge production that engages the respondent in the research on many levels.[96] In order to circumvent the notion of epistemic violence and revisit Spivak's question of subaltern

[94] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *boundary* 2, Vol. 12/13 no. 3 (Spring-Autumn, 1984), 337.
[95] Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes" 338.
[96] Michael Frisch, A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History, (New York: SUNY Press, 1990), 84.

voices, I build my framework upon the works of feminists who unsilenced the voices of those women who are most often left out of the historical record. [97]

Approaches to history and history writing vary, from archive-based history wiring to primary and secondary source-based histories. What these different types of histories have in common, other than supporting a certain dominant narrative, is that within the archives containing them is a dark legacy of colonial narrative-building. The bias that regarded certain sources to be important and others deemed insignificant, such bias leaves histories and narratives of marginalized groups out of the archives and this brings about the erasure of certain histories due to the "credibility of written sources".[98] In this respect, I use oral history as a methodology to convey the narrative of the social history of Syrians in Germany in a way that takes their narrative and delivers it to the "historical apparatus"[99] through the privilege that I now enjoy as a student with residency in the EU who is studying at a US-accredited institution.

After the Syrian Revolution began in March and was repressed by the Assad regime, many Syrians, like myself, were forced to flee to neighboring countries. Refugees then crosses the Mediterranean to seek asylum in certain European countries which has been referred to in the media as a new "refugee crisis". Grounded in a wider narrative of the 'deservingness' of certain refugees and migrants over others,[100] the role of certain media outlets has given the far-right

[97] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (London: Macmillan, 1988), 25.
[98] Alessandro Portelli, 'What makes oral history different', in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 1998), 66.
[99] Popular Memory Group, "Popular Memory Theory, Politics, Method" in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 1998), 76.
[100] Seth M. Holmes and Heide Castaneda, "Representing the "European Refugee Crisis" in Germany and Beyond: Deservingness and Difference, Life and Death," American Ethnologist, vol. 43 no. 1 (2016) 16.

parties in Europe a significant rise of votes from insecure, xenophobic and Islamophobic category of voters to counter the "invasion of Europe" in order to "protect the Christian values"[101]

The formation of a community happens amidst certain regulations and laws that are enforced by an efficient system will foster a compromise of cultural practices and social norms that will result in hybrid and mixed identities to be seen amongst youth who arrived to Germany and in the next generation of Syrians in Germany. My methodology has developed around the following questions: I) How the Syrian community is being formed in German cities? II) What are the methods and tactics of policies that the community is utilizing to keep its members in check and what are the origins of these tactics? III) What's the manifested purpose(s) of such tactics and what's the implicit purpose(s)? And most importantly, how does the perception of the Syrian refugees I interviewed across the Germany geography change upon living in diaspora for the past years with respect to identity, sexuality and belonging?

I embarked upon my fieldwork over the summer of 2018 from mid-July to mid-September and indeed I relied heavily on the network of my family scattered across three different cities, Berlin, Dresden and Greifswald. I began my oral history interviews in Greifswald where I was able to conduct eight different interviews half of them were with people I met through my family. I then moved to Berlin and continued my work by interviewing people I had previously met in Istanbul while working at the Migration Research center at Koc University (MiReKoc). I stayed in touch with families that I knew in Istanbul and I helped them through the process of family unification that granted them entry to Germany. Dresden was a short stop in my fieldwork where I conducted only two interviews and it then led for a trip to Munich in the south of Germany, where

[101] Jacques Rupnik, "Surging Illiberalism in the East," *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 27 no. 4. (2016), 84.

I conducted two focus groups with Syrian men and a few key interviews with Syrian women. I continued to interview when I returned to Dresden and then to Berlin.

I am indebted to my sister and my sister in law for their help in connecting to women in their network and for their help in spreading the word about my research in the community. Their help significantly strengthened my access to the field and also alleviated many of the fears and concerns of the women whom I interviewed from their network. There was a factor of mutual trust and respect that without the help of my sister and sister in law I would have needed to work for weeks to reach with my respondents. These collaborators coordinated meetings with other women who either invited us to their place or preferred to come to my family's or sister in law's place to have a private a safe space for them to speak to break away from the hierarchies within the Syrian community in the city as well as the social and personal ones.[102]

I opted to avoid recording my interviews for many reasons that I anticipated would prevent me from collecting honest account of the lived experiences of these women and men as migrants from Syria. Not only I was able to interview a significant number of Syrians but also many women felt comfortable talking and expressing their opinion without fretting about the recording and the insecurities it might have trigger. In some cases, even the consent form was a source of fear, insecurity and mistrust and I completely understand and related to their fears. Life in Syria before the conflict traumatized Syrians in many ways that there is an ever-present fear of repercussions upon speaking to unfamiliar people and signing and documents.[103] The fear that this simple signature will come around and bring headache for them, as Winfired Tate stated about the effects

[102] Nadia Jones-Gailani, "Third Parties in "Third Spaces": Reflecting on the Role of the Translator in Oral History Interviews with Iraqi Diasporic Women" in *Oral History Off the Record: Toward an Ethnography of Practice*, Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki eds. (Palgrave Macmillan: US, 2013), 171.
[103] Nadje Sadig Al-Ali, *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories From 1948 to the Present*, (London: Zed Books, 2013), 36.

of conflict on the emotions of people living there in "an atmosphere of terror" and the weight that the conflict would have on the mental and emotional state of the respondent.[104] By avoiding the record, I also avoided unexpected requests of 'turning off the record' and hopefully reached a closer step towards and ethics of silence as per the advice of Alexander Freund.[105]

I started my interviews with general questions about life in Germany. In answer to my questions, most of the individuals revealed the things they are insecure about the most or the ones they are grateful to have. When I asked 'what do you like about living in Germany, the women I interviewed told me they were grateful for the fact that they feel secure and happy with the support from the social system, while men mostly replied with answers that revealed their insecurity about living in Germany and the German laws or the racism or the rise of far-right parties and the topic of integration. In general, respondents were curious about my life, my studies and why I was in Hungary and not in Germany. So, as for the respondents who are familiar with me, I updated them about my life and studies. But the tricky par was to tell other respondents about my research and the purpose of my thesis, since I expected some skirmishes and fierce discussions especially that the term 'feminism' does not have a good reception amongst elderly or religious groups of the community. Fearing those expected tense discussions and debates, I talked at length about the topic of "refugees and integration" and the problems Syrians are facing in Germany, which made the respondents talk about the issues that they feel the most dissatisfied about.

[104] Winifred Tate, *Counting the Dead The Culture and Politics of Human Rights Activism in Colombia,* (LA: University of California Press, 2007), 23.
[105] Alexander Freund, "Toward an Ethics of Silence? Negotiating Off-the-Record Events and Identity in Oral History," in *Oral History Off the Record Toward an Ethnography of Practice,* Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 236.

There is no doubt that my life trajectory and that of my family have had its influence on me and my intention of writing this thesis. Even though I did not go as a refugee to Germany, I have been forced to navigate categories of legality and precarity, a student and then as a researcher at MiReKoc in Turkey. The 'EU Turkey deal' had imposed upon Syrians in Turkey immobility and required them to seek permission to travel within Turkish cities, I avoided these requirements by attaining a student residence permit. Furthermore, being part of a family that struggled for months in limbo, uncertain of their future as refugees in Germany. I became well informed with the stages of seeking asylum in Germany and equally frustrated with the uncertainties that the future may bring for my three brother who have waited for two years to receive a positive answer to their asylum request.

Early in 2013 after being displaced in Syria for a year, an ambulance for the Free Syrian Civil Defense dropped me and my younger brothers at the Turkish borders. I only had my wallet, a few Syrian pounds, and my two younger brothers in my care. The eldest of them had been in the intensive care unit for a month after receiving a bullet in his head by regime forces that resulted in his slipping into a comma. The Turkish border control -as per regulations- informed me that only one person can cross the border accompanying the wounded brother. In the end, my youngest brother (14 years old at the time) stayed at the borders and followed us after a few weeks.

After a long journey to recovery, my brother recovered from his head injury, and we were able to move him to Istanbul. I worked in the metal shining factories of Istanbul until I managed to resume my undergraduate studies. During my studies, my family crossed the Aegean Sea amidst the peak of migrant crossing to the Greek shores. It took them two weeks to arrive in Germany and settle in the Federation of Mecklenburg to the north of Berlin, while I stayed to continue my studies in Turkey. As a student, I was fortunate to work as a research assistant at Migration Research

Center at Koc University in Istanbul. This resulted in increasing my exposure to the Syrian community in several neighborhoods in the city and I managed to keep a close relationship with the respondents I met there from 2016 to 2017.

My positionality in doing this research is far from being simple, and I do not claim to be an objective researcher because, this project is as much a personal narrative as it is that of a community in diaspora. I claim a form of insider status in the community, but this is complicated by the fact that I have not lived and experienced their struggles with life in Germany. I claim to have a better understanding of my own community, coming from my membership to the Syrian community and a shared history of memories, trauma and loss. However, I am also not an outsider to the Syrian community in Germany either, and so I attempt here to theorize my identity as a halfie that fits within positionality of the research and the internal-outsider. I am a Syrian, Arab, Muslim researcher who is a part of a western academic institution. I am also a member of a Syrian diasporic community in Europe and it is within this complex power dynamics that I position myself and I defend the narrative of the subaltern within me.[106] In the beautiful words of Mahmoud Darwish, the complexity of this kind of identity is best summarized:

What about identity? I asked.
He said: It's self-defense...
Identity is the child of birth, but
at the end, it's self-invention, and not
an inheritance of the past. I am multiple...
Within me an ever-new exterior. And
I belong to the question of the victim. Were I not
from there? I would have trained my heart

[106] Binaya Subeidi, "Theorizing a 'halfie' researcher's identity in transnational fieldwork," *in International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 19: 5 (September-October 2006): 573-593.

to nurture there deer of metaphor...
So carry your homeland wherever you go, and be
a narcissist if need be.
The outside world is exile,
exile is the world inside.
And what are you between the two?[107]

In short, I am a halfie researcher who is getting to know more about themselves as I conduct the research and listened vulnerably to the respondents during the interviews with emotions of rage, anger and fear.[108] I came to know more about myself, my insecurities and anxieties, in the way that I relate to my respondents. For instance, that fact that I am writing this chapter at the moment while waiting for the renewal of my residence permit in Hungary exerts a tremendous pressure especially when knowing that Hungary is willing to deport me to Syria where I most likely be arrested and detained in Assad's infamous prisons. Adding to this is the growing restrictions worldwide on the movement of Syrians and many other migrants who have been forced to seek asylum. For example, I have recently had to give up the opportunity to travel to the United State where I received a generous fellowship to study, due to visa restrictions.

My departure to Germany for fieldwork happened a few months after a horrendous crime in the Syrian community in Germany. A Syrian man travelled for hours to kill his ex-wife after four years of divorce. On top of the horrendous act, this man went onto Facebook and live streamed to tell people that he "cleansed his shame".[109] Little is known about the crime, other than what's

[107] Mahmoud Darwish, "Edward Said: A Contrapuntal Reading Mahmoud Darwish bids Edward Said farewell," *adab.com*, 2005, http://www.adab.com/en/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=13.
[108] Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks your Heart* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 19.
[109] Iain Burns and Alan Hall, "Blood-splattered Syrian man posts chilling Facebook Live video 'moments after stabbing his wife to death in Germany, warning women "this is how you'll end" if you "irritate" your husband'," Daily Mail, March 2016, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5463005/Blood-splattered-Syrian-man-posts-chilling-Facebook-Live-video.html.

in news and the gossip in Facebook groups of the Syrian diaspora in Germany. I could not get permission to visit him and talk about his crime due to legal issues of the German authorities and time restrictions. However, the trigger is read through bits of details from the community, the wife demanded divorce, which happened, and a few years after that he could not take the fact that she established an independent life and kept custody of her children. The man used "honor" as a pretext to kill her and reclaim his "manhood".

This research is invested in understanding how and why gender roles shift in diaspora, and what happens as men and women negotiate different legal and social structures in Germany. I started asking questions to people after I read about this tragic incident, and hoped I could make sense of the changes I was seeing in my own family and community that related to, family ties, social and class hierarchies, and sexuality in the community. More than eight years after the beginning of the conflict in Syria not only shock the social norms in the society but also transgressed on many boundaries.

Nevertheless, the catastrophe that hit Syrian society does not mean the end of policing mechanisms. I intend in this thesis to address new forms of policing tools that either emerged in a new context of the Syrian community in Germany, or in other cases have actually been 'resurrected'. What I mean here is that some policing tools have been re-introduced into the community even though such tools did not exist in the Syrian society prior to the conflict or simply have gone out of fashion or practice. The extreme case of insecurity that men are dealing with in the Syrian community in Germany resulted in the re-introduction of new policing mechanism or the invention of it.

The methodology used in conducting this research draws upon practices in oral history designed to collecting and interpret narratives of refugees in an ethnographic fieldwork for two

months. I asked my respondents to identify the terms used themselves, for example when talking about integration I asked the respondents to share their understanding of the term integration and whether they are working to fulfil it. Interestingly the definition of integration for the majority of them was simply learning the language, understanding and obeying the law, in addition to finding a job. However, beyond this conversation about integration, most of the respondent did show their doubt about being accepted as citizens and openly stated that in case they will receive the German citizenship in the future, they will migrate and settle somewhere else.

The inclusion of my respondents in the research not only democratized the research and created a shared and more equal power dynamics, but it also helped creating a close relationship with them. When respondents shared such memories from their life, I tended to share my personal story and how I dropped out of my junior year studying literature in Homs. When memories of losing their loved ones in the conflict overwhelmed them and brought them to silence, I consoled them and shared some details about the loss of my father and my brother, and the how the regime exhumed their graves to bury them in classified mass graves. I only shared as much as they requested to hear and this helped the interviewees to trust me considering that all of the respondents have been on the side of the opposition to Assad. I felt it was crucial for me to make them feel safe and share this information about myself and my family.

For many of my respondents, I was the neighbor or the friend of a current neighbor, but most importantly, I was an example of those Syrians who endured the atrocities of the regime and was lucky enough to resume studies, graduate, and establish legal residency in Europe. No matter how insignificant those factors might be for an external reader, for my project, the trajectory of my life as well as my lived experiences and those of my family are very important and significant to build a trust-based relationship with my respondents.

My genealogy as an academic began at home in Syria within systems of indoctrination that the Assad regime established over decades. Then, after the conflict I resumed my studies in disciplines that not many Syrians in my university preferred to pursue, humanities were either undervalued in the society or simply were seen as a possible cause of troubles. Furthermore, the fact that I am a current student of gender studies, writing about the Syrian community's policing mechanism of young members of the community. Their attitude was influenced either by the fact of familiarity or by their own judgment and decision of opening up to me after breaking the ice of formalities with casual conversations.

Because I was open with especially the women that I interviewed who were of a similar age or younger than me, I feel that I was able to establish a lot of trust that allowed them to position me differently than they might have done to another Syrian man who was outside of their family. Knowing that I am in the Gender Studies department, it was easier for women to discuss feel comfortable talking to me about many problems that they are facing like the gender double standards and the hypocrisy prevalent in the community when it comes to standards of "piety" and "honor" that become policing mechanisms for unmarried women. These statements by most of the women I interviewed made my burden easier to deal with. Before starting my fieldwork, one of the fears I had in my mind was how to write about Muslim women within the hyper-secularized and orientalist academic atmosphere. At the beginning, I struggled to write about a very heterogeneous category i.e. the women who are Muslims or Arabs without falling into the orientalist depictions of them. I asked the different Syrian women I interviewed to tell me what they think about their society, and they helped me understand the inequalities in the society which they attributed to the hypocritical behavior of its members. I seek in this research to provide

answers to how the community policing of its younger members targets in particular women's daily behavior.

I started this research prompted by the lived experiences of family members and the time I spent in Germany made me aware that my status as an insider is not complete. Because of the lack of experience when it comes to living in Germany and navigating the structures of exclusion that asylum seekers and refugees deal with on daily basis. While I can claim membership to the community and communicate easily, this is not always a comfortable status for me as a researcher since I have only spent a short time living in these communities in Germany. I am indebted to those women for their comments and contributions that made me focus on gossip and the use of religion by men and women as policing tactics. Men mostly tended to talk about life in Syria after the conflict, and their narratives are mostly focused on the migration journey to Germany. I assumed that the trip to Europe and crossing the Aegean Sea served as a conversation starter amongst refugees in camps or in general while socializing in language courses. However, it was apparent from me after spending time with Syrian men in this community that they have not been able to recover from the shock of their journey in the same way as the women. Socialization serves as an important step to the formation of a community and trust building, which is why I intentionally devised a few questions in my interviews to talk about the background of the respondents, their life in Syria, and also how the conflict in Syria changed and influenced their lives leading to taking the decision of coming to Germany.

Racialization of the refugees from Syria follows the racialization of Muslims as brown bodies and especially in the aftermath of a surge in extremely racist and xenophobic far-right parties across Europe. This racialization of Muslim brown bodies is part of a new wave of racial

essentialization of Europeans as whites and non-Europeans as simply non-white people. Furthermore, as a result of feeling frustrated with a system that does not accommodate their needs, they then get disenfranchised and start to look for a means of survival within the community instead of the society as a whole.[110] This process of 'othering' targets those who do not fit into the imagined picture of German women and men, and it needs to be addressed in order to ameliorate the anxieties, insecurities and uncertainties that refugees face. The importance of intersectional analysis to this research stems from the fact that Syrian refugee women are more visible than Syrian men because of their dress code in case they were wearing a headscarf, and it not only makes women more vulnerable for racist, islamophobic and xenophobic attacks, but it might also leave room for "protection racket"[111] like community members who abuse their family members under the pretext of being the guardians of the community against the attacks of Islamophobes.

[110] Parin Dossa, *Racialized Bodies, Disabling Worlds: Storied Lives of Immigrant Muslim Women,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 16.
[111] Laura Sjoberg, "Witnessing the protection racket: Rethinking justice in/of wars through gender lenses," International Politics vol. 53, 3 (2016), 368.

Chapter Three: Life in Germany and the Formation of the Community

3.1 The Spectacle of Arrival

One day I learn,
A secret art.
Invisible-ness it was called.
I think it worked
As even now you look
But never see me...
Only my eyes will remain
To watch and haunt,
And turn your dreams to chaos.[112]

As I mentioned previously, several factors in the history of Syria triggered waves of migration to different destinations. The most important of which was South and North America, where Syrians and Lebanese not only established small successful communities,[113] but also managed to use certain loopholes and channels in the Immigration system of the United States to pass as white in order to obtain American citizenship.[114] By doing so, the early migrants to the United States from Syria and Lebanon contributed to further developing the community and its integration into the American society upon establishing a legal precedent of becoming citizens, therefore members of the society and citizens of the state.[115]

[112] Ibid., 46.
[113] György Kukovecz, "The "Turks " of Latin America: remarks on the problems of Syrian-Lebanese emigration," *Mediterrán tanulmányok* vol 6. (1995), 61.
[114] Sarah M. A. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora*, (University of California Press: London, 2009), 1.
[115] Gualtieri, *Between Arabs and White Race*, 59.

But that was long ago is the age of scientific racism and selective immigration policies and race consciousness under Jim Crow laws that granted new opportunities for those who passed as white.[116] Nowadays, we have human rights and international conventions that protect the rights of citizens, non-citizens, refugees and stateless people. The irony is that it may be a more difficult challenge to become a member of the societies of some countries nowadays than it was for Syrians and Lebanese in the United States in the year 1909. The world as we know it now, after 9/11 and the War on Terror, "unintentionally" led to the racialization of Islam and by default the exclusion of brown bodies of migrants from the imagined communities of host countries.[117] It is in an atmosphere of white supremacy, xenophobia and Islamophobia that refugees arrive to Europe. De Genova suggests that "protecting the nation" as puts it prioritizes the "native" over any outsider. De Genova further writes about the representation of the race as the nation, which deems those who are ethnically part of the race therefore not members of the nation. This nativist rhetoric has been utilized by many far-right parties to prioritize the "native" over the outsider:

> "For these movements, the mere affirmation of 'the nation' is an identitarian project that upholds the priority of the 'natives' against all presumed outsiders. In this respect, far-right anti-immigrant movements are merely the howling dogs prowling along the margins of the Border Spectacle's scene of exclusion."[118]

Nicholas De Genova's description of the nation-state made spectacle of migrant's 'illegality' explained how the construction of borders happened. These borders are then militarized and fortified to prevent the entry of undesirables.[119] This process is also accompanied by the

[116] Ibid., 57.
[117] Craig Considine, "The Racialization of Islam in the United States: Islamophobia, Hate Crimes, and "Flying while Brown"" (August 24, 2017), *Religions 2017*, 8, 165, 3.
[118] Nicholas De Genova, "Spectacles of migrant 'illegality': the scene of exclusion, the obscene of inclusion," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol 36 no. 7, 1188.
[119] De Genova, Spectacle of Migrant "illegality", 1182.

process of "othering" that denies immigrants the right to belong to the society. Similarly, the EU, a body of 28 European member states have been receiving a steady flow of migrants and asylum seekers. After tedious legal procedures, asylum seekers may be accepted as refugees and resettled in the EU member state countries. However, we see the similarity in the behavior of states militarizing their borders the US is doing on its borders with Mexico, where the work of De Genova has been conceptualized, and the behavior of the EU. In other words, the European Union is acting like a nation-state with respect to "protecting" its borders. Having reduced the chances of migrants to reach the EU within the legal procedure, the EU has been faced with an exacerbating humanitarian disaster. The passing of migrants through the EU external and internal borders during the years 2015-2016 was then labeled as a "crisis" revealing the focus on the member states to retain the integrity of their external borders, even if it meant striking an inhumane deal with Turkey to lock refugees up or with armed militias in Libya to push them back to the Sahara Desert. In the end, the focus turned back to preventing the crossings even if it meant incarceration and death of refugees after denying them the right to reach a place to seek asylum.

My research is situated in the context of new Syrian migration to the EU since 2011. By the time I was preparing to fly to Germany and begin my fieldwork, the 2018 World Cup occupied the spotlight on every possible media outlet. I never thought that such an event would have an important effect on my fieldwork and the topic of my thesis. Nevertheless, the disappointing performance of the German team triggered a tirade of critique of the German player Mesut Ozil because of a picture that he took with the Turkish president. Ozil, who was born and raised in

Germany to a Turkish family, was attacked in German media and scapegoated for the worst performance that the German National Team had had in decades.[120]

By revisiting Ozil's incident and his statement "when we win, I am German, but I am an immigrant when we lose."[121] we can conclude that the current reality in Germany denies the rights of diasporic communities attachment to their roots, heritage and culture or political sympathies, if the atmosphere, as it is now, dominated by suspicion of the "non-native" by taking BDS movements as an example, then, any German-Palestinian who supports the movement is by default antisemitic and their citizenship in Germany is in question as well as their loyalty, which is nothing less than a mob tactic to make example of the ones who transgress and keep others in check. Most importantly, it reveals the stubborn attitude that rejects seeing the diasporic communities in Germany - or in other countries - as anything else beyond those who bring "Turkish Kebab" or "Syrian Falafel" as a cultural enrichment and an apolitical component of the society. It is in this context that Agamben's explanation of the state of exception.

> "The exception is what cannot be included in the whole of which it is a member and cannot be a member of the whole in which it is always already included."[122]

In the case of refugees trying to be part of the whole –the German society- but they are not seen as such even though they already live in the country. The situation of diasporic communities is summarized by the embodiment of inclusion without membership i.e. the state exception.[123]

[120] 'I am German when we win, immigrant when we lose': Mesut Ozil quits Germany over racism," DW, July the 23rd 2018, https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/i-am-german-when-we-win-immigrant-when-we-lose-mesut-ozil-quits-germany-over-racism-85234.
[121] I am German when we win, immigrant when we lose': Mesut Ozil quits Germany over racism," DW, July the 23rd 2018.
[122] Giorgio Agamben, Homo Sacer Sovereign Power and Bare Lif, (California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 21.

3.2 Syrian Migration to Europe Post-1945

Syrians were not newcomers to Europe; many European countries received Syrian students since the country's independence in 1946, and Syria lived several periods in which many of its citizens travelled abroad either for economic purposes or for other reasons like education or escaping political oppression. Oftentimes, the rich Gulf countries were the destination of skilled workers and educated Syrians; Europe was never the first destination for Syrian migrants. However, the crisis that the country has been living for the past eight years in addition to the lack of security for making future plans in those Gulf countries and countries that share borders with Syria as I mentioned in the historical context chapter.

The violent conflict in the country since 2011 displaced more than half of the population and forced approximately six million people to seek refuge in neighboring countries.[124] The EU and the US have supported the armed rebels while Turkey have opened its borders for millions of Syrians and was more invested in supporting the armed rebels. Millions of Syrians settled in Turkey since 2011, and we see the number of asylum applications submitted by Syrians in EU member states increasing since 2011, which culminated in a surge in these applications in 2015-2016 in what was referred to by media outlets and government leaders as the 'refugee crisis'.[125]

Indeed, it was a crisis - a crisis of governance, a crisis of management and a crisis of the values that EU member-states claim to stand for. Denmark, for example, used several Lebanese newspapers to dissuade Syrians from trying to come to the country. The articles were published in Arabic and targeted the audience who might think of escaping Lebanon to seek asylum in

[124] Regional Refugee and resilience plan, UNHCR government of turkey, data2.unhcr.org, last updated August the 4th 2019, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria.
[125]IOM, Irregular Migrant, Refugee Arrivals in Europe Top One Million in 2015: IOM, December 22, 2015, https://www.iom.int/news/irregular-migrant-refugee-arrivals-europe-top-one-million-2015-iom.

Denmark.[126] Many European countries such as Hungary, Austria and Greece began constructing border fences to block migrants. In a blatant violation of the international law, the authorities in Hungary even prosecuted whoever crossed the fence.[127] Perhaps the most extreme statement regarding refugees arriving to the EU was by the Slovakian Interior Ministry spokesperson who explained the country's willingness to take Christians from Syria, because in Slovakia there are no mosques.[128]

The migrant 'crisis' securitized by several EU leaders and political parties. The securitization of migrant crossing happened through depicting migrants as a possible threat to the welfare systems, job opportunities and cultural identities.[129] Securitization of EU migration policy prompted changes in the European Union's strategies of dealing with the flow of incoming refugees. Since 20015 The European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) has been monitoring and guarding the external borders of the EU and during the 2015 "crisis" plans were laid to further externalize the borders of the European Union and prevent any future flow of refugees into the continent prompting an increase in budget and support to FRONTEX.

The recent flow in 2015 happened amidst a populist wave that swept across several European countries, wherein either a right-wing conservative party won the elections (as in the cases of Hungary and Italy) or right-wing parties gained a significant increase in votes (as in the cases of Germany and France). The politicization and securitization of the issue of migration led

[126] "Denmark advert in Lebanon newspapers warns off refugees Advertisement warns would-be asylum seekers that social assistance for new arrivals is reduced by up to 50 percent", September the 8th, 2015, Aljazeera and DPA, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/09/denmark-advert-lebanon-newspapers-warns-refugees-150907225146384.html.
[127] Marton Dunai, "Hungary Sentences 10 Migrants for Illegal Border Crossing," July 1, 2016, Reuters: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-hungary-court-idUSKCN0ZH4DP.
[128] "Slovakia vows to refuse entry to Muslim migrants," Reuters, AFP, January 7, 2016: https://www.dw.com/en/slovakia-vows-to-refuse-entry-to-muslim-migrants/a-18966481.
[129] Jef Huysmans, "The European Union and the Securitization of Migration*" Journal of Common Market Studies 38. 5 (2000), 770.

to an increase in xenophobic and Islamophobic rhetoric in the European media, which in turn increased the feelings of insecurity and uncertainty felt by refugees.[130] Furthermore, the racist and xenophobic rhetoric functioned on the racialization of the 'Other' as it undermined the membership of citizens with 'non-European' migrant backgrounds, which was the case of Ozil in the German context.

Amidst the aforementioned circumstances new arrivals have been settling in Germany since 2015. The Syrians refugees I interviewed who recently arrived in Germany are trying to rebuild their lives within the German national imagining. The integration policies of the German Federation require them to learn a good level of German before joining the labor market or pursuing their studies. The refugees who arrived in Germany recently after 2015 worried greatly about their future in the country and the chances of them being accepted future citizens in Germany and one of my respondents, an engineer from Homs expressed his frustration with the insecurity and uncertainty related to his life in Munich especially with respect to deporting refugees and rejecting new applicants.[131]

The politicization of Ozil's story along with the earlier criticism of German Chancellor Angela Merkel for accepting many refugees contributed to making refugees feeling cynical about being accepted as citizens in the near future, which I felt through my interviews and conversations I had with Syrian refugees in Germany. This frustration reveals the connections of Syrian Muslims to a fellow Muslim like Ozil and points out the multi-layered identities and belongings of diaspora

[130] Fabio Perocco, "Anti-Migrant Islamophobia in Europe. Social roots, Mechanisms and Actors"Brasilia Vol. 26 no. 53, (2018), 32.
[131] Interview with Author in Munich, 22nd of August, 2018.

in general to other Muslim and Arab diasporic communities, which is visible in the social and cultural space that these diasporic communities create in host countries.[132]

This chapter explores the spectacle in which Syrian refugees arrived in the EU and how their arrival was labelled a 'crisis' by media outlets and governments officials. I examine the formation of the Syrian community in Germany and the changing gender dynamics within these diasporic communities. In order to demonstrate the obstacles that new arrivals face and how they use the community as an informal site of knowledge production, and I argue that the community itself happens to be a source of policing mechanisms. This chapter also traces the emergence of new hierarchies in the Syrian diasporic community and how these hierarchies are influenced by that of German society and its integration policies. Finally, I tackle a few examples of shifting gender dynamics and home making tactics taking place in the household of Syrian families in Germany.

Asylums seekers and refugees learn to navigate the complicated bureaucratic systems in Germany through the learned experiences of other members of these social networks at the camp, the neighborhood, the mosque, market or even on social media. These groups simultaneously serve as support groups for Syrian men who miss their entitlement which they used to enjoy in the past in Syria. In an important book exploring Muslim diaspora community formation, Haideh Moghissi argues that insecurities of men in diaspora are attributed to the loss of prestige and social capital to the loss of economic security.[133] Finally, I argue that these social networks also produce and

[132] Cara Aitchison, Peter Hopkins and Mei-Po Kwan eds, *Geographies of Muslim Identities: Diaspora, Gender and Belonging* (ASHGATE: Burlington, 2007), 13.
[132] Aitchison et al, *Geographies of Muslim Identities*, 14.
[133] Haideh Moghissi, *Muslim Diaspora: Gender, Culture, and Identity*, (London: Routledge, 2009), 14.
[133] Amba Pande, eds, *Women in the Indian Diaspora: Historical Narratives and Contemporary Challenges*, 1st ed. (Singapore: Springer, 2017), 14.

introduce policing mechanisms whereby in the community men pose as the guardians of values and traditions of the Syrian community but most importantly this happens through questioning the morality of any woman who does not conform to social norms of the Syrian community.[134]

The formation of the community in Germany involves the construction of new hierarchies, which are influenced by knowledge of the German language, bureaucracy in the country in addition to the types of documents granted to them by the German government and the rights the recipient enjoy upon holding those documents. The gendered aspect of the migration regime in Germany is that it favors families and women over male asylum seekers –in case they were alone- This was the case for Murad, an engineer from Homs, arrive in Germany in 2015 and waited for a long period till he received refugee status, which put him at a disadvantaged position in the community due to his immobility, lack of access to language courses and documents. Murad's application to seek asylum was submitted with those of his family, but he lacked documents. While all members of his family were granted refugee status within three months, Murad, on the other hand, was granted refugee status only after three rejections from the Federal Authorities, which his lawyer appealed. Murad's finally received refugee status after two years of his arrival to Germany.

Murad departed from Turkey along with his sister in law and her two sons, helping Murad was his sister but they were separated on the way while they were trying to escape Greece. Upon arriving to Germany the family was united again in a refugee camp in the province of Mecklenburg. The sister in law and her sons received decision within three month, his sister shortly after them while Murad kept waiting for more than 18 months. He received a decision after that and was

[134] By social gatherings, I refer to the mode of socialization that men tend to adopt in order to stay in touch with other members of the community. These gatherings vary from daily meetings after courses to gatherings after Friday prayer.

granted refugee status but by the time he managed to move out of the camp he had lived there for two years.[135]

In design, the system in Germany is a welfare systems that revolves around family –just recently, the country ruled that same-sex marriage is legal[136] - and empowering and accommodating women, but the system is indeed far from being perfect and results in neglecting asylum applications of single men in favor of that submitted by family and female headed household. The drawback of the system is that it leaves male refugees in a legal limbo that is emotionally and psychologically exhausting, which was the case of Murad.

The community is being formed through socialization and building on previous ties either from home in Syria or through reconnecting to people who shared the trip to Germany or stayed in the same refugee camp for a certain time. Still, it became obvious in my interviews that men were either critical of the lack of social life in Germany or were nostalgic for the social life in Syria. Therefore, I argue that men in the Syrian diaspora in Germany rely on socialization with other Syrian men to form the community and that with this pattern of socialization they romanticize the past in Syria. Many of them complain constantly about the difficulties and the loss of respect that Syrian men are facing in Germany, which is similar to Barbara Franz's observation regarding different patterns of socialization between Bosnian men and women. While women were more focused on adjusting to life in the host country, men were occupied in nostalgia about their losses at home.[137] In the case of the Syrian community in Germany circles is not only in keeping men updated about news regarding dealing with German bureaucracy but also serves as a mechanism

[135] Interview with Author in Berlin, 20th of July, 2018.
[136] David Rising, "Germany legalizes same-sex marriage after Merkel U-turn," *AP*, June 30, 2017https://apnews.com/79a83eade46e4183aca99c657e0f1727.
[137] Barbara Franz, "Bosnian Refugee Women in (Re)Settlement: Gender Relations and Social Mobility," *Feminist Review*, vol. 73, (2003), 97.

for policing the diasporic community as moral guardians that needs to be established in diaspora, while at home it was already established. I argue that such patterns of socializing with a group of likeminded men mainly serves as a 'support group' for Syrian men who feel that life in Germany has threatened their position in the Syrian community. Thus, as Moghissi concluded in her research on Muslim diaspora that focused on Palestinian, Iranian, Pakistani and Afghan communities and found that men resort to religion and sexist social norms to reinforce their former hegemonic position. Similarly, I find that these practices in the Syrian diasporic community show is mostly done by gossiping about women, which gives them a sense of validation for their role of protecting the morality of the community.[138]

It is clear for Syrian women living in Germany that men are extremely insecure, and that this insecurity is caused by the presence of a powerful legal system that secures women's rights such as custody over their children. Men resort to more visible and vocal methods of reinforcing their power over female family members, such as openly request that the wife must be religious, which would have been considered an insult prior to the conflict. These methods consist of socialization, the accompanying gossip, which is by far the more important element of policing, along with claims of superior understanding of religion. These social groups and the gossip circulating within them tend to mostly revolve around malicious discussions of certain women who have learned German quickly, have started working with Germans, or who simply are visible in dealing with the community and German bureaucracy. This criticism is meant to tarnish their reputation to keep other women in check.[139] In attacking these women, some men always used a rhetoric of caring for the norms and values which they say are being violated by these women and

[138] Haideh Moghissi, "The 'Muslim' Diaspora" in Diaspora, Memory, and Identity a Search for home, Vijay Agnew Eds (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 256.
[139] Nadje Al-Ali, "Reconstructing Gender: Iraqi Women between Dictatorship, War, Sanctions and Occupation," Third world Quarterly Vol. 26 no. 4/5 (2005), 752.

accusations that the women are losing their piety and honor.[140] In this respect and as Al-Ali demonstrated in her research about the Iraqi women's fears, gossip proves to be a very torturous weapon that men may easily use against women.[141] One of my respondents, Hajj Ahmad, a fifty years old chemist from the city of Homs and who now lives in Berlin said:

> "I don't understand the change in Syrian women's behavior in Germany. They understood freedom in a wrong way and now they started to seek liberation from their husbands and leave their families to live like Germans. Our neighbor was arrested because his wife complained to the police about his behavior and she took his kids and left him, the poor guy is in prison now and she is happy about it."[142]

There is a common narrative that I have heard over my fieldwork that blames Syrian women for the problems that the community is facing in Germany. The former quote is just another example, even if the woman in question had been facing abuse she was not supposed to inform the police and she was supposed to be patient with her husband or else she is a "bad".

3.3 Formation of the Community

Refugees' daily lives in Germany revolve around integration courses. Socialization is limited by language barriers, geographical proximity, and economic resources for travelling to other federations in the country. These factors result in changing the social dynamics of Syrian families to be more social with fellow refugees whom they met recently. Nevertheless, socialization does not come without judgment from the community. Gendered social norms in Syria depended on socio-economic status, as it differed from urban to rural centers and across social classes. Working-class masculinity for example, ridiculed men who were married to

[140] Al-Ali, "Reconstructing Gender,", 753.
[141] Nadje Al-Ali and Yasmin Hussein, "Between Dreams and Sanctions: Teenage Lives in Iraq", in Akbar Mahdi (ed.) *Teenagers in the Middle East* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003), p. 46.
[142] Interview with Author in Berlin, 1st of August, 2018.

extremely public woman -driving the car or works as an engineer- and questioned the 'masculinity' of the heads of the family if they were not making all family decisions. A man's masculinity was likewise questioned if a female member of his family was known to be working in jobs that are not accepted for women. One interesting statement that I heard several times over the period of my fieldwork in Germany was that many men said that in Germany, the law puts kids on top of the hierarchy, then women and pets and the lowest position in the hierarchy is reserved for men."[143]

This interesting piece of rumor that Syrian men -mostly uneducated elderly men- repeated several times in my interviews is a result of the informal conversation that Syrians have in the community. The cornerstones of the establishment of the community are to some extent tied to the context of life in Germany or to the space that diasporic communities have created such as the mosque and the informal market. In the next part, I will explain in detail what these spaces are and how these space create a more inclusive social gathering for the community.

3.3.1 Social Networks at the Camp

Even though it is a transitional stage in the process of asylum, asylum seekers might stay in a camp for a long period that ranges from three months to a year and a half. The camp is a building that hosts hundreds of asylum seekers dispersed in its various rooms, a shared room for single people and a private one for families. In that space refugees end up sharing several spaces such as the restaurant where all residents eat their food, the laundry room and the yard. During that period of waiting for the asylum applications to be processed and accepted Syrians build their initial network with fellow asylum seekers with preference to socializing with Syrians, then Arabs and Muslims due to language limitation or culture.

[143] Interview with Author in Berlin, 17th of August, 2018.

As some families receive a positive decision from the immigration authorities, then they are entitled to move out of the camp and the search for an apartment starts. Through this process of searching for an apartment Syrians build and expand their network by connecting to those who have been in the same process to finding housing out of the camp and mobilize their acquaintances to find an apartment as soon as possible. It is a common process to seek help from a German company that provides this service but the language barrier always limits the communication and requires the help of an interpreter. Nevertheless, I noticed that many of my respondents have maintained the networks they have built at the camp and by time, after moving out of the camp to settle in urban centers, these networks were the foundations of stronger social and economic networks that built the community in urban centers.

3.3.2 The "Neighborhood"

The term neighborhood in my personal understanding and lived experiences in Syria, refers to a place in which all the residents know each other and have built connections over generations. I remember how people in my neighborhood would be able to tell who my family was by just mentioning my surname, they would even know that I am a Muslim, Sunni and Arab, due to the fact that there was a very old and respected cleric in my extended family. So, the current neighborhood that refugees have in Germany -at least the ones I visited during my fieldwork and the ones were my relatives are living- do not resemble our imagination of a neighborhood at home. The houses in my neighborhood -which was one of Homs' slums or in Arabic Ashwaeyyat- were side by side with connected roofs. These was more room for the community to solve each other's problems and whatever happens, not one will call the police on a neighbor for being loud or disturbing the peace.

Upon settling in after finding an apartment out of the camp, refugees are less restricted in terms of socialization and they even have more options to build larger networks. Settling down requires the provision of certain household goods that are only obtained from Syrian, Arab and Turkish markets. Furthermore, as both parents are required to join language courses and this means less time to spend with the kids, parents start to fear that their kids will lose the Arabic language, and this also necessitates an Arabic language teacher or a nearby mosque where kids are taught Arabic. As a result of these needs, the Syrian community ends up recreating its "neighborhood" or the locality in diaspora through building on a smaller scale in terms of the space but also on a transnational ones through social media.[144]

3.3.3 The Mosque

Mosques across the Muslim world are central building in urban centers around which economic and leisure activities may revolve. This is not the case in the German towns I visited, as refugees settled in urban centers in Germany, they start by joining any available mosque and they refer to it as a prayer room due to its small size which mostly happens to be a basement or a storage room in a building. Seeking out the mosque becomes an activity to get acquainted with the residents in the town and also a place to ask for help and information. Furthermore, it is the place to keep the kids attached to Muslim culture in days of celebration, like the month of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. This association with the mosque or the religious institution helps give the kids a proper religious education and keep the culture of home alive.[145]

[144] Nadje Al-Ali and Khalid Koser eds. "Transnationalism, international migration and home" in New Approaches to Migration? Transnational communities and the transformation of home, (Routledge: London, 2002), 4.
[145] Heidi Armbruster, "Syrian Christians in Turkey and Germany," in in New Approaches to Migration? Transnational communities and the transformation of home, Nadje Al-Ali and Khalid Koser eds. (London: Routledge, 2002), 23.

For example, one of the families I visited had young kids in the family and they were worried that the kids might not learn Arabic properly. So, the family pushed them to the mosque to learn Arabic through reading Quran but after knowing that the teacher was Turk and noticing that kids were speaking some Turkish along with German and Arabic, the family decided to send the kids to a different mosque. The parents were very upset about the lack of Arabic courses, which is a serious issue that most parents expressed their concern about.

Interestingly, as Syrians settle down in these German towns, they start by socializing and going to the already established mosque which might be run by a Turkish charity foundation or by members of other Arab diasporic communities such as the Iraqi diaspora. However, once the Syrian population in these towns rises to a significant number the community establishes its own mosque. During my fieldwork I have been to a Turkish mosque where Syrians were still socializing and praying at the mosque and then in another town where the Syrian community had already established its own mosque. This not only reveal the cultural differences between Muslim communities in diaspora but also reveals the politics of difference with respect to national and religious belonging.[146]

3.3.4 The Market

An important part of settling down in diaspora is obtaining certain items that families need. For example, Muslims do not consume any product that has pork in it. As Muslims settle in Germany, they seek a source of Zabiha Halal meat. Germany has the largest vegetarian and vegan population in Europe, and this helps Syrians and Muslims who have reservations regarding their food to opt for many other options. Nevertheless, the desire to obtain Halal goods and Zabiha Halal

[146] Michael Peter Smith, preface to in *New Approaches to Migration? Transnational communities and the transformation of home*, Nadje Al-Ali and Khalid Koser eds. (Routledge: London, 2002), xv.

meat has significantly contributed to the rise of Syrian and Arab markets across the towns I have visited. In cities with large Arab and Muslim populations like Berlin and Hamburg these markets are well established and regarded as social spots for the community. These markets are concentrated where the Turkish shops have been established and interestingly most Arabs just refer to locations like Sonnenalle in Berlin as Arabs' Street. In smaller towns, however, the established markets and shops they are replaced by Syrian purveyors who supply them with their requested materials through a biweekly visits to smaller cities and towns.

As I was at my family's place in Mecklenburg, I came to witness and participate in one of the family's shopping adventures. My mother and my aunty came down to the front yard of the apartment building as this Syrian purveyor known as Abo Ismail (the father of Ismail) was preparing his boxes for customers. He drives on a route from Berlin to Hamburg and distributes Syrian goods from Halal meat to Syrian bread. Within few minutes, more than fifty person, women, men and children. The funny thing that even Ukrainian refugees who passed by decided to take some of the items, so they stopped and decided to take some Syrian Zaatar.

3.3.5 Integration Courses

Shortly after receiving refugee status and supporting documents, refugees are expected to join language courses and need to pass a certain level before starting work or studies. These courses happen to be another place of gathering during which they not only expand upon their social capital but build an informal mechanism of learning and knowledge production to resolve certain problems that they are facing. These problems may be as simple as activating a SIM card or preparing for driving license exam in German. Nevertheless, it always helps to spread the word and hear the experiences of others. The process of learning the language and understanding the

systems of the host country are all part of the process of familiarizing oneself with the new space of the host country and they pave the way to being included in that space.[147]

3.3.6 Social Media

Since the beginning of the Syrian uprising in 2011 and the number of Syrians using different social media platforms is increasing by day. Facebook and Whatsapp are by far the most common due to their easy process of registration. As the Syrian diaspora spread around the world, initiatives of creating a virtual gathering spread equally. I personally noticed hundreds of Facebook groups in Turkey and Germany and for the purpose of this research I found such groups all around Europe, Canada and the US. These groups help to accumulate knowledge about the new place of settlement and in other cases people join such groups to accumulate information prior to moving to their new destination. In many cases, Syrians in the community also make announcements about services they are providing such as carpooling or carsharing or even selling furniture or other used items. Most importantly the encounters from the virtual world may be transformed into the real world through these services that other community members are providing, and these groups also function as a source of information as other members share their experiences with a certain procedure such as renewing their refugees status,[148] university application or obtaining a marriage certificate from the German authorities.

It is important to note that the role of women is a crucial one in the previous spaces, despite the fact that the visibility of women in those spaces differs based on many factors such as age, education and the domestic work that these women mostly do. Nevertheless, even within their

[147] Sarvendra Tharmalingam, "Making Space a Home: Role of Homeland-Based Cultural Practices in Homemaking of Tamils and Somalis in Norway," Intternational Journal of Social Science Studies (2016) vol.4 no. 6, 87.
[148] Ahmed Al-Rawi and Shahira Fahmy, "Social Media Use in the Diaspora: The Case of Syrians in Italy," (2018) in Diaspora and Media in Europe, Ahmed Al-Raw eds. (Cham: Palgrave 2018) 5.

limited visibility they shape and influence the community with their own networks and socialization patterns. The women I interviewed were by far much more active than their partners and other family members as they were running both domestic work of the family, taking care of other responsibilities related to the education of the kids such as school trips, visits to the hospitals and attending language courses.

The aforementioned patterns and spaces of socialization provide a great support for the community and make the early stages of living and settling in a new place a much easier task to do. However, the downside of these spaces is that they become sites of policing for the members of the community. Gossip, rumors, claims about religion and discourses of piety and morality gradually prevail in these spaces as the members of the community build stronger ties that are also strengthened with sharing information and "gossip" about other members. The information that is being circulated is mostly accompanied with a pretentious sense of care and protectionism towards the reputation of the community through policing its members and since the "honor" of the community is tied to the reputation and the body of women, these mechanisms happen to target women and young women more than men who pose as the guardians of religion, traditions and social norms while those "regarded norms" are immune to the violations that are committed by men. For example, one of the Syrian men I interviewed emphasized that the Syrian society is a religious one and we should respect that fact, however, he said that it would be really good for young Syrian men to date German women, because this will help them in learning the language faster. I then asked, what about Syrian women, how would they learn German language, he simply did not like my question and said, they can study. In the end, this shows that the norms revolve around controlling women and their bodies to preserve "honor" but this does not apply for men.

3.4 Homemaking

An observation which I have made during one of my fieldwork trips to a small town in the province of Bavaria and close to the city of Munich was tactics of homemaking done by some of the respondents. I have been invited for dinner by a Syrian aunty whom I have befriended during my work in Turkey. She insisted on picking me up from the train station even though her house was few minutes walking distance from the station. After a late lunch, she prepared Yerba Mate and asked me to check the temperature of the water, to make sure that it is exactly as she likes it. She then brought her narghile and we started our interview. I was surprised to see the narghile, considering that I thought she would have left it in Turkey, thinking in my mind, I am sure there are way more valuable items that she would bring with her to Germany. When I asked her about the trip while carrying a narghile she said:

> "This is my narghile, I take 'her' with me wherever I go. The Turkish police were laughing when they screened my bags and found out that I have a narghile with me, but they let me take it with me anyways. I would have felt really sad if they took it away."[149]

The following day her son drove us to a nearby village. The reason for the trip was to buy a second-hand rotating roaster, she asked her son to check for a certain type so that she can cook chicken exactly how she used to do in Syria. She was really happy about it and, I remembered how on many occasions she invited me in Istanbul to eat her family's famous roasted chicken. Though it might be very strange for some, the kitchen is an essential part of the house and a quintessential component of the home. It is in the space of the house that refugees start enacting certain practices from home to make themselves through these practices that fit with their identity, which is a pattern

[149] Interview with Author in Munich, the 20th of August 2018.

that exist in other diasporic communities like the Somali diaspora in Norway.[150] Furthermore, this also fits with the practices of other migrant women who shape the space of home by items that are both consumed and displayed to show plurality of identities.[151] Such as, displaying items at the house that shows the belonging to Syria or in her case being raised in Aleppo and then settling in Homs then in Turkey and finally Germany.

During and after my trip to Munich, I started to focus more on the role of cuisine and the ability to cook Syrian dishes in the houses I visited. The interesting observation was that I noticed that men are getting more involved in the process of cooking food and especially the labor-intensive dishes, which were more reserved for feasts and occasions in the past. Nevertheless, that involvement in the kitchen and food preparation, as I feel it myself, underlines a desire for the normal, a desire to remember a perfect past on a Friday or a night in Ramadan to break the fasting and be with the family. Nostalgia for the past and to the lost home is dealt with through a family - or what's left of it - gathering with friends and neighbors to have the most satisfying dish - or engage in any other activity - in the exact way as it was done in Syria in the past.

3.5 Conclusion

Syrians have established successful diasporic communities across the world in the past. They even managed to gain membership to the host communities in the Americas not only legally through citizenship but in other cases into the imagined communities of some other countries. Nonetheless, this may have become impossible after the age of War on Terror, Trump and White supremacy that racialized Muslims as the other and the non-white as Muslims. The Syrian

[150] Sarvendra Tharmalingam, "Making Space a Home: Role of Homeland-Based Cultural Practices in Homemaking of Tamils and Somalis in Norway," Intternational Journal of Social Science Studies (2016) vol.4 no. 6, 88.
[151] Ruba Salih, "Moroccan women's transnational practices," in New Approaches to Migration? Transnational communities and the transformation of home, (Routledge: London, 2002) Nadje Al-Ali and Khalid Koser eds. 56-57.

diasporic community has emerged in Germany amidst rising populism and xenophobia that targeted 2nd and 3rd generation Germans from immigrant roots and questioned their loyalty to Germany. This amplified the fears and insecurities of Syrians with respect to settling in Germany as "citizens". Nevertheless, the community thrives and prospers and learns to deal with their problems and legal uncertainties and build a new home. The acts of building a home may be as small as keeping an item brought from Syria or by the replication of activities to be as satisfying as being at home.

Chapter Four: Gendered Policing Mechanisms in the Community

The Syrian community in Germany has gradually developed mechanisms to police its members. These mechanisms help in social policing and controlling young members of the community. As a result of patriarchal double standards.[152] Syrian women tend to suffer most from these policing mechanisms, which range from being policed by the community through gossip, to being policed by community members through social media to the use of religion to police community members where claims to the knowledge of religion are utilized to support rhetoric of "morality" and "piety" against those who dare to transgress to social norms.

Refugee Syrian women in diaspora face multiple forms of critique and judgement. They deal with the gaze of German men and women, who in many cases hold a racist masculinist view of them. The women are likewise under the surveillance and judgement of Syrian men in their communities, as well as other women in the community. The gazes of these various actors can serve as policing social measures, with the threat of social consequences for those women violate and transgress the social norms of the Syrian community. For example, women may be harshly judged for behavior such as dressing differently in public spaces in Germany and may face harassment as a result. These women and especially the young ones, I argue, are the ultimate in-between group in the community. They are expected to behave in a way that meets the expectations of women and men of the Syrian community. On the other hand, Germany societal expectations for the integration of the newcomers are mostly targeted towards women. As Hilma Lutz argues, the European woman is constructed as the bar excellence example of civility and independence

[152] Policing mechanisms are used to police men and women in the community but the patriarchal double standards with respect to "morality" and "piety" applies these standards on women more than men.

and migrant women, especially Muslim women, are expected to conform to European women's norms in order to integrate.[153] These realities result in transforming the identities of Muslim Syrian women, reaching a hybrid and a multi-layered form of belonging to Syrian diasporic women, Muslim women in other communities and the German women.

Men, meanwhile, may often feel marginalized or disadvantaged within the new structures in the German society, and also feel threatened by the uncertainties of their legal status such as obtaining a permanent residence permit or the German citizenship.[154] This legal uncertainty, and the insecurity it brings about, prompts men to think about policing mechanisms to stay in charge and in a central role within the community.[155] My interviews showed a gap between the opinions of women and those of men regarding life in Germany. The differences to a large extent came from the fact that women feel more secure with the support they receive from the German welfare system. On the other hand, men's frustration came largely from the declining importance of their labor as the breadwinners of the family. While at home men's labor centralized them in both public sphere and the affairs of the private sphere, in the diaspora their labor is now less important. This fits in Moghissi's argument that men tend to feel the insecurities of diasporic life while these experiences can be transformative for women.[156]

Mahannad, an engineer in Syria now working in Munich explained:

> "I don't like it here [Germany] I don't know whether I can settle or not. I am pushing myself to finish the language and my vocational school to work. My wife is also learning German and soon will start her studies, but I don't feel secure, my residence permit expires soon, I don't know if they will renew it. I

[153]Helma Lutz, "The Limits of European-ness: Immigrant Women in Fortress Europe," *Feminist Review* 57, no. 1 (1997): 97.
[154] Haideh Moghissi, "The 'Muslim' Diaspora" in Diaspora, Memory, and Identity a Search for home,) Vijay Agnew Eds (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 2005. 256.
[155] Moghissi, The "Muslim" Diaspora, 255.
[156] Haideh Moghissi, Introduction to The Muslim Diaspora, Gender, Culture and Identity, (Routledge, New York, 2006), xvii.

> just want to get the citizenship and go somewhere else because I don't feel welcomed not matter how hard I work."[157]

When I talked to Mahannad, I could see his frustration with life in Germany and especially living in one of the most conservative regions in the country. His insecurity comes from the fact that the Federation of Bavaria, where the city of Munich lies, has been continuously deporting refugees and Mahannad fears that the far-right part Alternative for Germany will succeed in declaring Syria a "safe country,"[158] which might result in rejecting present asylum claims or the re-evaluation of refugees' applications for renewing their status in Germany. The re-evaluation process, according to Mahannad might result in rejection and possibly deportation of refugees to their countries once these countries have been declared safe by the German Immigration authorities.

Samar from Damascus and worked at a petroleum company still lives in Mecklenburg has a different opinion:

> "I like it in Germany, it has not been easy, but I am doing well. Despite racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia there are things I like in the Germany society. People respect your privacy and do not ask your personal questions. In Syria any woman would directly ask you very personal questions."[159]

After her second marriage was over, Samar had two jobs to take care of her daughter and she was always involved in taking care of her parents. She presented herself as an example of a significant number of Syrian women who were very active and independent in Syria and travelled to Germany for security reasons. Despite the racism and xenophobia she is dealing with in

[157] Interview with Author in Munich, 22nd of August, 2018.
[158] DW, "Syria is a 'safe country,' say German AfD lawmakers after visit," 20th of March 2018, https://www.dw.com/en/syria-is-a-safe-country-say-german-afd-lawmakers-after-visit/a-43044220.
[159] Interview with Author in Mecklenburg, 21nd of July, 2018.

Mecklenburg, Samar likes the mode of engagement between the circle of German people she knows and a very small circle of Syrian women that she keeps herself connects to.

> "I meet new Syrians I know that they will judge me and think that I am a bad woman and they try to limit my interaction with their family. So, I decided not to socialize much with them and only socialize with a selected group of women like me."[160]

Samar opted to limit her interaction to the Syrian community and she only interacts with members from the community whom she knows they respect her and deal with her equally but she pointed out that Syrian men do not consider her to be a 'woman' who is a good influence with respect to the social network of the family or good company for women in the family. Samar, a divorced woman who got remarried and now living by herself with her young daughter is seen as a bad company by men in the community. She highlighted this disparity with respect to how Syrian men treat her, saying that men in the community tend to deal with her as a man, due to the fact that they are confused with her and thus try to limit her interactions with their family members or police interaction by taking part in all conversations she has with family members."[161]

Samar's critique for the ways in which the Syrian men behave with her reminds me of my life in Syria and the way in which I, as well as the vast majority of Syrian men, was socialized. Young men are brought up to act in a certain masculinist way to be "proper men" and for that to succeed, women too are brought to act and behave in a way that makes them "proper women" according to Yuval Davis, as a result women's bodies are seen as carriers of national dignity and men's masculinity revolve around protecting the national dignity.[162] Similarly, Syrian men's masculinity revolves around the idea that they are protectors of communal dignity through policing

[160] Interview with Author in Mecklenburg, 21nd of July, 2018.
[161] Interview with Author in Mecklenburg, 21nd of July, 2018.
[162] Cited in Nadje Al-Ali, "Reconstructing Gender: Iraqi Women between Dictatorship, War, Sanctions and Occupation," Third world Quarterly Vol. 26 no. 4/5 (2005), 741.

women's bodies and behavior and both men and women are raised to fulfil that dichotomy of protector man\protected woman. When those men are surprised by a woman that does not conform to their expectations (which differ from region to region and the background of the person) men get confused. In order to resist disturbance in gender dynamics, men talk about the person – mostly women or queer people – in an effort of the insecure men to isolate the "rotten apple" from the rest, and which is how gossip and other mechanisms as a come onto the scene.

4.1 Shifting Gender Dynamics in Diaspora

The conflict in Syria and the insecurity it brought resulted in separation of families with men escaping to areas out of reach of security forces, leaving women in secure areas. As a result, men in the diaspora have been learning how to do housework and fulfil many roles that were always seen as women's work such as cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry. Women, on the other hand, had begun to invade the public sphere as a result of men in Syria being targeted for military service or random incarceration. In Germany, the state of immobility or the inability to work while learning language classes means that men tend to help more in the house and especially with cooking, which always helped them to settle down and feel like having a home once they established a decent kitchen with whatever they needed.

Simultaneously there is growing push-back to reestablish former gendered hierarchies from prior to the conflict. This poses a dilemma for women in that on the one hand, the community is important, as is being well connected to social capital that yields crucial answers to problems that newcomers are facing. On the other hand, being connected to the community will likely result in policing the members of that community, either by men who pose as the "protectors" of the community, resulting in a 'protection racket' power dynamic that allows men to exploit women on

the premise that men, in the end, are the "protectors" of the community and of the "honor" of women and are thus entitled to police aspects of women's lives such as their dress code.[163]

Similarly speaking, senior older women in the community also police its members. Their role is most crucial as it significantly targets women more than men, and since these women dwell freely in the private sphere within the community, they tend to target young women in their private domains. The result is that young women in the community are not only policed by men when they are in public spaces such as the city or the camp, but also by elderly women of the community. Elderly Syrian women's policing behavior fulfill what Connell calls the 'emphasized femininity'[164]: women in the community who condone the patriarchal norms and reprehend young women who cause disturbance by rejecting to conform to patriarchal expectations from women.

Regarding the influence of elderly women in the community, Sana shared her experience:

> "As a single woman and living by myself without family members, I socialized with elderly women and few younger ones. The married were afraid that I will steal their husbands, that's why I avoided them, and I liked socializing with elderly women, but it was difficult they [elderly women] would always tell me to get married. They always reminded me with the idiom 'al-rijjal bi al-bayt rahma hataa law kan fahma' [the man in the house is a blessing even if he was a charcoal]. That's why I stopped spending long time with them."[165]

For Sana, socializing with Syrians proved to be a tricky task, while younger women felt threatened by Sana's presence in social gatherings and family visits because Sana was an example of a strong and independent women who does not need help from men. Elderly women welcomed Sana but also preached to her about getting married.

[163] Nadje Al-Ali, "Reconstructing Gender: Iraqi Women between Dictatorship, War, Sanctions and Occupation," Third world Quarterly Vol. 26 no. 4/5 (2005), 752.
[164] Raewyn Connell, "Hegemonic Masculinity Rethinking the Concept," *Gender & Society*, Vol. 19 No. 6, (2005) 848.
[165] Interview with Author in Berlin, the 1st of September, 2019.

4.2 Policing via Gossip and Social Media

Gossip is by far one of the most influential social policing mechanisms aimed at controlling and maintaining the cohesion of social groups.[166] Similarly in the context of Syrian diasporic communities in Germany, this tactic can be targeted at anyone within the Syrian but affects women most strongly for the reasons I describe below. Gossip is an ever-present behavior in any community. As socialization started to establish a network to help with life in Germany so does the behavior of gossip. Gossip in Syrian communities takes a different form in Germany than it did in Syria. Huda, a Syrian woman in her fifties, shared her opinion about the changes that the Syrians have experienced in Germany:

> "In Syria my husband would directly leave the house when I receive guests. Of course, women gossiped about everything, who got engaged, who split their engagement or who got pregnant and so on. Now, in Germany this is different, most men are learning language for few hours a day and then going back home. So, they have plenty of time to spend and they gradually started to gossip about women. We used to say in Syria, you gossip like women, but now, to be fair, you have to say, you gossip like men."[167]

What Huda said was revealing for men and she actually helped me in seeing the importance of gossip to my project. The socialization and upbringing of men and women in society also fosters gendered stereotypes regarding gossip. For example, gossip is associated with women and in leaves a room to be questioning the masculinity of a man if he engages in gossip and rumors.

The use of gossip of course happens by both men and women and here the purpose of this gossip may not contribute to the cohesion of the group but rather the opposite, as long as it serves

[166] Heike Drotbohm, "Gossip and social control across the seas: Targeting gender, resource inequalities and support in Cape Verdean transnational families," African and Black Diaspora An International Journal January 2010, vol 3 no. 1, 54.
[167] Interview with Author in Munich, the 20th of August 2018.

the intention of the person spreading the gossip, which means that gossip is instrumentalized to serve a designated purpose,[168] such as to question the morality of other members of the community.

As I discussed in my previous chapter, the use of social media in Syria surged with the uprising and even spread more with displacement and exile. This has meant that in addition to face-to-face gossip, the policing mechanism can be wider spread via the internet. Facebook groups with titles such as '*Tajammoa al-Sureyyen fi Berlin*' ['the gathering of Syrians in Berlin'] spiked on Facebook. These groups were used for many reasons but mostly as knowledge production sites in order to discuss[169] questions regarding life and education in Germany, experience with asylum application development, and the rights enjoyed as refugees.[170] Most of the posts shared in these Facebook groups address issues of life in Germany and, in some cases, contain messages to Syrians to follow the laws and avoid making problems that may influence the community in general. Yet the groups also serve as means of policing gender norms. For example, a significant number of posts are critical to Syrian women, with critiques varying from women being very masculine and speaking in a very loud voice, to issues of marriage and requesting high dowries, to, most importantly, posts criticizing women for dressing in inappropriate ways that do not fit with the customs and traditions of Syrian society.

In a video that was circulated on Facebook in 2018, a Syrian man harassed a Syrian woman on the streets in Berlin. The man verbally harassed the woman and criticized the outfit she was wearing, but when the woman replied and shouted back at him 'who are you to tell me that?' he

[168] Robert Paine, "What is Gossip About? An Alternative Hypothesis," *Man, New Series* Vol. 2 No. 2 January 1967, 282.
[169] Qutaiba Idlbi, Kassem Eid, "The Syrian Uprising: What Role Did Social Media Play?," Hoover Institute One Hundred Years, Issue 1714, June (2017),https://www.hoover.org/research/combo.
[170] The use of social media in this way is a pattern that repeats itself in other Syrian diasporic communities such as the one in Italy, as discussed by Ahmed Al-Rawi and Shahira Fahmy, "Social Media Use in the Diaspora: The Case of Syrians in Italy," (2018) in *Diaspora and Media in Europe,* Ahmed Al-Raw eds. (Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, 2018) 5.

started to shout even louder and called her '*Sharmouta'* literally translates in English as a whore and a significant number of the comments below the video were actually supporting the actions of the man and criticizing the woman. Such behavior reveals the entitlement that some men in the Syrian community in Germany believe they have by virtue of being men to "protect" women in their family, networks, and community.[171] Such men may feel they have the right to harass and reprehend Syrian women on the streets of Berlin so long as they are questioning the honor and integrity of that woman. In return, she is expected to remain silent and accept their critique (even when it is shouted). It is important to point out here that these acts of 'protecting' the community are highly gendered: they are mostly only targeted at women and reveal the "masculinity crisis" than men in diaspora suffer from while in diaspora or even after returning home as it was the case of the Kuwaiti diasporic communities after the First Gulf War.[172]

In some situations, men are policed by other men and pushed to act in response to incidents which are perceived as transgression and violation to the norms of society, such as in the case of Abo Marwan, which I discussed in my previous chapter. In his video, Abo Marwan sent a message to all Syrian women who 'became arrogant' and don't like life with Syrian men like him after coming to Germany will suffer a destiny similar to that of his ex-wife. Unfortunately, the comments on the video were mixed in content. While most people rejected his act, a significant number of men actually supported it and even praised his action. The fact that a significant number of men accepted and supported such a crime for the sake of protecting the norms and honor of the Syrian society shows how misogynist and gendered policing mechanisms can be and how these mechanisms are only applied to women and rarely applied to men. Such mechanisms are not

[171] Fataneh Farahani, "Diasporic narratives on virginity," in *Muslim Diaspora Gender, culture and identity*, edited by Haideh Moghissi, (Routledge: New York, 2006), 199.
[172] Mary Ann Tétreault, "Divided communities of memory," in *Muslim Diaspora Gender, culture and identity*, edited by Haideh Moghissi, (Routledge: New York, 2006), 93.

unique to this context alone. For example, building on Enloe's work, Nadje Al-Ali argues that whatever gains Iraqi women had in terms of their rights were reclaimed by men who bolstered their masculinities during the conflict.[173] Similarly, in the case of Syrians diaspora, the conflict is still going but men in diaspora are reclaiming and bolstering their masculinity through attempts to regain control over women's bodies. When I asked Samar about the Abo Marwan incident, her reply was:

> "Marriage is like a property contract, men see it in that way, [let's say] she [the slain Syrian woman] deceived him [Abo Marwan] to leave him, she should have never been killed. Some men are really doing bad [neglecting family and sleeping around] things that push women to do that [cheating], he should have moved on, if she did something bad then her god will judge her, he should have moved on. Either [the wife stays as] my property or you die, this is sick, there is no pushing in such relationships. You can't force someone to love you."[174]

As her statement reveals, Samar's personal explanation for the incident was that Syrian men take marriage as property contract, in which the wife is the property of the husband, and that they can't perceive a change in that relationship. When I asked her about her opinion regarding the comments that some men wrote supporting his action, her answer was:

> "They have the same mentality, they told him that you are an honourable man and a real man [for killing his wife], they are sick. They feel threatened and they are losing power, so they act in this stupid way to control women and accuse them of adultery."[175]

Samar's opinion about the incident was that the wife did something bad according to the news she heard. Nevertheless, that in no way was an excuse for the ex-husband to murder his ex-wife and she believes that in case on infidelity, it must have been caused by the neglect of the

[173] Nadje Al-Ali, "Reconstructing Gender: Iraqi Women between Dictatorship, War, Sanctions and Occupation," Third world Quarterly Vol. 26 no. 4/5 (2005), 742.
[174] Interview with Author in Mecklenburg, 21nd of July, 2018.
[175] Interview with Author in Mecklenburg, 21nd of July, 2018.

husband towards the family or by his actions of infidelity. She further explains that men are having a crisis in Germany. In Samar's opinion, men sense defeat and they feel that they lost power and prestige in Germany.[176] However, those men can always claim "piety" through gossiping about a certain woman and accusing her of committing adultery, thus questioning her morality through the use of arguments to protect the Syrian culture or through the use of religion.

4.3 Instrumentalization of Religion as Policing Mechanism

Religion occupies a significant part of life in Syria and the society is predominantly religious despite the secular Ba'athist rule since 1963. The majority of Syrians are Muslims and even though the Assad government cracked down on religious groups in the country in the 1980s,[177] it did not attempt to secularize people. Religion remained in public as long as it fit within the guidelines of the state and in private it became an identity to cling to for the majority of Syrians who opposed the regime.

Before the conflict, religion has also been a crucial tool for the social policing of members of the Syrian society, particularly women. Men can easily claim knowledge of Islam and the Quran after growing a beard and watching a few videos on YouTube. For women, such claims to religious authority are much more difficult, if not impossible. The use of religion by men allows for the complete dismissal of activities or events merely by using the word '*Haram,'* meaning prohibited in English. This word has a great importance to the preservation of social norms. On the other hand, if something is allowed in Islam but it contradicts the interest of men, then it is easier to ignore, and the consequences are close to none.

[176] Interview with Author in Mecklenburg, 21nd of July, 2018.
[177] Raphael Lefevre, Ashes of Hama the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, (Oxford University Press: New York, 2013), 43.

All men I interviewed in Germany emphasized that the Syrian society is a religious and a Muslim one and their interpretation of good and bad was clearly religious. Women, on the other hand, disagreed. In the opinions women shared, hypocrisy prevailed in the society and the proof was the case of divorce or inheritance or the understanding of "honour" which is linked to the virginity of the woman but never to that of the man. As a divorced woman, Samar shared her own experience with the issues:

> Many women want divorce but can't because of economic insecurity, women are not getting divorced to have sex, they have reasons for it. In Syria she would not dare to seek divorce, men see that a divorced woman is an open call for sex, men harass her that's why men don't like someone of their family is divorced.[178]

The case of divorce is an interesting one. In Syria, after a divorce, the divorced woman is seen as a disaster for the family's reputation. The divorced woman will deal with gossip, not only about her own reputation but also the reputations of any daughters she might have. Samar was probably one of the lucky women to have family support by the time she decided to separate from her husband prior to the conflict, but in general other women may not receive such support.

As for inheritance, Quran mandates that a woman should get half of the male's share of any inheritance. However, in Syria there was an option of sorting the inheritance based on Islamic law or on a secular law that gives equal share for men and women. The reality, however, is often different. The experience of my own mother and her sisters is an example of this. They were denied their rights by their own father who opted to split the properties of the family between his two sons based on the understanding that "the money that goes to the daughter is wasted," unlike the money that is given to the son. Inheritance is yet another example in which religion comes second after the gendered traditions of society.

[178] Interview with Author in Mecklenburg, 21nd of July, 2018.

Finally, an understanding of religious honor is maintained through the control of women's appearance, conduct in private and public, and is connected to the woman's virginity.[179] Patriarchal religious norms rarely police the activities of men, but if a woman misbehaves even slightly her reputation and probably that of the family is tarnished for ever. This gendered interpretation of honor prevailed in the society prior to the conflict and is still being used in the Syrian communities in Germany today. Sana described an interesting case in Mecklenburg:

> In this community [Mecklenburg], there is a conservative family I personally know accepting their sons having [German] girlfriends and having the girlfriend of the son sleeping over, while they have two other young girls at home. The mom is proud that her boys are dating two German girls, but at the same time they ask for two good Muslim Syrian men for their two daughters. I saw this in four different families.[180]

This interesting example of a "religious" conservative family praising and bragging about the male members of the family dating German girl reveals the gendered norms and hypocritical religiosity that is applicable only to women, while men are immune to those norms that determines who is a "good" and who is "bad" member of the community. In other words, policing mechanisms are utilized by men and women to keep young women in check and keep them from willingly disturb the social order and concede to the patriarchal religious expectations.

4.4 Conclusion

As the community emerges and grows in Germany, Syrians seek to establish social capital in their new homes. However, the dilemma of obtaining the social capital without being subject to

[179] Fataneh Farahani, "Diasporic narratives on virginity," in *Muslim Diaspora Gender, culture and identity*, edited by Haideh Moghissi, (Routledge: New York, 2006), 199.
[180] Interview with Author in Berlin, the 1st of September, 2019.

policing mechanisms is near impossible to evade, especially for young women. Community peer pressure and gossip always pose as an obstacle for those who think of challenging the norms. But despite the fact that men have lost the large society as a support mechanism for sexist and misogynist practices that may have been taken for granted at home, the community in diaspora is still connected to the imagined life of Syria prior to the war and social norms pressure its members to rise up to the expectations of those years, using religion, honor and social pressure against non-conforming women. . Women are in-between two difficult decisions: to conform to gendered expectations and limits their options or to reject the performance of these norms that will make them pass as 'good' girls in order to better integrate, which could cost them their membership to the community. I argue that these policing mechanisms revolve around preserving gendered norms to control women and restrict them to the stereotype of "good woman, good wife" so that men can easily find future wives who will reproduce these gendered norms and practices and concede to their demands.

Chapter Five: The Case of Marriage

5.1 Marriage in Syria Before the 2011 Uprising

The gendered policing mechanisms levied against young women in the Syrian diasporic community that I discussed in my previous chapter are ultimately aimed to produce the ideal "good girl" who will be a suitable "traditional' wife. I came to know that during the endless conversations about marriage during my fieldwork. To understand marriage in the Syrian diaspora in Germany, it is important to have a clear understanding of the practice of marriage before the conflict, and how marriage and the practices revolving around it have changed. As I mentioned in my introduction, Syria was under severe isolation since the Ba'athists took control of the country after the 1963 military coup. As a result, similar to Nadje Al-Ali's analyses of conservatism in Iraq during the sanctions time, this led to social conservatism and more misogynist gendered norms.[181]

Prior to the conflict, marriage was seen as a rite of passage, which men could discuss with their parents upon finishing their obligatory military service and starting to work. On the other hand, women who were studying or about to graduate were always reminded by aunties and older women in their family and network that it was time to get married. The pressure was time sensitive: if young women didn't act quickly they would miss out on the 'great' opportunity of being able to select a spouse at this young age, whereas in few years they would lose this opportunity and they would be pressured to accept anyone proposing or worse, they will be called in Arabic *Aanes*. *Aenes* translates to English as someone who has overstayed at their parent's place and missed the chance of getting married, and has a pejorative meaning of 'undesired or left over.' The word *Aanes* linguistically speaking, refers to both men and woman. Nevertheless, it is mostly used

[181] Nadje Al-Ali, "Reconstructing Gender: Iraqi Women between Dictatorship, War, Sanctions and Occupation," Third world Quarterly Vol. 26 no. 4/5 (2005), 751.

to shame women. In case of its use to refer to men, it will be accompanied with the statement 'a man is immune to shame,' meaning that a man still has the chance of marrying no matter how old he is.

Before the conflict in Syria, it was a fairly normal to think of marriage as a family issue, in which the parents take a significant part. There were several stages for marriage in Syria, from the first meeting (*shoufa*) to the engagement (*khoutba*) and finally the wedding (*zifaf* or *al-eurs*). Matchmaking was a role undertaken by the mother or the aunties, while the father's role would be to give or deny the blessings, an essential aspect of proceeding with the arrangements for proposing to the bride's family, the engagement period and the wedding. These arrangements mostly involved the extended family which is very important for the creation of a well-respected spectacle for the prestige of the families or their position within their social group. In other words, the more significant the position of the family within the social hierarchy in Syria, the higher the expectations for their choice of spouses and spectacles of the weddings they organize. In most of these cases, people would use the following idiom: "*Yalle metelna taao laaenna*" which translates as those who resemble us, may approach us. This reflects a class division within the society and fits with Al-Ali's analysis of changes in marriage in Iraq after the first Gulf War.[182]

5.1.1 *Shoufa*

After navigating landmines of socio-economic differences, urban-rural divisions, and factors of religiosity and after obtaining the blessings of the two families involved, the first meeting, '*Shoufa,*' is held. The prospective groom and his family show up at the prospective bride's family home and after initiating indirect channels to investigate about the availability of the woman

[182] Nadje Al-Ali, "Reconstructing Gender: Iraqi Women between Dictatorship, War, Sanctions and Occupation," Third world Quarterly Vol. 26 no. 4/5 (2005), 750.

they are seeking in marriage, the groom is expected to nod to signal that he is interested in the woman, while the woman is expected to enact the utmost level of shyness and the inability to speak. It is important to clarify that in a significant number of such occasions the bride and the groom would have been dating secretly or texting online. Thus, the behavior during *Shoufa* is only a performance fulfilling the social norms that booth families seek to conform to. Sana from Homs brought up the case of her brother saying:

> My eldest brother was interested in a young girl from our neighborhood and they were secretly texting and talking on the phone. When he told my mother, she told my father and then after he agreed, my mother called the mother of the girl to let them know that we would like to visit them in a matter that brings the two families together. Of course, the mother of the girl knew, as a young girl is also expected to let her mother know that a guy who is interested in her might contact the family for a formal first visit.[183]

Though the youth in Syria would find ways of meeting and dating, there was an aspect of secrecy involved to avoid gossip. If the couple dating find themselves ready to proceed to a formal engagement, then they follow the social norms and inform their parents about their intention. Upon a successful first visit, the families decide the formalities of dowry and bride money and decide on a date to make the formal engagement.

5.1.2 *Khoutba*

In the case of positive response from the bride's family, the second step towards marriage, the engagement or '*Khoutba,*' takes place soon after. It is a common practice among many Syrian Muslim families for the engagement to be accompanied with religious marriage in Islam known

[183] Interview with Author in Berlin, the 1st of September, 2019.

as *'Nikah'*[184] or '*Katb-Ketab,*' which is the equivalent to a church marriage in Christianity. Religious marriage for Muslims is a sufficient ceremony to acknowledge the couple as a married couple. The period of engagement is considered the time in which the couple get to date – under the supervision of the family of course. The fiancé visits the fiancée's house at first, and then they are allowed to go out together more often, which also serves as a public spectacle to the community. Nevertheless, both families see the religious marriage as incomplete without the third step, which is the wedding.

Sana continued her brother's story, explaining:

> My brother's shoufa and engagement were smooth, but his father-in-law was a jerk. He [the father-in-law] would always make big fuss about my brother's visit to his fiancée [wife according to Islamic law] he [father-in-law] was very restrictive to their meetings.[185]

Even though Sana's brother was technically married according to Islamic practices, the family of the bride to be were not accommodating of the meetings of the couple. This is yet another example of where religion is sidelined by a conservative family to concede to social norms, proving that it is not religion that works as a main drive of social norms in the country.

5.1.3 Zifaf or Al-Eurs

After a successful engagement, planning for the wedding takes place. The wedding is a public spectacle that aims to inform the community that the couple is now properly married. Wedding parties reflect the socio-economic situation of the family and are always aimed at reflecting the prestige of the families of the couple. However, it is also common that many couples

[184] It important to note that this religious marriage has not legal binding power unless it was further certified by the municipality of the relevant city. Nevertheless, Muslim families still do the Nikah mostly before the official marriage at the municipality.
[185] Interview with Author in Berlin, the 1st of September, 2019.

get married and have a pompous wedding for days without even having a single legal document signed. In many cases, the religious marriage certificate would be the only proof of marriage, which would still need formal registry in court to guarantee the legal rights of bride.

Sana highlighted this point saying:

> After my eldest brother got married, it took him few months to register the marriage and obtain an official marriage certificate and the family notebook, which was normal in Syria back then.[186]

Marriage before the conflict reflected the class and social standing of the families of the couple. It was a public spectacle and a social communal event. Even though religiosity shapes the process of marriage in all stages and it is clear that religion and norms are intertwined and influence each other, religion is sidelined in many incidents to adhere to social patriarchal norms, which contradicts "religious" practices of conservative or practicing Muslim families.

5.2 Marriage in Syria After the Conflict

As a result of the conflict in the country, practices related to marriage as well as the spectacles that would be considered integral to marriage have changed. The state of insecurity that prevailed in the country as well as the economic burdens that the war brought about increased difficulties for families. In addition, travelling between cities became increasingly difficult, making it challenging to attend a wedding or to take part of a marriage proposal. 'Wajaha'[187] events related to weddings and marriage were seen as insignificant in light of the turmoil that Syria was living through in 2011 and remains so today.

[186] Interview with Author in Berlin, the 1st of September, 2019.
[187] Wajaha, from formal Arabic "Tho-Wajaha" a person of high standing in society, it also means a group of people of high standing in society.

I remember that in the early weeks and months of the 2011 revolution, news about the disappearance of young men and the death of protestors either by gunfire or torture in prisons was common. The prevalence of such horrific news resulted in postponing any plans related to marriage and weddings. In such cases, the role of the parents would be to show support to other families in the community who were dealing with the news of a missing son or the death of a relative. The phrase, '*sho bedda tehke anna elnas'* or 'what will people talk about us' served as a good pacifier to control enthusiastic couples and convince them to accept delaying marriage ceremonies until the situation was better.

The early changes halted marriage proposals or resulted in delaying the plans that people had in mind. However, as the country descended into a quagmire of armed conflict, the state of insecurity, military campaigns and displacement became a normal part of everyday life. Syrians continued their lives, taking into consideration that conflict was present in everyday routines. As a result, people's attitude shifted and the focus turned from having a pompous and a perfect wedding that would take weeks and months of planning to simply making it easier for the couple who were engaged or had a religious marriage to have a simple wedding and move-in together as a couple. Thus, marriages proposals became simpler and weddings took place on a very small scale that fulfilled the purpose of making an announcement to the community that the couple is now officially married following the norms and customs of the Syrian society. My Aunt Huda mentioned a story about a wedding that was delayed because the groom was wanted by the government due to his participation in the uprising.

She said:

> The couple was done with postponing [the wedding] so the girl took all of what she needed, kissed her parents goodbye, and I accompanied her to the town of

> her future husband. We passed through countless number of checkpoints and I was terrified, but we arrived safely. The groom and his relatives were waiting for us at the entrance of the town with arms in case we were arrested or harassed by soldiers.[188]

Indeed, the conflict led to a decline in marriages in the early months simply because many people thought it is a short turmoil and the situation will be clear soon. Nevertheless, the fact that the conflict worsened changed the priorities of people in the country and resulted in an unexpected surge in the number of marriages despite the conflict, which also affected marriages and wedding parties resulting in simplifying these events gradually to the extent that these events became just private or restricted to family members of the couples and lacked the public spectacle.

5.2.1 Digital Marriage Proposals

The sudden mobility of Syrians into many countries led to the breakup of social networks that once formed social capital of community members. Those networks transformed into transnational networks via social media as means of communication to members of the community from home. Therefore, many Syrians live a hybrid life of being in Istanbul or Berlin physically, but much more connected to relatives and friends at home through social media and other platforms. These transnational networks resulted in a new pattern of marriage proposals which I call the 'digital marriage proposal.' Such a pattern deviates from most of the acceptable social norms and traditions regarding marriage proposals in Syria before the war, but it shows that many of those ideas are being transformed as a result of migration.[189] Nevertheless, it has become a common practice of matchmaking that even conservative circles would be flexible and

[188] Interview with Author in Munich, the 20th of August 2018.
[189] Claire Alexander, "Marriage, Migration, Multiculturalism: Gendering 'The Bengal Diaspora'," Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, vol. 39, no. 3, 340.

accommodating to such new practices. Sana described the process of finding a wife for her second brother:

> My single brother was working abroad, he contacted his friends on Facebook and WhatsApp and told them that he is searching for a wife. After month, he found someone interesting and started chatting. Then he traveled to see girl and meet her family, they got married few months after that.[190]

Such cases of marriage were the result of connecting to the old community and network of people that Syrians used to have before the war, the only difference is that these transnational connections are online and keep their ties strong with people from the community but now live probably in a different continent. Another interesting change is the desire of the families to be part of the wedding ceremonies even if it means participating by watching online. Sana's younger sister got married in Turkey to her boyfriend in Lebanon via Skype.

Sana:

> My sister and her boyfriend were separated because of the conflict, so the boyfriend asked his younger brother [who was also in Turkey] to propose in his place. The family in Syria and the groom in Lebanon witnessed the engagement on Skype while his eldest brother [in a different town in Syria] did the religious marriage himself because he was a cleric.[191]

In this interesting case, a marriage proposal took place in Istanbul while the groom was in Lebanon and the family was in two different cities in Syria. Such an experience would have simply been unheard of before the conflict and it shows how people are mobilizing social media and old networks in the process of matchmaking and mating.

[190] Interview with Author in Berlin, the 1st of September, 2019.
[191] Interview with Author in Berlin, the 1st of September, 2019.

5.3 Marriage in Germany

5.3.1 Matchmaking

As I discussed in Chapter Three, many asylum seekers become familiar with other asylum seekers through social meetings and classes that are offered at camps. These meetings facilitate the important processes of learning about the outcomes of interviews that asylum seekers have with the German Immigration Office and the decisions that determines their lives. But the meetings also facilitate dating and matchmaking. Azad, originally from Hasaka but born and raised in Homs, shared his experience in the camp:

> I waited for more than a year at the camp and I was very social, I ended up meeting a girl in the camp and we liked each other. By the time I moved out from the camp, I proposed to her family and they accepted me. It was very difficult to live in the camp, away from family and loved ones but now I feel like home, I have my family and responsibility to look after and that's how I spend my day.[192]

In the case of Azad, he managed to find a date while still living in camp and this motivated him to work harder to settle down and take care of his family. Similarly, other members of the community connected to the network they built at the camp and built on it for other purposes. Such connections were the beginning of creating a small community and the beginning of establishing trust for future relationships for business and even possibilities of marriage.

Issues of marriage and the financial burden of marriage has prompt Syrians to connect to relatives who are still in Syria to seek their help in finding a future bride for their sons in Germany. An interesting example of this came out in the story of a chemist I interviewed in Berlin. He and his family settled in Berlin in 2016 and now two of his sons are waiting for family unification

[192] Interview with Author in Berlin, the 7th of August, 2018.

procedure to go through, which allows their future brides to come to Germany. The chemist expressed his frustration with the changes that the community is experiencing, and that people are demanding large sums of money instead of facilitating marriages.

> It is really difficult to find a suitable wife for the kids here; women are demanding lots of unrealistic things. My wife found two good girls through her family in Homs and we agreed on dowry and bride's money, everything was smooth, we could not find them [his two sons] suitable girls in Berlin and the community became more materialistic, demanding thousands of Euros.[193]

Matchmaking through networks at home in Syria proves to be a good solution for Syrians living in Germany. Yet such trends began on the premise that women coming from Syria are "pious" and have not been "corrupted" by the life in Germany, meaning that women who are getting married to men in Germany are less likely to question things in Germany, will obey the desires of their husbands, and would never call the police to report their husband if their rights are violated.

I would like to highlight an idiom used to describe how a good woman would behave, *a good woman has a mouth to eat, but never to speak.*[194] The idiom is often accompanied with the following one that refers to the level of obedience that women are expected to follow: *If you ask her is the yoghurt black? She would say yes.*[195]

The idioms I mention above summarize in part the reason why a significant number of young men would prefer to get married to a Syrian girl in Syria and then wait for the process of family unification to go through and the bride reaches Germany. The assumption is that these women know less about Germany and laws of the country and they are less likely to report family

[193] Interview with Author in Dresden, the 7th of August 2018.
[194] Interview with Author in Munich, the 20th of August 2018.
[195] Interview with Author in Munich, the 20th of August 2018.

issues to the authorities. Most importantly, a new hierarchy of piety is established because women coming from Syria are inexperienced and grateful to be brought to Germany instead of living in Syria. However, the process of family unification has been under severe scrutiny by the federal authorities in Germany, resulting in a plan of processing family unification applications over a period of ten years.[196]

5.3.2 Halal Tinder

With family unification made much more difficult, Syrians in diaspora are resorting to new means of matchmaking which is very un-orthodox to the community. The pattern of matchmaking through networks in Syria has declined and new pattern emerged. The new patterns which I call halal tinder, refers to the practice of matchmaking on social media platforms that adheres to social norms of the Syrian community such as no premarital sex. Social media platforms such as Facebook have witnessed the emergence of groups with titles such as "Zawaj al-Sureyyen" or marriage of Syrians. In my research, I found dozens of these groups on Facebook in many different cities in Germany. The purpose of such groups is to facilitate the process of matchmaking not only within the same city or country but also to connect people who are in Syria or a neighboring country with those who are all over Europe.

The vast majority of posts in these groups are made by younger men who are living in Germany. Their posts start by identifying the city they come from in Syria, then they follow by describing their situation in Germany including their status as a refugee or an asylum seeker. The ability to speak German language is highlighted in most of the posts and men include details

[196] Ann Esswein, "Germany's family reunification policy can leave young adults in limbo," Deutsche Welle,August the 1st 2018, https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-family-reunification-policy-can-leave-young-adults-in-limbo/a-44916708

regarding their economic situations. In general, it is mostly men using the platform to find a suitable wife and they use the platform as a way of demonstrating their own suitability, much as they would have performed prior to the conflict in order to pass as mature, independent and ready for marriage.

Men also emphasize the characteristics of the person they seek, such as "bnt adameyye" or "marabayeh." Such terms refer to a well-taught girl and not a problem maker, but also have illicit undertones, such as the requirements of being patient and tolerant which makes her as a 'good wife'. A woman who might decide to divorce her husband or report him to the police for a case of domestic abuse would in this understanding be considered a "bad" woman and would attract the topic gossip from all over the community.

Posts on these social media platforms are often critical of women for being too passive and making huge financial demands. Some men wrote that they are ashamed to have to write posts and commercials to get married while women are just picking whoever is interesting in them,[197] Likewise, a significant number of posts in the groups criticized women for being materialistic. Some users attacked divorced women who made posts searching for a suitable person to meet. As Samar pointed out when I asked her about the social attitude toward divorced women:

> Our society is filled with hypocrites they never say that Islam allowed woman to seek divorce and once a woman is divorced, she is seen as a bad woman or immodest. I lived this as a divorced woman and I would never want my daughter to face the same attitude, I would recommend her to conform to hypocritical norms better than dealing with gossip that will ruin her life.[198]

Some of the women I interviewed were indeed in difficult positions. They were strong and opinionated figures that terrified a significant number of men in their network because of their

[197] Facebook Comment, Zawaj al-Sureyyen in Vieana.
[198] Interview with Author in Mecklenburg, 21nd of July, 2018.

unusual behavior. As a result, men tended to avoid asking them out and those who do try to stipulate how the power dynamics of their relationship will be. In the end, those women may conform to the social norms and enact "piety" and "shyness" as Samar stated, but they can also keep transgressing. The cost of that transgression is jeopardizing their membership to the community or facing ostracization as "bad women" for their transgression.

5.4 Conclusion

The practice of marriage changed as a result of the war. From being a central social and economic part of life, including the close and extended family to becoming a small scale celebration, the practice became less public and less significant in terms of the need to reflect the social standing of the families. After a short period of halting marriages as a result of the conflict, the focus shifted to facilitating marriages quickly. In diaspora, the practice became very different, from the use of social media platforms in matchmaking, to establishing groups on Facebook to facilitate dating across the world. Most importantly, some men who are very insecure about the changes in the community are seeking the ultimate "good girl" and question the "piety" of women who don't conform to social norms.

Conclusion

My main motivation for undertaking this project was the experiences of my own family members in diaspora, especially the women in my family and extended network. Despite the many difficulties of living in diaspora for me as a single Syrian man, I sensed that the hardships were even harsher for Syrian women in similar situations, especially the young women. Occupying the ultimate in-between position, the women are living at the intersection of integrating into German society and proving loyalty to the Syrian community. These women endure not only racism and Islamopobia across different sites, but also a more conservative set of gendered social norms that aim to re-establish the gendered power balance, which was disturbed as a result of the conflict and migration.

This research traced a sense of fear, anxiety and frustration within the Syrian community in Germany, especially among men. Those feelings resulted from many factors but most importantly the dissatisfaction with shifting power dynamics within the family and community that have threatened the dominant position of men. As this project has demonstrated, notions of "morality" and "piety" are weaponized by community members and target whoever dares to transgress and violate the norms of Syrian community. These weaponized notions are mostly used against women and impose a more strict interpretation of the notion of "morality" that makes life for women harder through the constant demands to prove their "piety" by conceding to the new expectations of their community. Yet as difficult as it may be, Syrian women adapt to navigate the requirements of new life in Germany and the strict gendered norms of the community. Assisted by the welfare system and legal and economic security women like Sana and Samar resist the social

pressures of the community and point out its hypocritical standards with respect to its notions of "morality" which are applied only to women while granting men immunity.

It is worth mentioning that the conflict and life in diaspora have been transformative forces for the Syrian diasporic community, resulting in multi-faceted changes in the community that have often resulted in a gendered conservative backlash. Nevertheless, I observed patterns of hybrid practices of resistance utilized by women and community members to adjust to the changes in the community and notions of integration, exemplified by certain practices related to dating, matchmaking, and marriage. The experiences of living in diaspora have been more transformative for the lives of women whereas men tend to get stuck in nostalgia for their old lives at home. In this respect, in the long run Syrian women are more successful in coping with life in Germany despite the short term encroaching conservatism of the community.

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