

LAYERS OF LIMINALITY: A GROUNDED THEORY  
STUDY OF REFUGEE WOMEN IN ANKARA, TURKEY

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LARA SCHROETER

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Prof. Dr. Yaşar Kondakçı  
Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science.

---

Asst. Prof. Dr. Derya GöçerAkder  
Head of Department

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science.

---

Asst. Prof. Dr. Besim Can Zırh  
Supervisor

**Examining Committee Members**

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zana Çitak (METU, IR) \_\_\_\_\_

Asst. Prof. Dr. Besim Can Zırh (METU, SOC) \_\_\_\_\_

Asst. Prof. Dr. Reyhan Atasü Topçuoğlu (Hacettepe Uni., Sosyal Hizmet) \_\_\_\_\_

**I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.**

**Name, Last Name : Lara Schroeter**

**Signature :**

# **ABSTRACT**

## **LAYERS OF LIMINALITY: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF REFUGEE WOMEN IN ANKARA, TURKEY**

SCHROETER, Lara

M.S., Department of Middle East Studies

Supervisor: Asst. Prof. Dr. Besim Can ZIRH

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The focus of this study was on how women cope with living in forced displacement in Ankara, Turkey. Using a grounded theory methodology, and focusing on women's lived experience, allowed for an emphasis on the agency of these women, while also identifying their vulnerabilities. Eleven women with various ethnic backgrounds from Iraq and Syria participated in this study. An important finding in this study was that these women all shared the common experience of living in layers of liminality. They had separated from their homes, and were prevented from reaggregation in terms of being excluded from legal, social, and economic structures. This was conceptualized as concentric layers of liminality that the women were experiencing, with the inner most layer a psychosocial liminality where the women were withdrawn from society spatial and socially, and experienced negative emotion such as depression, loneliness, and hopelessness. Though vulnerable to these layers of liminality due to their being a women and their

displacement, these women engaged in resilience strategies to cope with and adapt to their situation. These strategies fell into two categories, one to exit the psychosocial liminality to varying degrees, and the other to settle in, and reframe their liminal position. The paradox of these strategies was that depending on various conditions, these strategies had the effect of helping them cope and adapt, or they could cause the women to cycle back into the liminality. However, the general result was that the women gained greater self-awareness and strength, and a regaining of agency over their lives.

**Keywords:** Liminality, Refugees, Displacement, Gender, Turkey

# ÖZ

## EŞİKTELİĞİN KATMANLARI ANKARA TÜRKİYEDEKİ MÜLTECİ KADINLAR ÜZERİNE BİR TEMELLENDİRİLMİŞ KURAM ÇALIŞMASI

SCHROETER, Lara

Yüksek Lisans, Orta Doğu Araştırma Bölümü

Tes Danışmanı: Prof. Dr. Besim Can ZIRH

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Bu çalışmanın odağı, zorla yerinden edilmiş mülteci kadınların Ankara, Türkiye’deki başa çıkma yöntemleridir. Çalışmada kadınların yaşamış olduğu tecrübelerle odaklanmak için Temellendirilmiş Kuram (Grounded Theory) metoduna başvurulması, kadınların hayatlarını şekillendirme yetkinliklerinin vurgulanmasına ve bir taraftan da savunmasızlıklarının tespit edilmesine olanak sağlamıştır. Farklı sosyoekonomik, etnik ve dini geçmişlere sahip Iraklı ve Suriyeli on bir kadınla açık uçlu görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Bu çalışmanın önemli bir bulgusu, tüm katılımcıların eşiktelik katmanlarında ortak yaşam deneyimleri paylaştıklarının görülmesi olmuştur. Evlerinden ayrı düşürülmüş ve yasal, sosyal ve ekonomik yapıların dışında tutulduklarından dolayı yeniden hayatlarına şekil vermelerinin önüne geçilmiştir. Katılımcıların tecrübe ettikleri bu durum, eşiktelik eşmerkezli katmanları olarak kavramsallaştırılmıştır. En içteki katman, kadınların hem

mekânsal hem de sosyal olarak toplumun dışına çekildiği; depresyon, yalnızlık ve umutsuzluk gibi olumsuz duygular yaşadığı psikososyal bir eşiktedir. Kadın olmaları ve evlerinden ayrı düşmüş olmaları bu kadınları bu eşiklik katmanlarına karşı savunmasız hale getirmiştir. Fakat yine de bu kadınlar içinde buldukları durumlarla başa çıkma ve durumlarına uyum sağlama stratejileri geliştirebilmiştir. Bu çalışma temel olarak içsel eşiklik ile başa çıkmak için kullanılan stratejilere odaklanmıştır. Bu stratejiler, biri eşiklikten farklı derecelerde dışarı çıkmak, diğeri ise yerleşmek ve eşiklikteki konumlarını yeniden çerçevelemek olarak iki kategoriye ayrılmıştır. Çeşitli koşullara bağlı olarak, bu stratejilerin çelişkisi, ya kadınların var olan durumlarıyla başa çıkmalarına ve onlara uyum sağlamalarına yardımcı olmaları ya da kadınların eşiklik haline geri dönmelerine neden olmalarıdır. Her ne şekilde olursa olsun, genel sonuç, kadınların daha fazla kişisel farkındalık ve güç kazanmış; aynı zamanda kendi hayatlarının hâkimiyetini yeniden elde etmiş olmalarıdır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Eşiklik, Mülteciler, Zorla Yerinden Edilmek, Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Türkiye

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

While every refugee's story is different, and their anguish personal, they all share a common thread of uncommon courage – the courage not only to survive, but to persevere and rebuild their shattered lives. Antonio Guterres, U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, 2005

Over the last decade the number of globally displaced people has grown from 43.3 million in 2009 to 70.8 million in 2018 (UNHCR, 2019). The hope of governments and of those displaced is to one day either repatriate or to relocate them to a third country. However, the rate of those who have returned and have been resettled has not kept pace with the rate of new displacements (UNHCR, 2019.). Additionally, four out of five find themselves trapped in prolonged exile, living as refugees anywhere from five to forty-seven years. Therefore, for refugees, waiting has become the rule, not the exception (Hyndman & Giles, 2011).

In protracted refugee situations, refugees are stuck in a

...long-lasting and intractable state of limbo. Their lives may not be at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile (UNHCR, 2006, p. 106).

This state of limbo may lead to frustration and hopelessness on the part of the refugees; but refugees by their nature are resilient, having shown their desire to overcome by their very action of leaving one place to seek refuge

in another. They are “people who have undergone a violent 'rite' of separation and unless they are 'incorporated'... find themselves in 'transition,' or in a state of liminality” (Harrell-Bond & Voutira, 1992, p. 7). Liminality is used to describe the middle phase in the ceremonial rites of passage, in that the initiate goes through a phase that has “few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state” (Turner, 1969, p. 94). Therefore, refugees who have left their home countries, and have not yet returned, resettled, or are not able to integrate economically, socially, and psychologically, meet Turner's (1969) definition of “liminal entities [that] are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, [and] convention” (p. 95).

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees suggests that for those refugees living in liminality in protracted situations:

One durable solution is the local integration of refugees. This is a complex and gradual process that involves refugees establishing themselves in a country of asylum and integrating into the community there. Separate but equally important legal, economic, social, and cultural aspects to local integration form part of the process, which over time should lead to permanent residence rights and, in many cases, the acquisition of citizenship in the country of asylum (UNHCR, 2018, p. 33).

As is mentioned, this process of coming to terms with living in a new host culture and reintegrating into the new economic and social milieu is a complex process. Acculturation theory examines the coping strategies of those in the process and the possible outcomes, whether there is integration or marginalization, or something in between. However, the literature is mostly focused on the period of resettlement with much of the literature coming out of Europe, North America and Australia. In this study, I would like to look at the coping strategies of those that are living in limbo in Ankara, Turkey. Though the liminality experienced by refugee limits their choices, they continue to negotiate within their new environment to cope with the options available to them. Specifically, I chose to focus on women, due to the fact that women refugees are considered to be a vulnerable group



due to exposure to gender-based violence and discrimination in war and displacement. Their coping strategies illuminate the process of resilience in liminality.

Since 2014, globally, Turkey has hosted the largest number of refugees with the number reaching 3.7 million (UNHCR, 2019). As the numbers of asylum seekers grew in Turkey starting primary from the Syrian war in 2011 and continuing to grow until the present day, there have been multiple governmental reports, studies conducted by independent researchers, NGOs, and by think tanks (see UN Women and ASAM, 2018; AFAD, 2017; Kaya & Kiraç, 2016; Özden, 2013). These have been valuable to map and assess the current situation, though more attention must be paid to vulnerable groups and their lived experience (Anderson et al., 2013; UN Women and ASAM, 2018).

### **1.1 Purpose and Personal Connection**

The purpose of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of the coping mechanisms of resilience of refugee women living in limbo in Ankara. My personal connection with this topic arose from personal interest in that I too was a temporary migrant to Turkey, though under totally different circumstances. I had initially come to Turkey as an English teacher, and I found myself teaching a vast range of students, some of who had been forcefully displaced and had come to Turkey looking for refuge. What was fascinating to me was that in some regards, we were going through similar processes, in that we were trying to reorient ourselves to a new culture, and learn to navigate in a new system. On the other hand, the differences were stark; I had come voluntarily, and could return to my home country whenever I chose, whereas for many, leaving their homes and coming to Turkey was a last resort, a choice made when others were exhausted. They were also mourning the lost of home, knowing that they would most likely not see it again. I remember clearly sitting with some Yazidi friends from

Iraq who were receiving reports that their village was being overrun by ISIS, and feeling the incredible weight of loss that they were experiencing. Time with these friends was not all sadness and remembering; they also saw the importance of laughter, hope for the future, and of living life where they were.

For many of the forcefully displaced, Turkey was often not their planned for destination, as they hoped to continue on to other more westerly countries. However, in Turkey they found themselves paused, possibly due to waiting on the asylum process, or due to a lack of funds to continue their journey. In that time, many picked up enough Turkish to get a job, while others came to me as an English teacher, hoping to ready themselves for where they wanted to go. It was fascinating for me to see how, in everyday ways, humans adapt; in both large significant ways and in small symbolic ways. A common topic of conversation was how to make food from our respective homes using Turkish ingredients, or about funny language mistakes that we have made. At other times, it was in how we appreciated Turkish culture, and in others how there was frustration with the different unwritten rules of society that we did not understand. Some of the ways of coping from our home countries were not useful in the context of Ankara, Turkey.

Therefore, my research started with the question; in light of the trauma of war and rupture of displacement, how do women rebuild their lives in a new country? What strategies are women employing to cope in this new cultural milieu? Eleven women, who were living in Ankara at the time, participated in my open-ended interviews. For this small sample size, the group was quite diverse. Six were from Iraq, and five were from Syria. Their age ranged from fifteen to fifty. Two of the women were Christian, and three were ethnically Turkmen, and the rest were Arab Muslims. Though their legal status differed, as some were in the process of applying for asylum with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees; others were under Turkey's Temporary Protection for Syrians; and others were not even categorized as such, however all of them identified as refugees, or *mülteci* in

Turkish.

In our interviews, women explained that they felt “stuck.” An example from the younger women interviewed was of their education in their home countries, had been cut short by their coming to Turkey. This was upsetting to them, and they shared with me their hopes to continue their education, but were unable due to their displacement. At a time in life when typically young women gain more agency through education, work, or through marriage and starting to build a family, these women's lives were now in stuck in transition. Therefore, the research lead to the question of how women rebuild in the sense of adaptation, regaining agency, and coping while living in liminality?

To approach this question, I decided to follow a grounded theory research approach. This research method was chosen to allow for an in-depth exploration into refugees' lived experiences and to gain a deeper understanding into the processes at work. Grounded theory method allows for participants to be viewed as active agents constructing meaning from their own perspectives. As Charmaz, a leader in grounded theory states, it's the people themselves that construct data (2006). Charmaz (2006) explains that following grounded theory is akin to going on a journey, to follow the data, and the result is largely linked to the process. This was true of this study, as I examined the meanings and experiences of the the participant women, it lead to the foundational concept of liminality, that this liminality was layered, with the inner layer being of psychosocial withdrawal. This led to the development of a theoretical model based on this experienced liminality (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The next chapter will set the framework from the literature as a foundation for this study, and the background from which to start the methodological journey.

## CHAPTER 2

### BACKGROUND AND FOUNDATION

We lost our home, which means the familiarity of daily life. We lost our occupation, which means the confidence that we are of some use in this world. We lost our language, which means the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of feelings. Hannah Arendt, 1943

#### 2.1 Introduction

In recent years Turkey has found itself with the distinguished title of country hosting the most refugees in the world. Syrians have been moving into Turkey since the Syrian conflict started in 2011, culminating in Turkey hosting approximately 3.5 million in 2018. Further complicating matters, the conflict in Iraq, with the rise of ISIS, caused many Iraqis to flee to Turkey as well. Though Iraqis have not received the international attention that the Syrians have, it is believed that there are up to a few hundred thousand Iraqis living in Turkey (Kırıkçioğlu, 2019) Though the numbers are unprecedented, the intention of this section is to put this current refugee situation into its historical context. From this background, the literature on gender in refugee studies will be examined to further provide context to the study. Lastly, the literature on the acculturation, adaptation, the resilience process, and the factors that can facilitate or impede that process will

provide the framework from which this grounded theory study is built.

## **2.2 Background to Migration in Turkey**

### **2.2.1 Brief History of Migration into Turkey**

Migration to Turkey is not a new phenomenon. In the first years of the Turkish Republic, over 800,000 migrants from the Balkans arrived in Turkey. Prior to the establishment of the Republic, over 1,445,000 migrants of Muslim and/or Turkish descent settled in Turkey from 1870-1920 (Kirisici,1998). At the time, the acceptance of migrants of Turkish and Muslim decent was a tool in the nation-building process. The 1934 Law on Settlement established the cornerstone of this doctrine in two statuses that 1) facilitated the migration and integration of those migrants or refugees of “Turkish origin and culture,” and 2) prevented the entry of those that did not meet those criteria (İçduygu, 2013). Migration increased in the 1980s when a large wave of 300,000 ethnic Turks from Bulgaria arrived in Turkey in the summer of 1989. They were welcomed as being both Turkic and Islamic (Vasileva, 1992). It was not until late in the 2000, in order to grant more rights to minorities, that the second regulation was relaxed (Vasileva, 1992). In practice however, this law was also somewhat extended to those that traditionally had close ties to the Ottoman Empire, such as Albanians, Bosnians, and Pomaks, who though not ethnically Turkish, had historical and religious ties. They were treated as immigrants and were given legal status, thereby enjoying economic and political privilege (Kutlu, 2002).

In the 1980s, the primary pattern of migration also shifted to Turkey becoming a country of asylum and transit migration of “non-Turks” (İçduygu, 2003). Events in the region, such as the regime change in Iran, and decades of turmoil in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan, contributed to the asylum seeking migration to Turkey. For example, since the 1980s, estimates put up to a million migrants coming from Iran to

Turkey (Pusch, 2012).

Turkey is a signer of the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention and the Protocol on the Legal Status of Refugees of 1967, but has retained the original restrictions of the convention, in that only those fleeing from events in Europe are granted refugee status. With this refugee status, the person seeking asylum receives international protection and can rely on international law to uphold specific individual rights (Haddad, 2008). These rights include liberty rights, such as the freedom of religion, and certain immunity rights, such as the right to non-refoulement, in that they can be forcibly repatriated (Haddad, 2008). People who are fleeing from non-European countries fall outside of Turkey's international responsibility and thus are not granted the status of refugee in Turkey. Therefore these people can not be granted the full protection under the Convention. Hence there occurs three categories of refugees in Turkey: 1) National refugees, those who are ethnic Turkish refugees, as per the 1934 Law on Settlement, 2) Conventional refugees, those who became refugees as a result of events in Europe, and 3) Non-Conventional refugees, those from the Middle East and Africa (Kutlu, 2002).

Non-Conventional refugees are classified “conditional” and are allowed by the Turkish government to reside in Turkey on the basis that they are transitioning to a third country for resettlement (T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı, 1994) and are allowed to stay temporarily. Turkey allows the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to provide protection and to conduct refugee status determination procedures in Turkey. While they are waiting in their application process they are assigned a specific city, usually a “satellite city,” a city that is outside of the urban centers of Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir (Leghtas & Sullivan, 2016). Six months after they receive their residence card for that city, they can apply for a work permit for that city (Leghtas & Sullivan, 2016). Once the applications for asylum are approved, asylum seekers are relocated by the UNHCR to a third country.

In the 1990s, The Turkish government grew increasingly concerned with the growth of illegal entries into Turkey and the number of rejected asylum seekers left to remain in Turkey. Many in the government felt that the asylum seekers created economic, social, and political problems in their country (Kultu, 2002). This was exacerbated by the large movement of refugees from Iraq at the time.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, three distinct waves of Iraqi asylum seekers arrived in Turkey. This was due to the use of chemical weapons and human-rights abuses. During the third wave in the spring of 1991, some 460,000 Iraqis fled to Turkey (Kaynak, 1992). Turkey dealt with this influx by considering these Iraqis "temporary guests," and they were named "people allowed to remain in Turkey for humanitarian reasons" (Kaynak, 1992). Some were resettled in a third country, however, Turkey refused them the right to seek asylum, and retained the right to deport them, arguing that they did not fall under the Convention.

The issue of the Iraqi refugees, especially the Kurdish asylum seekers, along with the issue of increasing illegal migration through Turkey, strained this relationship between the UNHCR and the Turkish government. In 1994, in an attempt to bring the control of the status determination of asylum seekers under its control, the government declared the *Asylum Regulation* which introduced strict governing access to asylum procedures and reduced the rights of refugees (İçduygu & Kirisci, 2009). This relationship began to improve, and by the late 1990s, the UNHCR and Turkey returned to their close cooperation, for all intent and purposes, carrying out the status determination, with Turkey relocating those waiting for processing of their application to cities throughout Turkey. Between 1995 and 2007, there were between 3,500-4,000 applications for asylum per year (İçduygu & Kirisci, 2009). By the early 2000s, Turkey was receiving asylum applications from over thirty countries from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia (İçduygu, 2003).

## **2.2.2 The Current Situation in Turkey**

### **2.2.2.1 Syrians in Turkey**

The current wave of asylum seeking migrants to Turkey began in April 2011 with 250 Syrians crossing into the Hatay region. Following that incident, Ahmet Davutoğlu, the Turkish foreign minister, announced that Turkey would allow those Syrians “who are not happy at home” (Özden, 2013). By the end of that year, Turkey had set up six refugee camps, and there were 8,000 registered Syrians. Initially, the number of Syrians coming into Turkey was small, though notable, considering other migration movements into the country. The numbers increased substantially in the following years, with Turkey's Ministry of Interior Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) estimating in May of 2019 there to be more than 3.6 million displaced Syrians in Turkey.

Due to the geographical limitation clause of the Geneva Convention, those from Syria that have moved into Turkey's territory seeking asylum, have been labeled “guests” rather than refugees or asylum seekers. Similar to what was done with the Iraqi refugees in the 1980-90s, the Turkish government has placed these guests under “Temporary Protection” under Article 10 of the Asylum and Asylum Regulation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Turkey. This “temporary protection” has no time limit (T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı, 2014). Turkey maintained an “Open Door Policy” in which its borders would remain open to anyone fleeing conflict, their basic needs would be met, and they would not be forcibly returned to Syria (Csicsmann, 2016). However, Turkey has been constructing a concrete wall along its land border with Syria in order to physically hinder land crossings (Freeman et al., 2017).

The Turkish government formalized its temporary protection regime in April 2013, and its Temporary Protection Regulation in October 2014. This regulation included the rights to health and education, however, Syrians must obtain government-granted permits in order to work legally. As of



2017, approximately 35,000 work permits were issued to Syrians (UN Women & ASAM, 2018), meaning that approximately one percent of the number of Syrians are able to work legally. To travel inside of Turkey, Syrians must obtain travel documents from the Directorate General of Migration Management (UN Women & ASAM, 2018). Additionally, the regulation reserved the right to terminate the temporary protection regime at any time, therefore theoretically, the ability to deport Syrians to Syria at any time.

Though given the title as “guests” of the Turkish government, from here forward, displaced Syrians in Turkey will be called refugees. This is for the sake of clarity, and because this is how those interviewed in this study often referenced themselves (often using the Turkish word “mülteci”).

#### **2.2.2.2 Iraqis in Turkey**

As the Syrian conflict overflowed into neighboring Iraq, a new wave of Iraqis began to arrive in Turkey. The security situation in Iraq had been going through cycles of war and violence, with the Iran-Iraq war in 1980 and the United States invasion in 2003 leading to large numbers of undocumented Iraqis coming to Turkey throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the largest groups being Kurds, Turkmen, and Assyro-Christians (Danis, 2005). It was the entrance of ISIS and activities of the militias in 2014 that resulted in the current wave of refugees (Yijala & Nyman, 2017). The number of Iraqis in Turkey that registered for international protection, that is to be a conditional refugee, in 2017 alone was 68,685, with the number just slightly lower for 2018 (DGMM, 2019). Officially, as of 2019, there are still 150,000 Iraqis living in Turkey, however, estimates put that number at potentially a couple hundred thousand (Kırıkçıoğlu, 2019). Tens of thousands of those are Turkmen, a Turkic-speaking minority group; most of whom came to Turkey from Tel-Afar and the Mosul region (Kırıkçıoğlu, 2019). Iraqis are not able to receive humanitarian residence permits, but are

generally granted short-term residence permits and living in Turkey on such permits (AIDA, 2019). I also found this to be the case, especially for the Turkmen living in Ankara, as I informally asked around their community. However, Christian refugees tend to apply for international protection with the UNHCR, and therefore are often sent to satellite provinces (Leghtas & Daniel, 2016). Christian Iraqis have reported that they chose to leave their designated province due to there not being churches, and problems finding housing because they were told “we do not rent to Christians”

### **2.2.2.3 The Urban Component**

The Turkish government, in the first year of the Syrian conflict, was able to settle most of the Syrians coming into Turkey in camps. The Disaster and Emergency Management Authority has been authorized as the coordinating agency for these refugees, along with much coordination across multiple government ministries, such as the Ministries of Internal Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Health, Education, Agricultural and Rural Affairs, and The Red Crescent Society. However, comparing the data from AFAD (2014, 2017), the number of Syrians living in camps stayed consistently just about 200,000-250,000 from the next years on to present day, while the numbers of Syrians in Turkey increased to 3,020,654 as of May 29, 2017. Meaning that more than 90% of Syrian refugees live outside of the camps. The needs of those in the camps seem to be adequately addressed (Kaya and Kiraç, 2016), as the government provides basic services in food, water, shelter, sanitation, medical services, and education (AFAD, 2014).

The bigger question seems to be what about the ninety percent outside the camps. This question began to be raised in earnest around 2014 (Kirişçi 2014, Kaya & Kiraç 2016, Dinçer et al., 2013). Though there is some governmental assistance and a number of aid agencies providing assistance, Amnesty International reports that refugees that live outside government-run camps struggle to access their social and economic rights, such as education,

housing and healthcare (as cited in Kaya & Kiraç, 2016). In a study conducted for AFAD (2017), forty-three percent of those interviewed outside of the camps reported that they did not have adequate food for the next seven days, nor the money to supply that same amount of food. Additionally, fifty-five percent reported that they could not adequately meet their basic needs, such as fuel, furniture, household goods, and clothing items (AFAD, 2017). The Turkish government has established a number of different programs to address these issues, for example, in 2016, the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), a cash assistance program that reaches over 1.3 million vulnerable Syrians to help cover essential needs, was launched (UN Women & ASAM, 2018). The work done by the central government is supported by the local municipalities; they distribute food, clothes, and household goods (UN Women & ASAM, 2018). However, this responsibility plus keeping up with the general municipal service with large influxes of people, puts severe strains on the local municipalities. For example Kilis, a border city, as of 2017 hosted more than two and a half times more people than its original city planning of 80,000, leading to a disruption of municipal services (Eraydin, 2017).

According to (Eraydin, 2017) as refugees move into Turkey, outside of the camps, they have three categories of options in which to live. The first option is the border cities, such as Gaziantep, Hatay, or Kilis. These cities have the advantage of having a large Syrian population and Arabic is spoken in daily life (UN Women & ASAM, 2018). The second is western coastal cities, and the third is the big metropolitan cities such as Ankara and Istanbul (Eraydin, 2017, p. 8). Though refugees may be registered to a specific province, they may be drawn to these cities due to a variety of reasons such as economic opportunities, better infrastructure, or simply because a family member had gone there first. A major challenge to those registered to smaller provinces in Turkey is the lack of economic opportunities which may force them to the larger cities, leaving them more vulnerable to exploitation as they residing there illegally (Leghtas & Sullivan, 2016).

Regardless of which city refugees live, there are challenges that they consistently face in an urban setting. In their study with 1291 Syrian refugees living in seven cities across Turkey, UN Women and ASAM (2017) found that Syrian women consider access to housing, lack of Turkish speaking skills, and employment to be their biggest challenges. Low income affects Syrian women's access to housing, therefore leading to overcrowding and living in substandard housing; exacerbating their vulnerability to gender-based violence, and causing them to stay at home and not engage in society. In addition, refugees face many problems due to the language barrier, such as social integration issues, and difficulties benefiting from services such as healthcare and education (AFAD, 2014). Finding appropriate work, being paid a low wage, and being taken advantage of in the workplace is also commonly reported (AFAD, 2014). This is in line with the findings of Daniş (2005), who a decade earlier, studied undocumented transit migrants in Istanbul from a variety of countries surrounding Turkey. She found that refugees and transit migrants lived in impoverished and underprivileged areas in what she terms “the periphery of the center” of Istanbul (p. 17) and due to the difficulty integrating into the labor force, most often work in the informal economy, where exploitation is common.

### **2.3 Women Refugees**

Women make up a large portion of those that have been displaced by the Syrian conflict, and though the exact numbers are not known, the UN Population Fund in 2014 reported that about seventy-eight percent of those displaced are women and children (UNFPA, 2014, qt in Freeman et al, 2017). The mixing of women and children in this figure is problematic and criticized by many feminist authors (Enloe, 1993), though the inability to collect accurate differentiated data is due to the difficulty and complexity of the situations in Syria and the surrounding countries, as in many other refugee situations (Freedman et al., 2017). Additionally, this may be due to

the practice of the data being collected during a conversation with the presumed head of the household, most often a man, in the initial registration to surrounding countries (Women's Refugee Commission, 2014, qt in Freedman, 2017, p. 2). Without accurate data, this creates a situation where

...certain populations receive less attention and less access to programs, including the elderly, women, and girls living outside the camps, people with disabilities and sexual minorities (Women's Refugee Commission, 2014, qt in Freedman, 2017, p.1)

In general, research considering gender in forced migration and refugee studies was nonexistent until the mid-1980s. Indra (1999), outlining the history of the research of gender in forced migration, pointed to the 1985 Decade of Women Conference in Nairobi as an "early seminal event," in which the 1985 The Deputy High Commissioner for the UNHCR brought together more than 150 participants from forty countries. However it was not until a few years later that women in forced migration gained significant institutional recognition (Indra, 1999). She goes on to explain that in early research gender was then often regarded as "just another variable like age or occupation." (Indra, 1989, qtd as cited in Freedman et al., 2017 p. 11). Additionally problematic, as both Indra (1999) and Palmary et al (2010) argue, is the tendency was to equate gender with women, as the topic 'gender and migration' most often focuses on women's issues. This creates the illusion that gender is just a variable that qualifies a pre-existing genderless category of 'migrant' or 'refugee,' rather gender can be understood to structure a category such as male and female in the first place (Palmary et at., 2010).

In the last twenty years, gender has increasingly been a primary point of analysis, and a search of the literature brings forward many that have given attention to 'gender and migration' (Palmary et.al., 2010 see Martin, 2004; Moussa, 1991; Enarsson, 2017; Freeman et. al., 2017). These studies indicate that while the UNHCR, other international organizations, and NGOs have committed to gender mainstreaming as a policy commitment, in practice gender issues still need more attention (Freedman et al., 2017, p.

11). Hyndman points out that from the beginning of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* in 1998 until 2009 only forty-five articles out of the 497 published contained references to gender or women in the abstract or title (Hyndman, 2010).

Indra (1999) borrows from Virginia Woolf's phrase in explaining that:

...forced migration discourse may now increasingly allocate a 'room of their own' to the women and men that wanting to discuss women's issues, *but most of the house remains a genderless space* (p. 5) [italics Indra's].

She continues in the metaphor, in that while women and men occupy and use these society rooms differently:

...gender is deeply incorporated into the architectural plans, furnishings, and room assignments, as well as the values and practices relating to the spaces and places everywhere in the building" (p.6).

This focus on gender can illuminate issues and positions of both women and men that would otherwise remain invisible (Palmary, 2010). Therefore, engendering forced migration is the work of disaggregating concepts, methods, theories, policies, and practices by gender in order to gain a deeper understanding of appropriate social action and response (Indra, 1999). Carol Cohn (2013) stresses that:

...women's and men's vulnerabilities cannot be understood without a multi-layered gender analysis, an analysis than moves us away from the careless ontological assumption about women as a "naturally" vulnerable group to a clear-eyed assessment of the manifold ways in which gender as it intersects and inflects through other structures of power, plays out in embodied lives, and shapes their lives in different ways (p. 28).

It is for this reason that an in-depth knowledge of individuals, both women and men, and their context is vital to forced migration. By examining women and men's lived experience, gender as it effects daily life can be more clearly seen. The advantage of engendering forced migration discourse is that it allows for both the identification of the vulnerability and the emphasis of the agency of refugee women (Gozdziak, 2009). These vulnerabilities do not arise solely from biological differences between men

and women; they also are significantly affected by social factors (Gozdzaik, 2009).

During forced migration, women most often remain responsible for the domestic activities of the family. Though this remains constant, the context in which they must carry on these duties changes dramatically, and may include less access to resources. In contrast, during forced migration men often can not continue their outside employment, and struggle to find work. This can lead to stress in the household, tension, and increased violence (Martin, 2004). Refugee families' unstable economic position may also lead to the need for a change in traditional roles, as women may find it necessary to work outside the home as well, or for the need for older daughters to work or marry to relieve the financial burden. Additionally refugee women fleeing from war, may also find themselves the sole head of the household, with husbands killed or not present to help support their families (Martin, 2004).

Though the traditional role of women can be a source of vulnerability, it can also be a source of strength. In her study of Latin American women and men in exile, Freire (1995) suggests that in general, refugee women respond better to the crisis of forced migration by developing better coping mechanisms and adjustment strategies than the men in her study. She argues that it is due to the very fact that women in many societies have been socialized to be confined to the microcosms of family and households, that women do better (p. 20). She points out that in patriarchal societies, women from a young age have been geared toward providing for, caring for, and protecting their loved ones; even highly educated women work in positions subordinate to men and the work only “adds an additional, secondary role to their core identity as mothers and wives” (p. 21). She argues that in such societies, such as Latin America, even under normal circumstances,

...women are accustomed to having fewer opportunities than men, to assuming that they must be able to cope with whatever situation arises, to drawing something positive out of the most taxing experiences, and to being thankful for whatever assistance, if any, they receive from others (p. 21).

This 'built-in' survival mechanism, inherent in their positions in society, is the basis of women's heightened resilience in crisis.

The literature on refugee women in the Middle East has most often been from the perspective of gender-based violence, shifting gender roles during forced migration, and access to health care and humanitarian aid (Fakhry, 2016). In Ressler's introduction to a special issue of the journal *Al Raida* (2008), which explores gaps in the literature and focuses on case studies of refugee women in the Middle East, she argues that to understand and appreciate the complexities of women refugees will give a more nuanced understanding of the region:

Refugee women are central to understanding the political, social, and economic turmoil in the Arab region, and as such deserve much more attention than commonly given. First and foremost, refugee women deserve attention as a basic response to their humanity. They are in many ways the human face of war, poverty, and discrimination, but also of hope and resilience. They are often identified as exceptionally vulnerable, experiencing the traumas of war, displacement, and gender-based violence. As such, they deserve increased protection and service. But they also act as the family protector and provider, the memory holder, and the builder of family, identity, and society. For this, they deserve better understanding, opportunities, and our admiration (Ressler, 2008, p. 4).

Ressler argues not only do women often represent the “human face” of the vulnerabilities of refugees in the region, upon closer reflection, their resilience and agency also shines through.

As to Syrian refugee women, research has focused on issues in mental health and gender-based violence, child labor, and marriage (see Yasmine & Moughalian, 2016; Hassan et al., 2016; Freeman et al., 201; Sweileh, 2018). These vulnerabilities make women more susceptible to sexual and gender-based violence. Research suggests that one in five displaced women experience gender based violence, including sexual harassment, sexual assault and early marriage (Wringle et al., 2019). Research has shown that sexual and gender-based violence has increased substantially in Syria since the beginning of the conflict, and those that have fled continue to face



domestic violence, sexual violence, early marriage, harassment and isolation, exploitation, and survival sex (Hassan et al., 2016). According to Alsaba and Kpilashrami (2016), Syrian women experience a continuum of violence pre-migration and post migration.

In their report on Syrian refugees in Istanbul, Kaya and Kiraç (2016), both women and men responded that unemployment, poverty, and lack of language was their biggest concerns. However, women reported experiencing discrimination; religious intolerance; issues with access to services such as education and healthcare; and loneliness at higher rates than men. Follow-up focus groups brought up that it is the women of the family that negotiate more with the host society, in respect to relations with the neighborhood. Therefore, women are confronted with more problems while carrying out such tasks as household chores, buying groceries, navigating schooling for their children, seeking healthcare, and finding their way around the city (Kaya & Kiraç, 2016). Likewise, in a study with Syrian young people aged fifteen to twenty-five living in Izmir, most participants felt that young women were more exposed to risks of violence when outside their homes, with sexual, verbal, and street harassment being the most prevalent that resulted in “feelings of anxiety and trauma” (Wringle et al., 2019, p. 4). Though harassment came from both the host society and their own, women reported experiencing it for the first time post-migration. Additionally, Wringle et. al. (2019) found that a major concern for the young women in the study was the limited educational opportunities, and thus schooling was replaced with early marriage or work. These were necessary to relieve the family of the financial burdens they faced post-migration. Some in the study reflected that leaving school to work was preferable to getting married at a young age. However, working opened up the young women to increased risk of harassment. Therefore, due to fewer educational opportunities, young women that did not marry or work spent more time at home, as they were restricted by their families' fear of harassment. Wringle et al. (2019) argues that these young women are

...bounded through their triple placement within the lower echelons of the social hierarchies that were defined not only by their age, but also by their gender and their situation of displacement (p. 7).

Displacement has been found to affect women's identity, social relations, and sense of emotional and physical well-being (Anderson et al., 2013). As Wringle et al (2019) demonstrates, this leads to a compromised sense of security, and limited mobility. A UN Women and ASAM report found that among the 1,291 Syrian women and girls across seven cities:

...only 28% of women reported that they leave their houses daily, the others are largely confined to their homes, with a staggering 39.8 percent of women saying that they go out once a week or less. At the same time, Syrian women report that they are obliged to move frequently due to high rents and their dependence on landlords. This reduces women's ability to build relations with their neighbors and host community (p. 6-7).

Anderson et al. (2013) also found that forced migration disrupted Syrian women's social networks and caused a feeling of alienation with the Turkish host society that significantly impacted their emotional health and negatively affected their ability to adapt to their new surroundings. This was in agreement with a survey conducted by the Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD, 2017). In the survey, Syrians were asked, "How well do you think you have adapted to the social life in Turkey?" Women living in non-camp settings responded with 58% stating that they were not able to adapt or were hesitant to do so (p. 96). Additionally, when asked if they felt like they were a part of Turkish society, 59% of women answered negatively (p. 97). When asked to identify factors hindering their adaptation, women identified: financial incapability (52.8%), war psychology (45.2%), cultural differences (19.4%), and a difference in social life (19.4%) as their primary concerns (p. 95).

## **2.4 Acculturation, Adaptation, and the Resilience Process**

With the background of forced urban migration to Turkey and the specific vulnerabilities in regard to gender, arises the question: how do people respond to the extraordinary event that is forced migration? Particularly when this migration has been in some way involuntary, as in the context of war, civil unrest and threats to safety, how do people respond through this transition? Experiences and factors from refugees' lives prior to migration in their home countries, from the time of transition, and from post-migration, all contribute to, or threaten, the well-being of that individual or group. These experiences and factors influence the responses to migration and can create risks to the physical and mental health of refugees. They may disrupt processes of adaptation and impair the ability to access external and internal resources that may be used to becoming resilient (Altunay-Yilmaz, 2018).

Migration from one context and culture to another and its effect on acculturation and adaptation has been studied across a variety of fields and disciplines (Berry, 1997, Kuo 2014). Cohen in 1974 stated that “Culture is man's most important instrument to adaptation” and focused on adaptation as “man's attempts to construct his patterns of social relations and to free himself from the limitations of his habitats” (p. 1). Therefore, adaptation refers to the changes that take place in response to environmental demands, and in this context, those demands come in the form of a new host culture's difference of values, behaviors, and structures. Borrowing from the classic definition of acculturation from Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936):

...acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups (qtd as cited in Berry 1997, p. 7).

Therefore, acculturation theory is the framework to discern cultural transition, or adaptation, for migrants moving into another cultural context in terms of processes, elements, and consequences.

Scholars like Berry (1997), Kuo (2014), and Castro and Murry (2010) place the principles of acculturation theory, into the broader psychological theory of stress and coping. Forced migration is such a major life change, and therefore coping responses to the stress of cultural transition are natural and inevitable (Kuo, 2014). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) in their seminal work describes coping as,

...the constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person (p. 141).

Therefore, in this context, cultural adaptation is viewed as a process to manage and cope with the stressors and change brought on by being in extended contact with a new host culture (Berry, 1997) and a new societal milieu.

In his cornerstone acculturation theory Berry (1997) conceived of four outcomes that coping responses, or strategies, can produce. These strategies are engaged in by the incoming group, but the outcomes are dependent on both the incoming and host societies. At times, when the attitudes in the host society are accepting, and when the strategies are used to pursue assimilation or integration, these coping strategies result in what he calls a “fit” (p. 14). Assimilation is defined as the strategy in which the newcomers do not wish to maintain their cultural identity, take on the host culture, and interact continuously with the host society. When the acculturating individual or group seeks to maintain their cultural integrity while also interacting and participating in the host society as an integral part, this strategy is defined as integration. Integration requires a mutual desire for daily interaction and the maintaining of the in-coming culture of both the host society and the in-coming society. If this is not the case, separation/segregation and marginalization results. Separation is the strategy in which the individual or group withdraws from the host society and does not interact on a daily basis. Segregation is the result when separation is required or enforced, or integration strategies are blocked by the host society. Cases of segregation and exclusion, and/or combined with forced

assimilation, bring about marginalization of the individual or group. Berry's four outcomes demonstrates that acculturation is not a linear process, but is a dynamic two-sided process, being affected by both the attitudes and desires of the incoming group, and the structures, cultural systems, and desires of the majority host society. Therefore adaptation outcomes as to whether a group will integrate, assimilate, separate, or be marginalized are dependent on both the incoming group and the host community.

Acculturation is also multifaceted. Berry (1997) draws a distinction between psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Though they are interrelated, and are often combined into one term, psychosocial adaptation, for convenience, their separate characteristics must be noted. The first indicates a sense of personal and cultural identity and personal satisfaction in the new context. The second indicates a “a set of external psychological outcomes that link individuals to the new context, including their ability to deal with daily problems, particularly in the areas of family life, work and school” (Berry, 1997, p. 14). Berry (1997) also adds economic adaption to indicate the degree to which work is found and is effective in the new context. Montgomery (1996) also breaks down the process into different aspects, though he uses differing terms, and argues the importance of treating the psychological, family dynamics, and sociocultural-economic, as a multidimensional and multifaceted phenomenon.

It is notable that individuals may adopt different acculturation orientations in different areas of life (Yijala & Nyman, 2017). This may be due to individual factors, such as desire; for example, a person may actively work to achieve economic assimilation, while choosing to maintain social contact with only those of her same cultural background. Other factors may be structural, such as the situation in the individual's home country, or the trauma experienced pre-migration. In a study with 350 Vietnamese refugees resettled to Canada, Montgomery (1996) argued that though one variable may have significance in one aspect of adaptation, it may have less or no power of prediction in another. In two examples from his study, he found

that sex was a predictor to economic adaptation, but not for sociocultural adaptation; inversely, the extent of the trauma of the voyage from Vietnam was a significant predictor of sociocultural adaptation, but had no effect on economic adaptation.

Therefore, cultural adaptation is multifaceted and the process includes factors that are both environmental and individual. Due to this process of negotiation between individuals and the environment, Castro and Murray (2010) place the process of cultural adjustment within a resilience framework. Resilience in this regard, is defined as the outcome of adaptation resulting from migrants' "persistent efforts at coping with multiple and often chronic stressors encountered within the new environment" (Castro & Murray, 2010, p. 376). This framework conceives of acculturation as a "resilience trajectory," in which migrants move across over time according to an individual's ability to overcome and adapt positively to adversity. This is in line with a constructionist perspective in that it views resilience as an outcome of negotiations between individuals and their environment for resources needed to define themselves as healthy, despite adverse conditions (Lennette et al., 2009).

Lenette, Brough, and Cox (2012) point out that rather than just being connected to static individual traits, resilience is a dynamic process. It is in the space of

...everyday life-worlds of refugee women that a more complex set of possibilities become enacted, which gives meaning to the *processes* rather than the *traits* of resilience (p. 639) [italics theirs].

Their research with single refugee women in Australia found that it was in everyday routine and interactions with their environment that markers of resilience were observed. The everyday life-worlds were not background to display resilience, but that "everydayness" in itself was a potential aspect of resilience. This is in line with Pulvirenti and Mason's (2011) study of service providers working with refugees, which outlines the significance to understanding that resilience is a process rather than a trait. Also they reveal

that the construction of resilience was linked to the concept of “moving on” from adversity rather than the idea of “bouncing back” from it.

#### **2.4.1 Factors in Adaptation**

Characteristics that impede and facilitate this resilience trajectory can arise from three phases: pre-migration, trans-migration, and post migration. Yakushko et al. (2008) summarized stressors and facilitators experienced pre-migration and post migration. Pre-migration factors that were associated with positive outcomes: voluntary migration, optimistic expectations, language skills, and availability of support. Stressors include experience with violence, conflict and trauma, and fear associated with the passage or flight. Also those of minority status within their home country may have experienced discrimination pre-migration. The literature that focuses on the period of trans-migration stressors often focuses on the period of stay in a refugee camp, which reports a lack of basic necessities, physical and health concerns, disrupted educational and career trajectories, and uncertainty as to their future as being major stressors (Kiteki, 2016, Schweitzer et al., 2007).

Post-migration stressors resulted in the stress of relocation, acculturation stress, and a possible prejudicial host environment. Additionally, post-migration refugees encountered high levels of housing problems, unemployment, language problems, challenges navigating social services and legal systems, and financial challenges (Kiteki, 2016). Schweitzer et. al. (2007) in their study of coping strategies in resettled Sudanese refugees found that social support and personal qualities assisted in coping across the periods of pre-migration, transit, and post-migration. They found that family and close friends provided emotional support, backing from their ethnic community, and faith in God and support from the religious community was a large factor in coping. They also found that personal attitudes and beliefs, such as the refugee's attitudes in responding to difficulties allowed them to cope. Below are a few of the most reoccurring factors in the literature that

aid or inhibit the adaptation process.

#### **2.4.1.1 Social Support**

A number of qualitative studies emphasized the salient factor of support from family, friends, and community in refugee studies. This support could be tangible such as financial aid and resources, or intangible, such as emotional and informational support. These act as a buffer against experienced adversity and enhance resiliency. The importance of family and community as a source of strength and encouragement is seen in Borwick and Schweitzer et al. (2013) in their study of Burmese refugees through the experience of sharing stories and struggles. They quoted one of their female participants who stated that community was a “place where you can charge your emotion and strength” (p. 10). McMichael and Manderson (2004) found that refugee women that utilized social networks tended to experience less sadness, depression, distrust and anxiety. However, they found that in the reverse, the loss of social networks increased these negative feelings. They inferred that this could be mitigated by the connection and establishment of alternative networks, like church groups, distant family overseas, or associations. This can also include ethnic connections. In their study with 361 Syrians living in Turkey, Smeeks et al. (2017) reported that ethnic group belonging can serve as a protective factor in mental health. In reverse, those refugees that did not have like-ethnic community was found to suffer four times higher rates of depression than those that did (Ager & Strang, 2008).

Sossou, Craig, Ogren & Schnak (2008) found that the importance of family is a substantial resilience factor. In their study, the women explained that they received strength from their families, and also “stay strong” for their children: “ I try to stay strong for them... I have to do whatever is in my power for them to survive here” (p. 378). Family assists with mobilizing refugees psychological resources, and “provides a reference group through



with the new environment can be interpreted” (Yijala & Nyman, 2017, p. 31). Additionally, Anderson et al. (2013) found that consistent engagement in rewarding social interactions, whether that was family, friends, or with the host community, allowed Syrian women to access community coping mechanisms, as well as the ability to participate in enjoyable pastimes outside the home (p. 24-25), which built resilience and feelings of personal agency.

#### **2.4.1.2 Personal Qualities**

Multiple studies have found that a belief in one's inner strength, a positive attitude, and having hope for the future helped refugees cope (Khawaja et al., 2008; Goodman, 2004; Luster et al., 2009; Borwick et al., 2013). Castro and Murray (2010) explain that certain cognitive and behavioral responses such as having a life purpose, being goal driven, developing a sense of mastery, and capacity for self-regulation and decision making have been associated with resilience, because these skills can be utilized to attain self-directed, desirable outcomes.

Luster et al. (2009) in their grounded theory study with the Sudanese 'Lost Boys' found that the youths developed emotion focused and problem focused strategies. These strategies included avoiding and distracting from emotions, or focusing on obtaining information from home, finding meaning in religion, and building relationships with peers. These youths fit the description of resilience in “rising above traumatic and ambiguous loss by not letting them immobilize and living well and living well despite them” (Boss, 2006 p. 27 qtd. as cited in Luster et al. 2009, p. 209).

Refugees often employ a cognitive strategy of re-framing the situation as they progress through the acculturation process (Khawaja et al., 2008). By interpreting their situations differently, they could normalize or minimize the situation they faced. They also found that refugees in the transition

period used the additional methods of hope for the future and comparison to their previous situation in Sudan. Similarly, Hutchington and Dorsett (2012) found that refugees preferred to talk about the future, or the present, and if the past was discussed it was usually in terms of the strength they had gained. Goodman found that framing experiences in terms of God helped Sudanese youths cope. Khawaja et al. 2008 also found that throughout migration into resettlement hardships, refugees relied strongly on their beliefs. The belief in a higher power, whether from God, ancestors, or something deep inside, was an important strength to refugees (Sossou et al., 2008; Luster et al., 2009; Schweitzer et al., 2007). However, McBrien (2005) stated that those in the process of adapting to a new culture, experience anxiety, depression, and stress and such things as one's sense of identity, values, and beliefs may change.

#### **2.4.1.3 Education**

Education post migration was often seen as a tool for fostering hope for the future (Borwick et al., 2013). In Phillimore and Goodson's (2008) survey of refugees in the U.K., the respondents placed education as the third most important factor in facilitating integration behind housing and employment. "However, if the importance of learning English is included, then education becomes the most important factor to aid settlement" (Phillimore & Goodson, 2008, p. 317). In adult refugees, occupational and economic adjustment is essential to acculturation to the new county, as is educational adjustment for children (McBrien, 2005). Education obtained prior to migration can serve as a vital resource for refugees and can usually enhance employment and financial opportunities. However, surprisingly, it has been noted that among refugees with higher levels of education the loss of the social status that they enjoyed before migration led to higher levels of psychological distress post-migration (Castro & Murray, 2010). Post-migration, one of the most important conditions of continuing education was

mastery of the language of instruction (Esser, 2006).

#### **2.4.1.4 Language**

In migration, language is a resource by which other resources can be obtained (Esser, 2006). Not knowing the language is a major barrier to adaptation and forming new social networks, and is a barrier to education and employment (Bloch, 2002; Castro & Murray, 2010; Khawaja et al., 2008). Language difficulties also inhibited participation in daily life and daily interactions in the host society (Schweitzer et al., 2007). Additionally, not knowing the language made it difficult for refugees to access healthcare and other health or welfare services (Ager & Strang, 2008).

Learning language, on the other hand, reduced isolation (Hutchingson & Dorsett, 2012, McBrien 2005). In her study with refugee students, McBrien (2005) found that language learning was a major factor, with students who had learned the language scoring higher on self-esteem, and lower on depression indicators, and those that struggled with language acquisition reported feeling more isolated and depressed. Bloch (2002) reported a high correlation between language proficiency and employment among refugees in Britain, with 51% of English fluent refugees working, whereas, only 11% of those that could not speak English were working at the time of the survey. In addition, experiences of trauma and availability of social support affected language acquisition and psychosocial adjustment. (McBrien, 2005).

#### **2.4.1.5 Discrimination**

One of the major hindrances to adaptation is perceived discrimination, which also increased psychological distress (Liebkind et al., 2004, Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Refugee women especially face multiple layers of discrimination, due to the social stigma of being refugees, and also social,

cultural, and legal gender-based discrimination (Ressler, 2008). Perceived ethnic discrimination and lack of identity were associated with increased social isolation and poorer physical and mental health in studies conducted among Syrians in Turkey (Celebi et al., 2017). Language can also be a symbol that activates stereotypes and ideas that causes barriers to social interactions. This might be seen in assumptions made due to an accent about issues such as refugees' ability to perform in school, or in the workplace (Esser, 2006).

In their study of Iranian refugees in the Netherlands, Lindert et al. (2008) found that perceived discrimination was an important variable in the ability of the refugees to acculturate. Though expecting to find a correlation between perceived discrimination and negative outcomes, they were actually surprised as to the high degree that perceived discrimination played in the negative psychological functioning of Iranian refugees. They also found that Iranian women refugees reported less discrimination in relation to Iran, due to a more egalitarian environment, and therefore reported more positive outcomes. Though perceived discrimination has been shown to be detrimental to self-esteem in refugees (Gile & Vega, 1996), it does not necessarily hinder them in finding opportunities to experience being in control of their life circumstances (Liebkind et al., 2004).

#### **2.4.2 Economic Adaptation**

Consistently, employment has been shown to be an important factor in influencing many important issues such as planning for the future, economic independence, restoring self-esteem and self-reliance (Ager and Stang, 2008, Bloch, 2002). Ager and Strang (2008) argue that employment is, in fact, the single most important factor for refugees to integrate into society. In their study asking what were the most important factors to making refugees feel at home, Phillimore and Goodson (2008), found that just behind having a place to live, refugees placed the importance of having a

job.

The factors mentioned above are tilted at focusing more on the psychosocial dimension of acculturation and resilience. However, the interrelation between these factors and economic adaptation can be seen throughout, as they significantly influence each other. Research indicates that refugees who are employed adjust more easily into the host society (Phillimore & Goodson, 2005). The link is made stronger by Montgomery (1996), who combines it in the term sociocultural-economic adaptation. Many studies have demonstrated the links between refugees' employment and economic situation and their psychosocial situation (Beiser et al., 1993; Schwarzer et al., 1994; Vrečer, 2010). If refugees are employed, they face a better chance of integrating into host societies in general (Vrečer, 2010). Employment also enables opportunities to interact with the host society and learn language (Phillimore & Goodson, 2005). So although only one of the dimensions of adaptation, employment is also a factor in resilience and psychosocial acculturation.

In their 1994 study of East German refugees, Schwarzer, Jerusalem, and Hahn, reported a correlation between unemployment and a decrease in physical and psychological well-being. However, they found that this could be mediated somewhat by social support (1994). However Potocky-Tripodi (2000) argued that receiving social benefit is not sufficient for economic integration. In a long term study of Bosnian forced migrants in Slovenia, Vrečer (2010) found that under the Temporary Protection Act, Bosnian asylum seekers were not allowed to work. Those living in refugee centers received only food, and those living in private accommodations received minimal monetary support that was not enough to meet basic needs. This caused considerable suffering over the decade that they were unable to work. Many were forced to work illegally and reported exploitation and harsh conditions, which lead to health and psychological issues in the long term (Vrečer, 2010). In contrast, in Australia, Bosnian refugees were allowed to work, and in their study Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003),

reported that integration into the workforce was related to an individual's reconstruction of identity. They found that economic integration was vital to social integration (Colic-Peisker & Walker, 2003).

### **2.4.3 Adaptation in Limbo**

Comparatively very little study has been done on acculturation factors in the transition phase of the forced migration process. However, as is demonstrated in Vrečer's 2010 work on Bosnian refugees under the Temporary Protection act, in contrast to those in Australia, living in limbo can greatly affect the ability to adapt and acculturate. In their study of Iraqi asylum seekers awaiting their asylum decisions in Finland, Yijala and Nyman (2017), found that the length of time that refugees waited, and their experiences during that time in the in-between stages of migration directly influenced the development of acculturation attitudes. They argued that in order to predict long-term adaptation outcomes of refugees, more attention should be paid to the factors that influence short-term adaptation outcomes, such as the relation to experiences from the past and from the limbo-stage (p. 34). They hypothesized that factors that are found to be salient in short-term adaptation will have importance in the long-term. For example, despite Iraqi asylum seekers reporting a strong motivation to work, economic adaptation proved to be difficult due to such structural issues as inability to work without the proper credentials, and high-barrier entrepreneurship, as well as language barriers, and employers' negative attitudes. This was compounded by the unresolved stress of the past and the challenges of the new stress of waiting and acculturation. They concluded their study with the warning of leaving refugees in limbo:

If the important stage in the beginning of the acculturation process is seen as an opportunity to create new ways of co-existing, the newcomers could enrich the Finnish culture. On the other hand, if the asylum seekers about to gain residence status are not given the opportunity to integrate into the society, but are being discriminated against, there is danger of people wanting to isolate and only mingle

with their own cultural group, or get alienated from society altogether, and worse, even pose a threat to create radicalistic [sic] behavior (pp.18-19).

Therefore preventing reaggregation socially, economically, and legally have long term effects not only to the incoming group, but to the host community as well.

Though refugees in transition are often blocked from integrating strategies by the host structures, it would be incorrect to assume that refugees in limbo are stuck in some sort of suspended animation, totally without agency and opportunities. Though they may be inhibited by their liminality, refugees still engage in resilience strategies. This may lead to what Daniş (2005) calls “segmented incorporation” or “integration from the periphery.” In her study of differing undocumented migrant groups in transit through Istanbul, she found that through the support of social networks, they were able to integrate to some degree in differing aspects of sociocultural and economic acculturation. Significantly, it was the support and the capacity of their community, whether that was ethnic, national, or religious, that was the differential to the migrants. For example, it was through their ties to the Turkisk Syriac community in Istanbul that Iraqi Assyro-Christians were able to find housing and adapt economically. Likewise, Iraqi and Afghan Turkmen linked into previously migrated Turkmen that have built a social space with representation in such elements as Turkmen associations. However,

these mechanisms that help migrants incorporation or survival are always delicate and precarious... and contingent on policies as well as on the official treatment of foreigners in the country. Thus, such an incorporation, even though it is highly important for the survival of undocumented migrants, is condemned to stay “in limbo,” unless an improvement in the migrants’ status does not occur (Daniş, 2005, p. 127).

Therefore, though refugees may engage in “segmented” integration, if their legal status continues to be in limbo, then their adaptation will also stay in limbo. This means that the coping and resilience strategies' outcomes are

tied to the structures of the receiving society, and are therefore tenuous.

## **2.5 Discussion**

The UNHCR reported that in 2018, out of the global population, one in 110 is living in forced displacement. Many of these are living in protracted refugee situations, in a “long-lasting and intractable state of limbo” (UNHCR, 2006, p. 106). This includes Iraqis and Syrians in Turkey. Though these populations may be safe from war while in displacement, “their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile” (UNHCR 2006, p. 106). The focus of this grounded theory study has been to examine how refugee women rebuild life while living in transition, using refugee women living in Ankara, Turkey as a case study. The methodology used and the profiles of these women will be explained in Chapter Three.

Integration, the often talked about solution to refugee situations by the United Nations and by the literature, is a positive outcome of a complex process of adaptation. This requires both the incoming and host society's desire and participation. If these are not in alignment, then separation and marginalization can result. Refugees in Turkey, due to a geographical constriction in the Conventional definition, are not considered conventional refugees and are termed, “guests,” and therefore their legal protection is “temporary.” Others' stay in Turkey is conditional as they wait their asylum case, or they may have no legal protection altogether. Therefore, refugees are in legal limbo. This limbo extends, as is stated in the UN quote above, to the economic, social, and psychological realm. This situation will be framed within the concept of liminality, how this concept emerged from the data, and how it is demonstrated in the lives of the women in this study will be addressed in Chapter Four.

This leads to the question of how the women of this study cope in this liminality; in what resilience strategies do they engage to adapt; and what



are the consequences of those strategies? Furthermore, what factors help or hinder these strategies? These will be addressed in Chapter Five. In summary, the findings of this study demonstrate a glimpse into the resilience and adaptation pattern of women in Ankara, with the hope that it may add to the understanding of the experiences of those living in liminality in forced displacement around the globe.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE METHODOLOGY JOURNEY

Once we had a country and we thought it  
fair, Look in the atlas and you'll find it there:  
We cannot go there now, my dear, we cannot  
go there now. W.H. Auden, 1939

#### **3.1 Grounded Theory Definition and Considerations**

Grounded theory method provides a set of principles in which to conduct research to generate theory that is 'grounded' in that data, in that the researcher's constant comparative analysis of data produces theory. It was developed by Glaser and Strauss, with the aim of creating a method and framework to generate theory that had 'fit,' 'work,' and 'relevance' and could be easily modified to a range of disciplines (1967). It has since progressed into three main branches. Strauss and Corbin continued to add structure to the process (1990) while Charmaz (2000) emphasized that constructivist grounded theory was unique and interpretive. While continuing with the original method of constant comparison, Strauss and Corbin also suggest theoretical comparison, asking questions of the data, and a more systematic approach (Creswell, 1994). I conducted this research with both Strauss and Corbin's structure, and with Charmaz's constructivist point of view in mind.

Grounded Theory moves from general questions that ask what are the broader social processes at work, to how these social processes emerge, to how the participants actions work to construct them (Charmaz, 2000, p. 29). It is important to distinguish as Glaser states that in grounded theory,

behavior and actions are patterns that a person engages in, but these are not the people themselves, and therefore people are not being categorized, behavior is (Glaser, 2003, p. 53).

The importance of objectivity in the research is fundamental. However, perceptions of reality are a process and can be subjective and partial. Therefore, research is the investigation into the process of how that reality is interpreted by individuals, both the researcher and the subjects (Creswell, 1994). Therefore, as a part of that grounded theory investigation, data is collected for the purpose of interpretation. Data is both the language of the subjects and the memos and notes recorded by the researcher during the interview. The researcher then uses close examination through constant comparison to build up meaning from the data, therefore the meaning and the categories that emerge are grounded in the data. This assumes the value of the words used by the interviewee, the context, and their point of view. Even the interview's direction is molded by the response of the interviewee.

In processing the data, the researcher is committed to doing so without bias and seeing the data as valuable as data, regardless of the internal views, biases, and actions found there. The understanding is that researchers, as participant observers, do not impose their own biases nor force the data into preconceived categories. Though every effort was made to protect the Grounded theory method process to allow for the theory to develop and be analyzed and that the data matched the interviews, it must be acknowledged the potential for preexisting factors may have influenced the gathering and interpretation of the data. First, there may have been cultural misunderstandings or misinterpretations as I approached the women, their interviews, and the data collected. Likewise, the women themselves may have misgivings or misunderstandings as they approached their interview with me. Regardless, they courageously chose to trust me with their stories, a trust that I have done my best to honor.

## 3.2 The Process

### 3.2.1 Background and Initial Research Question

Grounded theory method relies on the development of theory from the data, and therefore the end product is not entirely clear from the beginning of the project. In choosing my research method, what drew me to the advantages of qualitative studies in general, and grounded theory studies specifically, is their flexibility, and

...we can add new pieces to the research puzzle or conjure entire new puzzles while we gather data ... and we can follow leads as they emerge (Charmaz, 2000, p. 14).

The emphasis on comparative method leads the researcher to interact with, and compare, the data from the beginning of the research. This can result in greater involvement in the research question. The rigid line between data collection and analysis is removed, while still remaining rigorous in “going back to the data, while going forward to the analysis” (p. 23). In addition, grounded theory gives priority to studying the phenomenon or process, rather than just a description of the setting or situation. Charmaz (2006) likens grounded theory to a journey, in that good methodology leads to a final destination, or product, in which the process is largely tied. I found this to be the case, that the methodology journey and the final product was inextricably linked. It is my hope that in this chapter as I outline my methodology journey, it will more clearly illuminate the next chapters which outline what was discovered along the way.

During my time in Ankara, I connected to a group that runs an informal aid center that provides basic food stuffs, aid and basic services to refugees from the countries of Iraq and Syria. It is registered as a Turkish *Dernek* (association) however, due to the sensitive political situation that Turkey has gone through in recent years, and how this has affected and constrained the work of NGOs that work with refugees (Alet, 2017), they shall remain anonymous. The group of volunteers was a mix of Turks and foreigners,

both from the West, as I am, and from different Middle Eastern countries, many of whom are refugees themselves. Their friendships and insight was invaluable as I began to conduct my research. I initially conducted an informal pilot interview with two of the volunteers that worked at the center. It was from these initial interviews that I was able to narrow my subject down to women refugees in Ankara and how they began to rebuild their lives.

### **3.2.2 Data Collection**

An important component of grounded theory is theoretical sampling. The sampling done is intentional and focused on generating theory, and the choice of how, and with whom the data will be gathered, is to insure that that data will be useful to inform the process. Charmaz (2007) explains that though theoretical sampling is often thought of as a procedure, it is more of a strategy of how to look for data that will fit the study, how to conduct the gathering of data, and the specific method will vary accordingly.

With this initial research question, of “how do refugee women rebuild their lives and cope in forced displacement?” I began to collect data through open-ended in-depth interviews<sup>1</sup>. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. A semi-structured format was used, to allow for flexibility and the ability to expand on topics as the participant brought them up. The initial interviews roughly followed the list of questions prepared beforehand in the pilot interview (see Appendix B). The interviews were either conducted in English or in Arabic, with a translator. The translator differed, but was always known by me, had signed a confidentiality form, and was a volunteer.

Though an interview is essentially a directed conversation, the interviewer is asking the participant to reflect and describe events or experiences in ways

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<sup>1</sup> A copy of the METU Ethicis Committee Approval # 129-ODTU-2019 can be found in Appendix A

that do not often occur in normal life (Charmaz, 2000). This requires building of trust, and “trust is especially problematic for the forced migrant given the loss of familiar and social cues” (Oliver-Smith, 1991, p. 2). With this in mind, there were a few strategies that I employed to help build trust. One strategy was that the participants were found through contacts and acquaintances, similar to a snowball sample technique, in which participants are asked to recommend other possible participants. My hope was that through a relationship connection, the participant would feel more comfortable than if I were just a random researcher unknown to their community. I initially used my two contacts at the refugee center to suggest interview participants and would then have them explain the research and ask the proposed participants for their consent. My logic in this was that the prospective participants would potentially be more comfortable saying “no” to a third party than to me directly.

The second strategy in the protection and honoring of trust was to identify a place to meet that was comfortable and convenient for the participant. In four cases that was in the participant's home in one of the neighborhood on Ankara's periphery primarily populated by Syrians. In these cases, I always went with the translator and with the person that was the point of contact. The other interviews took place at the refugee center at a time that was convenient for the participant.

The third was obtaining informed consent. The principle of informed consent at its most basic is the understanding that there is truthful and respectful exchanges between the researcher and those being studied (Ethical Guidelines, 2007) . However, a truly informed consent is a process, one that is renegotiated over time, and it is suggested that the researcher return to it periodically (Ethical Guidelines, 2007). At the beginning of the interview, I would outline my research and purpose, affirm confidentiality, and note that my only affiliation was the university. I deemed this especially important for the participants to understand when the interviews were done at the refugee center. Though I had a relationship with the center and some

of those that volunteered there, this research was not connected to them, nor would the information be given to them. The participant was then handed a consent form while the interpreter read it out, being mindful that the participant may or may not have a high level of literacy (Block et al., 2012). Often the presence of my audio recording device caused initial concern for some of the participants. In the understanding of the renegotiation of consent, the translator and I explained verbally that the data would be kept totally confidential and removed from their names and identities, and that this data would only be used in relation to my university studies and not a government study; however, if they preferred, we could continue without it. All the participants then agreed to the use of the recording device. Their verbal agreement to the recording device also confirmed in the consent form, which we, the translator and I, also signed in front of the participant, committing to confidentiality. Interviews then generally lasted around forty minutes, depending on the participant and their schedule and comfort level. At times the interviews were quite informal, with a few people in the room, such as a mother in one case, or a husband in another, in which case the participant would sometimes ask the other(s) for clarification or would include them in the story; whereas a few interviews were more classic, with just myself, the interpreter, and the participant speaking together. I followed up with two of the participants in follow up interviews, and with one for just a few clarifying questions.

### **3.2.3 Data Collection Limitations**

The first limitation had to do with the gathering of the participants. Recruitment with vulnerable populations present limitations, such as the issue of trust and access to the populations. Therefore, I relied on a few gatekeepers to the population. Though I attempted to sample across age and socioeconomic lines, the initial contacts, those that volunteered at a refugee center started off my snowball, as it were. As a result those who were

reached out to may not be a true representation of the refugee population in Ankara as a whole.

Additionally, only two of the interviews were done in English with fluent English speakers. The rest of the interviews were done through translation, which could inhibit spontaneity in the interview. In the two English interviews, I noticed that direct contact caused far more trust to be built, the ability to more easily observe non-verbal communication and to make mental notes of topics to follow up on for further questions. Translation also puts a type of filter on the words of the participants, as meaning and nuance may have gotten lost in translation. However, the translators did their best to accurately convey the message of each answer, and I felt that the core, and much of the nuance, was conveyed.

Another limitation was my cultural background. Although I trust my sense of empathy and have lived in Turkey for a number of years, I would never truly understand what the women who graciously allowed themselves to be a part of this study have gone through.

### **3.3 Grounded Theory Steps**

In the systematic design approach advocated by Stauss and Corbin (1998) process of data analysis is threefold, with steps of open, axial, and selective coding. Along with constant comparison, these steps lead to a development of a logic paradigm or model of the theory generated (Creswell, 2012). Open coding is the initial breaking down the data into parts, contrasting and comparing the pieces, and asking questions of the data. At this stage the researcher notes the words and phrases from the data to develop concepts that lead to new insights. The goal of the researcher is to name concepts and to group those concepts into categories according to their properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, p. 103). The researcher then moves on to axial coding which is coding within the categories, relating to the who,



what, where, and why of the category (Strauss, 1998). It is in this phase that the core category, the main theme of the research is identified. Once the core category is identified, the researcher turns to selective coding, concentrating on the core category as more data is collected.

In the next section I will explain the Grounded Theory process and the coding steps. Though explained as sequential stages, I often engaged in axial coding and open coding concurrently. Even at the stage of selective coding, I was returning to the earlier stages to answer the main question of my research.

### **3.3.1 Open Coding**

Open coding is the initial step of taking concrete statements and interpreting them analytically. This involves breaking the data down into segments and naming those segments as codes. It is in this naming that Charmaz (2006) argues that the researcher is constructing the codes; though they may fit the empirical data, the codes are named and chosen by the researcher. Likewise, at times the code names are chosen by the interviewee themselves, or through the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. When the researcher chooses to name the codes from the direct words of the participant, it is an *in vivo* code. In our interview, Leyla (a pseudonym), explained the hardship of coming to Turkey, sleeping in the bus station for days, and then being tricked by another Syrian. She said “This was our first problem in Turkey! It was like the 'hoşgeldin problem.’” Her choice to label their problem as such, mixing English with the Turkish word for 'welcome' spoke of the mixed world to which she had come, and it had not welcomed her. This became an *in vivo* code.

Therefore, coding is an inherently interpretive process, with initial codes that are provisional as they are compared and contrasted against each other. In this, the researcher “remains open to other analytical possibilities and

creates codes that best fit the data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46) and is careful to “study the emerging data (Glaser 1978, qtd. as cited in Charmaz, 2006, p. 47). Through this comparison, codes are linked and categorized.

In the process of open coding, I first transcribed each recorded interview. I then engaged in open coding by coding each interview line-by-line. As per Charmaz's suggestion in coding, I attempted to use gerunds as much as possible, therefore emphasizing the processes and actions at work. An example of this open coding process can be seen in Table 1 which demonstrates the open coding process with a piece of the interview with Manolya (a pseudonym), a seventeen year old Iraqi girl.

**Table 1**

*Open Coding Example*

<p>Q: You gave me an example of how it affected your parents, can you give me an example of how coming here affected you?</p>	
<p>It made me depressed, I used to stay in my room the whole time, I didn't talk to my siblings, and I didn't want to do anything. I used to look at little girls with their fathers and I used to feel really bad, especially because I didn't go to school, so I felt really depressed.</p>	<p>coming causing depressed          staying in her room          withdrawing from family          no desire to be active          seeing children w/ fathers          intensifying neg. feeling          not able to go to school          emphasizing depressed feeling</p>

It was at this point in the process that I began to compare 'bits with bits' and to focus on trends and patterns emerging in the data. This is where codes are categorized and sub categorized. Categories that emerged from the above example was “depression,” “withdrawal,” and “ability to attend school.”

### **3.3.2 Axial Coding**

In the second phase, axial coding, the researcher selects one of the categories and positions it as the core phenomenon, or axis of the process (Creswell, 2012). Then the researcher explores how the other categories are related to it. In this way, the large amount of data, codes, and categories can be synthesized and organized. Strauss and Corbin apply an organization scheme to these relationships that portrays the links between causal conditions, strategies, contextual and intervening conditions, and consequences (Creswell, 2012). This provides the frame of the research.

As the interviews progressed, and I compared my data, I found the themes of depression and withdrawal emerging regularly. As I centered these categories and connected others to them, the core phenomenon of “being stuck in an inside space” emerged. Strauss and Corbin (1998) encourage the use of diagrams and models to “help to raise the researcher’s thinking out of the level of facts...to integrate their ideas” (p. 125). With this, I formulated my conceptualization of a layered liminality, which will be explained in chapter three.

### **3.3.3 Selective Coding**

In the third phase of selective coding, categories can be filled in by going back to the data, looking at memos, or theoretically sampling. An important component of grounded theory is theoretical sampling. The sampling done is intentional and focused on generating theory; and the choice of how, and with whom the data will be gathered is to insure that that data will be useful to inform the process. For example, I theoretically sampled women that were married to determine if the categories that I had developed from mainly younger unmarried women would hold up. Some of the data that I gathered in those interviews supported and filled out my categories but also

caused me to create new categories. For example, the strategy of reframing their situation into terms of duty and responsibility emerged. As compared with other interviews, it fit; however, I would not have recognized it without the interviews with the women who were mothers.

Selective coding is also the phase in which the frame of the interrelationships of the categories is analyzed and the theory is written. Creswell (2012) explains that at its fundamental level, theory provides the abstract explanation of the process or phenomenon being studied. Again the framework of causal conditions, strategies, contextual and intervening conditions, and consequences, is used to clarify the process, and the strategies used by the participants. This is the place in the analytic journey where the 'story-line' that interconnects the memos written, the theoretical ideas, and the categories. It is the place of integrating and refining the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 143).

In the next chapter, I share my findings of the core phenomenon based on the concept of liminality. It is upon this core phenomenon that the emergent theory is built which will be explained in the fourth chapter. The theory is explained applying a format in which results are discussed using terms to indicate the frequency agreement in the data per each participant (Richie et al., 1997). The phrases “the majority of,” “many,” and “most” were used to discuss concepts expressed by at least seven of the eleven participants. The words “some,” “several,” and “a number of” show that four to six of the participants supported the concept. “A few” was used to indicate concepts expressed by three or fewer participants.

### **3.4 Participant Profiles**

Meeting with and interviewing these women, I recognized the courage that these women carried. They owed me nothing, but courageously and generously gave me their stories. We were in such different places in life, I

am living in Turkey by choice, and can return to the U.S at anytime that I wish, whereas, they are stuck living in transition in Turkey, either waiting to return, or to resettle. They are unsure of the future, and presently living in limbo in many areas of their lives. They told their stories: their hopes, their frustration, and their struggles, but under-girding it all was their resilience. In Mackenzie, McDowell, and Pittaway's (2007) article on research with refugees, they aptly noted that:

It is wrong to think that the experience of being displaced, living under external pressure, lacking day-to-day security, experiencing uncertainty about the future, concern about family and friends, poor health, lack of reliable information about home, all of which are common to the refugee experience, undermine autonomous agency altogether. [Refugees] may nevertheless be able to express their autonomous agency in some aspects of their lives.

A friend had volunteered to take me to the home of a Syrian woman that she knew who had agreed to meet with us. As we entered what looked like a condemned two-story apartment building at the very outside edge of Ankara, we were met by two hosts. One was an old widow who was sharing the flat with “Nazife,” our second host, the woman that I had come to meet. Nazife (a pseudonym), once realizing that there were no men with us, took off her black over-coat and headscarf, revealing a shirt underneath that read “Make Love Not War.” Later, when I referenced her shirt, she said that she could not read English, and did not know what it said. This felt like a symbol to me of the resilience and resistance of the women themselves, sometimes hidden, sometimes they did not recognize it themselves, but it was there nevertheless.

Below is a brief profile of each of the eleven women interviewed. Their names are pseudonyms to protect their identity. I was privileged to interview women across a broad range in regard to their age, ethnicity, and their home country. The mean age is twenty three, which was my initial target demographic. However, as I began to theoretically sample, I had the

opportunity to have women both older and younger agree to be interviewed. Likewise, though my initial research question was regarding single women, I found the need to add married women, both to add depth and dimension to the data and out of necessity. Also coincidentally, the desires of the women: whether to stay in Turkey, return to their home country, or to be resettled as a refugee under the UNHCR refugee regime were also evenly diverse. A summary of these descriptions can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Participant Profiles*

Name	Age	Origin	Marital status	Religion	Ethnicity	Desire for future
Meryem	23	Iraq	single	Christian	Armenian	resettlement
Leyla	23	Syria	single	Muslim	Arab	resettlement
Ayshe	24	Iraq	single	Muslim	Turkmen	return
Nazife	42	Syria	married	Muslim	Arab	resettlement
Melek	15	Syria	single	Muslim	Arab	unsure
Manolya	17	Iraq	single	Muslim	Arab	unsure
Sabah	21	Iraq	single	Muslim	Turkmen	return
Ruhan	19	Syria	married	Muslim	Arab	return
Fatma	50	Iraq	widowed	Muslim	Turkmen	unsure/stay
Nisa	16	Iraq	single	Muslim	Arab	stay
Safiye	29	Syria	married	Christian	Arab	resettlement

**Meryem** is a twenty-three year old Armenian Iraqi originally from Baghdad. She had spent the last fourteen years prior to coming to Turkey in Erbil, where she completed high school and had obtained certificates in computers and English. She came with her parents, her two older brothers and a sister-in-law. Their intention in coming was to directly register with the United Nations to be resettled hopefully, in Canada, where they had extended family living. They seemed to be middle to upper class with her

father having bought a restaurant in Ankara. She had also had some jobs working in Ankara, mostly doing translation work, due to her English and a fair knowledge of Turkish. She mentioned finding a church with Arabic speakers in Ankara as a turning point and a life-line for her. In our follow-up interview, she had married a Christian-background Turkish citizen, whom she had met through connections at her church. She had then changed her legal status to a resident of Turkey.

**Leyla** is an unmarried twenty-one year old Syrian from Aleppo, where she was a student. Both of her parents worked, her father in computers. Three years before coming to Turkey they had fled Aleppo and resettled in Latakia, where she had finished high school and had completed one year of university in English literature. Her family has been in Turkey for approximately three years and had come to Ankara to apply for asylum at United Nations, At the time of our interview they were waiting for resettlement to Canada, where they had relatives. She had recently gotten a job at an aid center translating from English to Arabic. This job seemed to be more for experience and to pass the time than a necessity for her family. After our interview she learned that her family's claim had been accepted, and they left for Canada a month later.

**Ayshe** is an unmarried twenty-four year old Iraqi Turkmen from the Mosul region. She had been a high school student when they fled in 2016. Her family had come to Ankara due to links with the Turkmen community already living in the city. She had tried to continue her studies in Turkey but “wasn't able to succeed, so I left it.” She spent most of her time at home, and when she goes out, she explains that she should go out with an older sibling. Her family was of lower-middle socioeconomic status in Iraq, but appeared to be struggling significantly in Turkey. Her parents had encouraged her to return to Iraq with a brother to continue her studies, but “was afraid of the road and the situation there,” a decision that she now regrets. Her hope is to return to Iraq within the year.

**Nazife** is a forty-two year old married mother of three from Idlib, Syria. A missile strike had destroyed the building next to hers, killing everyone inside, all of which were family. After this she fled to Turkey where she has lived for four years. She has approximately a middle school education, as do her two daughters, who both studied until 9<sup>th</sup> grade. She explained that they were both married while living in Turkey, one to a Syrian, one to a Turk at ages 19 and 20 respectively. Her husband works a low wage job outside the home, but her grown son was disabled in the war and is unable to work. They had not originally thought of resettling elsewhere, but with her son's disability, they are now in the asylum process with the United Nations as refugees.

**Melek** is a fifteen year old from Aleppo, Syria. She says she only has vague memories of Syria, which she left five years ago, “from when I started to understand, the war started there, so we ran away to Turkey.” She and her family lived and received their *kimlik* (government issued identification card) in Antakya where she attended a Syrian school. Her family had then come to Ankara due to better economic opportunities for her brother who was supporting their family by working in a furniture factory. Her primary concern was to finish school, which may not be possible due to her registered in another province. Her father had migrated to Germany five years ago, so she was unsure if she would continue living in Turkey or continue on to Germany. She shared that she dreamed of becoming a psychologist, but “it’s just a dream. There is a reality. There is a problem because I am a girl.”

**Manolya** is seventeen years old from an unnamed city in Iraq. She and her family had been smuggled into Turkey four years ago, and her father had continued on to Europe. She said that this had left her mother, herself, and three young siblings in a difficult physical and financial situation. She reported having to move numerous times, living in crowded and unsanitary conditions. They finally left the city where their *kimliks* were registered, and came to Ankara looking for a safer environment with more economic



opportunities. She was unable to attend school, and felt like her siblings' "second mom," because she would take care of them while her mom was working. She also was unsure whether or not she would continue to live in Turkey, or eventually be able to join her father. At the time of the interview, she had joined a sewing course with the intention of helping provide for her family.

**Sabah** is an unmarried twenty-one year old from the Mosul region of Iraq. She is Turkmen and speaks Turkish. She lives with her family who fled to Turkey approximately three years ago. She explained that they had relatives living in the Turkmen community in Ankara. She "used to go to school, but here I couldn't." She mentioned that she felt comfortable in Turkey because she could communicate, but felt disconnected from Turks because of the cultural difference. She was also attending the sewing course, so she "could learn something new, and something new could enter my mind." She is concerned because it is difficult for her father to find a job. Her hope is to return to Iraq, where her family still has a house, though contacts in Iraq have said that it's "in bad condition."

**Ruhan** is a nineteen year old married mother of a five month old. She comes from Aleppo, Syria, where she studied until the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. She fled to Antakya, Turkey six years ago with her family. She mentioned that while in Antakya, she attended a Koran school for one year. A year and a half ago she got married and moved to Ankara to live with her husband and his family. She does not speak a word of Turkish and told of giving birth alone in a hospital in Ankara without the ability to communicate with the hospital staff. Her husband works in a furniture factory, and, as far as I could tell, was the sole-breadwinner for his wife, son, mother and a few siblings. She would like to return to Syria one day.

**Fatma** is a fifty year old Turkmen from Mosul, Iraq. She has been widowed for seven years. She was not clear on her education level, but she proudly explained that her two daughters attend school and are in 7<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade,

and they are doing well in school. She and her daughters fled to Turkey by way of a smuggler through Syria in 2016. She has subsisted by means of help from charities, relatives, and working odd jobs, often working as a seamstress. My translator explained that she had visited Fatma's home, which was quite poor, and she “did not even have a chair to sit on.” She is unsure whether she will stay in Turkey or if she will return. She explained that her daughters liked living in Turkey and wanted to stay.

**Nisa** is a sixteen year old Iraqi from Anbar province. Her family had chosen to come to Turkey because it was “better for us,” because it was Muslim, and there were already other Iraqi Arabs living here. She had been living in Ankara for two years but was unable to go to school nor learn Turkish. She had an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education. Her family seemed to be lower middle class, and they were supplementing her brother's income with aid from charities. Their intention was to stay in Turkey, but some time after our interview, they returned to Iraq, citing that “life was too hard in Turkey.”

**Safiye** is a married twenty-nine year old Syrian from Latakia, Syria. Before fleeing to Turkey one year ago, she had worked as a teacher, and her husband had worked two jobs. They were “living in a good lifestyle.” They had come after her husband was conscripted to the army and have tried to register as asylum seekers with the UNHCR. They had “imagined that they could easily travel to the outside,” but have found themselves caught up in bureaucracy. Their economic situation has recently gotten better, as family abroad has provided them money to buy an old car, which her husband uses as an unofficial taxi for other Syrians. “Though we can cover our expenses, our life is in a hard condition.” She, her husband, and young son, are from a Christian-background, and she felt ostracized by both Turks and Syrians due to her identity.

### 3.5 Discussion

All the women that participated in this study have different stories, backgrounds, and hopes for their futures. Their places of origin, education level and socioeconomic levels prior to coming to Turkey all vary widely. Likewise their understandings of faith, God, religion, and how these things interact with personal identity is equally diverse. Though not covered specifically in this study, these factors all have an influence on their lives and the outcomes of their time in Turkey. However, all these women shared the fact that they had been forced from their home countries, and were now waiting.

Waiting and wavering between hope and hopelessness was their commonality, whether for the potential for resettlement as UNHCR refugees; to return to their home countries; or maybe they themselves were not sure what they were waiting for, whether to go back or to go forward.

Four of the women reported that they were hoping to be resettled to a third country by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, three had come directly to Ankara for that purpose, two out of those explained that they had relatives that had been refugees abroad. At the time of our interview, all four of them were somewhere in the years-long refugee process with the UNHCR, whether waiting for the initial interview, or for the decision about their case. The other, Nazife and her family, had filed for asylum due to their son being disabled in the war, and they felt that they could no longer return to Syria, and that they had a good chance to be accepted.

Three of the women expressed desire to return to their home countries and were in a sense waiting for the situations become more favorable. Three of the women were unsure of their future. Two of these had fathers that had traveled to Europe, and therefore, they were waiting and were unsure if the day would come that their fathers would gain refugee status there and then send for them. The other, Fatma, seemed to feel that her daughters' future

would be more secure in Turkey, and was waiting to see what would happen. Nisa was the only exception in that she reported that her family's initial intention was to stay in Turkey. However, I feel comfortable including her in this category of waiting in limbo. This is due to the fact that legally, as per the policies of Turkey discussed in the first chapter, she and her family would not have been legally resettled as refugees in Turkey. Also, in my interpretation of the data coming out of our interview, in recognition of the fact that she and her family had not taken steps to learn Turkish or to integrate socially, economically, or educationally meant that they were also in a type of waiting period to test the possibility of them living in Turkey. In the end they deemed that it was not possible for them personally to live in Turkey.

All of these women found themselves stuck in a transition period in an urban context in Ankara, Turkey. In this context they and their families had to find housing, a source of income, navigate a new legal, linguistic, and social system, and find a new sense of normalcy. Their ways of coping from their home countries may or may not be useful in this context. Therefore, following this data as per Grounded Theory, the questions arise as to how this waiting period is experienced by the women, and what strategies are employed to rebuild, and carry on with their lives? Though only eleven women out of hundreds of thousands of refugees in Ankara who find themselves in similar limbo, it is my intention to hear what their experiences have to say to this broader and tragically common situation.

## CHAPTER 4

### LIMINALITY

The consul banged the table and said,  
"If you've got no passport you're officially  
dead": But we are still alive, my dear, but  
we are still alive. W.H. Auden, 1939

#### 4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to answer the question, “How do refugee women rebuild life in forced displacement in Ankara?” The deeper level of analysis to that question would be “What strategies are women employing, and which of those seem to be most helpful?” These questions served as a starting place for my research as an outside observer. Although I set out to answer those questions, the questions posed to the women participating in my study were not restricted to only those in that vein. However, some of my most important findings did not directly relate to my initial research question. My hope is that in following the data, as per Grounded Theory, I am able to demonstrate the organic nature of the theory discovery process. Though my key findings, and the theory built off it, do not directly answer the initial research question, they do tie in in meaningful ways.

As I examined the data and engaged in open coding and then in axial coding, a theme that I found emerging was what I conceptualized as concentric layered inside spaces that the women were experiencing. The term “inside space” was the code that I coined for this concept, arising from a number of interviews where the participants described a feeling of “being

stuck inside.” The first layer being the “macro inside” of Turkey: they had left their homes, some hoping to continue on to a third country, but found themselves essentially “stuck” in Turkey for an unknown period of time. Kutlu (2002) describes this phenomenon as “Turkey as a Waiting Room.” The second “inside” the women experience is the “physical inside” arising from cultural norms and conceptions of men’s and women’s spaces. The third “inside” that I found emerging from my data was linked to, and arose in part from the other two, but differed in that it was more of a mental and emotional place. It was described by the participants as a “hopelessness” and “fearing the outside,” etc that would manifest into a literal withdrawal from society and staying inside the home. This is the main phenomena that I focused on and later conceptualized as a liminal space. This led to a re-conceptualizing of this concentric “inside space” as a layers of liminality that the women were experiencing.

#### **4.2 Concept of Liminality**

Developed by Turner (1969), liminality is used to describe a period of transition and ambiguity. Turner worked off the previous definition by van Gennep who used the Latin word *limen*, meaning threshold, to describe the middle transitional phase of the three phases (Separation, margin (or limen), and aggregation) that the initiate goes through in the rite of passage.

During the intervening “liminal” period, the characteristics of the ritual subject are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state...Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. Thus liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness...(Turner, 1969, pp. 94-95)

As he explains, these “places” are a place of “limbo and statuslessness (Turner, 1969, p. 97).” Due to the flexibility in the terms and possibilities for adaptation into various fields, liminality is a concept often used in the study of refugees (see Daniş, 2005; Abourahme, 2011; and Vreecer, 2010).

Harrell-Bond and Voutira (1992) define the term refugee as:

People who have undergone a violent 'rite' of separation and unless or until they are 'incorporated' as citizens into their host state (or returned to their state of origin) find themselves in 'transition', or in a state of 'liminality' (p. 7).

Malkki applies Turner's concept of structural invisibility to refugees; the liminal individual or group is “no longer classified and not yet classified” (Turner 1967, qtd. as cited in Malkki, 1995), in that refugees are at the same time both categorized as such, but are no longer categorized as what they were. Refugees can no longer be the unproblematic citizens or representatives of their group. They are marked as something different. She points to the “universalization” of the image of “the refugee” as “an almost generic, ideal-typical figure (p. 8). She argues that especially problematic is that as a generalized type of person, the refugee has “become an object of specialization” in which an entire way of speaking of the refugee has emerged. An example that she gives is the pervasive photographic representation, such that when the word “refugee” is given, images immediately spring to mind. “The refugee captured by the journalist's camera is seen as a singularly expressive emissary of horror and powerlessness” (p. 10). Malkki's observation can be seen in each large wave of refugees; whether it's the images that she wrote about of Somalia in 1993, or lines of refugees trudging along railroad tracks out of Bosnia, or of image of little Aylan Kurdi's body washed up on a beach that gained headlines around the world in 2015 that drew international attention to the refugee situation coming out of Syria. The individual and their personal story is obscured, caught up in the distress and pain that is the story of “the refugee.” The paradox of this is that in “the humanitarian regime, the refugee is both the means and the end: it is the image of the refugee herself that will bring money for the relief programs that will then assist her. Hence the victim-like definition is necessary for the survival of of the concept in theory and the survival of the individual in practice” (Haddad, 2008, p. 35).

This in-between nature of the classification of refugees is not only problematic in the literature on refugees, but also in the legal and political arena. It is argued by Zetter (2007), that in the current “global” world, to gain legal “refugee status” is a privilege that must be won, meaning that there are those who do not win. “Asylum and refugee status is now 'a scarce resource' the scarcity of which is, however, is political and not physical” (Martin, qtd. as cited in Haddad, 2008, p. 26). The legal definition of what constitutes as a refugee, in effect, acts as a limiting device for refugee protection, in that it operates to exclude those that do not fall under the accepted definition of the conventional refugee as put forth by the 1951 Convention on Refugees (Kutlu, 2002). For those that do not win that legal “refugee status,” they are caught in what Bailey et al. (2002) call a “permanent temporariness,” in their study of Salvadorian asylum seekers who have waited for decades for a decision for their case (qtd. as cited in Hyndman & Giles, 2011, p. 361).

In his study of illegal immigrants in the United States, Chavez (2012) uses the concept of liminality to describe how this lack of legal status creates a feeling of being “stuck.” They are in legal limbo, in that they are in between citizenship in one country and the potential for citizenship in another. Their legal status is in essence “unclassified.” To use Turner's (1979) terminology, they have separated from their home country, but have not achieved legal reaggregation by receiving legal status. Likewise, Daniş (2005) in her research on non-European asylum seekers in Istanbul, describes how those that attempt to pass from Turkey to Europe live in a state of limbo, in that they experience a “vagueness and fluidity” in their legal status and in their socioeconomic incorporation into society. Chavez (2012) also explains how this legal limbo was a barrier to integration into society. Therefore blocked from legal, economically, and socially aggregation, refugees stay in liminality.

As demonstrated by Daniş (2012), the liminal state of a refugee might not just be in legality alone. It can also be psychological, social, and economic



as well (Harrell-Bond & Voutira, 1992). These dynamics can arise from exclusion of such society structures as the juridical system and the formal job market. Vrečer specifically describes the differing aspects of the liminal life of Bosnian and Herzegovinian refugees including their psychology and social life and how they have attempted to integrate into society. The marginalization from society experienced and the inability to exercise power and control over their economic and social situation is coined as social liminality by Simich, Maiter, and Ochocka (2009). In their study of newly arrived immigrants in Canada, Simich et. al. (2009) argue that though the term social exclusion is often used for the experience of refugees, the term social liminality better captures the feeling of stress of living on the margins of society.

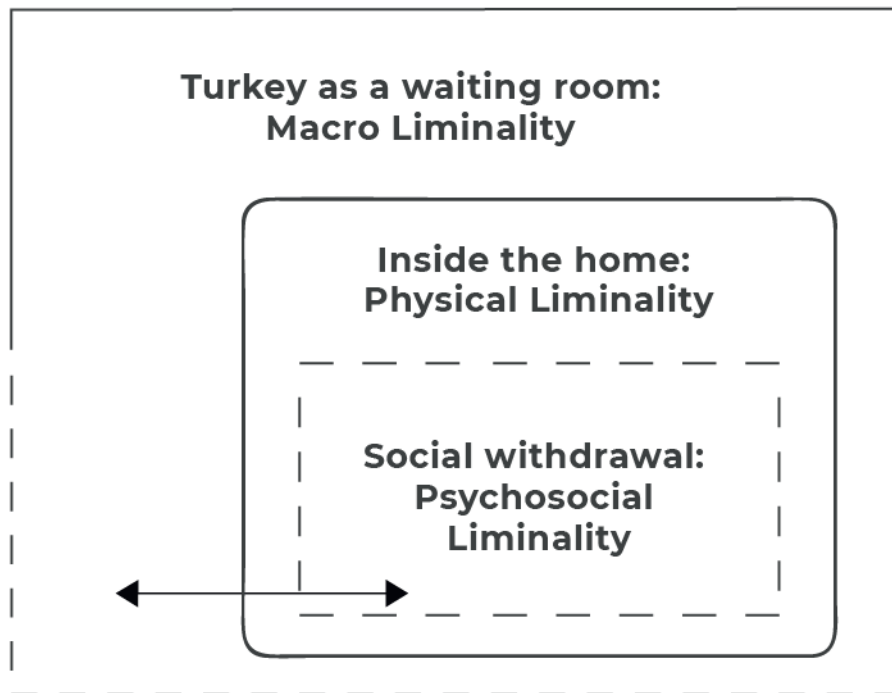
### **4.3 Conceptual Model: Layers of Liminality**

Above I have attempted to outline how liminality in refugee research generally falls into various categories. In this section I will attempt to demonstrate how the women that participated in my study experienced these hallmarks of liminality; including separation, liminality in regards to legal status, and psychological, social, and economic marginality. The conceptual model that I developed evolved from the data analysis and data collection. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), diagrams:

...are conceptual visualizations of data, and...help to raise the researcher's thinking out of the level of facts... enable researchers to organize their data, keep a record of their concepts and the relationships between them, and to integrate their ideas (p. 124-125).

This model (Figure 1) is to visually organize the varying layers of liminality that was experienced. As mentioned previously, the women found themselves in differing constricted “inside,” or liminal spaces. I will focus on each layer and their properties and dimensions.

## Layers of Liminality



**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Model: Layers of Liminality*

### **4.3.1 The Macro Inside: Being a Refugee in Turkey as the First Layer of Liminality**

#### **4.3.1.1 Liminality in Regards to Transition**

Following Harrell-Bond & Voutira's definition of refugees being “people who have undergone a violent 'rite' of separation,” the participants in this study had all experienced that “rite” of separation, having left their homes and come to Turkey, and now found themselves in a state of transition.

The beginning of this state of transition was the initial decision to leave their homes, and the factors that led up to it. Most of the women interviewed elaborated on the circumstances leading up to the decision to migrate.

However, two of the Iraqi participants did not give details on their experiences, and chose only to speak in vague terms, labeling the time pre-migration as a “hard situation” or “troubles.” For those that lived with their parents at the time of leaving generally pointed to their parents, primarily their father, as the decision makers, but always affirmed that they felt it to be the right decision. The main factor in the decision to migrate was a threatened sense of safety and personal security. Though war and violence was the salient factor, the women explained that it was not an easy choice and was made when there did not seem to be an option anymore:

I was refusing to come to Turkey initially but as the situation got worse and worse I agreed to come. There were explosions near my house and I heard some of them die and so I decided to leave. I escaped from Kilis and came with a bus to Ankara [Nazife, 42, Syrian]

Yeah, so my dad and my mom said we should come to Turkey be registered [with the UN] because we felt afraid, because ISIS. Oh God. They kill the people. They kill the people, the Muslim, and of course the Christian. Both. They maybe enter to Erbil, and we don't know which day, maybe one years, 2 years, 3 years, why we wait? We wait, until we, until we die? [Meryem, 23, Iraqi Christian]

Similarly, Safiye (29, Syrian Christian) explained that though there had been a war for a number of years, she and her husband had been doing alright, she and her husband were both working, she as a teacher, but that the threat of him joining the army was the tipping point:

The problems started when my husband was conscripted into the army. We decided that we were not able to join the army and be a part of the problem.... We decide the need to run away, to come to Turkey, and then from Turkey to find a way to travel outside.

For some, the decision was a two-step decision due to a cycle of violence and loss; there was the initial violence, that led to worsening economic conditions and opportunities. Generally they explained that life had become unbearable:

First, we were in Aleppo, and then suddenly all the problems start to happen. We just woke up to the noise of bombing, and all the stuff. So the life was miserable there. We stayed for like one month, but it

was terrible, we didn't have water, or electric, and it was summer, so it was really hot. And even the food was so hard to get, especially the bread, because not all the bakers were working, and so we had only one baker, and so there were really long line of people waiting and sometimes there was no more bread to get. So we stayed for like one month and then one day a tank came to our area, and it started to hit other soldiers, so then we decided to leave Aleppo, because we had little children and now its really unsafe to stay. So we left, and we moved to Latakia... we stayed there for like 3 years. [Leyla, 23, Syrian Muslim]

Leyla then went on to explain that after living internally displaced in Syria, her father started to consider migrating abroad. The factors of the economic situation, the lack of opportunity, and the prospect of a “better future” and safety for his children overrode his desire to stay in his country:

And then, my dad, he didn't want to leave Syria, and come to here, he was just saying, no, I don't want to leave my country. Then one day my mother's friend she came to our house and she started to speak about leaving the country to have a safe place to have the children. Then my dad seemed to be much more focused on what she was saying, and started to think seriously about leaving the country. My uncle talked to my dad, and said it would be much better to come to Canada with him, there 'you will have a better future for your children.'

All of us wanted to go, because the life in Syria was getting much worse, getting more expensive, and my dad didn't have a job, it was only my mom working, he was receiving help from his sister and his brother, so he didn't want that anymore. He needed to have his life and his job. So we decided it was much better to go, because there was no work to do in Syria. And no more opportunity.

As can be observed in Safiye and Leyla's quotes above, Turkey was often chosen by the women and their families due to the desire to travel on to resettle in a third country. Other reasons for choosing to come to Turkey over other countries in the region was the proximity, no need for a visa [at the time of their arrival] and political or cultural similarities.

The physical marker of that “rite” of separation for those interviewed was the journey to Turkey. Five of the women offered that they had come illegally, often paying smugglers to help them cross the border. They explained the fear and the hardship of that journey. Even those that did not

come illegally, either by plane or by bus, saw that journey as a symbolic threshold. Leyla told of arriving at the Ankara bus station with no idea where to go or what to do; and therefore having her entire family, even her grandmother, sleeping on chairs for three days. This led them to be tricked by another Syrian man, before they were finally able to find a place to stay in Ankara. It was this experience that she labeled as their first problem in Turkey, their “hoşgeldin problem” as she termed it (hoşgeldin meaning 'welcome' in Turkish).

#### **4.3.1.2 Liminality in Regard to Legal Status**

Continuing with Harrell-Bond & Voutira's (1992) definition of refugees as those who have gone through separation, and “unless or until they are 'incorporated' as citizens into their host state (or returned to their state of origin) find themselves in 'transition', or in a state of 'liminality’” (pg 7). Haddad (2008) explains that

In her position outside and between sovereign states the refugee does not belong to a particular state and thus does not have the means to claiming the rights associated with membership of a political community. She has been forced out of her relationship with a political community into the refugee category (pp. 86-87).

In other words, her position between state structures, the refugee is uncategorized and can not benefit from the same protection and rights as those in the state structure.

Turkey is a signer of the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention, which is the cornerstone of refugee definition, stating that a refugee is anyone who:

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, 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.<sup>2</sup>

However, as with any definition, context is required. Haddad (2008) explains that the term 'refugee' is “essentially a contested concept” (p. 26), with differing actors preferring a narrower or wider definition depending on their context. Likewise, in the history of migration to Turkey, Turkey has taken a wider or narrower scope on the definition of refugees depending on such context as ethnic or religious ties, acting to expand or tighten the requirements needed to satisfy the criteria as a refugee. Kutlu (2002) argues that the 1951 definition

act[s] as a limiting device for refugee protection, the regime in practice mainly operates in exclusionary ways and it constructs the 'walls of exclusion' (p.125).

These walls of exclusion run the risk of denying protection and fulfilling basic humanitarian obligations (Haddad, 2008), therefore in the context of the political crisis in Syria, Turkey creatively sidestepped the definition and chooses to speak of “guests” under temporary protection. In the Temporary Protection law, Turkey reserves the right to cancel that protection at anytime. If, as argued above, the refugee falls 'betwixt and between' classification, then one who is a “guest” and an “asylum seeker” is positioned even more marginally, in that they have not even achieved refugee status.

#### **4.3.1.3 Turkey as a “Waiting Room”**

Therefore as refugees in Turkey fall “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law,” (Turner, 1969, p. 94), if they are inhibited from reaggregation, they are stuck in transition. In her 2002 graduate study work on refugees in Turkey, Kultu coined the term, Turkey as a “Waiting room” (p.126) to express how refugees experience their time in Turkey. She argued that in this time their main action is waiting, which prohibited

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2 Article 1(A)(2)1951 Convention

integration:

Refugees are using Turkey as a waiting room on their way to the West, and during this period they are not the main actors and deciders of their lives. The main action of refugees in Turkey is waiting, so the transition period that refugees experience in Turkey can not be considered a process, in which the individuals 'integrate' (socially, economically, culturally, and politically) in their "transit-homes" (p. 126).

For many of the refugees coming to Turkey intending to move on to a third country, Turkey is just a step in their journey. It is in Turkey that they must file their asylum request and then wait for it to be accepted or rejected, to be resettled or to be stuck in limbo. Until their case is decided, they are in legal limbo in regard to their status, and are not able to work legally. This period is one of uncertainty and mental fatigue and is based on waiting for case files to be reviewed, waiting for appointments, and waiting for acceptance so that they can move forward. This was likened to "resembling a billiard ball which, devoid of inner self-propelling force, allows its path and movement to be governed by outside forces beyond its control" (Kunz, 1975 qtd. as cited in Chan & Loveridge, 1987, p. 746). This can lead to a state of both passivity and frustration and constant shifting between hope and hopelessness (Chan & Loveridge, 1987). Knudsen (1983) labels this mental state a "limbo state" that is characterized by waiting and feeling forgotten and undesired by the world (p. 73). This feeling of being forgotten and the frustration of the waiting process is expounded upon by Leyla (23, Syrian Muslim), who below explained her exasperation with waiting for their interview for their asylum case:

It was burning our nerves, because we never knew when it was going to be .... it was like, Come on guy! We have been waiting for two years and a half. If you don't want us to come, just say it! Don't leave us! We used to ask them when it would be, but they would never answer us. They just say that we are on the waiting list, and told us to be patient, stuff like this. I don't know, they have to appreciate that! They have to think about the family that is waiting.

Manolya (17, Iraqi Muslim) outlined her frustration with the policy of sending conventional refugees to smaller outlying cities of Turkey to wait for their asylum decision. Due to her family's decision to move away from their designated city to Ankara, she was unable to register at school. She explained how waiting caused her frustration, and she felt like it inhibited her life's trajectory:

We decide to register in the UN and they have to choose a city for you to stay, and they chose for us a bad city, the people there had no morals, they were so bad, especially at the schools, and so we felt that we can not stay in this city, so we had to move to Ankara. When we came here, I decided that I wouldn't make anymore friends, because all the time we were moving to a new place, I hope to be finally settled in my life, to go back to school, and to be more open to the people around me. But because we left the city that the UN told us to go to I cannot go to school in this city until the UN gives us permission to move to Ankara. And they didn't give us permission. That makes me so upset, because school defines your future, and how your life could be and without it you can't do anything.

This quote demonstrates Kutlu's (2002) argument that the action of waiting and being stuck in transit, inhibits the integration process. Manolya and her family, while in “the Waiting room” was sent to a satellite city. However they felt that they could not stay in this city, were moving all the time due to their economic situation, and therefore she is not able to go to school, which she views as a direct hindrance to her future. All this culminated in hindering her social integration and she “deciding to not make anymore friends” due to her unsettled life.

#### **4.3.2 The Physical and Psychosocial “Inside”: Layers of Social and Psychological Liminality**

The concept of liminality, the state and period of transitions from one state to another, is inherently connected to social structure and the relationships



between those structures. Turner (1969) refers to Mary Douglas's argument (1966) in that which cannot be classified, or falls between classification boundaries is most often labeled “polluting” and dangerous:

To those concerned with the maintenance of 'structure,' all sustained manifestations of *communitas* must appear as dangerous and anarchial, and have to be hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions and conditions (p109).

Here he uses the Latin term *communitas* to describe the social group, or community in terms of relational ties, of those that are in the liminal period. Turner argues that the *communitas* falls outside of social structure, and can only be understood in some relation to structure. He makes the example that for the high to be high, low must exist, likewise those inside structure and classification and those outside of it inform and define each other. Therefore, for those in the structure, those in the liminal state by nature of their existence, present a threat to the established social structure and must be “hedged-in” in some way.

Malkki picks up this thread and expounds that as liminal entities, refugees are seen to “hemorrhage or weaken national boundaries, and pose a threat to 'national security'... here the symbolic and political danger can not be entirely distinct” and are “challenge 'time-honored distinctions between nationals and foreigners” (1995, pp. 7-8). Here Malkki demonstrates the overlapping layers that are the concrete and the abstract. The liminality of the refugee *communitas* not only threatens state and social structures, but also the concepts of nationality and community. Therefore the refugee is 'a problem' and must be dealt with as such. The solution that has been found by states and societies that interact with refugees is exclusion, to “hedge them out,” both spatially and socially. The social aspect is referenced in Berry's (1997) theory of acculturation as segregation, when the host society blocks the adaptation strategies of the incoming group. Due to this, marginalization and separation result.

#### 4.3.2.1 Spatial Liminality

Morland (1987) argues that the international strategy to deal with this problem is the refugee camp which is the physical and symbolic mark of the refugee's liminality. Much has been written about in refugee studies literature, of the camp as a place outside of the legal and social framework, a “space of exception,” borrowing off of Agamben's 2005 book of the same name, (see Ramadan 2013, Owens 2010). In examining processing centers for asylum seekers in Switzerland, Gold (2019) labels this a type of spatial liminality. Camps and processing centers are usually removed from city centers and are separated from society (Gold, 2019, Ghorashi et al, 2018). Therefore, it can be argued that refugee camps can be seen as a physical example of the attempt to “hedge in” the refugee as a liminal entity.

Turkey has established refugee camps in the bordering provinces with Syria and Iraq; however, more than ninety percent of refugees in Turkey are not living in those camps. Many of the refugees in Turkey, although not living in camps, are living in spatial liminality. It is the policy for those waiting on their asylum applications to be relocated to provinces outside of the major Turkish cities (Kutlu 2002). These smaller cities have fewer economic opportunities. Those that leave these cities to relocate to one of the larger cities are excluded from working legally, accessing medical care, and enrolling their children in school (Leghtas & Daniel, 2016). Those that do live in the larger Turkish cities are clumped in specific neighborhoods, such as the Önder neighborhood in Ankara (Eraydin, 2017). In gathering data, establishing relationships with the refugee community, and meeting with participants, I traveled to three different neighborhoods, all on Ankara's periphery. Sometimes it required two forms of transportation, and all were over an hour from the city center.

#### 4.3.2.2 Social Liminality

Refugees are not only “hedged-in” spatially, but also socially. Galabuzi (2004), defines social exclusion as both the dynamic process of inequality among groups in society and as an outcome in four aspects: exclusion from the legal processes, acquiring social goods, social production, and economic activities (pp. 389-390). Studying the asylum process, Gold (2019) argued that the asylum process, which is the process of turning an asylum seeker into a politically recognized refugee, is in itself a process of exclusion. According to Gold, due to processes of social formation being strongly exclusionary, the asylum process is one marked by “rites of exclusion,” playing off Harrell-Bond and Voutira's definition (p. 16). She explained that in the refugee process, either the asylum seekers are excluded altogether, or redefined into a kind that is less dangerous economically and is more suited to fit into the Swiss structure.

Marginalization from mainstream society and social exclusion produces multiple disadvantages including hindering social integration and negatively affecting mental health (Galabuzi, 2004). In her study of Bosnian refugees in Slovenia, Vrečer (2010) examined the social inclusion in both institutional structures such as political, legal, educational, and housing integration, and social inclusion in sociocultural and psychological integration. She explained that she observed many physically and mentally strong individuals break down over the decade of her study; individuals who had been left in limbo politically, economically and psychologically without the chance to integrate. She concluded:

The stress did not end with the war, but the hard conditions of exclusion added to the stressors in the post-migration period,” confirming that “the experiences that occur post-migration in the receiving society which 'can be just as stressful and damaging as the trauma of war’ (Coughlan and Owens-Manley, 2006, qtd. as cited in Vrečer, 2010, pp. 298-299).

Simich, Maiter, and Ochocka (2009) argued that the term social liminality better captures this feeling of stress of living on the margins of society, than

the term social exclusion which is often used for the experience of refugees, and is indeed used by Vrečer and others. They felt that 'social liminality' is a more dynamic concept that describes the

...active psychosocial process underlying immigrant adaptation and the struggle to maintain mental health, because it carries within it the potential for transformation (Simich et al., 2009 p. 258).

The findings of this study align with Vrečer (2010) and Simich et al., (2009), in the stress experienced by the participants which was caused by post-migration marginalization from the host society. This social liminality was expressed as a feeling of 'being stuck,' both by the participants of this study and those of Simich, Maiter, and Ochocka (2009). This 'being stuck' manifested as a withdrawal both socially and spatially which are not totally distinct, hence the term layered liminality.

#### **4.3.2.3 Staying Inside**

All of the participants explained periods of time, particularly when they first came to Turkey, that they experienced varied feelings of hopelessness, fear, loneliness, which a few called a "dark place" or a time of depression, where they would "stay inside all day." It was due to the continued usage of this phrase as I compared the data that caused it to emerge as the core category. Sabah (21, Iraqi Turkmen) who had been sent to Turkey with her older brothers ahead of her parents remembered:

We didn't see anything when we first came to Turkey, we always stayed inside the house until my father and mother came, that's when we started to go out. That time was about four months. During that time I was cleaning the house, working in the house, and sitting all the time.

This was echoed by Sayife (29, Syrian Christian), who had previously explained the fear of being smuggled across the border, having been shot at, and walking for days:

At the beginning, if I talk about my day: I stayed at home for two months. I was afraid to go outside. I was tired from walking across the border, and we felt afraid because we didn't know anyone, and also my sister stayed inside all the time.

The concept of “staying home,” or something similar, due to psychological stress occurred seven out of the eleven interviews. The women of this study were also actively going through the psychosocial process that Simich et al. (2009) used to define their term of social liminality. That process will be explained further in the next chapter. Due to the psychological stress arising from the overlap of the spatial and social liminality leading to withdrawal and “staying home,” I have named this “inside” as a psychosocial liminality, and the inner most layer of the layers of liminality.

#### **4.4 The Bounds of the Psychosocial Liminality**

In this next section, the categories that emerged in this phenomenon will better help to flesh out the dimensions of this “inside” liminal space as experienced by the women in this study. It is my intention that by outlining the factors that have given rise to, and binds this liminality, that this liminal space will become more clear. I have identified four causal conditions that inhibit and bound the participant's psychosocial liminal space: (a) cultural inhibitors, (b) knowledge inhibitors, (c) psychological inhibitors, and (d) experienced or perceived inhibitors. These categories are interrelated and not mutually exclusive, they often overlap and shade from one to another. Therefore, though not entirely separate in and of themselves, I have chosen to break them down as such. A brief explanation of each follows, with some of the major subcategories that emerged, along with quotations for a clearer picture of each.

#### 4.4.1 Cultural Inhibitors

As the concept of social liminality, and “staying inside” emerged, one of the first subcategories to emerge that bound this space was the cultural practice and social expectation of what are men's and women's spaces and roles. These practices and expectations often took the form of the types of responsibilities the women carried, such as taking care of the home and children and cooking for family and extended family. Many of the women reported that they were not expected or encouraged to find a job or work outside the home by their families, citing culture or society practice. While explaining the economic hardship, and the resulting stress, that her family had faced when first coming to Ankara, Ayshe (24, Iraqi Turkmen) stated:

There was lack of money, coming to a new country, that was hard. It was hard because my older brother was the only one working, then my little brother, who is sixteen, started to work and then my father started to work too, that's why it became better... In my culture, girls aren't allowed to work, and my brother said that I couldn't work, and they would work for us. He is my older brother, and he knows what's best for me, and I respect that.

In addition, when asked what had changed for her when coming to Turkey, Nazife (42, Syrian Muslim) responded:

My husband is working so he is getting money for us, and when I was in Syria I carried the responsibility of home so nothing has really changed for me.

The above quotations from Ayshe and Nazife are examples of how their cultural norms, pre-migration, carried over into their expectations for what role women should occupy while in Turkey. For example, when Safiye (29, Syrian Christian) first arrived in Turkey, she and her husband stayed with her sister, whose husband's family felt that women's roles were inside the house, and therefore “she just stayed inside all the time. Just work at home, and prepare food for men, when they come home from outside.” But after she got her own apartment, Safiye now “goes outside.” Therefore these expectations of roles differed not only from family to family, but from individual to individual. The difference could also be observed across

socioeconomic, ethnic, religious, and regional lines. For Leyla, whose family was urban and educated, and both parents had worked while in Syria, working outside the home was natural, whereas for Ayshe, above, it was not.

#### **4.4.2 Knowledge Inhibitors**

The first subcategory in this category is the lack of language. This was mentioned early on in the interviews, often before the interviews even started. Owing to the fact that I can not speak Arabic, I would initially try to 'break the ice' with some basic Turkish greetings. Sometimes the participant and I could bond over our limited knowledge of Turkish, but for four of the women, they were not able to engage in simple Turkish greetings and 'get to know you' vocabulary, and would then explain through the translator that they hadn't learned any Turkish. All of the women pointed to speaking Turkish as one of their biggest difficulties, with the exception of the three Iraqi Turkmen women. The Turkmen women pointed out their ability to quickly understand and pick up Turkish as an asset for them. However, Ayshe (24) one of the Turkmen interviewed, explained that though she could understand Turkish, the minute that she spoke, her dialect would immediately mark her as a foreigner and cause her to feel uncomfortable:

when I talk to them, they can feel the difference in my accent so they start to ask me questions, and it makes me feel like this is not my place.

Melek, fifteen years old (Syrian Muslim), attends a school of Turkish and Syrian students, but the language of education is Turkish. She also explained that language is her biggest difficulty. However, she said that her classmates and teachers try to help her and to explain the meaning of the things that she can not understand. She explained that it was not just words, but that language is her connection:

“Language for me is the hardest point, it is the only thing, its is the communication between me and the community.”

Another subcategory in the category of knowledge inhibitors is the difficulty in navigating their new physical, legal, and social space. One participant explained that it was difficult to learn about the help available. Another explained her initial fear of walking around her neighborhood due to becoming lost because she could not read the signs. Another explained that she gave birth in a hospital alone without being able to communicate to the doctors because the only person in her family who could speak some Turkish was her husband who was not permitted into the room.

#### **4.4.3 Psychological Inhibitors**

Some of the subcategories that are included in this category are as follows: the trauma of violence in their home country, trauma of the journey, pain of loss and separation from friends/family/ “her life there,” stress of waiting, and the stress of marginalization. Again, many of these categories overlapped and built upon one another. As was explained in the section regarding their decision to leave their homes, many of the women saw, experienced, or felt the threat of violence. Only two of the women explained that they were receiving treatment from a doctor for mental health due to their traumatic experience. However, all of the participants expressed negative effects from at least two of the subcategories listed above. Many pointed to the pain of leaving their old lives, homes and family and friends. One of the women explained that she felt guilty and “hated herself” for leaving her studies, and her friends to come to Turkey. Another did not flinch while recounting the bombs or not having bread, but teared up when she mentioned saying goodbye to friends. Manolya, seventeen years old (Iraqi Muslim), pointed to the pain of not saying goodbye and the trauma experienced while leaving:

It was hard to leave our country, our friends, all the people that we knew, but we didn't have another chance.... I wasn't able to say goodbye, in my town there was a lot of bombing, and half of my friends were dead, and the other half, I didn't know where they were



because we all had to escape and move around, and not stay in one area, and so I couldn't see them.

Though most of the women said that they felt safe from war in Turkey, and for that they felt happy and grateful, it seemed that even years after leaving their home countries they continued to carry the trauma psychologically. This trauma was not usually dealt with and was only compounded by the stress of living in transition in Turkey. One participant explained that the initial relief and happiness to be in a place of physical safety gave way to a hopelessness as she and her family waited for word on their asylum status. This hopelessness turned to depression, which manifested into loneliness, withdrawal, and “sometimes crying all night.” She explained that even with the war, she was not “as depressed as I am here.” Another woman explained that for a period of time she was just waiting for their application to start with the U.N. and she was “smoking and drinking too much.” When she would go out, she experienced harassment; and this would trigger her to feel more helpless, cause her to relive memories of past trauma, and she would get angry and “feel so bad, I just only smoke and take my pills.” For the women, discrimination and harassment from the Turkish community exacerbated the psychological stress from the past and significantly added to the stress of “being stuck” living in limbo. This overlaps and will be further illustrated and expounded upon in the next category.

#### **4.4.4 Experienced Inhibitors**

The subcategories included in this category includes: (a) discrimination or prejudice due to religion, ethnicity, or nationality, (b) sexual harassment and (c) the fear of these happening. All of the women expressed times in which they felt marginalization and “made to feel like a stranger.” This could happen in larger more structural ways where in three cases, women told of being unable to rent apartments due to their being a refugee; or it could

appear in small seemingly insignificant ways that would build up over time. In a small but meaningful example, one of the women explained that she would sometimes wear her headscarf in a more “Turkish way,” in order to blend in. This is due to the style difference in the way she had worn it in Iraq marking her as not Turkish. She went on to say that at other times she chose to wear it in her own way because she sees it as more beautiful regardless of the attention that it drew.

Some this pressure increased to some of the women recounting uncomfortable interactions on the street, or in buses or taxi cabs, for example. People would tell them to “go back” or look at them accusingly and speak about them in front of them. Four of the women used similar language to express the interactions, explaining they would be called “Arab girl,” using their tone of voice to imply a judgmental tone, that “Arab girl” represented a category of derision and disgust:

Sometimes I feel pressure from some people because they realize that I'm not from Turkey. Some people say “ oh you are an Arabic girl” and I feel sad, “why do you say it like that, Arabic?” Sometimes that makes me sad, and sometimes it doesn't matter for me. [Nisa, 16, Iraqi Muslim]

Worse, was when “Arab girl” was said in a soliciting tone or as a cat-call. They explained that Turkish men knew that they were not doing well financially and tried to take advantage of the situation.

They say bad ways, uh, they say: 'look to her Arabic girl, oh she is a cheap girl, just wants money from us.' And they want to do sex, like that. So when they speak to me, I don't speak to them, I'm not like that. Yeah it happens in the street, in the taxi, or in a restaurant, like the garson [waiter]. Yeah it's so disgusting. [Meryem, 23, Iraqi Christian]

Meryem explained these interactions would only get worse if they knew that she was a Christian, and felt judged as a “bad girl,” and be solicited for sex.

Safiye (29, Syrian Christian) also underlined her experience religious discrimination. She felt that marginalization came from both the Turkish society and her surrounding Syrian population. She explained that her

family received some aid from the government, however, she felt when there were neighborhood distributions, she was left out, which she attributed to being a Christian. She also told of going to an aid NGO and being asked to convert to Islam before she could receive aid.

When the participants were asked about what challenges they faced, often the conversation quickly turned to feelings of discrimination as foreigners being one of their major concerns. Recounting the difficulty in making friends as a young teenager when she first came to Turkey, Manolya (17, Iraqi Muslim) emphasized the discrimination that she faced from other children:

I had friends, we used to play together when I first came to Turkey, but I wasn't comfortable with them, because they always made me feel like I was a stranger, and they would tell me that I was a terrorist, and so I always would feel like they would do something to me and they would make fun of me and laugh, so yeah, I felt so upset. Why are they so racist? I would feel that. After that, we went to another house and I made other friends. And they were so nice to me, and they loved me so much, and we would play together, and I was really happy with them.

In the above quote, Manolya, used the terms: uncomfortable, “feel like a stranger,” upset, and racism to explain the psychological distress caused by her experience, to the point that “she was afraid that they would do something to her. It is unclear in the interview whether she felt that could be a physical altercation, or if it would be more bullying. However, she went on to explain that she found other friends from which she felt love and acceptance.

Similarly, in the interviews, some of the women made sure that I understood that discrimination and harassment was not always the case. They would emphasize that these things happened in specific circumstances, or that they could empathize with why their host community would feel ambivalence towards the refugee community. Throughout my interview with Nazife (42, Syrian Muslim), she would return often to the topic of relations between Syrians and Turks:

It's hard to see the way Turks look at us and see us, how they are so rude to us...four years ago Turkish people were not looking at us in this way but now they are getting more rude to us. They are saying to us, "why are you still here, just go back to your home, why are you staying here?!" But I just ignore it. [Here she started to cry]. When the war was in Lebanon or Iraq and people came to us, we treated them in a good way and not like this, but when we came here people did not treat us in a good way.

It should be noted that though she said that she "just ignores" the rude and hurtful comments, she began to cry, denoting how distressing these comments were to her. A few minutes later after answering some other questions she returned to the topic:

We reached this point because we got so far from God. In Syria they used to fear God and love themselves only little and now they don't fear God and only love themselves. And people, like Turkish people or others, are now using this point. People are saying we are brothers, and they are giving, but only with interest. There is no sense that these are my brothers and sisters, I should take care of you.

But the Turkish people are kind, sometimes they show some things, but at least sometimes they show their kind hearts. To be honest, when Iraqi and Syrians began to come here people were good to them but Iraqi and Syrian started to do some bad stuff and so Turkish people began to take another side with them. So Iraqi and Syrian people they have a part in it.

Nazife's words illustrate the often fluctuating feeling of the women interviewed about not only about their host community, but also about their own community. A few of the women mentioned that since coming to Turkey they had learned not to trust anyone, either Turks or Syrians, because of poor experiences with both communities. In a follow up interview with Meryem (23, Iraqi Christian), she explained her frustration with being included in the misdeeds of her compatriots. She felt that many of the Iraqis had built a poor reputation for themselves, but a lot of that reputation was "from people from Tel Afar, they are like that, but I am from Baghdad."

This fluctuation in feelings of frustration and marginalization from both the Turkish and refugee community carried over into the economic sphere. Many stories were told of being taken advantage of in rental contracts. Part of Leyla's "hosgeldin problem" was the problem of having no place to go and having to sleep in the bus station, but the other part was being almost tricked by another Syrian into a scam rental contract. This was echoed in the workplace. The women that did not work but relied on the salaries from fathers or husbands, often mentioned how employment was difficult to find as foreigners and that salaries would be lower or withheld by employers due to no legal recourse. The women that worked echoed that sentiment, while adding verbal and sexual harassment to the list of complaints. One told her story of while working for an NGO on a project to provide Syrian refugees winter stoves, her Turkish manager started to give her preferential treatment due to her good looks and her good English and then started to make advances toward her. She felt that the other Syrians working on the project resented that and worked to get her fired. Another told of being given the demeaning jobs at her former place of employment, because she is Syrian while receiving constant verbal insults; she said the stress was too much to handle and she quit.

#### **4.5 Discussion**

Refugees coming to Turkey have undergone the "rite of separation" and now find themselves in a place of "limbo and statuslessness" defined as the middle transitional phase before reaggregation (Turner, 1969, p. 97). The women in this study found themselves in a position of liminality, and experience this in layered ways, therefore defined in this chapter as layers of liminality.

Therefore, what is the nature of this liminality that refugees experience? Kutlu (2002) argues that due to their primary action being waiting, liminality is more akin to a period, in that refugees are stuck, and are waiting

for life to start again. In this, refugees are unable to partake in the process of integration socially, economically, culturally, and politically. This is demonstrated in that refugees are blocked in terms of their legal status due to the policies of the Turkish government. They are “hedged out” of their legal protection. This separation is similarly seen spatially, as a physical representation of their social exclusion. The stress of living on the margins of society is termed as a social liminality by Simich et al. (2009). This social liminality is conceptualized as a psychosocial process of adaptation and negotiation with the refugees' internal and external world. This emerged in the data, as the women “stay home,” or something similar, due to the psychological stress. Both Kutlu (2020) and Simich et al.'s (2009) conceptualizations are in line with Turner's (1969) assertion that liminality “is both a phase and a state” (p. 167). The liminal entity “passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state” (p. 94)...and “thus liminality is frequently likened to death... to invisibility... to the wilderness” (p.95).

A weakness in the use of the concept of liminality in regards to refugees and refugee studies can be seen in both Kutlu and Simich's studies. Inherent in Turner's definition of liminality is that it will eventually lead to reaggregation, as in a rite of passage will eventually lead to the new state being realized. However, refugees waiting protracted refugee states, do not necessarily have a guarantee that they will even be resettled or returned to their home countries. They are potentially waiting out of the legal structure indefinitely, or what Bailey et al. (2002) call a “permanent temporariness” (qtd. as cited in Hyndman & Giles, 2011, p. 361). Even if refugees do achieve being “incorporated as citizens in their host state” (Harrell-Bond & Voutira, 1992), as Simich et al.'s (2009) study in Canada demonstrate, they may continue to experience social liminality.

Therefore, the question arises whether liminality in regards to refugees actually comes to an end, in that refugees are fully able to integrate across all dimensions, legally, economically, socially, and psychologically. As is

seen in Berry's (1997) acculturation theory, integration is one of four possible outcomes in the process of acculturation. The outcome of that process relies on both external factors, which in this case, are the structures that prohibit refugees from partaking in legal protection, and the economic and social arenas, and factors arising from the refugee's desire, experience, and expectation. It can then be helpful to conceive of this process as a "resilience trajectory" (Castro & Murry, 2010, p. 376) which refugees move through over time as they cope with the stressors of their new environment.

Therefore, due to the ambiguous nature of liminality, I have chosen to envision the liminal position that the women experienced as a liminal "space." A space gives room for maneuver and negotiation, as the women go along the "resilience trajectory" of adapting. This is in line with Turner's liminal "realm," keeping in mind that that also carries with it attributes of being a phase and a state. Though the question still exists as to whether liminality ends for refugees, I have chosen to continue to use the notion of liminality that the women find themselves in.

I have conceptualized this liminal "space" as one with concentric layers of the differing aspects of liminality experienced by the women in this study. The inner most liminality, the psychosocial, emerged as the women "staying inside:" having been "hedged out" spatially and socially, they withdrew psychologically, spatially, and socially. I then outlined the inhibitors that bound that "inside space." It is my intention that by envisioning the experience of the women in this study as as a space of concentric layers of liminality, it will better capture how these women navigate through; adapt to; return to; and leave these differing aspects of liminality. How this happens depends on the conditions surrounding this process and space. In the next chapter, it is my intention to continue to map out the strategies used by the women to cope, and what may help and hinder them as they move through these layers of liminality.

## CHAPTER 5

### STRATEGIES

Went to a committee; they offered me a  
chair;  
Asked me politely to return next year:  
But where shall we go to-day, my dear, but  
where shall we go to-day? W.H. Auden,  
1939

#### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter it is my intention to map out the grounded theory model for negotiating the layers of liminality that emerged in this study. For this purpose I will introduce a theoretical model that I created to illustrate the links between the core phenomenon of psychosocial liminality that I explained in the last chapter and add the axial coding categories of the intervening conditions and the strategies employed then leading to the consequences. This model evolved from Strauss and Corbin's (1998) framework and borrowed its form from Morrow and Smith (1995), and can be seen in Figure 2.

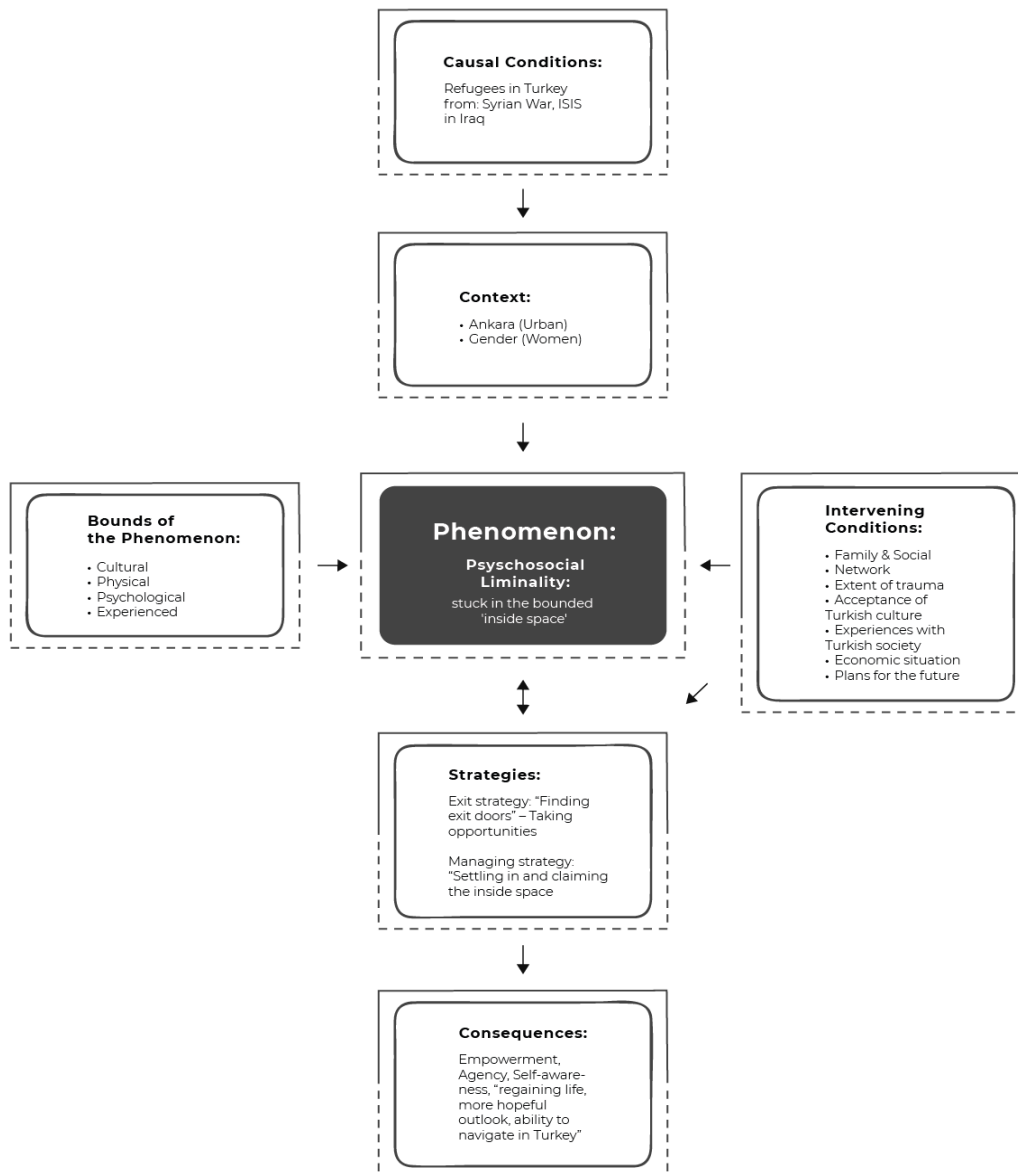
The causal conditions of refugees moving to Turkey from Syria and Iraq was discussed in the the second chapter, and sets the foundation of the study. The context of this specific study is urban refugees living in Ankara. This was narrowed down to the experiences women, as a particularly vulnerable group. The previous chapter explained the phenomenon of the layers of liminality experienced by the women in this study. The core category in this phenomenon was conceptualized as psychosocial liminality



or an “inside space,” that the women found themselves in, which referred to the psychosocial stress experienced and the literal staying inside the house. I then attempted to explain the factors and conditions that both contributed to the creation of that phenomenon and bound it.

This chapter focuses on the strategies to cope with this inner liminality that I identified from the data. Two main strategies emerged from the data. Strategies were developed to “exit” this inner psychosocial liminality and to engage with society. Alongside these, strategies were developed to manage the liminality, by “settling in.” Though I conceptualized them as such, it is important to note that they are in essence, both used to manage and move onward on the resilience trajectory, and therefore not mutually exclusive, nor can they be totally complete in and of themselves. These can be seen in more detail in Figure 3. The behaviors coming from these strategies contributed to the women adapting to the difficult situation of forced displacement and finding themselves stuck in a new country, a new culture, a new physical and economic situation.

Both the bounds of the phenomenon, mentioned earlier, and intervening conditions influenced the participant's choice in engaging in these strategies. These conditions intervened in the adaptation process that the women engaged in, and could be beneficial or disruptive to these strategies. It's important to note that none of these variables act in isolation but in conjunction with others, and against each woman's personal backdrop of their particular situation and history. Depending on the situation, these intervening conditions could cause the participants to retreat back into the inner layer of social liminality. This is denoted by the double arrow in the diagram Figure 1 in the previous chapter, and in Figure 2 below.



**Figure 2**  
*Theoretical Model*

## 5.2 Intervening Conditions

The intervening conditions overlap with, and carry over from, the conditions that bound the liminal space of the participants. As I compared my data, I found these conditions arose out of categories of differing factors that have the potential to influence: 1) the choice of strategies engaged in, and/or 2)

the effectiveness of those strategies. These conditions could be a strength and an asset to the participant and had the potential to be protective factors in her resilience strategies. On the other hand, they could be a hindrance and disrupt the process, to the point of reinforcing the liminality. This could mean that, hypothetically, the participant, having her choice narrowed by one intervening condition, engages in a strategy to leave her liminal position only to be disrupted by another intervening condition, causing her to withdraw socially, to become more psychologically distressed, and to feel more stuck. Therefore liminality is reinforced. In the reverse, an intervening condition such as a supportive family and social structure, could help to open up the choices for the participant and help her to cope.

Though these conditions, or variables, to use another term, are difficult to measure and are in many ways overlapping, I chose to categorize them as such. Intervening conditions include (a) family and social network, (b) extent of negative or traumatic emotions, (c) acceptance of Turkish culture, (d) experiences with Turkish people (e) economic situation, (f) plans for the future, (g) availability of educational opportunities.

### **5.2.1 Family and Social Network**

Family ties and social networks provided the participants with support and resources to smooth the transition to Turkey. Most of the women reported that they had relatives that had escaped to Turkey prior to their arrival, and that these relatives were their initial contact when arriving in the county. The women, or their male relatives prior to the women coming, would often stay with relatives or other close contacts initially and would lean on these contacts to help to find places to stay. These contacts also helped to navigate them around the city, helped explain legal bureaucracy, and would provide information on help centers or educational opportunities. Their social networks also helped economically, providing financial support or information about job openings.

However, not having family or social networks in Turkey when coming, or if their initial contacts were distant, would cause increased stress and the sense of feeling alone. For a few of the participants, they had no family in Turkey, and they explained the difficulty. They also mourned the loss of the family and social networks that they had in the past. Leyla (23, Syrian Muslim), who had no family connections in Turkey to speak of, spoke of her loneliness:

Even in Syria, even with the problems that we had, the war that we had, I wasn't that depressed the same way as here. Because I had my family there, my friends there, all the people that I know, I grew up with them, so it was easier than here. Sometimes I just sit and think, what if one day we just died in this house? No one would ever notice, no one ever know us here in Turkey. Its like living in a place no one is noticing you, no one knowing you. Ach! Its very hard. Sometimes I just wish to hear the door knock, and someone coming to visit us. Ach.

In the above quotation, Leyla spoke of how having friends and family helped with the trauma while in Syria. That, even though experiencing the war, she “was not as depressed as now,” now being that she does not have friends and other family, outside of her nuclear family. This is a clear example of the psychological and social aspects to this liminality. She felt “not known,” “not noticed,” and not remembered, in that if they suddenly died, no one would care. She longed for a simple visit, feeling like this would mitigate some of these feelings of loneliness and depression.

Additionally, if there were family tensions, or absence, there was an increased report of negative feelings like depression and apathy. This was especially true if the family head, either the father or husband, was not present, due to leaving for Europe or death. Manolya (17, Iraqi Muslim) explained how her father's absence negatively impacted the condition of her family's sense of security both financially and emotionally:

After my father went to Europe, the relationship between my parents became a bit shaky, and they don't talk to each other a lot, and he didn't send enough money to live. So my mother had to work, and she had a lot of problems while she was working; and they didn't give her enough money, and they tried to use her, and use her body,

and things like this. And it was really hard for us, we saw that our mother was hurting and we couldn't do anything. He left three years ago, and it was really hard, because when you live in a house without a father, you feel like you have nothing to give him your problems, and feel like he always has your back and things like this.

The absence of Manolya's father, as she explained, clearly put relational and financial strain on her family. Her mother was then forced to work, which Manolya had earlier explained was uncharacteristic for her family and her culture. This exposed her mother to sexual harassment and potential exploitation. As to how her father's absence affected her, she speaks of feeling the lack of emotional support and protection of a father. That in a sense, due to her not being able to give him her problems, she had to carry them herself.

### **5.2.2 Extent of Negative and Traumatic Emotions**

Carrying over from the psychological condition that inhibited the psychosocial liminality, the extent to which negative and traumatic emotions were felt and experienced was a large factor in the women engaging in exit strategies from that liminality. As was explained in the section regarding the psychological inhibitors, these emotions included the trauma of violence in their home country, from the journey, and pain of loss. The extent to which these were experienced in their home country and the extent to which they were repeated while living in Turkey could affect the process negatively or positively. Additionally, these could be affected by the resources available to help such as a strong support system which could be family or faith community, or an outlet such as painting or helping others.

Two contrasting examples of this category are Nisa and Manolya, both from Iraq, sixteen and seventeen years old respectively. Both explained having “seen war.” Nisa explained that Turkey was a relief to her: “I feel so relaxed here, there is no war, no one trying to kill me, I am safe now. I am good.” Manolya, on the other hand, experienced past trauma, and then again loss

and anguish while living in transition in Turkey. After expressing the pain of the loss of her friends due to the bombing of her city, and the pain of not saying goodbye, she then explained she had given up on trying to make friends here in Turkey. She stated that when first coming to Turkey she tried to make friends in her neighborhood, however, due to moving from apartments and cities frequently and having to say goodbye again and again, she decided not to have any more friends because “I didn't want them to hurt, and I didn't want to hurt.” She then went on to explain that she reached out to her mother, who supported her and got her a phone to use social media to connect to new friends and new ideas. She explained that it was through contacts on social media that she got the idea to paint and deal with her emotions.

### **5.2.3 Acceptance of Turkish Culture**

As the refugee women arrived in Turkey, many expressed that they were faced with a culture that was different or similar depending on their previous context and background. Some mentioned that they felt more comfortable in Turkey in relation to other potential countries of migration because of their shared religious and cultural values. Nisa, the only one that reported it was her family's intention to stay in Turkey, mentioned that this was one of the reasons that her family had chosen to immigrate to Turkey as opposed to Europe. She explained that in her view Turkey was actually more free for women, and therefore she felt more comfortable as a woman going out of the house in Turkey than in her home of Tel Afar. Others recounted that such things as Turkish women not wearing the headscarf had surprised them when first arriving in Turkey. The freedom for women in Turkey was seen as a positive trait by some and a negative trait by others. A few explained that it made them uncomfortable:

What makes me disconnected here is their [Turkish] culture. Here everyone has their own freedom to do what they want, but we are not, and I can't be a part of that. But my family knows what's best for

me, so I feel happy about that. [Sabah, 21, Iraqi Turkmen]

Sometimes I feel like I am connected here, and sometimes I don't, like we are strange people... Because I'm a girl, and am wearing a scarf, it is not really not ok for them, because they don't like to see girls wearing scarves, so that makes me feel uncomfortable. But I don't want to change the way that I dress. [Ayshe, 24, Iraqi Turkmen]

It's difficult to determine why Ayshe felt that Turks “do not like to see girls wearing scarves” as she did not elaborate, but regardless, it made her feel in some way judged, and therefore disconnected. She had earlier alluded to the fact the style of her headscarf marked her as not Turkish, as she wore her scarf in a more Iraqi way, this difference may have also made her feel uncomfortable. As a woman who wore the head-scarf, she was less able to blend in to Turkish society than her male counterparts.

Depending on how the individual and their community responded to the difference in Turkish cultural practices affected the social liminality experienced. This is evidenced by Sabah's quote “I can't be part of it.” Though Sabah could speak Turkish, a few chose to totally remain within their own community and social network and not interact with Turkish culture and society at all, not learning any Turkish and interacting with only those in their family and close circle.

#### **5.2.4 Experiences with Turkish Society**

In a similar and overlapping way as above, experiences with Turkish society could both be a help or a hindrance to the adaptation process. As mentioned in the section regarding experienced inhibitors that bound their social liminality; discrimination, marginalization, and experiencing sexual and racial harassment could even harm and disrupt the strategies and could reinforce liminality. This is demonstrated in Leyla's (23, Syrian Muslim) quote below. She was, as explained above, already experiencing depression, loneliness, and lack of a social network. She then decided that she should get a job:

So we went to the factory [to work], and there were two Turkish ladies who worked there. They really really hate the Syrian women, they really hate them; and they make them do the dirtiest jobs, like cleaning the bathroom, cleaning the floor and doing jobs that aren't good. So when I went there the first day, they started to say bad words, saying 'why are you even here, we don't care if you die or not. You are bothering us, you are stealing our jobs and you are stealing our men.' Yeah. It was bad. It was the first time that I felt really humiliated. And I started to feel that there is seriously people that don't want us to be here. And the Canada [resettlement process] was taking a long time and I was getting really angry about it. And I was just like, 'I just want to leave! I just want to leave Turkey, leave Ankara! I hate it so much, so much.' I was feeling like it was a prison. It is keeping me here and won't let me go.

Here Leyla's negative experience reinforced the frustration she was already feeling. She also referenced the layers of liminality felt, as she explained that her experience at work (marginalization in the economic and social sphere), made her feel that “Turkey was prison,” (reinforcing her liminal position in “Turkey as a Waiting room”) and that she wanted to leave.

Just as a negative experience could reinforce liminality, a positive experience could be helpful and transformative. Later Leyla got another job working for an aid center and saw it as a totally different experience:

It's good, it gives me more experience, this job, and knowing more friends, and I am actually starting to love Turkey. It's getting better because I have friends here. Even though I still have problems but now I can solve them, because I now know that I have people supporting me, having my back. I have my friends, the people that I know, Turkish, Arabic, people from all over the world.

As expressed by Leyla, “I am actually starting to love Turkey;” positive interactions with Turkish society was pointed to by the participants as helping their perspective of their time in Turkey. Melek (15, Syrian Muslim), who went to a mixed Syrian and Turkish school generally felt helped and supported by her classmates and teachers, and felt that “Turks are lovely people.” After our first interview, Meryem (23, Iraqi Christian) married a Turkish citizen from a similar Christian background. In our follow-up interview, she explained that she had changed her residence status in Turkey; and her primary network was changing to Turkish, though she



stayed connected to her older refugee and Arabic community.

### **5.2.5 Economic Situation**

The women often pointed to their economic situation as a point of frustration and difficulty for themselves and their families. The difficulty finding a job, paying rent and utilities, and providing for basic necessities all reinforced the stress of living in displacement. Some were forced to rent poor quality houses or live in neighborhoods far from the city center, and three women explained that their family had come to Ankara looking for better economic opportunities. Financial concerns also inhibited women from taking language courses, or from “going out.” Financial difficulties and stress was mentioned explicitly by nine out of the eleven women interviewed as a factor that marked their time in Turkey. For some of the women, the strain was mitigated by family abroad, or by meager aid received from the government and aid organizations. To the degree that financial stress increased, the degree of psychosocial liminality experienced also seemed to increase. When asked to give advice to new-comers, many said to “not come” due to the financial stress:

Don't come to a country like this. In my country, if there is no food, if there is no peace, its more better than to be a poor family in a strange country [Safiye, 29, Syrian Christian].

If I would give advice for living, I would say, don't come, because renting houses here is really expensive, and there are no jobs here. If everything was cheaper here, and more opportunity for jobs for men, that would make life easier. But I would wish to live happily with my parents and go back to my country [Sabah, 21, Iraqi Turkmen].

Nazife (42, Syrian Muslim) explained that she felt much more comfortable in Turkey a few years ago, before the economic downturn that Turkey experienced. She felt that her family’s place in Turkey was more insecure now and that there were higher social tensions between Turks and Syrians than when she first came.

### 5.2.6 Plans for the Future

The plans that the participants and their families had for their future, also affected the women's liminality. Most came to Turkey thinking that they would be in the country only a short time before relocating elsewhere or that they would be returning to their own country. These were initially less willing to put effort into learning language, or looking for educational opportunities. This was especially true for those that were hoping to resettle in a third country. It was due to the resettlement process, which meant long waits at the United Nations for example, that they chose to come to live in Ankara in the first place. Upon obtaining an apartment, they then entered a period of prolonged waiting. This waiting reinforced and increased liminality, and made negative emotions worse. This could be seen in the quote from Leyla in the previous section, it was the combined negative experience with Turkish society with the liminality of waiting. In a follow-up interview with Leyla (23, Syrian Muslim) after her family had finally received the go-ahead from the Canadian embassy, she offered the advice to others:

The first lesson you should learn here is “never wait.” I have been here for three years and a half now, and if I had started to go to university from the first day that I came here, then I would be anything I want. Or I would learn Turkish. Not like now, I can't even speak a couple words in Turkish, I mean, I can understand some words.

I would say go out, don't stay home, make new friends. I was waiting with [my family], I had been waiting for about two years, like them, and after that I felt like, “That's enough, I should do something.” All of those years have been going out of me, and I can't get them back. This is really wrong to waste your time. I mean the life that you are living, you can never get it back, so take the chance to take the chance, every single moment. For me, I regret that I made that [wasted the time], but that encouraged me to work harder when I get there [Canada]

In the quote above, Leyla points out that her time in Turkey would have been helped if she had made use of the time that she had in Turkey. So her advice, in a sense, was that in the waiting for resettlement, “don't wait,” and

continue to pursue short-term goals. It emerged that similarly those that held on to short-term goals for their time in Turkey felt more hopeful and positive. These goals were things like the above, learning Turkish and starting or finishing education, or managing the home and family well.

### **5.2.7 Availability of Educational Opportunities**

As was mentioned above, short term goals were helpful in the participant's coping with liminality. Largely these goals were centered on education, either for Turkish language learning, or finishing the education that they had left when coming to Turkey. These were either helped or hampered by the availability and accessibility of educational opportunities. Education could help to reduce the stress of marginalization that came from a lack of knowledge of the language, and provided a social network. Melek (15, Syrian Muslim), attending a Turkish-Syrian high school, explained that prior to coming to Ankara, she had attended a Syrian school and therefore had little to no contacts with Turkish society. Her advice to a newcomer to Turkey:

I would advise her to build relationships with Turks, don't be afraid of Turks, they are lovely people. They should go to school, because if they don't go to school, there is no relationship with Turks. I build relationships because I went to school.

However, she also explained that because her *kimlik* (residence card) was not registered for Ankara, she was only permitted to go to school as a guest for one year, and she was worried that she would not be allowed to attend in the upcoming year. This inability to continue education due to leaving the refugee's permitted province was a problem for the four participants that were trying to finish their education. Manolya (17, Iraqi Muslim) explained how this hampered her goals:

I would hope in the next few months to be finally settled in my life, to go back to school, and to be more open to the people around me. But because we left the city that the UN told us to go to I can not go

to school in this city until the UN gives us permission to move to Ankara. And they didn't give us permission. That makes me so upset, because school defines your future, and how your life could be, and without it you can't do anything

Two Iraqi Turkmen participants, Ayshe and Sabah, explained that the way that they tried to bypass this restriction was to attend an Iraqi school that was set up by an Iraqi association. The education was not adequate and met at sporadic times, and therefore they quit. Likewise, a few of the women tried to apply for Turkish language courses and were disappointed that they were not able to partake or continue due to financial constraints, infrequent and inadequate meeting times, or the distance needed to travel to the course.

### **5.3 Strategies**

In the context of being an urban refugee in Ankara, women found themselves experiencing layers of liminality, with a bounded inner psychosocial liminality, and expressed feeling stuck. The presence of the intervening conditions, the phenomenon of this liminality led to the women developing and engaging in two core strategies to cope with, limit, or leave altogether this feeling of being stuck in this psychosocial “inside place.” The first was an exit strategy that I labeled “finding doors and taking opportunities.” The second was a strategy that labeled “settling in and claiming the space,” and the goal was to, in a way, to internally manage that space. These were labeled as such in order to more clearly see the behaviors and processes at work. These were not mutually exclusive, and were engaged in at times simultaneously and in various degrees. Additionally, they could be cyclical, in that depending on the intervening conditions, their effectiveness could be uncertain, and consequently, the women could cycle back into social and spatial withdrawal and into the psychosocial liminality.

I will explain each core strategies along with their sub-strategies, which can be seen in Figure 3. Again, I will use select quotations from the women to better illustrate each point.

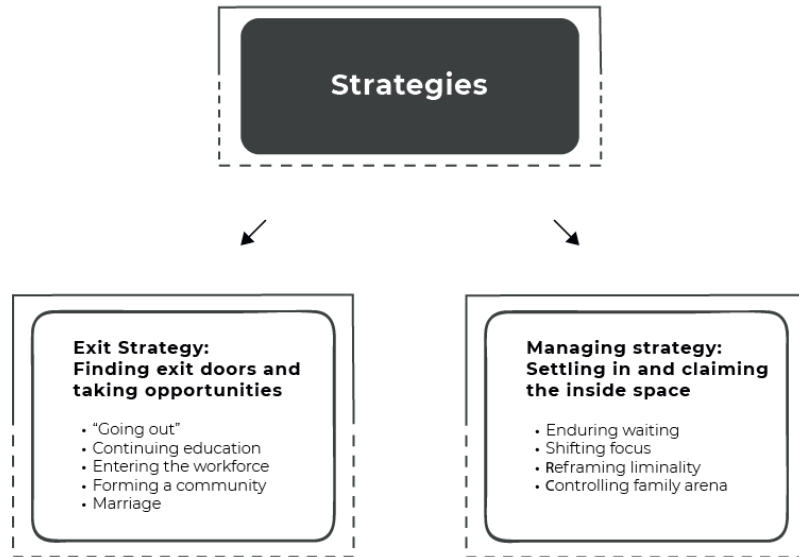


Figure 3

*Strategies for coping with the inner psychosocial liminality*

### 5.3.1 Exit Strategy: Finding Exit Doors and Taking Opportunities

This overarching strategy category, in summary, includes strategies to leave, or to come out of the psychosocial liminality that the women experience. This leaving could have varying degrees of temporariness and permanency. Due to the inner layer of liminality being conceptualized as an “inside place,” this core strategy was labeled “finding exit doors and taking opportunities.” The purpose of this name is to hint toward the active role of the women in coping by finding, taking, and creating opportunities to exit this liminality. The name emerged and was derived from an *in vivo* code in a quote from Meryem (23, Iraqi Christian) in which she explained that finding an Arabic church community was a turning point for her. She explained that she had been in a “dark ring” when she found that God had *opened a door* for her, in that she discovered a similar ethnic-religious community and through them, got a job that “changed her life.” Actively finding and choosing to ‘go through’ this open door out of liminality to engage in

community, both Arabic and Turkish, and to engage in the job market encapsulates the codes that constructed the conceptualization of this category. Examples of these codes were as follows: 'to take a chance,' 'going out,' and 'outside engagement.'

As the data was compared and as categories emerged, the *in vivo* code “take a chance” was repeated through at least five of the interviews. In context this phrase did not mean as in the English meaning, to take a gamble, but the meaning is closer to: to take an opportunity or to find an opportunity. An example can be seen in the quote above in the section of “Plans for the future” from Leyla as she advises that refugees should not wait, but “take a chance,” as in to find a job, or to start education and they should “go out, don't stay home.”

Additionally, the code “going out” was used continually by many of the women. Though it describes a physical action, it was often used to signify an engaging in the outside world. I paired the *in vivo* code “going out” with the code “outside engagement” due to their strong links in the understanding of the women participating in the interviews. As is demonstrated in the quote by Safiye (29, Syrian Christian), the act of “staying home” signified fear and hopelessness, the trauma of her journey, and the role of preparing food for the family. Whereas the action of “going out” is symbolic of joining society, having confidence, and regaining independence:

At the beginning... I stayed at home for two months. I was afraid to go outside. I was tired from walking across the border, and we felt afraid because we didn't know anyone, and also my sister stayed inside all the time. Just work at home, prepare food for children, for men, when they came home from outside. That's all. *But now*, now I *go outside*, I can take transportation, I applied for a course, I can do what I want as I want when I want. Every night I walk in the garden. I can go to the church, and again on Monday I will take a Turkish lesson, and there is some help with some friends from the church, we meet together.

In the beginning we felt that we were *hopeless*, but with time, our views changed and now we feel that there is *hope*... We started to

join the society, my husband started to work, and I started to *go outside*, we have some self-confidence now. We feel like we are independent. But it came step-by-step. Slowly slowly. Still there are some challenges, but everyday there is something better, everyday there is something better than the day before. [italics my own]

She acknowledges that this process from hopelessness to hope was not a quick one. It was a step-by-step process of adaptation, a sum of small actions: joining society, “going outside,” gaining employment and self-confidence, and a changing of perspective.

The strategies that were identified that the women had developed to leave their inner liminality and take opportunities were: continuing education, entering the workforce, and forming community. Examples of the use of these sub-strategies can be neatly seen in the steps taken by Safiye above. She mentioned applying for a Turkish language course, going out to meet with community, both from the church and neighbors in the garden of her building, and used the examples of using transportation and her husband's job as regaining independence. These sub-strategies are in this theoretical model the 'doors' to engaging the outside world, or as Safiye said “to join society.”

The concept of going through a door also implies that one is able to exit or enter through that door. Depending on the intervening conditions that the women are met with in the use of these strategies, liminality could be reduced or reinforced. As was explained in the section on the intervening conditions, factors such as experience with Turkish society as one entered the workforce could either support that strategy or could hamper the strategy. Additionally, the intervening conditions could cause refugees to retreat, or cycle back, into psychosocial liminality. This is represented as the double sided arrow in Figures 1 and 2.

### 5.3.1.1 Continuing Education

The topic of learning and education was one of high priorities of the women interviewed. This was especially true for those that had their education interrupted by war and the flight to Turkey. Many recognized that the lack of education and the prospect of not being able to continue with their education contributed to their feelings of hopelessness and exclusion. Therefore, the women used various methods to find ways to continue their education in Turkey. Some relied on friends or community tips to find schools, as the Iraqi Turkmen participants did. They then enrolled in an association-run school as opposed to a government school. Melek (15, Syrian Muslim) reported that she enrolled as a “guest” student in a high school for one year. Ruhan (19, Syrian Muslim) explained that though she did not continue her education past her 7<sup>th</sup> grade certificate in Syria, she was able to attend a religious school for one year. However, Manyola (17, Iraqi Muslim) was hampered in her hope to continue school, due to her *kimlik* (government issued identification card) registered to a different province than where she was currently living.

Language learning is also an important piece to continued education. All of the women saw language as a door to engaging with the outside world. Though all acknowledged that, and generally put an emphasis on the importance of knowing Turkish, the levels to which they engaged in this strategy differed. This was due in part to personal desire, and to intervening conditions, mainly: the availability of educational opportunities, the plans for the future, and financial situation of the participants. As was explained specifically in the section on the availability of educational opportunities, when the women experienced inadequacy in education it could cause frustration and reinforce hopelessness and cause them to give up. Likewise, financial constraints could cause the women to give up or to not enroll in a language course. This could be because they did not have the money for the course, or that they or other family members had to work, and so it was not possible to attend. Plans for the future also influenced the women's decision



to learn Turkish. Those that planned to relocate to a third country in the near future saw less need to learn Turkish. This was also true of those that were unable to visualize any future for themselves and of those that wanted to return to their home country. However, those that were interfacing with Turkish society in a positive way, especially through work, like Meryem (23, Iraqi Christian), and through education, like Melek (15, Syrian Muslim), planned to continue and therefore put emphasis on continuing to learn Turkish. These two women in the process of learning Turkish reported that they felt empowered in their language skills and were hoping to continue to learn additional languages.

Another way in which the women used continuing education was through finding opportunities to learn or expand their skills. Four of the women interviewed had taken part in a sewing skills course. The sewing course had three main purposes as expressed by the women. For Sabah (21, Iraqi Turkmen) it was “to learn something new that could enter my mind” and for Nisa, (16, Iraqi Muslim), it was to make new connections and friends. It was the same for the others, also with the goal of using the new skill for economic gain, as will be seen below. Two of the women started to use art, one going to an art course, to channel their emotions and to expand their skills. Also a few women found connections with others to practice and learn English, either face to face and on the internet.

### **5.3.1.2 Entering the Workforce**

One of the sub-strategies that women engaged to “go out” was to enter the workforce. This was especially seen in the case of Meryem and Leyla. Meryem (23, Iraqi Christian) explained that her “job picked me up, gave me new life,” and it renewed purpose in her life. Likewise, Manolya (17, Iraqi Muslim) inferred that learning how to sew and working as a tailor was also a part of her “giving herself a chance,” by helping her mother. Prior to this decision, she had gone through a “dark period” and had withdrawn from her

family:

When you feel depressed, you feel so upset all the time, and I thought, I have to *give myself a chance* and I decided to start talking to my siblings, and help my mother, and my mother helped me a lot too, she used to talk to me a lot and give me good ideas and say that I could use the phone to find some friends and have fun, and so it kept increasing. And after that we decided to come here and learn how to sew, and that's how I got out of the depressive time.

It seemed that working had not been necessarily required of Manolya by her mother, but recognizing the economic situation that her family was in, she decided to learn how to sew and then work, and this was a part of her “getting out” of her “depressive time.” This was echoed by Leyla (23, Syrian Muslim):

So we waited two and half years, so, I was so depressed. I felt so lonely, I had no friends, I had nothing to do. I actually thought that there was not very many Syrian people in Ankara. I was like, why are there no Syrian people here? After one year, we decided that's enough, we have to do something. And one day, I was in the PTT... and I found a Syrian guy, and he started to talk to me, and he notice that I was an Arabic girl, and he asked if I was Syrian, and I was like “Yeah! Are you Syrian too?” And we started to talk and he told that he was working for an organization... its a Syrian organization here in Ankara. I was very excited, I was like. “Yeah! Let me work with you! Please take me to work with you!” and I asked him if they needed volunteers, and he said yeah, actually they need girls to work with them as volunteers, so I took their number, and I talked to them and I started to work with them. And it was the beginning point of my real life in Ankara. And it was my first time that I work, it was my first job ever.

Similarly to Manoyla, Leyla came to a point where she “decided that's enough,” and she could not just wait anymore. She then found an opportunity and took it, and she then started working. She explained that this job was the “beginning point of her real life in Ankara,” inferring that prior to this, while in psychosocial liminality she had not been really living. She went on to explain that she had “a lot of problems” at that job, and the discrimination that she experienced eventually caused her to retreat and withdraw again. This was a cycle that was repeated for Leyla. However, in our follow-up interview before her leaving for Canada, she reiterated her

belief that “going out was better than staying in.” She regretted the “time that was wasted” and wished that she had started working or going to school earlier, but was glad of the experiences and skills that she gathered during her time working, and felt that they would help better her life in Canada.

The women who were working did not necessarily need to, in that their salaries were required to help the financial situation of the family. It seemed more like a personal expectation, or a choice. This was different from many of the participants' male relatives, who were required to work for the family. As one of the Turkmen women explained, that women in her family did not work due to cultural restrictions, but her sixteen year old brother was expected to help provide financially. The choice to engage in this sub-strategy was one that was not open for all the women, but for the women who were able to work they also seemed less encumbered by family expectation to provide due to the fact that they were women.

### **5.3.1.3 Forming Community**

The importance of forming a community emerged throughout the data. As explained in the section on social networks, community is an important way for refugees to transition to Turkey and find opportunities for jobs, for education, and for housing. Beyond those foundational needs, forming community provided the women a feeling of independence and belonging, hence providing a door out of psychosocial liminality. Forming a community could be hindered or supported by the intervening conditions of the social network, prior experience with and the acceptance of Turkish culture, and the extent of trauma.

Forming community varied for each of the participants, in many, focusing on fostering relationships with other refugees, from places like their neighborhood, school, or work. These were often with others of similar ethnic, religious, or language groups. Others used social media and

messaging apps to connect with both old and new contacts in their home country and abroad. They reported checking in with family, or what was happening with old connections, or who was getting married or moving. Others formed community with special family relations, such as sisters-in-law. Nisa and Meryem explained that it was together with their older sisters-in-law, that they would go out to go shopping, to the park, or exploring the city.

To those that belonged to minority groups, connecting to their respective ethnic and religious social networks was vital. The Turkmen women mentioned Turkmen associations that provided help, and education. For the two Christians interviewed, it was finding a church community that helped to turn a page for them. Meryem (23, Iraqi Christian) described the approximately three month period when first coming to Turkey in which she would just stay at home and refused to go outside, she “hated life, and herself,” and labeled that time a “disgusting life.” She attributed the point of change to when she found the Arabic church that was meeting in Ankara. From them she found a job working with other refugees:

When I come to [the church], I tell you, I feel like I am so safe here, and I see Christian people, and I think 'oh my God! Christian people like me!' So my life here is so different now, I feel so happy here, and I don't want to go to another job, and I can work everywhere if I want to work, I can find another job, that's so easy for me, but I don't want to. But this job picked me up, gave me new life. So this job changed my life.

Now I talk to the other refugees, about my life here in Turkey, when I came, those three months, what I do in that time, and then when God opened the doors for me, when I go to the church... I see my friend, and my life changed so much. Only maybe in one or two months when I come here, I feel like, 'oh my god, I was in a dark ring,' but not now, I feel like so free, and have freedom, and the people here love me, and I love them, like that. I tell you, when I help one person I feel so happy.

In this quote from Meryem, not only does she attribute finding the church community and the job as a turning point for her, she mentions that it was afterward that she was then able to reflect on that previous time of liminality

and identified it as a “dark ring.” She calls finding the community an “open door” out of that dark place into a place where she could find “people like me,” and experience love, feelings of safety and freedom, and could then act altruistically. Later Meryem explained that it was through her church connections she met her Turkish Syriac husband, and through him and her job she formed a Turkish community around herself.

As was explained in the section on intervening conditions, where there was trauma, tension, or absence in the home it reinforced liminality, and was harder to overcome. Continuing with the example of Manyola (17, Iraqi Muslim) who spoke of the stress that her father's absence caused on her family, when asked how she felt affected, she answered:

It made me depressed, I used to stay in my room the whole time, I didn't talk to my siblings, and I didn't want to do anything. I used to look at little girls with their fathers and I used to feel really bad, especially because I didn't go to school, so I felt really depressed.

Others explained that trauma, tension, and loss would lead them to “smoke too much,” or to “just sit all day,” and they would not want to interface with community.

This could also be the case when women tried to engage in forming community but experienced discrimination or harassment. These would potentially cause the women to retreat back into social liminality. Examples of this effect from harassment and discrimination occurred from work colleagues, employers, landlords, neighbors and schoolmates.

### **5.3.2 Managing Strategy: Settling In and Claiming the Inside Space**

This overarching strategy category includes strategies to manage the inner psychosocial liminality. Continuing with the concept of this liminality as a concentric circle, this strategy was labeled “settling in and claiming the inside space.” This was due to the women's choices to limit or reduce liminality by managing it from the inside, as it were, rather than ignoring it

or “leaving” it. This could be by what I labeled “settling in” meaning to come to terms with their feelings and surroundings or “claiming the space” in which women reframed the liminality, chose to focus on family and home, or controlled other areas of life. See Figure 3.

### **5.3.2.1 Settling In**

One sub-strategy that women used to manage liminality was a type of settling into it. For some there was an acceptance of where they were and a focus on positive thinking. For others it was a more tacit choice to 'wait it out.'

As has been explained, waiting emerged as a major theme throughout the data. Some of the participants were waiting to be resettled, some were waiting to go back to their home, two were waiting to go to school, one was waiting to get married. As was mentioned earlier, this felt like “being stuck.” All experienced this waiting, and some chose to accept it as part of the process. When asked what advice she would give to newcomers to Turkey, Sabah (21, Iraqi Turkmen) simply said “don't come here. If you do come, have patience. Its normal for me to have patience.” She later explained that she was just waiting to return to Iraq where she hoped to continue her studies. This attitude to just endure with patience was repeated in at least five of the interviews.

Waiting was a strategy that women could not use indefinitely. Here the intervening condition of plans for the future affected this strategy. As Leyla (23, Syrian Muslim) and Nazife (42, Syrian Muslim) explained, if the plan for the future was uncertain and prolonged, it caused depression. However, if there was hope for an upcoming change in the near future, or a time limit, it was fine. Three of the women put self defined time limits to manage the waiting time, saying things like, “next year we will go back,” or “in a few months, I will...” Women also pointed to hopeful factors that could reduce

waiting time such as why their resettlement case had merit to relatives abroad who were sponsoring them.

The financial position of the family also affected the women's strategy of waiting. All of the interviews mentioned financial concerns. The more access that they or male relatives had to stable employment, the less stress the women expressed. However, if their financial situation was unstable, the more the stress of finances would intervene in the strategy of enduring waiting.

The other aspect of this strategy was a shift in focus toward the positive. This included positive self talk and choosing to focus on positive emotions and aspects of situations. Three of the women mentioned a moment when they remembered choosing to “give myself a chance.” Ayshe (24, Iraqi Turkmen) reported that though life was hard at first, she started “feeling that I could make it, I could live here,” and told herself this. When asked what advice she had for new refugees coming to Turkey, Manoyla (17, Iraqi Muslim) advised them “to take good thoughts about their experience.” Some mentioned trusting in a positive future and “having faith,” as Safiye (29, Syrian Christian) does:

And I look forward to the future. Not all Syrians are like this, but I have faith. Always we have faith, that God will take care of us and provide all our need, and for that I can continue.

At times the choice to focus on the positive emerged subtly from the data, and could be seen in women sometimes choosing to phrase answers with what I labeled “but” statements. This would be when women would explain a difficulty and then follow it up with a “but” and add a positive statement. This can be seen in the quote above, and in another quote from Safiye:

To ensure your basic needs that is the hardest thing.... *But* the government, they give us something every six months, the church and other societies, everyone tries to help, to do something. [italics mine]

### 5.3.2.2 Claiming the Space

The second sub-strategy that women developed to manage the inner liminality was what I labeled “claiming the inner space.” This strategy consisted of codes such as ‘focusing on family and home,’ ‘reframing the liminality,’ and ‘controlling family areas of life.’ These codes are all linked together in that they all deal with the choice of focus on the home and family.

In focusing on family, the women managed their psychosocial liminality by essentially reducing the outside element as much as possible. A few of the women explained that they did not need to go out other than to go to the market etc. and their focus was inside. Instead of attempting to exit, they claimed the inside space and reframed social liminality into concepts of duty and responsibility. In these instances, expressions like “for the sake of the children,” or “my duty for my family” were used to explain, or to frame, their experiences. For example, in our interview, when explaining about the hardships of managing a home in Turkey and then experiencing discrimination, Nazife (42, Syrian Muslim) said she just ignored the harsh situation, but then immediately started crying. She followed that up with, but “this is my duty for my family...I have to do it, so I just do it. You are strong, so you just do it.” This strategy was especially true of those that had children. The participants that were not the head of the home focused on the home, family, and household chores. This included helping with cooking, watching siblings or nieces and nephews, and spending time with family. In response to the question on what tools did she find helpful in living in Turkey, Sabah (21, Iraqi Turkmen) answered, “to stay with my family, and be happy.”

A piece of this sub-strategy was to control other aspects of life. This emerged through some of the women explaining about how in Turkey their daughters had gotten married, or how they had accessed opportunities for their children. Nazife (42, Syrian Muslim) worried about how to get her son



disability services, and Fatma (50, Iraqi Turkmen) focused on the education of her two daughters. Safiye (29, Syrian Christian) mentioned that she was concerned with the high rate of women marrying around fourteen or fifteen years old and how she was attempting to talk to the girls in her neighborhood to explain to them the problems. A few of the women mentioned how they tried to help others with their problems.

#### **5.4 Consequences**

As the participants used these strategies to manage and leave the liminality that they experienced, these strategies led to consequences. One was the paradox that these strategies could both increase and reduce liminality. As women experienced disruption from the intervening conditions, it had the potential to increase liminality and cause the women to retreat back into psychosocial exclusion. For example, Leyla (23, Syrian Muslim) recounted the story of how she entered the workforce because it was “better than staying home.” However, experiencing discrimination and verbal harassment at her new job was a tipping point for her and the “feelings of being in prison in Turkey” got much worse. Afterward, she “stayed home for a long time...feeling depressed, loneliness, sadness.” Likewise, as women managed liminality by framing that 'space' as a period of waiting or of “just family,” this had the effect of coping, but on the other hand, could increase social isolation and negative feelings. However, through engaging in these strategies during their time in Turkey many of the women moved into a more settled state of being, a more hopeful outlook, and the ability to navigate in Turkey.

Most of the women reflecting on their time in Turkey mentioned the consequence of greater self-awareness:

I see myself as unique, and I'm happy with myself [Ruhan, 19, Syrian Muslim]

When I came to Turkey, I feel like, “I am girl.” “ I am someone.” “I am here.” like that. Everything is not the same, I feel like I am a new girl here. Not like in Iraq. I feel so relaxed here. [Nisa, 16, Iraqi Muslim]

I have the power to carry heavy loads, I can live without my family. I have self-confidence. [Safiye, 29, Syrian Christian]

A theme that emerged was feeling stronger and more able to stand on their own. They expressed realizing more of their internal strength, and one explained that she recognized her own kindness. Though coping through their problems and making it through, they mentioned a greater sense of their own ability. They felt more empowered and capable. By engaging in these strategies they were able to, in some ways, exert choice in their lives, thereby mitigating the feelings of powerlessness and increase their sense of agency. This made them proud of their achievements and motivated them for the future:

I'm so proud that I could help my mother and my siblings, I feel like I could do something good, and I'm so proud of it. [Manoyla, 17, Iraqi Muslim]

Now I have a second language. So I learned I have the ability to learn a language. During the last year I learned a lot in my life. Life in Turkey is more better than in Syria. [Melek, 15, Syrian Muslim]

So I was like, 'everything is getting better, everything is getting solved.' I was feeling that the bad things that I used to feel and all the bad things that happened to me now are good, because now they are now giving me much more power, they are making me much stronger, they give me much more knowledge about life, and the problems of life, and now I have a good reason to be a good student at my college when I study in Canada because I don't want to go back to the way that I was, I seriously don't want to go back. So its pushing me forward, its not taking me back. [Leyla, 23, Syrian Muslim]

In Leyla's quotation above, she explained that the consequence of her experience was that felt she had more strength, power, and knowledge about life. She inferred that having left the the inner liminality that she was in, she was very motivated to not return. This motivation “pushes her forward.”

## 5.5 Discussion

Having found themselves in layers of liminality in their time in Ankara, the eleven women of this study engaged in strategies to navigate and to cope with this liminality. As this liminality was envisioned as an “inside space,” the two main strategies were twofold, each with their own sub-strategies. One was to “exit” this inner liminality, by taking opportunities, whether in the workplace, or in education, or by forming a community. One of the participants after our initial interview, actually exited all the layers of liminality by marrying a Turkish citizen and changing her legal status from refugee to a resident of Turkey. Another strategy was to manage the inner liminality, either by settling in and deciding to endure, or by claiming the space by reframing the situation or focusing on the household arena. These strategies had differing degrees of effectiveness due to various conditions that intervened in the processes of these women. These conditions also influenced and could bind the choice of which strategy to use. Additionally, these intervening conditions led to the paradox that these strategies could both help the women cope with liminality or they could increase the hopelessness and “feeling stuck.” Therefore, this suggests more research should be done in the relationship between the two main strategies and these conditions, and how the intervening conditions constrain the women’s choices in which strategies to choose. However, the general consequences of these strategies were an increased sense of strength and self-awareness. The women as they coped in liminality found that they were more capable and stronger than they had imagined.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Refugees are perhaps the ultimate transitional figures. They are leaving and have lost a permanent home. Refugees inspire us by reason of their loss as well as their ability to rise above that loss and to re-establish their lives. There is something noble and enduring about the ability of people to reconstitute themselves and begin again after suffering such a deprivation. Refugees thus can be a source of hope and a flesh-and-blood reflection of a tenacious life force. Arther Helton, 2002

#### **6.1 Conclusion and Discussion of the Study**

The focus of this study was on how women cope with living in forced displacement in Ankara, Turkey. By using a lens of gender through focusing on women's lived experience, it allowed for an emphasis on the agency of these women, while also identifying their vulnerabilities. All of the eleven women in this study had separated from their homes due to violence and war and were now living as urban refugees in Ankara, Turkey. They shared the common experiences of others in urban protracted refugee situations, in that they and their families had to find ways to procure food, shelter, and to adapt to the new social, legal, cultural, and economic milieu in which they were now living. They had to navigate accessing education and healthcare for themselves and their families, and deal with the confusion of the legal bureaucracy in obtaining residence permits or temporary protection, and/ or registering as an asylum seeker with the United Nations High Commissioner

for Refugees. Other than these experiences, the eleven women who participated in this study lived very different lives. They came from geographically different locations across Iraq and Syria; they were ethnically and religiously diverse. Their educational backgrounds and goals were likewise very diverse. Their hopes for the future fell into three main categories: the hope to resettle in another country, preferably North America or Europe; the desire to return to their home country at a more secure time; and the insecurity of not knowing what was to come, or not being the primary decision makers of the family. Additionally, their socioeconomic status prior to and after coming to Turkey varied, as did their support systems. Some had family abroad to help them financially, whereas others had co-religious or co-ethnic communities supporting them socially. Others had very little support. However, an important finding in this study is that these women all shared the common experience of living in layers of liminality.

The women of this study had separated from their homes and were prevented from reaggregation in Turkey in terms of being excluded from legal, social, and economic structures. Therefore they were stuck in a state of marginalization. Liminal entities, in that they fall outside the structures of society, are often deemed “polluting” or “a problem” by those within the structures (Turner, 1969). Refugees are seen as such a problem in that they “challenge ‘time-honored distinctions between nationals and foreigners’” (Malkki, 1995, p. 8), and have the potential to blur structural lines between national boundaries and between historic and nationalistic ideas. Therefore, due to this threat, refugees are “hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions and conditions” (Turner, 1969, p. 109). Turner labeled these “hedged-out” entities as *communitas*, or a community in liminality (Turner, 1969, p. 109). When a host society blocks the integration of an incoming *communitas*, or enforces separation between the two communities, segregation results (Berry, 1997). This leads to more separation, which is defined by Berry (1997) as the choice by the incoming group to withdraw and to not interact with the host community. However, individuals or a

communitas may adopt different acculturation orientations in different aspects of life (Yijala & Nyman, 2017) Acculturation is multifaceted with psychological, sociocultural, and economic aspects; due to structural and individual factors, the communitas may be more able or willing to adapt more easily in one or more of these arenas more than others. This leads to what Daniş (2005) terms “segmented incorporation,” or “integration from the periphery,” with the former term capturing the inherent inhibition that is happening, and the latter capturing marginalization spatial and socially. Also inherent in these terms is the resilience in overcoming individual and environmental inhibitors to adapt even in liminality.

The women of this study were “hedged out” in numerous ways: legally, socially, and spatially. This was conceptualized as concentric layers of liminality that the women found themselves experiencing. These women were living betwixt and between many differing places and structures. In the most literal sense, before they could continue on their journey to where they desired to go, they were stuck waiting in Turkey. This aligned with Kutlu's (2002) work with refugees stuck in transition in Turkey, as in a waiting room.

They were also “hedged around” spatially, in that though they were not in refugee camps and were living in an urban setting, they were generally confined to living in peripheral neighborhoods, or in areas with substandard housing. They were also very often “staying inside” the home which was conceived of as the innermost layer: a psychosocial liminality, in which the women were separated and withdrawn from society both spatially and socially. In this place they reported experiencing negative emotions such as depression, loneliness, and hopelessness. This coincides with the findings of the UN Women and ASAM's (2017) report that almost forty percent of Syrian women studied across seven cities reported only going outside their home once a week or less (p. 6). This is also in agreement with Anderson et al. (2013) that found that displacement disrupts Syrian women's social network and causes them to feel isolation and alienation.

It was found in this study that various factors bound this inner liminality and caused the women “to stay inside.” The first was the cultural and social expectations of women's place and role inside the home. The second was a lack of knowledge, with language being the almost universal concern, the exception being the Turkmen women, though even then their accents gave away that they were “strangers.” Knowledge of help available and how to navigate in a new environment also came out as a factor in this category. This finding is in accordance to the work of many focusing on how language affects the process of adapting to a new environment (Bloch, 2002; Castro & Murray, 2010; Schweitzer et al., 2007), and makes it difficult to access services (Ager & Strang, 2008). The third factor was psychological distress. This arose from the past in regard to trauma experienced due to war, violence, loss, separation from friends/ family, and leaving life behind. This could also be more current, coming from the stress of waiting and living in marginalization. The fourth factor that caused and “hedged -in” the women, was negative experiences that they may have had in Turkey. Discrimination, harassment, and the fear of those happening, caused distress and withdrawal. These results align with other studies with refugee women in Turkey such as Kaya and Kiraç (2016), Wringle et al. (2019), and Celebi et al. (2017). Specifically, Wringle et al.'s (2019) work with young women in Izmir found that they were more at risk for sexual and verbal harassment outside the home leading to feelings of anxiety and trauma and causing them to spend more time at home, or that they were restricted by their families' fear of more harassment. Likewise, discrimination increased Syrian's social isolation and poorer physical and mental health (Celebi et al., 2017).

Though vulnerable to these layers of liminality due to the double bind of the social stigma of being a refugee, and gender-based discrimination (Ressler, 2008), these women engaged in resilience strategies to cope with and adapt to their situation. These strategies fell into two categories, one to exit the liminality to varying degrees, and the other to settle in, and manage their liminal position. These behaviors were the efforts of the women to regain agency and to not remain “stuck.”

The first strategy identified in this study was one that the women used to 'exit' that inner psychosocial liminality and re-engage with society and the outside world. These were actions to “go out” and to continue education, enter the workforce, and to form a community. These results are consistent with Anderson et al.'s (2013) findings that Syrian women that consistently engaged in rewarding social connection with community, whether with family, friends, or the host community, reported increased feelings of agency, and decreased negative psychological symptoms and feelings of powerlessness. Smeeks et al. (2017) also confirmed this result in their study of Syrians, finding that belonging and connecting to a like-ethnic group served as a protective factor in mental health. This was especially true of the two Christian participants and the three Turkmen women in the study, who found mental, emotional, and social support in their communities. This was particularly true for the Christians, who were feeling doubly isolated due to their refugee social status, and being a religious minority. Finding a co-religious community helped them to regain a sense of their identity. From this community, one of these women, Meryem (23, Iraqi Christian), exited the layers of liminality altogether by marrying a Turkish citizen with a similar Christian background and therefore gained a more secure legal, economic, and social status. The Turkmen women also found social support such as associations that helped provide informal education and charity to their community. Though there were brief mentions in the data of similar things for Syrians, for example, Leyla (23, Syrian Muslim) mentioned that she had worked as a volunteer for a Syrian aid group, it did not emerge quite as salient for the others as it had for the two minority groups in the study. These findings are in agreement with Daniş (2005), who found that refugees in transit in Istanbul leaned on their social networks to integrate in the ways that were available to them. She focused on groups from four different countries/ regions: Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Maghreb. She found that ties to co-religious or co-ethnic groups were stronger and more vital to the refugees than their ties to co-nationals. This was especially true for Iraqi Assyro-Christians and Iraqi and Afghan Turkmen, whose pre-existing



members of the community would help the new-comers to adapt as they had capacity.

Similarly, the current study's finding of the women entering the workforce, aligns with and contributes to the body of work that has found that employment is a salient factor in the integration of refugees and links the refugee's economic situation with their psychosocial situation (Phillimore & Goodson, 2005; Beiser et al., 1993; Schwarzer et al., 1994; Vrečer, 2010). This study also found that the financial situation of the women and their family enabled or constrained them in their choices and caused stress and anxiety. Financial stress and meeting basic needs was a common complaint in this study, and contributed to the women's isolation.

According to Castro and Murray (2010), education obtained prior to displacement is a meaningful resource. This can be seen in the cases of Leyla (23, Syrian Muslim) and Meryem (23, Iraqi Christian), who had both finished high school and had studied English prior to coming to Turkey, which they drew upon to get their jobs. However, Castro and Murray (2010), also found that occasionally refugees with higher levels of education may experience higher levels of distress after displacement due to the loss of social status. This may be true in Safiye's (29, Syrian Christian) situation, as she had a university degree, as did her husband, and it may explain the high level of psychological distress she felt upon coming to Turkey.

An incredibly important piece to employment is language, and therefore Phillimore & Goodson (2008) argue that it may be the most important factor in adaptation. Therefore, as lack of language was one of the factors that bound the women's liminality, learning language through continuing education, whether they were learning it in school like Melek (15, Syrian Muslim), or essentially picking it up on the job, like Meryem (23, Iraqi Christian), was an important piece to their resilience. Continuing their education was an important goal for many of the women in this study. Often their access was blocked due to factors such as their location, or legal status,

or financial situation. This frustrated them as they understood education to be a vital step into their futures. Borwick et al. (2013) explained the importance of education as fostering hope for the future in resettlement. For the one participant who was able to attend school, that hope was tenuous, as she had problems with her legal residence in Ankara and was living with the possibility that she may not attend next year. Those that were unable to continue their education looked for opportunities elsewhere, for example, partaking in charity sewing courses.

The second strategy identified in this study was to manage and to “settle in” to the liminality. This was less an attempt to leave or escape the isolation and exclusion in the inner layer of liminality, but rather a method of coming to terms with it. A large piece of a dimension of this liminality was waiting, whether that was waiting in the asylum seeking process, or waiting to return. Waiting caused anxiety and depression in the women in this study. Therefore, they attempted to reframe their waiting in terms of endurance and “patience,” or would put self defined time limits, such as “next year we will...”. They would also try to focus on the positive and on the future. These results coincide with Khawaja et al.'s (2008) study with Sudanese refugees that employed such cognitive strategies as reframing the situation, focusing on inner resources, and focusing on the future, which helped them cope across the different stages of forced migration. Castro and Murray (2010) also emphasize the cognitive practices as having a life purpose, being goal driven, and the ability of self-regulation as highly associated with resilience in adaptation. Likewise, plans for the future was found in this study to be a variable that could help or hinder this strategy; if they were able to set and obtain short term goals, this was helpful to their waiting process; however, if they were waiting indefinitely and their short-term goals, such as going to school, were blocked, this had the potential to reinforce the feeling of being stuck and the negative emotions.

Another sub-strategy that was included in this category of managing the liminality, was to focus on controlling other areas of life, such as the family

arena. This was seen in women focusing on their children, rather than on their own situation. For example, they concentrated on whether their children were coping in Turkey or not, whether they were getting an education, etc. Fatma, though the head of her household as a widow, did not really have an answer for what her plans were for the future; she rather rerouted the question to answer how her daughters were getting used to Turkey, and they did not want to leave. This finding is in agreement with Sossou, Craig, Ogren & Schnak (2008) who found that family was a resilience factor for women, and that they also “had to stay strong for them.” Additionally, Luster et al. (2009) found that Sudanese youths distracted themselves from negative emotions by focusing on problem-solving. This sub-strategy from the current study seems to be a combination of these strategies, with the women both gaining strength from and distracting themselves from negative emotions by their families and other arenas.

A paradox of these strategies identified in this study was that, depending on various conditions, these strategies had the effect of helping the women cope and adapt, or they could cause the women to loop back into the liminality. These conditions intervened in these strategies and either constrained or enabled the choices of strategies. The exact nature of each condition's relationship to each strategy is an important area of further study. The current study identified that they: intervened both positively and negatively, and they both enabled or constrained the choice of which strategy to use. However, the limited nature of the study was unable to fully ascertain to what degree and in what specific circumstances these occurred. Seven such conditions were identified and categorized though they often overlapped and worked in conjunction with one another.

One of these conditions was the women's family and social network. As was demonstrated with the Christian and Turkmen women, these could be vital to their resilience. Inversely, lack of a family or social network, inhibited the resilience trajectory. Multiple studies have confirmed similar results (see McMichael & Manderson, 2004; Smeeks et al., 2017; Yijala & Nyman,

2017). Ager and Strang (2008) report that refugees without co-ethnic community were found to have rates of depression four times higher than those that did. Likewise, for a few of the women in the study, it was their family that inhibited them from entering the workforce because they felt that it was not a woman's role, or felt that they should not go out, due to harassment. Similar cases were reported by Anderson et al. (2013), Wringle et al. (2019), and UN Women & ASAM (2018).

Other conditions that intervened in the women's strategies, were experiences that they had with Turkish society while engaging in these strategies, and their level of acceptance of Turkish culture. Some perceived Turkish culture as close to their own home culture, and therefore felt more willing to adapt to it; whereas, others felt uncomfortable with aspects of Turkish culture, and were less willing to engage. For example, one felt “like a stranger here” and was uncomfortable because fewer women wore headscarves in Turkey than in her home country, and she perceived discrimination due to the style of her scarf. Judgment, discrimination, and harassment were commonly reported experiences. These could cause significant distress, and loss of self-esteem (Gile & Vega, 1996) and lead to women “staying inside.” However, positive encounters with the Turkish community could encourage women in their choice to engage with the outside world. This was especially facilitated through positive work and schooling environments, which is consistent with numerous studies (see Phillimore & Goodson, 2005; Montgomery, 1996; Beiser et al., 1993).

In their study with single refugee women that resettled in Australia, Lenette, Brough, and Cox (2012) argue that the everyday life worlds of refugee women are not just the backgrounds to display resilience, but it is in the “everydayness” itself that “a complex set of possibilities become enacted, which gives meaning to the processes” of resilience (p. 639). In other words, the resilience trajectory can be seen as a dynamic process of women daily overcoming and adapting to find a new normalcy for themselves in this complex mixture of individual and environmental factors. As is seen in the

current study, these environmental factors arose from both Turkish societal, legal, and cultural structures and from conditions in the women's past and present that bound their liminality and constrained their strategies. Evans (2007), in her study on young people in transition termed this a bounded agency, which she defines as a concept that:

...sees the actors as having a past and imagined future possibilities, which guide and shape actions in the present, together with subjective perceptions of the structures they have to negotiate, the social landscapes which affect how they act. Bounded agency is socially situated agency, influenced but not determined by environments and emphasizing internalized frames of reference as well as external actions (p. 18).

In the current study, the women reported having felt “stuck” in layers of liminality, and they were in-between and excluded from differing structures. However, despite their bounded agency, these women in everyday ways, negotiated and coped with these liminalities. Though conditions intervened both positively or negatively in their resilience process, the women adapted in relation to the resources at their disposal that arose both from their past and from their time in Turkey. Though conceptualized through this study as conditions, such factors as: a family and social network, economic situation, education, and plans for the future, could alternatively be conceived as resources to support them in their strategies. Inversely, these conditions, such as negative experiences with Turkish society, or a weak family network, or a decision that they could not accept Turkish culture, would continue to constrain or disrupt them.

Though the intervening conditions constrained the women and their strategies, the general result was, as they reflected over their time in Turkey, a reported gaining of greater self-awareness and strength, and regaining a sense of agency over their lives. They were better able to navigate in Turkey and felt more settled. Though their agency was bound, they were able to adapt to various degrees and move on in the process of resilience. This is consistent with Daniş (2005), in that the women in this study were in a “segmented” adaptation.

However, as per Barry's acculturation theory, integration needs both the desire and ability of both the incoming group and the host community and structure. Due to the current legal and social structures binding and excluding these women in Turkey, full integration may be unattainable at this time. Regardless, these women have shown in their processes of resilience that the possibility exists for segmented adaptation, even while living in limbo.

## **6.2 Considerations and Implications**

The current study was conducted with a small sample size in only one city in Turkey. Eleven women participated, though all living in Ankara, they had very diverse backgrounds in terms of age, employment, marital status, legal status, education level, socioeconomic level, and religion. This was an advantage in rounding out my data, but the size and the heterogeneous nature of the sample must be taken into account. Therefore the generalization of this study's findings to the larger population of refugees in Turkey must be considered with care as this study's size was quite limited. A few of the women were quite educated, and their backgrounds and future plans may not reflect the greater population of displaced in Turkey, therefore care must be taken in extrapolation of these findings. Further studies with larger sample sizes with both homogeneous and heterogeneous groups are suggested to observe what differences arise and compare these findings. This would be especially important to observe how the intervening conditions affect both larger populations, and more specialized populations, based on variables such as age, or marital status, etc.

Additionally the findings of this study, were in essence, a snapshot of where these women were mentally, emotionally, socially, etc at the moment that they were interviewed. It would be of value to continue to follow up with them and to observe how their strategies change and develop over time while conducting a longer-term study. As Yijala and Nyman (2017)

hypothesize, the factors in adaptation and the resilience gained in the limbo-stage of a refugee's journey will have importance in the long-term.

As my writing process came to an end, I reached out to Leyla (23, Syrian Muslim) who has been resettled in Canada. She explained that she felt that she was doing well, though it was difficult to start the process of adapting over again. She felt relieved that the effort that she was putting in was working toward something permanent this time around. Her response implies the importance of resettlement as one of the factors identified in this study, plans for the future. She also mentioned feeling glad that there was a significant Arab population that helped her and her family when they first arrived. This suggests again the importance of social network as an important condition in the resilience process. As she was leaving Turkey, Leyla had reported that from her time in Turkey she had gained more self-motivation, and it seems that this is continuing into her resettlement.

The implications of this study are modest, but bring up important findings to contribute to the body of work on refugees in liminality. Leaders in the field of refugee studies, such as Malkki, Harrell-Bond, and many current studies (see Simich, Maiter & Ochocka, 2009; Vrecer, 2010; Gold, 2019) have linked the concept of liminality to the study of those in displacement. Linking the concept of liminality to refugees has the potential to be accused of “picking the long hanging fruit,” that is to be too easy, due to the fact that refugees are, by their nature, in transition. This study has attempted to demonstrate how, especially in the case of refugees in Turkey, refugees are not only in transition, but are unable to reaggregate in the economic, legal, and psychosocial arenas, and therefore are in liminality.

Though used widely in the literature on refugees, the limitation regarding liminality in the literature is that it assumes eventual reaggregation, whereas in the field of refugee studies, this is not guaranteed. However, this assumption exists not only in the literature on refugees in liminality, but in refugee studies in general; in that after resettlement, or if provided

economic, political, and legal rights, refugees will then reaggregate. Therefore, the concept of layers of liminality can be a helpful contribution to the literature, in that though “hedged-out” from various structure, refugees continue to maneuver and negotiate in that space, and may get closer to aggregation in some arenas, or layers, than in others. Though the question mark still exists as to whether refugees can totally exit all layers of liminality, and may cycle through them repeatedly, the concept is helpful to pinpoint structural or personal strategies that can be employed to support their resilience trajectory.

The concept of layers of liminality emerged from the data, as per grounded theory methodology. Positioning these concentric layers of liminality as the core phenomenon of the study, I then identified and explored the factors that both bound the inner liminality, while also touching on some of the political and societal structures that bound the other layers of liminality that the women experienced. Thus, I have argued that they are stuck in-between these structures in a place of liminality. This study positioned the concept of liminality into Berry's (1997) acculturation framework, along with the framework of resilience and coping as a dynamic process (Castro & Murray, 2010, Lenette et al., 2012), and agrees with Daniş (2005), in that these women, though in liminality, adapt in “segmented” ways, as they cope by both exiting the psychosocial liminality and managing these layers of liminality.



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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Human Subjects Ethics Committee Approval Form

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ  
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER



DUMLUPINAR BULVARI 06800  
ÇANKAYA ANKARA/TURKEY  
T: +90 312 210 22 91  
F: +90 312 210 79 59  
ueam@metu.edu.tr  
www.ueam.metu.edu.tr

Sayı: 28620816 / 140

26 MART 2019

Konu: Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi: İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın Besim Can ZIRH

Danışmanlığını yaptığımız Lara SCHROETER'in "Young refugee women in Ankara: Forming a community" başlıklı araştırması İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülmüş ve 129-ODTÜ-2019 protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır.

Saygılarımızla bilgilerinize sunarız

Prof. Dr. Tülin GENÇÖZ

Başkan

Prof. Dr. Ayhan SOL

Üye

Prof. Dr. Ayhan Gürbüz DEMİR

Üye

Prof. Dr. Yaşar KONDAKÇI (4.)

Üye

Doç. Dr. Emre SELÇUK

Üye

Doç. Dr. Pınar KAYGAN

Üye

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Ali Emre TURGUT

Üye

## APPENDIX B

### Example Questions for my Grounded Theory Interviews

Note: These are examples as to the line of questions that I will be asking, not necessarily the exact questions themselves. As this is a Grounded theory study, I will leave the questions open-ended and will let the participant answer the questions as they like. As Charmaz (2006) states the “participant's comfort level has a high priority than obtaining juicy data.” These questions were created upon the basis of the example questions in Charmaz (2006).

#### Initial open-ended questions:

- Tell me about yourself, how old are you, have you studied, do you have family?
- Tell me about coming to Turkey, who did you come with? How did you get here?
- Could you describe what your initial feelings were when you came?
- What was your thoughts at that time?
- How did you learn to navigate life in Turkey? i.e. find stores, learn the bus system, etc?

#### Intermediate questions:

- What has been difficult in your time in Turkey?
- What has been easy?
- In your opinion, what do has made your time here easier?
- Could you describe a typical day when you first arrived? How about now? What has changed?
- Could you tell me about the people around you? How have you connected to others here?

#### Ending questions:

- What are the most important ways to \_\_\_\_?
- What have you learned about yourself during this time? What ave you learned about your community?
- What advice do you have for others that might be newly coming to Turkey and might experience similar things as you?

- Is there anything else that you think that I should understand?
- Is there anything that you would like to ask me?

## APPENDIX C

### Turkish Summary/ Türkçe Özet

#### Giriş

Son on yılda zorla yerinden edilmiş insanların sayısı 2009'da 43,3 milyondan 2018'de 70,8 milyona çıkmıştır (BMMYK, 2019). Hükümetlerin ve mültecilerin ortak umudu ya ülkelerine geri dönmek ya da üçüncü bir ülkeye yerleşmektir. Fakat, ülkelerine geri dönen veya başka bir ülkeye iltica eden kişilerin sayısı, ülkesinden edilen yeni kişilerin sayısına kıyasla çok küçük kalmaktadır (BMMYK, 2019). Buna ek olarak, beş mülteçiden dördü kendilerini uzun bir sürgünde bulmakta, iltica ettikleri yerde 5 ila 47 yıl arasında kalmaktadırlar. Bu nedenle, mülteciler için beklemek istisna değil, kaidedir demek doğru olacaktır (Hydman & Giles, 2011).

2014'ten bu yana Türkiye diğer ülkelere kıyasla en çok mülteciye kapı açan ülkedir, günümüz itibarıyla Türkiye'deki mülteci sayısı 3,7 milyonu bulmuştur (BMMYK, 2019). Sığınma isteyen kimselerin sayısı 2011'de Suriye'deki savaş sonrası artmaya başlamış, daha sonra IŞİD'den kaçan Iraklı mültecilerin katılımıyla daha da yükselmiştir. Sözü edilen nüfus grupları ülkelerinden uzakta güvende olmalarına rağmen, “temel hakları ve önemli ekonomik, toplumsal ve psikolojik ihtiyaçları karşılanmamakta ve yıllar sonra karşılanmamaya devam etmektedir” (BMMYK 2006, s. 106).

Uzun süren iltica durumlarında, mülteciler “uzun ve zorlu bir belirsizlikte sıkışıp kalmaktadırlar. Hayati riskleri olmamasına rağmen, bu kişilerin, temel hakları ve önemli ekonomik, toplumsal ve psikolojik ihtiyaçları karşılanmamakta ve yıllar sonra karşılanmamaya devam etmektedir”

(BMMYK 2006, s. 106). Bu belirsizlik mültecileri düş kırıklığı ve umutsuzluğa itmektedir; ancak, mülteciler doğaları gereği dayanıklı kişilerdir ve bu dayanıklılığı ülkelerinden çıkıp gelmekle göstermişlerdir. Onlar “şiddet dolu bir geçiş ‘ritüelinden’ geçmiş kişilerdir ve “entegre” edilmedikleri durumda ... kendilerini bir ‘geçiş’ ya da ‘eşiklik (liminality)’ halinde bulurlar” (Harrell-Bond & Voutira, 1992, s. 7). Eşiklik terimi bir geçiş ritüelindeki ana evreyi anlatmak için kullanılmaktadır, yeni üye bu evrede ‘geçmiş ya da gelecekteki durumlarına hiç benzemeyen ya da çok az benzeyen’ bir süreçten geçmektedir (Turner, 1969, s. 94). Dolayısıyla, ana vatanlarını bırakıp gelen ve halihazırda geri dönmemiş, başka bir yere göç etmemiş ve ekonomik, toplumsal ve psikolojik anlamda buldukları ülkeye entegre olmamış mülteciler Turner’ın söylediği gibi (1996), “ne kendi ülkelerine ne de içinde buldukları ülkeye ait, ikisinin ortasında kalmış, hukuk, gelenek ve göreneklerin belirlediği sınırların içinde konumlanan kişilerdir” (s. 95).

Eşiklikte bulunan, yani toplumsal yapıların dışında kalan kişiler, çoğu zaman toplumdakiler tarafından toplumu “kirleten” ve “sorun çıkaran” bireyler olarak görülmektedirler (Turner, 1969). Mülteciler o kadar büyük çapta bir sorun teşkil ederler ki, “nesillerdir saygı duyulan yerli halk ve yabancılar arasındaki ayrıma meydan okurlar” (Malkki, 1995, s.8). Mülteciler milli sınırlar ve tarihi milliyetçi düşünceler arasındaki yapısal sınırları bulanıklaştırma potansiyeline sahiptirler. Bu nedenle, bu tehdit karşısında, “talimatlar, yasaklar ve şartlarla kısıtlanmaktadır” (Turner, 1969, s. 109). Turner bu “kısıtlanmış” kişilere *komünitas* veya eşiklikte bulunan topluluk ismini vermiştir (s. 109).

Birleşmiş Milletler Mülteciler Yüksek Komiserliği sürüncemede kalmış mülteciler için aşağıdaki tavsiyeyi uygun görmektedir:

Bu durumda kalıcı çözüm mültecilerin yerel hayata entegre edilmesidir. Bu karmaşık ve yavaş süreç mültecilerin kendilerini sığındıkları ülkelerde yeniden eski konumlarına getirmelerini ve oradaki halka entegre olmalarını içermektedir. Bu sürecin bir diğer kısmını, aynı önemdeki hukuki, toplumsal ve kültürel faktörler

oluşturmaktadır, bu faktörler zaman içinde kalıcı ikamet haklarına dönüşmeli veya, birçok vakada, sığınılan ülkenin vatandaşlığının alınmasıyla sonuçlanmalıdır (BMMYK, 2018, s. 33).

Yukarıda bahsedildiği gibi, yeni bir ev sahibi kültürle uzlaşmak ve yeni ekonomik ve toplumsal bir çevreye entegre olmak çok karmaşık bir süreçtir. Kültürleşme (Acculturation) teorisi, bu süreçteki kişilerin başa çıkma stratejilerini ve muhtemel sonuçları (entegrasyon ya da marjinalleşme, veya ikisinin ortası) araştırmakta kullanılmaktadır (Berry, 1997). Ev sahibi ülke gelen bir grubun (komünitas) entegrasyonuna engel olduğu, veya söz konusu iki topluluk arasındaki ayrımı vurguladığı zaman, bu durum ayrımcılıkla sonuçlanmaktadır (Berry, 1997). Bu da daha çok ayrışmaya neden olmaktadır. Ayrışma Berry'nin (1997) tanımına göre, yeni gelen grubun ev sahibi toplumla bir ilişki kurmayarak kendi kabuğuna çekilmeyi seçmesidir.

Bireyler veya *komünitas*, hayatın farklı alanlarında farklı kültürleşme oryantasyonları kullanmaktadırlar (Yijala & Nyman, 2017). Kültürleşme psikolojik, sosyokültürel, ekonomik vb. birçok farklı yanı ile çok yönlü bir olgudur. Bazı yapısal ve kişisel faktörlerden dolayı, komünitas bu alanlarından birine ya da birkaçına daha zor adapte olabilir veya karşı durabilir. Bu da bizi Danış'ın (2005) "bölünmüş entegrasyon" veya "dışarıdan entegrasyon" olarak adlandırdığı terimlere götürmektedir, birinci terim halihazırdaki engelleri, ikinci terim ise hem mekansal hem de toplumsal marjinalleşmeyi anlatmaktadır. Bu terimler aynı zamanda, eşitlik durumunda bile hem bireysel hem de çevresel engelleri aşarak entegre olmayı açıklamakta kullanılmaktadır.

Şimdiye kadarki literatür, kültürleşme konusunu sadece yeniden iskan odaklı değerlendirmiş ve literatürün çoğu Avrupa, Kuzey Amerika ve Avustralya'dan gelmiştir. Bu tez çalışmasında, Ankara, Türkiye'de belirsizlik içinde yaşayan mültecilerin zorluklarla başa çıkma stratejilerine odaklanılmıştır. Eşitlik mültecilerin olanaklarını kısıtlasa da, yine de ellerindeki olanaklarla yeni çevrelerindeki sorunlarla başa çıkmaya çalışmaktadırlar. Ben özellikle kadın mültecilere odaklanmayı seçtim, çünkü

kadın mülteciler hem savaşta hem de göç durumunda toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı şiddete ve ayrımcılığa uğrayan savunmasız bir grup olarak görülmektedir. Kadınların başa çıkma stratejileri eşiklikte direnç sürecine dair önemli bilgiler sunmaktadır.

### **Çalışmanın Amacı**

Bu çalışmanın amacı Ankara'da sürünceme içinde yaşayan mülteci kadınların dayanıklılık ve başa çıkma stratejilerine dair daha derin bir anlayış sunmaktır. Araştırmamın temel sorusu şudur: savaş travması yaşayıp yerinden edilen kadınlar yeni bir ülkede hayatlarını nasıl tekrar kurmaktadırlar?

Bu sorunun cevabını araştırırken, temellendirilmiş kuram (grounded theory) yaklaşımından faydalandım. Bu araştırma tekniğini, mültecilerin yaşadıkları deneyime daha derin bir gözlem olanağı sağladığı için ve yaşadıkları süreçleri daha iyi anlamak amacıyla seçtim. Temellendirilmiş kuram analizinde, katılımcılar, kendi bakış açılarıyla anlam üreten etkin etmenler (agent) olarak görülmektedirler. Bu kuramda bir öncü olarak görülen, Charmaz'ın da dediği gibi, veriyi oluşturan kişiler katılımcıların kendileridir (2006). Bu çalışmaya başlarken umduğum sonuç, Ankara'daki mülteci tecrübesine daha verimli bir şekilde ışık tutmak ve bu sayede onların tecrübelerine dayanan bir kuramsal modelin ortaya çıkmasına yardımcı olmaktı (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Veri toplama sürecinde temellendirilmiş kuram basamaklarını izledim (açık kodlama, kuramsal kodlama, seçici kodlama).

Bu süreçte yaptığım açık uçlu görüşmelere, Ankara'da yaşayan 11 kadın katıldı. Katılımcıların kimliklerini korumak adına onlara takma isimler verdim. Örnek boyutu küçük olmasına rağmen, grupta çok çeşitli katılımcılar vardı. Bu kişilerden altısı Irak'tan, kalan beşi ise Suriye'den gelmişti. Yaşları 15 ila 50 arasındaydı. İki kadın Hristiyan, üçü Türkmen,

geri kalanları ise Arap Müslümanlardı. Menşe yerleri, eğitim düzeyleri ve sosyoekonomik düzeyleri Türkiye'ye gelmeden önce çok çeşitlilik göstermekteydi. Fakat, ortak paydaları ülkelerinden edilmiş ve bekleme sürecinde olmalarıydı.

Yasal anlamda, Türkiye'nin 1951 Cenevre Sözleşmesinin coğrafi kısıtlamalarını kabul etmesinden dolayı, çalışmaya katılan kadınlar Türkiye'nin uluslar arası sorumluluğunun dışında kalmakta, bu nedenler Türkiye'de onlara mülteci statüsü verilmemektedir. Suriyeliler hukuken Türkiye İç İşleri Bakanlığı İltica Yönetmeliğinin 10. Maddesine göre "Geçici Koruma" altında görülmektedirler. Iraklıların ise hiçbir koruma hakları yoktur, genellikle Türkiye'de kısa süreli ikamet izniyle yaşamaktadırlar. Sözü geçen kadınlardan bazıları aileleriyle birlikte BMMYK tarafından mülteci olarak tanınmak için başvuru sürecinde bulunmaktadırlar. Hukuken mülteci statüsünde olmamalarına rağmen, bu çalışmada açıklık adına onlardan mülteciler olarak bahsedilecektir, zaten katılımcılar da kendilerinden böyle bahsetmektedirler.

Bir başka ortak paydaları ise umutluluk ve umutsuzluk arasında mekik dokumalarıydı. BMMYK mültecileri yeniden iskan edilmeyi beklerken, bazı mülteciler evlerine dönmeyi bekliyorlardı, bazıları ise neyi beklediklerini bilmiyor, geri mi dönsünler yoksa başka bir ülkeye mi yerleşsinler, karar veremiyorlardı. Tüm katılımcılar kendilerini Ankara, Türkiye'de bir geçiş döneminde sıkışıp kalmış durumda görüyorlardı. Bu bağlamda, aileleriyle birlikte bir ev ve geçim kaynağı bulmak durumunda kalmış, yeni bir yasal, dilsel ve toplumsal sistemde yollarını bulmaya ve hayatlarını yeniden normalleştirmeye çalışmaktaydılar. Ana vatanlarındaki zorluklarla başa çıkma süreçleri bu bağlamda yararlı olmayabilir diye düşünüyorum. Bu sebeple, Temellendirilmiş Kuram analizini takip ettiğimde, şu soru ortaya çıkmaktadır: Bu bekleme süreci kadın mülteciler tarafından nasıl deneyimlenmektedir ve bu kişiler hayatlarını tekrar kurmak ve yaşayışlarına devam etmek için ne tür stratejilerden faydalanmaktadırlar?



## Sonuçlar

Açık ve kuramsal kodlama yardımıyla veri analizi yaparken ortaya çıkan bir tema şudur: eş merkezli iç alanlar diye adlandırdığım bir olgu. “İç Alan” terimi bu kavram için benim ürettiğim bir terim olmakla beraber, katılımcıların görüşmelerde kendilerini “içeride sıkışıp kalmış” hissettiklerini anlatmalarının bir sonucuydu. Bu eş merkezli “iç alanlar”ı daha sonra eşikliliğin farklı katmanları olarak yeniden tanımladım.

İlk katman Türkiye’nin “makro iç alanı”dır: katılımcılar evlerini terk edip, Türkiye’den sonra üçüncü bir ülkeye gitmeyi amaçlarken belirsiz bir süre boyunca kendilerini Türkiye’de “sıkışıp kalmış” bir halde bulmuşlardır. Kutlu (2002) bu olguyu “Bekleme Odası olarak Türkiye” diye adlandırmıştır. Bu durum öncelikle yasal eşiklilikle başlamaktadır, bu da demek oluyor ki, Türkiye’deki mülteciler 1951 tarihli Cenevre Mülteci Sözleşmesinin coğrafi kısıtlamaları yüzünden bazı engellerle karşılaşmaktadır. Kutlu (2002) 1951 tarifi “mülteci koruma konusuna engel teşkil etmekte ve ayrımcılığın yolunu açıp ‘ayrımcılık duvarları’ örmektedir” diye yazmıştır. Bu ayrımcılık duvarları mültecileri korumama ve temel insan yükümlülüklerini yerine getirmeme riskini ortaya çıkarmaktadır (Haddad, 2008), bu bağlamda Türkiye yaratıcı bir şekilde bu tariften kendini muaf tutmaya çalışmış ve geçici koruma altındaki “misafirler”den bahsetmeye başlamıştır. Geçici Koruma Yasası altında Türkiye korumasını istediği zaman geri çekme hakkına sahiptir. Yukarıda da söylediğimiz gibi, eğer bir mülteci normalde “ne onlardan ne bizden” kümesine dahilken”; “misafir” veya “sığınmacı” olarak adlandırılan kişiler çok daha marjinal bir durumda konumlandırılırlar, kısacası, mülteci statüsünde tutulmazlar.

Başka bir ülkeye göç etme amacıyla gelen birçok mülteci için, Türkiye bekleme odası olarak görülmektedir. Mülteciler, Türkiye’de iltica talebi sürecinden geçip bu sürecin sonucu beklemekte, şu üç sonuçtan birini almaktadırlar: yeni bir ülkeye kabul edilmek, red almak ve belirsizlikte

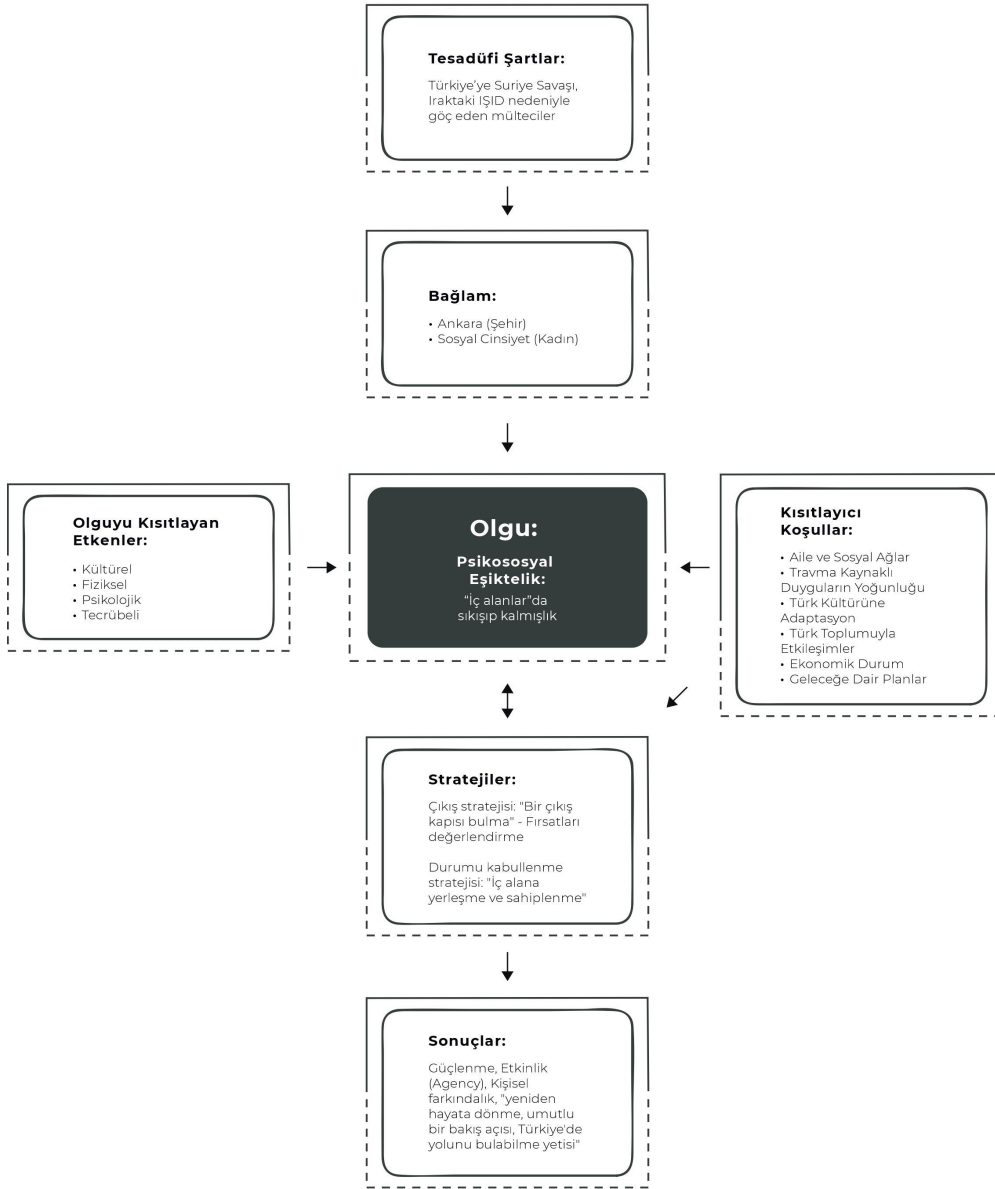
kalmak. Talep süreçleri bitene kadar yasal anlamda statülerine dair belirsizlik vardır ve çalışma izinleri yoktur. Bu bekleme sürecinin yarattığı düş kırıklığıyla ilgili Leyla (23, Suriyeli Müslüman), iltica talebi sürecinde görüşmesini beklerken yaşadığı bıkkınlığı şöyle anlatmıştır:

Sürekli sinirimiz bozuluyordu, çünkü sonucun ne olacağını hiç bilmiyorduk... yeter be adam! diye düşünüyorduk. İki buçuk yıldır bekliyoruz. Gelmemizi istemiyorsanız söyleyin! Bizi burada habersiz bırakmayın! Eskiden onlara sonucun ne zaman geleceğini sorardık, bizi hiç cevaplamazlardı. Bekleme listesindesiniz, sabırlı olun vs. gibi şeyler söyleyip geçirirlerdi. Bilemiyorum, keşke kıymet bilseler! Keşke onları bekleyen aileleri düşünseler.

Knudsen (1983) bu psikolojik durumu “arafta kalmışlık” olarak adlandırmaktadır, bu süreçte mülteciler beklerken kendilerini dünya tarafından unutulmuş hissetme ve istenmediklerini düşünmektedirler (s.73).

İkinci “iç alan” kadınların tecrübe ettikleri mekansal ve toplumsal dışlanmanın sebep olduğu “fiziksel iç alan”dır. Bu iç alan, mülteci komünites’in ev sahibi kültürden hissettiği marjinalleşmenin ve ayrışmanın bir sonucudur. Aynı zamanda kadınların kendi topluluklarının kültürel normları, kadınlara ve erkeklere verilen yaşama alanının da bu tanıma etkisi vardır.

Üçüncü “iç alan”, diğer verilerden ortaya çıkmıştır ve onlarla bağlantılıdır. Bu alan, zihinsel ve duygusal bir alandır. Bu alan, katılımcılar tarafından ‘umutsuzluk’ ve ‘dışarıdaki dünyadan korkmak’ vs. olarak betimlenmiştir, sonucu ise kabuğuna çekilmek ve evden çıkmamaktır. Ben bu olguya psikososyal eşiklik ismini verdim. Bu benim odaklandığım temel olguydu ve buna katkıda bulunan dört faktörün olduğunu bulguladım. Bu faktörler (a) kültürel engeller, (b) bilgisel engeller, (c) psikolojik etkenler ve (d) deneyimlenen ya da algılanan engellerdi. Bu kategoriler birbirleriyle bağlantılıdır ve birbirlerini dışlamazlar, çoğunlukla örtüşüp aynı olgunun farklı tonlarını anlatırlar.



**Figür 1**

*Theoretical Model*

Bu faktörleri tanımlamam, eşikliliğin katmanlarıyla başa çıkmanın teorik modelinin oluşmasına, özellikle en iç katmandan en dış katmana, Türkiye'yle ve Türkiye toplumu ile ilişki kurmanın kavramsallaşmasına yol açtı. Bu model Strauss ve Corbin'in (1998) çalışma çerçevesine dayanmaktadır. Bakınız Figür 1.

## Stratejiler

Bu çalışmadan ortaya çıkan stratejileri iki ana başlık ve birkaç alt başlık altında topladım. Birinci strateji, bu eşiklikten eldeki fırsatları değerlendirerek (iş, okul ya da bir topluluk oluşturmak vb) “çıkılmayı” içeriyordu. İlk görüşmelerde, katılımcılardan biri eşiklikğin bütün katmanlarından bir Türk vatandaşıyla evlenip ikamet izni alarak çıktığını anlatmıştı. Başka bir strateji ise başka bir iç eşikliğe girerek, yani ya durumu kabullenerek ya da duruma bir şekilde katlanarak içinde bulunan dönemi yeni bir zihinsel çerçeveye almak (reframing) ya da aileye odaklanmaktı.

İlk strateji, anlatıldığı gibi, kadınların iç eşiklikten “çıkarak” toplumun ve dış dünyanın bir parçası olmalarıydı. Bu yöntem “dışarı çıkıp” eğitime devam etmek, bir iş bulmak ya da yeni bir topluluğun parçası olmak demektir. Görüşme yaptığım kadınlar için eğitim en büyük önceliklerden biriydi. Birçoğu eğitimsizliklerinin veya eğitimlerine devam edememenin umutsuzluklarını ve dışlanmışlıklarını arttırdığının farkındaydı. Bir başka alt strateji, iş dünyasına giriş yapmaktı. Meryem (23, Iraklı Hristiyan) işinin “onu yerden kaldırıp, ona yeni bir yaşama gücü verdiğini” ve hayatında yeni bir amacı olduğunu söyledi. Buna benzer şekilde, verilerde yeni bir topluluğa katılmanın önemi tekrar tekrar bir tema olarak ortaya çıktı. Yeni bir topluluğa girme olgusu her katılımcı için farklı bir şekilde kendini gösterse de, çoğunda diğer mültecilerle ilişki kurmak, mahallelerinde, okul ve işte arkadaşlıklar kurmak bu stratejinin bir parçasıydı. Bu ilişkiler, genellikle benzer etnik, dini ve dilsel gruplardan insanlarla kurulmuştu. Burada ulaşılan sonuçlar, Anderson v.d.’nin (2013) ulaştığı sonuçla benzerlik göstermektedir: Suriyeli kadınlar sık sık aileleri, arkadaşları ve ev sahibi toplulukla sosyal bağlar kurarak, daha çok faillik (agency) hissederek, güçsüzlük hissini ve negatif psikolojik semptomlarını azaltmaktadırlar.

İkinci strateji, bir şekilde eşiklikte kendilerine “bir yer bulmaları” demektir. Bu yöntemde amaç eşiklikğin iç katmanındaki ayrışma ve dışlanmadan

kaçmak değil, bunu kabullenmektir. Bu çeşit eşikte beklemek merkezidir: iltica talebinin sonucunu beklemek ya da eve dönmeyi beklemek. Beklemek bu çalışmanın sonuçlarına göre, katılımcılarda anksiyete ve depresyona neden olmuştur. Dolayısıyla, katılımcılar bekleme süreçlerini dayanıklılık veya “sabırlı olmak” gibi kavramlarla yeniden tanımlayıp kendilerine belli bir zaman için hedefler koymaktadırlar, örneğin: “Gelecek yıl ... yaparız” gibi.

Diğer bir alt strateji ise hayatın diğer alanlarını kontrol altına almaya çalışmak ve aileye odaklanmaktır. Bu, kadınların kendilerini içlerinde buldukları durumdan ziyade çocuklarına adamalarında görülmektedir. Örnek olarak, katılımcılardan bazıları çocuklarının Türkiye’ye alışma sürecine, eğitimlerine vs. odaklanmışlardır. Bu durum, Sossou, Craig, Ogren & Shnak’in (2008) bulgularıyla uyumaktadır: mülteci kadınlar için aile bir dayanıklılık faktörüdür, bu nedenle aileleri için “güçlü kalmaya çalışırlar”. Ek olarak, Luster v.d. (2009) mülteci gençlerin olumsuz duygularını görmezden gelmek amacıyla sorun çözmeye odaklandıklarını göstermiştir. Bu alt strateji literatürdeki bu iki stratejinin bir sentezi gibi görülmektedir, yani, kadınlar aileleri ve hayatlarındaki diğer faktörler sayesinde hem güç kazanmakta hem de olumsuz duygulardan kaçış bulmaktadırlar.

### **Kısıtlayıcı Koşullar**

Bu stratejilerin etkili olmaları katılımcı kadınların geçtikleri süreci etkileyen çeşitli koşullara bağlıdır. Bu koşullar, hangi stratejinin kullanılacağını etkilemekte ve kısıtlamaktadır. Buna ek olarak, bu koşullar, paradoksal bir şekilde, hem katılımcıların başa çıkmalarına ve entegre olmalarına fırsat sağlarken, hem de eşikseliğe geri dönmelerine ve umutsuzluk, “sıkışık kalmışlık” duygularının artmasına neden olabilir. Tanımladığım kısıtlayıcı koşullar şunlardır: (a) aile ve sosyal ağlar, (b) olumsuz ve travma kaynaklı duyguların yoğunluğu, (c) Türk kültürüne adaptasyon, (d) Türkiyelilerle etkileşimler, (e) ekonomik durum, (f) geleceğe dair planlar, (g) eğitim

olanaklarının erişilebilirliği. Bu araştırmada, sözü geçen koşulların hem olumlu hem olumsuz etkisinin olabileceği, hangi stratejinin kullanılacağına hem karar verip hem de engelleyebileceğini göstermiştir. Her bir koşulun her bir stratejiyle bağlantısı gelecek araştırmalar için önemli bir odak noktası olabilir.

Bu koşulların biri kadınların aile ve sosyal ağları demiştik. Bu özellikle Hristiyan ve Türkmen kadınların hayatında önemli bir faktör olarak ortaya çıkmıştır, çünkü bu topluluklarda dini ve etnik topluluk dayanıklılık için esas olarak görülmektedir. Aksine, ailenin ya da sosyal bağlantıların olmaması dayanıklılığın azalmasına neden olmaktadır. Bu sonucu destekleyen birçok araştırma vardır (bkz. McMichael & Manderson, 2004, Smeeks v.d., 2017, Yijala & Nyman, 2017). Ager ve Strang (2008) kendi etnik toplulukları olmayan mültecilerin, olanlara kıyasla dört katı daha fazla depresyona girdiğini göstermiştir. Buna örnek olarak, çalışmadaki birkaç kadını aileleri engelleyerek, iş bulmalarını istememiştir, çünkü kadının rolünün bu olmadığını, dışarı çıkmamaları, yoksa tacize uğrayabileceklerini belirtmişlerdir. Buna benzer vakalar Anderson v.d. (2013), Wringle v.d. (2019) ve BM Kadın Birimi & ASAM (2018) tarafından rapor edilmiştir.

Katılımcıları kısıtlayan diğer koşullar, Türk toplumuyla etkileşimleri ve Türk kültürüne ne kadar adapte olduklarıdır. Bazıları Türk kültürünü kendilerine yakın bulup adapte olmayı seçmiş, bazıları ise Türk kültürünün bazı yanlarını iyi bulup bazı yanlarını kabul etmekte zorlanmışlardır. Örneğin, bir katılımcı Türkiyede kendisini “yabancı gibi” hissettiğini ve burada rahat olmadığını, çünkü ülkesine kıyasla daha az kadının başörtüsü giydiğini ve başörtüsü takma şeklinden dolayı ayrımcılığa uğradığını anlatmıştır. Yargılama, ayrımcılık ve taciz bu kadınların çoğunun maruz kaldığı durumlardır. Bu olaylar kayda değer ölçüde sıkıntı ve özgüven düşüklüğüne neden olabilmekte (Gile & Vega, 1996) ve kadınların “içeride (evde) kalmalarına” yol açmaktadır. Bunun aksine, Türkiyedeki topluluklarla pozitif etkileşimler kadınların dış dünyayla bağ kurma hissini güçlendirmektedir. Birçok araştırmada gösterildiği gibi özellikle olumlu iş

ve okul çevresi pozitif sonuçlara yol açmaktadır (bkz Phillimore & Goodson, 2005, Montgomery, 1996, Beiser v.d., 1993).

### **Stratejilerin Sonuçları**

Bu stratejilerin genel sonucu güç ve kişisel farkındalık hissini artmasıdır. Eşitlikteki durumlarıyla mücadele eden kadınlar düşündüklerinden daha güçlü ve kabiliyetli olduklarını fark ederler. Türkiye'deki zamanlarına dönüp baktıklarına kişisel farkındalıklarının ve güçlerinin arttığını, hayatlarının kontrolünün tekrar kendi ellerinde olduğunu hissetmişlerdir. Türkiyedeki zorluklarla daha iyi başa çıkıp ülkeye uyum sağlamaya başladıklarını hissetmişlerdir. Faillikleri (agency) sınırlandırılmış olsa da farklı koşullara adapte olup dayanıklılık göstermişlerdir. Bu da Danış (2005)'in söylediği gibi bu kadınların "bölünmüş adaptasyon" sürecinden geçtiklerini göstermektedir.

Fakat, Barry'nin (1997) Kültürleşme Teorisi'nde söylenildiği gibi entegrasyon hem gelen grubun hem de ev sahipliği yapan topluluk ve yapıların arzu ve kabiliyetlerine bağlıdır. Günümüzdeki yasal ve toplumsal yapılar göz önüne alındığında, bu durumun Türkiye'deki mülteci kadınları kısıtladığı ve dışlanmaya neden olduğunu, tam bir entegrasyonun bu halde mümkün olmadığı görülmektedir. Her şeye rağmen, söz konusu kadınlar dayanıklılıklarını ve bölünmüş adaptasyonun eşitlik durumunda bile mümkün olabileceğini göstermişlerdir.

### **Sonuç**

Bu araştırmanın sonuçları, katılımcıların sayısı nedeniyle mütevazı olsa da, ortaya çıkan önemli bulgular eşitlikteki mültecilerle ilgili bütüncüye katkıda bulunmaktadır. İltica araştırmalarının önder kişileri, örneğin Malkki, Harrell-Bond, ve güncel birçok başka araştırma (bkz. Simich, Maiter &

Ochocka, 2009; Vrečer, 2010; Gold, 2019) eşiklik kavramıyla zorla yerinden edilmiş kişilerle ilgili çalışmaları birlikte ele almıştır.

Bu araştırmada özellikle Türkiye’deki mültecilerin vakalarına odaklanarak, mültecilerin ekonomik, yasal ve psikososyal alanlara tümüyle entegre olmakta ne kadar zorlandıkları gösterilmeye çalışılmıştır. Temellendirilmiş teori metodolojisine göre veri toplanmış ve veriden eşiklik katmanları ortaya çıkmıştır (“farklı iç alanlar”da sıkışmışlık). Bu eş merkezli eşiklik katmanları çalışmanın çekirdek olgusunu oluşturmaktadır, bununla beraber, katılımcıların tecrübe ettiği diğer eşiklik kavramlarını kısıtlayan siyasi ve toplumsal yapılar göz önüne alınmıştır. Sonuç olarak, mülteci kadınların bu eşiklik alanlarındaki yapılar arasında sıkışıp kaldıkları gösterilmiştir. Bu araştırma, eşiklik kavramını Berry’nin (1997) kültürleşme çerçevesi içerisinde ele alarak, aynı zamanda dayanıklılık ve başa çıkma olgusunu dinamik bir süreç olarak değerlendirmiştir (Castro & Murray, 2010, Lenette v.d., 2012), ortaya çıkan bu sonuç ise Danış’ın (2005) söylediği gibi eşiklikteki kadınların yaşadıkları zorluklara rağmen “bölünmüş” entegrasyonlarının mümkün olduğunu, bu kişilerin eşikliğin dışına çıkarak veya kabullenerek zorluklarla başa çıkabilecekleri düşüncesini desteklemektedir.



## APPENDIX D

### Tez İzin Formu/ Thesis Permission Form

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#### YAZARIN / AUTHOR

Soyadı / Surname : .....

Adı / Name : .....

Bölümü / Department : .....

#### TEZİN ADI / TITLE OF THE THESIS (İngilizce / English) :

.....

.....

.....

TEZİN TÜRÜ / DEGREE: Yüksek Lisans / Master  Doktora / PhD

1. Tezin tamamı dünya çapında erişime açılacaktır. / Release the entire work immediately for access worldwide.

2. Tez iki yıl süreyle erişime kapalı olacaktır. / Secure the entire work for patent and/or proprietary purposes for a period of **two years**. \*

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\* Enstitü Yönetim Kurulu kararının basılı kopyası tezle birlikte kütüphaneye teslim edilecektir.

A copy of the decision of the Institute Administrative Committee will be delivered to the library together with the printed thesis.

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