TRANSFORMATION OF THE MEANING OF LOSS AMONG DISPLACED SYRIANS: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF A COMMUNITY OF RESILIENCE

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TRANSFORMATION OF THE MEANING OF LOSS AMONG DISPLACED SYRIANS: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF A COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

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ABSTRACT

TRANSFORMATION OF THE MEANING OF LOSS AMONG DISPLACED SYRIANS: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF A COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

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Keywords: displacement, war, Syrians, collective trauma, community building, resilience, ethnography

The war that started in Syria in 2011 has given rise to immense economic, political, social, cultural, and individual losses and reconstructions, and a large population of displaced people. Currently, there are over three and a half million Syrians registered in Turkey. Although the "open door policy" has paved the way of a new life for many displaced Syrians, many are still exposed to numerous challenges. Considering the experience of war and consequent losses as both traumatic and transformative, this research explores the individual and collective ways in which displaced Syrians in Istanbul deal with trauma and transform its effects through empowerment and solidarity. The thesis focuses specifically on how a community center, imagined as an "open space," shapes the sense of home and creates a site of resilience among displaced Syrians. Based on ethnographic fieldwork between January 2019 and April 2020 at a local community center initiated by displaced Syrians in Istanbul, this thesis tries to explore individual and collective capacities of resilience in dire times.

ÖZET

YERİNDEN EDİLMİŞ SURİYELİLER İÇİN KAYBIN ANLAMININ DÖNÜŞÜMÜ: DAYANIKLI BİR TOPLULUK ÜZERİNE ETNOGRAFİK BİR ÇALIŞMA

BERFU SERÇE

KÜLTÜREL ÇALIŞMALAR YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ, AĞUSTOS 2020

Tez Danışmanı: Prof. AYŞE GÜL ALTINAY

Anahtar Kelimeler: yerinden edilme, savaş, Suriyeliler, toplumsal travma, topluluk inşası, dayanıklılık, etnografi

2011 yılında Suriye'de başlayan savaş ekonomik, politik, sosyal, kültürel ve bireysel boyutta ağır kayıplara ve yeniden yapılanmalara sebep olurken, geriye yerinden edilmiş büyük bir nüfus bıraktı. Güncel verilere göre Türkiye'de kayıtlı Suriyeli sayısı üç buçuk milyonu aşmış durumdadır. Türkiye'nin benimsemiş olduğu 'açık kapı politikası' Suriyeliler için yeni bir hayatın kapılarını aralamış olsa da, birçok Suriyeli hala büyük zorluklarla mücadele etmektedir. Savaşı ve savaşın sebep olduğu kayıpları hem travmatik hem de dönüştürücü deneyimler olarak ele alan bu araştırma, İstanbul'da yaşayan yerinden edilmiş Suriyelilerin bireysel ve kolektif olarak travma ile baş etme yollarını ve bu deneyimlerin sebep olduğu etkileri güçlenme ve dayanışma ile dönüştürme pratiklerini incelemektedir. Bu incelemenin odak noktasını 'açık mekan' olarak hayal edilen bir toplum merkezi oluşturmaktadır ve bu mekanın Suriyeliler için hangi yollarla 'evinde olma' hissini şekillendirdiği ve bir dayanıklılık zemini yarattığı tartışılmaktadır. Yerinden edilmiş Suriyelilerin İstanbul'da kurmuş olduğu yerel bir toplum merkezinde Ocak 2019 ile Nisan 2020 tarihleri arasında yapılan etnografik araştırmaya dayanan bu tez, zorlayıcı zamanlarda bireysel ve kolektif dayanıklılık kapasitesinin nasıl geliştirilebildiğini analiz etmeye odaklanmaktadır.

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To the displaced people of Syria

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Hope is the Thing with Feathers

"Hope" is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul
And sings the tune without the words
And never stops-at all-

And sweetest- in the Gale- is heard
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm

I've heard it in the chilliest land
And on the strangest Sea
Yet, never, in Extremity
It asked a crumb-of me

-Emily Dickinson

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Context of the Research

In the middle of March 2011, the unrest that started against the regime in Syria quickly evolved into a state of civil war. The war resulted in serious losses for many Syrians including the "loss of loved ones, friends, the loss of home, the loss of community connectedness, the loss of employment, the loss of a place itself" (Saul and Landau 2004, 5) - losses which can be regarded as traumatic both individually and collectively. As the war continues unabated, over half of the population have lost their homes due to the conflict and its effects, and many have been forced to leave their habitual residence and eventually their country. According to recent data by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (also known as the UN Refugee Agency or UNHCR), over five and half million have fled from Syria[1]; these numbers signify the worst crisis involving displaced people since the Second World War[2].Nearly 80% of those who have fled Syria have gone mainly to neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan[3].

The war that started in Syria in 2011 has given rise to economic, political, social, cultural, and individual reconstructions, and a significantly large population of Syrian refugees being hosted in Turkey. Turkey has claimed its commitment to an open-door policy towards Syrian refugees which has been "accompanied by a humanitarian discourse regarding the admission and accommodation of the refugees" (Koca et al. 2015, 209). Turkey's open-door policy was initially praised and well-received at international and domestic levels. Although the policy has helped pave

[1]https://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html?gclid=CjwKCAjw34n5BRA9EiwA2u9k31Ki$_KgQjVvsZW1ViJWe09EGdo4$

[2]http://graphics.wsj.com/migrant-crisis-a-history-of-displacement/

[3]https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/numbers-syrian-refugees-around-world/

the way toward a new life in Turkey for many displaced Syrians, social structures concerning the economic, social, political, and legal conditions of these displaced people have perpetuated experienced violence.

When the open-door policy was first put into practice, the Syrians who came to Turkey on a mass scale were regarded as "guests" (*misafir*), not refugees. Turkey is one of the signatories of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (also known as *the 1951 Refugee Convention, Geneva Convention or 1951 U.N. Convention*). The 1951 U.N. Convention was initially prepared after massive displacement due to the Second World War, and it was restricted to "persons who became refugees due to the events occurring in Europe" at the outset[4]. The term "refugee" is defined in the 1951 U.N. Convention as follows:

> As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (1951 UN Convention).[5]

The 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees that entered into force by the U.N. attempted to remove the limitation on who was considered a "refugee" relating to time and geography. Although Turkey is a signatory to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, it sustains its right to keep the limitation clause of the 1951 Convention and grants refugee status only to those who come from the Council of Europe member-states[6]. This situation grants Syrians who flee from the war and seek refuge in Turkey an uncertain legal status.

In response to the lack of proper laws and regulations concerning displaced Syrians, Turkey has followed a special procedure. The Law on Foreigners and International Protection (*Yabancılar ve Uluslararası Koruma Kanunu*) passed in April 2013 and the Regulation on Temporary Protection (*Geçici Koruma Yönetmeliği*) passed in October 2014 attempted to regulate the process of asylum-seeking in Turkey (Çam

[4] https://www.unhcr.org/about-us/background/4ec262df9/1951-convention-relating-status-refugees-its-1967-protocol.html

[5] https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10

[6] https://www.goc.gov.tr/multeci

2019; Şanlı 2017). After the Law on Foreigners and International Protection and the Regulation on Temporary Protection was passed, Syrians initially addressed as "guest" (*misafir*) obtained the legal status of "temporary protection" (*geçici koruma*). Although the status of displaced Syrians has changed from 'being a guest' to 'temporary protection', the perception of Syrians as "guests" in Turkey has prevailed in everyday interactions and in public discourse.

The temporary protection status is designed to provide displaced Syrians in Turkey ID cards with a Foreigner's ID number (*Yabancı Kimlik Numarası, YKN*), which is supposed to facilitate access to employment, education, health care, and social welfare services[7]. Nonetheless, temporary protection does not cover everyone who comes from Syria to Turkey. According to recent data published by Directorate General of Migration Management (*Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü*) in July 2020, the official number of Syrians registered in Turkey is over three and a half million. While every city in Turkey currently hosts displaced Syrians, Istanbul has the highest population, hosting more than 500.000 Syrians displaced by the war as of July 2020[8].

1.2 War as a Complex Social Condition and/or as the Event

War and the experience of life during war and its aftermath has been extensively researched by anthropologists (Agier 2002; Glowacki, Wilson, and Wrangham 2017; Otterbein 2009; Turner and Pitt 1989). The effects of war on the lives of survivors, the new subjectivities that emerge out of the experience of war, and the different forms of social continuities and new ways of social structures represented by war has given war its own agency in social analysis over many years.

In this introduction, I do not intend to cover conventional approaches on war and violence. Rather, in my analysis I am inspired by a discussion revolving around two important books: Nordstrom (1997)'s *A Different Kind of War Story* and Lubkemann (2010)'s *Culture in Chaos*. In *A Different Kind of War Story*, Nordstrom, a prominent anthropologist of war and militarism, offers a new way of looking at war and its consequences on the lives of survivors of the civil war in Mozambique through focusing firmly on violence and the strategies of surviving violence. Her

[7] https://www.goc.gov.tr/kurumlar/goc.gov.tr/gecicikorumayonetmeligi.pdf

[8] https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638

discussion of war and of the social lives of survivors focuses on the graphic violence people were exposed to during the 15-year war and what coping with violence involved for the survivors. While regarding war as essentially violent and destructive, she conceptualizes her analysis in two all-encompassing motifs: (1) the effects of violence itself generate a shared custom among different communities in response to brutality, and (2) those responses towards brutality primarily involve methods of surviving violence. She argues that war "comes into existence when violence is employed... It is in the act of violence, then, that the definition of war is found" (Nordstrom 1997, cited in Thiranagama 2011, 7).

However, some critics have argued that Nordstrom aestheticizes violence by exclusively focusing on it and on what coping with violence involves in the lives of survivors Kelly 2008; Lubkemann 2010. In Nordstrom's introduction, she stands by her arguments and emphasizes the necessity to depict the violent part of war; otherwise, she argues, it would be another form of silencing. Depictions of war with a focus on violence are necessary, she claims, as they reflect the graphic events people have experienced; this emphasis makes it possible to frame the violence as suspending life as usual for survivors. However, war as "an event" in people's lives does not solely entail violence as brutal force, it also transforms people's social existence as war is lived through. How this violence is experienced exceeds simply surviving within this violence; survivors' social, emotional, and physical landscapes are also transformed.

While admitting the importance of analyzing the construction of violence and how war-zone inhabitants handle it, Lubkemann, who also studies the civil war in Mozambique, criticizes Nordstrom's approach, claiming that it ignores the complexity of social lives, aspirations, and the mundanity of violence in the lives of survivors. He asserts that "our understanding of what war involves as an experience for subjects and societies thus tends to be organized almost exclusively around our understanding of what coping with violence involves" (2008, 11). His book, *Culture in Chaos*, begins with a discussion that takes war as "a complex social condition" (Thiranagama 2011, 8) rather than a suspension of social life:

> In the growing number of places in which armed conflicts and displacement persist for decades... For the inhabitants of such places war has not been an 'event' that suspends 'normal' social processes, but instead has become the normal – in the sense of "expected" – context for the unfolding of social life. Rather than treating war as an 'event' that suspends social processes, anthropologists should study the realization and transformation of social relations and cultural practices throughout

> conflict, investigating war as a transformative social condition (Lubkemann 2010, 1)

Inspired by both of these approaches on violence, in my analysis I observe the effects of war and of the social structure concerning economic, social, political, and legal conditions that perpetuate violence in the lives of those I interviewed. I consider the Syrian war and its effects to be both an "event" that suspends life as usual and a transformative social condition through which creativity and resilience can be (re)produced as individual and collective responses within and beyond violence. Throughout this thesis, I adopt a lens whereby the traumatic effects of protracted violence on the lives of displaced Syrians are not ignored. However, I observe that the responses of the participants of this research go beyond ways of coping with violence; their social, emotional, and physical landscapes are transformed. While I regard the war and its aftermath as "an event" or a trauma, I also analyze it as a process of transformation wherein individual and collective strength can be rebuilt through resilience within and beyond violence.

Trauma studies and psychoanalysis emphasize the belatedness of traumatic experience. In other words, it is beyond the bounds of possibility to witness a traumatic event as it occurs, and confrontation with an appalling reality may cause an absolute numbing to that reality (Caruth 1995). Trauma, in its very oxymoronic definition, refers to a state when "no trace of a registration of any kind is left in the psyche; instead, a void, a hole is found" (Ibid, 6). The experience of trauma causes a rupture in one's self and creates a fracture in one's personal biography.

The rupture caused by the traumatic event and the mystery of the experience that suddenly accosts us, which shatters our relationship with the symbolic and tears through our symbolic integration, is an encounter with the impossibility of the experience; it is the encounter with "the Event" (also referred to as "the Real" in the Lacanian sense). The Real has occurred through the impossibility of an occurrence.

> This moment is the moment of death and sublimation: when the subject's presence is exposed outside the symbolic support, he 'dies' as a member of the symbolic community, his being is no longer determined by a place in the symbolic network, it materializes the pure Nothingness of the hole, the void in the Other (the symbolic order), the void designated, in Lacan, by the German word das Ding, the Thing, the pure substance of enjoyment resisting symbolization. (Žižek 1992, 8)

The Real as the failure of symbolization signals a momentary gap in the symbolic and introduces a lack which shatters the symbolic structure of one's subjectivity. Thus, the construction of subjectivity "is anchored in something unknown, or more correctly put, in something that cannot be known" (Franzén 2016, 131)). The Real never happens, yet it ushers itself into the symbolic, and, simultaneously, its impossibility brings life and death into the realm of the symbolic. While witnessing the traumatic event, encountering the Real connotes symbolic death; the real is, at the same time, "not only death but also life: not only the pale, frozen, lifeless immobility but also the flesh from which everything exudes" (Žižek 1992, 22).

Witnessing a traumatic event, which suspends the inscription of an experience in the symbolic world into the psyche, causes a loss that can be thought as simultaneously the experience of death where "life as usual" is suspended and the beginning of a new, more resilient life molded by its residuals. While the psychoanalytical framework of trauma provided a valuable insight to conceptualize the experiences of war-related losses, what I aim to explore in this study is the role that creating a community can play in dealing with the trauma of war and the challenges and ambiguities concerning displaced Syrians in Turkey. I focus on the experiences of displaced Syrians who came together at the community center where I conducted my ethnographic fieldwork. I regard the experiences of the participants of this research as traumatic as a consequence of multiple losses in their lives, yet I also realize that the traumatic experiences resulted from these losses can be renegotiated through the collectivity created in centers and communities such as the one I have analyzed. I realize that the experience of trauma, as numbness and lack of responding efficiently, can be transformed with the help of a collective. The meaning of loss may take another form within the collectivity, from being a private experience to a shared one among people who have gone through similar losses and who are collectively finding the means to express, heal and transform them.

This research originates from four main questions:

1) How is it possible to reconfigure "the meaning of home" as Turkey becomes "a new home" for many displaced Syrians?
2) What are the economic, social, and political challenges Syrians are exposed to while constructing the sense of home in Turkey?
3) What is the role of this community center in reconstituting the sense of belonging and the sense of home among displaced Syrians in Turkey?
4) What are the effects of community building in reconstructing micro-level everyday resilience in dire times?

War is understood as violence, and the suspension of social life was evidently present

in my informants' narratives. They recounted the violent conflict as it happened in their neighborhoods which caused the destruction of their lives as usual. In their narrations, almost everybody referred to this war as "a matter of life and death." In each narration, the war and following experiences in Turkey caused a rupture with previous life. Ghanem, for example, said: "Later on when the war broke out in Syria, a lot of things changed in my life, but not everything. Something like my priorities and stuff. So, I started to think to change or to do something." Considering the emphasis on violence and suspension of life as usual in the narrations, I believe that the traumatic experience of war and structural violence my informants encountered in Turkey should be included in the picture. Nonetheless, my fieldwork at the community center and my daily encounters with the participants of this research also revealed the ways in which displaced Syrians in Istanbul are collectively and individually navigating the traumatic experience of war and transforming it through resilience and community building.

The war in Syria has caused multiple levels of loss ranging from the "loss of loved ones, friends, the loss of home, the loss of community connectedness, the loss of employment, the loss of a place itself" (Saul and Landau 2004, 5). The catastrophic experience of the war which involves losses of life, property, and livelihoods, which gives prominence to what we can call "collective traumatic loss," is faced by displaced Syrians who come to Turkey due to the ongoing war. In the following section, I discuss the interrelatedness of individual and collective trauma in the case of collective traumatic losses and the transformative effects of nurturing and supportive relationships formed in community building.

1.3 Individual and Collective Trauma

Jack Saul, in his book *Collective Trauma and Collective Healing: Promoting Community Resilience in the Aftermath of Disaster*, has come up with a distinction between individual and collective trauma based on his research with survivors, their families, and communities after natural disasters, conflicts, and other major catastrophes. Throughout the book, Saul adopts Kai Erikson's distinction between individual and collective trauma: individual trauma is "a blow to the psyche" whereas collective trauma is "a blow to the basic tissues of social life" (Saul 2013, 3). Erikson defines individual trauma as follows:

> By individual trauma I mean a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively. This is what clinicians normally mean when they use the term, and Buffalo Creek survivors experienced precisely that. They suffered deep shock as a result of their exposure to death and devastation, and as so often happens in catastrophes of this magnitude, they withdrew into themselves, feeling numbed, afraid, vulnerable, and very alone (Erikson 1976, cited in Saul 2013, 3).

Erikson continues:

> By collective trauma, on the other hand, I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with 'trauma'. But it is a form of shock all the same, *a gradual realization that community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared* ... 'I' continue to exist, though damaged and maybe permanently changed. 'You' continue to exist, though distant and hard to relate to. But 'we' no longer exist a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body (Erikson 1976, cited in Saul 2013, 3). (*emphasis added*)

Erikson adds that in the absence of the other, whether it is the loss of a loved one or the loss of a larger communal body, people might experience either individual or collective trauma. However, the distinction between individual and collective trauma is not strict, and these categories are not mutually exclusive. After a catastrophe, people experience both individual and collective trauma. The interrelatedness of individual and collective trauma in the aftermath of a serious loss of resources, as in the case of displaced Syrians who come to Turkey due to the Syrian war, gives prominence to what we can call "collective traumatic loss" for displaced Syrians.

The concept of resilience refers to "bouncing back", "adaptation", "elasticity under extreme stress", and "capacity of responding positively" to the traumatic losses in life (Karakılıç, Körükmez, and Soykan 2019; Saul 2013; Saul and Landau 2004). In the case of collective trauma, bouncing back from adversity or recovering from the traumatic losses of the war and challenges that follow could be possible by regaining the "bonds attaching people together" within a nurturing and supportive environment where a sense of communality and connectedness prevails Saul (2013); Saul and Landau (2004). Restoring social bonds for those who have gone through a

similar experience could pave a new way toward social togetherness that can foster individual and collective resilience (Kellermann 2007). Focusing on adaptation as a process of recovery from adversity necessitates an understanding of trauma not only as a frozen moment or an inanimate void that contains only a picture that makes sight impossible. Rather, it necessitates a new understanding of trauma that can embrace both the reality of the picture and beyond the motion initiated by the picture. While the traditional understanding of trauma does not articulate the past as a continuum towards the present and future, resilience-focused approaches to trauma might be thought of as an active dialogue between what is lost and what remains (Eng, Kazanjian, and Butler 2003, 2).

In addition to the main questions above, this study asks: How can the meaning of loss and the experience of trauma be transformed through everyday practices in newly formed collectives and spaces such as the community center? More specifically, how does "the open space" of the community center, which generates the possibility of engaging in nurturing and supportive relationships beyond the antagonistic structure of guest vs. host, help to reconstruct resilience among displaced Syrians in Turkey? Does being part of such a community provide a source for the self and for the community to be more resilient?

By focusing on individual and collective capacities for resilience through the sense of communality, empowerment, and solidarity, this research takes a critical approach to the orthodox approaches to trauma that regard the experience of trauma as pathological, based on a distinction between "dysfunctional" patterns and "functional behavior" in line with clinical approaches (Saul 2013, 47). Instead of pathologizing, I adopt an approach that revolves around resilience and attend to the transformative experience of trauma for individuals and collectivities rather than assigning their responses as "normal/abnormal" or "functional/dysfunctional." Throughout this study, I am seeking to inquire closely into what "gives lives a sense of purpose or direction, or how people search for the best way to live even in dire and hostile circumstances" (Ortner 2016, 59). This resilience-oriented approach towards trauma might enable a lens through which to witness both individual and collective resilience. Rather than focusing on a pathological explanation, a shift towards a resilience-oriented lens might enable the recognition of the creative strength of individuals and of collectivities. It allows the vision to be susceptible to multiple possibilities of experience and demonstrate beautifully that "emotional archive of trauma is not limited no numbness, anxiety or lack of feeling" (Cvetkovich 2003, 15).

1.4 The Community Center: Creating a Community of Resilience

Resilience as a concept has been used in many different thematic areas. The concept of resilience has been considered "a set of network capacities" (Norris et al. 2008; Sherrieb, Norris, and Galea 2010), "a set of distinct capital" ranging from economic to social (Alawiyah et al. 2011; Aldrich 2012), or as "attributes of a particular system" such as environment, infrastructure, governance, and economy (Flynn 2007; O'Brien, Hayward, and Berkes 2009). In this research, I use the concept of resilience as a capacity of individuals and communities to "rebound from adversity, strengthened and more resourceful" and as *an ability* "to withstand and rebound from disruptive life challenges" (Walsh 2007, cited in Saul 2013, 7).

> First, resilience is the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to resources that sustain well-being; second, resilience is the capacity of individuals' physical and social ecologies to provide these resources; and third, resilience is the capacity of individuals and their families and communities to negotiate culturally meaningful ways for resources to be shared (Ungar 2008, cited in Saul 2013, 12).

Inspired by the above definitions, I adopt a conceptualization of resilience as having two layers: first, the attainment of resources within the self as an individual trait of resilience; second, the sharing of resources so that the community can develop resilience as a collective trait. In the academic literature, while resilience is typically discussed as an attribute of individuals, it is also discussed as a social phenomenon in which the social, economic, and political environment is involved in its reproduction, for individuals, communities, and collectives (Karakılıç, Körükmez, and Soykan 2019). While the existence of a community, which "helps build a foundation for a new life, establishes connections with new sources of social support, reconnects with important people in life, [and] helps people regain a sense of agency" (Saul 2014, 48) in relation to their present condition, fosters individual resilience, each individual within this community fosters collective capacities and multiplies the ways in which the community exhibits resilience in their responses to challenges (Pfefferbaum et al. 2008; Saul 2013; Walsh 2007).

A community of resilience[9]which promotes a “sense of safety, calming, sense of self and community efficacy, connectedness and hope” (Saul 2013, 14) in multiple unique ways helps to (re)produce individual and collective resilience in the aftermath of a disaster. Throughout the thesis, I will trace the unique ways along which the community center makes possible individual and collective resilience and creates a community of resilience.

The community center is one among many other centers that focuses on the needs of displaced Syrians in Turkey. Since the beginning of the conflict, there has been an emergence of civil society organizations that address the needs and problems of displaced Syrians in Turkey.[10] There is an increasing number of civil society organizations ranging from Syrian, Turkish, and international NGOs to other organizations aiming to provide humanitarian aid, financial assistance, and psychological and social support for displaced Syrians. Syrian-initiated community centers, in a similar fashion, work toward ameliorating the challenges faced by Syrians. These local centers can be thought also as platforms of communication and socialization, which is how they initially drew my attention.

The community center schedules language classes, art workshops, preparation classes for language and comprehensive exams, helping sessions for university and scholarship applicants as well as community meals, movie nights, music and dance events, all within the atmosphere of a home. As a non-political, non-religious, and multicultural open space, the community center is run by an all-volunteer staff.

[9]Larry Ward, whose work involves trauma/resiliency trainings, non-violent social change, healing and transformation for individuals and communities, uses the phrase “community of resilience” in one of his speeches dated May 28, 2020, in relation to the recent discussion of Black Lives Matter movement. He refers to a “community of resilience” as one characterized by kindness, openness, and generosity that fosters ways of collective healing. Since I was inspired by this usage of the phrase “community of resilience,” I decided to adopt it in referring both to resilient communities of people and to the spaces promoting collective healing for communities. To see the transcription of his speech: https://www.thelotusinstitute.org/blog/2020/5/28/race-resilience-and-revolution?fbclid=IwAR0Tqm8b5zBsQHwtfKH-dMkv$_{a}apJE_{D}dkF6DkSD3EgF_{l}EuKdXJmgCEuzo$.

[10]https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkey/access-ngos-and-unhcr

1.5 Research Methodology and Positionality

Donna Haraway, in her discussion of "situated knowledges," engages in the problem of knowledge production and asks whether epistemology can be objective. She argues against the unmarked category of "the knower", and claims that it is not enough or even right to extend the category of "the knower" by filling it with various components such as race, gender, age, ethnicity, and sexuality to make the category complete. The problem is not just the heteronormative, rigid modes of knowledge production that systematically pave the way for the subjugation of certain people whose life are "represented" through such knowledge, but the very claim about ultimate knowledge and unreserved representation. There is no ultimate truth out there awaiting human reason to discover objectively and to represent unreservedly. Haraway argues that "accounts of a 'real' world do not, then, depend on the 'discovery', but on a power-charged social relation of 'conversation'" (**?**, 198). Therefore, it is impossible not to be biased in "knowing" and "representing," and any category or even personal involvement does not guarantee complete knowledge. Acknowledging my inevitable "marked category" of an anthropologist, I feel the responsibility to reflect upon my positionality in this research and the methodology that I used.

In this research, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork for nearly one and a half years, combining extensive participant observation and oral history/in-depth life story interviews. The fieldwork was conducted at a local community center initiated by displaced Syrians living in Turkey. The fieldwork was conducted between January 2019 and April 2020, and it consisted of daily interactions and relations initiated thereby with more than 40 people who were coming to the center on a regular basis. Although it was January 2019 when I started my research at the center, my first encounter with the space was in October 2018 while I was looking for a place at which to learn Arabic and started going to the center regularly.

The choice to use ethnography and oral history as my methodology for proceeding with this research comes as natural given the atmosphere of my fieldwork. Though the community center had adopted "a policy of no research," individual exceptions existed. This policy was explained to me when I identified myself as a researcher and asked permission for my research. The founder of the center explained to me the "open space" that the center exhibits, and told me that over time I could develop my own relations with the center and the people with whom I would like to conduct interviews. Through becoming a part of the center, attending the classes as a student, engaging in daily conversations, joining meals, preparing the tea, washing

the dishes, and volunteering as a Turkish teacher, I developed my own relationality with the center as well as with the people. Through my research, the community center became a part of my everyday life as well, and I was predominantly perceived there as “a friend.” I was less “an inquisitive researcher” than “a participant” of the center.

Especially since the late 1980s, the positionality of the anthropologist doing fieldwork has been a matter of heated debate and scholarly discussion (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Crapanzano 2013; Marcus and Cushman 1982). The process of knowledge production and the textuality of “ethnography” has become a major theme in discussions related to representation and anthropology’s subject matter (traditionally “the other”) (Clifford 1986, 1999). The book *Writing Culture* edited by James Clifford and George Marcus in 1986 is considered “a turning point” in anthropological writing and representation. With its emphasis on self-questioning and reflexivity toward the relational process of fieldwork and textual production, the book paved the way to “challenge older forms of authority” and to “broaden the field of representation” by acknowledging “ethnographic truth as inherently *partial and incomplete* (Clifford 1999, 643). Furthermore, as Haraway suggests, if one’s positionality affects the collection, interpretation, and organization of data and knowledge production, how can any knowledge be complete? Acknowledging a dynamic understanding of knowledges (as plural), I do not claim to produce “knowledge” (*as singular*) on displaced Syrians in Turkey. My positionality in its peculiar form becomes a medium through which I perceive and analyze the community center, a medium through which I have developed my relations with the people at the center. Throughout the thesis, I aim to refrain from claiming to be “the voice of my participants” or putting myself in a position to “give voice” to the “voiceless.” Rather, I seek to listen carefully to their unique voices, how they narrate their life stories, and the ways in which their stories are related to each other. Through the dialogical relations of fieldwork, my own story with the research participants has inherently informed the thesis. Moreover, the “knowledge” presented here is open to reformulation based on new stories or changes in the existing ones.

For a year and a half, I developed many friendships through my daily interactions in the center. In some cases, the interviews fortified some of these friendships further as they opened new channels of communication and encounter. Even if I refrained from asking exclusively research-related questions during in daily conversation, the dialogical relations of the fieldwork gave me valuable insight into my research participants’ lives and the experiences they related in the interviews.

Initially, I was hesitant to ask my informants whether they would be interested in a

life-story interview, as I feared that asking for life stories could be intrusive without there being a prior relationship based on trust and confidence. By the end of my fieldwork, I was able to conduct five life-story interviews with those participants with whom I felt that I had been able to establish a closer relationship. By the time I asked to conduct our talks, my informants and I had already been meeting at the center together for meals, dance nights, and movie screenings. I intentionally did not ask to conduct any interviews with the people attending the Turkish class I taught at the center since I felt that they might feel obliged to accept. I also did not ask to conduct any interviews with the children at the center for ethical concerns.

1.6 Interviews

The life history interviews that comprise the core of this thesis were conducted between May 2019 and September 2019 with five adults (three male, two female) between the ages of 26 and 49. When I asked to conduct interviews with the participants of this research, the responses I gained were quite positive: they all said that they would be happy to help. I explained to each participant what my research is about and add that I would love to listen to his/her unique life story – I expressed how I was inspired already by their resilient attitudes towards life. For some, the time of the interviews intersected with turning points in their lives; specifically, some were about to leave Turkey to go abroad. In those cases, the meaning of home materially was more present in our conversation as the subject was already at the top of their agendas. One of my informants had recently moved out of his flat while the other one was in the process of packing to move. Three of the interviews were held in the homes of my informants, and one was held in my home; the last interview was held at a quiet café. The spaces where I conducted the interviews were private, with only my informant and I present, except in two cases: in one interview, the interview space was shared with my informant's two-and-a-half-year-old daughter, and in the other, my informant's cat shared the space. The presence of each was precious, and at certain points eased conversation. Before all the interviews, I confirmed that my informants felt comfortable if I used a voice recorder, and all of my informants allowed me to record the interviews. Although I prepared a set of tentative questions, within the flow of the conversation some were not needed and/or new questions arose. Four of the interviews were conducted in English primarily, and one of the interviews was mainly conducted in Turkish, although the mixed use

of English, Turkish, and Arabic prevailed in all. The length of the interviews varied between 50 minutes and two and a half hours.

Portelli (2010), a well-known scholar of oral history, defines oral history as "narrative sources" (48). These narrative sources display how history can be experienced and interpreted distinctively by individuals who embody the past in their stories. Given that narrative sources reveal subjective interpretations of history for individuals, multiple variations of the same event can be possible. Oral history and the narratives of individuals who experience history as it happens give us insights about both the event and multiple possible meanings for different individuals.

> The result is narratives in which the boundary between *what takes place outside the narrator and what happens inside*, between what concerns the individual and what concerns the group, may become more elusive than in established written genres, so that personal "truth" may coincide with shared "imagination" (Portelli 2010, 49) *(emphasis added)*.

Conceptualizing them as reflecting both "what takes place outside the narrator and what happens inside," I attach to the narratives value in understanding how "the event" can be understood from different subjectivities and how multiple meanings can be attached in my informants' life stories. The life story interviews were led by questions about childhood experiences, family relations, senses of neighborhood, and important turning points. While the stories shared in these interviews reveal informants' own meanings attached to the events that they experienced, they also tell us about the history these life stories are informed by. Charlotte Linde, one of the most influential theorists of life story, defines the life story as follows:

> A life story consists of all the stories and associated discourse units, such as explanations and chronicles, and the connections between them, told by an individual during the course of his/her lifetime that satisfy the following two criteria: 1. The stories and associated discourse units contained in the life story have as their primary evaluation a point about the speaker, not a general point about the way the world is. 2. The stories and associated discourse units have extended reportability; that is, they are tellable and are told and retold over the course of a long period of time. (Linde and et al. 1993, cited in Lynn 2010, 41).

For some of my informants, the experience of being interviewed about their life stories was a new experience; two others, however, had previously given interviews.

While they recounted their stories, some of my informants told me that it was the first time they were narrating their story in that form, and some said that it was the first time they had recounted and thought about the experience in the form of a story. In the interviews, the stories did not follow a linear or chronological timeline. Some past experiences shed light on later experiences and the present. I observed how my informants connected those experiences and constructed a narration of their life story. The recounting of their stories, however, came always in a moving form – in the form of narration or of story-telling. I was very impressed that in most of the interviews my informants recounted very difficult memories in a flow. During some interviews, we needed to take a break from recording, either because of external distractions or because I took the initiative to offer breaks. I believe those breaks were helpful in lightening the atmosphere and provided a fresh return for the next part of the conversation.

At certain points, the atmosphere during the interviews also became difficult for me to move through, yet my informants were so adept at navigating these moments and making the mood more comfortable for me as well. I admired their perseverance at staying in balance amidst all the challenges and the impressive strength with which they were able to stay connected with the beauty in life and their passionate desire to help others. The ability of most of my informants to laugh, even while recounting very dramatic scenes in their lives, was a beautiful exemplar of resilience that inspired me. With an acceptance and revealing endurance, they continued to speak and share, and adjust themselves to multiple situations. Of course, not everyone recounted past atrocities and present experiences in Turkey in a similar manner. However, one common point in all the narrations was the power with which my informants could tell their stories through an acceptance of what had been lost and continue to be present in the moment while taking a journey to revisit their difficult past.

1.7 Significance

There have been numerous studies and research conducted on the conditions of displaced Syrians in Turkey. The growing literature including academic studies as well as non-academic reports, and articles provides analysis focusing on the problems and difficulties of displaced Syrians (Ferris, Kirişçi, and Shaikh 2013; İçduygu 2015; Kirişci 2014; Yılmaz 2013). Some studies have focused on displaced Syrians' ongoing

challenges with limited access to social welfare, as well as the effects of the vagueness of temporary protection status (Biehl 2013; Dinçer et al. 2013; Kaya and Kıraç 2016). Some have adopted a gendered lens ((Biehl 2013; Kıvılcım and Özgür Baklacıoğlu 2015; Terzioğlu 2018)).. These studies document the precarious living conditions of displaced Syrians in Turkey and insecurities resulting from economic, social, and legal uncertainty while resilience in the Turkish migratory context also discussed in the recent literature review by Karakılıç, Körükmez, and Soykan (2019).

There have also been several studies that analyze the Turkish government's policy and security framework and humanitarian discourse concerning the admission and accommodation of displaced Syrians in Turkey (Baban, Ilcan, and Rygiel 2017; Koca et al. 2015; Korkut 2016; Polat 2018). Most of these studies provide a critique of the current framework as being "exclusionary" and "selective" and discuss how while the current framework provides Syrians with limited citizenship rights, it also simultaneously situates them in a position of limbo and precarity.

Although the existing scholarship on the challenging conditions of displaced Syrians has gained attention and velocity in recent years, most of these studies have adopted a macro-level analysis, providing statistical data and revealing the immediate and long-term difficulties, and remain at the collective level of the experience. There continues to be a need for ethnographic studies on the conditions of displaced Syrians in Turkey which give more insight into the experiences of individuals as well as collectives. I believe that this research will contribute to the existing literature on displaced Syrians in Turkey by bringing together collective and individual experiences. By conducting ethnographic fieldwork at a community center and focusing on both individuals and the collectivity of the center, this research constantly shifts between macro- and micro-levels. Moreover, in focusing on unique individual stories and my informants' social relations, this research discusses the ongoing challenges and difficulties of displaced Syrians together with individual and collective possibilities and capacities for resilience.

1.8 Outline of This Thesis

The Syrian war has resulted in serious losses for many Syrians including the "loss of loved ones, friends, the loss of home, the loss of community connectedness, the loss of employment, the loss of a place itself" (Saul 2013, 5) which can be regarded as traumatic both individually and collectively. This thesis develops a way of approaching trauma through the lens of resilience. While I regard the experience of war itself as an individual and collective trauma, I question whether later experiences, ranging from the lack of legal security to economic, social, and legal challenges among displaced Syrians hosted in Turkey, perpetuate the experienced violence. Initially, I tried to understand how in the face of collective trauma and adversity individual and collective resilience can be possible. By adopting a conceptualization of resilience as having two individual and collective layers, I trace the unique ways in which the participants of this research exhibit resilience and how the presence of the community center enables this resilience both individually and collectively. A community of resilience can be defined as a community which promotes a "sense of safety, calming, sense of self and community efficacy, connectedness and hope" (Ibid, 14). For the participants of this research, the community center signifies a safe home, and many have referred to the center as "home". Acknowledging the multiple modalities of "home", I regard home both as a wider collectivity and a social category, expected to promote a sense of safety, and as an individual experience within which the sense of safety and belonging is reconstituted.

To that end, in Chapter 2 I will elaborate upon the meanings of home and the economic, social, and political challenges faced by Syrians while constructing the sense of home in Turkey. How is home is remembered, made, and re-made as they are subjected to the present situation in Turkey? How is the idea of home and homeland renegotiated? What are the economic, social, and political challenges facing displaced Syrians in the process of home-making? I try to understand the search for an environment that promotes a sense of home through individual stories of resilience.

In Chapter 3 I change the lens from individual stories of resilience to the possibilities of collective resilience through community building. The community center is one among many other communities of resilience. In this chapter I will elaborate upon the specific atmosphere and practices of the community center that enable individual and collective resilience. While thinking about the community center as "a space of a safe home" through my informants' narrations, I examine the ethics

of home, the concept of hospitality, and the possibilities of living together beyond the antagonistic relationship between "guest" and "host". I discuss "identity" in relation to the concept of home and hospitality, in both everyday practices at the community center and on the wider discursive level in the Turkish context. Then, I focus on how the presence of the community center affects the sense of home in Turkey and the (re)production of resilience among participants of this community. I illustrate the ways in which the conditions of displaced Syrians can be transformed and how everyday practices of solidarity at the community center promote and reinforce individual and collective resilience. In conclusion, I reiterate the significance of (re)connection formed through communities and through the community center for my informants, and, finally, I discuss the limitations of this research.

2. The Meanings of Home and the Process of Home-making

On a cold day in October, I was walking through the street as my thoughts led my body to the Community Center where I planned to attend Arabic classes they had been offering for free. Arabic is not wholly unfamiliar to me thanks to my family origins. I was born in Hatay, a city in Turkey on the border with Syria and with many ties historically to Syria both in terms of language and cultural aspects. Being of a generation subjected to the Turkish nationalization process, I do not speak my mother-tongue. My extended family on the paternal side came from Syria to Turkey a long time ago. In Hatay, Arabic is widely spoken among older generations, and many of the elders do not even know Turkish. However, people of my generation are being kept away from learning Arabic out of a supposed concern for young people's "proper" integration into Turkish society. Although my generation has mostly been assimilated into speaking Turkish, I have been exposed to Arabic in my everyday life for many years, from fortune telling sessions with neighbors and overhearing secret conversations between my grandfather and grandmother, to my daily encounters with inhabitants of the city. The spoken language in Hatay can be considered a mixed language between Turkish and Arabic, which gives a distinct character to Hatay's vernacular language.

With these memories from Hatay in my mind, I entered the building where the community center was located. I did not know anybody, and I had not let anyone know beforehand that I was coming to Arabic class. I simply rang the bell, and the door was opened for me. The place had been created with great effort by people who were all volunteers. I walked into an open kitchen, and immediately I sensed that whoever wanted to share their taste -the foods of their culture, their cooking- would be welcomed. Upon walking into the community center, I directly encountered the smells of many different foods and cultures and entered an environment that felt like home. I felt shy though because I was new and was not used to speaking a language other than Turkish. Though no one asked me why I was there, I felt the necessity to explain my presence: "Hey, I am Berfu," I said. "I heard about the community center from Facebook, and the schedule there says that there is an Arabic class here

at 5 pm." It was at that time 3 pm, so I added, "I am sorry I came a bit early, but can I stay till the time comes?" The kitchen was not crowded that day, there were only two people. They smiled at my question and said, "For sure you can. Do you want tea or coffee?"

We drank tea and smoked cigarettes together in a beautiful garden they have outside, over a warm conversation. Dalia started to talk about her experience of language learning when she was in France and gave me suggestions, as I was a student of a new language. She told me not to be afraid to speak to people and let myself make mistakes. The anxiety I had from being in a new environment started to calm by the help of the conversation and from learning about another experience. The time passed quickly and class started. In class we learned not the *Fusha* (the official Arabic language) but the *Ammice*, the spoken Arabic dialect with which one spoke about daily concerns and in daily conversations. The teacher conversed with us in the dialect about foods, daily routines, the bazaar, and about the lives of the people in class; all of these conversations were in *Ammice*Arabic with English translation by the teacher. Afterwards he asked: *Bidkun şay?* (Do you want tea?) Then, we all wanted to drink tea together while the class was continuing. I had not expected this place to be so welcoming, and I was inspired by the environment. As a master's student searching for a research topic, I developed an enormous curiosity about that place, the community center. A place that felt like home.

Since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, a countless number of people have disappeared, almost as many people have been internally displaced. As the ongoing conflict makes the shocking statistics more unbearable, "over half of the population of twenty-three million people have been forced out of their homes" (Cooke 2017, 1). As the war continues into its ninth year, and as many people are forced to leave their homes behind, together with anti-immigration sentiments all over the world, the experience of displacement is hardening. The feeling of belonging to a place and a safe home is what many displaced Syrians search for as they begin an unpredictable journey. In an unsettling situation, how is the relationship between home, the feeling of belonging, of "leaving home" and of "being at home" reconfigured? In my research, I have been curious about what kinds of evocations home entails for my informants. Is home a place that they have fled from and a place where they don't want to recall? Is home a place that is missed or a place where they are headed to continuously? How is home remembered, made, and re-made by displaced Syrians in present-day Turkey?

The notion of home is hard to fix in a single definition. Does "home" correspond to a place in one's memory? Is it a feeling that one can attain in an internal world

independent from physical reality? What is the relationship between memories of home and the physical surroundings one inhabits?

In this chapter, I will elaborate upon the meaning of home and the economic, social, and political challenges Syrians are exposed to while constructing their sense of home in Turkey. I regard home both as a wider collectivity, a social category relating to the country's atmosphere as home, and the individual experiences within which the sense of home is reconstituted as a conceptual space. While migration is unsettling the nature of home each passing day, the issue becomes more critical to discuss.

In a rudimentary sense, an understanding of home is usually affiliated with one's place of birth. However, considering the place of birth as a determinant of home fails to account for the reality of movement that characterizes the lives of people on the move and the necessity to make and re-make homes. During our daily conversations at the community center, I listened to many stories and learned how understandings of home in relation to the place of one's birth could bring up tensions between Syrians and some Turkish citizens. The question "Where are you from?" could even lead to hostility. One of my informants recounting his experience discussing his birth place said: "After he learned that I am from Syria, he said: 'Then go where your home is.'"

Hobsbawm (1991) made an important differentiation between the individual home *(Heim)* as it relates to private memory and a collective homeland *(Heimat)* as a social category:

> Home in the literal sense, *Heim*, chez soi, is essentially private. Home in the wider sense, *Heimat*, is essentially public... *Heim* belongs to me and mine and nobody else. Anyone who has been burglarized knows the feeling of intrusion, of a private space violated. *Heimat* is by definition collective. It cannot belong to us as individuals. We belong to it because we don't want to be alone (Hobsbawm 1991 cited in Frost and Selwyn 2018, 139).

Hobsbawm's differentiation of the individual home as it is related to the private domain of the self, which takes part in the construction of individual identity, and the homeland as a wider net of collectivity is useful. However, I argue that these two senses of home are always intertwined in providing one a sense of home or being at home. In the following section, I will examine the shifts in my informants' relationality with Syria, and then I will try to understand their search for an environment in which they strive to build a sense of home, both in private and public domains.

2.1 Shifts in Perception of Home and Homeland

The existence of war in the lives of those I interviewed stands out as a turning point in my informants' reconstructions of relationships with their homeland and senses of home. Although homeland and a sense of home hold different places in each of my informants' memories, a point I will discuss further in a discussion on nostalgia, the reality of war, which causes multiple levels of loss ranging from "loss of loved ones, friends, employment, and the loss of a place itself" (Saul 2013, 5) necessitates rebuilding a sense of home. Following the catastrophic experience of loss, my informants' relationships with Syria, commonly thought as their homeland and inappropriately characterized as their home, was shattered after the war. As the situation accelerates each passing day, the belief in a better future to come after peaceful resolution is dissipating.

> "I noticed that this war endless and nothing help. So we went for so many conferences like negotiation conferences, like Geneva and other conferences and we got nothing." (Ghanem)
>
> "Unfortunately, in this crisis you have to take really very clear position. And *yani* still to struggling at the end. Until the end of this crisis. Because Syrian crisis were continue for 20 years, okay? It is not done yet. It's becoming complicated more and more." (Sidar)

At the point of deciding to leave Syria, my informants' feelings of belonging to their homeland were wrecked for many reasons, varying from fear, insecurity, loss of community-connectedness, and prevailing injustices within society. Sidar and Ghanem recount their shifts in perception as follows:

> "I got threatened to be jailed in when I was 18. This was huge turning point in my life. We had problems with our neighbor, and he was trying to let us knee by using the law and the government, okay? I was very young. So, my relation with my country destroyed at that place." (Sidar)
>
> "I couldn't move from (one) city to another because there are many checkpoints in every single faction... I didn't want to give any contribute to this shitty situation... So, this time I decided *khalas* (finished/enough). So it's time to flee. It's not my place here. Then I came to Turkey." (Ghanem)

Many of my informants as they told me their stories of escaping the war described Syria as a place no longer inhabitable. Sidar expressed, "So my relation with my country (was) destroyed at that place," and, similarly, Ghanem said, "It's not my place here." Although there were many differences in my informants' reasons for escape, after the war started, the feeling of disconnectedness, a shattered feeling of belonging, and the lack of safety in Syria were the reasons that prevailed in my fieldwork.

Thirinagama, in the book *In My Mother's House*, scrutinizes war and people's reconstructions of a sense of home after the civil war in Sri Lanka. She reminds us of differences in the reasoning behind escaping one's "former home" and homeland and discusses how the recreation of a sense of home necessitates an understanding of a person's life timeline as it intersects with war and with the crucial materials and affective relations built in one's homeland (Thiranagama 2011, 172). For some of my informants, who were relatively younger than the others, "crucial materials" such as employment, career, and ownership of a home had not yet been realized in Syria; and as unmarried and without children, the ones who are relatively younger lacked what Thriganama regards as "affective relations." It is, however, problematic to assume that marriage and children could be the only possible affective relations, which could be expanded to include having a sense of neighborhood or having grown up or attended school in a certain place. In my fieldwork, the generational differences that affected my informants' senses of home were in line with Thirinagama's assumptions of one's life timeline intersecting with the war. While for the younger generation their former home is a home yet to come in terms of affective relations and crucial materials, for the relatively older generation, who were married and had children in Syria, their former home is a home to re-create as it was. When the war started, Leila was a mother of one and married. As she recounted the time just before the war started, she pictured a settled and pleasant life.

> "Everything was good *yani*...We had a house, we had a car, and we were very satisfied with our jobs. Everything was good. In 2012, Amal *(her first daughter)* was born. The war was starting at that time[1]

For Leila, the turning point was when she acknowledged that she could no longer sustain the life that she built with great effort for her family and for her newly born daughter. When she perceived that it was no longer possible to maintain her

[1] "Everything was good yani... Bizde ev var, araba var and our work was very good, was very very very very nice. En büyük Amal Suriyede doğdum, 2012. Iı ama savaş biraz başlıyordu aynı zamanda."

home as she pleased, she came to Turkey with her family. During our interview, she recounted Syria both as a place of beautiful memories and "horrible experiences." While the war made it impossible for Leila and her family to sustain their lives in safety, she told stories of how she met her husband, of their marriage, and of the feeling of being a mom for the first time, stories she recounted as beautiful memories of her homeland. For Leila and her husband, Syria was a place where they wanted to raise their children, and they would never have thought of leaving the country if life had been sustainable.

> "But one day I was going to visit my family in Idlib, carrying my baby in my arms, and there were bombs coming. The planes above us, My God... What I will do, what I will do? I was so afraid - how would I protect my baby? I was sitting under some place to hide, after *ya rab ya rab ya rab,* bombs coming. Sometimes the windows were flying, sometimes people were dying. We thought maybe we could go to another city first but after... the situation was so bad, no electric, no water. Then, the war started so near to our house, and we immediately decided to come to Turkey directly."[2]

As their homeland became a rubble of collapsed buildings, the themes that they had associated with a sense of home in Syria were demolished as well. The environment of a "former home" that was either a home that was "settled" in terms of affective relations and materials or a "home yet to come" was no longer inhabitable or "homey." It is necessary to reiterate that the feeling of home being "unhomey" and the sense of homelessness are not experienced in the same manner for each of my informants. Furthermore, feelings of home as "unhomey" is not a necessary outcome in every migration process and in mobility. In fact, as it is asserted by Liisa Mallki, the position of being displaced does not have to bring about abnormality as "a generalized condition of homelessness(Malkki 1992, 25)." She argues that "more than perhaps ever before, people are chronically mobile and routinely displaced" (Malkki 1992, 24). However, focusing on narrations of escape and the following experiences in attempts to build and rebuild their homes, displacement for Syrians within this context becomes more than an ordinary phenomenon.

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[2]"Sonra bir gün ben annemlere gidiyorum, benim ailem şimdi İdlip'te hala yaşıyorlar. Amal benimle, carrying my baby with my arms... i was walking to ve bomba geliyor, hem benim Amal benimle, ben meselan ailemi ziyaret ediyordum, ıı uçak geliyor ben ne yapıcam ne yapıcam. Çok korkuyorum çünkü burda oturuyorum, çünkü burda çok daha sert, yani şey ne diyolar, altında oturuyorum kızımla, sonra ya rab ya rab ya rab sonra bomba geliyor. Bazen pencere çıkıyor, bazen insanlar ölüyor. Sonra düşündük belki bir yerde daha iyi, çünkü çok kötü bir durumlar, elektrik yok, su yok. Yani durumlar çok, her yerde suriyede, her yerde yani başka yerde taşınacak düşündük ama iyi değil yani, sonra hemen bizim orda oldu... Bu yüzden karar verdik aldık. Türkiye'ye hemen İstanbul."

The need to conceptualize home independent from where one is born and unfix the notion of home to a place becomes obligatory for Syrians in the context of displacement. Frost and Selwyn (2018) in *Home and Homemaking in a Time of Crisis* discuss four layers in the concept of home. First, the idea of home is inevitably bound to spaces and places by individuals and collectivities. Second, by considering the contemporary system with a constant movement, it is unavoidable to combine the fixity of the notion to a place with its inescapable fluidity in a constant motion of making and re-making. As a third layer, the definition of home, they remind, needs to contain its antithetical engagements with the concept concerning the experiences in "unhomey" states of being. Fourth, the idea of home should be conceptualized as both related to "inner feelings and emotions, on the one hand, and spaces and places on the other" (2018, 2). As it can be inferred from this multiplicity of an understanding of home, home entails many different modalities. However, in my fieldwork, home (attached ideas and feelings) was recounted as a place that was supposed to promote feelings of belonging both in the private and public domains, as it is through individual belonging and a sense of belonging to a wider collectivity that the individual home is re-created.

Home has been discussed widely in scholarship (Ahmed 1999, 2003; Blunt 2005; Duyvendak 2011). The notion of "home" as an overarching theme is understood both as a conceptual space, "a kind of context or ether within which people, places, and things exist," and as a lived space "encompass[ing] the experience of dwelling in a property as a home" (O'Mahony 2006, 141). In my analysis, a consideration of home as just a dwelling experience would not cover the wider context as the experiences of home for displaced Syrians unveil greater significations. Inspired by Frost and Selwyn, throughout this thesis I regard home as a conceptual space that combines "the material," "the politico-economic," and "the symbolic realms (Frost and Selwyn 2018, 13)."

In the following sections, I focus on narratives of my informants in terms of their initial arrival in Turkey, finding a new physical home, and the process of home-making in terms of its material construction and politico-economic conditions. How are displaced Syrians exposed to the notion of home both in its material condition and in terms of political societal acceptance and how does this affect their feelings of belonging within Turkey? What kind of environment has awaited displaced Syrians while they re-constitute their homes?

2.2 Home-Making Process of Displaced Syrians in Turkey

During all of my interviews and the stories I listened to in daily conversations at the community center, the process of homemaking was described as very difficult at the beginning of arrival. Many people made immediate decisions to come to Turkey without plans of where to stay or how to earn livelihoods to sustain the space of a home.

> "When I came to Turkey first day, i know nothing... That's ok man, I came, *khalas*(finished). I had no choice. First day I decided to sleep in a park. One day I didn't sleep... On the sun raised, I start to call the people, and have the connections. One of them answered at 9 pm. Like I was so happy and it was raining. It was like Eylül or August. And you know Istanbul's weather. It was raining very hard." (Ghanem)

> "So, I came to Istanbul. I had like 500 dollars in my pocket. Okay, when I land I didn't know where I will sleep at the first night. I had yani impression that, okay, if I will sleep in the garden, go and sleep in the garden, then I will fight very hard to survive, *tamam?* I was in this mood. I was prepared for any possibility." (Sidar)

As a matter of course, it is an important determinant whether my informants come to Turkey individually or with their families. In the case of individual arrival, arriving without any plan and with no place to stay for the first days can be manageable. Here, gender and age play an important role. For most cases, those who came to Turkey individually were young men. They came prior to their wives and families in order to secure places for them to stay.

> "My family were in Syria at that time, I wanted to work a bit and secure a place to stay in and you know this. Then my family came, half of them. My parents and my sisters. Not half, four of them. So, we rented the house." (Ghanem)

The process of finding a physical place of home was easier for those who come to Turkey with pre-existing connections, whether they be family or friends. For example, Thamer came to Istanbul with his family, and they rented a house in an area where most residents were Syrians. They came to Istanbul with previous connec-

tions from Syria, and the reason they chose to stay in this particular neighborhood was affected by that fact.

> "Luckily, we had one of our (old) neighbors in that neighborhood, only one block away from us. The people we know from Aleppo. There was a little community in that neighborhood (that) we knew." (Thamer)

Most of my informants recounted the process of homemaking and their first encounters with the realities of making Turkey their new home as an unpredictable and uncertain journey. While pre-existing connections and a limited community already in Turkey made their construction of a new life in Turkey relatively easier, they still faced economic, social, and legal challenges in the process of home-making. In the following sections I focus on the challenges related to living conditions, working conditions, and societal dynamics my informants encountered as they constructed their spaces of home in Turkey.

2.2.1 Material Construction of Home

The process of homemaking for my informants who came to Turkey without plans was recounted as troublesome. Despite having pre-existing connections including family or friends, which could ease the process, the condition of being Syrian in Turkey was nonetheless difficult. Those who arrived earlier also had limited resources to help others coming to Turkey in need of solutions. Living conditions were also challenging for those who arrived beforehand, and the ability to help newcomers presented challenges.

> "We came here - my husband, and my daughter. What will Camal do? He didn't know Turkish, he just knew Arabic and English. There is no work. We searched everything. We didn't know anybody. Just one distant friend from Syria, but he couldn't help… No work…" [3] (Leila)

[3]"Sonra buraya geldik Camal Amal. Camal ne çalışacak çünkü bilmiyor Türkçe. Sadece Arapça İngilizce. İş yok. Baktık her şey, kimse yok. Yalnız biri ama yani Suri, uzak, ama yok olmadı… İş yok.... "

As in the case of Leila and her family, language barriers also made finding suitable work difficult. Although Leila's husband had a university degree and experience working in his field of expertise in Syria, there was no available work for him in Turkey related to his career. Leila said that in order to pay the rent and to sustain their family in Turkey, in the initial period they needed to spend some of the money they had saved for their future since there was "no work." She said, "Our situation was better than the others, çok şükür, we had a little money[4]." Initially, since they had a certain amount of money to sustain their life for a while and were able to pay the rent, they perceived themselves as lucky, as for the most part, people faced serious difficulties in finding a place to stay because of material challenges. For example, although Ghanem's brother was already living in Istanbul, it was not possible for Ghanem to stay with him because his brother needed to live at his workplace due to financial problems.

> "My brother was working and staying in the same place at work. He was working *tornacı*(machinist). You know the *tornacı* life, black face and dirt... but (he said), 'I can't allow you to stay with me even for one night. Because the boss will kick me out. My patron...' And he had really mean boss... Thankfully, I found my cousin and he was working in the same area. He said, 'Come at 2-3 am, the boss will be gone, and you can sleep until 6-7 before the patron comes.' Ooooh, this was the best option because I don't want to be homeless and sleep on the streets." (Ghanem)

The condition of working and staying in the same place was not uncommon in the stories of initial arrival. I have listened many stories of exploitation by "bosses"; in these instances, workers were paid much less money or were given no payment at all in exchange for a place to stay. But finding a decent home at a reasonable price was an immediate concern for many Syrians. Concerning the economic reality of most Syrians in Turkey, most new arrivals search for a home for a relatively reasonable price, although reasonably priced homes often mean poor housing conditions.

> "I stayed with my friends for six months; then we collected some money and rent a *dükkan*. It's not even a house. A small thing has bathroom and a place to take a shower, and something like. It's a cafe I guess and it has some tables and couch something. So we lived at this place for one year." (Ghanem)

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[4]"Yani bazı insanlar çok problem var. Daha iyi biz, çok şükür, bizde biraz para var."

In most cases, my informants' preferences regarding where to live were determined by housing prices. However, a reasonable rent price was not the only factor in deciding where to stay. As many of them did not know the city and did not have access to know-how regarding the process of housing, their previous connections had an impact on their choice of residence. In addition to the effects of housing prices, the immediate need to sustain their livelihoods let them choose areas of residence where there are more employment opportunities. Most of displaced Syrians are inhabited in neighborhoods near to "production and/or tourism centers", where mostly "informal and low-skill opportunities" (Biehl 2013, 242).

Moreover, the work status of displaced Syrians is regulated and restricted by the government policies concerning displaced Syrians. The Regulation of Work Permit for Foreigners under Temporary Protection allows temporary protection beneficiaries to apply for work permits based on their Temporary Protection Identification Cards. In order to apply for a work permit, the regulation on working concerning displaced Syrians states that those who hold the status of "temporary protection" for at least six months can apply to obtain the work permit (Çam 2019; Şanlı 2017). Displaced Syrians who want to work in formal economy need to obtain the temporary protection status first, and in the following six months, employers can make the application to obtain work permits. However, employers in most cases choose not to provide work permits for displaced Syrians either to avoid the extra cost or the responsibility of working through the bureaucratic process. Moreover, the Ministry of Interior has created a quota system that restricts employers.

> The number of beneficiaries active in a specific workplace may not exceed 10% of the workforce, unless the employer can prove that there would be no Turkish nationals able to undertake the position. If the workplace employs less than 10 people, only one temporary protection beneficiary may be recruited[5] (Asylum Information Database).

Given the fact that not all Syrians in Turkey hold the status of temporary protection and the regulation on work permit concerning Syrians already restricts working opportunities, there are limited employment opportunities for Syrians within the formal economy.

When Thamer came to Istanbul at the age of 19, he immediately started working in a textile factory in the same neighborhood where he lived. He said that he didn't want to stay home without work and wanted to provide for his family. Thamer and

[5] http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkey/access-labour-market-0

his family lived in a neighborhood where there was a little community they knew from Syria who came to Turkey earlier. The work that Thamer found upon coming to Turkey he heard about from one of the people within that community. Thamer explained his situation as follows:

> "I worked from the second day when I arrived. I didn't want to stay home. My family was saying just take a couple weeks, take a rest or something. I didn't feel comfortable because it is a different country and you don't feel safe, financially at least first you come. So I wanted to provide whatever I can." (Thamer)

Amidst ongoing financial problems faced by many Syrians, the condition of work cannot be open for negotiation. Working and having some sense of financial security for themselves and for their families takes priority. Even among those who had a prestigious status back in Syria or who held university degrees pursued whichever jobs were available, regardless of working conditions. Ghanem recounted his friend's experience as follows:

> "He worked like six months, very hard. He said (he worked) 15 hours (a day) and this living with cows and shits and stuff... And he didn't tell them that he is graduated from law school, but I said 'Why?' (He said) 'Who cares, who cares? Even if I say who cares?' Yeah this is history." (Ghanem)

The process of homemaking for displaced Syrians who come to Turkey is challenging in terms of the material conditions they face, both in terms of accessing know-how, finding jobs to sustain their lives, and the working conditions available. While pre-existing connections may sometimes be effective in helping one find work or choose a neighborhood and a home, in some instances connections may not be very helpful. When Thamer said, "I didn't feel comfortable because it is a different country, and you don't feel safe, financially at least first you come," he articulates the experience of many displaced Syrians. Many people must comply with working over-time at low-pay, insecure jobs to be able to earn money and to feel more secure. In the following section, I focus on the working conditions and economic challenges that my informants faced in constructing their homes in Turkey.

2.2.2 Economic Constructions of Home and Working Conditions

The precariousness of their situation in Turkey pushes many displaced Syrians to secure their livelihoods as soon as possible. The feeling of insecurity propels people into a life of relentless work. In my fieldwork, I listened to many stories about the condition of work and witnessed many people's discontent in their work-life. Most of my informants worked over-time, most of the time for little payment without work security. Many worked in harsh conditions that consumed their energy and time.

> "Then (I) started to look for job. Found daily jobs. You get paid everyday... *Neyse günlük*(anyway, for a day) 35 liras... One day for 12 hours at publish house. Anyways, worked for I think two years, everything. It was like really hell... You have two breaks, morning, 10-15 minutes for tea; lunch wasn't even an hour. It was only 45 minutes. And for another tea at 4 o'clock 10 minutes. Until 8 you cannot stop. From 8 to 8, you have these only breaks. At the end, I had backaches and issues with my back." (Ghanem)

Many other Syrians I knew changed jobs several times in a short period of time. These changes were related to many reasons varying from the over-time work, unhealthy working atmospheres, attitudes of the boss and of co-workers.

> "I didn't like the atmosphere of textile generally, working in textile factories. Because you are sitting in the same place, in the same room, seeing the same faces. Not doing anything, just doing the same job. It is very routine then I hate it... " (Thamer)

In my fieldwork, most of the stories I heard about the initial time of arrival from those who worked outside the home were men among families. In those cases, the gendered division of labor within the home was prominent. While the reality of gendered employment restricted available work, family obligations and related care roles added one more layer. Those who came with their husbands and those who were unmarried and came with other family members, whether it be brothers or fathers, stayed home most of the time upon their initial arrival, doing necessary domestic work such as cleaning, cooking, and taking care of the kids if they had them. However, the situation differed for those women who came on their own and needed to provide for themselves or for their families.

Dalia is a single mother who came to Istanbul with her only son. As she said, "I came with him and stayed for him." She surmounted many difficulties throughout her life by herself. She got divorced after eight years of marriage and, as she told me, started life again through her own efforts. Her experience of being a displaced Syrian in Turkey is multifaceted given both her responsibility as a single mother and as a woman.

> "I couldn't find a work, except cleaning, so it was so exhausting physically *yani*. When you came back home, you don't find time to do anything. Because I have to cook too, all the day I was working and I have to continue inside the house." (Dalia)

Dalia explained to me how hard it was for her to manage her time. While working outside for long hours at a job that was physically exhausting, she also performed domestic labor at home and took care of her son. The survey prepared in a collaboration between UN Women and the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM) states that 85% of Syrian women living in Turkey are unemployed and do not have an income of their own, while among those who are working, the condition of their work is challenging with a low-paid salary (Karakılıç, Körükmez, and Soykan 2019, 2). Syrian women in Turkey are working "in regular or irregular/seasonal works especially in agriculture, textile, and service provisions"; however, the condition of "extreme poverty among Syrian women" still prevails (Ibid, 2). I will discuss the condition of Syrian women participating in the work-force and alternative ways of generating income in more detail in the following chapter. However, it is important to note that the reality of gendered employment, family obligations, and related care roles make the living conditions of many Syrian women in Turkey more precarious.

As they construct their homes in Turkey, Syrians are exposed to many challenges. Home as it is considered materially and economically becomes a place of exhaustion in its creation. However, home has many other significations other than its material and economic construction. According to Frost and Selwyn, home "as a conceptual space" combines "the material," "the politico-economic," and the "symbolic" realms (Frost and Selwyn 2018, 13). My next focus is the process of constructing home in relation to politico-social aspects. What kinds of social and political environments do displaced Syrians inhabit? I would like to focus my informant's narratives on the experiences in sociality, the feeling of neighborhood, and the language as social aspects of home, and the political atmosphere of Turkey as it becomes one's new home on a wider scale.

2.2.3 The Politico-Social Aspects of Home

Added to the material and economic conditions of home, including extreme working conditions necessary to maintaining one's livelihood and securing a place to live, politico-social aspects of home for displaced Syrians represents another layer of hardship that derives from a lack of societal acceptance and lack of communication with Turkish inhabitants. Diversity in neighborhood experiences exist, especially in a city where around a half million Syrians live, yet it is common that my informants' narratives express limited societal relations with only Turkish-speaking inhabitants. The reasons for this may be the language barrier or public prejudices associating Syrians with criminality, violence, and corruption. Syrians are often depicted as a source of danger in the mainstream media[6].

When I conducted my interview with Leila, I had already spent some time with her at the community center. When I went to her house for the interview she was happy to have a guest. In a disappointed tone, she told me that she missed having neighborhood relations since in her current neighborhood she did not communicate with the neighbors. Although Leila is starting to learn Turkish and speaks competently, her relationship with her neighbors and experience of the neighborhood is still very limited.

> "It has been four years, I don't know anybody in the apartment. We are not communicating. They don't have any *komşuluk ilişkisi…* I was pregnant, nobody knew... I was going to the hospital to give birth, nobody knew… I came here after the birth and I was alone, nobody asked[7] (Leila)

Leila and her family came to Turkey in 2015 when her oldest daughter was three years old. They lived in a mixed neighborhood populated with Turkish and non-Turkish residents. Their choice of that neighborhood was affected by the proximity of the hotel where her husband worked as a bell-boy. She worked as a knitter from home. At that time, Leila had two children. Her youngest daughter was two years old and born in Turkey, and her oldest daughter Amal was eight. Amal was going to a school in which Arabic was the language of instruction. Leila hung many Turkish

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[6] Hrant Dink Vakfı, Medyada Nefret Söylemi İzleme Raporu Mayıs- Ağustos 2019 https://hrantdink.org/attachments/article/2375/MNS%C4%B0-rapor-may%C4%B1s-agustos-2019.pdf

[7] "Dört yıl biz burdayız, burda kimse tanımıyorum ben. Yok konuşmuyoruz. Komşuluk ilişkisi onlar yok. Şimdi ben hamileydim, ama kimse bilmiyor. Hastane var temiz bir hastane ama benimle kimse yok. Sonra Amal geldi, Amal buyüdü, ben yalnız, kimse sormadı."

learning materials on the walls of her home to help both her and her daughters learn Turkish. While we sat and talked together in her living room, she told me about the lack of acceptance of Syrians in her neighborhood and how the neighborhood did not feel welcoming. Leila said that Amal was resisting to learn Turkish however much Leila was trying to create an atmosphere of learning. Leila was concerned that Amal had difficulty in developing friendships with the children of the neighborhood because they made fun of her for not speaking Turkish "properly."

Language, since it is involved in every aspect of life, is implicated in the self within one's symbolic home as well. The Turkish language for some of my informants connotes bad experiences. The experience of learning Turkish is also affected by the social environment Syrians are exposed to publicly. Ghanem recounted a story of his friend:

> Berfu: He is your friend from university?
> Ghanem: Yes, he went to law school as well. By the way, he wanted to study Turkish language.
> Berfu: Aaaaa really?
> Ghanem: Yeah, he couldn't because he missed one point, just one point. And he couldn't, we went to law school. And he is really, he loved this language, and he wanted to study Turkish literature.
> Berfu: Hmmm
> Ghanem: So, he said yeah, I wanted to study Turkish literature and language and he couldn't. (Laughters) And he came to Turkey and hated it. (Laughters) Came to, I will tell you history. He came to İstanbul to find a job after he graduated from law school. What he worked, he worked in Edirne as a cow keeper, what do you call it, shepherd, to take care of cows, and to clean shits, and crap and stuff.

Other than daily life experiences, many of which led to alienation and disaffection in my informants' everyday encounters, the legal status of Syrians and the political environment concerning their lives have had a drastic effect on their feelings of safety, well-being, and feelings of belonging within the wider circle of society. First of all, it is highly disputed that Syrians' legal position, a status of semi-legal "temporary protection," provides what it supposedly offers. The temporary protection provides ID cards which are supposed to improve social conditions by providing Syrians "access to health care, education, employment, and translation services[8]." However, many of my informants explained that many people cannot benefit from these services properly because they either face never-ending wait-times and bureaucracy or their

[8]https://www.goc.gov.tr/kurumlar/goc.gov.tr/gecicikorumayonetmeligi.pdf

needs are not taken seriously by these institutions. Besides this, the situation is even harder for many others who don't have ID cards.

Added to this controversially effective legal status, in the summer of 2019, Ministry of the Interior's municipal order[9] induces much fear and insecurity. In August 2019, Dalia and I planned to meet in her house for our interview. This was not long after the Ministry of the Interior's municipal order was issued in Istanbul stating that unregistered Syrians or Syrians registered in another city in Turkey must be transferred to their designated cities. This order quickly turned into a witch hunt, and many people were forced to sign either "voluntary return" papers and be forcefully deported to Syria or forced to play hide-and-seek so as not to be caught by constant monitoring[10]. When I arrived Dalia opened the door, but she was clearly distraught about the process. Our interview started on the subject of the new municipal order. Although it did not affect her position in Turkey, Dalia was very upset about the situation as many of her friends did not have temporary protection status, which either meant they could be deported to Syria or, for her friends who were assigned to another city other than Istanbul, meant they needed to re-start their lives without jobs or places to stay in their assigned cities.

> "It's bringing us to these horrible moments when you are crossing a check point they will arrest you or deport you or put you in the prison. It's crazy... The same, the same..." (Dalia)
>
> "They are telling me this. They came to her house and she said we are living in the fourth floor and they didn't check any other. They know they are coming by knowing there is two Syrian girls, to check them... So it's crazy." (Dalia)
>
> "They start deport people. All the organization working, talking, and seeing the people and government blah blah... Nothing is changing. Always attacking, going homes and taking people and deporting them... They are not treating people in any human way. It's bad behavior, I can tell. They are hating people, shouting, everything... You have an order, I will obey. No need for this bad behavior... I am a human being." (Dalia)

[9]http://www.istanbul.gov.tr/duzensiz-goc-kayitsiz-suriyeliler-kayit-disi-istihdam-basin-aciklamasi

[10]https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/10/24/turkey-syrians-being-deported-danger / https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/aug/23/its-not-legal-un-stands-by-as-turkey-deports-vulnerable-syrians /https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syria-refugees-deported-turkey-idlib-amnesty-international-human-rights-watch-a9171871.html

While the order itself caused many problems and put the lives of many displaced Syrians on the edge of fear, insecurity, and unpredictability, Dalia mentioned how the process of enactment was also unfair and inflicted violence against many displaced Syrians. She said: “You have an order, I will obey. No need for this bad behavior.” She acknowledged the order as such and knew it was not up to the people enacting it to change the situation. However, the way of enacting the order could be considered an indicator of the overwhelming discrimination against many Syrians in Turkey.

> “Nothing became better as a Syrian people I am saying. As a Syrian people because there is a lot of stuff, you can’t deal with it as a person. But, like, we are here as guests, we have to obey these orders. We cannot do anything to change anything, even how much we are trying.” (Dalia)

Searching for a home, both in the material and economic realms, has been narrated to me as a difficult journey. Beyond this, the political and social atmosphere makes conditions harder and more complicated. Dalia expressed her position in Turkey as “still a guest.” To what extent the feeling of belonging can be generated within the positionality of a guest is highly contentious. Although the legal status has been changed from a vague definition of a guest to “temporary protection”, the feeling of being a guest, or one who should comply unquestionably with the rules of the host, is still diffused through everyday lived experiences, the political treatment of Syrians, and the material conditions Syrians are forced to survive within Turkey. Added to their experiences of leaving Syria, my informants’ arrivals in Turkey were constructed as narrations of survival.

Although the picture drawn in their stories of displacement from their “former homes” and coming to a “new home” in Turkey is unpleasant, Syrians are not desperate in this condition of being. The attitude of many people is to accept their condition and to look for new ways to be able to continue during the time of difficulty. This acceptance does not come in the form of passive submission. Rather than surrendering themselves, many people have engaged in the search to transform their social conditions. I believe that this search is a search for home, which enables them to “exist” in their symbolic surroundings individually and collectively, a community which enables them to be (re)connected, and to be active participants in reconstituting a “feeling at home.”

Ahmed (1999) reminds us that “home is not exterior to a self, but implicated in it” (343) In a similar manner, Cubero (2015) talks about home as “not a phenomenon that lies outside of the individual. The individual is embedded in the home-making

process" (6). If one cannot be at home with himself/herself within the given symbolic, one cannot create continuity within his/her memory that makes it possible to construct a narration about who s/he is. In the process of recreating the home and reclaiming the memory that gives the identity its uniqueness, the consequences of war cannot take the form of a transformative form but the war remains an "event" that causes a symbolic death in life.

The war and the experiences thereafter in Turkey, as these stories suggest, have been experienced both as individual and collective trauma, which makes recreating the symbolic home exhausting for those individuals who lived through it. In the following chapter, I will scrutinize my informants' narrations about the community center, how an "unhomey" state of being is negotiated through the presence of that place, and how home is re-membered and remade through unconditional openness, solidarity, and empowerment.

3. Home and Unconditional Hospitality

When I decided to conduct my research at the community center, I went to ask for permission from the founder of the center. I explained my curiosity regarding this place that was referred to as "home" for so many displaced Syrians, and asked whether it was possible for me to learn from this environment in which collective resilience and intimate familial relations seem to be fostered. When I approached him with my load of questions, I expressed my wish to be a part of such a place where collective healing through community-building was taking place. He listened to me and answered generously. He explained to me that the place is created as an open home and said that he does not have such an authority to permit or to expel someone from the space. At the community center everybody develops their own relationship with the people coming and going and with the place itself. He told me that if people wanted to share their stories with me, they would; if I wanted to come there, I would be welcomed as well. Furthermore, he said, "Don't make yourself a guest here. If you want to drink tea you can make it, and if you are hungry you can eat." Being a part of the place, he seemed to be suggesting, comes with the feeling of not being a guest. I was thinking that to be a part of the "home" that the community center was, might mean not to restrain one's agency within the position of "guest," even as a Turkish person.

The community center can be thought of as a symbolic home related to identity and practice. Its atmosphere provides a conceptual space that represents a "safe home" – all of my interviewees, without exception, referred to the center as home. I consider the community center as a "symbolic home" for two reasons: (1) sense of identity. Compared to the ambiguity entailed in the status of "permanent guest," the community center as an open space, facilitates the possibility for the roles of "guest" and "host" to be renegotiated in dialogue with "everyday cosmopolitanism," (2) practices in social solidarity and empowerment. In what follows, I will first discuss identity in relation to the concept of home and hospitality, referring both to everyday practices at the community center and hospitality concerning displaced Syrians on the wider discursive level in the context of Turkey.

The discursive construction of Syrians as “guests” who are expected to know their limits, complying with the rules of the host and being subject to decisions made on their behalf, has contributed to experiences of discrimination for many of my informants in their interactions with the bureaucratic system as well as in their everyday lives. The discursive framework that renders Syrians as “guests” of Turkey creates a “moral economy of generosity” that subjugates Syrians to a particular position and renders legal rights a matter of “conscience.” Consequently, as “guests”, displaced Syrians have found themselves in a more insecure and precarious condition within Turkish society. Thus, the feeling of belonging and being a part of society becomes more difficult to attain.

3.1 Unconditional Openness and Hospitality

> "...Absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner, etc.), but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I give place to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names. The law of absolute hospitality commands a break with hospitality by right, with law or justice as rights. Just hospitality breaks with hospitality by right; not that it condemns or is opposed to it, and it can on the contrary set and maintain it in a perpetual progressive movement" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000, 25-7).

Derrida draws attention to the dilemma of the *irreconcilable but indissociable* nature of hospitality, between unconditional absolute openness to a stranger and the inevitable and unavoidable conditions within which acts of unconditional openness are carried out. Throughout his work *Of Hospitality* he elaborates upon this tension that is always alive in the concept of unconditional hospitality. Hospitality, in its traditional understanding, is always tied to the law and the conditions in which the host receives guests. In this conditional hospitality, the host is required to be the “master of the house” who has the power to determine the rules of the house, while the guest is expected to conform to those rules, merely complying with them so as not to be expelled from the house.

In conditional hospitality, the relationship between guest and host is inherently hierarchical, and that hierarchy is celebrated and legitimated through the law or pact of hospitality. The structures within which the acts of conditional hospitality are carried out grant the host significant power over the guest. In this kind of hospitality, if the structures that endow legitimate power to the host over the guest are challenged by the guest who is expected to remain subjugated and thankful to the "nobleness" of the host, "acceptance and incorporation may rapidly become transformed into hostility, rejection, and even expulsion" (Selwyn 2000, 20). Given that hospitality is thought about through either/or positions that become indicators of inherently asymmetrical power relations, it makes sense that "hospitality belongs to the same lineage as hostility, that guests are often former or potential enemies of their hosts, and that there are times when a guest is a potential source of danger" (Ibid, 33).

Regarding the conditions faced by Syrians and concerning the legal and societal framework that determines their status, the current situation in Turkey renders them "guests" who cannot claim to be "at home" and excludes their individual sovereignty that would enable them to decide how to live within their new supposed home. How is it possible for Syrians to feel "at home" while living in a "home" where there is a lack of a proper legal framework and of secure work opportunities, where they are exposed to frustration, and where the future is perpetually insecure?

Derrida argues that it can be possible to establish a new ethical framework of relations between guest and host that does not presuppose them through either/or positions. For this, the antagonistic structure of the relationship, with the host having the sole authority to determine the rules, needs to be undone and a new space needs to open for the guest to participate in defining the rules of living together as equals (Baban and Rygiel 2017, 108).

One might ask, if unconditional hospitality is a radical form of openness, can we speak about certain rules that would supervise and control the conditions of living together? One has to have a house in order to unconditionally invite and unconditionally welcome the unknown, yet the house is always bounded by the boundaries. The space is limited as are the resources. How is it possible to protect that space without any law? How is it possible to make sure that newcomers won't be regarded as "parasitic"? The question of unconditionally open space is an antinomy, especially in the lives of Syrians who are regulated by borders, doors, passports, identity checks, and immigration policies. Derrida reminds us that a space needs a law in order to be effectively unconditional, and so "even while keeping itself above the laws of hospitality, the unconditional law of hospitality needs the laws, it requires

them. This demand is constitutive" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000, 79).

The aporetic nature of the notion of unconditional hospitality, which always implies tension between unconditional openness and conditioned realities, should be alive in the concept, because this tension itself creates such a space as unconditional. The paradox is that unconditional ideals are supposed to be informed by this tension or by the relevant principle on which these ideals and determinations are to be made. Derrida through the notion of unconditional hospitality invites us to be in that aporetic place where perpetual puzzlement is *the* law. Since "in the fixity of our mourning, we have perhaps forgotten this movement of invitation which is hospitality, and sacrificed a little of our humanity to the desire to know" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000, 154).

Though the community center is a home open and welcoming to whoever wants to be a part of it, Aaftab, who is the founder of the center, explained to me that the center adopted a "no research policy." Although the community center is an open home, I was reminded that this home has some rules, and if one wanted to be a part of it, those rules should be learned and respected. Throughout my fieldwork, I searched for what those rules might be. There were no lists, no contracts, and no pacts for these already established rules with which I had to comply. Then, I wondered, how could one be a part of this home without being perceived as an invader? Being part of it would probably mean not being a mere "guest" but to exist there as I was. By this invitation to "not be a guest," I might have been invited to participate in defining the rules of the home together with others and to be attentive to the humanity of each member of the home. The position of being a guest does not always mean that one is "the stranger" who disturbs home. Derrida 1998 also noted that "being at home with oneself often requires the ability to receive guests" (cited in Vandevoordt 2017, 6. What Aaftab might have been implying when he told me to not "be a guest" was about not restraining my agency as equals.

Throughout my fieldwork, I was going to the center knowing that I am welcomed there, participating in meals, evenings of music, movie screenings, and dance events hosted at the center. However, I was also in the position to invite my "guests" to these events and be a host at the center. During these occasions, I was also a host in the very place where I was invited. An open home is unconditionally open to everyone as long as one participates in making the rules of living together and respects everyone's common humanity and dignity. In that sense, the community center could be thought of as an example that exhibits a new ethics of a home that could reconfigure the antagonistic and hierarchical structure of guest/host in line with what one might call "radical cosmopolitanism." Derrida, in line with his

conceptualization of unconditional hospitality, presents a way to look at a kind of cosmopolitanism that is beyond what legal procedures and status make possible:

> . . . Beyond rights and laws, beyond a hospitality conditioned by the right of asylum, by the right of immigration, to citizenship, and even by the right to universal hospitality, which still remains for Kant, for example, under the authority of a political and cosmopolitan law. Only an unconditional hospitality can give meaning and practical rationality to a concept of hospitality. Unconditional hospitality exceeds juridical, political, or economic calculation (Derrida 2003, cited in Baban and Rygiel 2017, 104).

Critical cosmopolitanism scholars have discussed that the promising prospect in cosmopolitanism is its capacity to reflect upon interactions between different identities and between "the self" and "the other," as well as upon the transformation of "the self" and "the other" thereof (Appiah 2008; Beck 2002; Cheah 2006; Landau and Freemantle 2010; Nyers 2003). In a similar manner, Baban and Rygiel assert that cosmopolitanism "requires a simultaneous double process of, first, building the desire to recognize that we are all part of a common humanity and, second, recognizing the need to acknowledge the question of difference that comes with the premise of living with others" (2017, 103).

Within the current framework, can the commitment to an open-door policy on the basis of a humanitarian approach adopted by Turkey present the promise of living together with Syrians? Can the approach adopted by Turkey really open the door of "home" and make it possible for all to live together as equals? What kind of hospitality does Turkey exhibit towards Syrians? Are they invited unconditionally, and does that invitation include living together as equals?

Although there is significant variation in the ethnic and religious backgrounds of displaced Syrians in Turkey, on the discursive level the "refugee crisis" has been referred to as a war between Sunnite victims and Alawite oppressor groups within official and mainstream media discourses, with the Turkish government allying itself with the Sunnite warring factions (Korkut 2016). The discursive construction of the Syrian war as "Sunnite victims vs. Alawite oppressors" also affects the nature of humanitarian approaches towards displaced Syrians, from an all-encompassing humanitarian policy to a selective model of humanitarianism which predominantly welcomes those who are deemed religiously and ethnically acceptable (Korkut 2016; Polat 2018). This assimilationist approach welcomes only a limited group of newcomers on the grounds that they should already share the supposedly "common"

identity of the host country and the assumption that these newcomers should integrate seamlessly into society (Baban, Rygiel 2017). Displaced Syrians, besides being referred to as "guests" of the state, are also addressed as "*muhacir*," literally meaning "migrant," while the government takes the position of being "*ensar*." Muhacir also has a religious connotation as "a term rooted in Islamic history" (Polat 2018, 505). The term indicates those "who had to move from Mecca to Medina in the 7th century because of religious persecution" (Ibid, 505), and the Turkish government, accordingly, refers to itself as the "*ensar*," in reference to "the inhabitants of Medina who helped and greeted Muslims fleeing from Mecca" (Ibid, 505).

By employing the analogy of "*ensar-muhacir*" next to "guest-host," Turkey, although claiming to open the home, implies that "home" is not actually a place that is shared by equals with regard to the rights of inhabitants in participation. Displaced Syrians are situated in a strictly hierarchical structure below the status of the "real" inhabitants of the country. They need either to comply with the rules of "the host" and know their limited place as temporary "guests," or they need to be assimilated into the supposed common identity by appreciating their saviors or *muhacir*. It is highly debatable even in the selective model of humanitarianism whether this hierarchical structure can be renegotiated. For example, although Leila and her family can be said to occupy an ethnically and religiously "acceptable" category by the current government of Turkey, the construction of a stable societal position has still been left uncertain. With regard to their struggle to preserve a stable place while Turkey becomes their new home, Leila said: "We did everything *kendi kendimize yani*. Now, we are applying for citizenship... we have everything, but we are waiting... *şans, şans...*"

Considering the challenges displaced Syrians are exposed to while making Turkey their new home, how do the new ethics of "home" that I argue the community center exhibits through cosmopolitanism have an impact on resilience and the feeling of being at home beyond what legality and procedures make possible? The community center comes into existence in people's lives to fill what the government falls short of providing. By creating a community of resilience, the community center brings people together on the basis of *kindness, openness and generosity*, it makes possible to foster a sense of safety and belonging.

The community center by materializing a new ethics of a home in line with cosmopolitanism and creating a vibrant space of interactions, offers Syrians and non-Syrians a possibility to engage differently with the current environment. Under the premise of cosmopolitanism that I argue starts from adopting unconditional hospitality at its center, the simultaneous double process of embracing unconditional

openness within a conditioned world promises a beautiful example of living together.

The community center enables an environment where one can feel supported and consequently can be more resilient in the time of crisis. Non-political, non-religious, and multicultural open space in the center provides a possibility for people to carry on, and to feel safer and welcomed.

How can this notion of unconditional hospitality with its inherent aporetic tension help to reconfigure "being a guest" while respecting both the singularities of each individual and keep the reality of domination and discrimination in-view? Anzaldúa (2015), in her essay "Geographies of Selves- Reimagining Identity," articulates the mysterious nature of identity:

> It's not race, gender, class, sexuality, or any single aspect of the self that determines identity but the interaction of all these aspects plus as yet unnamed features. We discover, uncover, create our identities as we interrelate with others and our *alrededores*/surroundings. Identity grows out of our interactions, and we strategically reinvent ourselves to accommodate our exchanges (Anzaldúa 2015, 75).

Creating a community of resilience, the community center fosters a space of encounter for displaced Syrians to connect and re-connect while keeping the uniqueness of their experiences relevant. "As we interrelate with others and our alrededores/surroundings" and are attentive to each other's suffering and multiple ways of being, a ground is created on which multiple identities may grow out resiliently. Thanks to these encounters, participants of the community center can build stronger solidarity, and share their challenges and unique stories. Through these acts of communication, a sense of belonging both to oneself -in the sense of "being at home"- and to one's surroundings may blossom. People come together during the center's special events, and feelings of joy and celebrations of life find expression in the activities of dancing, eating, knitting, and talking together.

I argue that the feeling of not being alone in this situation can endorse a different kind of inclusion for displaced Syrian in Turkey. Through the help of nurturing and supportive activities occurring within the atmosphere of an open home, it becomes possible to transform the space in which they inhabit. Within this new ethics of home, the antagonistic and hierarchical structure of guest/host can be reconfigured, and one can adopt the role of "host" within the space and acknowledge having a voice and being heard.

At the time of my interview with Dalia during the summer of 2019 in Turkey, the atmosphere was heavy, especially for displaced Syrians without the necessary papers and especially in Istanbul, the most populated province for displaced Syrians.[1] This atmosphere of heaviness pervaded the center as well, as many of the people who shared the space were directly affected. Amidst all the difficulties and in this heavy atmosphere, Dalia was generous to continue with our interview. When I went to her house, we spoke mainly about our friends living in Istanbul who were directly affected by this new order. She accepted the situation patiently as there was nothing to be done. While I was greatly inspired by her patience acceptance; I asked her how she heals herself, especially in these times of crisis. She explained me an appealing strategy of resilience and of finding a way to continue:

> "Always, whatever happening around me, it depends on me how much I have the ability to continue... (Even when) it's crowded, you always find a way to continue walking. So, this is the challenge always, to find this way... Without hurting anyone, and to go slowly and smiling... Gives you always good feeling and gives the people around you good feeling." (Dalia)

I observed how she resiliently told of her and her loved one's experiences while patiently accepting what could not be resisted, and how she continued to be present in the moment with an awareness of beauty and togetherness. As I continued to ask about the creative activities she was doing, since I knew that she was knitting and attending the other creative workshops at the community center; Dalia expressed the importance of being within a nurturing and supportive environment and philanthropy.

> Berfu: You are doing a lot of beautiful things... knitting, writing stories...
> Dalia: You know, helping people always give you the feeling that life continues in any way, and if you have the ability to make someone even smile in this kind of condition of life, it is a huge job. And that (is) what I consider while I am going to the community center. I am going to this lovely place... I am going to meet with these lovely people whom I love. Maybe to feel safe a little bit, I can give them this feeling, (and for that) I am pleased. Really.

[1] https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638

In my interviews as well as in the conversations I had at the center, the emphasis on *kindness* and generosity, and the importance of such a community was clearly evident. In the following section, I look more at concrete practices whereby these social relations of solidarity and a "homey" atmosphere are built upon.

3.2 Practices in Constructing a Symbolic Home

The community center is located in a small apartment building in the center of the city. The front door opens onto a kitchen, and in the middle of the kitchen there is a big wooden table. This table hosts many feasts, many conversations, and many laughs. Behind the table, there is a bench and a stove. Most of the time, the kitchen is full of people around the table; while some cook together for the daily meal, some engage in daily conversations. In the corner of the kitchen, there are comfortable chairs where one can sit and do his/her daily work and participate in the conversations. The fridge is open to all, and food is shared with all who come. Next to the kitchen, there are two multi-purpose rooms used for teaching, screening movies, and other activities. A big beautiful garden is at the back of the center in which a big meal is hosted once a week. A rectangular yard is connected to the upstairs where there are trees and a table. When the weather is warm, people sit usually in the garden, enjoying the surrounding tranquility.

In addition to providing a space of interactions on the basis of *kindness, openness and generosity*, the community center also addresses the concrete needs of many Syrians in the process of making Turkey their new "home." It is important to address the question of how my informants have found out so as to understand the significance of the community center in their everyday lives. Most of my informants came across the center through their friends and family connections or via social media.

> "Iıı (It) was my friend Marguerite. She was friend of Aaftab, from Syria. Iıı we met together through her. . . " (Sidar)
> "I came with my brother 2014. We came for an acting workshop. There was an acting workshop in the center. Only after few months after community center opened. And yeah, we came, it was fun. We made new friends." (Thamer)

Other than pre-existing connections, social media has been a vibrant platform to connect and re-connect for many Syrians with their loved ones now scattered all over the world. During our daily conversations, I have heard many stories about the use of social media as a tool to recover relations that were cut off suddenly. One of my friends told me that every Sunday all his family members prepare breakfast in their separate homes in several different countries, spruce themselves up for a special family gathering, garnish the table as they prefer, and start a video chat during which they eat together. Other than providing a space to stay connected with their loved ones and maintaining the pre-existing connections, social media can ignite new connections and create new sources of support. In the case of Ghanem, while he was searching for an employment opportunity via social media, he discovered the community center through a chain of coincidences.

> "I found a smart phone after I earned money and worked hard. Smart phone and created a Facebook page. Started searching. I want to connect with my friends. I wrote to write names random... Maybe, maybe... So I started find my friends. One of my friends, he was really powerful, let's say, I connected him. (And he said) Good, come, come, I will find you a job. He found me a job with a legal organization… My friend, he said, I don't have printer you know, (but here's) where we can find printer. He takes me to a place (the community center) where he has a friend volunteering there. The friend who was volunteering there by coincidence was my best friend who I haven't seen in ages, like 10 years. I entered the place, and, 'Asaaaf. No waaay you maaaan!' (Laughters)" (Ghanem)

3.3 Social Solidarity and Empowerment

Some of my informants came across the center while they were searching for their basic needs in Turkey. The center is located in an apartment building where there is also an NGO for displaced Syrians. In other words, it is located in a hub of interactions for Syrians searching to meet needs that the government has inadequately met.

Displaced Syrians have made new connections in this space of solidarity, and some of their major needs have been fulfilled so that they can live their lives with more ease.

The current social, economic, and varying legal conditions of Syrians inhabiting Turkey are intermingled with the condition of *a blow to the basic tissues of social life*, or with a collective trauma. Restoring the bonds of social life creates the need to establish supportive connections, and these bonds play a crucial role for individual and collective resilience. The evident material needs of people intermingle with the need to establish nurturing and supportive connections to deal with the current condition, and these two can come together at the community center.

At the community center the needs of displaced Syrians are addressed through the ethics of an open place, which makes it possible for those needs to be fulfilled in an individually tailored way. The center, while providing a nurturing and supportive space for children and adults, also enables access to the necessary knowledge to attain new skills, to access know-how, to make new connections, and thus to pursue a future in the best way possible. The community center schedules language classes, art workshops, preparation classes for exams such as TOEFL, IELTs, and SAT, and sessions to assist those applying for university and scholarships. Next to this, it hosts community meals, movie nights, and music and dance events.

The community center, as a non-political, non-religious, and multicultural open space, is run by volunteers. Volunteers organize weekly language classes, share their cooking and recipes together, organize drawing lessons or music classes, or take the children out to play. The schedule of activities is determined by what volunteers are capable of and willing to share with others.

During my fieldwork, "*ma andi waid*" (I don't have time) was the first sentence that I learned from daily conversations at the center. Scarcity of available time is experienced by those who are working to earn their living, dealing with the bureaucratic process ranging from obtaining visa, residence permit, or work permits, and trying to improve or acquire new skills to ameliorate their position in current condition (albeit the fact that transitioning social or professional positions doesn't always relate to people's skill level and previous experiences). The common experience among the people I interviewed is an insufficiency of time to build their future in the best way possible. Keeping in mind the realities of most Syrians' economic situations and challenges ranging from working conditions to young people's educational hardship, the community center provides ways to gain know-how via its classes, workshops, and programs. The classes are especially important for the younger generations in providing the necessary knowledge to continue their education in Turkey and abroad. Economic difficulties, especially for those who need to provide not only for themselves but also for their families, language barriers and a lack of know-how make conditions harder.

> "If I apply for university here, I have to have a stable job. Even (for) my brother sometimes, it didn't feel stable for him, especially in the first year (of university) because he had to go to the language preparation year, he had to go to the classes, and also he had to provide for himself and for the family also. So, when I realize this was going to be very difficult for me, and the only way for me is to get scholarship... To at least focus on studying. Because I'll be distracted." (Thamer)

For Thamer, applying for university in Turkey was inconceivable given his time limitations. Going to a university, learning a new language to be successful in classes, and working at the same time was beyond possibility. However, he is a bright young man who desires to pursue his goals and earn a diploma. At the community center, there are special programs for those who want scholarships to study and pursue their futures.

Thamer continues:

> "The program was still going, and they give us lists. My list had five universities that are interested in giving me a chance to apply for studying and giving me a scholarship. All of them were in Canada. But then at the end, when I was very late and missed most of the deadlines because of some problems with the passport... And I was trying to get a passport from the Consulate here. Also, the IELTS score came late. Only one university stayed, and they were still ready to give me this chance... Actually, I was accepted in the scholarship in August of last year. But then I had to wait for the visa over seven months. I was supposed to go in January this year. Now all is good."

The challenges with bureaucracy and consequent delay of many opportunities is an unexceptional and repeated story for many Syrians. Another of my informants, Ghanem, was accepted to a university in London; however, due to paperwork delays, he waited three years to start his study. In order to get his passport and necessary documents for his travel from Turkey to England, he repeatedly went back and forth from the Consulate with no result in hand. The widespread experience of waiting shared among many displaced Syrians is transformed at the community center into bearable moments. Through everyday life activities and creative workshops, I argue the center may mobilize what is alive in each individual and help them in their journey of survival and transformation.

> “In that time, my son does nothing, except sitting home and playing online. He was not going school. He was not working. In that time, he was 16 or 17. So I keep push him go to the community center... Keep pushing my son in that time, go and there are people in your age and there are guitar classes, go go go... Until he went... he was doing nothing here, just wasting time. Waiting for what you don’t know.” (Dalia)

At the center, people can discover new abilities they have or can cultivate what they are already engaged in. Time has gained another layer, and the moment becomes significant in waiting. It offers them an opportunity to be active and not to get stuck while waiting for a future to come.

“Tawwil balak” (Be patient) was the phrase I heard many times from Ghanem. In the process of his visa application to London where he continued a master program in Transitional Justice and Conflict, we went together to some bureaucratic places before his departure. In Aleppo, Ghanem had been a lawyer, but when he came to Turkey, he couldn’t continue working in the field of his expertise. He worked at a lot of low-paid daily jobs without job security. The emphasis of “being patient” over protracted waiting was also present in Dalia’s narration.

> “I am telling (you) this, I am almost 50 now, so close... What life showed me, just wait. If anything you can’t (do), it’s not your decision what is happening now. How much I became angry, how much (I) became sad nothing will change. So I would save my energy, okay... Let’s see what is coming. Let’s deal with it, step by step... This is what helps me. Otherwise anything that is needed for me to think, to make a decision, I am giving the whole matter what (it) deserve from thinking, acting, asking, searching.” (Dalia)

Dalia decided to come to Turkey with her son while the war was unfolding severely. She was saying when she made the decision to come Turkey her life was already complicated in Syria. After her divorce, she moved to her childhood city where many of her family members were living in. Being the eldest of her female siblings, when she moved back to her hometown she became the foremost responsible person for her parents. In addition to being the sole caregiver for her son, she was also taking care of her parents who were in need of help in their everyday lives.

On top of the already existed threat of the war in Syria that caused severe challenges to sustain her life, she was also needed to fulfill gendered family obligations and related care-roles. She was expressing that life had become more and more challenging as the oldest daughter and a single mother.

Although she was planning the return to Syria after she helped her son's departure to his father, she got stuck in Turkey because of the accelerated war in Syria. Shortly after her arrival in Turkey, she learned that her mother got sick. Dalia was saying that she got two choices, either to return back to Syria while running the risk of not seeing her son again to help her ill mother or to stay in Turkey with her son. She was recounting that the time period as being one of the worst periods of her life. It was already uncertain that whether she would be able to be with her son after his departure. She said that at that time she was trying to be patient within this uncertainty and trying to make a decision that would be beneficial both for her son and her mother. She decided to stay with her son in Turkey while admitting that there was nothing she could do to prevent her mother's death.

Although I did not have a specific gender focus while choosing my interviewees, I realized during my research that gender related care-roles, family obligations and experiences of being a woman were adding more difficulties to the lives of female participants of my research. In the following section, I examine the forms of solidarity I observed among women in my fieldwork and the ways in which they support each other in terms of moving on with their lives in a more resilient way.

3.4 Women's Solidarity

The community center, while providing tools for pursuing a future in the best way possible, also makes it possible for those to cross paths, learn from one another and extend their circles of solidarity. As such, it provides s space for displaced Syrians to establish nurturing and supportive connections. While examining the connections of social solidarity; I believe it is important to keep in mind the limitations of taking identity as unified and regarding "being Syrian" as external to all power relations prevailing in a given society. A common identity such as "being Syrian" neither takes into consideration the complexities in Syrians' backgrounds based on nationality, ethnicity, religion, language, nor does it make it possible to think critically about the experiences of diverse groups of people and their unique conditions.

This reminds us to take a critical approach against the common identity of "being Syrian." The experience of war and displacement as a collective trauma has a significant effect on the lives of Syrians, and it is necessary to include the multiplicity of individual experiences in the face of supposedly "the same event." Thus, any group identity, including that of Syrian, cannot be thought without including individuals' relationalities with the existing system and their intersectionality.

> "[I]ntersectionality consists of an assemblage of ideas and practices that maintain that gender, race, class, sexuality, age, ethnicity, ability, and similar phenomena cannot be analytically understood in isolation from one another; instead, these constructs signal an intersecting constellation of power relationships that produce unequal material realities and distinctive social experiences for individuals and groups positioned within them" (Waylen et al. 2013, 58-9).

While thinking through the connections revolving around intersectionality within the community center, I was especially curious about connections among women, which experiences were found to be in common in their conversations, and the ways in which they constructed solidarity and support for each other, material or non-material.

While I spent time at the community center, I realized that most Syrian women were coming to the space to learn Turkish, to cook and eat collectively, and to knit together. Those who had children were bringing their kids to socialize with other kids or to attend the activities designed for kids.

Leila and I met while people were preparing for an exhibition composed of children's paintings. At the beginning of Summer 2019, preparation classes for the children had just started. One of the volunteers in the community center, a Syrian painter, arranged a series of six-hour drawing workshops for children each day. At the workshops, the children learned how to make sketches to help them express their feelings in the form of drawing. At the end of this intense workshop series, the children were very excited to share what they had created in the workshop as their art-pieces. Leila was in a hurry to help her oldest daughter finish her piece before the exhibition started. I was curious about the hurry of a mother to help her child. While I could not figure out how to help myself without trespassing the connection between mother and child, I stood near them. After a while, Leila started a conversation with me. She knew me in the center as one of the Turkish teachers, and I had seen her several times with the women gathering for weekly knitting. But this was the first time we were engaging in a conversation.

As she continued to help her daughter, Leila told me why her daughter had not been able to finish her piece. Her daughter hadn't attended all the drawing lessons in the center because she was going to Turkish preparation classes for an exam necessary for her transition into the Turkish education system. Leila asked me whether I could study with her daughter to help her pass this exam and to get the information about this exam in detail. Although Leila could speak Turkish, getting access to the know-how of this process was challenging. We exchanged numbers to arrange a time to study and speak about the process further. After a while, I spoke with her daughter, Amal, and we introduced ourselves to each other. Her piece was almost finished and started to look like what she was hoping for. When it was ready for the exhibition, her piece took its place on the walls endowed with the works of the other children. Each one astonishingly revealed both the great labor devoted and the astonishing imaginations of the children. The rooms next to kitchen were in a joyful hustle for hosting this exhibition. The children's parents and other family members alongside the volunteers started to fill the center. While children explained their work, we moved with them from one drawing to the next.

After the exhibition, Leila and I stayed in touch, and soon we met for study in the center. She helped me communicate with Amal since she knows both Arabic and Turkish. Although I was improving my Arabic with the help of the classes at the center, my competence in Arabic was not enough to communicate well. Amal was born in Syria in 2012 and moved to Turkey with her family when she was three. Adoption of a new language was challenging for her. Her difficulty was compounded by the specific challenges of Turkish learning for Syrians in current conditions. Although she knew limited Turkish, she was not comfortable speaking.

While Amal and I studied, Leila and I had a daily conversation as her two-and-a-half-year-old child Zeynep occasionally joined us. Leila told me how she endeavored in the beginning of her arrival to learn Turkish in order to make the language transition for her children easier and to be able to work and connect more easily with people. However, the reality of gendered employment, the family obligations and related care roles made it impossible for her to work initially. Leila's story was similar to those I had heard of other Syrian women at the community center, those who had come with their husbands as well as those who were single and came with other family members, like brothers or fathers. Most women stayed home most of the time doing necessary domestic work such as cleaning, cooking, and taking care of the kids. Their husbands or other male members of the family worked outside mostly in textile factories or in similar insecure conditions. However, at that time, Leila was working as a knitter, and she was making a keyholder for an order. After studying with Amal, Leila started knitting on the sofa in the kitchen, and I went to

make our tea. Over tea we talked about the knitting she was working on, the colors of the strings and their combinations. She was meticulous in her creative labor.

I was curious about the knitting gatherings and the sociality revolving around the knitting hours, as this was the time when I mostly saw Syrian women at the center. After one of my interviews, I was informed in more detail about the knitting gatherings. The knitting gatherings was a project initiated by a female international volunteer which creates an opportunity for Syrian women to participate in the work-force. The needs and concerns of Syrian women were communicated around this space of solidarity while it paved the ways for participation in employment.

Dalia was a single mother who came to Turkey in 2013 with her 16-year-old son. At that time, it had been more than ten years since Dalia and her ex-husband had gotten divorced. Her hope was to provide a better future for her son; to send him safely to her ex-husband in Europe, to help his son go to Europe. Initially, Dalia's plan was to go back to Syria after she sent her son to his father. However, the situation in Syria was making her return harder and harder as the war accelerated. She decided that she could stay longer in Turkey, but didn't expect this would be necessary. In the meantime, she had managed to send her son to his father who was starting a new life in Europe. Yet, in the following months, after a huge fight, her ex-husband sent their son back to Turkey to his mother. Revealing another side of Syrian women's experience upon arrival in Turkey, Dalia had to do both the domestic work at home and was obliged to work outside the home to maintain a livelihood for her and her son. Since the reality of gendered employment restricted available work, Dalia worked several jobs ranging from cleaning to working at a tourism company. While she looked for ways for her son to continue his education, she made connections with the people volunteering at the community center. One of the volunteers, who also helped her son get a scholarship, introduced her to the knitting project.

> "In that time I was jobless, and she said, 'Do you know how to knit?' I said yes. And she connects me with some friends, the first knitter who works with her. We were five ladies in that time, and the group became bigger and bigger. The community center hosting this project. All our stuff, our knitting, all our activities are happening there. I can tell you, I love knitting, it is really interesting. You are creating something *yani* in the end. When you finish any piece, the most happy moment. (Laugh) I did this." (Dalia)

While some of the women who knit for the project were already coming to the community center, some others started to come after this project. Within this space of solidarity, new friendships were built. Syrian women from different backgrounds connected to each other through working and creating together. As their labor was transforming into financial support, they were also paving connections through daily conversation and establishing solidarity revolving around their common struggles and concerns in life. Dalia and Leila along with other Syrian women creating together at the center supported each other and witnessed their sorrow and joy together by sharing moments with each other.

At the community center the space of solidarity formed around knitting together is one form among many others. The place itself connects people together and ignites new encounters through its socially vibrant open construction, alongside shared meals, classes, music and dance events, movie screenings, and workshops.

> "There are people coming for the first time to the community center, and foreigners, a lot of volunteers, and the teachers. You know that. Our volunteers from everywhere in the world. We cannot travel, but we are seeing the world through these people. So, it's an amazing place, magical place for me." (Dalia)
>
> "The community center is very important experience for me. I have learned from the center and through this place *yani*... I learned many things through this place, I dealt with other cultures, other perspectives, other people, you know. From people coming from all over the world. And this place allowed me to open up to others. And to see what other people think." (Ghanem)

The community center as a space facilitating solidarity, empowerment, and connectivity exhibits unique ways whereby individual and collective resilience can be fostered. As a socially vibrant open space, it "helps build a foundation for a new life, establishes connections with new sources of social support, reconnects with important people in life, helps people regain a sense of agency" (Saul 2013, 48). While the presence of such a community helps displaced Syrians with cultivating individual resilience, individuals within this "*community of resilience*" foster collective capacity of endurance and multiply the ways in which the community exhibits resilience in response to challenges. Conceptualizing resilience as having two interrelated layers, the individual and the collective, the community center provides both *a capacity* to rebound from adversity and an ability "to withstand and rebound from disruptive life challenges" Walsh 2007, cited in Saul 2013, 7 individually and collectively.

The practical and instrumental importance of the center in constructing "a symbolic home" and providing a space of solidarity, empowerment, and connectivity; shows another form of civil togetherness within Turkey among displaced Syrians and beyond. Furthermore, it makes also possible to access the necessary knowledge to pursue one's future in the best way possible, to attain new skills, to access know-how, and to acquire new connections. The existence of the community center helps to restore the bonds of social and cultural life.

4. Conclusion

> "(It is) like a small family, or a place that reminds us how life is used to be in Syria. It looks like you are celebrating all the time, you know this atmosphere happening when you are going to your grandmother house, and all the family gathered in this nice time... Something like this..."-(Dalia)

> Nostalgia (from nostos "to return home" and algia "longing") is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy [...] an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world (Svetlana 2001, IX-XI).

On a sunny Saturday, I was on my way to the community center. On the ferry I took from the other side of Istanbul I watched the seagulls in the sky and talked inside of myself. I sent a "*selam*" to one of my family members buried in Hatay by imagining that the seagulls flying in the sky would help deliver my greeting. It had not been a long time since my mother and I went to Hatay to sell our family home. After two years, I would visit Hatay again. My mom would go more often to visit family members and bring back special ingredients and spices specifically used in Hatay cuisine. I have lived in Istanbul for the past seven years for my undergraduate and graduate study, and my mom moved in with me four years ago. In the process of selling my childhood family home, we came together many times with our family members to eat Hatay's special foods together.

The time was approaching 1 pm when the ferry landed on the European side. As I walked to the community center, I knew that there would be a lot of delicious food to share. In the corridor of the building, I heard the laughter and conversations in Arabic. When I arrived at the door it was half open already, and I pushed it to enter. On the wooden table in the kitchen, there were onions, tomatoes, mezes, Syrian bread, a thermos for tea. The kitchen was crowded that day. People were in a joyful

hurry to prepare the meals, and mezes were being taken to the tables in the room beside the kitchen. Dalia was organizing the kitchen and preparing the ingredients for making *mulukhiyah* (a special Syrian dish), for which she was regarded the best cook. I had not been able to go to the Saturday gatherings for some weeks. When I entered the kitchen, I hugged and kissed Dalia and other friends and asked if there was anything I could do to help prepare the food. Dalia said there was no need because everything was already organized. Finally, *mulukhiyah* was ready to serve, and it took its place on the table together with hummus, kousa, falafel, salads, rice, labneh, and other dishes. People started to take plates and help themselves to the food. In the kitchen I saw a friend I had met over daily conversations at the center. He was learning Turkish and practicing it with me, and I was learning Arabic and practicing with him. After filling our plates with food, we went to the garden.

As it was a sunny day, tables and chairs were also taken out to the garden. We sat at the table and started to eat while new people continued to come. After the meal, as I was taking my plate to the kitchen, I came across Aaftab. I knew that he had prepared a lot of the mezes, so I said, “Aaftab, everything was delicious.” Meanwhile, Leila’s daughter Zeynep was walking around in the kitchen with her childish curiosity, her face painted with colors like all the other children at the center that day. I followed Zeynep and we went to the other room where most of the children were either still eating or playing together.

When many of my informants referred to the community center as their home, they were describing how the relations they built through the space provided them the feeling of a family. Arguably, the “homey” atmosphere at the center makes the space into “a place of nostalgia” for many displaced Syrians. Their affective relations bound with their memories of homeland occupy a crucial space in their narrations; homeland still exists in their memories and senses through tastes, smells, and melodies. Svetlana Boym, in the book *The Future of Nostalgia*, discusses nostalgia as “the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups” unlike melancholia which “confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness” (Boym 2001, XVII) While nostalgia can mean “mournful, melancholic, and tied to home,” it can also be regarded as “enabling, practical, positive and aid for renewing the lives in strange lands” (Radstone 2010, 187). In her discussion of nostalgia, Boym argues that “creative rethinking of nostalgia” for many displaced people could as well create “a way of making sense of the (im)possibility of homecoming” and “a strategy of survival” (2001, XVIII).

> "I am so proud about the family I created here. So family (is) the people who you care about the most, and the people who support you and you support them whenever they need, whenever you need. And the love without benefit exist, this is the family. I created a family here and I love them so much... The feeling that they are ready for me, relieving (helps) me all the time. And this is something so precious. I am holding this... that reaches me, in somehow I feel strong." (Dalia)

The feeling of family and diasporic intimacy at the community center, a feeling revolving around an atmosphere of a home, enables a way to reconnect to nostalgic longings, smells, tastes, and melodies, while paving a way for survival and resilience both in terms of received and perceived support.

Considering the experience of war and the social structure concerning the economic, social, political, and legal conditions of displaced Syrians in Turkey, which perpetuates experienced violence, this research has sought to explore different practices of dealing with collective trauma and resilience fostered through community building for both individuals and the community at large. In the face of a collective trauma understood as "the shared injuries to a population's social, cultural, and physical ecologies," (Saul 2013, 1) I have tried to understand resilience among my informants as "an active process of endurance and growth in response to crisis and challenge" (Ibid, 7). Initially, I tried to understand the general context that my informants faced in Turkey, in terms of their ambiguous status and their limited access to social welfare. As I listened closely to their stories of resilience, I realized that communities such as pre-existing connections, like friends and family, have been helpful to newcomers in finding work, a place to stay, and ways to continue their lives; however, in some cases, challenging conditions of living and working, unpredictability, and insecurity may render potential help impossible or untenable. In the second part of the thesis, I focused on the significance of the community center in the lives of my informants and tried to understand the effects of the nurturing and supportive connections that are built through the center. Remembering again that many of my informants refer to the center as home, I argue that the loss of home and loss of the larger communal body is an experience of collective trauma which in the community center is re-negotiated and processed through solidarity, mutual empowerment, and expanded connectivity. I observed that the community center materializes a new ethics of a home in line with cosmopolitanism and creates a vibrant space of interactions in solidarity and empowerment. Additionally, it offers displaced Syrians a possibility of engaging differently with their current environment. While providing a space for interactions on the basis of "*kindness, openness and generosity*" offering non-material support which may foster the feeling of belonging within a home, the

community center also addresses the concrete needs of many Syrians in the process of making Turkey their new "home" and facilitates access to the necessary knowledge to pursue the future.

While the community center enables a place of encounter where creative resilience strategies can be developed and communicated, it also opens a space of collaboration and (re)connection. In its specific texture, the space enables resilience as a creative and emergent process.

4.1 Limitations and Further Research

While I proceeded in this research, the language barrier was my main limitation. Although due to my family origin, I do speak Arabic with basic daily competence, important differences exist colloquially and between dialects. While *Fusha* Arabic, or the standard Arabic, is used mainly in media and texts, *Ammice* Arabic, or the spoken colloquial Arabic has numerous variations. Given my lack of competence in standard Arabic and my limited competence in the Syrian colloquial language, my analysis has been affected by the language barrier. Although during my fieldwork, I had the chance to get familiar with the Syrian colloquial language, my competence remained limited. Fortunately, my informants were competent either in English or in Turkish, as well as Arabic.

Besides the limitation of the language, the community center is one among many other centers that addresses the needs of displaced Syrians in Turkey and helps facilitate their adaptation in multiple ways. Given the fact that there are over three and a half million displaced Syrians living in the country, I only had the chance to meet a few. Thus, I do not have the authority to make a general claim about either the characteristics of centers or, in this context, communities of resilience, or of the conditions of displaced Syrians overall. I believe, however partial my research is, that the experiences of my informants provide insight into the experiences of other displaced Syrians in Turkey. Nonetheless, the condition of my informants may also be relatively unique concerning the significance and the support of the center in their everyday lives.

Furthermore, collective trauma and experiences of survivors can be approached with various sets of questions and with different conceptual and methodological tools, perspectives, and concerns in mind. In this thesis, I do not adopt a specific focus

concerning the potential different experiences among various ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups among displaced Syrians and those with intersectional identities. Adopting such a focus might have initiate further discussion and deepen the analysis.

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