



Master Thesis  
Regional Studies  
Urban Geography

Homes in Flux: Multiple Layers of Domesticity among Syrian Refugees in Istanbul

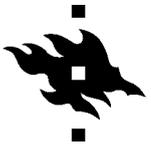
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<p>To date, Turkey has one of the highest refugee populations in the world. The Syrian conflict has played a major role in this as over 2,5 million Syrians have taken refuge in Turkey. Most of Syrian refugees are residing in the largest city of Turkey, Istanbul. Turkey is a signatory member of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, however has an exception for permanent residency granted only for European refugees. Thus, under Turkish refugee policy, Syrians are merely granted temporary protection that guarantees them a temporary residency permit. However, the policy does not cover; at the time of this research; the right to work. Syrian refugees, undocumented Syrians and Syrian Palestinians are especially vulnerable in Turkish society due to the lack of permanent residency and legal work.</p> <p>This research identifies how Syrian refugees create home as well as the factors that influence their home-making process in Istanbul. The factors are evaluated through the conditions under which Syrian refugees are residing in Istanbul including the right to work, housing and residency. The research also evaluates the refugees home-making in retrospective to their living conditions, feeling of home, legal position, access to a dwelling place as well as cultural identification.</p> <p>Although, this research focuses on the individual experience of home-making for Syrian refugees, it considers and examines Syrian refugees in a context of politicised bodies. As international refugees, Syrian refugees are highly politicized bodies, whose lives are affected by international politics as well as the domopolitics of the country in which they reside. Subsequently, their home and their home-making processes are also politicised. Beyond politics, refugeeness alters one's relationship to home and place, making home a complex concept attached with emotions and potential pain and loss. Literacy identifies that refugees displace their home through space and time. Hence, this research treats home as a socially and culturally produced metaphor that describes a person's belonging within socio-spatial narratives, but of which content is individually chosen to describe or to support a person's identity and psychological environment.</p> <p>The method of this research was a combination of two field trips to Istanbul, Turkey, fourteen in-depth interviews and qualitative analysis. The main reference of the research are the fourteen in-depth interviews that included ten men and four women; aged from 20 to 40 years old; Syrians residing in Istanbul. The interviewees were selected through social media online connections and face-to-face acquaintances during the field trips. The interviewees time of residence in Istanbul varied from two months to over four years.</p> <p>The eleven influencing factors identified in this research can be more commonly divided into two categories: the common factors and the personal factors. Common factors related to the responder's habitation environment; such as the city of Istanbul and the Turkish society. These common factors included: the city itself, the Turkish culture and society, the legislation, working life, housing, discrimination and relationships with their family and friends as well as with the Turkish people. The interviewees considered these factors as the ones that impacted everyday life and which they could not "escape". Personal factors that were identified are related to interviewees personality, world views and emotions. The interviewees could be divided into four main categories of personal factor denominators: their relationship to Syria, sense of belonging, definition of home and views of the future.</p> <p>This research concludes that displacement has an impact on how home is perceived and reflected by the interviewees. Its findings are in accordance to previous research literature on home-making among refugees, but it questions refugee policies that emphasis on repatriation as the most favourable long term solution for refugees as well as the position of housing as a most influential factor in refugees' home-making, by stating that other factors such as relationship to family and friends and earning a living, are higher in importance for those who have arrived into a new country less than two years ago.</p>			
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<p>Syyrian kriisin myötä Turkissa asuu tänä päivänä maailman laajin pakolaisyhteisö: 2,5 miljoonaa. Suuri osa Syyrian pakolaisista on asettunut asumaan Turkin suurimpaan kaupunkiin, Istanbuliin. Syyrian pakolaisilla on Turkissa erikoisasema: heitä varten on säädetty erikseen pakolaisasetus, joka määrittelee syyrialaisien pakolaisten aseman Turkissa. Syyrialaiset saavat oleskella maassa niin kutsutun väliaikaisen suojeluksen nojalla, joka estää suojelusta hakevien palautukset Syyriaan, mutta tutkimuksen aikaan ei tarjonnut mahdollisuutta työskennellä laillisesti tai pysyvää oleskelulupaa. Tämä asetus laittaa syyrialaiset pakolaiset hyvin haavoittuvaan asemaan turkkilaisessa yhteiskunnassa, jossa suurin osa työskentelee laittomasti ja heillä on ongelmia muun muassa hankkia asuntoa.</p> <p>Tämä tutkimus perehtyy siihen, kuinka syyrialaiset pakolaiset tekevät kodin Istanbulissa ja mitkä tekijät vaikuttavat kodin tekemiseen. Näitä tekijöitä tarkastellaan niiden olosuhteiden kautta, jotka syyrialaisilla vallitsevat Istanbulissa. Huomioon otettuja seikkoja ovat muun muassa laillinen asema, asema asuntomarkkinoilla, työskentelymahdollisuudet, kulttuurinen identifioituminen sekä kodin kokeminen. Vaikka tämä tutkimus keskittyy yksilöllisiin kokemuksiin, syyrialaisien pakolaisten kodin tekemistä tarkastellaan myös pakolaiskontekstissa, jossa pakolaisten kodin tekeminen on politisoitunutta. Pakolaisina syyrialaiset ovat hyvin politisoituja henkilöitä, joiden kodin tekemiseen vaikuttaa isäntämaan domopolitiikka kuten myös kansainvälinen politiikka.</p> <p>Poliittisen näkökulman lisäksi tutkimus nojaa kirjallisuuteen pakolaisten kodin tekemisestä, joka huomioi pakolaisuuden muuttavan yksilön suhdetta ja käsitystä kodista. Kodin nähdään olevan merkityksellinen konsepti juuri siihen kohdistuvan menetyksen ja kivun vuoksi. Tutkimuksessa käytetyssä kirjallisuudessa pakolaisten nähdään sijoittavan kodin useisiin eri paikkoihin ja myös aikoihin. Tämä tutkimus käsittelee kotia sosiaalisesti ja kulttuurisesti tuotettuna metaforana, joka kuvaa henkilön kuulumista sosio-spatiaalisissa narratiiveissa, mutta jonka sisällön yksilö valitsee kuvatakseen tai tukeakseen omaa identiteettiään ja psykologista hyvinvointiaan.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen metodina on kvalitatiivinen analyysi. Sen aineisto on kerätty neljästätoista syvähaastattelusta ja kahdesta tutkimusmatkasta Istanbuliin. Haastateltavat olivat 20-40-vuotiaita syyrialaisia, jotka olivat eläneet Istanbulissa kahdesta kuukaudesta yli neljään vuoteen. Haastateltavat valittiin sosiaalisen median välityksellä luotujen suhteiden kautta.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa selvisi yksitoista kodin tekemiseen vaikuttavaa tekijää, jotka on jaettu yleisiin ja yksilöllisiin tekijöihin. Yleiset tekijät ovat elinympäristöstä nousevia tekijöitä, jotka vaikuttivat kaikkiin haastateltaviin. Nämä tekijät olivat Istanbul kaupunkina, turkkilainen kulttuuri ja yhteiskunta, lainsäädäntö, työelämä, syrjiminen, ihmissuhteet perheeseen, ystäviin ja turkkilaisiin. Yksilölliset tekijät ovat haastateltavan persoonasta, maailmankatsomuksesta ja tunteista nousevia tekijöitä, jotka yleisten tekijöiden lailla vaikuttivat haastateltavien kodin kokemukseen. Yksilölliset tekijät jakautuivat neljään kategoriaan: haastateltavien suhteeseen Syyriaan, kuulumisen kokemukseen, kodin merkitykseen ja tulevaisuuden näkemyksiin.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen tulokset tukevat aikaisempaa tutkimusta pakolaisten kodin tekemisestä ja siitä, kuinka kotimaassa sijainneen kodin menetys vaikuttaa siihen, kuinka pakolaiset käsittävät ja kokevat kodin. Tutkimus kuitenkin kyseenalaistaa pakolaisten kotouttamiseen liittyviä poliittisia ratkaisuja, kuten kotimaahan palauttamisen ensisijaisena vaihtoehtona. Tutkimuksessa kävi myös ilmi, että asumuksen sijaan kotoutumisen kannalta ensisijaisia tekijöitä olivat suhteet perheeseen ja ystäviin ja elannon ansaitseminen alle kaksi vuotta Istanbulissa asuneiden haastateltavien keskuudessa.</p>			
Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords Kodin tekeminen, paikalleen asettuminen, pakkosiirto, pakolaisuus, asutus, asuttaminen, siirtolaisuus, domopolitiikka, Syyrian kriisi, Turkki, Istanbul, EU-Turkki pakolaissopimus, väliaikainen suojelus			
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## 1. Introduction

Home is an important concept to people and for the society. Home is seen as a basic structure of society building. For people, it is a place to rest, live our lives, find security and establish a permanence. However, home is not a self-evident, stable nor permanent element of life for millions of people. For tens of millions of displaced people, losing their home and recreating it elsewhere is a constant reality. Conflicts over the world have displaced citizens. They seek refuge in other parts of their respective countries or by crossing international borders. There are more forcibly displaced people in the world today, than there has ever been since the Second World War. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2015:3a), by the end of 2014, there were 59.5 million forcibly displaced individuals worldwide. The massive displacement of peoples and prolonged duration of conflicts have resulted in sizeable refugee minorities. The lives of the refugees have been greatly influenced by the displacement process and life outside their country of origin.

Since 2011 ongoing Syrian conflict has forced up to five million Syrian citizens to seek refuge outside of Syria, of whom a great number residing in Turkey. By the end of 2015, close to 2.5 million registered Syrian refugees in Turkey alone (Homepage of Syria Regional Refugee Response Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal 2016). Turkey has signed the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. The Convention applies an exception by offering permanent asylum only for European citizens. In the tripartite structure of the Turkish asylum system, Syrians and stateless Palestinians originating from Syria fall under a group-based temporary protection regime, which grants the right to legal stay, right against refoulement and access to a set of basic rights and services (Homepage of Aida 2016a). However, these rights do not include the right to work legally. Although Turkey has built numerous refugee camps close to the Syrian border, close to 90 percent of the refugees within Turkey reside in cities (UNHCR 2015:1b) relying on their family members or on their own financial resources. One of the main destinations of Syrians is Istanbul which now hosts more than 350, 000 refugees.

The Syrian refugee community residing in Istanbul is socio-economically, demographically and by living conditions heterogeneous (UNHCR 2015b & Syria Regional Refugee Response Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal 2016). However, many refugees are in highly vulnerable position due to

the lack of housing, healthcare, education and social services. The lack of legal work permits has forced families and individuals to seek employment through informal labour work markets.

Considering the rapid changes in Turkish refugee policies, the ongoing negotiations between Turkey and the European Union on border issues, as well as the treatment of refugees in Turkey, insecurity and uncertainty about the future are ever-present in the refugees' lives. Refugees' plans for the future vary from creating permanent residency in Istanbul to returning to Syria or even moving forward to Europe or a third country. Although these temporary conditions are influencing the lives of Syrian refugees, they are not a passive group. These members are actively engaging themselves within their new host communities. They engage in processes to end their displacement through creative attempts to make their livelihood and home in Istanbul.

This research was inspired by a journey to Istanbul in January of 2016 and by the interviews and discussions with refugees conducted during the trip. In these discussions, the word 'home' came up consistently during these interviews. I wanted to analyse the meaning of home for these refugees and what emphasize, if any, did it have in shaping the life of Syrian refugees. In many narratives home was used to describe Syria or a place of family origin, an old house in Syria, but also Istanbul and current dwelling place and, in some cases, even human relationships within the family and with other people of their respective community. In these narratives home functioned as a metaphor for emotional connections through space and time. By naming different locations and relationships as homes, interviewees were narrating their spatial relationship with meaningful places and re-locating or emplacing their identities after the displacement had taken place.

Nostalgia for past life and home, pain and trauma caused by the war and displacement, Turkish migration politics and refugees' current living circumstances influence their well-being. This research tries to understand how, under the given circumstances, refugees arrange their lives and make their home in Istanbul.

## 2. Syrians in Turkey an overview

The number of Syrian refugees in Turkey has increased rapidly in the past four years (see graph 1) due to the worsening civic crisis in the midst of the war. In this chapter, I represent an overview on the situation of Syrians in Turkey, why they are there and how Turkish legislation is impacting Syrian refugees.

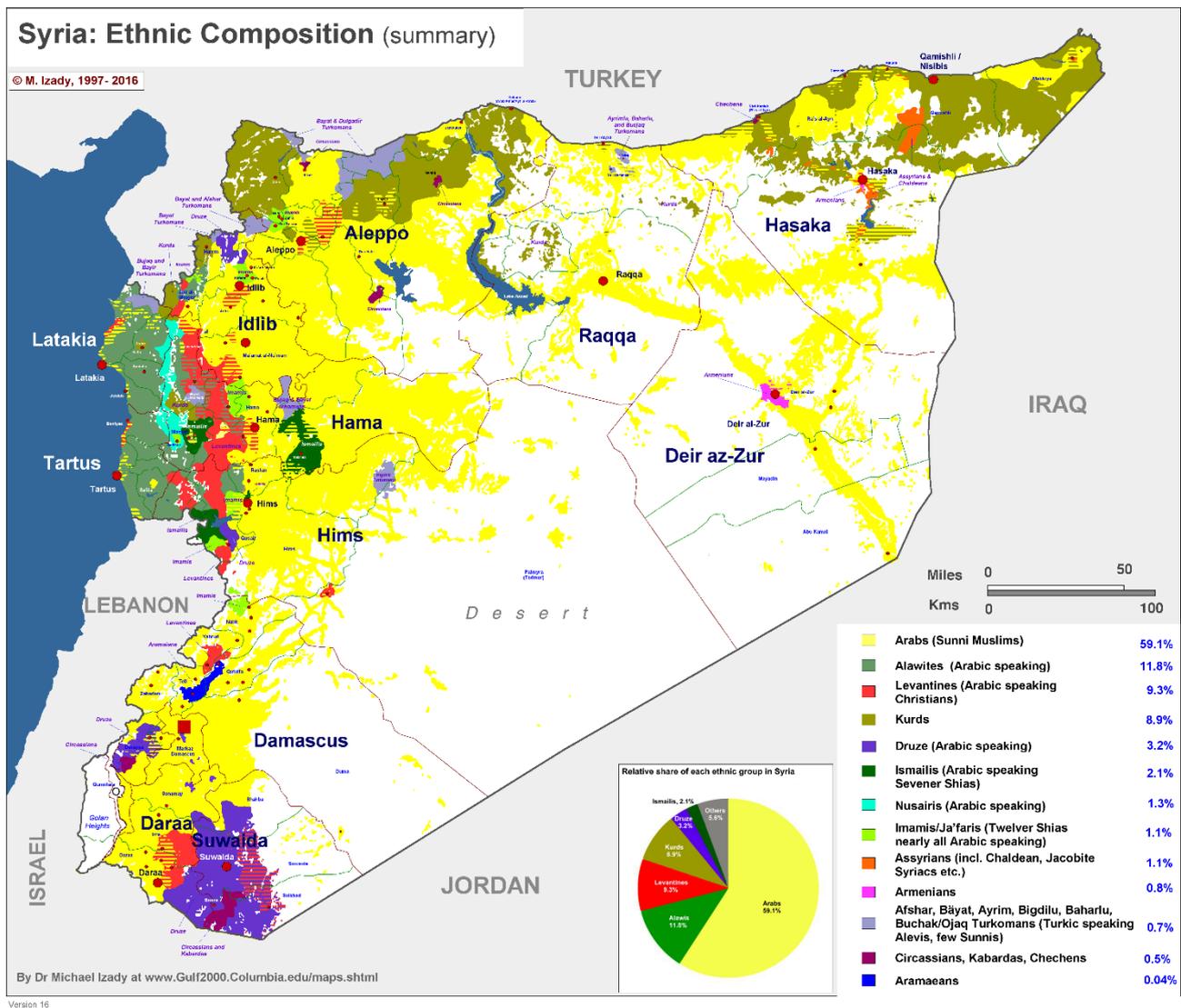
### 2.1 From civil unrest to proxy war – a short overview on the Syrian situation

The Syrian crisis, currently a full-blown war of numerous warring parties, ignited through peaceful protests in 2011, which were part of the Arab Spring uprising, that swept across the Middle East and the North African countries. Although Hugo Slim and Lorenzo Trombetta (2014:16) state that the uprising in Syria was “*the first time in Syria’s contemporary history that people were demanding real and concrete political and economic reforms*”, the unrests of the state were deeply rooted in the country’s history of ethnic, religious and economic inequalities and rivalling interests. Slim and Trombetta (2014:3) call Syria a “*mosaic of small groupings and their local relationships that spread beyond the arbitrary borders of the modern State*” (see map 1). These localized groupings and politics were overruled in numerous foreign interventions during Syria’s history as well as during the independence. Before the Ottoman Empire, the Syrian region was composed of numerous regional ruling areas at the regions of current states of Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Israel, Palestine and Jordan. During the Ottoman Empire, the region was divided into regional ruling areas, but each region maintained relative political autonomy managed by a local elite. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Syria achieved brief period of independence from 1919 to 1920, before an Anglo-French rule was imposed on the area of today’s Lebanon and Syria. The localized identities and traditional cross-border connections were disregarded during the Syrian independence in 1946 (Slim and Trombetta 2014:3). The Ba’ath party entered into power in 1961 making way for party member Hafez al-Assad. Al-Assad held authoritarian rule in Syria until he died in 2000, followed then by his son Bashar al-Assad.

In the onset of the millennia Syria witnessed a new political movement, called the Damascus Spring, a group of intellectuals demanding the liberation of political prisoners and the right to form political parties and civil society organizations. The government released some political prisoners, however, only a year later, repressive politics and arrests were back in place. However, Billie

Jeanne Brownlee (2013:139) states that the Bashar’s decade (2000-2011) was “*the time when the revolutionary seeds were sown.*”

Political tensions were fuelled by a surprisingly long lasting drought that started in 2006, and lasted up to 2011. Severe droughts, yearly crop failures, and economic stagnation led to a very significant dislocation and migration from the rural areas to the urban areas, which were already suffering from urban unemployment due to economic regression (Gleick 2014:334 and Brownlee 2013:139). In the autumn of 2010, the United Nations warned that “*low rainfall and inadequate infrastructure had pushed 2.3 million Syrians into extreme poverty*”. (Slim and Trombetta 2014:17).



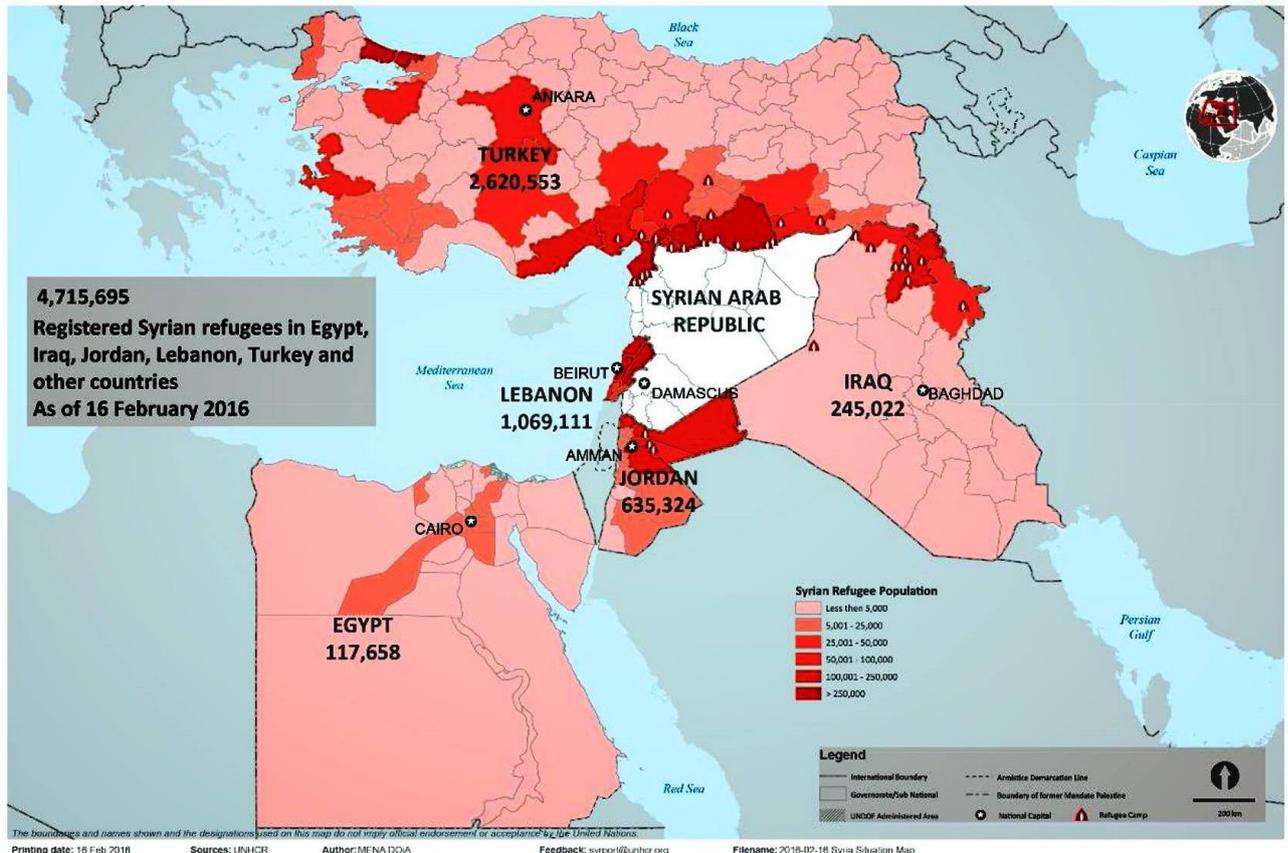
Map 1. Syria has many ethnicities (Izady 2016).

The state of the economy, increasing poverty, human rights violations and search for better employment opportunities brought people to the streets in reform demands (Brownlee 2013:139).

Peaceful demonstrations against the government quickly changed into violent ones due to the repressive actions of the military and the appraisal of violent opposition forces. The violent conflict has since developed into a proxy war, which is being directed from abroad by complex networks of alliances (HRC 2016: 5). The warring parties target a majority of their attacks towards civilians. The Human Rights Council of United Nations (2015:6 and 2014:5-21) states that the Syrian government, as well as Non-State armed groups have committed cross human right violations and war crimes of massacre, hostage, rape and torture of civilians. The warring parties spread terror among civilians by bombarding, shelling and destroying civilian infrastructures and denying people their basic freedoms. Children have been recruited and used in war actions, multiple towns have been sieged and humanitarian aid has been obstructed. By the end of 2015 more than 210 000 Syrians were killed directly and even more indirectly due to the collapse of the medical care system, broken down services, and in sieged areas, civilians have been starved to death (Sida, Trombetta and Panero 2016:1 and Slim, Trombetta and Sida 2015:21).

During the war, the Syrian economy and the structures of civilian life have collapsed and increased poverty. In the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Report, Slim, Trombetta and Sida (2015:20) state that the economic downfall has caused four out of five Syrians to live in poverty. By August 2015, 12.2 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance including 7.6 million internally displaced. Around 4.6 million people who did not have access to humanitarian assistance, including 422,000 people in besieged locations (Slim, Trombetta and Sida 2015:20). By April 2016, more than 4.8 million Syrians were registered as refugees (Syria Regional Refugee Response Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal 2016). The collapsing of civil services, proliferation of warring parties as well as war crimes, human rights violations against the civilian population are pushing Syrians across the border mainly to neighbouring countries such as Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan as well as Iraq, Egypt and Europe (see map 2).

**Syria Situation Map**  
**Syrian Refugees**



Map 2. Registered Syrian refugees in the region (Syria Regional Refugee Response Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal 2016).

*2.2 Turkey as a refugee hosting country*

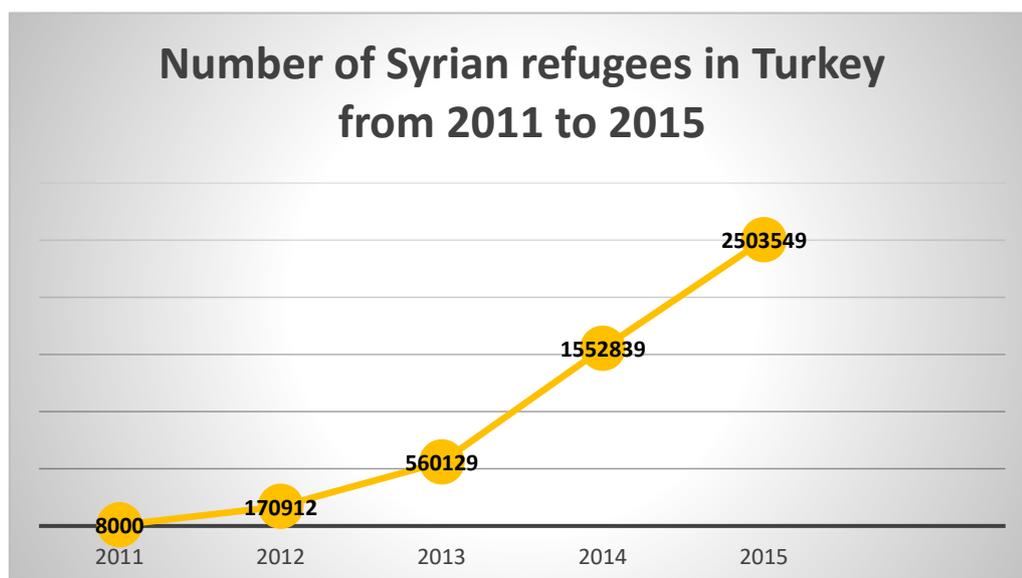
Turkey was the first country to receive Syrian refugees. Only one month after the breakout of unrest and military repression in the end of April 2011, the first 250 Syrians arrived to Turkey. They were welcomed by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu, who announced that Turkey is ready to let in those Syrians “*who are not happy at home*” (Özden 2013:1). By June 2011, 10 000 people had escaped from Syria to Turkey (Sida, Trombetta and Panero 2016:7). As the crisis escalated, more and more Syrians Fled the country. Turkish officials insisted (see New York Times 2011) that the Syrians are not refugees but “*guests*”, who will return home once the situation in Syria calms down. As shown in graph 1, the number of registered Syrian refugees within Turkey has constantly increased. Around 8,000 Syrian refugees were accounted for in the end of 2011 whereas by the end of 2015 up to 2.5 million Syrians were registered. By the end of March 2016, the number of Syrians in Turkey rose to over 2.7 million peoples (Syria Regional

Refugee Response Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal 2016). The welcoming attitude changed, and in February of 2016 Turkey closed its borders to all new refugees stating that it had reached its limit. An estimated 30, 000 and 50, 000 Syrians were stuck at the border.

At the beginning of March 2016, Turkey and the European Union signed a new deal regarding refugees. The agreement allows the EU to return refugees who had arrived irregularly from Turkey to Greece. Furthermore, the EU would agree to take in one Syrian refugee from Turkey for each refugee returned to Turkey. The EU-Turkey deal also included a financial agreement of 6 billion euros of assistance from the EU to Turkey.

The United Nations (see UNHCR 2016) and human rights organisations have criticized forced push backs in regards to the Turkey-EU deal. According to Amnesty International (2016) the deal is illegal under Turkish, EU and international laws. Human Rights Watch (2016) has deemed the deal a breach of the European Convention on Human Rights and the Red Cross (2016) has deemed the deal as inhumane. The UNHCR (2016) points out that asylum seekers can be sent to a third country only if the country can guarantee protection from refoulement and internationally acknowledged refugee rights, and guarantee that refugees have “*full and effective access to education, work, health care and social assistance*”. The Red Cross (2016) warned that containing refugees in Turkey will not solve the humanitarian crisis, but indeed create a new one.

Graph 1. Number of Syrian refugees residing in Turkey, based on data of Syria Regional Refugee Response Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal (2016).



The legal position of a refugee in Turkey depends on their country of origin. The Turkish asylum system has a parallel structure based on geographical limitations. Turkey has signed the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, with an exception to offer permanent protection for asylum only from Europe. Non-European refugees who enter Turkey are conditioned refugees and entitled only to temporary protection. Conditioned refugees are entitled to fewer rights than other refugees and are not “*offered the prospect of long-term legal integration in Turkey and are excluded from “family unification” rights*” (Aida 2016a). A third group subjected to special treatment are Syrians for whom Turkey founded a temporary protection regime in 2014. This temporary protection was based on three principles: maintaining Turkey’s border open for asylum seekers, not sending any Syrians back to Syria against their will and Turkey committing to offering basic humanitarian aid. (Aida 2016b).

The temporary protection regime grants legal stay and a set of basic rights and services, such as free health care, but access to on-the-books work is limited. Although temporary protection grants the right to apply for a work permit, the way Aida (2016c) evaluates the legal access to Turkey’s labour market for refugee is rather theoretical. In order to apply for a work permit, a foreign national who is already residing in Turkey, must have a valid residence permit to which persons under temporary protection are not entitled to. In retrospect, the majority of Syrians participate in the informal labour market and face exploitative working terms and payments. Policy shifted in a major way in January 2016 when the Turkish Government published a set of new regulations which allowed registered Syrian refugees, who have resided in Turkey for at least six months, to apply for work permits in the province in which they have first arrived to (Syria Regional Refugee Response Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal 2016:2). At the time of this research (April 2016), no data on estimates on the effects of new regulation were available.

Turkey has built 23 refugee camps in Southern Turkey (3 RP 2016:70), but 90 per cent of the refugee population (Syria Regional Refugee Response Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal 2016) reside by their own means in the urban and peri-urban areas close to the Syrian border, the capital, the west coast and Istanbul (see map 2). Syrians living outside the camps are facing difficulties meeting their basic domestic needs. Their financial means are inadequate for food, accommodation, water, electricity, gas and heating fuel costs, and the humanitarian community does not have the means to cover all basic needs of all these persons in concern (3 RP 2016:71).

As the temporary protection regime being group based and covering all registered Syrians in Turkey, no Syrian can apply for international protection on a personal basis. According to Biehl

(2015:59), the uncertainty “*that invades asylum seekers’ everyday lives in Turkey has a powerful governing effect, serving to contain, demobilize, and criminalize them through the production and normalization of uncertainty*”. The situation of Syrians in Turkey can be described in Giorgia Doná’s (2015:68) terms as “*prolonged condition of displacement*”, in which persons who have been granted refugee status, are lacking permanent solutions for several years such as settlement, resettlement, or repatriation; hence their current location can become a site where they experience forced immobility. The on-going crisis in Syria, blocked routes to Europe, and exclusion from the Turkish society are creating conditions in which refugees are stuck in a temporary situation.

### 2.3 Istanbul, a migration hub

Istanbul is one the main destinations of Syrian refugees in Turkey (see map 2.). Turkey’s largest city, with an estimated population of 14. 3 million (City population 2016), has more than 350,000 Syrian residents. The Syrian community in Istanbul is not a homogenous group, but rather the community consists of members from various socio-economic groups. With a young population, more than half of the refugees are under 18, and the working age population (18 to 59) form approximately 44 per cent of the total Syrian population of Istanbul, whilst the elderly are underrepresented. Men and women both form approximately half of the refugee population in Turkey (Homepage of Syria Regional Refugee Response Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal, 2016). Syrians arrive to Istanbul by their own means, mostly by land and until the beginning of 2016 before the visa limitations, by air.

Istanbul’s opportunities attract people: it is Turkey’s most significant economic zone as well as the most important social life and artistic creation hub (Güvenç and Ünlü-Yücesoy 2009). Istanbul is also one of the important nodes for those who are moving towards Europe. At the Aksaray square, life vests hang from the street shops and in the evenings, busses stop at the square bringing new immigrants from Syria who then gather at parks and playgrounds. The presence of Syrians in Istanbul is visible: around Fatih, a downtown district called “Little Syria” by locals and media, bakeries, meat shops, and restaurants have Arabic names as well as downtown areas and major squares have Syrians, mainly children, begging in the streets.

One of the most difficult issues Syrian refugees face at arrival in Istanbul is the lack of affordable housing. The poorest refugees are unable to find housing and they are living alongside the metro lines in self built huts and abandoned buildings. Those who are able to find an apartment are living

within inadequate space with little furniture (Anna Tuson, interview 2016). Language barriers, inadequate resources and also reluctance from landlords to rent out to refugees, are putting refugees in a highly vulnerable position in the housing leasing market. Refugees' high demand of rental housing has led to landlords seizing opportunities to increase profits and has in return inflated the rent prices. Realtors Chamber President Nizamettin Aşa estimated in Daily Sabah interview (2014) that rent price rose one third and houses that are affordable for the middle-class are very hard to find.

### 3. Key definitions

Here I present some of the key definitions to understand the study.

#### 3.1 Refugee

In this research, I take into consideration that there are many terms and definitions which are used to describe the individuals who are forcibly displaced from their homes of origin. A person can hold multiple titles at the same time. The rights, entitlements and also exclusion of such a person may vary depending on which term is applied to his or her case. However, in this paper, I use the definition of refugee which is laid down by the United Nations (UN) in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, standing as the only international legal instrument precisely covering the status of the refugee.

By the definition of the Convention, a refugee is a person who *"owing to a 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 to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country"* (UNHCR 2011: 3). By this definition all Syrians who have crossed the international borders in order to escape their country due to some of the above-mentioned reasons, are refugees and therefore entitled to international protection. In the case of Turkey, it is notable that all Syrians are treated under the temporary protection regime, which does not cover the full rights of internationally acknowledged refugees. Therefore, refugees residing in Turkey face more vulnerabilities due to their position than refugees in countries that follow the full letter of 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol.

Although any Syrian, who has crossed international borders due to any of the above-mentioned reasons, can be described as a refugee, it is worth mentioning that Syrians' decisions to move outside of Syria involve both coercion as well as free choice. In a country torn by civil war, a person's situation may change rapidly even during their stay outside the country and a person's position may vary from being a refugee to being a migrant and vice versa according to the events in their country of origin (Holm Pedersen 2003:5-6). It can also be difficult to define the motivations for movement and whether they can be regarded as voluntary or involuntary movement. Some of the Syrians in Turkey may not consider themselves as refugees nor have registered themselves as refugees. Despite the problematic differentiation of term refugee, I have decided to use it in this study for two reasons:

1. In Turkish legislation Syrians are treated under the Temporary Protection regime, and it is exceptional to have another type of residence permit (see Aida 2016a).
2. The term refugee describes better the unique relationship to home that Syrians have, who have migrated to Istanbul, rather than the term migrant. For Syrians in Istanbul, home of origin is experienced as at least temporarily unattainable, distinguishing it from the migrants' experience of the possibility to return by their free choice.

### 3.2 Refoulement

Refoulement is a term that is used when an individual is returned to a state or territory where one may be persecuted or their freedom is in danger. Refoulement is prohibited by international law and it is binding to all states whether they have signed the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol (UNHCR 2016). Therefore, any action that would force the return of Syrian nationals back to Syria is illegal by international law.

### 3.3 Displacement and emplacement

Displacement is a condition in which a refugee is spatially, temporally and at a bureaucratic level dislocated from their original homes and is unable to settle.

Emplacement in a forced migration context is an act or a process to end displacement and a state of being "at home", an experience of belonging to a place. Laura Hammond (sit. Holm Pedersen 2003:8) calls emplacement "*a process of transforming an unfamiliar physical space into a personalized, social place*". Emplacement does not require repatriation (return to the country of origin), but it can take place in the new location in which a refugee commits to a home-making process.

### 3.4 Settlement and home-making

Settlement is an act of settling; putting an end to one's displacement and establishing residence. It is a state of stability or permanence, and a process of a person's settling into a new country or place. Settling can be used as a synonym for emplacement and the home-making process and holds to a

profound experience for refugees as it can mark the beginning of new possibilities. These include *“the acquisition of a status; the end of a difficult experience of war or persecution and a form of success after a long period of waiting and of insecurity in asylum”* (Archambault 2012:36).

Home-making can be used as a synonym for settling, but it has more individualistic nuance: to make a home refers to an act that an individual performs in order to take management over the process of settling or, especially in this research, experiencing being at home and leading one’s daily life.

#### 4. Spatial dimensions of “refugeeness”

Refugees, by their forced mobility, are inevitably experiencing drastic spatial changes which are unique in a global scale. Refugees have lost their original home and often travelled through dangerous routes across international borders to their current dwelling sites, which may or may not be their final destination. The places that they have lost do not necessarily cease to exist, but they become unattainable. Current dwelling places might be chosen on behalf of refugees or chosen out of their free will or out of lack of other options. New dwelling place can be a new previously unknown place or it might be attached with emotional connections of pre-displacement. What is sure is that these experiences alter refugees’ relationship to places. Here I present some of the most important spatial notions that help understand the landscape of refugees.

##### 4.1 Construction of emotional relationship to place

Place is a fundamental concept in the geographical discipline, because it is tied to our understanding and functionalities of the physical reality we live in (Tuan 1977). Existence of the concept of place emerges from the spaces we occupy and create relationship with. Jaakko Suvantola (2002:31) describes these places as reference points in our existential space. Places do not exist neutrally within space, but they are connected to our individual experiences of them (Tuan 1977 and Suvantola 2002:30). Our interaction with places creates meaning for them and thus places are subjective by their essence. This humanistic perspective of subjective construction of place is being questioned by structuralists such as Harvey (1990), who considers places as constructed through social processes and therefore our experiences of them are products of the social construction of place. Anssi Paasi (1986:112) contests this perspective stating these social processes and structures are “*reconstructed precisely through the agency of individual practices*”. There is an interplay of social construction of place and individual experience of place. Therefore, individual experience of place is not separate from the socially constructed space, but rather experienced within the larger socio-political context (Manzo 2003:47). At the same time, personal experience is unique, and hence, it not only reconstructs the social structures of the place, but also contributes something new to them (Suvantola 2002:31). The nature of place is not stable but the social construction and the individual re-interaction processes enables the mobility and continuous creativity in the re-creation of place (Cristoforetti, Gennai and Rodeschini 2011:225). The fluid nature of places characterizes refugees’ relationships to places.

Lynne Manzo (2003:47) observes people's relationships to places as "*an ever-changing, dynamic phenomenon*" and as such they are "*conscious process in which people are active shapers of their lives*". These relationships are loaded with emotions and meanings. Antonio Cristoforetti, Francesca Gennai and Giulia Rodeschini (2011:226) state that people are "*meaning makers*" as they consistently attribute their personal meanings and thus transform spaces from a simple container to subjectively lived meaningful places. Making meaning to places suggest humans have a certain "*sense of place*". Meaningful places and meaning making to places are often viewed through a positive sense of them. Edward Relph (1997:208) calls positive sense of place "*a strong sense of place*". However, an emotional relationship to a place does not need to be positive in order to carry meaning. This is a particularly important notion of refugee studies. Refugees experience a great deal of loss of physical places whilst they are displaced. The emotional connection to these places of refuge remains meaningful, or as Manzo (2003:51) argues, they become meaningful "*precisely because of the experiences of pain and loss*".

Suvantola (2002:36-37) states that in places where we have experienced a great deal, means we have attached ourselves emotionally to them. He sees that places are an integral part of our identity and therefore places and people are a part of each other. Also Bernanzo Hernández (& al 2007:311) identifies place as a component of personal identity which is created through interactions and belonging. The sense of place, belonging and identity are not limited only to the places where people have their roots. Refugee identities are deterritorialized (Malkki 1992: 24) as pointed out by Dudley (2010:743), physical continuity of place for refugees is impossible: where ever they now are located "*is not or never will be the place where they have come from*". Although the spatiotemporal continuum of place is disrupted, Liisa Malkki (1992:38) draws attention to the attachments refugees form to places through "*living in, remembering and imagining them*". Per Gustafson calls mobility (2006:19) "*the overcoming of spatial distance*".

## 5. Home

The concept of home has a significant meaning in this study. In refugee studies, the meaning of home is one of the key components in understanding the experiences of refugees (see Dudley 2010, Doná 2015, Holm Pedersen 2003 and Kabachnik, Regulska and Mitchneck 2010). In the displacement process refugee changes their notion of home and the meaning of home is given different nuances than, for example, in situations where home is a relatively stable unit at a personal and societal level. Peter Kabachnik, Joanna Regulska and Beth Mitchneck (2010:320) make a reminder that displacement entails the forced and/or unwanted loss of home. Giorgia Doná (2015:68) grounds that studying notions of homes on the basis that home -related terminology is used by refugees and it reveals their experiences. She states that while official organizations responsible for refugee settlement consider “*contexts,*” “*conditions,*” and “*solutions*” forced migrants are speaking of “*homes, homemaking, and belonging*”. These are terms refugees use to define their dislocated identities and their emplacement practices. Therefore, it is important to observe the dynamics of displacement and emplacement through terminology that reveals refugees’ personal experiences and perspectives of their lives in exile. Here I present some of the main perspectives that positions home in the understanding of the refugee life in exile.

### 5.1 Home as a metaphor

In this research, I do not understand home as a solid, physically existing object but rather as fluid range of diverse, emotionally attached metaphors or as Jeanne Moore (2000:208) calls home “*an abstract signifier of a wide set of associations and meanings*”. A useful summary of home is given by Walter Benjamin (cit. Moore 2000:208). He describes home as “*a spatially localised, temporally defined, significant and autonomous physical frame and conceptual system for the ordering, transformation and interpretation of the physical and abstract aspects of domestic daily life at several simultaneous spatio-temporal scales, normally activated by the connection to a person or community such as a nuclear family*”. Benjamin’s definition emphasizes the material as well as the imagined perspective of home, which are well described by Allison Blunt and Robyn Dawling (2006:22-23). According to them home is a multi-scalar entity of physical location and a set of feelings. Lynne Manzo on her part sees (2003:49) home as being used metaphorically, but is often been interpreted literally which makes the concept of home complex. Therefore, she separates the physical aspect of dwelling, which I here discuss in the following sub-chapter, from the symbolic meaning of home. Manzo states that when we use term home, we are using a metaphor of an

archetypal landscape as a comparison point to other landscapes. In this research, I do not see home as metaphorical comparison point, but rather used in a symbolic way giving meaning to places and important relationships. Though I observe refugees as creators of these metaphors, I recognize they are also objectives of political metaphors of homes. Liisa Malkki (1992:27) points out how metaphoric practises link people and place, and how they are used to tie people to their “*homelands*”. I will discuss this matter later on in Politicising homes chapter.

## 5.2 Home as a dwelling place

The need for places to which we attach and can call homes comes from the exercise of dwelling which, according to Heidegger (1993:350), “*is the manner in which mortals are on the earth*”. In his classic essay *Building dwelling thinking*, building is seen as conditional to dwelling, or as Heidegger puts it, “*Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then we can build*” (1993:361). Housing, the material aspect of dwelling, is defined in The Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a right of “*living adequate for the health and well-being*” (Homepage of United Nations 2016). Moore (2000:210) states that many researchers argue that an emotional based relationship with the dwelling place is what defines the nature of home and distinguishes it from a house. Another perspective is given by Doná (2015:68), who studied refugees in protracted refugee situations and discovered that in these circumstances forced migrants turned shelters into homes and engage themselves into homemaking practices. Therefore, home, even as a place of dwelling, is something that doesn’t simply exist, but is rather made through material and imaginative processes “*of creating and understanding forms of dwelling and belonging*” (Blunt and Dowling 2006: 22-23).

## 5.3 Scale of home

The term home has a highly fluid scale: it can be used to describe a building, town, region, country or even the planet Earth. Home can even be reduced to a single body (Blunt and Dowling 2006) or, if home is seen as metaphor, it can be taken beyond physicality and reduce (or expand) it into bits of virtual reality. Giorgia Dóna (2015:72) researched the use of “*virtual home*” among refugees in prolonged displacement conditions. She came to the conclusion that by using news, Skype and social media, refugees were reinventing home through what she calls the creation of new spaces of cyber-memorialization. The non-physical location of home is in our memories. Numerous studies

(see Dorai 2002, Kabachnik, Regulska and Mitchneck 2009 and Dudley 2010) shows that home is recreated in memories, which Mohammed Kamel Dorai (2002:93) calls an identity reservoir.

#### 5.4 Home as identity

Yi-Fu Tuan (1975:155) sees home as a place where life begins and ends and even if it is rare in modern society, it is still seen as ideal. Home is seen as a grounding place of identities so essential that Blunt and Dowling (2006:11) calls it a “*heart: an anchoring point through which human beings are centred*”. Within refugees, home of origin can become something idealized and memorized (Dóna 2015:79), and these memories allow refugees to reproduce their identification with their original home in new context (Kabachnik, Regulska and Mitchneck 2010:331-332). Sara Ahmed (1999: 329) calls this remembering collective acts of communities to create multiple identifications. Although the original home plays a significant role in the creation of identity, it is important to recognise that it is not used only to create identity, in that it separates refugees from their current “*homes*”, but also allows them to invent and imagine them (Liisa Malkki 1992: 24). Anthropologist Liisa Malkki (1992: 27) who has studied refugees, whom she calls “*uprooted*”, suggests that identities should be seen as being always on the move. She states that putting too much emphasis on the roots blinds the multiplicity of attachment people create with places. Therefore, an individual can identify one’s home in multiple places at the same time.

#### 5.5 Spatiotemporal notion of home

As revealed by Benjamin’s definition (sit. Moore 2000:208), home is inherently a spatial concept with a temporal aspect. In refugee studies, the spatiotemporal dimension home comes under special scrutiny. According to Richard Black (Black 2002:2), homes cannot be identified without locating them in their spatiotemporal context. Kabachnik, Regulska and Mitchneck (2009:315) use a term “*double-displacement*” to describe how displacement shifts the locus of refugees home not only in space but also in time. Sarah Dudley (2010:743) addresses the importance of sense of spatiotemporal continuity of place and emplacement, not only for the displaced but also the non-displaced people alike, in order to feel “*at home*”. As pointed out earlier this is impossible for refugees. For them the existence of an original home in spatiotemporal continuum has seized for unmeasurable duration.

The spatiotemporal aspect of the concept of home overlaps with the concepts of meaningful places. The concept of home functions as an everyday word for the emotional connection created with place. Manzo (2003: 56) argues that “*‘home’ is a spatial metaphor for relationships to a variety of places as well as a way of being in the world*”. Home is an emotional place. Home-making is an everyday word for emplacement, finding oneself in space. In this research I observe home as a metaphor for the emotional relationship or attachment to places and a term to describe refugees’ spatialized belonging and identity formation.

## 6. Three theoretical perspectives on home-making among refugees

The literature regarding home-making in a refugee situations focuses around three topics: the politicized aspect of home and refugees, being displaced and experiences of loss of home and the emplacement or the human ability to create home despite the prevailing circumstances. Here I contemplate these three major topics.

### 6.1 Politicized homes and bodies

Although this study focuses on the personal experiences of refugees, it is relevant to pay attention to the political realm in which they reside. Refugees are a unique group of people in a nation states politics, hence they are nationals of a foreign country. Now residing inside the state borders, refugees are unable, at least for the time being, to return to where they came from. Crossing international borders makes refugees highly politicized bodies, whose lives are affected by international politics as well as the domopolitics of the country where they are residing.

National politics have a close connection with the conception of home. William Walters (2004:241), who has studied UK border politics and domopolitics, observes that nations are governed as if they were homes. He sees that home is viewed as a place that is a *“heart, a refuge or a sanctuary in a heartless world, embodying ownerships: the home as our place, where we belong naturally, and where, by definition, others do not”*; and as natural order: *“every people should have (at least) one”*. According to Walters (2004:241) this leads to perceiving *“others”* as guests, who are allowed to visit if invited by *“us”*, but not allowed to stay. At the same time, homeland needs to be protected against the dangerous mobility, such as refugees, that threatens the *“heart”*. What makes refugees particularly problematic for domopolitics, is well observed by anthropologist Liisa Malkki (1992). She has studied the refugee phenomenon from the perspective of *“roots”* and *“nations”*, and discovered that refugees are portrayed as politico-moral problem tightly connected to the understanding of nation states and *“roots”*. To have *“roots”* means you belong somewhere. Displaced people are uprooted from *“national soils”*: their place of belonging, and hence they challenge the natural order of things (Malkki 1992:25).

Since refugees are viewed as rootless, they are assumed to return to their roots. According to Suzanna Y.A. Tete (2012:107) there are widespread claims that people desire to return their home countries, to their ‘roots’ since *“there is no greater loss than the loss of one’s homeland”*.

Voluntary repatriation is one the UNHCR's "*durable solutions*" for solving the refugee situation. Nevertheless, there is no clear continuity in the lives of refugees between "*leaving home – being away – coming home*" (Holm Pedersen 2003: 4). If refugees cannot be "sent back" to their home countries, they attempt to keep as close to their "*home*" as possible. In his research of Kosovan refugees, Dan Bulley (2010:43) discovered strong held beliefs of the link between being human and belonging to where your roots are: "*to remain human, the subject of ethical concern, the Kosovan refugee, had to remain near Kosovo.*"

Malkki (1992:32-33) sees that uprootedness is viewed through our sedimentary assumption of attachment to place which leads us to define displacement not "*as a fact about socio-political context, but rather as an inner, pathological condition of the displaced.*" Hence, uprooted people are not seen as ordinary people, but instead are represent an anomaly that requires interventions. Malkki (1992: 32) cites a historical survey of refugees from 1939, in which refugees are described as politically uprooted and therefore "*he [the refugee] may sink into the underworld of terrorism and political crime; and in any case he is suspected of political irresponsibility that endangers national security*". The loss of bodily connection to their "*roots*" has caused the loss of moral bearings for the refugees.

The idea of nation states as homes defines refugees as rootless, abnormal alien bodies occupying the 'home' territory, and are therefore subjects of political actions, preferably located within refugee camps, in which space and movement of 'people who are out of place' can be managed (Malkki 1992:34). Those refugees, who are not residing in camps, are managed through state's refugee politics, which determine refugees' legal position in the respective country. Politics that uphold refugees' state of "*uprootedness*" or, in other words, displacement by utilizing temporary protection, have become widespread (Dóna 2015). Institutions, which are responsible for refugee integration, seem to disregard the need to make refugees feel at home or rooted. Hilje van der Horst's (2004) studies of the institutional spaces of the Dutch asylum system, reveals that home discourses are non-existent in the institutional narratives, even as refugees used home discourses to describe their living in the centres.

Within the context of Syrians in Turkey, the concept of a nation as home helps to understand the political decisions and attitudes related to the Syrian refugees, and the reality in which refugees make their homes. Syrians are viewed as guests, who are expected to return home as soon as they can. They are offered minimal social services in order to keep them alive, but no means to integrate into the society.

## 6.2 Homes in limbo: displaced identities

Due to the circumstances of refugees' lives, home or origin has become unattainable, often for unmeasurable time periods. Peter Kabachnik, Joanna Regulska and Beth Mitchneck (2010: 315) calls this experience a "*double displacement*". Home has been lost not only spatially, but also in time. They portray home-making and conceptualization of home as a journey, as a "*continuous process and renegotiation*" (2009:317). In their research on Georgian IDP's, Kabachnik, Regulska and Mitchneck discovered that IDP's located their homes in the past and the future instead of the present where they were currently dwelling. They found out that IDP's were not focusing on the current condition of their homes of origin, but the future plans were more idealistic and did not take into account potential changes their neighbourhoods might have undergone (2010:327). They suggest that Georgian IDP's use these different temporalities of home to cope in their current living conditions. Past functions work as reference points that represent the normality, which stresses the uncertainty of their current lives (2010:323). Future and return to Abkhazia are ways to regain this state of normality (2010:328), which are looked upon to gain better life for the family (2010:325).

The IDP's of Kabachnik's, Regulska's and Mitchneck's research faced "*displacement, economic hardship, poor living conditions, and lack of social and economic integration*" (2010:316), but Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson (1998:10) deny that feeling "*at home*" or "*homeless*" would depend on the movements, which is in the case of refugees displacement, arrival to a new environment, or physical and sociocultural spaces and times. Therefore, being 'at home' is a cogitative environment in which a person can "*undertake the routines of daily life and through which one finds one's identity best mediated – and homeless when such a cognitive environment is eschewed*". Hence, feeling 'at home' or displaced can be independent from the prevailing reality of current circumstances. Even if physical displacement ends by the aid of resettling, displacement can continue influencing the refugees home-making and integration at a cognitive level. Sara Ahmed (1999:331), who has studied people who move internationally, states that movement can separate home from "*the particular worldly space of living here, through the possibility of some memories and the impossibility of others*". In this state the 'home space' becomes unreachable and separate from the space of inhabitancy resulting in a creation of a home fetish "*in which one finds the self as almost, but not quite, at home*".

### 6.3 Emplacement through home-making

Although displacement has a significant influence on refugees' home-making and the sense of home, refugees do not meet their new situation with passive acceptance, but instead many studies (see Dóna 2015, Holm Pedersen 2003 and Dudley 2010) show that home-making practices are on-going even when persons are displaced from their home of origin and have not yet discovered other permanent solutions. Marianne Holm Pedersen (2003:8) refers to a dissertation of Laura Hammond, in which she studied Tigrayan refugees' emplacement and community building in a returnee settlement, stating that Hammond shows in her study that Tigrayans created sense of belonging and sense of home to the new place through home-making practices such as creating daily routines, founding a material base of living as well as later point forming a community. Holm Pederson borrows Hammond's term "*emplacement*" which, according to her, Hammond uses to describe the "*process in which unfamiliar physical space is transformed into personalized and socialized space*", to outline how her research subject, Lebanese returnees, used stories and practices to create a relationship to the new "*places where they could belong*". In both of these studies 'returnees' were settled in places for which they had no previous connection.

Daily routines, which refugees are able maintain in a similar way as back in their homes of origin, were also deemed meaningful for experiencing a sense of home as well as sense of purpose in displacement in Sarah Dudley's research on Karenni refugees at the Thai-Burma border refugee camps. By observing daily life routines like eating, weaving and dress practices, Dudley (2011:743 and 752) found out that, by repeating and engaging in the present "*with the objects and actions of the past*", refugees were connecting to their pre-exile past and as well able to maintain "*some of what the spatial discontinuity of forced migration has disrupted*". Dudley states that, through these practices, Karenni refugees attempt to produce a feeling of being at home even while they are in the camp. Giorgia Dóna (2015:71) refers to similar studies of Brun, Čapo, Fábos and Trapp demonstrating that even in unsteady lives refugees aim to "*improve their material conditions and recreate familiarity and belonging to the new environment*".

Familiarity can also be created through non-material ways of religious practices and ideologies. Celia McMichael (2002), who studied the role of Islam for Somali women in Melbourne, discovered that religion offered another 'home' for these women. She identified that religion helped these women to overcome the discontinuity of home caused by displacement providing them "*a plurilocal home that can be carried through space and time*". In the researches of Dóna (2015), Dudley (2011) and Holm Pedersen (2003) also non-religious memorizing and stories were used to

create familiarity. These memories and stories were maintained via social networks of other refugees or returnees. The importance of social networks in home-making is also recognized by Kabachnik, Regulska and Mitchneck (2009:329). They discovered that Abkhazian IDP's spend much of their time with people with whom they share experiences. Through these social networks IDP's were constructing their homes, both in past and future.

## 7. Aim and the research questions

In this research, I aim to understand the life of a refugee in temporary conditions by studying home-making among Syrians in Istanbul. Although home-making among refugees has been studied, the existing research has been more focused on organised settings, such as camps and asylum centres, rather than urban settings in which refugees organize their lives for themselves. Home-making among Syrians who live in Istanbul has not yet been studied, and hence in this research I try to bring new understanding on the topic by asking

1. How Syrian refugees make home in Istanbul?
2. What factors influence their home-making?

I seek to answer these questions by finding out the living conditions of refugees, and, through interviews, identify whether these persons feel at home in Istanbul and in their homes as well as factors behind feelings of being or not being at home, such as legal position in the country, having or not having a dwelling place, and experiencing cultural closeness or distance. This study preconditions that policies and the status of a person has an influence on the experiences of home-making.

Although there are numerous other refugee groups and internally displaced people (IDP's) living in Istanbul, this study engages only Syrians who have moved to Istanbul after the beginning of the Syrian conflict in 2011. Particular interest given to this group of people originates from the following motives:

1. The Syrians are the most numbered refugee group on global scale as well as in Turkey. The crisis in Syria has been going on for five years, and the repatriation of Syrians in the imminent future appears unlikely, putting a majority of them in a position where home of origin is unattainable.
2. The Syrians and stateless Palestinians originating from Syria, who live in Turkey, are held under the Temporary Protection regime, which defines specific rights and at the same time denies other rights, which will likely influence the refugees' home-making and living in Turkey.
3. Syrians form a significant Arabic minority group in Istanbul.

4. Istanbul is an important node for a highly mobile Syrian refugee community. Of the Syrians living in the city, some are there to stay, some are there waiting to move on to Europe and some are staying there to be close to Syria in order to return.

## 8. Methodology

In this study I have utilised qualitative methods. According to Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara (2007:157) the basis of qualitative research is to describe “*real life*”. I chose this approach, because I aim to understand the everyday experience of Syrian refugee life in Istanbul. The research results of this method are descriptions of real life experiences and through these descriptions I aim to comprehend common factors influencing home-making and how the experience of home is formed within an exile context.

In this chapter I introduce the chosen methods, realization of data collection and data analysing. I also estimate validity and reliability of the research and chosen methods to provide tools for a reader to interpret the findings.

### 8.1 Field trips

This research included two field trips to Istanbul, the first taking its place on January 2016 and second from April to May 2016 both lasting 8 days. The purpose of my first trip was to comprehend the situation refugees have in Istanbul. For this I conducted four interviews with two Iraqi refugees, one Syrian refugee and one interview with Anna Tuson from Small Project Istanbul, an organization helping refugees in Istanbul. I also visited one Syrian-Palestinian family, as well as in the first Syrian bookstore café in Istanbul, and listened to their life stories in Istanbul. During my first stay, I also visited places such as Aksaray square, to where Syrians arrive by busses and where shop-keepers sell life vests, as well as the Fatih district, which is one the most popular districts among Syrians. During this trip I gained knowledge of major issues refugees, and especially Syrian refugees, face in Istanbul, such as lack of legal rights and status and unequal treatment in work and housing market. I also learned about the biased emotions Syrians had towards Syria and about longing for their old home.

During the second trip, my focus was on conducting interviews. I aimed to have 15 interviews of which I gained 14 in total. I conducted 12 interviews during the second trip and two later via Skype and e-mail through contacts made during the trip in Istanbul. I held interviews in public places, such as cafeterias and bars, which were easy to reach by both the interviewee and me. However, in some cases, interviewees travelled long distances to the location of the interview. The size of the city as well as timing were major issues in conducting the interviews. Most of the interviewees worked till

6pm and, due to this, most of the interviews were conducted after 7pm. Also some one of the interviews did not happen because the interviewees lived relatively far from the city centre and one direction trip would have taken up to two hours one way. Although I aimed to plan the trip well pre-hand and agree meeting times and days with the interviewees, most of the interviews took place a day or in some cases even half an hour notice. For most of the interviewees it was impossible to agree detailed meeting times which made the field trip relatively unpredictable. Most of the days I conducted one interview in the evening, on one day three interviews and on another day five interviews in total.

Besides the interviews I practiced “*small scale participant observation*”. Participant observation is a method in ethnographical research in which a researcher access’ a community and the lives of the community by participating in their everyday life at the same time as observing their ways of life, and then returns to academia, as Gran and Cook (2007:36) put it, “*makes sense of this through writing up an account of that community's ‘culture’*”. During my field trip, I did not practice participant observation in its description. For example, I did not observe systematically certain elements. However, I participated in different moments and events of Syrian people’s lives, and through observing in these moments, I gained greater understanding of their lives in Istanbul.

I spent two evenings with two different groups: others between ages 20 to 26 and others 25 to 35. With the younger group I spend time in cafeteria and after we went to a Syrian restaurant to taste traditional Syrian food. With the older group we spend time at one of theirs home as well as in a bar. One of the interviewees invited me for a lunch to a Syrian restaurant with people he knew from law school back from Syria, who then worked as waiters. I visited the same Syrian-Palestinian family twice as during both trips, and had a celebration lunch for one of their husbands receiving a residence permit in Europe after 8 months of waiting. I also participated as a guest in Syrian talent party (see picture 1) in which young Syrian talents were performing arts, such as theatre, rap, traditional Syrian music, magic and during which they also screened a short documentary of a family whose son was killed by Daesh. The majority of the performances were critical to either the war in Syria, Syrian domestic politics or international politics. The Syrian talent party was organized at the same time as heavy bombing was taking place in Aleppo, which created an intense atmosphere in the party.



Picture 1. A Syrian rap artist performing in Syrian talent party on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2016.

## 8.2 Interviews

I collected primary research data by using semi-structured in-depth interview method. I aimed to understand Syrian refugees' experience of living in exile via interviewees' personal experiences and their views, and hence I designed open-ended questions which allowed interviewees to freely discuss and raise issues they felt were significant. However, to make sure the same topics and phases of life were covered, the interviews required structure. I designed the interview covering three different temporal and spatial aspects: first phase covered their current lives in Istanbul, second was about their past life in Syria and their relationship to Syria, and third part concerned their future plans and dreams that could take place in any possible location. I avoided making questions that indicate certain end results or could direct the interviewees. For example, instead of asking "*Are you planning to return Syria?*" I asked questions such as "*Where do you see yourself in future?*" and "*In an ideal world, where would you live and how your life would be?*"

To find interviewees, I utilized snowball sampling methods in which interviewees were found via other interviewees or with the help of key persons. According to Giampierito Gobo (2008:97-116) snowball sampling is the best method in research of sensitive topics. I already had couple of old contacts from the first trip who helped me to get two additional interviewees. Other key persons I found via social media from group that included Syrians who lived in Istanbul. Two of my key persons were living in Istanbul, others in other parts of Turkey, in Syria and in Europe. A majority

of the interviewees who were reached via key persons were friends or relatives of the key persons'. In total, the primary data of this research includes 14 interviews.

### *8.2.1 Using social media in research*

Social media was one of my major sources to find interviewees in this research, and it was highly productive for finding key persons as well as interviewees: 12 of the interviewees were reached through social media or via key persons, who were also found through social media. However, using social media, in this case particularly Facebook, for research has impact on who were chosen for the interviews, as well as impacted the nature of the interaction, and raised issues of boundaries between researcher's role and private life. I will contemplate questions on privacy later in the chapter 8.4 *Research ethics and positionality*, and here I focus on the selectivity of the interviewees.

Through Facebook I could find pre-selected group of Syrians, who belonged to a group of Syrians who lived in Istanbul. They were accepted into this group by some other group member, which indicated they had some sort of connection to Syrians who live in Istanbul, if they did not live there themselves. From this group I made random selection of people to whom I send private message. From these randomly selected people, I still made another selection based on their profile information to increase the accuracy of the target group: I dropped out those who had stated to live somewhere else than Istanbul, as well as those whose profile were only in Arabic. For my personal safety and comfort, I made choice not to send message to those persons whose profile included disturbing material, such pictures of themselves posing with a gun. Hence the final selection of those who I sent messages to was based on limited selection from the randomly selected people within a pre-selected group. Besides random selection, I also hand-picked a few people whom I knew to be active community speakers and activists, as well as reporters working with Syrians, and some associations working in Istanbul, for potential contacts.

When using social media to reach interviewees, it is not only the researcher choosing the target group, but also those people I reached were able to make the decision whether to reply or not. Their decision was based, not only on their own life situation and personal interest on the subject, but also on my profile; aka whom I appeared to be. Prior to contacting them, I had my profile settings highly limited, showing only my latest profile picture. After receiving comments about it and doubts on the factuality of my profile, I added more information to be shown in public, such as my work and education background and some of my older profile pictures and cover photos. Without further knowledge, it is impossible to say how much my profile information had influence on contacted persons' decision to reply, or how my personal profile influenced the general profile of the

interviewees and what other factors influenced the selectivity. For example, such information as my previous employment experience in a well-known human right association, might have turned some potential, but more conservative interview candidates away. Being able to see my working background information also influenced on one of the interviewees who assumed I would have contacts to Turkish based associations for refugee related issues and hence able to help him. However, using social media limited the target group to relatively young persons who were active social media users as well as men. Although I approached an equal number of men and women, I received only three out of 16 replies from women respondents.

The fact that people were also able to decide by themselves whether to answer me or not, helped me to be in contact with people who were actually interested in participating in the interview, as well as with those, who were interested in finding interviewees for the research. Having people genuinely interested to be interviewees', the interviewees' influence on the profile of the interviewees might differ from the average profile of Syrians who are living in Istanbul. Chatting via Facebook allowed me to have numerous conversations about the topic, and helped me to gain more knowledge and understanding about the Syrian community in Turkey. These conversations were also essential in gaining mutual trust between me and the key persons.

Because Facebook is a social media channel and, by its nature, informal, I also had to alter my messaging style from formal academic messages to more personal and non-academic style. I first made a test with 15 receivers with more formal messages, which produced only one reply that did not lead to interview. After altering the message style, I sent message to 45 people receiving 16 replies. One of the issues that I faced by using Facebook was that messages sent by others than friend connections go de facto to the 'Others' inbox instead the of the regular inbox, and hence receivers do not receive notifications of new messages, but only notifications that are easily left unseen among the vast amount of notifications a Facebook user might receive during the day. Although I sent the messages four weeks to two weeks before leaving on the field trip, I received some replies while I was in Istanbul and some even months after I had finished the trip.

### 8.3 Realising and analysing the interviews

As previously mentioned, 12 interviews were conducted in Istanbul during April 28<sup>th</sup> to May 6<sup>th</sup> 2016, one via Skype on May 10<sup>th</sup> 2016 and the last by e-mail on May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2016. Interviews lasted from half an hour to one hour depending on the interviewee, and they were held in public places. 13

interviews were held in English and one interview was conducted in a manner that I asked questions in English and interviewee replied either in English or in Arabic. Responses given in Arabic were then translated by her friend. All interviews were recorded and afterwards transcribed. Since my purpose was to analyse interviewees' thoughts and not the language that was used, I did not transcribe such things as laughter, sighs, stutters or repetitions, unless they were meaningful. I also did not transcribe my own lines or those lines that were out of the context, such as comments on what was going on around in the interviewing place or any general non-research topic related talk.

After transcribing the interviews, I started creating categories based on themes that arose from the material. I colour coded the themes and marked sections in the transcriptions that related to the theme. Then I collected all the sections under each theme and summarised what seemed to be in common with the answers and what differences were discovered. Colour coding helped me to discover interrelations among the themes. I could observe how often and in which manner, for example, racism and work or relationships and future plans were mentioned within the same topic.

#### 8.4 Research ethics and positionality

In this research, the ethical questions arose from the chosen method, the semi-structured in-depth interview, but moreover from the research interest group, Syrian refugees. Regina Pernice (1994) discusses the methodological issues related on research with refugees and migrants which are always context specific. Although she writes in a context of psychological research, her major points are applicable also in other fields of study. Pernice (1994:208) lists six points in which issues arise and should be taken into consideration:

1. *contextual differences between, for example, war-torn countries and a society of peace*
2. *conceptual problems with translations of instrument*
3. *sampling difficulties*
4. *linguistic problems*
5. *observation of etiquette*
6. *personality characteristics of researchers.*

The greatest difference between me and the study group was the contextual difference of our lives: I come from a country regarded as the most peaceful in the world (Institute for Economics & Peace 2015:6-9) and the study group comes from a warring country. I was visiting Turkey as a tourist who was able to enter and exit the country without a visa. Great part of the study group was in the

country without any legal documentation. My major pre-concerns were focused on avoiding causing any harm to the participants, preserving their anonymity as well as gaining trust. My asset to understand interviewees experiences comes from my own family history. I grew up in a family with members who have experienced war and loss of their original home. In order to avoid creating questions that would support my own family experiences, I designed questions in a manner that they do not imply any particular end result (see Attachment 1).

Hence Syrians come from a country torn by civil war and are living in foreign territory, in which legislation criminalizes the majority of their lives (Biehl 2015:59 and Aida 2016c), a majority of locals experience distrust of Syrians, but also of authorities, organizations and unknown individuals. For this I needed to find intermediators who could trust me in order to find more interviewees. From the first field trip I had created connection with a Syrian man who helped me to find two interviewees. Other intermediators I found via Facebook from groups collecting Syrians who live in Istanbul. With some of them I exchanged often long conversations about the topic and the ways I am about to conduct the research and the interviews in order to gain the trust. Using Facebook as a tool to find interviewees and being in contact with people raised particular questions about privacy: how much should I tell about myself, what was visible on my profile, and should I friend potential interviewees and intermediators. At the beginning I decided not to friend anyone who I did not meet in person, but after several friend requests and including one clear suspicion if I am even a real person; as well as a recommendation from a journalist who works with refugees; I realized friending those who requested made me more trustworthy in their eyes. Seeing my profile made me a real person and gave face to who I ought to be. I also considered how much information I should give about myself. Although it was a professional setting for me, it was personal for the interviewee, and so I wanted to narrow the gap between the interviewee and the interviewer, but also feel comfortable. After all, it depended on the situation and required situational decision-making.

I decided not to use interpreter, because it is impossible to be aware of all potential conflicts between different groups and individuals. In worst case, if using interpreter, I could have placed opposing parties to the same table. This decision limited potential target groups to those, who knew English to an adequate level, but in the other hand, it also allowed direct communication between the researcher and the interviewee, which was important for the interviewees openly discuss their personal issues. I aimed to make interviewee as comfortable as possible by, first of all, interviewing only persons who voluntarily announced interest to participate. I tried to make sure that interviewee was aware that there were no other benefits in participating other than the ability to tell their stories

and contribute to the research. Before the interviews, I made sure interviewees knew that she/he can stop the interview at any point, can abstain from answering any questions and can decide independently what to say. I also emphasized that I was interested in their personal experiences, hence all their answers are correct, to avoid interviewee replying in a way she/he thinks is a correct answer. In the design of the interview structure, I attempted to organise it in a manner in which easier questions were asked first and then gradually moving towards more demanding or potentially deeply emotional questions. Considering that questions related to the home of origin and Syria were the most likely to create a range of emotional reactions or feelings which might be by nature negative emotions, I placed these questions after ones that related to their lives in Istanbul as well as before ones related to their future plans in order to avoid leaving interviewees pondering in the past or negative feelings. After interview, I remained discussing with the interviewee, excluding cases in which they were in a rush, and de-briefed the interview situation by asking their overall feelings on the conductions of the interview and offered the possibility to give feedback. I also collected written consent forms to use quotations in the research report.

In order to preserve interviewees' anonymity, I avoided recording personalizing data. I saved records by codes (day + code) so that person's name and recording cannot be connected. I recorded interviews with mobile phone and transferred them into Dropbox immediately after recording. I kept consents and notes separate, and I also coded notes. I did not take any pictures of any interviewee nor the interview situation. Also transcriptions were coded, although personalizing data, such as age and stay in Istanbul, were included. In the transcriptions as well as in this report, place names are left untold unless the place is big enough, such as Damascus or Aleppo, as the information cannot be related to the person. If I use quotations that include information that might reveal the person in question, I have changed the details to more general ones or left information out entirely of the quotation.

Cultural differences were not a major issue for conducting the interviews for three main reasons. Firstly, the interviews took place in Istanbul, which is foreign soil for both the interviewee and therefore asserting both of us to the role of a foreigner. It is however to be noted that, interviewees experienced Turkish culture to be familiar and its behaviour etiquette is closer to one of Syrian rather than a Finnish cultural etiquette. Secondly, the data collected was gathered from the interviews were not political opinions, but personal thoughts of their individual experiences, which allowed interviewees to represent only themselves, not a greater community. This also positioned me to be more perceived as a person, who was interested in them as individual people, rather than perceived as a Westerner, who was inquiring about their position within the context of war. Thirdly,

the interviewees were gathered with a snowball sampling method via key persons with whom I had established relations through social media and during the first field trip. As mentioned before in chapter 8.2.1 *Using social media in research*, it is not only the researcher who chooses the key persons and interviewees, but also the other way around. Hence personality and ways of communication between the key persons and I did not differ radically, in a manner that they would create a conflict between us. Also, most of the interviewees had similar educational backgrounds and they belonged to the same age group as I do.

Despite these factors that narrowed down the differences between me and the study group, I had to take into consideration the cultural and gender related issues which arose particular with more conservative and religious interviewees. As general rule, I dressed according to Turkish etiquette wearing shoulder covering shirts and knee covering trousers. In Arabic culture it is general that the host offers guests and that a man pays for the woman's food and drinks in a restaurant. I resulted the situation by ordering most of the time only tea, and adapting to the situation: when possible; I offered, or paid for myself and when it was clear that I should not pay, I allowed the interviewee to offer.

As a woman, I had preconceptions that finding women interviewees would not be as difficult as it turned out to be. As mentioned in chapter 8.2.1 *Using social media in research*, when I made initial approach to contact potential interviewees I send interview request to 23 men and 22 women, I received 16 replies of which only three replies were from women. Through one of these women respondents, I received one male interviewee and two others did not result interviews. Out of 14 interviewees only four are women. Two of them were contacted via a male key person and two through the help of a woman interviewee.

### 8.5 Validity and reliability of the study

Reliability of a study describes whether chosen methods create same results if study is repeated (Hirsjärvi & al 2010:231). However, estimating reliability of a qualitative study is not straightforward. Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara (2010:231) state that results of qualitative studies are always images of the situation and of the current moment in a changing environment. They are narrated images of a moment in life and these methods picture thoughts and emotions of the moment. Accordingly, general assumptions should not be induced from the results of qualitative studies. In this study I have used qualitative methods in a particular historical moment within a

particular study group. At its best, this study pictures a comprehensive image of the study groups relationship to the studied subject. The answers and conclusion that I have made based on qualitative methods, describe the reality and perspectives of highly educated, relatively young group of Syrians, who reside in Istanbul in a time when situations in Syria as well as Turkish and international policies and practices are changing promptly. All the questions asked are subjugated to changes in the reality of the study group. For example, their thoughts on Syria and old home are influenced by what they know to be going on in Syria at the moment of the interview. Since the interviews, situations in some of the home towns of the interviewees have changed drastically. If the same question patterns were now to be repeated to the same group, answers could differ. Hence, even though the methods are repeatable, conclusions will always describe only particular historical moments. However, in this report I have tried to supply detailed explanations of how I have executed the research and how I have come to the results. I have used plenty of quotations to support my statements. I state this study can be repeated, and with a similar study group in a similar setting, certain commonalities could be traced.

The research validity describes how accurate the chosen research method is for the study in question (Hirsjärvi & al 2010:231). The purpose of the study was to measure Syrian refugees' personal experiences and perspectives of home, as well as to examine the factors that influence home-making in Istanbul by this group of people. I had two research questions: "*How Syrian refugees make home in Istanbul?*" and "*What factors influence their home-making?*". The chosen method of in-depth interviewing was accurately chosen for the discovery of personal experiences and it made it possible for the revelation of those factors that the study group found influential to their home-making. However, the chosen questions did not straightforwardly answer the question "*How Syrian refugees make home in Istanbul?*". To answer this question, I visited a couple of Syrian homes in Istanbul as well as spent time with Syrian people outside the formal setting of the interviews. Withal, my participations and observations were in the context of short-term visits and hence they cannot be considered as ethnographic participation observation methods. Consequently, results related to this question are interpretations drawn from the interview data and observations. Since this study is focused on understanding personal experiences, the size of the data was sufficient. In order to draw general assumptions on the home-making of Syrians refugees in Istanbul, the size of the sample should be greater.

## 9. Findings

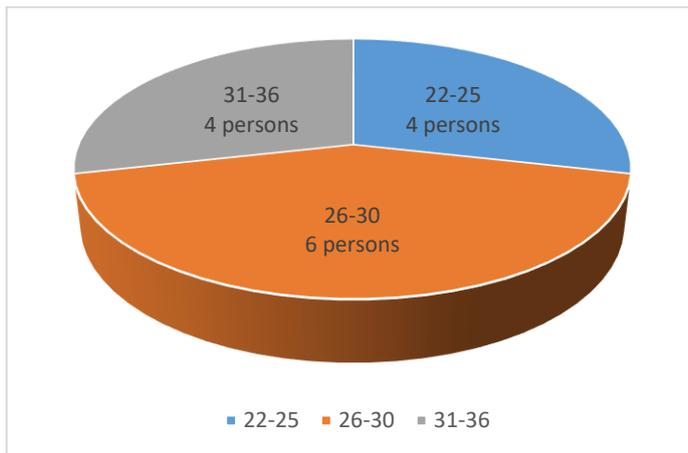
In this chapter, I introduce the research group and the central findings of the study. In chapter 9.2 *Factors influencing on home-making in Istanbul*, I list the factors in two categories: common factors and personal factors. I have included plenty of quotations to support my statements. Firstly, I begin by introducing the study group.

### 9.1 The research group

There are 14 interviews that form the research data. Out of 14 interviewees ten are men and four are women. According to the Turkish government 50.8 per cent of Syrians in Turkey are men and 49.2 per cent are women (Syria Regional Refugee Response Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal 2016a). Thus, women in this research group are underrepresented and therefore this research does not represent gender related differences within the results. Also, without denying the potential existence of gender specific experiences, this data cannot show any commonalities within one gender group that other gender group would not have.

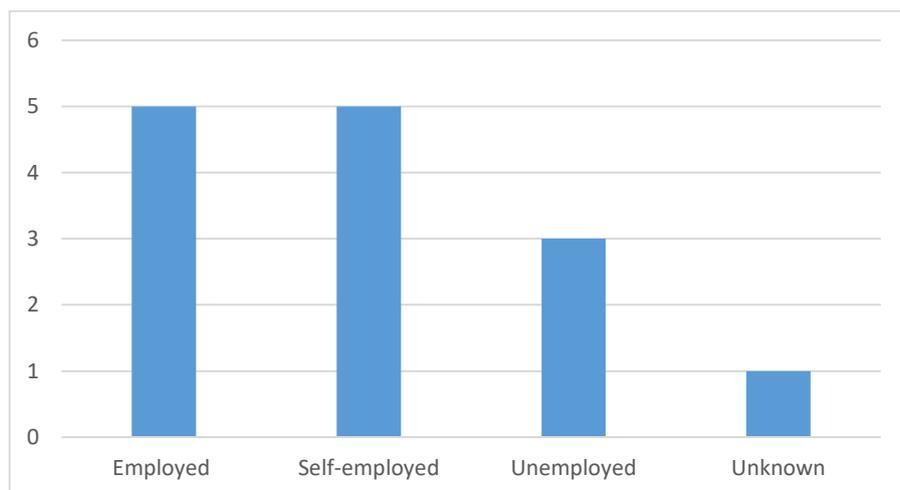
Age division among the interviewees is narrow: all interviewees were between 22 to 36 years old (see table 9.1.1). Group's representativeness among the total Syrian adult population of Turkey is hard to determine, as the demographic information does not separate adult working aged population into smaller groups. However, 42.4 per cent of Syrians in Turkey are between ages 18 to 59 (Syria Regional Refugee Response Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal 2016a). Under 18 years old represent around 54.2 per cent of the total refugee population and over 60 years old represent a mere 3.5 per cent. Out of 54.2 per cent of under 18-year-old Syrians, 40.2 per cent are under 12 years old, which suggest that of the group aged in between 18 to 59 years, a greater share could be under 40 years old and parenting under 12 years old children. Also only three of the interviewees had their parents living in Istanbul, which also indicates that the under middle-aged population is greater than over middle-aged.

Table 9.1.1 The age division of the research group.



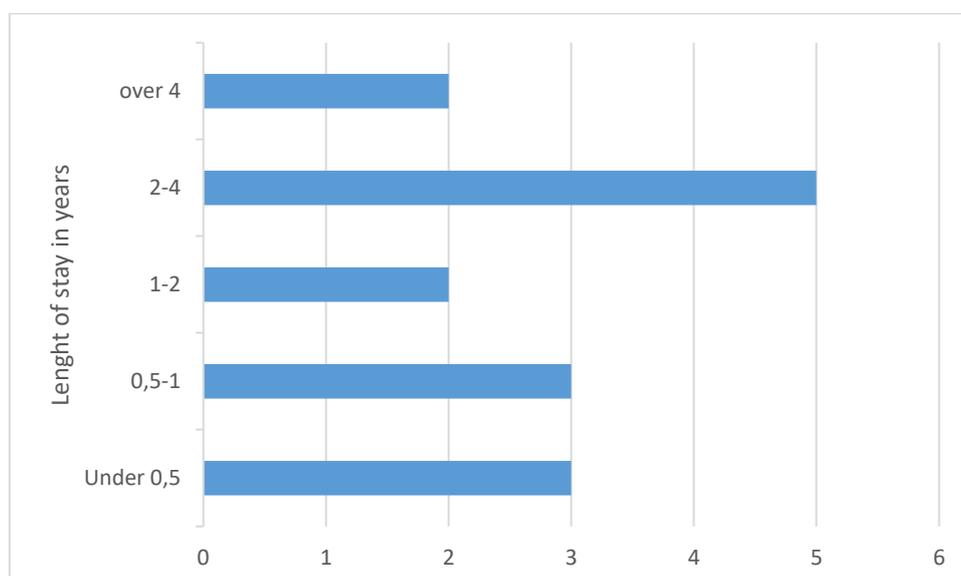
The research group included mostly single people: only one was married and had a child. Majority of the interviewees were also in Istanbul without their family members. Three interviewees had their parents and siblings living in Istanbul, another three had part of their family living in Istanbul, often one of the parents or sister or brother; and nine interviewees' parents and siblings were living in Syria or in a third country. Interviewees were highly educated. Only one did not have university level studies and additionally one interviewees educational background was left unclear. Interviewees' employment situations were under flux, but while conducting these interviews, five of the interviewees were employed in either Turkish or in Syrian companies (see table 9.1.2). Five of them were self-employed, four of them freelancing and one owned a company. Three of the interviewees were unemployed at the moment of the interview. Of the unemployed interviewees, one had been unemployed for the full extent of time she had been in Turkey, and the two had been unemployed for weeks or months. One of the interviewees situation was left unclear. At the time of the interview, he had attended a job interview and was waiting for the result, but it was left unclear whether he had work at the particular time of the interview.

Table 9.1.2 *Employment situation of the research group at the time of the interviews.*



Interviewees were evenly distributed based on the length of their stay. Three of the interviewees had stayed in Istanbul less than six months, three six to twelve months, two one to two years, five two to four years and two over four years (see Table 9.1.3). All the interviewees had moved to Istanbul after the start of the Syrian civil war in the spring of 2011. Only one of the interviewees had arrived to Istanbul after the visa restrictions had been implemented at the spring 2016, hence entering the country illegally. The influence of the length of stay on the data can be discovered. For example, the longer interviewees had stayed in Istanbul, the more they put emphasis on legal issues and lack of status in comparison to those, who had been in Istanbul less than a year.

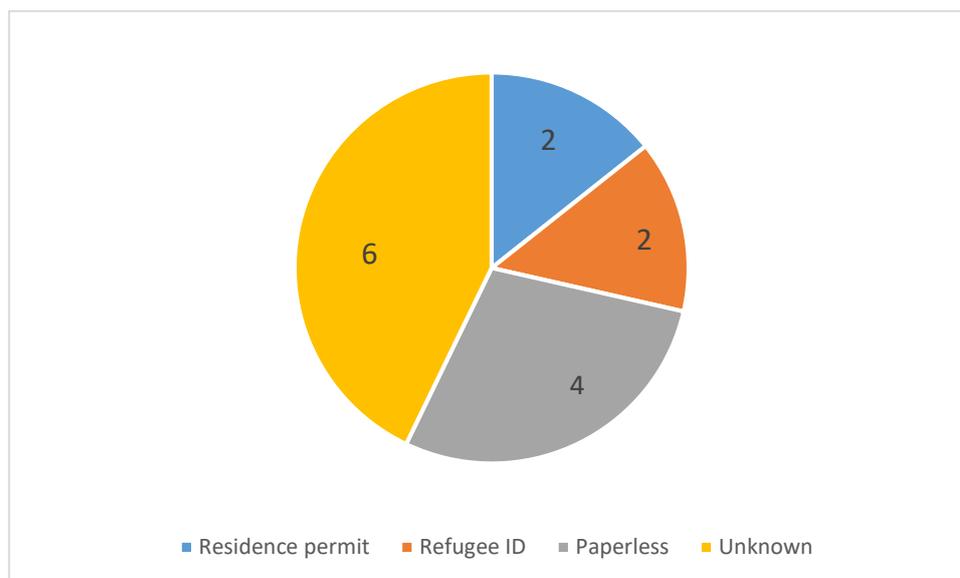
Table 9.1.3 *Interviewees length of stay in Istanbul in years.*



Defining interviewees' status appeared to be more problematic than I had expected pre-hand. Referring to all interviewees as refugees is problematic, due to the difference in the nature of their experiences. Interviewees differed in experiences for example in regards of legal status in Turkey, experience life threat in Syria, as well as the lack of threat or even their nationality. For example, interviewees left Syria for various reasons and their experienced threat or persecution varied from person to person. For some, returning to Syria would mean immediate threat of their life or freedom, but for two interviewees returning would not place them in any mentioned threat. Three of the interviewees had been arrested and imprisoned for their political activity or opinion, suspicion of political activity or other undefined reasons. One person was searched for by Syrian police, but had not been apprehended during her stay in the country. Three men reported that they had left Syria or that they cannot go back there nor apply for a passport, because they have not performed their military national service and, if stayed or returned, they would be forced to serve in the military. Two interviewees mentioned that armed conflict had erupted in their home district had and hence their only option was to leave. Three of the interviewees did not mention any specific reason why they had left. Two of them expressed strong negative emotions and thoughts regarding Syria and one expressed strong longing indicating that return was, at the moment, impossible. Out of the two who did not face direct threat in Syria, the other had left with her family and the other had reported leaving in haste before the visa limitation was implemented.

12 of the interviewees had Syrian nationality and two had been born and raised in Syria, but due to their foreign heritage, they have not acquired Syrian nationality. Hence they are not treated in Turkey as Syrians, but as members of the countries of their passport. Although one of them did explain that public officers in Turkey are not aware how to handle his case. Out of all the interviewees, only two mentioned having refugee ID in Turkey, so called kimlik, which is the official status granted by application for all the Syrians and Syrian Palestinians staying in Turkey (see Table 9.1.4). Two mentioned having residence permits, which they had gained through their work. Four explained living currently without any official recognition, hence being paperless. The legal status of six interviewees was left unknown. Two of them mentioned to have applied for residence permits, but their current status was left unclear.

Table 9.1.4. The legal status of the interviewees in Turkey.



An important factor related to the research group is that all of them have undergone major changes in their lives during the process of leaving Syria and coming to live in Istanbul. Most of the respondents' socio-economic status decreased significantly after leaving Syria. Coming from a stable economic situation, a great number of the research group now face difficulties to make ends meet. Although some of the respondents did have pre-existing social networks in Istanbul prior to arrival, their social networks were lesser integrated in the society in comparison to their lives in Syria. Most of the research group members had to leave their families behind to Syria. The research group members' legal status' changed from citizen to foreign worker, temporary refugee, tourist and illegal immigrant or undocumented. However, many respondents mentioned how they finally experienced life in peace and without persecution and constant fear. Also for many respondents, coming to Istanbul was the beginning of something new: a new opportunity for life.

## 9.2 Factors influencing on home-making in Istanbul

The interview data identified 11 major influencing factors of home-making. I have divided these factors into seven most common factors and four personal factors. The common factors are factors that arose from the environment the respondents inhabit; the city of Istanbul and Turkish society. These common factors; the city itself, the Turkish culture and society, the legislation, working life, housing, discrimination, and relationships with their family and friends as well as with the Turkish

people, are factors that every respondent faced in their everyday life and regarded as influences they could not “escape”.

Personal factors are factors that are not related to respondents’ current environment, but are related to their personality, world view and emotions. However, these individual responses can be divided into following categories: relationship to Syria, sense of belonging, definition of home and views of the future. These factors influence equally on the home-making as the common factors.

### *9.2.1 Common factors*

The city of Istanbul had some pull and push effect on why respondents wanted to settle there or leave. The city also has particular issues based on its infrastructure, crowdedness and lack of housing. Turkish culture and society had influenced how well respondents experienced fitting into Istanbul life. Legislation and racism were major negative influence on Syrians’ feelings of belonging and living in Turkey. Work and career progression possibilities were major factors on how the respondents viewed themselves and their role in the future. Housing was less emphasised than other factors, however, it was of high importance for a few of the responders. Having close relationships, or the lack of them, influenced how respondents felt being at home in Istanbul. In the following I go through each common factor.

#### *City itself*

Istanbul, the city itself, is a significant factor explaining respondents’ decision-making. The first part of the interview covered the lives of the respondents in Istanbul due to it being their current city of residence. I asked questions, such as “what are the best and worst parts of living in Istanbul”, to map respondent's’ relationships to the city. Six of the respondents had positive views and experiences of Istanbul, five both positive and negative and three had only negative views. The positive views of Istanbul included the international and culturally similarity, which enables the lifestyle and choices of the respondents. Istanbul was considered a tolerant city in which multiple identities and lifestyles can coexist. Freedom to express yourself and your identity was the most often mentioned (seven times) factor as to why the respondents felt good living in the city. The freedom to self-expression and tolerance was a factor regardless of the respondents’ religious or value background.

*“For long time, for me, the night of Istanbul was the best part. Also I like the city, because it’s city in a city. I like this part of Istanbul. The people you meet here, you see all the kind of people here from everywhere, from every country. Istanbul is an international city, so it accepts all the people... You can be free to be who you are. You feel like it’s your home.”* (22 years, male, 10 months in Istanbul)

*“When I travel around other cities, and I return here after two weeks, I notice I have missed this city so much. It’s super amazing. So good memories here, the people, the life style. Nobody cares about your religion, your ideas... I’m Muslim and all my neighbours are Christians and I feel like family with them. And I have lot of friends, who do not believe in God. Everything is good.”* (26 years, male, 1, 5 years in Istanbul)

*“My mom wears headscarf. If we would go to, let’s say France, people would look us bad. Here nobody looks us bad because of this.”* (27 years, male, 4 years in Istanbul)

*“This year Pride is going to be on my birthday. I am turning 30. So I was very clear I am going to be very public on my Facebook... I’m planning to take picture of the flag and say I’m proud of every single day of these 30 years. So that is also part of the freedom vibe that is going on in the city here.”* (29 years, female, 2 months in Istanbul)

Five respondents explained that Istanbul is a surprising city that allows you to try and experience new things and offers new opportunities. These new opportunities were often related to work, hobbies or meeting new people as listed by 25-year-old woman who had moved to Istanbul with her parents, but then stayed alone in the city:

*“Diversity of people, possibility to learn from them, try new things you couldn’t try in Syria, finding a job and be completely independent.”* (25, female, 9 months in Istanbul)

*“I have met a lot of people here and made a lot of new friends. Syrian friends also. I was exposed to a lot new thing I hadn’t experienced before, because my country is a bit closed, you know. Here it’s a bit more international. You understand new thing, you understand new culture, new people since it’s a metropolitan city. And the country and this city, some parts of the city are beautiful, you know. You just see beautiful things and experience beautiful stuff you haven’t before.”* (31 years, male, 2, 5 years in Istanbul)

*“And addition to the fact, the side of freedom, even forms of expression are here much... I don’t know, maybe it’s the city that inspires you, because there is a lot things going on. So even artistically I am able to think differently. And what I can sense is freedom in my work. I’m experimenting a lot of things, I’m not afraid to try, and this didn’t happen before.”* (29 years, female, 2 months in Istanbul)

The architecture of Istanbul and its aesthetics were praised by five respondents. Istanbul was considered to be a “*proper*” city. It was also seen to be close to Damascus in its architecture, its vibe and culture. Culture and “*cultural way of doing things*” were seen visible in Istanbul, which were liked by the respondents. Four respondents mentioned Istanbul to be culturally close to their home towns and cities in Syria. However, cultural differences were also recognized. One respondent mentioned that the mix of European and Arabic cultures in the city confused him at the beginning when he arrived to Istanbul.

*“Later on I fall in love with the city. I call it my city. It’s so colourful. If you walk on Istikla, you see people all over, you hear different instruments, and you can eat whatever you want... Istanbul is like a proper city; you can see its ugly part and its pretty part. You pass some shop or garden and there’s nice smell of flowers, you pass some garbage car that just smells like shit. Yeah, it’s like proper city. It’s not artificial style.”* (33 years, male, 4 years in Istanbul)

*“It is huge city compared to Damascus. You cannot really compare. Like Damascus is like one part of Istanbul. So this is how crazy this city is. You feel it has kind of like European theme to it in some places, but the culture is very different, so it creates this kind of a weird feeling. I have been Europe before, France, my aunt is French, so I know what Europe is, you know. So when I first arrived here I felt that European theme, but at the same time the culture is like our culture. So it created this kind of contradiction in my mind, like what the hell is happening here.”* (31 years, male, 2, 5 years in Istanbul)

*“Just walking around, I sense the feeling of Damascus. The vibe, the people, the culture, the old places, even the touristic areas, all of this, it gives a vibe of Damascus, but little bit more free than Damascus. I mean, we keep on joking, me and my friends, Istanbul is not Turkey. Istanbul is basically what we wanted Syria to be. That’s one of the reasons I really like the city. And yeah, the vibe is really important to me, because, in one of the previous cities I lived, there isn’t really a cultural way to anything. So here the cultural way is really visible and it’s really out there.”* (29 years, female, 2 months in Istanbul)

The size of the city and its crowdedness were found both positive (2) and negative (5).

Crowdedness made it more interesting, but at the same time respondents felt they were wasting their time in transportation and that they could not find a peaceful place to be. Also city was considered to be very expensive which made life difficult.

*“I love how complex this city is. It’s a big city, it seems like it has promising future as a modern city, but at the same time it has this oriental spirit that I’m used to, since I come from the same background. It feels kind of friendly. And I just love how crowded*

*it is. It's interesting, it always finds a way to surprise you.*" (26 years, male, 7 months in Istanbul)

*"You feel like you're running all the time. It's nice that it's crowded, but it's also tiring. That's why I chose living as far away from the centre as possible to have a quiet life, but how ever far you go, it is still crowded."* (25 years, female, 3 months in Istanbul)

*"It is hard city to stay: you have to work hard to stay alive, and it is expensive if you compare Istanbul to other cities. It is so expensive that we have to work around 12 hours to get good salary."* (26 years, male, 1, 5 years in Istanbul)

*"Routines are very bad in Istanbul because I have to work 10 hours a day or more and spending 3 hours in transportation from/to home that means 13 hours and nothing left to me to live as a human. Yes, now I am like a machine and all of that just to stay alive, just to eat bread."* (27 years, male 2, 5 years in Istanbul)

Although, Istanbul was considered to be a good place to live at the moment, it was also considered to be only a temporary solution. One of the respondents explained Istanbul is to make experiences but not to build a life. I will go through respondents' future perspectives later on in a chapter 9.2.3 *Future non-seen*.

#### Culture and society

As the city of Istanbul and its local culture and ways, also Turkish culture and society had an influence on how well respondents felt they integrated into society and how they felt a sense of belonging and home. Turkish culture was experienced similar to the Syrian culture, but with differences that were experienced as confusing, irritating and fascinating.

*"Even they have same religion, Turkish have a little bit different mentality about everything, about work, the local life. We have differences, and the history. They don't trust Arabs."* (27, male, 4 years in Istanbul)

Respondents did not consider Turkey particularly stable country although it offered them peace they could not experience in Syria. A man with a child explained that peace was the best part of Turkey. He saw Turkey as a peaceful place to raise his child. Other mentions of peace were also made. Couple of respondents expressed that they were greatly relieved for being away from constant noise made by shootings and bombings. A respondent mentioned feeling more relaxed, because she was able to walk around without being constantly stopped and questioned of her intentions. Also the fact that the infrastructure was functional in comparison to Syria, made respondents feel comfortable.

*Somehow you feel suddenly like human. First few days it was really scary feel this silence. No shooting, no bombs, no sounds anywhere. I lived in Damascus in safish (relatively safe) area, but you always hear the sounds of bombs... I try to get used to having electricity 24/7. It's really... I used to wake from sleep, turn on the lights and... Oh my god! I have lights!"* (29 years, male, 1 month in Istanbul)

*"I wasn't in a city that had a lot of problems, so it's not the safety that has changed so much. But still the difference is peace. Whatever I'm facing here it's still different, because at least I can still walk around here and not suddenly any man can ask me what are you doing here. You forget this question. And you have electricity all the time, you have fast internet, and you have a lot of options that you haven't even ever think about."* (25 years, female, 3 months in Istanbul)

People felt gratitude to Turkey for taking them in. Five respondents wanted to express their gratitude towards Turkey for saving their lives and giving them opportunities that other Arabic countries or Syria could not provide for them. However, the Turkish government was not considered highly trustworthy and four respondents expressed that it is the society and the "regular" people who have helped them integrate, find work and offer a helping hand during hard times. Despite this, friendships with Turkish people were not very common. Only four respondents told having Turkish friends. However, Turkish people were described nice and friendly people.

*"I like Turkish government. We have to thank them, because they took Arab people, took Syrians, under their wings, but they say we will do that and that, but they do nothing. They take the European money and put them in their pockets. Maybe they will give food for those who live in camps."* (36 years, male, 2 years in Istanbul)

One of the greatest challenges for the respondents was the Turkish language. Only three of the respondents had learned the language, which was described hard and different from Arabic. Also the lack of English speakers was a surprise for some of the respondents. The communication issues made ten out of 14 respondents experience difficulty in integration and they could not feel as they belonged. Since they could not communicate with the Turkish, they felt like outsiders. The lack of common ground influenced six respondents' willingness to integrate in the Turkish society in a negative way. A couple of the respondents also expressed that due to their countries history, Turkish people did not trust Arabic people, which caused issues for them to try and find their place in the society.

*"I don't feel local. I don't feel I belong here. There are some resembles of my home, since it's kinda close background and since actually Turkish people are very close to the mentality of Arabic people, but since I cannot connect with people, and since this*

*reputation issue, I feel like a foreigner, but at the same time I don't get the privilege of being foreigner.” (26 years, male, 7 months in Istanbul)*

*“I can understand the people as soon as I meet them, because the culture is basically the same. But at the same time, I don't speak the language and it makes me... I don't feel like I belong and on the other side, I don't like the language. If I would feel this is home, I would be speaking Turkish in three or four months' maximum.” (31 years, male, 2, 5 years in Istanbul)*

One of the interviewees believed that Turkish politeness and welcoming attitudes were following the country's politics. He viewed that those who favoured President Erdogan also welcomed Syrians and those who hated Erdogan, hated Syrians as well.

### Legislation

Turkish legislation and Syrians legal position in Turkey had a significant influence on the lives of the respondents'. As mentioned before, only two of the respondents had residency permits, two had refugee ID's, four were undocumented and six of the respondents' situation were unclear (see table 9.1.4. The legal status of the interviewees in Turkey). Refugee ID's were seen unnecessary or inutile by undocumented respondents as well as those, who held refugee ID's. They felt it did not provide them work nor security.

The overall influence of legal matters was highly negative. Respondents reported losing jobs, because they lacked working permits; difficulties renting housing t due to lack of residence permits; and restrictions to their mobility due to the necessity of separate permission. Three respondent mentioned they had had issues at borders; such as being arrested while attempting to go enter Europe. One of the respondents entered Turkey illegally after the visa restriction. Six respondents described feeling trapped in Turkey without the possibility of returning to Syria or going anywhere else. Three respondents explained how their family members were unable to visit each other, because respondents could not go to European countries nor to Syria, and their family members could not get visa to enter Turkey. Respondents' situations were worsened because of previous arrests in Syria or because they had not fulfilled their military national service they were unable to renew their passports. One of the interviewees described his situation in the following way:

*“With my Syrian passport, there are too many restrictions for me. I cannot be together with my wife. I would like travel. Now I cannot go anywhere... I cannot have Syrian nationality, because I haven't gone in army there. My passport goes old in two*

*years and I cannot get Turkish citizenship. I become a non-citizen of any country... The only reason why I would go to Europe, is to get a passport of some country. To have freedom. All we Syrians want, is to be free.” (27 years, male, 4 years in Istanbul)*

The specific area of difficulty was the unfavourable legal position in working life. Six respondents explained being denied certain jobs, because they lacked working permits or being left without salary as well as being underpaid for the work they performed. Respondents strongly experienced that their position in the working market was clearly disadvantageous in comparison to Turkish national due to their status.

*“The biggest mistake in my journey was that the people I met here, the friends that I already had here, told me I don’t need a residence permit that I can get a job without. Truth is that you can get a job, but it’s a shitty job, where you are actually enslaved and you’re asked to work 12 or 14 hours per day for 200 dollars which is not enough even for survival... Most of us cannot afford to make our papers, so it’s not a choice. We work for less.” (26 years, male, 7 months in Istanbul)*

Respondents were also lacked awareness of their current legal positions, because they felt legislation is constantly changing. They were unable to attain updated information, and a couple of the respondents even felt that the Turkish officers did not have the knowledge to help them, and respondents were left unanswered or left waiting from hours up to months to receive services from officers. The lack of legal status was causing worry, uncertainty of the future and feelings of not belonging.

## Work

Work is one of the most emphasized factors influencing respondents experience of their life in Istanbul and how they viewed their future in the city. Respondents had highly varied working situations: six were employed by Turkish or Syrian companies, six were self-employed one having his own company and five freelancing, and two of the interviewees were unemployed at the current moment of which the other one had been already without a job for a year. The longer respondents had been in Istanbul, the better their employment position was. Those who had been in Istanbul for over two years held more stable positions in comparison to those who had lived in Istanbul less than two years. However, the stability of work did not guarantee satisfaction in their situation.

Respondents experienced their education and know-how was belittled, and their salary was unfair (seven mentions).

Respondents had worked in multiple jobs and rapid employment changes were common. One of the respondents explained he had changed his job every three four weeks at the beginning of his stay in Istanbul, and one had had 15 different jobs within the first year. Istanbul's working opportunities surprised respondents aged under 25. They considered one could support oneself doing work that would not have been possible in Syria such as careers in dance or magic show entertainment.

Istanbul was also considered to offer opportunities to organize working life in a non-traditional "nine to five" -work as explained by a 29-year-old woman respondent, who worked as freelancer at the time of the interview:

*"I wake up quite late, start working, go to some coffee to continue my work. Yeah, I think I wanna keep it like this for some time. When I'm gonna start looking for a job, I'm not gonna look for a nine to five -job. Something that I like about Turkey is that a lot people that I'm meeting they try these non-nine to five working hours and they are feeling productive without it, so they wanna keep it that way."* (29 years, female, 2 months in Istanbul)

Work was considered easy to find, but 10 respondents considered that many jobs offered too little salary to survive. Also travelling distances in the city were long which caused three respondents to use multiple hours of the day just for transportation.

*"Routines are very bad in Istanbul because I have to work for 10 hours a day or more, and I spend 3 hours in transportation from/to home that means 13 hours and there is nothing left to me to live as a human".* (27 years, male, 2, 5 years in Istanbul)

Lack of work permits and the unfair treatment of Syrians were respondents' major issues regarding working life. Five respondents mentioned they had been left without payment for work. Two of the respondents told they had lied their Syrian background to get a job they wanted, and one respondent had to transfer ownership of the business to his brother, because he only had a refugee ID, hence was unable to found it in his own name. Respondents without working permit faced a dilemma: once they would get a "good" job, they could get residency and more rights, but in order to get a "good" job, they were required to have working permit that they could only have through residency. However, seven of the respondents were optimistic about their future employment possibilities in Istanbul, and some of them saw work as an opportunity to become legal residents.

## Housing

The typical solution for housing was a shared apartment which older respondents viewed as a less desirable solution than living by themselves. Seven respondents mentioned difficulties finding a good apartment and described their first apartments to have been in bad condition or that they had stayed their friends place or lived in communes. Two respondents mentioned that they had issues in the housing rental market, because of their Syrian background. One interviewee had spent a night at the street, because he had issues coming up with rent on time and was thrown out from the apartment by the owner. One respondent lived in a basement with 30 people at the beginning of his stay in Istanbul. For four respondents finding an apartment was easy, because they had friends or family to help them.

Housing was the least emphasized factor influencing the home-making of the respondents. Two of the respondents emphasized that the meaning of a house for them was to feel comfortable and the feeling of being at home. One respondent felt that a house bought safety and was a refuge to withdraw from the society to experience peace. Also two respondents mentioned they had chosen the location of their house so that they would locate in a peaceful area.

*“My definition of home starts from the home, the house itself. This is how I feel about it. My house is my world. I’m not very outgoing person. Or I’m outgoing person, but I like my house. I go back to it, I wanna spend time in it. So I don’t have a home here, I don’t have a house here.”* (31 years, male, 2,5 years in Istanbul)

Otherwise housing was mentioned as a factor increasing or decreasing comfort. Four respondents expressed satisfaction with their current housing. Their apartments were comfortable, in good locations and they had functional infrastructures such as internet, water and electricity. Housing was also used to compare their life in Istanbul to their life in Syria.

*“In Damascus I used to have my own job, pretty good salary, my own flat, and now I have nothing. I just have a room with flat mates.”* (33 years, male, 4 years in Istanbul)

## Racism

Racism and discriminative attitudes were commonly experienced by the respondents. 10 out of 14 respondents had experienced discrimination and racism. These were everyday encounters and special issues related to the housing rental market as well as within working life. Six respondents had encountered issues especially in work life. Their know-how had been belittled, they had been payed less than their Turkish

colleagues and their payments were left unpaid. Two of the interviewees even reported they had lied about their nationality to get work.

*In my first interview, I was dying for job, because, as I told you, I was working as a porter carrying heavy stuff around, so English teacher is very different. So she told me I cannot hire you, because everybody hates Syrians. She told me, if you wanna work here, you must lie about your nationality. You should say you are American, because your accent is a bit like American. I was dying for the job, so I said whatever, I just want the job. And I have continued to lie to my students for a year and a half. (31 years, male, 2, 5 years in Istanbul)*

Respondents faced discriminative attitudes in the streets and during their encounters with Turkish people. Racism was either subtle such as staring, commenting, showing distrust or not subtle such as direct conflicts. A 25-year-old woman respondent explained how she faces constant reactions from the public, because she is Syrian. These encounters have influenced her feelings of belonging as well as her national identity.

*“You’re not feeling free, because you’re having this box. I haven’t never felt like this before. When you’re inside a country, you don’t even believe in nationalities. I don’t think this one is Syrian, this one is French, you know. So when you don’t believe stuff like this and you’re being judged by this, you feel like trapped. I have never known that I’m Syrian. I have never had this much feeling that I’m this national, but after you go and you feel like you’re defending this, and I never wanted to defend what is Syrian and what is not, but now you feel like you have to. You feel like your actions really matter, and they are put in the book of judgement of Syrian people.” (25 years, female, 2 months in Istanbul)*

Some of the respondents did not feel as they were discriminated by the Turkish people. Two respondents felt that Turkish people were “good” to them, and one reported feeling that Turkish people treated him as he was a part of their group. He felt the discrimination issues were at the administration level and that in employment market there were people who were taking advantage of Syrian people. The other, a 27-year-old man, described his relationships with his neighbours as very good, and after living in Istanbul for four years, he felt that he belongs to the society. However, he felt that there is a group of people, who do not want Syrians in the country and are blaming Syrians about everything.

*“I feel I am part of this society, but at the same time I feel there is some people who do not want to accept us here. There are crazy people without education that always blames Syrians whatever happens.” (27 years, male, 4 years in Istanbul)*

Four interviewees said that they have not faced racism or did not speak about it. Two of them did not feel as they had integrated into the Turkish society. Overall, discrimination and racist incidents influenced in a way that respondents felt excluded, frustrated, lesser valued and confused.

*“First of all, I’m Syrian, and I receive vast amount of comments of being Syrian. It makes you confused, it makes you getting angry...”* (36 years, male, 2 years in Istanbul)

*“Turkish people are very close to the mentality of Arabic people, but since I cannot connect with people, and since this reputation issue, I feel like a foreigner, but at the same time I don’t get the privilege of being foreigner.”* (26 years, male, 7 months in Istanbul)

### Relationships

Respondents’ family members and close friends were scattered all over Turkey, Syria and in European countries. Only one respondent had almost his entire family living in Turkey (including parents and siblings). Five respondents had some family members in Istanbul such as one parent, brother, wife and child, and rest of the family was in Syria. Eight respondents did not have family in Istanbul. Their family members were mainly living Syria and five respondents had family members living outside of Syria and Turkey, mainly in Europe. Those respondents who already had family members or close friends living in Istanbul experienced ease upon their arrival and in the origination of their lives.

*“I was happy to discover new country. I had my brother here, and I came with my parents, so I wasn’t alone. First few months were amazing. It was a really good start.”* (25 years, female, 9 months in Istanbul)

*“When you have friends you start loving the city. Friends made me fall in love with the city.”* (33 years, male, 4 years in Istanbul)

Moving into Istanbul did not only have a negative impact on respondents’ relationships, but it also allowed them to create new relationships with other Syrian people as well as with Turkish and other nationalities. Three respondents told having many Turkish friends from whom they had received help during their hardships. One respondent felt he was saved by his Turkish friend who took the respondent to live with him after the respondent had been left unpaid at work and was about to lose his apartment.

*“He saved my life actually. I stayed at his place about month and half.”* (26 years, male, 7 months in Istanbul)

However, not all the respondents had close friends in Istanbul and some respondents experienced loneliness and longing for those friends and family who did not live in Istanbul. Four respondents explained they could not feel being at home in Istanbul, because they did not have their family nor close friends living there. A couple of the respondents felt they were growing distant from their friends they could not see, and one explained his friends were telling him he had changed.

*“I know people here, but they are not close (friends). That’s a problem, because sometimes you need a person to talk to. Sometimes I go alone to be sad, because I don’t want to talk all time to her (wife). I don’t want to push her to be sad too.”* (36 years, male, 2 years in Istanbul)

*“I don’t feel home. But even the definition home, for me home is the people, not the geographical location. I don’t feel home, because lot of my close friends and family are far away. That’s why I don’t feel home.”* (25 years, female, 9 months in Istanbul)

Almost all (13) respondents had family members living in Syria, but not all had friends left in Syria. Four respondents told they no longer had friends in Syria: they were either dead or had moved to other countries.

*“I used to have thousands of friends there, but now I think there is only dead friends.”* (29, male, 1 month in Istanbul)

Separation from family and friends was experienced as painful and distressing. Respondents tried to solve this by trying to be in contact with friend and family as much as possible via social media channels. However, staying in contact with family and friends was found challenging, because the internet connection in Syria does not function continuously, and hence respondents were often unaware of what was going on with their relatives and close people. This caused constant worry among the respondents.

*“Sometimes he (brother) disappears like two weeks or something and me and my father start worrying. Where are you man? Give us a hint. Give us something. It was just few days ago. He had been vanished for like three weeks in a row. I was about to go crazy. Then he just suddenly appeared out of nothing.”* (31 years, male, 2, 5 years in Istanbul)

For some, thinking of their relatives and friends was too painful and in order to continue their lives, they tried not to think of them ‘too much’ or to be in contact. Yet, only a few of the respondents felt guilt of being safe whilst their people were dying in Syria.

*“I try not to (stay in contact with friends in Syria). My cousin was basically my soulmate. At the beginning we of course talked every day, every weekend telling our stories, what happened with me, what happened with her, but then at some point you realize you are living a parallel universe and whatever she is going through, you don’t understand it, and whatever you are going through she is not understanding it. And it starts to become futile even talk. So every few months now we say hey what’s up, are you okay, how’s everything, and that’s it. I don’t talk to the others.” (29 years, female, 2 months in Istanbul)*

*“I feel so guilty, because I’m moving on with my life. As a very simple example I have electricity 24/7. In Syria, now, It’s like a dream. So I feel guilty about everything I have. Even that my life here is sometimes shitty, but even with this shitty life I feel guilt, because things back there are horrible, and I feel helpless about it. That’s why I avoid thinking back home as much as I can.” (26 years, male, 7 months in Istanbul)*

### 9.2.2 Personal factors

Here I represent personal factors, which are not related to the environment respondents residing nor common reactions to the prevailing reality, but respondents’ unique views and emotions that arose from their personal experiences all deeply influencing respondents home-making and experiences on being or not being at home.

#### Multiple belongings and non-belonging

Respondents’ sense of belonging was pieced together from answers to questions such as “Do you feel local here?” and “Do you feel you are at home here?” as well as from conversations related to Syria, past home and life in Istanbul. There was a great variety of answers. Respondents experienced their sense of belonging in multiple ways: for the majority of the questions reflected spatial belonging, but also some cultural belonging. Few respondents disavowed spatial belonging hence questioning whether they needed to feel belonging to some place at all. One respondent experienced cultural alienation from Middle-Eastern culture. The sense of belonging was highly influenced by respondents’ experience of the Turkish society as well as their relation and thoughts of Syria.

Nine respondents denied feeling local or feeling at home in Istanbul. Part of the respondents experienced they are not welcomed or they are unable to integrate into the society, because of language issues and the difficulties that the status of a Syrian brings, both on legal as societal level.

*“I don’t feel local. I don’t feel I belong here. There are some resembles of my home, since it’s kinda close background and since actually Turkish people are very close to the mentality of Arabic people, but since I cannot connect with people, and since this reputation issue, I feel like a foreigner, but at the same time I don’t get the privilege of being foreigner.”* (26 years, male, 7 months in Istanbul)

Three respondents felt they had made a great effort to integrate into the society (such as learning the Turkish language, networking and establish themselves in Istanbul), and they felt they were part of society. One of the three respondents explained missing Istanbul when traveling outside of the city. However, at the same time to feeling being a part of the society, these respondents reported obstacles that make it difficult for them to feel belonging. These obstacles arose from their legal status as well as from a strong sense of belonging to Syria.

*“I am part this society. This is my new home now. One day I would like to be a citizen, to have document, to be able to vote and so on. I think this is my country, my new country now, but it’s the political situation among Syrian people you know.”* (27 years, male, 4 years in Istanbul)

Strong sense of belonging to Syria was discovered from four respondents. They experienced they could not feel belonging anywhere else than in Syria, because it was the “*real home*” as well as part of their identity.

*“Istanbul, for me, is a good place to live. I like it here, and I like Turkey. The people of Turkey, the government of Turkey, but of course I won’t feel like that (local). I always feel like I’m stranger here. But I don’t make anybody feel like I’m stranger here: I speak your language, I think like you, I go out like you. Maybe I am just lying to myself. So I don’t feel local here. I wish I would go back to my country, of course, in close future. But as I told, I like Turkey, and if I go back, I will come here again, and again, and again, because I have now a lot of friends here, lot of places to go... but I would like to go back to my country... I like it here. I feel like home, but not my home. There is nothing you can do to make this your home. Even if they would give us a lot of money and house, there is always a part of you wanting to go back home, to your real home.”* (22 years, male, 3 years in Istanbul)

*“No, this is not my home. I’m just here to get back to Syria. Maybe I will stay here, but I will go visit back to Syria. I’m still Syrian, even I would take Turkish nationality. Even I hate Syrian people now, I’m still Syrian. I love Syria.”* (36 years, male, 2 years in Istanbul)

In contrary to these respondents, three respondents disavowed their belonging to Syria. These respondents had either had bad experiences in Syria, such as imprisonment as well as loss of family

members, or they felt that the society had changed so that they could no longer experience belonging to the Syrian society.

*“All your memories, all your identity behind that city is being occupied by pictures of one person and by military uniforms and by militarized appearance all the time. And there was this state of fear people were going through. Like people went back not talking out loud. People went back not even talking politics at all, because it’s a thing of the devil in that country. So it’s ugly now. It’s really ugly. Very grey and very dark green and very camouflage pattern, aggressive and... and there is no-one of my friends. All my friends are gone, except that one cousin. So it felt, I don’t belong here.”* (29 years, female, 2 months in Istanbul)

Three respondents, who did not feel spatial belonging to any particular place, felt belonging to the Middle-Eastern culture and their backgrounds. Their background was seen as something that could not be occupied nor taken away. Being from Middle East created a sense of pride and sense of belonging to a group of people. However, this sense of belonging did not influence their critical observation of Syria, the region and Turkish society to which they did not feel belonging to.

*“I love Middle East, but it’s getting worst day by day. I glad I’m from Middle East, I’m lucky to be from Middle East, especially from this ethnic mix... but you know, with this security, when you lose it, you cannot be there anymore. You just have to find another place.”* (33 years, male, 4 years in Istanbul)

One of the respondents experienced both spatial and cultural alienation from both Turkish and Syrian, or in a larger context, the Middle-Eastern culture and region.

*“I didn’t feel I belonged to the culture that I was raised in. I wanted something different, and I want country that respects human for their humanity. Here, it’s okay, but it goes back to culture, and I know what’s gonna happen. Our culture has gone so bad that they don’t appreciate humans anymore. Humans are just machines, just to work, just to fight.”* (31 years, male, 2, 5 years in Istanbul)

Respondents who disavowed spatial belonging, were also questioning its overall meaning to them. Four respondents did not view a feeling belonging as a problem for them. One of them considered home to be in every place she visited hence every place leaves a mark on oneself. Among these four respondents spatial belonging was considered unnecessary or even too limiting.

*“Where you feel good, you just stay here and where you don’t feel good, you leave. This is how I feel. Sometimes you chain yourself to a place. Some Syrians want to leave, but they feel guilty to leave. You don’t have to feel guilty just because you were born here. You can just leave and search for another place that you feel better. I don’t like the idea chaining people to places or countries. So maybe I find this feeling*

(being at home) *or not, but I don't consider it as problem for myself.*" (25 years, female, 3 months in Istanbul)

*"To me, settle is, right now at this very moment, it is to take out all the possibilities leaving again, because you just had a home. I don't have all of that right now. I mean, I don't have a home and I don't wanna close all the opportunities from further leaving and further going somewhere. Maybe I go back to Syria, maybe I go to Europe, maybe I... have no idea. But I think settling itself is very limiting for me right now."* (29 years, female, 2 months in Istanbul)

#### Syria. A reference point?

Respondents' relationship to Syria was examined with questions that asked them to compare their current lives to their lives back in Syria, their family ties to Syria and open questions such as "Do you want to tell me something about your old home/hometown/country in Syria?" and "Is there something you miss?". However, Syria arose into the conversation in numerous times during the interview. Life back in Syria and the way things are in Syria now or the way they were before the war, were used to explain why respondents experienced certain ways of their current lives and their future plans. For respondents, Syria functioned as a reference point. Depending on whether they were referring to times before war or during the war, Syria was seen in a different light. Respondents, who remembered times before war, often remembered it even in idealistic light: life was seen easier, happier and wealthier than their current lives. Some of the respondents saw that they were now more independent than living back in Syria, and considered it positive, even they saw their lives had been easier in Syria than in Istanbul.

*"I feel bad when I start remembering how we were in Aleppo. It is the oldest city, very old, there is the biggest castle in the world. It is really bad to start remembering, we were living there happily, in peace, just happy. I was happy there with my family, with my friends, with my work, with everything. For me, it was good. I miss my city, I miss my home, I miss my street, I miss my friends, I miss all."* (22 years, male, 3 years in Istanbul)

Although, it was more common for respondents to miss people and their old lives, many respondents expressed longing of certain specific places that they would still like to visit. Few of the respondents had an affectionate tone whilst speaking about their home-town's or favourite places. Two respondents said they "loved" Damascus.

*"One of the places I miss in Syria is my beach house, because I love sea and we had a lot of nice moments there. This is one of the places I feel I want to visit again and I wanna see it. And sometimes I feel I miss Damascus."* (25 years, female, 9 months in Istanbul)

*“I miss too many things, but one the things I miss the most – I used to live in an old house, Ottoman house. There is tree and there is water, I had my sofa there and I could see the sky. And the smell, we had kinda of a lemon tree. I just wanna smell that smell. I also want to go the Syrian, the Damascus Spice market, and smell the spice market.”* (27 years, male, 4 years in Istanbul).

Most of the respondents had biased feelings towards Syria. Life before the war was remembered positively, but the civil war, disappointment of the governance, deaths of loved ones, and negative personal events during the war casted negative views of the country. The only thing one the respondents wanted to say about Syria was that the country “sucks”. Respondents were saddened by the events in the country, and a sense of guilt for being safe in another country while people are dying and suffering in Syria. Some of the respondents experienced that Syria is a lost country, and it will never return to what it was.

*“I love Damascus. When I think about it, I love the street, all the walks I used to take with my friends, the times and all the good memories. I love it. But now, I don’t want to go back there. Maybe because I lost my mother so suddenly because of a virus. She got the virus, and she went in three days... so, you know, the virus is because of the war and everything going around, nobody paying attention to health care stuff... So I, you know, with all the problems that I had in the war and thing that happened to my brother, my mother, and my brother’s situation right now, and the friends that I have lost there... So I just kinda have a grouch against it. I don’t want to go back and remember this stuff that I used to do with my people, with my friends, because now it’s not a good memory... I don’t want to have anything to do with Syria anymore, because to me, it’s all gone.”* (31 years, male, 2, 5 years in Istanbul)

*“Things that are happening are horrible, but the most horrible thing is that there is no longer an idea of Syrian people. Things will never get back the way they were. I will never see my people back again. I have seen fights among my friends, seen my friends fighting, I have seen my friends almost killing each other.”* (26 years, male, 7 months in Istanbul)

Negative relationships to Syria reflected respondents’ views of their future. Only three respondents expressed their will to return Syria in order to re-build the country. For two of them, returning was seen as a duty, because the country “needs” them.

*“When we look to the future, there is nothing to see.” (26 years, male, 1,5 years in Istanbul)*

Respondents future plans and dreams were examined by asking questions such as are they plans to stay in Istanbul, where they pictured themselves in the future and where they would live and how their lives would be in an ideal world. Replies were divided into realistic plans and future dreams. In general, respondents found it hard to give any concrete plans of what they would do. They viewed their life and current situation as uncertain, which made it hard to say what their life and plans could be even in near future. Respondents found it easier to describe what type of life they wanted for themselves, but in which geographical locations these would take place, was unclear for the majority of the respondents.

None of the respondents replied certainly staying in Istanbul, because it was too hard to predict. However, nine respondents told they would stay in Istanbul for now and maybe in the future if certain conditions and needs are met. Four respondents said they will stay in Istanbul, if they manage to gain legal position and/ or if their work and studying plans comes to life there. Two respondents replied they are staying in Istanbul now, because they do not have any other option and three were staying for now, but they had other plans in that will take place in other places. Istanbul was also seen a good place for now and for the experience, but not a place to stay for a longer time.

*“I will stay, because I have my papers ready. I feel safe because I have my legal papers, and it’s because it is hard to find another place. You don’t know where to go... when you consider your options, you don’t have other options. I was already lucky to come here before the visa (restrictions).” (25 years, female, 3months in Istanbul)*

*“If I want to stay in Istanbul, I should be in better place than I’m right now. For jobs, I mean. If I cannot work on my field of study, I will not stay in Istanbul.” (25 years, female, 9 months in Istanbul)*

*“I will stay in Istanbul. As I told you, I tried to leave and it didn’t work out. Now I got job, and I will stay, but for more than five years, I don’t think so. It’s perfect city for me in this age, but after five, six, seven months, I don’t know. Where I will be, I will be. Only if I get better chance, I will not stay.” (22 years, male, 10 months in Istanbul)*

*“Actually when I came to Turkey, I didn’t have plans to go outside Turkey. I knew I’m coming here and I’m coming to stay here for a while, and I’m not actually interested in going to Europe and becoming a refugee, because I want to work. I’m interesting in working and in Europe it takes too much time and too much paper work to start working. It takes about two years to start working, and I cannot afford that anyway. If this work doesn’t work out, probably it does, I start applying some scholarship. In*

*that case I might not stay in Turkey, but for now I'm staying in Istanbul.” (26 years, male, 7 months in Istanbul)*

Five respondents were not going to stay in Istanbul. Two of them had found work elsewhere, one wanted to make a living somewhere else and one felt Istanbul unsafe and hence wanted to move to another location.

*“To be honest, I want to leave. I don't like it here. You can call me weak or what, but it's too much. It's way too much. I can't tolerate this for the rest of my life. I don't see future here. I don't want to stay working as teacher for the rest of my life. I wanna go back to finance or do something else that I really really love. I don't think Turkey will offer me that change. I don't know what will happen. Maybe I manage to leave, maybe I don't.” (31 years, male, 2, 5 years in Istanbul)*

Two respondents wanted to return to Syria after the war to help to rebuild the country and one respondent saw herself in an ideal world working in Syria for the civil society. However, thoughts regarding the return to Syria were not concrete plans, but dreams and desires.

*“I dream to serve my country even I know it would be hard to go back if the war ended, but I would because our country needs us.” (27 years, male, 4 years in Istanbul)*

Questions of respondents' ideal lives were received with mixed reactions. Respondents told about their dreams and what type of lives they wished to lead or in what type of place they would like to live. Responses reflected hopes to gain things respondents felt or reported their current lives were missing such as peace (2), possibilities to study and work (5) and for self-development and change (3), legal position and human rights (3), return to Syria (2), trouble free life (1), ability to see family and friends (3), and live dignified lives outside nine to five work life (1).

*“I haven't never think this question in my life! But if I close my eyes, I see myself doing things that I like. I follow the adrenaline games, I follow the quiet places, and sometimes noisy places. I keep changing.” (22 years, male, 10 months in Istanbul)*

*“To me, very ideal world, I would be living in Australia, working as a pilot. This is my dream. I wanted to be commercial pilot. I'm very crazy about flying stuff. Have my own home studio to make my own music. Have a family.” (31 years, male, 2, 5 years in Istanbul)*

Four respondents felt they could not think about their future or they did not believe in utopia and hence talking about ideal life was futile. For these respondents' uncertainty of life was a predominant aspect and future seemed equally unpredictable as they had felt the war had been.

*“I do not believe in ideal world or utopia. It’s not only Syria. Syria is just mirroring the world at the moment. The whole world is corrupt. We are consuming our planet in a horrible way. It is hard to imagine utopia, so I think utopia is a place where people are living just a little bit more peaceful way and less consuming.”* (26 years, male, 7 months in Istanbul)

#### Do you need a home? Meaning of home

The meaning of home for the respondents was examined by asking the following questions: “Do you feel you are at home here? Can you describe what makes you feel at home/not at home? What would it require for you to feel at home here?”, “What home means to you?” and “Where do you feel your home/s is/are?” Respondents gave numerous explanations of what they considered their home to be, and home could hold multiple meanings from relationships to physical places. The way respondents describe the meaning of home for them might influence the way respondents experience their home-making in Istanbul and, at the same time, rapid changes in their lives related to home might have influenced to the way they describe its meaning. Some of the respondents explained their views on home and its meaning had changed within time and it was during the time of the interview, different for them that what it used to be.

The most common way to explain the role of home in their lives was to describe it through their relationships. For eight respondents, feeling at home and the meaning of home when they felt they were surrounded by their family, friends and community. Within this group the importance of geographical location was considered of lesser importance. Four respondents stated the geographical location as unimportant when it came to defining a meaning of home.

*“Home is the place where my family is living good, and my friends. Where you don’t have problems.”* (30 years, female, 1 year in Istanbul)

*“For me home is where I find safe and security. Where people want me to be around there. Where I am part of this community. You know, home is always related to the tribe you are from, to the people you are around. I think this is home.”* (33 years, male, 4 years in Istanbul)

For four respondents the “real” home existed only in certain locations; which was either Syria as a home country or their hometown or even as detailed as their home street. For two respondents, home meant their background: the cultural background, family background and the region their heritage was from. When I asked about the meaning of the home, one the respondents pointed a

tattoo on her hand. It held the Arabic symbol and a symbol of the region her parents were from. For three respondents, home was a physical house in which they could feel comfortable. However, for these respondents, the location of the house was not important factor, but it could be anywhere where they would feel good in it.

*“Maybe because of my age, my home is my family. Because I am not also married. I have my family, my mother, my father. It is my whole family. And where ever my family is, it will be my home, but it will not be my real home. My real home is Aleppo, it’s in (name of district), it is in this same street in this same place. That would be my home.”* (22 years, male, 3 years in Istanbul)

*“My definition of home starts from the home, the house itself. This is how I feel about it. My house is my world. I’m not very outgoing person. Or I’m outgoing person, but I like my house. I go back to it, I wanna spend time in it. So I don’t have a home here, I don’t have a house here.”* (31 years, male, 2,5 years in Istanbul)

Four respondents emphasised the need of security and peace to feel at home. Home was also described as a state of mind in which one’s needs are met and one can feel satisfied. It is the ability to promote one’s life.

*“Home is where you simply stop being afraid. Where you can trust people around you, and people around you can trust you, and where you can live in peace. That’s what home is. They place, the geographical place it’s not an issue. It is just a state of mind.”* (26 years, male, 7 months in Istanbul)

*“Home, for me, is place you feel satisfied about yourself. That is the most important thing. Home is the place you feel you’re doing well and you’re giving something to the world and at the same time you’re taking something, and you are also feeling secured about all the people who you concern about. This is the home for me. It’s not about the geography.”* (25 years, female, 9 months in Istanbul)

For three respondents the concept of home was troublesome. Its meaning had changed radically in recent years, and defining it home felt limiting or unfit. One of the respondents explained she tries to life without the idea of home and was questioning does one need a home to be. Other respondent felt she had not found the meaning of home, but she was not in a search of it. Third respondent described the lack of idea of home influenced on his work as an artist, but at the same time he did not feel the need to rediscover it’s meaning. Nine respondents felt they did not have a home at that moment in time and that their current life situation did not meet with the sense of home they had.

*“I don’t really know. As I told you, I haven’t never felt I believe in nationalities and countries. So I don’t think my home is where I’m born or my origin. I haven’t find it yet, I guess. I’m not searching. I don’t like, actually, the idea that we put in our mind*

*that we have to search for this feeling we call home.” (25 years, female, 3 months in Istanbul)*

*“To be honest, I’m lost on that concept (of home). Which usually, actually, influence on my job as a painter, as a sculptor, it is usually a lot about that, because there was this big experience of home. But to be honest, I’m totally lost about that idea. I cannot figure out what home is, as I told you, my home is my background. It it’s okay, it’s not a horrible thing, and I’m over it. It’s okay, I just feel this idea is gone.” (27 years, male, 7 months in Istanbul)*

### 9.3 Making home in exile

In this chapter, I draw together the results of the study which were not mentioned in the previous chapter and reflect on them to factors mentioned in previous chapters.

The length of the stay influenced on the responses of the research group. Home-making process seems to follow an order in which “*survival*” factors comes first: the newer migrant the more emphasis there is on finding work and relationships which were found essential for their stay. Hence Turkish society do not support Syrian refugees financially to such a level that they could live independent lives, working or having working family members is the only way to support oneself. Work was also seen one of the best mediums to improve one’s situation. It offered channels to become legal, have better living standards, and find one’s place in the society and support psychological survival or endurance of their situation. The ability to maintain relationships to Syria and create new relationships in Istanbul were highly influential, which were discussed by every single respondent. If a respondent felt he/she did not have satisfying relationships in Istanbul, the respondent was more prone to be unhappy and feel less at home and less belonging. Longing for those family members and friends, who were either in Syria or somewhere else, seemed to keep respondents unattached to Istanbul and made the city feel a temporary place to stay.

The longer respondents had stayed in Istanbul, the more they were interested in their legal position and finding a comfortable place to stay. All the respondents, who had lived in Istanbul over 2 years were employed. They were in a more stable situation than those, who had just arrived. They had found a place to stay which did or did not meet their current expectations, and they were more likely to have relationships with Turkish people. Also those two respondents who did speak Turkish, had lived in the country over 2 years. For this group, it was more likely to have positive image of Turkish people and life in Turkey. At the same time, this group was also more dissatisfied or more focused on the issues of their legality in the country. Respondents, who had stayed in

Istanbul for some years were facing issues of outdated passports that they could not renew and, at the same time, they could not have any other legal residence in Turkey to stay as a citizen. They were living or entering a situation where they did not hold any legal residency of any country.

Turkish bureaucracy was clearly unprepared to handle Syrian issues, and none of the respondents experienced they would have received any help from Turkish officials. The officials offered solutions such as moving for six months to another country and then pay tourist visas that allows working in Turkey and return. Such an option was not possible for most of the respondents for two main reasons: visa was too expensive for their budget and with Syrian passport, if still valid, entering a third country was almost impossible due to visa restrictions (none of the neighbouring countries nor European countries allow visa free entry for Syrians). Therefore, majority of respondents felt they were, if not from their free will in Istanbul, trapped in Istanbul without other solutions.

For the group who stayed in Istanbul over 2 years, respondents were more prone to think about how they would like to live: in which part of the city and in what type of apartment. Good housing standards were seen somewhat luxurious, and low in the list of important things in life.

Respondents did dream of comfortable housing and of not living in a shared apartment, but only two respondents emphasised housing as a significant factor in order to feel at home. One possible explanation could be that respondents experienced Istanbul only a temporary place to stay, and hence, also the apartment they were living currently was not seen permanent living solution and therefore, not highly importance. The greater interests in housing was by the group that had stayed the longest, could also be due to their tendency to seek longer term solutions to live in Istanbul. Part of the longer stayed group also found Istanbul a more likely place to stay (under their defined conditions) than those who had stayed less than 2 years. A few respondents also felt they had put a great effort to integrate into the Turkish society and it would be too much of an effort to move again. Despite this, none of the respondents felt they were at home in Istanbul. Although, few respondents saw Istanbul as a second home or one of the homes they had or would have, if certain conditions became reality, such as legal position in Turkey or peace in Syria. None of the less, the current circumstances were such that the realities of surrounding society and ability to organize one's life (see chapter 9.2.1 *Common factors*) or personal factors (see chapter 9.2.2 *Personal factors*) kept respondents from the experience of being at home.

Particularly, only three respondents were planning to return to Syria if peace would come. For others, return to Syria was not a realistic choice. Although, respondents expressed longing and nostalgia whilst speaking about their lives in Syria, respondents were highly aware that their lives

could not be restored in Syria as such as they were before the war. One possible factor that influences on this was that respondents had constant communication to Syria via social media and there is a constant news of the war. Hence, respondents held great amounts of information of what was going on in their home country and were able to form their opinions of possible return based on this information. Many of the respondents also saw that the country had changed radically and it could not return to what it was. For some of the respondents who had been active during the uprising or believed in the revolution, felt that the “*original*” revolution did not exist anymore and Syria and their home towns were occupied by hostile forces and ideologies.

Respondents in the whole group had undergone immense life changes and majority had lost the most of their material possessions. Respondents were more prone to emphasize immaterial values and factors in home-making. They looked for external and internal peace, the ability to develop themselves, and the possibilities to reunite with their families. For the respondents, it seemed uncertain whether they could or could not obtain these immaterial goals in Istanbul.

Majority of the respondents committed themselves to the home-making process or to a process of making themselves feel comfortable to some extent in the city they inhabited. Some of the respondents were actively searching alternative solutions to leave Istanbul and find another place to stay which I also consider a home-making process, as these respondents are looking for solutions to end their physical and psychological displacement. However, nine out of 14 respondents felt they did not have a home at the moment.

## 10. Discussion

This chapter reflects the results of the study to the literature that I have used in this study. I also view the results and the study through critical eyes and try to estimate its usability and value.

### 10.1 Pondering in the concept of home

The core of this study has been to understand what the concept of home means. Already, while researching literature, I came across the fact that home is a highly disputed and politicised concept. Its meaning varies depending whom you ask: whether it is an individual, a politician or representative of a scientific community, their perspectives vary greatly from each other, but also within. While I was conducting the interviews, I ran into the fact that interviewees were using home in multiple ways: sometimes they used it to refer Syria as a country, their current dwelling place or to a feeling what they had on a certain geographical location within a certain time frame or to a socialized space which was occupied by people who generated the feeling of home within them. However, when I asked them about the meaning of home, home was stated to be a certain object: a physical place, memory, relationship and so on, but soon later they once again utilised the concept in some other meaning. I quickly came to realize that, as the concept of home can be used as a metaphor for so many different things, in the talks of the respondents, the use of the word home reflected whatever the respondents were learned the metaphor included and what they believed I was referring with the word within the context of the interview and the study. Some responses were clear reflections of how respondents believed home was perceived in the refugee context: as something that bonds you to a certain nation and certain geographical location. This was argued either in favour of it or against it.

Only the fact, that the concept of home was utilised and explained in so many ways by each respondent enforces a reading that refugees hold a complex relationship to the concept of home. They also might hold stronger emotional connection to it than those, who do not have experienced such drastic changes in their relationship to home. As Manzo (2003:51) states that places become meaningful for refugees, because they have experienced pain and loss; I also believe that the life events that the respondent group had undergone influenced on their relationship to home and they “forced” respondents to re-evaluate how they perceive home. Although it is apparent that none of them hold a clear perspective of what is the individual meaning of home for them is, the concept itself hold emotional weight that all the respondents felt they needed to react to one way or another.

In the literature review, I chose to observe home as a metaphor, an identity and a dwelling place as well as taking into consideration its scale and spatiotemporal aspects. If I consider the scale and the spatiotemporal aspects of the respondents' relationship to the home concept, Kabachnik's, Regulaska's and Mitchneck's (2009:315) term "*double-displacement*" offers a great explanation of how refugee home becomes multiscalar and how it gets scattered in space and time. The respondents located their homes in multiple scales varying from a human race to nation and to a certain physical location which have a measurable, geographical point on the surface of Earth. At the same time home was seen unattainable in this historical moment, but it could be discovered in multiple places and times that were either in the past or in the future.

I drew my attention to the fact that housing was so little emphasised as an important factor in home-making. Based on the data it seems to be of secondary interest to the respondents. However, here were differences between respondents who had lived in Istanbul less than two years and those who had lived more than two years. Those who had lived more than two years were more prone to consider housing issues. Regardless, the position of housing seemed to be unique within refugee context. A popular assumption and integration policy is that housing roots mobile people and offers an access to home-making. This research does not question the importance of housing in integration, but it points out that other factors such as relationship to family and friends and earning a living are higher in importance for those who have arrived into a new country less than two years ago. This reminds me of Heidegger's (1993:361) words "*Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then we can build*" that maybe dwelling should be seen more complex than settling people down.

A peculiar finding of this study, that I did not come across before, was that three of the respondents had, as it were, given up on the concept of home or denied it's necessity for their lives. This type of answer was, however, quite rare within the study group and it was not particularly supported by the literature either. However, this reply interests me highly and the only source where I seem to be able to find explanation arose from the evaluating of home as identity. Hence home I seen a grounding place of identities (Blunt and Dowling 2006:11) and if a respondent has used the concept of home as such before, losing the original grounding place of identity might have caused a change in the relationship to the concept and to support one's psychological well-being, denying its meaning could have been favourable reaction. At least, this field study data made me perceive home as a socially and culturally produced metaphor that describes person's belonging within socio-spatial narratives, but of which content is individually chosen to describe or to support person's identity and psychological environment.

## 10.2 Reflections

The literature reading focused on politicising refugees and their spatial belonging through home narrative as well as on the pain of the lost home and ability to create home outside the home country. This study reaffirms that refugees are highly politicised via home narrative in Turkey as well. Walters' (2004:241) statement on how states are governed as they were homes in which "others" can be invited as "guests", but they do not belong and are not allowed to stay, suits Turkey's case as well. Turkey's immigration policy relating to Syrians is created so that Syrians receive minimal help and permission to stay, but their length of stay is attempted to be minimized by making their living illegal or extremely hard by hindering housing and working opportunities with policies and legislation. Although immigration policy relating to the Syrian refugees has changed in accordance of the agreements with EU and Turkey's internal political events. Hence, Syrians in Turkey are subjugated in discontinuous policies of which, according to the respondents of this study, the officials of Turkey do not always follow nor are sure of the latest legislation and policies.

Malkki (1992) states that refugees are seen as "rootless" and hence they provide threat to the natural order of things. Xenophobia and racism were commonly experienced within the study group. The common explanation, to why respondents believed there was racism or "bad attitudes" towards Syrians, arose from Turkish distrust of Syrians. Respondents thought it was due historical reasons, but also because of politics and power relations between political parties within Turkey. I feel that the respondents of this study and, in general, Syrians who have fled the war are the sufferers of the consequences of unclear immigration policies and ineffectiveness of international agreements relating refugees.

In the introduction part, I stated that even temporary conditions and lack of legal status influence on the lives of Syrian refugees, they are not a passive group, but that they actively engage in their new host community as well as in processes to end their displacement. The results of this study recognise that with matters such as poor legal position and the approval or disapproval of the host society as well as broken relationships has a significantly negative influence on the settling process of the respondents. These factors made them less connected to the host society and made them feel they are not at home in Istanbul. However, to support my statement, respondents had other, self-reliant means to engage in the host community and feel belonging such as learning Turkish language, making friends with Turkish people, finding a job, discovering pleasing or homely

aspects of the city. Another means to end their displacement was contrary to assimilation: part of the respondents denied the need of home and hence disowning displacement.

Kabachnik, Regulska and Mitchneck (2010) found in their study on Georgian IDP's that IDP's homes are displaced in space and in time. In their study was discovered that IDP's idealised their past homes which functioned as reference points as well as return to their old homes was idealised. In this study, it was found that home and life back in Syria functioned as a reference point to their current lives. Some of the respondents did idealize their past homes, but for others, Syria also functioned as a negative reference point. The way respondents perceived Syria and their old homes dependent on their experiences in Syria and in which time frame they placed their memories. Often time before war was remembered as positive, but if respondents had personal negative experiences from the war, life in Syria was rarely idealised.

Unlike in the case of Georgian IDP's, in this study, return to Syria was an option for only few members of the study group. This finding supports Holm Pedersen's (2003:4) statement that there is no clear continuity between "*leaving home – being away – coming home*". Potential reason for the difference could be, that in this study, study group had constant information from Syrian and they had realistic image of the state of their old homes and home country. Also, the nature of the civil war could influence on the mild desire to return: for many threat for their life and health came from the community they lived in instead of an outside source. Hence, familiar and safe became unfamiliar and threatening. It could be interesting to compare if there is a difference in the experience to the home of origin in a civil war context in which threat comes from the community and in a war context in which threat comes from an outside source. At least some of the respondents explained having a grudge against Syria, feeling disappointed with Syrian society and expressing distrust towards other Syrian people. This can be context related reflecting personal as well as general civil war experiences.

### 10.3 Meeting the goals and further study

I have already estimated the validity and reliability of the study already in pre-hand in the chapter 8.5 *Validity and reliability of the study* to support readers critical analysing of the results of this study. This study aimed to understand the life of Syrian refugees in Istanbul by studying home-making among a study group. My research questions were:

1. How do Syrian refugees make home in Istanbul?

## 2. What factors influence their home-making?

The methods I chose and the questions that I asked answered better on the second question about the factors influencing on the home-making than to the first question how do Syrians make home in Istanbul. I feel that to answer the “*how*” question, I should had had longer field period and practice participative observation in study group’s homes and everyday life. However, I think this study brought some new light to the topic.

For geographers, home is an interesting concept to research further. This research only grasped a surface of the topic and, to me, it showed its multiple aspects. Home can be studied from so many different perspectives and from so many different geographical disciplines: whether your interest is in political geography, geography of identities, urban or development geography, home offers a unique research target as well as a tool to study various human related phenomena. I consider this research discussed one the core issues of modern global society within geographical interest: forced movement of people and how they place themselves.

Modern warfare creates new forms of refugeeness; prolonged situations are more common than ever and refugees reside increasingly in cities and towns instead of camps. Academic or international community should not take it as given that refugees necessarily want or will return to their home countries, but to seek to understand the realities of modern refugeeness and create durable solutions. What this study shows is that home-making in refugee context is complex. The concept of home is not always related to a specific location, and hence while studying home-making and refugees, it is smart not to focus only on refugees’ relationship to their past homes, but aim to understand how the concept is used in relation to refugees and how refugees by themselves utilize the concept and what is their relationship to it. I hope this study serves those curious minds that are interested in looking for new perspectives on home-making in refugee context.

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## Attachment 1

### **I Basic questions**

1. Year of birth:
2. Place of birth:
3. Gender:
4. Status: married, single, widowed, divorced
5. Length of stay in Istanbul (in months from arriving till today):

### **II Life in Istanbul**

1. Could you describe me how was it when you first arrived to Istanbul (finding apartment, job, feelings, thoughts)?
2. How have you settled here? (Apartment, job/occupation, friends, family, community activities)
3. What are the best parts of living in Istanbul? Worst? (residence permits “white card”, working permits)
4. Do you feel locale here? Can you describe what makes you feel yes/no? (Turkish friends, “integration”, language, racism)
5. Could you describe me your everyday life here (routines)?
6. If you compare your life here in Istanbul to your life in Syria, how has it changed?
7. Do you feel you are at home here? Can you describe what makes you feel at home/not at home? What would it require for you to feel at home here?

### **III History/Syria**

1. Is there something you brought with you from Syria? Can you describe xx items meaning for you?
2. Do you still have family or friends living in Syria? How do you stay in contact?
3. Do you want to tell me something about your old home/hometown/country in Syria?
4. Is there something you miss?

### **IV Future, dreams**

1. Are you planning to stay here in Istanbul?
2. Where do you see yourself in future (within 5 years, 10 years, longer)?

3. In an ideal world where would you live and how your life would be?
4. What home means to you?
5. Where do you feel your home/s is/are?

#### **V Closing the interview**

1. Is there something you would like add?
2. Do you have any questions relating the interview, practicalities?
3. How did this interview felt? Do you have some feedback you would like to give?