



SAMHÄLLS-
VETENSKAPLIGA
FAKULTETEN

Centre for Middle Eastern Studies

The Self-esteem of Syrians in Sweden as an internal factor during the integration process

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Master of Arts
in Middle Eastern Studies

Author: Taha Haj

Advisor:

Examiner:

Date: 6th of January 2020

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my gratitude and thanks for the professors and staff at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Lund University for all the support, knowledge, and help they gave me in the past years. I also want to thank the Swedish Institute and its lovely staff for choosing me to receive a scholarship for master studies in Sweden, which made this thesis a reality. By choosing me for that scholarship you changed my life forever and for the better, for that you have my sincerest thanks.

My everlasting appreciation goes to my family, which support and encouragement have accompanied me all the way. It is the qualities that I see in every one of you that inspire me every day to do my best and keep going forward; My father's wisdom, my mother's compassion, my sisters' confidence, courage, and determination. Thank you for being there for me.

Finally, I want to thank all the Syrians who rushed to help with this research, and in particular the 15 nameless heroes who shared with me their stories. I felt your pain and I saw your triumph against all odds, please continue to rise as you wished for yourselves in the interviews and continue to inspire the world around you.

Abstract

Many migrants face difficult times during the integration in the new society, especially during the first stages after their arrival. Among others, they face discrimination, racism, and stigmatization, and they end up resorting to different techniques to cope with their situation, and they even change their identity and go through identity negotiation process with the surrounding new society.

This thesis examines the self-esteem of Syrian migrants in Sweden after establishing it as the internal and personal factor leading the migrants to cope and change identity. It examines the changes, and the factors causing them, in self-esteem levels starting from the war in Syria, to help as a comparison point, until the integration in Sweden. To this end, this thesis uses Terror Management Theory to examine and analyze the results and outcomes of the research.

The research main conclusion is that the loss of the two components of self-esteem, value and meaning, according to the Terror Management Theory. Value being the migrants ability to produce or have any real effect on their surroundings, and meaning being the world-value system that the migrants use to draw value and sense of worth. These two losses are the main reasons behind the huge drop in self-esteem levels among Syrian migrants in Sweden during their stay in the camps.

At the end, this work gave recommendations for future studies, and a suggestion for an improved integration plan based on providing migrants with opportunities to have value and produce valuable contributions to the society during their stay in the camps, and also suggested the establishment of a new “trans” and basic world value system to help ease the transition of the migrants between their old system and the new one in Sweden.

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Introduction

It all started with an interview I was doing with a young Syrian man in Malmö's Migration office center. The interview was part of a temporary work to help a research group in Göteborg Universitet that was trying to investigate the different experiences that asylum seekers have in Sweden while waiting for a resident permit. In that interview the young man looked devastated, he had been in Sweden for a year by then and he was still waiting for the resident permit, which is going to be a temporary permit where he would have many limitations on family reunification. He was telling me about his times in Turkey where he had a good job and gaining a decent amount of money, and comparing that to the camp situation in Sweden where he cannot do anything at all, and without work he could not produce or accomplish anything. His comparison was mainly focused on the fact that in the year he spent in the camp in Sweden, he could have accomplished many things had he stayed in Turkey from his work there. He then said to me that he wanted to go back but he could not leave Sweden until he gets the resident permit, because he was a defect from the army in Syria and he did not have a passport, hence, the Swedish Government cannot send him back before resolving his asylum application and issuing new papers for him. He felt stuck, powerless, and worthless to his family.

That interview with that young man sparked my attention to look deeper into the situation of Syrians in Sweden, most of all because it was obvious that this situation was hindering any real integration of this man into Swedish society, and his story might possibly be the story of many others. I asked and heard many accounts from friends, relatives, and acquaintances who were going through the integration process in Sweden, and read about the challenges migrants face in the integration process, and how migrants have to find ways to cope with many negative interactions in their daily lives in the host countries, like stigmatization and racism, by changing their approach, or look, or identity, or how they present themselves, among other methods.

This led me to the question; what is causing these changes among migrants? Specifically on the personal and internal level, because it was clear during the interview with that Syrian man that he thought less of himself and did not have much pride since he could not help his family or be of any effect on his surroundings, he said "I am, and all those in the camp are just air, nothing" and "I could not help my family with anything, before when I was in Turkey I was sending them money every month, but now I cannot send them anything, I cannot even work". The main question

here is; why would not he just blame his situation on bureaucracy for example, why did it affect his self-esteem?

And this also begs other questions, how did this man self-esteem change and what caused that change? Even more and since we are talking about Syrian migrants, did the self-esteem change before arriving to Sweden, mainly during the war and the trip to Sweden? If it did change, then what caused it? And can this change be used to better understand the change and its dynamics that is taking place in the integration process here in Sweden? This is how this study came to be a study of self-esteem, and its changes, as internal factor in the Syrians migrants' behavior in the integration process in Sweden, starting from the time of war in Syria until the integration here in Sweden.

This study's main research questions are:

- With the understanding that self-esteem's changes are the main internal and personal factors for the changes that migrants undergo in the integration process and the need for coping and identity change. The question is; how does the self-esteem of Syrians in Sweden change and what are the reasons behind those changes?
- What effects do living in a dangerous situation during the war in Syria and the journey to Sweden have on the self-esteem of Syrian migrants? Did it change it? And how? And how does that compare to the changes and its reasons during the integration process?
- Are there any clear patterns for the changes in self-esteem among Syrians in Sweden? If yes, what are they?

Disposition

At the beginning, this thesis will examine different literature in the field to see how the migrants cope and negotiate their identity with the surrounding society, followed up with an examination of how the literature talked and approached self-esteem. Afterwards, it will talk about Terror Management Theory and explain it and why it is suitable for this research and how it will be used.

Afterwards, this thesis will talk about the methods used and how was the actual application of those methods. Later, it will go through the analysis of the findings and discussion of the results. At the end it will present recommendations for future studies and a possibly improved approach for integration processes of migrants in the host countries.

Review of Literature

The large influx of migrants to European countries has created a big social issue, especially when it comes to integrating those migrants into host countries. However, the economic and demographic challenges have created a situation where there is a need to integrate more migrants into the economy.¹ This is particularly related to the ageing population, global competition and labor needs which have created a gap in the job market.

When it comes to Sweden, the Swedish economic system falls under the Nordic model, which consists of high levels of productivity, low unemployment rates, and a solid welfare structure. Sweden and other Nordic countries have developed a welfare structures with the aim at providing their people with access to services such as free education, free health care, and financial security plans for people without employment or those that fall outside the labor market.²

Furthermore, there are efforts created to ensure that women are active participants in the labor market.³ However, some factors are used to ensure that the needs of these welfare structures are met. They include financial support of the government. Other standards at play include high employment rates for both men and women. Therefore, to ensure full functionality of the Nordic model, there must be an effective integration of migrants in the labor market. Adding to the equation that Sweden received considerably high number of migrants in the recent migration wave, for example 163,000 in 2015 alone which is the highest per capita number in an OECD country⁴, this makes the special situation of the Swedish case clearer.

On the other hand, the Syrian case can be best described by quoting Filippo Grandi, UNHCR High Commissioner “Syria is the biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time, a continuing cause of suffering for millions which should be garnering a groundswell of support

¹ Marco Martiniello, "Towards a coherent approach to immigrant integration policies in the European Union." Intensive Programme “Theories of International Migration (2006): 2

² Anne Britt Djuve, "Refugee migration-a crisis for the Nordic model?." International Policy Analysis. Friedrich Ebert Foundation (April 2016)

³ Søren Kaj Andersen, Jon Erik Dølvik, and Christian Lyhne Ibsen. Nordic labour market models in open markets. Brussels: ETUI, 2014.

⁴ OECD, Promoting Well Being and Inclusiveness in Sweden, Better Policies Series” (OECD publications, August 2016), 8. <https://www.oecd.org/sweden/promoting-well-being-and-inclusiveness-in-sweden.pdf>.

around the world.” . Moreover, 32% of the 163,000 migrants who came to Sweden in 2015 were Syrian migrants⁵.

With this it becomes clear the importance of studying Syrian migrants and the role Sweden plays in hosting big numbers of migrants.

The goal of this literature review is to explore the literature addressing the challenges that migrants face in their integration and how they react to them, as a first step to help understand the migrants struggle. Afterwards, this review will discuss the literature talking about self-esteem as it is the main focus of this thesis.

Facing the new land

Migrants face many obstacles in the host country and struggle against them and are forced to find ways to either avoid or overcome them, they face, among other things, stigmatization, racism, discrimination and lack of respect in the new countries⁶. This naturally makes life harder in those new countries, however, migrants find ways to cope with those challenges and obstacles and try to find their place in the host countries. Most notably is the change in their identity and the negotiation with the hosts mostly, which takes place during that change.

Coping

Valenta’s study that is conducted on Bosnians, Croats, and Iraqis living in Norway, describes a very wide array of ways that migrants use to face and cope with stigmatization in the host country. Some of these ways are trying to show that those stigmas are wrong through the migrants’ behavior and interactions, or by making fun of those generalizations and joke⁷. The

⁵ EMN Sweden, EMN Policy Report 2015 - Sweden (Migrationsverket (Swedish Migration Agency), 2016), 6. http://www.emnsweden.se/download/18.2d998fffc151ac38715917abb/1484748703258/Policy%20Report%20Sweden_2015.pdf .

⁶ Marko Valenta, "Immigrants' Identity Negotiations and Coping with Stigma in Different Relational Frames." *Symbolic Interaction* 32, 4 (2009): 351, doi:10.1525/si.2009.32.4.351. Also: HANNA MALEWSKA-PEYRE, "Identity Crises in Migrant's Children and Their Consequences." *Polish Sociological Review*, no. 106 (1994): 125. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41274534>. Also: MARTINA CVAJNER, "The Presentation of Self in Emigration: Eastern European Women in Italy." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 642 (2012): 189-190. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23218471>.

⁷ Valenta, "Immigrants' Identity Negotiations and Coping with Stigma in Different Relational Frames." 358-359.

migrants could also try to pretend to be coming from a different place that is more acceptable, or they could try to pass as indigenous people because of similarities in their looks⁸. Another notable way described by Valenta for migrants to cope with stigmatization is dividing their social network between indigenous and migrants, this can be, Valenta explains, due to two reasons, either they are trying to keep the image they had in their homeland in front of the people from their homeland or this could be a coping technique, as the migrants try to distance themselves from the stigmas either by presenting themselves as the exception or by reproducing new group identity that is more suitable⁹.

In an older study than Valenta's, Malewska-Peyre also tries to describe the different techniques used to cope with stigmatization and racism, her study is conducted on teenagers from minority groups in France. Malewska-Peyre discuss fewer techniques but she goes deeper in the analysis, for example, she talks about the previously mentioned technique where the migrant tries to pass as indigenous, but she adds that the migrant might not just use this technique if they had similar physical appearance, but they may even try to create that similar appearance¹⁰. However, Malewska-Peyre adds, it gets worse when they need to deny their own culture or even put it down, which can have a high psychological cost¹¹. She also mentions some techniques that were not mentioned in Valenta's study, like group strategies to face stigmatization problems, for example a group created by the children of North African migrants in France, claiming they want to be better and do better than their fathers' generation¹². Nevertheless, both studies stress that there is not one strategy or technique used by the same migrant always, and that migrants choose the suitable method for facing the situation in front of them according to the circumstances surrounding the situation and the people involved¹³.

When it comes to the Syrian migrants, there are also studies that addressed the struggles and challenges they face. In their journal, Çelebi, Verkuyten, and Bağcı explore how Syrian

⁸ Valenta, "Immigrants' Identity Negotiations and Coping with Stigma in Different Relational Frames." 361-362.

⁹ Valenta, "Immigrants' Identity Negotiations and Coping with Stigma in Different Relational Frames." 367-368.

¹⁰ MALEWSKA-PEYRE, "Identity Crises in Migrant's Children and Their Consequences." 130.

¹¹ MALEWSKA-PEYRE, "Identity Crises in Migrant's Children and Their Consequences." 130.

¹² MALEWSKA-PEYRE, "Identity Crises in Migrant's Children and Their Consequences." 130.

¹³ MALEWSKA-PEYRE, "Identity Crises in Migrant's Children and Their Consequences." 131. Also, Valenta, "Immigrants' Identity Negotiations and Coping with Stigma in Different Relational Frames." 362-363.

migrants undergo discrimination in the host countries.¹⁴ The research consisted of a series of interviews with Syrian migrants, in countries such as Turkey, to determine the relation between perceived discrimination, physical, and mental health among Syrian migrants. The findings from the research showed that there were different dimensions associated with physical and psychological health.¹⁵ These included belonging among others.

On the contrary, a study by Barbelet and Wake aimed at assessing the level of discrimination among Syrian migrants in urban areas of Turkey.¹⁶ The research conducted aimed at establishing the levels of discrimination among Syrian refugee employers and the perceived level of discrimination among Syrian refugees living in Turkish urban areas. The findings from the study showed that there were Syrian refugees who were more comfortable with their living conditions and more focused on integration as they perceived themselves to be wealthy.¹⁷ On the other hand, there were Syrian refugees whose sole motive was to ensure their survival rather than integration into society. When asked for their feedback on whether they would prefer to migrate to European countries, most of the respondents stated that they would not consider it. The main reason for their response was their perceived level of risk associated with migrating to European countries.¹⁸ These reasons included discrimination in terms of employment and inequality and high levels of racism.

The difference in the responses, mentioned in Barbelet and Wake's study between people interested in integration and people interested only in survival and do not wish to continue to Europe, this could be accredited to the fact that Turkey is a neighboring country to Syria, therefore, there may be considerable amount of Syrians who went there because of the fight and are just waiting for the war to end in order to get back to their homes. On the other hand, the other respondents could see that there is nothing left for them in Syria or that they have a better living

¹⁴ Elif Çelebi, Maykel Verkuyten, and Sabahat Cigdem Bagci. "Ethnic identification, discrimination, and mental and physical health among Syrian refugees: The moderating role of identity needs." *European journal of social psychology* 47, no. 7 (2017): 832-843.

¹⁵ Çelebi, Verkuyten, Bagci, "Ethnic identification, discrimination, and mental and physical health among Syrian refugees: The moderating role of identity needs."

¹⁶ Veronique Barbelet, and Caitlin Wake. "The lives and livelihoods of Syrian refugees in Turkey and Jordan: Summary Report." (2017).

¹⁷ Barbelet, Wake, The lives and livelihoods of Syrian refugees in Turkey and Jordan: Summary Report."

¹⁸ Barbelet, Wake, The lives and livelihoods of Syrian refugees in Turkey and Jordan: Summary Report."

in Turkey and wish to stay. However, with the prolonged war and forced stay in Turkey, many people who were initially interested in survival are starting to settle down and integrate¹⁹.

On the other side of the world in a study carried out by Shihadeh, she sees a main theme coming from her research in how Syrian migrants need to learn English in order to integrate into the American society.²⁰ While it may be viewed as an obvious statement, most migrants need to learn English to integrate into the American culture and as a means of coping with the stigmatization associated with being a native from the Middle East. The findings from the survey showed that by interacting with native speakers, the Syrian migrants developed a proficiency in English, and this helped them integrate easily both socially and culturally among the natives of America.²¹

Moreover, the stereotypes that came from the survey showed that Syrian migrants faced discrimination regardless of their religious affiliations.²² The negative perception comes from how Americans view the Syrian identity, which is closely tied to Islamic culture. When asked what hindered their integration into society, most of the participants highlighted that it was their identities which were closely tied as terrorists²³.

It is clear that Syrian migrants, like most migrants, face stigmatization, racism, and other hardships in their integration in the host countries. And migrants resort to different techniques and methods to cope and circumvent these obstacles. Moreover, there is a special coping mechanism where the migrant change their identity to help them get by when faced with the aforementioned negative behavior.

¹⁹ This comes from my own experience and knowledge of friends, family, and neighbours who went to Turkey temporarily until the war ends, and now they are settling down, opening businesses , learning Turkish, and some of them even getting the Turkish citizenship.

²⁰ Sheren Iskandar Shihadeh, "Social and Cultural Integration Process Among Syrian Refugees in the United States" Electronic Theses, Projects, and Dissertations. (2016)

²¹ Shihadeh, "Social and Cultural Integration Process Among Syrian Refugees in the United States"

²² Shihadeh, "Social and Cultural Integration Process Among Syrian Refugees in the United States"

²³ Shihadeh, "Social and Cultural Integration Process Among Syrian Refugees in the United States"

Identity change and negotiation

Our identity changes naturally over time and even though we might try to limit that, it takes place nevertheless, and this change is most obvious in the turning points in life that might push the change faster²⁴. Migrants are put in one of those “turning points in life”, in a situation where they need to find their new position and identity between the old and new world value systems surrounding them, not to mention the need to avoid the negative interaction coming from racist views to their homeland identity, or stigmatizing their religious identity.

In Valenta’s study that was discussed earlier, he also talks about identity negotiation and how it happens in many forms and ways, for example the migrant could decide to focus on one of several new or old identities to try and blend in the new environment²⁵. Valena also shed light on how different groups of migrants could use qualities and distinctions to have better standings in their identity negotiations, like emphasizing certain ethnicity or distancing themselves from a certain religion as a way for more acceptance²⁶.

In an article by Kibria, the researcher notes that race and ethnicity play a central role in the American culture, both historically and under current events.²⁷ The notion, therefore, is that religion and other cultural beliefs play a role in racial and pan-ethnic identity formation. Kibria uses the term of the racialization of ethnicity.²⁸ In most instances, the Asians fall under the racial category and have their defined character while on the ethnic aspect, the Hispanic/Latino fall under the ethnic category with shared cultural identity.²⁹

²⁴ Kaja Kazmierska, "Migration Experiences and Changes of Identity. The Analysis of a Narrative." *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 31, no. 3 (117) (2006): 76. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20762141>.

²⁵ Valenta, "Immigrants’ Identity Negotiations and Coping with Stigma in Different Relational Frames." 353-354.

²⁶ Valenta, "Immigrants’ Identity Negotiations and Coping with Stigma in Different Relational Frames." 375.

²⁷ Nazli Kibria, *Becoming Asian American: Second-Generation Chinese and Korean American Identities*. JHU Press, 2003.

²⁸ Kibria, *Becoming Asian American: Second-Generation Chinese and Korean American Identities*.

²⁹ Kibria, *Becoming Asian American: Second-Generation Chinese and Korean American Identities*.

Here Marvasti tries to identify how Middle Eastern Americans cope with stigma, particularly after the 9/11 attacks. One of the findings is that Middle Eastern Americans tend to adopt a less controversial identity as a coping mechanism to avoid being stereotyped.³⁰

Going back to the previously mentioned Shihadeh's research, the findings indicated that most migrants faced pressure in integrating into the U.S culture. On the other hand, the need to maintain Syrian culture and values came from parents' pressures to ensure that their culture remains preserved despite changing localities. However, this presented a dilemma as it is difficult for migrants to integrate into a post-9/11 society where the natives tend to stereotype migrants from Middle-Eastern Countries and they ended facing fear and negative perception from the locals.³¹ This is contrary to Marvasti's research where migrants were willing to forfeit their identity to avoid social and cultural stereotyping.³²

In a different approach, Kazmierska, in a study, follows the life story of a Turkish migrant woman in Germany who seems to be torn between the old and new cultures and values. Even though at the start the Turkish migrant stayed with her original culture, values, and Turk migrants, later she started to drift apart from other Turks in Germany and adapt new values from the German culture which are not welcome among Turks, at that point she felt alienated from the Turkish group and this feeling became the main drive in her identity change³³. Nevertheless, she was also alienated from the German society and culture because she is still migrant and looked at as an outsider³⁴.

Kazmierska then tries to look at this woman's situation as a marginal person in two societies. Even though she chooses to be marginal in the Turkish society, she is being marginalized in the German society because she is different. Kazmierska concludes that, eventually, a person in this situation either assimilate in the big group or stays with the small group or just remains in between³⁵, which seems to be the case with the narrator woman.

³⁰ Amir Marvasti, "Being Middle Eastern American: Identity negotiation in the context of the war on terror." *Symbolic interaction* 28, no. 4 (2005): 541.

³¹ Shihadeh, "Social and Cultural Integration Process Among Syrian Refugees in the United States"

³² Marvasti, "Being Middle Eastern American: Identity negotiation in the context of the war on terror."

³³ Kazmierska, "Migration Experiences and Changes of Identity. The Analysis of a Narrative." 79-87.

³⁴ Kazmierska, "Migration Experiences and Changes of Identity. The Analysis of a Narrative." 88.

³⁵ Kazmierska, "Migration Experiences and Changes of Identity. The Analysis of a Narrative." 88.

Even though Kazmierska's study presents only one possible scenario for how identity change can take place with a migrant. Nevertheless, it gives a very good example of what kind of pressure the migrant goes through and how they change their identity to better suit their reality.

Conclusion

Migrants in general face many obstacles during their integration in the host countries, and they face discrimination, racism, among other negative interactions. These lead the migrants to find ways for coping and getting through their daily lives and integrating with their new surroundings. The most notable method for this coping is the migrant's identity change to better fit the new surroundings or to receive the least negative interactions possible.

Upon starting the search for the reasons for the changes and challenges in the interactions of migrants with their surroundings in the integration process, namely the processes leading to coping and identity change. It seems that the changes in self-esteem are the internal cause for the changes in interactions with the surroundings, because the way humans experience and see themselves affects how they interact with others and their surroundings and has a big weight in their interpersonal behavior³⁶. Also, the self-image or self-esteem "has (a) central role in maintaining and changing interpersonal behavior patterns"³⁷. Moreover, self-image or self-esteem with clear formulation help in successfully predicting the behavior of the individual with others³⁸.

Therefore, self-esteem merits a deeper look and understanding as the main internal and personal factor that is leading the coping process and the change in identity within migrants.

Self-esteem

At the beginning there is a need to establish what is the concept of self-esteem addressed in this thesis. The Terror Management Theory (TMT) consider the self-esteem culturally

³⁶ Kari Öhman, and Kerstin Armelius. Self-Image and Personality Organization : A Five Year Prospective Follow-Up. DAPS-Report: 42. Univ., 1992.
<http://search.ebscohost.com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat07147a&AN=lub.828583&site=eds-live&scope=site>. 2.

³⁷ Öhman, Armelius. Self-Image and Personality Organization, 2.

³⁸ Kari Öhman, Self-Image, Interpersonal Interactions and Psychopathology. Univ., 1992.
<http://search.ebscohost.com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat07147a&AN=lub.732768&site=eds-live&scope=site>. 19.

constructed and it believes that the person is “a valuable member of a meaningful culture”³⁹. Taormina and Gao say that self-esteem is “a person’s attitudinal evaluation of and the respect he or she has for his or her own nature or character and the related feelings of one’s worthiness, merit, or value as a person.”⁴⁰. Having this in mind and adding Malewska-Peyre’s perspective that considers a positive self-image a sign of good psychological health and stability and integration with the surrounding environment⁴¹. With all this it becomes clear that the self-esteem addressed in this study is the representation of how a person views him/herself at a certain time, how much value they believe they have in the society around them, and in general, how satisfied they are with themselves.

Now, it is accepted that individuals have a positive social personality or are highly valued individuals, as suggested by the theory of social identity theory (SIT).⁴² The main assumption behind this proposal is that people will try to maintain or improve their confidence and support their groups in out-of-town meetings. To clarify this suggestion, Abrams and Hogg propose self-esteem hypothesis (SEH), which includes two important points. The first is constructive separation from one group to another will improve social character. The second point is that lack of confidence will increase the vulnerability of the group due to the trusting needs of individuals.⁴³ In all cases, the test shows conflicting evidence of SEH. In one study, Rubin and Hewstone managed to confirm the first point in SEH, but not the second.⁴⁴ In another audit study, unlike the second point, scientists show that people who have high self-esteem tend to be more confident in groups.⁴⁵

³⁹ Armand Chatard, Leila Selimbegović, Paul N'Dri Konan, Jamie Arndt, Tom Pyszczynski, Fabio Lorenzi-Cioldi, and Martial Van Der Linden. "Terror Management in times of War: Mortality Salience Effects on Self-esteem and Governmental and Army Support." *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 2 (2011): 226. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29777505>.

⁴⁰ Robert J. Taormina, and Jennifer H. Gao. "Maslow and the Motivation Hierarchy: Measuring Satisfaction of the Needs." *The American Journal of Psychology* 126, no. 2 (2013): 158-159. doi:10.5406/amerjpsyc.126.2.0155.

⁴¹ MALEWSKA-PEYRE, "Identity Crises in Migrant's Children and Their Consequences." 127-128.

⁴² Henri Tajfel, John C. Turner, William G. Austin, and Stephen Worchel. "An integrative theory of intergroup conflict." *Organizational identity: A reader* (1979): 56-65.

⁴³ Dominic Abrams, Michael A. Hogg. "Comments on the motivational status of self-esteem in social identity and intergroup discrimination." *European journal of social psychology* 18, no. 4 (1988): 317-334.

⁴⁴ Mark Rubin, Miles Hewstone. "Social identity theory's self-esteem hypothesis: A review and some suggestions for clarification." *Personality and social psychology review* 2, no. 1 (1998): 40-62.

⁴⁵ Christopher L. Aberson, Michael Healy, Victoria Romero. "In-group bias and self-esteem: A meta-analysis." *Personality and social psychology review* 4, no. 2 (2000): 157-173.

Nevertheless, the second point in the SEH and the findings in the last study are not necessarily contradicting each other, because the self-esteem is not only affecting or being affected, it is both. Therefore, high self-esteem can lead to better social standing, while lack of self-esteem can lead to the situation where the bad social standing have eroding effects on the self-esteem itself. Moreover, the first point in SEH does not really stand, because not every separation from the main group necessarily means improvement in character.

Kim, Hogge, and Salvisberg talked about self-esteem specifically and touched upon self-esteem and the pressure to assimilate into a new culture, their study tried to see how “psychological resources”, like self-esteem and ethnic identity would have any effect in the acculturation process and the stress coming from it⁴⁶. It talked about the pressure from two cultures on migrants and concluded that self-esteem was decreased because of the double stress from the two cultures, and that led to decreased well-being. On the other hand, with high self-esteem, some migrants managed to negate the effects of the high stress during the acculturation process⁴⁷. Unlike self-esteem, ethnic identity, and what it requires from the migrant, was a factor in making the negative effect of stress higher on psychological well-being⁴⁸.

Valentine, on the other hand, notes that the acculturation of migrants in host countries has a significant impact, especially when it comes to self-esteem among migrants.⁴⁹ Acculturation in this context can be linked to assimilation, and in most cases, migrants have to abandon their culture to cope with the host society. In most scenarios, the migrants tend to find difficulties assimilating into the new culture, and in such instances, this can have an impact on their self-esteem.⁵⁰ Findings from the research show that migrants with higher self-esteem tend to be more sociable, and this offers them the ability to integrate into their surroundings.⁵¹ In this sense, Kim, Hogge, and

⁴⁶ Eunha Kim, Ingrid Hogge, and Camila Salvisberg. "Effects of Self-Esteem and Ethnic Identity: Acculturative Stress and Psychological Well-Being Among Mexican Immigrants." *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* Vol 36, Issue 2. (March 30, 2014): 147, doi:10.1177/0739986314527733.

⁴⁷ Kim, Hogge, and Salvisberg. "Effects of Self-Esteem and Ethnic Identity" 157-158.

⁴⁸ Kim, Hogge, and Salvisberg. "Effects of Self-Esteem and Ethnic Identity" 158.

⁴⁹ Sean Valentine, "Self-esteem, cultural identity, and generation status as determinants of Hispanic acculturation." *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 23, no. 4 (2001): 459-468.

⁵⁰ Valentine. "Self-esteem, cultural identity, and generation status as determinants of Hispanic acculturation."

⁵¹ Valentine. "Self-esteem, cultural identity, and generation status as determinants of Hispanic acculturation."

Salvisberg's study and Valentine's study confirm each other in regards of high self-esteem and its positive impact on the migrant.

Cvajner, in a different approach, tried to look at the matter from an economical point of view. Particularly, whether migrants would spend some of the money they gain to have better social appearance to proof and show their worth in the new society even though this is a bad decision economically, and whether migrants would look and interact with other migrants from the same home country mostly as a source to find material gains and opportunities⁵². Cvajner's study showed that migrants would do many decisions to help boost their standing and self-esteem even if that was a wrong decision from the economical point of view, and with this she puts to rest the claim that migrants are only driven by financial aspects. Moreover, the migrants' social networks from the same home country help migrants even if they do not give much material gain, they help by keeping the self-worth and self-esteem high and they offered "compensatory recognition"⁵³. The use of such social networks is the natural choice for migrants when they are facing hardships integrating in the host countries and getting acceptance from it, and sense they are kept out of it, they cannot get any recognition or self-worth from it.

Then Teixeira and Dias' study try to examine the matter with general approach, by focusing on the Psychological Distress among migrants, its causes and what affects it and how it is related to the social and economic status of migrants and their employability⁵⁴. The study took place in Portugal and was conducted on several hundred people from Brazil, African countries, and Eastern European countries. Even though the results were clear that some experiences in the migration process have their negative effects, but some other factors help ease the situation for migrants, like having good income, good physical health, stable outlook for the future, among others⁵⁵.

In their study, Ruggiero and Taylor, tried to look at the role of self-esteem in how small groups in bigger societies look at discrimination. The main aspect here was whether members of those small groups would accredit negative experiences and feedback to discrimination, or will

⁵² CVAJNER, "The Presentation of Self in Emigration: Eastern European Women in Italy." 187.

⁵³ CVAJNER, "The Presentation of Self in Emigration: Eastern European Women in Italy." 195-196-197.

⁵⁴ Ana F. Teixeira & Sónia F. Dias. "Labor market integration, immigration experience, and psychological distress in a multi-ethnic sample of immigrants residing in Portugal." *Ethnicity & Health*, 23:1 (2018): 82-83, DOI: 10.1080/13557858.2016.1246421.

⁵⁵ Teixeira & Dias. "Labor market integration" 93-94.

they minimize the discrimination and put the blame on themselves and thus maintaining control since the means to change the situation lay within them⁵⁶. Ruggiero and Taylor concluded that in general the small groups in society would be more willing to minimize the discrimination they are facing because it protected “their social state self-esteem” and kept the feeling of control and because it is “psychologically beneficial”, however, the authors continue, this has many negative outcomes, namely, the continuous minimizing of discrimination will stop the small group from taking action to remove the obstacles placed in front of their development⁵⁷.

In a look at the severe effects of migration on self-esteem, Robila notes that there are risks associated with migration, particularly when trying to reach the host countries. For example, in 2015, more than 2,600, migrants died when trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea to migrate to Europe.⁵⁸ The author argues that there are psychological effects associated with this form of trauma, particularly when it comes to integrating into a new society.⁵⁹

Such kind of trauma can raise the internal oppression, which could be a typical encounter between different gatherings of individuals: women, racial/ethnic encounters, youth, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Internalized violence has been associated with a decline in personal and general self-esteem, misery, feelings of grief, fragility and isolation.⁶⁰ The observation has changed considerably in Syrian culture, although men consider themselves advocates of the family. In migration, mostly in the neighboring countries, women still follow and abide to the family and their remaining responsibilities have been expanded, on the other hand, the extraordinary burden on men has considerably diminished as Syrians find it difficult to find work in host countries due to legitimate restrictions. In this way, they experience fatigue, weakness and low self-esteem. Lower self-esteem can lead displaced people to express their masculinity

⁵⁶ Karen M Ruggiero, and Donald M. Taylor. “Why Minority Group Members Perceive or Do Not Perceive the Discrimination That Confronts Them: The Role of Self-Esteem and Perceived Control.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 72, no. 2 (February 1997): 373-374. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.72.2.373.

⁵⁷ Ruggiero and Taylor. “Why Minority Group Members Perceive or Do Not Perceive the Discrimination That Confronts Them” 385-386-387.

⁵⁸ Mihaela Robila, "Refugees and Social Integration in Europe." United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs(UNDESA) (2018).

⁵⁹ Robila: "Refugees and Social Integration in Europe.": 3

⁶⁰ Gloria Wong, Annie O. Derthick, E. J. R. David, Anne Saw, Sumie Okazaki. "The what, the why, and the how: A review of racial microaggressions research in psychology." *Race and social problems* 6, no. 2 (2014): 181-200.

negatively⁶¹. This is a good example on how negative and unsupportive surroundings with the lack of any means to produce value can diminish the self-esteem and confidence strongly.

On the other hand, another test was held at the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan shows the effects of supporting surroundings on self-esteem. It was based on a professional program to help women in exile.⁶² The results showed that women's safety, confidence and ability improved. The program helped women pay for a higher standard of living and gave them confidence after suffering gunshot wounds.

Conclusion

Migrants are facing many challenges in their integration, and they are employing the use of different mechanisms to cope with the negative interactions they face during this process, most notably is identity change and negotiation. Internally, it seems that self-esteem is one of the main factors affecting and leading the migrant's behavior and reaction in these situations and negative interactions.

The literature addresses migrants' self-esteem from various points, as a psychological resource, from economical aspect, its effects during assimilation and the dynamics when there is a pressure from two cultures, to the severe effects of lack of self-esteem.

Nevertheless, there is still a small missing link, which is the understanding of the self-esteem, and how it changes and what affects it, as the internal factor leading from within the migrants during the process of coping with the negative interactions during the integration process in the host countries. This understanding of the self-esteem from the internal perspective will help complete the overview of the migrants' self-esteem in the literature, and understanding the self-esteem from that aspect could help in finding new ways to help address the migrants' challenges during the integration process directly within the migrants. It is this gap that this research will try to fill in the field of literature.

⁶¹ Lorraine Charles, Kate Denman. "Syrian and Palestinian Syrian refugees in Lebanon: the plight of women and children." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 14, no. 5 (2013): 96-111.

⁶² Sinaria Abdel Jabbar, Haidar Ibrahim Zaza. "Evaluating a vocational training programme for women refugees at the Zaatari camp in Jordan: Women empowerment: A journey and not an output." *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 21, no. 3 (2016): 304-319.

Theory

Introducing Terror Management Theory (TMT)

Around the mid-80s of the last century, Tom Pyszczynski, Sheldon Solomon, and Jeff Greenberg developed the Terror Management Theory by building upon and the work of Ernest Becker⁶³. TMT tries to answer some very basic question; why we need self-esteem, why we think our world-value system is the right system, and why cannot we get along with people with different views⁶⁴.

TMT says that we, humans, realize our coming and unavoidable demise due to being conscious beings⁶⁵. This realization creates constant anxiety and fear from the impending death⁶⁶. Therefore, we seek to downplay the effects of this realization by gaining and increasing a socially constructed value of self-worth or “self-esteem” within an also socially constructed world-value system that helps us make sense of the world around us and provide security and the promise of immortality, either in the form of a literal afterlife or the figurative heritage that lasts after the death⁶⁷.

TMT have had hundreds of supporting empirical data and studies that prove its validity⁶⁸. And all of this support can be brewed down to affirm the following 4 main hypothesis⁶⁹:

1) Increasing self-esteem or faith in one's CWV (cultural world-value) makes people less prone to anxiety, anxiety-related behavior, and less likely to have death-related thoughts come close to consciousness [...]

⁶³ Sheldon Solomon, Jeff Greenberg, and Tom Pyszczynski, "Terror management theory of self-esteem," *Handbook of social and clinical psychology: The health perspective* 162 (1991):22.

Also: Tom Pyszczynski, "What Are We So Afraid Of? A Terror Management Theory Perspective on the Politics of Fear." *Social Research* 71, no. 4 (2004): 828. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40971981>.

⁶⁴ Pyszczynski, "What Are We So Afraid Of?": 829.

⁶⁵ Pyszczynski, "What Are We So Afraid Of?": 829.

⁶⁶ Chatard, Selimbegović, Konan, Arndt, Pyszczynski, Lorenzi-Cioldi, Linden. "Terror Management in times of War" 226.

⁶⁷ Solomon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, "Terror management theory of self-esteem,":22-24.

⁶⁸ Pyszczynski, "What Are We So Afraid Of?": 832.

Also: Chatard, Selimbegović, Konan, Arndt, Pyszczynski, Lorenzi-Cioldi, Linden. "Terror Management in times of War":226.

⁶⁹ Pyszczynski, "What Are We So Afraid Of?": 833.

- 2) Reminding people of the inevitability of death leads to a broad range of attempts to maintain faith in their worldviews and self-esteem and defend them against threats [...]
- 3) Increasing people's self-esteem reduces or eliminates the effects of mortality salience on their self-esteem striving and clinging to their cultural worldviews [...]
- 4) Convincing evidence of the existence of some form of an afterlife reduces the effects of mortality salience on self-esteem striving and worldview defense.⁷⁰

Mainly, the theory can be looked at from two sides

1. The effects of having high self-esteem on a person's reaction in the face of an anxiety inducing experience. When that person has higher self-esteem, the anxiety inducing situation has lower effects on that person than when that person has a lower self-esteem.
2. The effects of situations where death is presented as a possibility, on self-esteem. The death possibility pushes humans to seek higher self-esteem and stronger attachment and believe in the world-values they and their society adapt.

TMT view of self-esteem

TMT looks at self-esteem in a specific way starting from an evolutionary point of view⁷¹. It sees that humans developed the need for self-esteem because they realize their inevitable death, which in turn comes from being conscious and intelligent beings⁷². When presented with this realization of death, humans will have anxiety from it, especially in a world filled with chaos and dangers⁷³. And with this chaos and danger comes the need for a system that the group of humans establish with certain world-values, which brings order to the chaotic world and sense of safety that would reduce the anxiety⁷⁴. However, this world-value system comes with subscription

⁷⁰ Pyszczynski, "What Are We So Afraid Of?": 833-835.

⁷¹ Solomon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, "Terror management theory of self-esteem," :22.

⁷² Chatard, Selimbegović, Konan, Arndt, Pyszczynski, Lorenzi-Cioldi, Linden. "Terror Management in times of War":226.

⁷³ Solomon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, "Terror management theory of self-esteem," :22.

⁷⁴ Solomon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, "Terror management theory of self-esteem," :22.

requirements, which is the way a human must conduct oneself in order to be valued as “good” and conforming with the system⁷⁵.

TMT sees that the way a human measures him/herself according to that system and feels his/her value under that system is what we call self-esteem⁷⁶. Therefore, the higher self-esteem you have the more in conformity you are with the world-value system and the more you are in safety and deserving of the promises and rewards of the system, consequently you are less anxious about your inevitable death⁷⁷.

Thus, self-esteem works as an anxiety buffer⁷⁸. And there are many studies that support this, from proving the relation between self-esteem and anxiety, to proving that threatening self-esteem increases anxiety, and many others⁷⁹.

Self-esteem, World-Value System, and adaptation

Building on the theory, an assumption goes that a human being will always seek to increase self-esteem in order to reduce anxiety⁸⁰. Thus, a human’s self-esteem is adaptable to face changes and challenges.

Moreover, there are two pillars of self-esteem, the meaning that comes from the world-value system and the value the human has within that system, and changes and challenges can come to either of them⁸¹.

One of the main issues that might face self-esteem is when the conflict happens between the world-value systems in the human surroundings, for example in cases of minorities or migrants to a society with a different world-value system. The issue starts when the new world-value system undermines and belittles the original world-value system, this in turn disturbs the balance of self-esteem that relies on the meaning of the world-value system⁸².

⁷⁵ Pyszczynski, "What Are We So Afraid Of?": 830.

⁷⁶ Solomon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, "Terror management theory of self-esteem," :22-23.

⁷⁷ Pyszczynski, "What Are We So Afraid Of?": 830-831.

⁷⁸ Solomon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, "Terror management theory of self-esteem," :22-26.

⁷⁹ Solomon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, "Terror management theory of self-esteem," :25.

⁸⁰ Solomon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, "Terror management theory of self-esteem," :25.

⁸¹ Solomon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, "Terror management theory of self-esteem," :26.

⁸² Solomon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, "Terror management theory of self-esteem," :29.

In such situation TMT suggests that the human will suffer from low self-esteem due to these discrepancies, but how long this low self-esteem phase would last depends on the human's reaction to this situation. This phase could end up being a chronic issue if the human stays torn between the two systems and unable to conform with either. On the other hand, it can be temporary and even short lived if the human either adapts to the new world-value system and starts deriving meaning from it or refuse the new system and keeps believing in the original world-value system and keeps taking meaning from it. In the latter case, the human will have issues integrating with his/her new surrounding environment and society.

TMT in times of war

During war the threat of death is most prominent, it presents itself almost every day in the minds of the people living in such conditions. And with the presence of existential threat the usual defense mechanisms in the brain and consciousness kicks-in and start working.

Here comes the TMT to explain some behavioral aspects that people display during those times. TMT sees that people in war times and while facing life-threatening situations and being constantly reminded of their mortality, will seek a form of anxiety relief by trying to increase their self-esteem and conform strongly and closely with their world-value system and possibly fight against any attempts to undermine them⁸³.

There are many studies that show changes in people behavior when reminded of mortality, like changing voting patterns, support for suicide bombers, support for military intervention, and others⁸⁴.

TMT also sees that terror has increasing effects on nationalism, because any person who comes from the same country will most likely be holding a similar set of world-values. Moreover, in times of war and in the face of terror, soldiers would be less prone to cooperate with other soldiers from different nationalities regardless of the similarities in cultural background. A good

⁸³ Solomon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, "Terror management theory of self-esteem,":26.

⁸⁴ Chatard, Selimbegović, Konan, Arndt, Pyszczynski, Lorenzi-Cioldi, Linden. "Terror Management in times of War:" : 227.

Also: Pyszczynski, "What Are We So Afraid Of?": 843-844.

example comes from a study that shows Dutch soldiers in Afghanistan unwilling to cooperate with German soldiers in the peacekeeping force stationed there⁸⁵.

Furthermore, one study focused on TMT and the effects of increased fear of death during a civil war on the people's self-esteem and support for the government and army⁸⁶. It found that in the face of increased fear, the participants of the study tended to indicate having higher self-esteem than the control group⁸⁷. The study acknowledges that existential threats could have negative effects on self-worth but nevertheless notices that it pushes people to seek higher self-esteem⁸⁸. The study continues to note that this effect on self-esteem along with the participants' increased support for the government and army could have negative effects on any peace talks in that conflict⁸⁹.

TMT suitability for this study

TMT is suitable for this research for several reasons; it gives a clear structure for self-esteem and what affects it, which I can use to analyze the changes in the levels of self-esteem in general, and the reasons behind those changes. Also, it touches closely on levels of self-esteem during war times, and I am trying to understand the changes in the levels of self-esteem in my interviewees during the war in Syria.

Moreover, TMT explains the relation between anxiety and self-esteem. It says that all anxiety comes from fear of death⁹⁰, and all the periods that I am examining with my interviewees are hard times that essentially causes anxiety. Moreover, TMT says that self-esteem comes as an

⁸⁵ Chatard, Selimbegović, Konan, Arndt, Pyszczynski, Lorenzi-Cioldi, Linden. "Terror Management in times of War:": 227.

Also: Pyszczynski, "What Are We So Afraid Of?": 837-838.

⁸⁶ Chatard, Selimbegović, Konan, Arndt, Pyszczynski, Lorenzi-Cioldi, Linden. "Terror Management in times of War:": 228.

⁸⁷ Chatard, Selimbegović, Konan, Arndt, Pyszczynski, Lorenzi-Cioldi, Linden. "Terror Management in times of War:": 230.

⁸⁸ Chatard, Selimbegović, Konan, Arndt, Pyszczynski, Lorenzi-Cioldi, Linden. "Terror Management in times of War:": 230.

⁸⁹ Chatard, Selimbegović, Konan, Arndt, Pyszczynski, Lorenzi-Cioldi, Linden. "Terror Management in times of War:": 230.

⁹⁰ Solomon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, "Terror management theory of self-esteem,":22.

anxiety buffer and gets affected by or affects the reactions to any anxiety causing incident⁹¹. Which means it is the most suitable theory to help analyze the findings in my study.

Most of all, TMT helps view the self-esteem from the internal perspective of the interviewees, because it addresses it from the side of fears that are affecting it, and from the value perspective that the interviewee is placing on him/herself in the world value system they are living under.

However, TMT falls short in some aspects, because it puts a strong emphasis on fear of death, because even though it can be given that this fear is part of us as humans because we all know the inevitability of our demise, nonetheless, not all human actions and behaviors are governed and guided by that fear, and humans have several different motives for their actions and decisions.

The use of TMT in the analysis

In the analysis the TMT will be used for looking at the changes in the meaning of the world-value system around the interviewees and the change in the value of their membership in their surroundings. Meaning and value are the two pillars of self-esteem according to TMT⁹². Also, it will be used for looking at the reasons of change given by the interviewees and if they correlate with the explanations from TMT.

Using TMT, this study will try to see how the war in Syria affected the interviewees self-esteem and try to explain that using the theory. And see how that helps better understand the changes during the integration process.

⁹¹ Solomon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, "Terror management theory of self-esteem," :25-26.

⁹² Solomon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, "Terror management theory of self-esteem," :26.

Methods

Choice of research method

In this section I will discuss the research paradigm, life history interviews, life diagrams.

Research Paradigm

In this research, my ontological position will be “constructionist”. Constructionism is “an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors.”⁹³ This stance means that the phenomenon is a product of the interactions taking place among the individuals⁹⁴, it is not just existing in nature and it is also in a continuous change and shift⁹⁵. This also means that the social phenomenon is an ongoing accomplishment of the individual and not an external constraint⁹⁶. This means that I am as a researcher not going to give a final confirmed view of self-esteem in migrants, but rather an edition of the reality⁹⁷. In his book “Social Research Methods”, Bryman mentions a successful study of occupational careers as an example of Constructionism in life history interviews.⁹⁸ Considering that I will be using the same method it seems to support the logic behind my choice.

As for the epistemological position, in this research it will be “interpretivist” or “Anti-positivist”. This position means to emphasize that reality is understood by the people according to their ideas and views⁹⁹. Hence, knowledge is a personal experience and not given from outside¹⁰⁰.

⁹³ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 33.

⁹⁴ Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 380.

⁹⁵ Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 33.

⁹⁶ Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 34.

⁹⁷ Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 33.

⁹⁸ Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 490.

⁹⁹ Nirod K. Dash, Online Research Methods Resource, “Selection of the Research Paradigm and Methodology,” (blog), Posted June 2005, Accessed June 22, 2017, https://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/researchmethods/Modules/Selection_of_methodology/

¹⁰⁰ Dash, “Selection of the Research Paradigm and Methodology,”

As a researcher I see that every phenomenon has many interpretations¹⁰¹, and I need to seek to get the subjective meaning of the social phenomenon¹⁰².

Based on the ontology and epistemology in this research and in accordance with the research question and aim. It seems suitable to choose Hermeneutic Phenomenology as a research methodology. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology which came out from and still close to phenomenological philosophy¹⁰³. The philosophy itself is interested in asking how people understand the world and how the philosopher can avoid preconceptions about the world.¹⁰⁴ The aim of hermeneutic phenomenological research is to uncover and understand the lived meaning of the basic experience that comes before any attempt to give an explanation to our immediate experiences¹⁰⁵. This methodology is applicable to almost all human experiences¹⁰⁶.

In general, this choice of ontology, epistemology, and methodology is called The Interpretivist Paradigm. This paradigm has developed as a critique of positivism, and it is “concerned with understanding the world as it is from subjective experiences of individuals.”¹⁰⁷ This is the interpretive approach, that tries to explain the subjective reasons and meanings of the social phenomenon.¹⁰⁸

Finally, since Interpretivist Paradigm favors the use of oriented methods like interviews¹⁰⁹, and them being the main tool for the Phenomenology methodology. It seems clear that Life history interviews are the most suitable tool for my research. Moreover, the use of a technique called life diagrams would help me get better results.

¹⁰¹ Dash, “Selection of the Research Paradigm and Methodology,”

¹⁰² Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 30.

¹⁰³ Erika Goble & Yin Yin, IIQM – The Qualitative Research Blog, “Introduction to Hermeneutic Phenomenology: A research methodology best learned by doing it,” (blog), Posted October 16, 2014, Accessed June 22, 2017, <https://iiqm.wordpress.com/2014/10/16/introduction-to-hermeneutic-phenomenology-a-research-methodology-best-learned-by-doing-it/>

¹⁰⁴ Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 714.

¹⁰⁵ Erika Goble & Yin Yin, “Introduction to Hermeneutic Phenomenology: A research methodology best learned by doing it.” Also, Dash, “Selection of the Research Paradigm and Methodology,”

¹⁰⁶ Erika Goble & Yin Yin, “Introduction to Hermeneutic Phenomenology: A research methodology best learned by doing it.”

¹⁰⁷ Pelleth Yohannan Thomas, "Towards developing a web-based blended learning environment at the University of Botswana" (PhD thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 2010) 296, <http://hdl.handle.net/10500/4245>

¹⁰⁸ Thomas, "Towards developing a web-based blended learning," 296.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas, "Towards developing a web-based blended learning," 296.

Life history interviews

Here I will try to explain what they are, then go through the advantages of this method and finally explain why it is suitable

1. Explanation of the method:

The interest and use of life history interviews in social sciences have increased considerably in recent years¹¹⁰. Most notably, the reason behind this increase is the rise of interest in people's agency in society¹¹¹.

There are many who tried to give a definition for the life history interviews¹¹². However, I find the following two definitions to be more to the point and accurate, especially in the case of my research since it is specific in the phenomenon it is dealing with.

Ruth Shonle Cavan defined life history interviews "By life -history is meant an account of the life of a person presented in such manner that the development of habits and attitudes may be traced"¹¹³ O'Reilly on the other hand says "Life histories are interviews in which an individual is interviewed on a specific topic in the context of their whole life story."¹¹⁴

2. The advantages of this method:

There are many perks that come with the use of life history interviews. In general, this method increases the sense of catharsis and intimacy between the interviewer and the

¹¹⁰ Annica Ojermark, "Presenting Life Histories: A literature review and annotated bibliography," Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC) Working Paper (2007): 2, URL: <http://www.chronicpoverty.org/publications/details/presenting-life-histories-a-literature-review-and-annotated-bibliography-cprc-annotated-bibliographies-6> . Also, Bryman, Social Research Methods, 489. Also Johanna Söderström, "Life diagrams: a methodological and analytical tool for accessing life histories" (Paper presented at the 112th APSA annual meeting, Philadelphia, PA, September 1-4 2016, 2.

¹¹¹ Bryman, Social Research Methods, 489.

¹¹² Jaber F. Gubrium & James A. Holstien, Handbook of INTERVIEW RESEARCH: Context & Method (United States: Sage Publications, 2002), 123. Also, Bryman, Social Research Methods, 488. Also, Söderström, "Life diagrams", 4.

¹¹³ Ruth Shonle Cavan, "Topical Summaries of Current Literature: Interviewing for Life-History Material," American Journal of Sociology 35, no. 1 (1929): 101. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2766014>.

¹¹⁴ Karen O'Reilly, Ethnographic Methods (New York: Routledge, 2012), 128.

interviewee¹¹⁵, also life histories can be used to understand the big turns in the big world history, and on small scale as well, in a country, for example¹¹⁶.

Life history is the best reflector of the inner life of the interviewee and a good tool to explain the society around him or her.¹¹⁷ It also can give a lot of data¹¹⁸, and help the scholar to “explore the life course and to examine the relationships between cause and effect, and agency and structure”¹¹⁹. Those interviews can provide the scholar with bigger and general view of the phenomena than other methodological tools¹²⁰. They also give the interviewee the chance to talk and reflect about more than just their lives but also the environment around them that affected their lives, in this way it helps intersecting the circumstances and the interviewee’s agency to form a bigger understanding about his or her life¹²¹.

Life history interviews are powerful qualitative tool because they are clear and focused on the views of life from the interviewee’s side and what that entails of focus on the social dynamic.¹²²

3. Why is it suitable:

When it comes to my specific research, the use of life history interviews could prove useful for many reasons.

Life history interviews with all its perks can be applied to cover specific times or events and to look for a certain phenomenon¹²³, and capture the changes taking place on it. In my study, the phenomenon is the self-esteem, and identifying its trajectory and identifying the key factors affecting it.¹²⁴

¹¹⁵ O’Reilly, *Ethnographic Methods*, 128. Also, Söderström, “Life diagrams”, 9.

¹¹⁶ Söderström, “Life diagrams”, 4.

¹¹⁷ Gubrium & Holstien, *Handbook of INTERVIEW RESEARCH*, 127,129.

¹¹⁸ Ojermark, "Presenting Life Histories: A literature review and annotated bibliography," 2. Also, O’Reilly, *Ethnographic Methods*, 130.

¹¹⁹ Ojermark, "Presenting Life Histories: A literature review and annotated bibliography," 2.

¹²⁰ Ojermark, "Presenting Life Histories: A literature review and annotated bibliography," 2.

¹²¹ Ojermark, "Presenting Life Histories: A literature review and annotated bibliography," 2.

¹²² O’Reilly, *Ethnographic Methods*, 128. Also, Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 489.

¹²³ Cavan, "Topical Summaries of Current Literature: Interviewing for Life-History Material," 101.

¹²⁴ Ojermark, "Presenting Life Histories: A literature review and annotated bibliography," 2-3.

Also life histories can be used alone in a research¹²⁵, it is particularly useful in the early stages of exploring a topic when the information is limited or there is no “sitting” to be accessed through other methods but only experiences of the interviewees,¹²⁶ it provides what some call it a “springboards” for the production of information and data¹²⁷.

On one hand the interviewee will be more free in his or her expressions and would be allowed to roam more freely and touch on any topic they feel is related to the story and plot¹²⁸, even to a side story that might not show much relation, because as an interviewer I cannot know for sure where the real reason for the change might be, and this approach would help cover bigger grounds with the interviewee.¹²⁹ Finally, as Karen O’Reilly puts it, “There are also things that are better learned from simply listening rather than asking directly”¹³⁰.

Life diagrams

Aside from the increase in the biographical interest in social sciences, there has been lately an increase in the interest in visual tools and its implementation to help the research. From stimulating a response from the participant with visual aid “picture or movie or soundtrack”, to asking the participant to produce something visual as part of the process or as a result of it¹³¹.

Life diagrams can be seen as part of this turn in social sciences¹³², or what some call “Visual ethnography”¹³³.

Here I will try to explain what life diagrams are, and the advantages of using them.

¹²⁵ Warren & Hackney, *Gender Issues in Ethnography*, 35. Also, Ojermark, "Presenting Life Histories: A literature review and annotated bibliography," 3.

¹²⁶ Warren & Hackney, *Gender Issues in Ethnography*, 35. Also, Ojermark, "Presenting Life Histories: A literature review and annotated bibliography," 3.

¹²⁷ Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 491.

¹²⁸ Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (United States: SAGE Publications, 2009), 153. Also O’Reilly, *Ethnographic Methods*, 128. Also, Gubrium & Holstien, *Handbook of INTERVIEW RESEARCH*, 124.

¹²⁹ O’Reilly, *Ethnographic Methods*, 128. Also, Gubrium & Holstien, *Handbook of INTERVIEW RESEARCH*, 124.

¹³⁰ O’Reilly, *Ethnographic Methods*, 117.

¹³¹ Söderström, “Life diagrams”, 3.

¹³² Söderström, “Life diagrams”, 3.

¹³³ O’Reilly, *Ethnographic Methods*, 160.

1. Explanation of the method:

Johanna Söderström presents life diagrams in one paper after she has developed this technique during previous studies. This technique implies that the interview be focused on specific variables and a phenomenon, then asking the interviewee to draw a diagram that represents it throughout the course of his or her life, as Söderström puts it “I suggest life diagrams can be seen as a way for the research participant to map themselves in time, and place their self and its development across time.”¹³⁴. Examples can be the level of political mobilization like in Söderström’s study and can also be the level of self-esteem in this study.

2. The advantages of this method:

There are many advantages for this method in interviewing, since it can be a tool for data collection and analysis.¹³⁵

- Life Diagrams during the interview:

Life diagrams make it easy for the interviewer to see the points of change and compare them to each other and ask the interviewee about them immediately, even though they may be apparent for the research without the diagram but sometimes these points are not as obvious and could be missed in a usual setting.¹³⁶

In all of our thoughts, our current status and state of mind affect how we see and understand other parts of our life. For example, if I have now a nice and strong self-esteem, I would look back to the times that I did not have this with resentment and would see the future with even nicer image, the opposite could be if I was in a time when I hated myself. Life diagrams make this position more visible because it is obvious by the place of the diagram in the present point.¹³⁷

In a normal interview the story tends to take chronological perspective in order to get all the periods or the interviewer might risk losing some info. The diagram helps avoid a chronological

¹³⁴ Söderström, “Life diagrams”, 4.

¹³⁵ Söderström, “Life diagrams”, 6.

¹³⁶ Adriansen, “Timeline interviews: A tool for conducting life history research,” 43. Also, Söderström, “Life diagrams”, 6.

¹³⁷ Söderström, “Life diagrams”, 6-7.

perspective and at the same time it helps keeping track of what parts of life are not covered yet when the story is not told in order and chronologically.¹³⁸

In addition to the temporal position, life diagrams change the power balance in the interview and after it. During the interview the interviewees' authority in telling the story is established and clear as they hold in their hands the tool for setting that history and phenomenon.¹³⁹ Also at the end of the interview, the interviewee is not left with the feeling that he or she has shared and got drained. Because the diagram gives them a sense of completion as it is their product, which gave them better vision and understanding of their own life.¹⁴⁰ After the interview, the diagram remains as the interviewee's summary of their lives and the phenomenon under research during the analysis part.¹⁴¹ Moreover, The interviewee's power over the interpretation is emphasized because as a researcher I cannot depart from what he or she has presented, in the form of a clear drawn diagram, without a strong justification for that.¹⁴²

- Life diagrams during the analysis:

The researcher can start immediately the analysis in the interview as the diagram itself is a form of analysis that the interviewee has already performed.¹⁴³ Also the use of life diagrams and the discussion about the different changes in the diagram, helps increase the validity of the story by making the interviewee reflect more on his or her life and the story being told, which leads to smaller gap between what happened and what we imagine has happened.¹⁴⁴

Moreover, life diagrams help identify types of trajectories as the diagram itself can represent the trajectory of the life and then the peaks and valleys are the transitions in that trajectory.¹⁴⁵ On top of that, when analyzing the different interviews and diagrams, the researcher

¹³⁸ Söderström, "Life diagrams", 7.

¹³⁹ Adriansen, "Timeline interviews: A tool for conducting life history research," 44,48. Also, Söderström, "Life diagrams", 8.

¹⁴⁰ Adriansen, "Timeline interviews: A tool for conducting life history research," 44,48. Also, Söderström, "Life diagrams", 9.

¹⁴¹ Adriansen, "Timeline interviews: A tool for conducting life history research," 44,48. Also, Söderström, "Life diagrams", 9.

¹⁴² Söderström, "Life diagrams", 10.

¹⁴³ Söderström, "Life diagrams", 8.

¹⁴⁴ Söderström, "Life diagrams", 8.

¹⁴⁵ Söderström, "Life diagrams", 10.

can trace the specific events and their effects, then the researcher can easily compare and construct types of trajectories that come out from the diagrams.¹⁴⁶

Methodological Reflections

In the interviews, my plan is to leave the interviewee to guide the drawing to see what points and moments of interest he or she will outline, in hope of getting all the points of interest and change. Nevertheless, I want to try and establish three major points in the diagram, one at the beginning of the "events" in Syria, one at the time they left Syria, one when they arrived in Sweden.

Dealing with the Syrian war will be a big part of the research and I need to find a way to avoid getting put with one side or the other in order to keep the space open for the interviewees to express themselves. Therefore, I will use the word "events" to avoid any conflict with supporters of the rebels who call it revolution or with supporters of the regime who call it terrorism.

Also, I wonder how the self-esteem will change in the future from the point of view of the interviewee now, how he or she see themselves. That is why I will try to push the discussion and the diagrams a little into the future.

Before the interviews I must decide on my role among the Syrians I am engaging. As it is very important and would affect the way the interviewee perceives and interacts with me, which would in turn affect my access to their story and experiences¹⁴⁷. Therefore, I will try to put myself during the interviews in the position of "socially acceptable incompetent", as one who is nice but needs some help understanding the basics¹⁴⁸. The point of this is to gain trust and to get as much information as possible from the interviewee. Also, to avoid being cast as "expert" which may lead to limited sharing of information¹⁴⁹ on the assumption that I already know, or the interviewee gets anxious about saying something "wrong".

Finally, being Syrian myself could be helpful and an issue at the same time. It would help me connect easily with the interviewees using Syrian "jokes" and dialect, which will make the

¹⁴⁶ Söderström, "Life diagrams", 10.

¹⁴⁷ Karen O'Reilly, 2005. *Ethnographic Methods*. London: Routledge. P 88-98.

¹⁴⁸ Warren & Hackney, *Gender Issues in Ethnography*, 36.

¹⁴⁹ Warren & Hackney, *Gender Issues in Ethnography*, 36.

interviews run smoothly and help build the trust between us. However, being Syrian might affect my view for the whole research and influence my judgment in the analysis. However, this will not be a big issue because I do not have any idea what the self-esteem of the Syrians could be. Therefore, I will not have a prejudgment that makes me lead the research into forced conclusions. Moreover, I will try to use the life diagrams and the empowerment of the interviewee and the discussions during the interviews to get the participant account as clear and far from any influence from me, especially that this goes in hand with the phenomenological methodology that I chose.

Ethical and practical problems

There are several issues that arise when using the life history interviews. One of the main issues is the memory distortion, the interviewee presumably will try to recall incidents as accurately as possible, but that does not mean he or she will remember all the details and events exactly how they happened, a lot might be forgotten or mixed or changed.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, some might lie intentionally to look as a “better” person.¹⁵¹ Also some interviewees might try to make sense of their lives and tell a nicely “decorated” story, which might make the outcome of the life history interview very neat and meaningful, more than it is supposed to be.¹⁵²

Another challenge, even more important, is the balance of influence between the interviewer and the interviewee. It is well established that the form and the way you collect the data affect the data collected itself¹⁵³, and that the method you use becomes part of the things you are trying to catch and understand. Since life history is the result of the meeting between the researcher and the interviewee, then how much is acceptable for the researcher to have influence over the interview.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Marcia K. Johnson, "Source Monitoring and Memory Distortion," *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences* 352, no. 1362 (1997): 1733. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/56697>. Also, Elizabeth F. Loftus, "Misfortunes of Memory," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological Sciences* 302, no. 1110 (1983): 413. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2396003>. Also, Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research* (Canada: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2013), 111. Also, Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 491. Also, Söderström, "Life diagrams", 2.

¹⁵¹ Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 111.

¹⁵² H.K Adriansen, "Timeline interviews: A tool for conducting life history research," *Qualitative Studies* 3, 1 (2012): 52, http://pure.au.dk/ws/files/45143513/Timeline_interviews_Qualitative_Studies.pdf

¹⁵³ Söderström, "Life diagrams", 2.

¹⁵⁴ Söderström, "Life diagrams", 3.

Another potential disadvantage in my case, considering I am Syrian and conducting my study on Syrians, is that this kind of setting might put some distance between me and the interviewees.¹⁵⁵ Especially that being considered as an “Eastern” man might make the female participants more careful or not willing to participate in the first place. Also, in the Syrian society we have high respect to the academic society and its people, which may push the interviewees to put me in the “expert” character.

Even with the advantages coming from using life diagrams, there are always some negative sides. Most of all is the limitation that can be in drawing the diagram by the interviewee, whether because of limited schooling or illiteracy, or physical impairments like Parkinson disease, or the failure to deliver clear instructions to the interviewee that results in misguided drawing and interpretations¹⁵⁶.

Even though some does not find this a problem and suggest that the interviewer can take charge of the drawing¹⁵⁷. However, I think this is harder in case of diagrams than in timelines, since they might require more accuracy, also getting the interviewer to do the drawing will take away many of the advantages of this approach, like balancing the power, the agency for the interviewee, and the feelings of involvement and completion.

Also, in this kind of interviews, the situation might get more complicated and emotionally loaded because the interviews involve going through many emotional parts of life, with it getting more and more personal. This might lead the interviewees to open up more about personal matters that are not related to the research, only because they feel comfortable. This means I have to be very considerate and careful in my approach¹⁵⁸, and keep the interview course focused on self-esteem levels and the reasons for change throughout the interviewee’s life. The turn towards more personal interview also might happen due to the feeling of ownership that the interviewee gets because of the used method¹⁵⁹, life diagrams.

¹⁵⁵ Carola. B. Warren & Jennifer Kay Hackney, *Gender Issues in Ethnography* (United States: Sage Publications, 2000),35.

¹⁵⁶ Söderström, “Life diagrams”, 8-9.

¹⁵⁷ Adriansen, “Timeline interviews: A tool for conducting life history research,” 50-51.

¹⁵⁸ Adriansen, “Timeline interviews: A tool for conducting life history research,” 46-47.

¹⁵⁹ Adriansen, “Timeline interviews: A tool for conducting life history research,” 46.

The application of methods

The actual interviews course

Selection

I used my friends to help me connect with Syrians in Sweden to do my research, which helped me find some participants. However, the biggest help I got came from a Facebook group from Syrians and for Syrians in Sweden, dedicated to helping each other continue higher education, I found most of my participants there. On top of that, being Syrian helped at this stage as many were willing to help as a form of solidarity with a fellow Syrian.

When I initiated contact with any potential participant, I made sure first and foremost that he or she is suitable for the study, by making sure they were living in a dangerous situation during the war in Syria and that they came to Sweden through a road with a higher level of danger and at least crossed through the sea to Europe. I thanked and apologized for many who came from safe zones in Syria or came using normal ways to Sweden, like student visa. Both of these restrictions come to make sure that the interviewee went through a stress inducing situations before arriving to Sweden and going through the integration process.

I tried to have a balance between the genders, but due to the nature of Syrian culture and the fact that I am a male, more males were willing to help than females.

I did not focus on having interviewees from different backgrounds and religions and ethnicities from Syria, I focused on the experience itself, I did not even ask during the interviews about their religion or ethnicity nor their political orientation, I introduced myself as fellow Syrian and that had a very positive effect especially skipping the politics and presenting myself as neutral and going along the side they presented throughout the interview. However, focusing on the experience meant I make sure that the interviewees live in different areas in Sweden, I interviewed people from the Stockholm area, Skane, Gothenburg, and other smaller provinces.

At the end I had 15 interviewees, 10 males, 5 females. All with rich stories, one a warrior in the free Syrian army, some governmental employees, some activists, some came through Turkey and others came through Libya, etc.

My focus and instructions

I conducted the interviews mostly in cafes, and in some rare occasions at private houses.

I made it clear from the start that I will be recording the interview but assured them that there will only be a number on the interview without any name to safeguard the privacy of the interviewee.

Then I explained what the interview is about, saying:

[In this interview we will try to see how your self-esteem changed over the years since the events in Syria. We will start the story from one or two years before the events in Syria and then go through the war times, immigration trip, and integration here in Sweden. There is also another optional component, which is the diagram, it helps in the interview and in the analysis later, but it is up to you if you want to draw it. The diagram answers a basic question “How was the level of your self-esteem at that time”.]

Then, I show a small example of a diagram (image 1) with no writing on it and explain the two axes. Everyone was fine with adding the diagram to the interview.

Throughout the interview, my focus was on the levels of self-esteem, how was it and what were the reasons that got it there. However, I never interrupted the interviewee when he or she was going on in a certain part of the story.

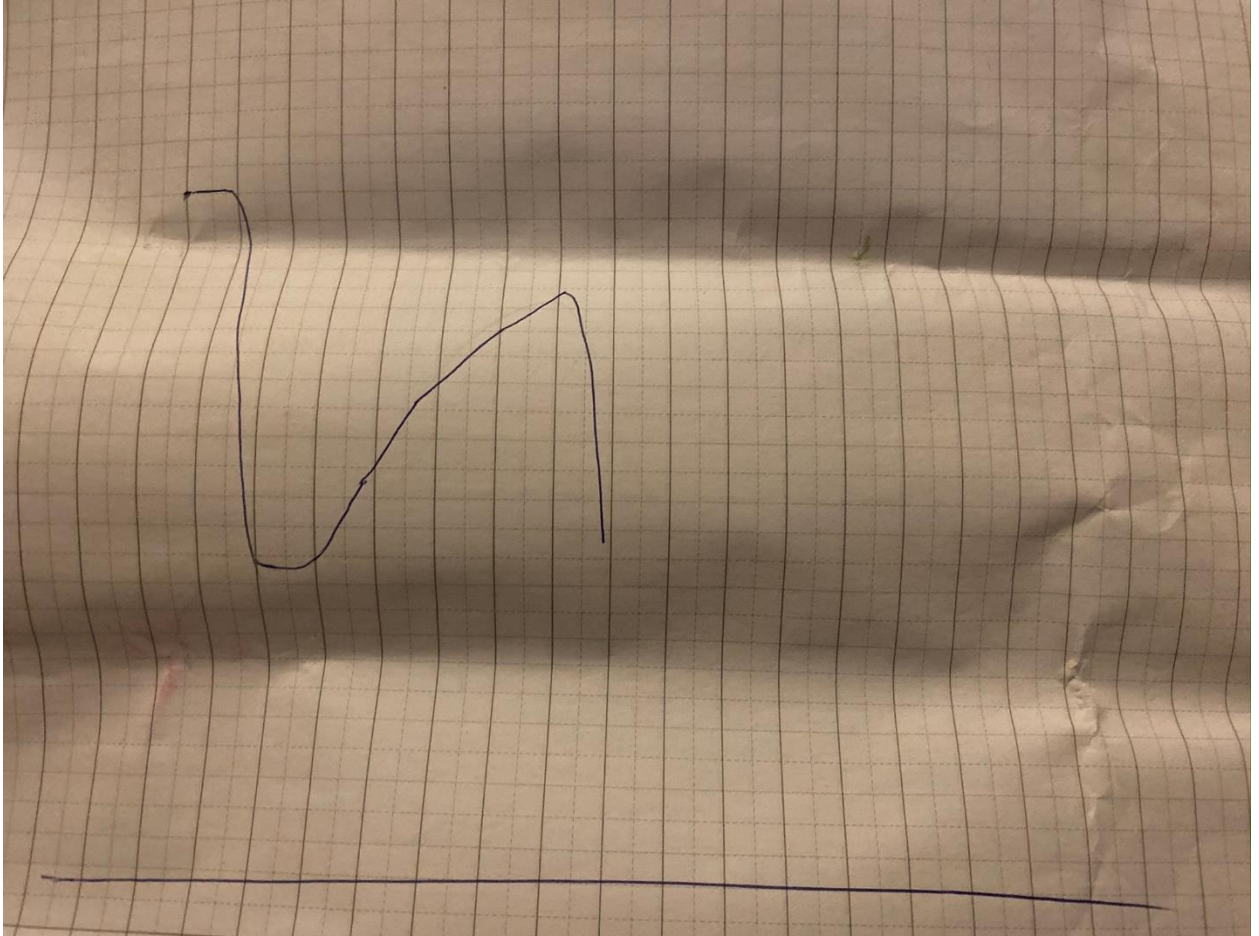


Image 1 (example diagram)

Midway realization

After almost half of the interviews I realized that the interviewees are getting a bit distracted by drawing the diagram from their stories. Therefore, for the second half of the interviews, I got the interviewees to tell their story all of it, then I thank them and tell them now we will try to draw the diagram and go back to every step and during the trip. After the drawing is done, I go again to every step and ask about the reasons for the increase or decrease in the levels of self-esteem.

Diagrams function

The diagrams were very helpful in keeping track of the interview and all my questions, making sure that we covered all the stages in the story, and asked about the details that I needed.

It even helped the analysis to start from the interview stage, as certain patterns started to emerge and get repeated, which in turn made me adjust my questions and the things that I am asking. For example, after a while I noticed that the time spent in the camps is more often than not being marked as the worst time in the whole story. This in turn made me focus more in latter interviews on the time in the camp by asking questions related to the life there and the atmosphere.

Moreover, the patterns in the diagrams themselves started to take shape and reveal themselves during the interviews.

Finally, it was clear that the interviewees had the power and control in the interviews, with telling the story and drawing the diagram, some even tried to give part of the power back to me by asking me how I want the diagram to look like, but I always kept the power in their hand and assured them that they can draw it however they want as long as they feel it represents their self-esteem at the time.

Coding and summarizing

Summaries instead of transcripts

During the interviews I used a voice recorder to gather the data, which helped free me to focus on the topic, it also helped save the tone, intonation, pauses, and the similar effects, which in turn helped in the analysis later¹⁶⁰. This meant using the recording had big advantages and benefits for the analysis.

On the other hand, transcription is effectively a transformation from one mode of narrative to another, which entails that changes might happen due to this, for example a good answer might sound silly when written down¹⁶¹. As Kvale and Brinkmann put it in their book “InterViews” “In short, transcripts are impoverished, decontextualized renderings of live interview conversations”¹⁶².

Furthermore, with the diagram of every interview, it was easy to remember the content of the interview and simplify the process of gathering info from it. Therefore, I decided to summarize

¹⁶⁰ Kvale and Brinkmann, *InterViews*, 178-179.

¹⁶¹ Kvale and Brinkmann, *InterViews*, 178.

¹⁶² Kvale and Brinkmann, *InterViews*, 178.

every interview, instead of transcribing it. And I used the same template for all interviews, to highlight the main points in my research, which complemented the diagram of that interview and presented the main outcome of the interview forward and ready for the analysis.

In conclusion, for every interview I used its diagram, summary, and audio recording, the use of the latter did not pose any problem since the recordings had no names nor any other identifiers of the interviewees.

Coding

In the summary template, I have fields for the stages of the story to help remember the main storyline. Then there is a section for analysis points with the highest and lowest points, and a list of the main reasons that caused an increase or decrease in the levels of self-esteem.

Sometimes, I also included quotations from the interview to help catch certain aspect from the interviewee's character or a direct relation with the analysis, like one interviewee speaking about God when crossing the sea and being afraid, a situation that can be explained using TMT.

On top of that, gathering the info from the interviews in the same template is effectively codifying the data from the interviews and putting it in an easy to compare and analyze form.

To help gather all the compacted data for comparison, I created an info sheet that included numbers gathered from all the interviews, like the most repeated highest points and the reasons for increase and decrease in the self-esteem, etc.

Eventually, I looked at every diagram and went through the summaries and listened to the interviews one by one before I went to the analysis stage.

Notes on the analysis

Analysis starts during the interview itself¹⁶³, as the teller of a story is its first analyzer¹⁶⁴, and it is possible to integrate big parts of the analysis process in the interview¹⁶⁵, which will help make the final analysis easier and more structured¹⁶⁶. As Kvale and Brinkmann put it in their book

¹⁶³ Adriansen, "Timeline interviews: A tool for conducting life history research," 44.

¹⁶⁴ Gubrium & Holstien, *Handbook of INTERVIEW RESEARCH*, 124.

¹⁶⁵ Kvale and Brinkmann, *InterViews*, 190.

¹⁶⁶ Kvale and Brinkmann, *InterViews*, 190.

“InterViews” “the ideal interview is already analyzed by the time the sound recorder is turned off”¹⁶⁷. This actually came naturally and without effort during the interviews and immediately after, while the interviewee was giving me his or her story, I was linking the ideas together and building on what I saw in previous interviews, and would even go further to get the interviewee in the analysis by asking him or her either directly about my ideas or indirectly if I thought the question might affect their story.

On top of that, and as Cavan explains in her paper “Usually the analysis used in concrete studies is a rather common-sense interpretation of causes and processes based upon the investigator's psychological preconceptions.”¹⁶⁸. I found that this statement to be very accurate as it describes big parts of my analysis at the end.

¹⁶⁷ Kvale and Brinkmann, *InterViews*, 190.

¹⁶⁸ Cavan, "Topical Summaries of Current Literature: Interviewing for Life-History Material," 110.

Findings and Analysis

Going through war and integrating into a new society causes turmoil in the levels of self-esteem. And even though the change differs from one person to the other and the reasons for that change as well. We can still see patterns and similarities emerging that is worth investigating.

Findings

Interviewees introduction

Here I will be presenting the interviewees briefly along with the diagram from each interview, the names given to the interviewees are fictitious, assigned for every interview to make it easier to discuss them.

1. Ali: a Syrian man around 28 years old, originally from Idlib, he lived all his life in Aleppo, now he lives in Gothenburg.

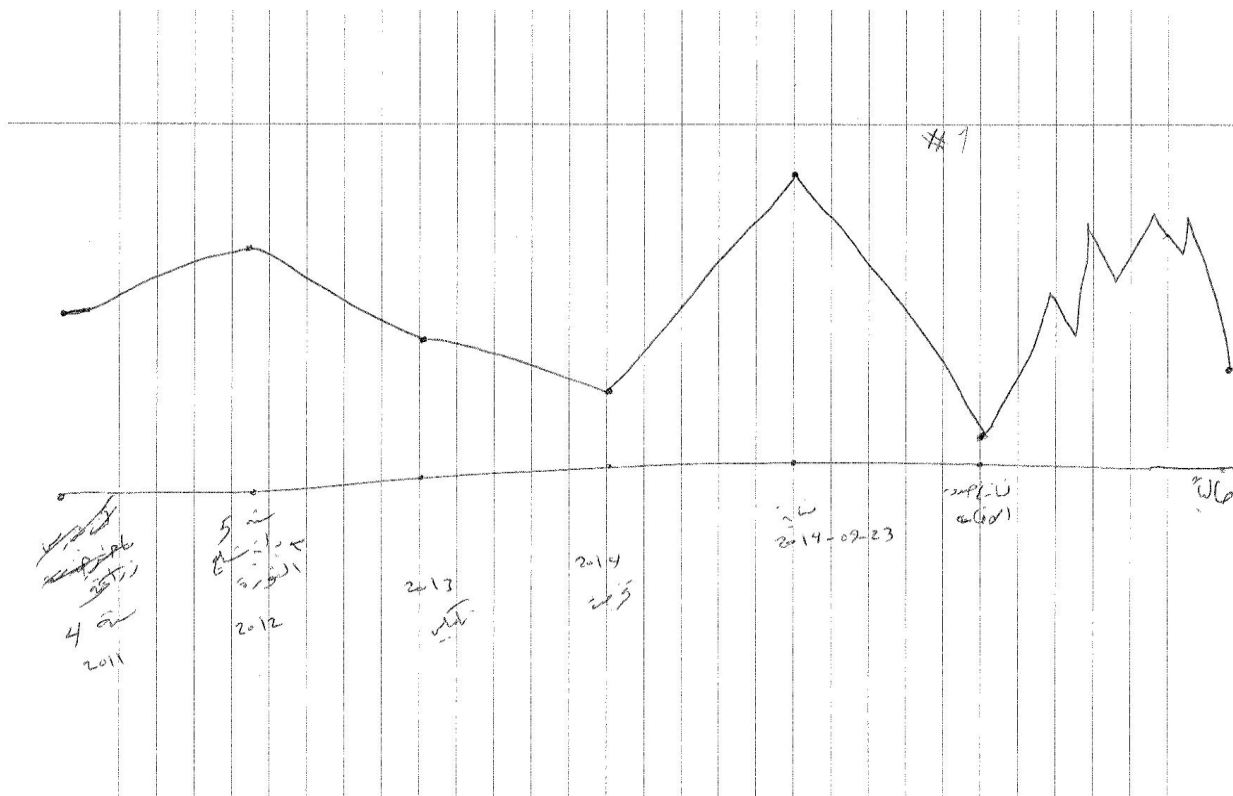


Image 2 (#1 Ali)

2. Ahmed: a Syrian man around 25 years old, from Aleppo city, now he lives in Gothenburg.

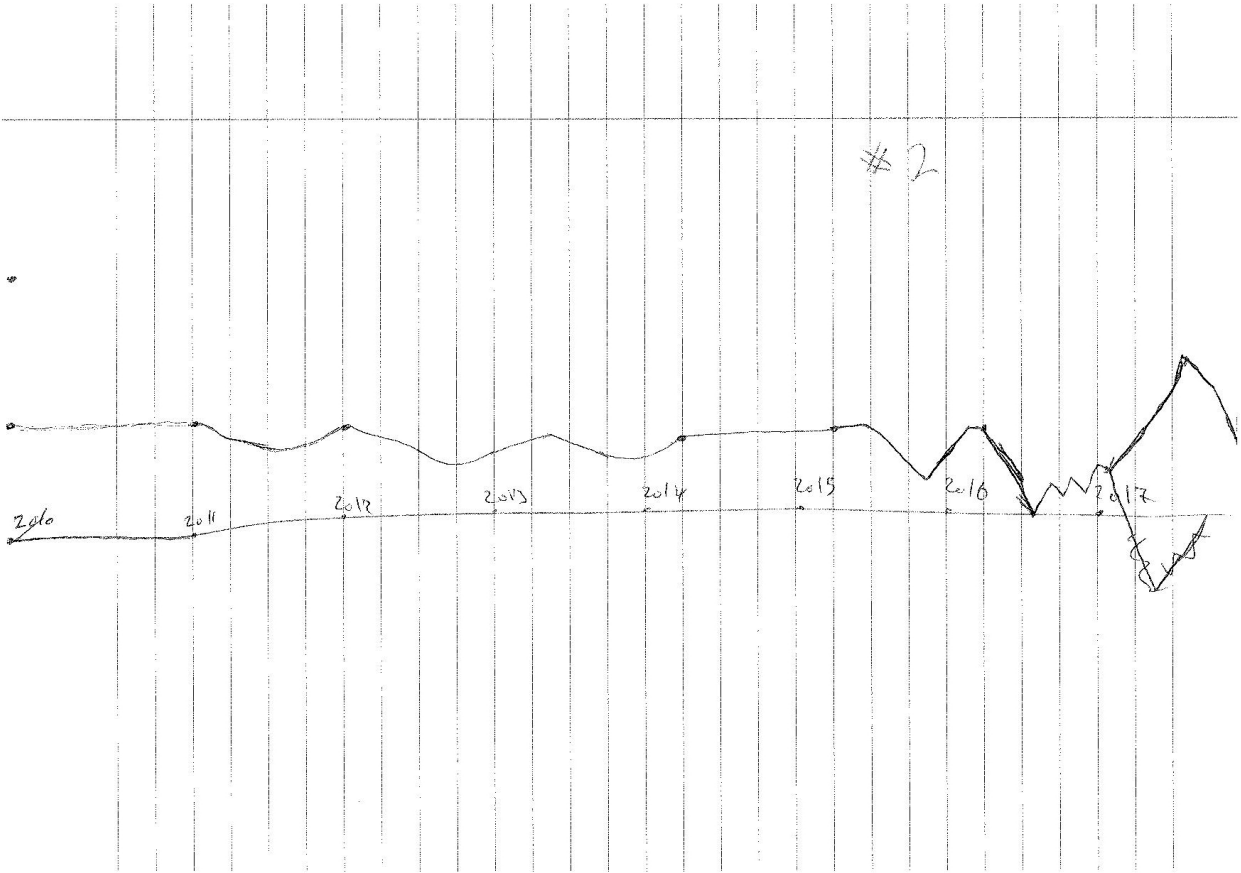


Image 3 (#2 Ahmed)

3. Salma: Syrian woman in her mid-20s, originally, she comes from Aleppo's Eastern countryside. Now she lives in Örebro.

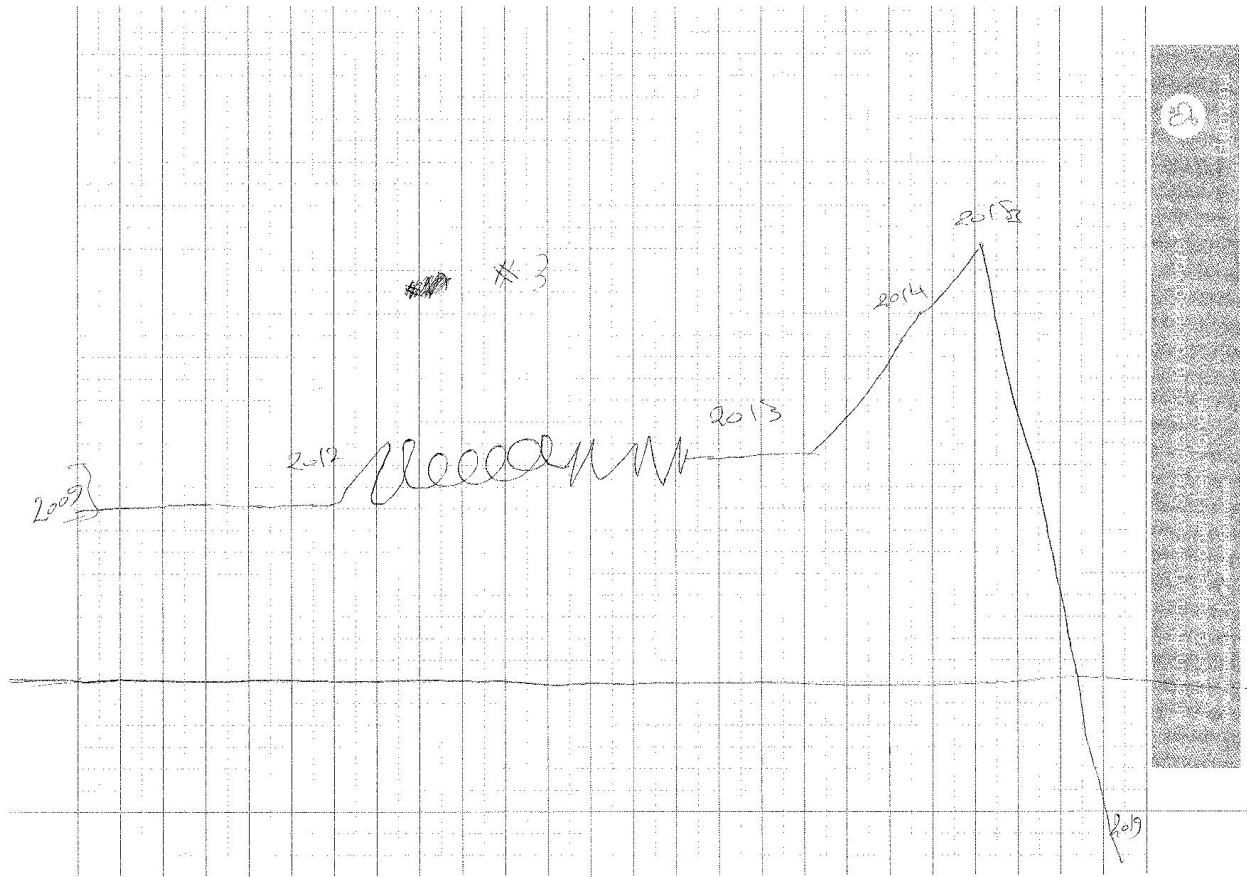


Image 4 (#3 Salma)

4. Hasan: a Syrian man in his mid-40s from Dara'a. Now he lives in Skane's countryside.

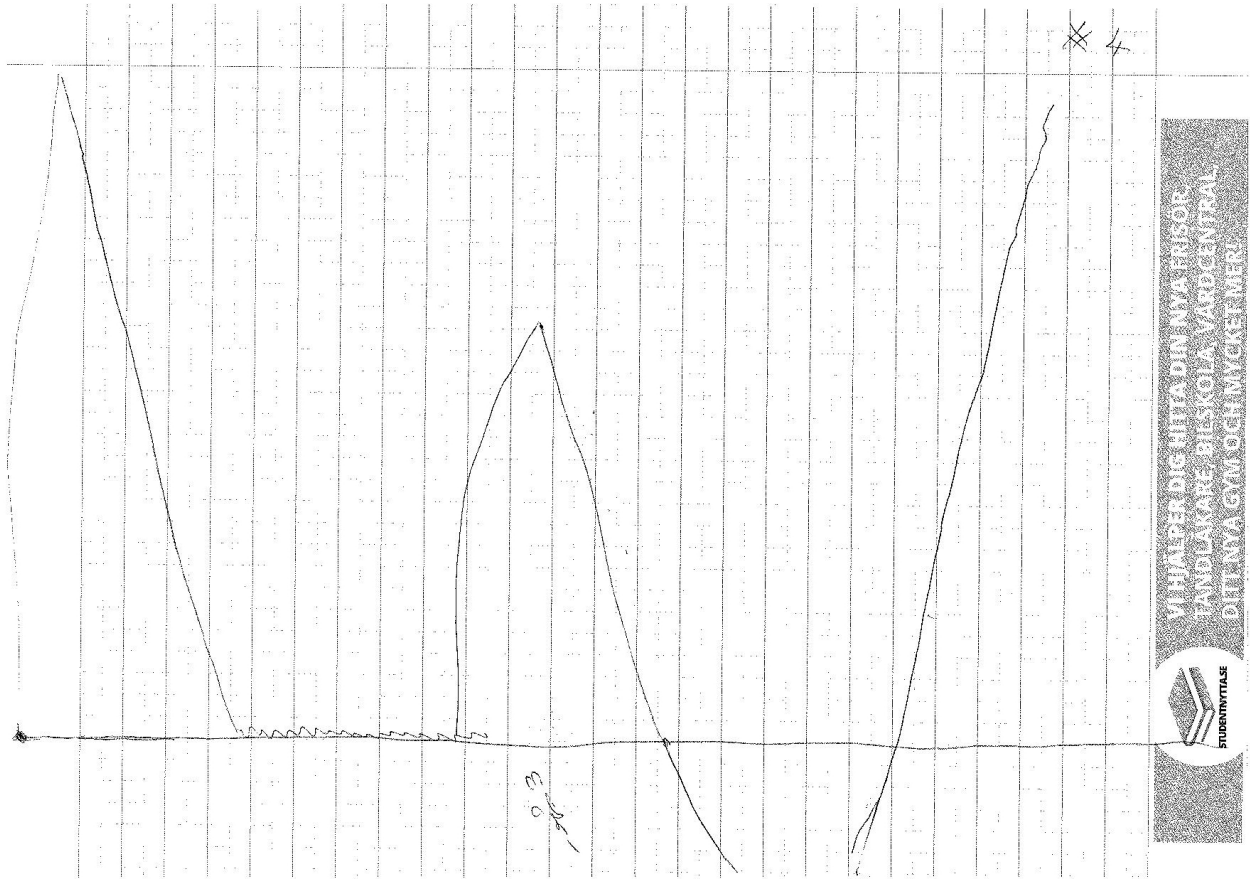


Image 5 (#4 Hasan)

5. Maha: a Syrian woman near the end of her 20s from Homs, now she lives in Skane's countryside.



Image 6 (#5 Maha)

6. Nour: a Syrian woman in her mid-20s from Damascus' countryside. Now living in Skane's countryside.

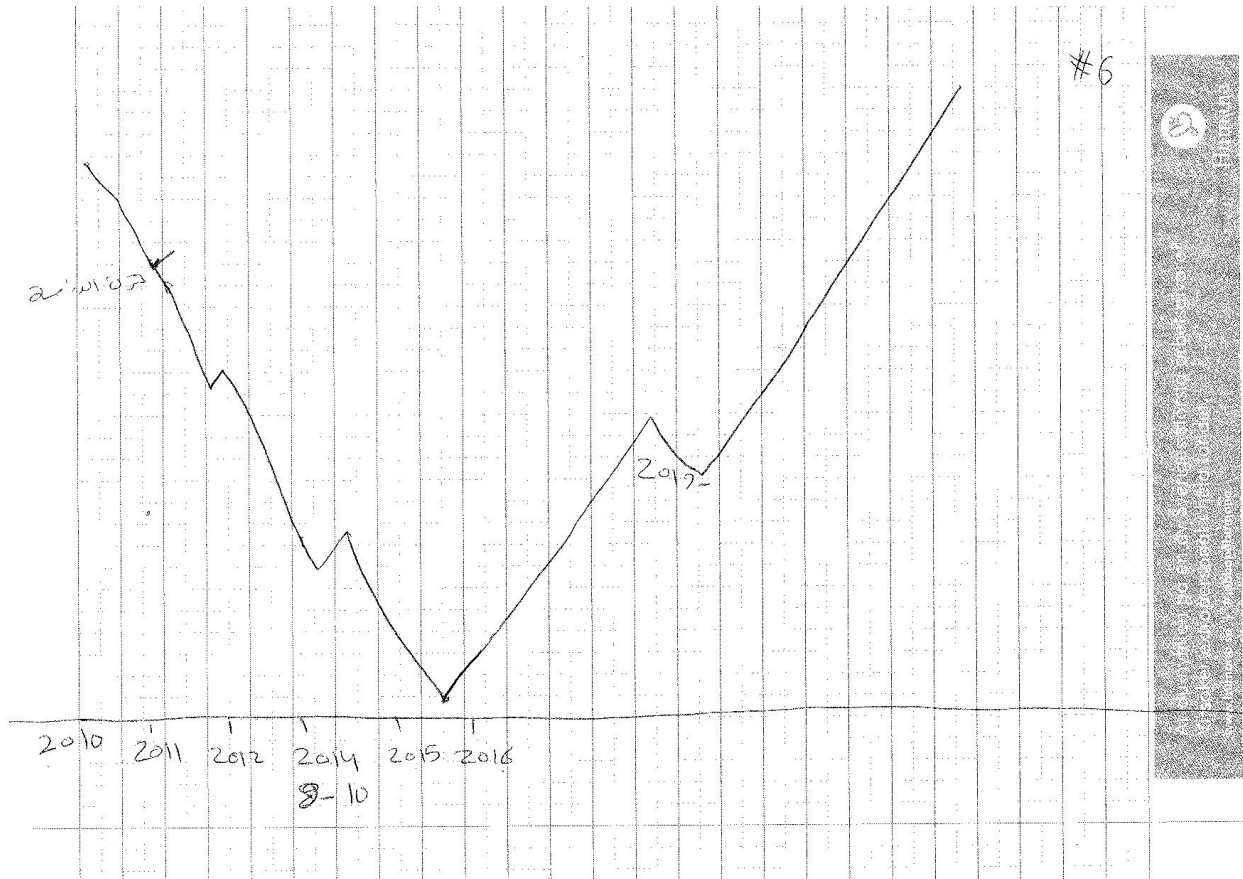


Image 7 (#6 Nour)

7. Jad: a Syrian man in his late 20s from Damascus. Now he lives in Lund.

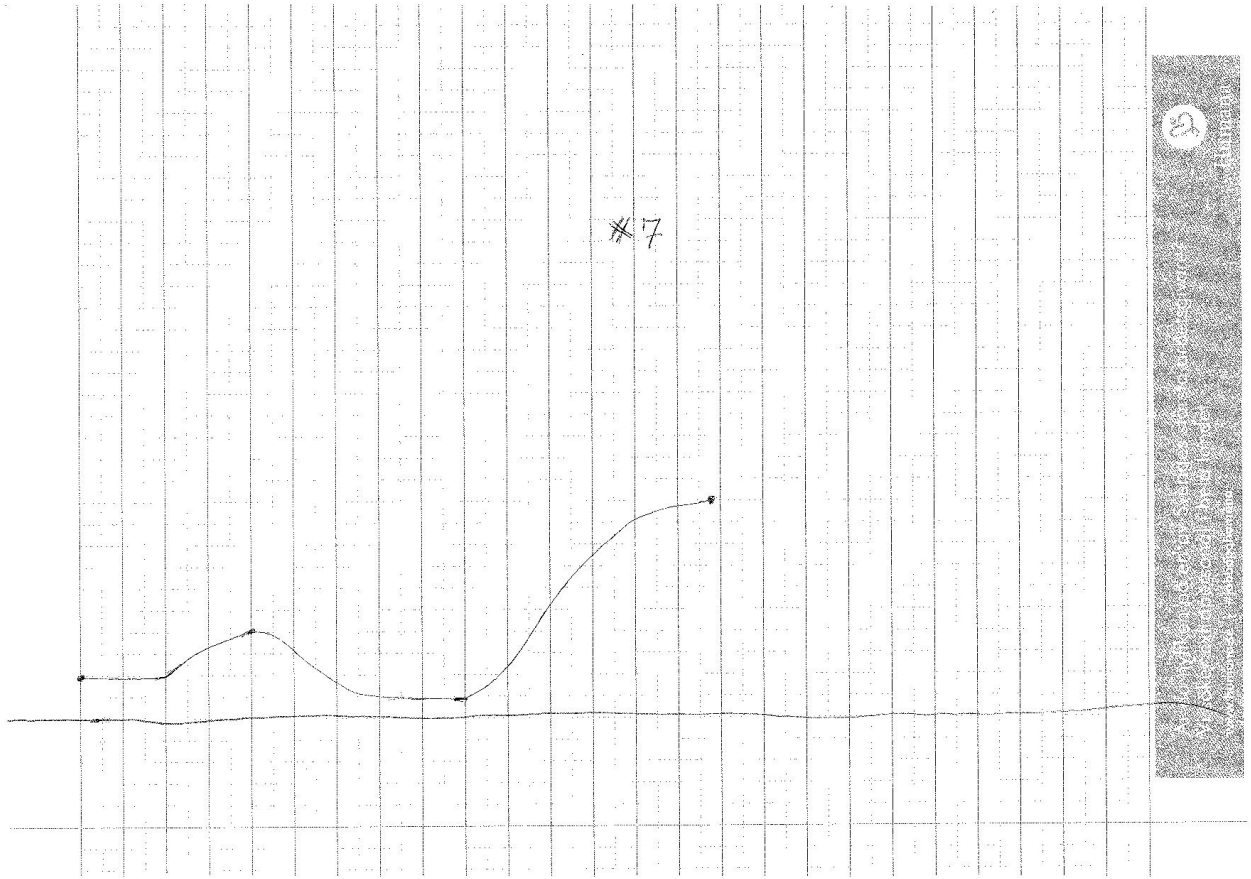


Image 8 (#7 Jad)

8. Ziad: a Syrian man in his mid-30s from Damascus. Now living in Skane's countryside.

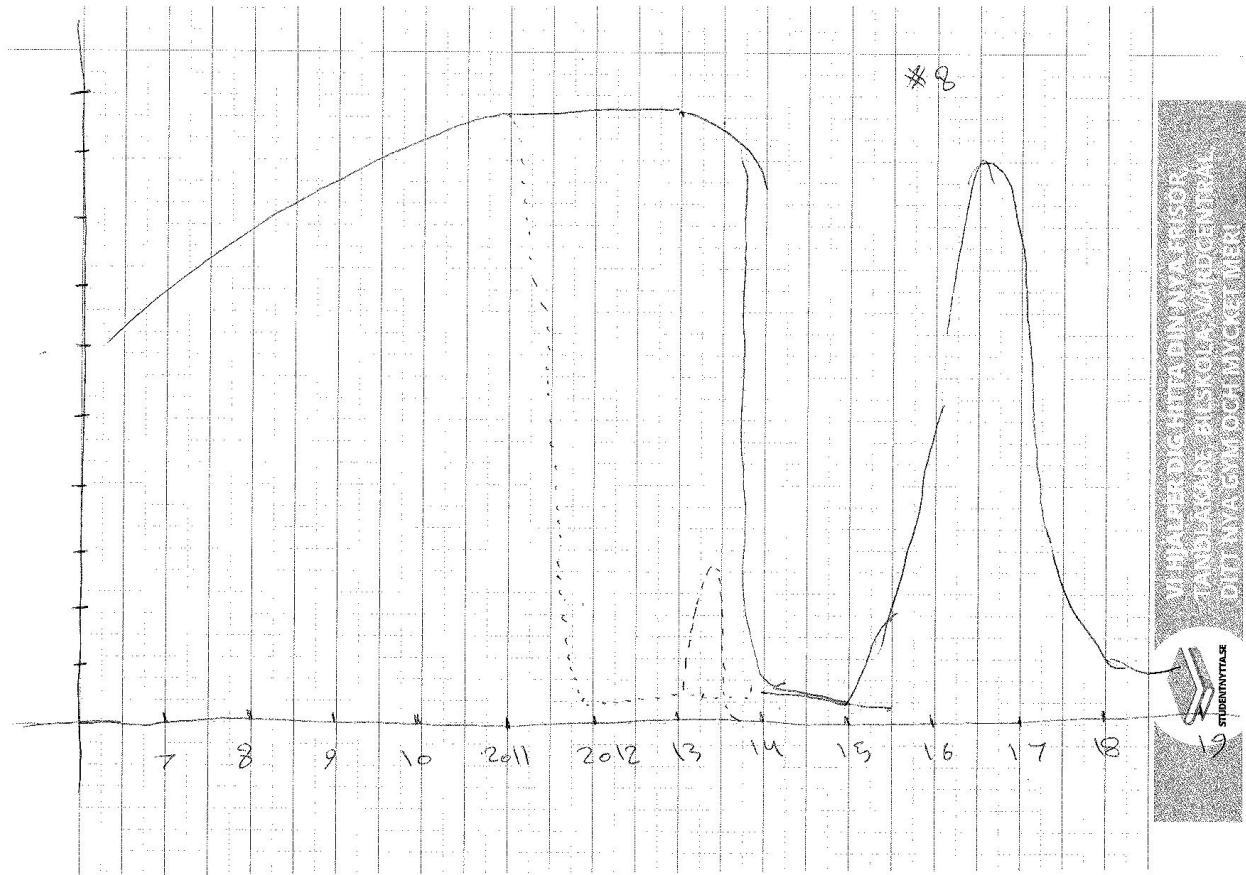


Image 9 (#8 Ziad)

9. Farah: a Syrian woman around 23 years old from Damascus originally, and lived in Yarmouk camp just before leaving Syria. Now she lives in Helsingborg.

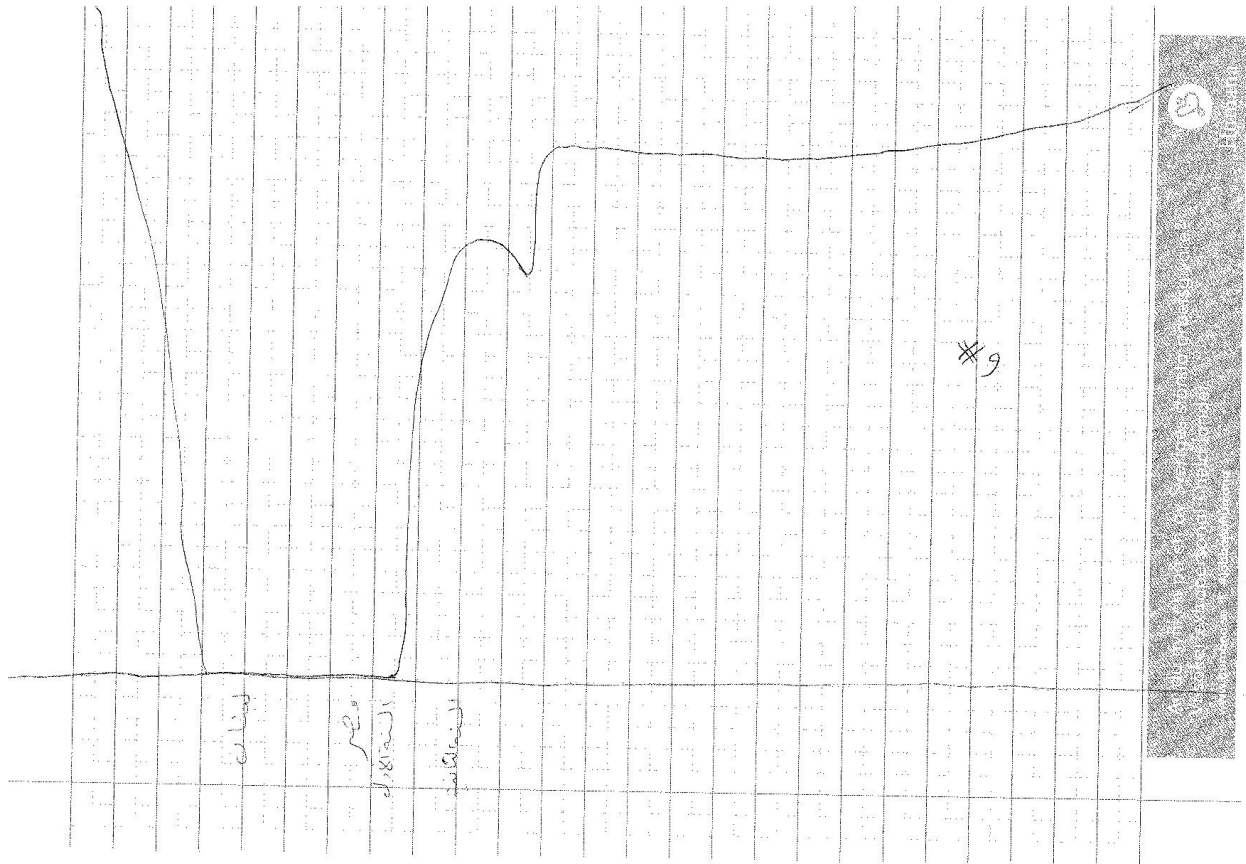


Image 10 (#9 Farah)

10. Abd: a Syrian man in his late 20s from Damascus. Now he lives in Stockholm.

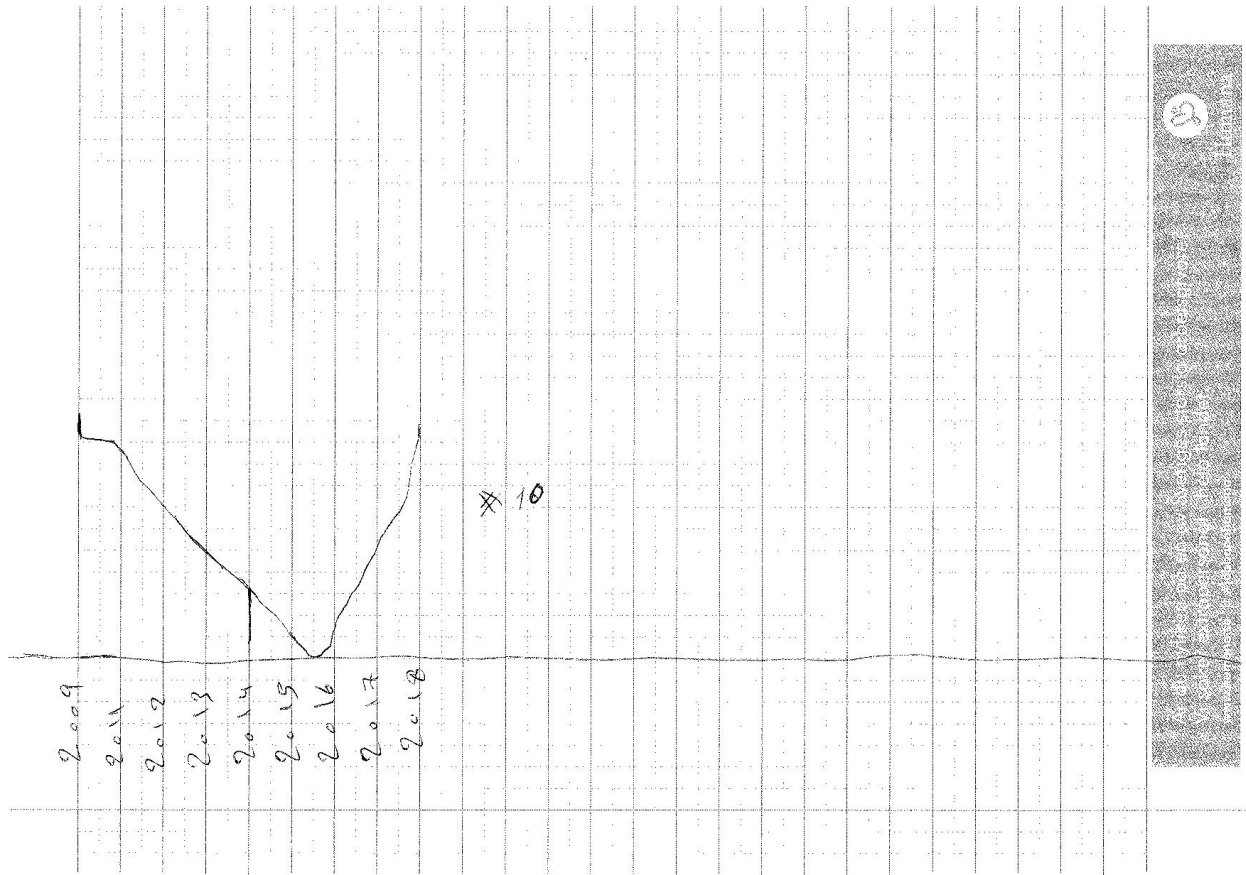


Image 11 (#10 Abd)

11. Lotfi: a Syrian man in his early 40s. He lived in Damascus before leaving Syria. Now he lives in Kristianstad.

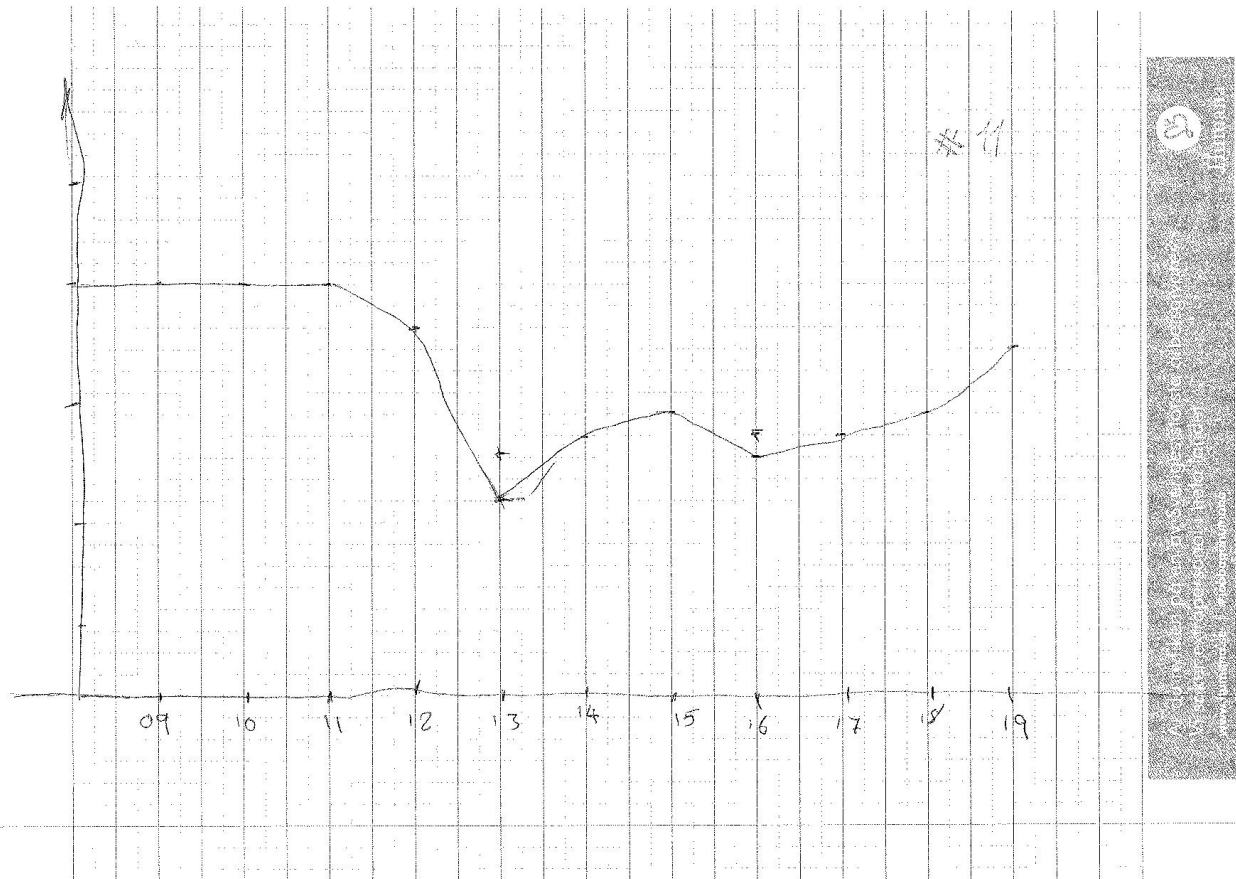


Image 12 (#11 Lotfi)

12. Husain: a Syrian man in his mid-20s from Homs. Now he lives in Stockholm.

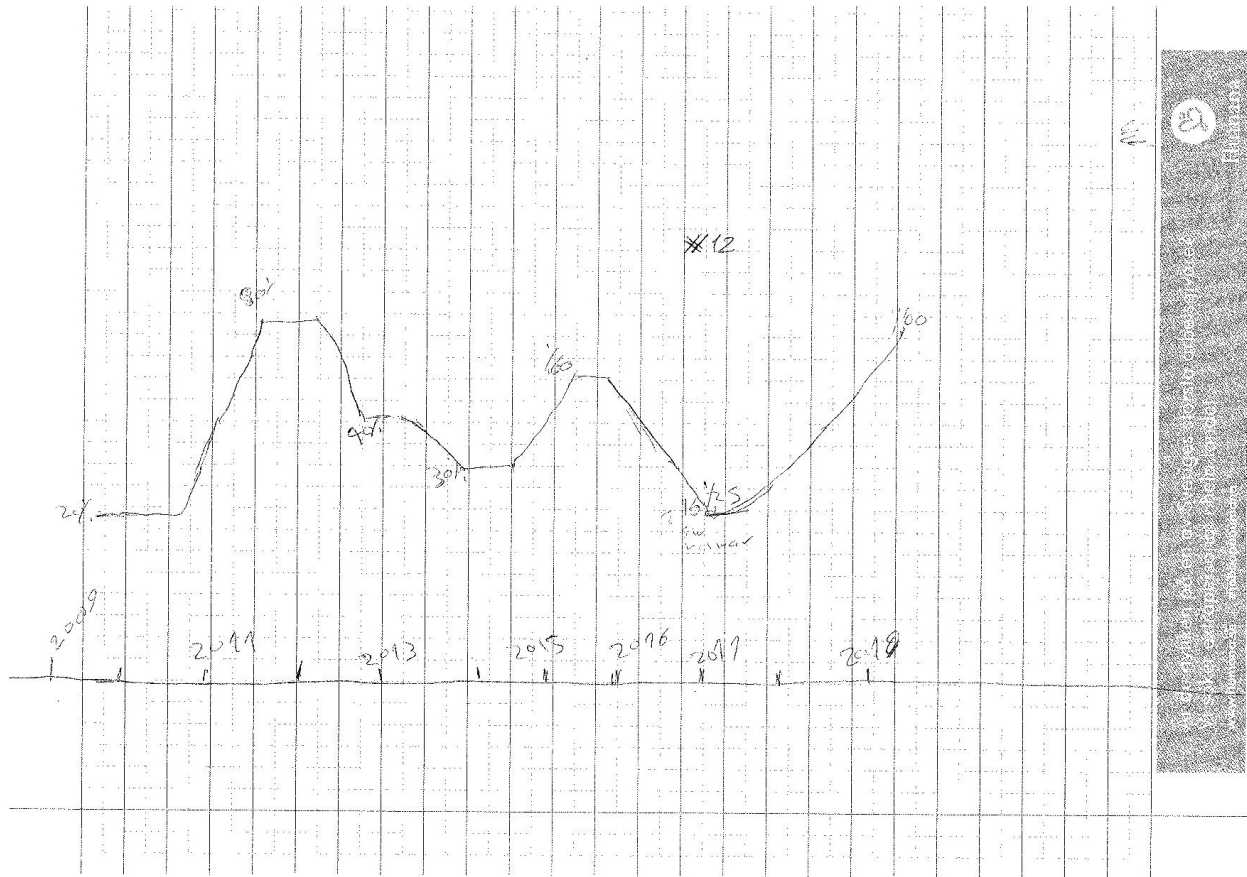


Image 13 (#12 Husain)

13. Amal: a Syrian woman at the end of her 20s from Damascus' countryside, now she lives in Enköping.

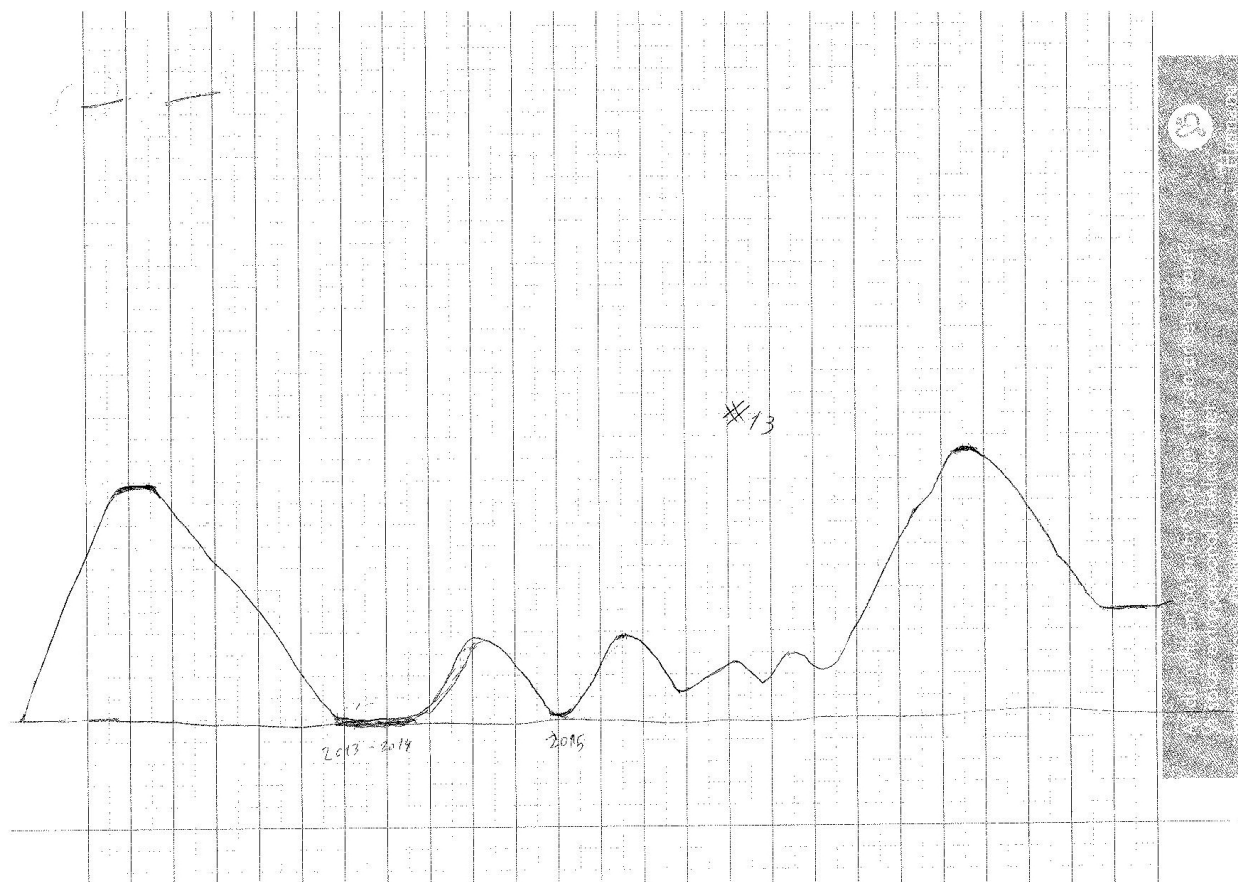


Image 14 (#13 Amal)

14. Samer: a Syrian man in his late 20s from Damascus' countryside. Now he lives in Stockholm.

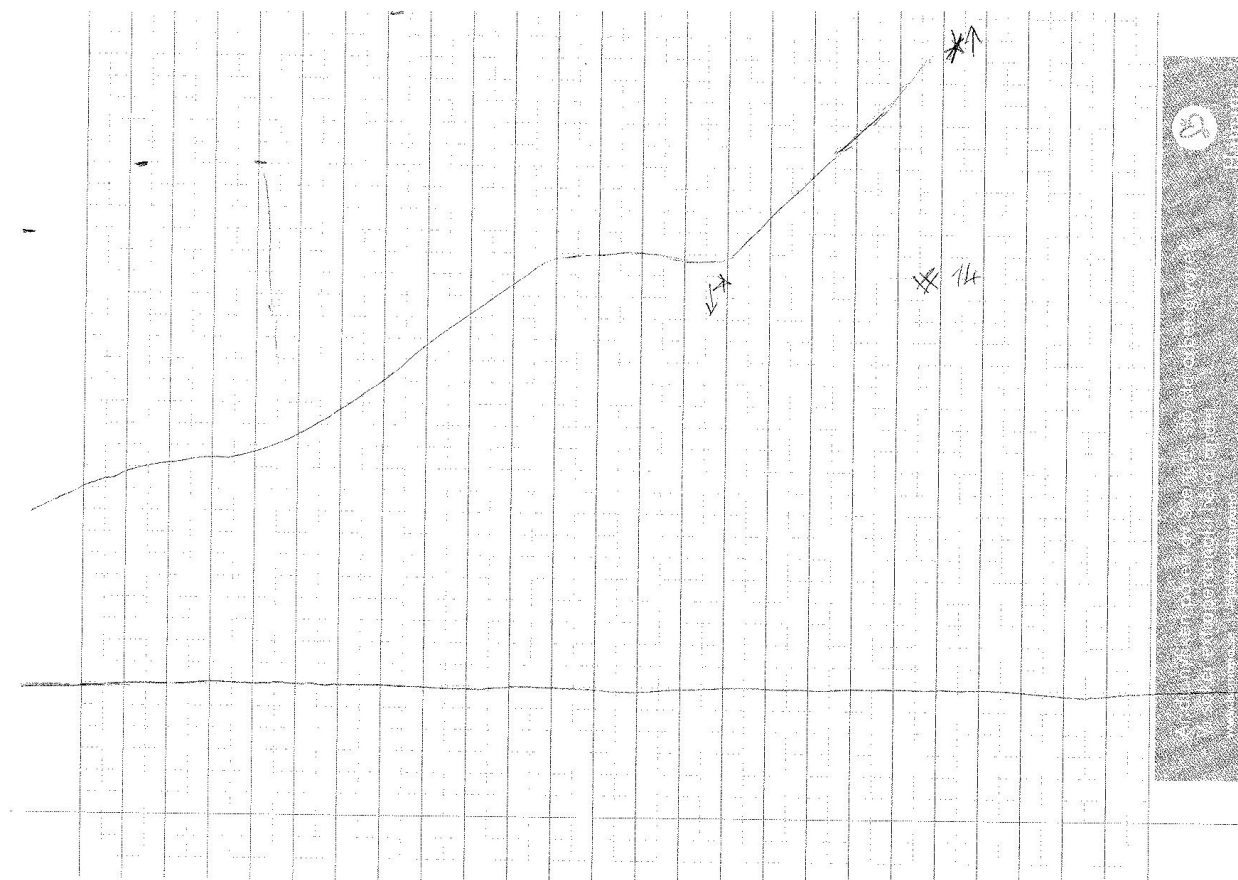


Image 15 (#14 Samer)

15. Fateh: a Syrian man in his early 30s from Daraa. Now he lives in Västerås.

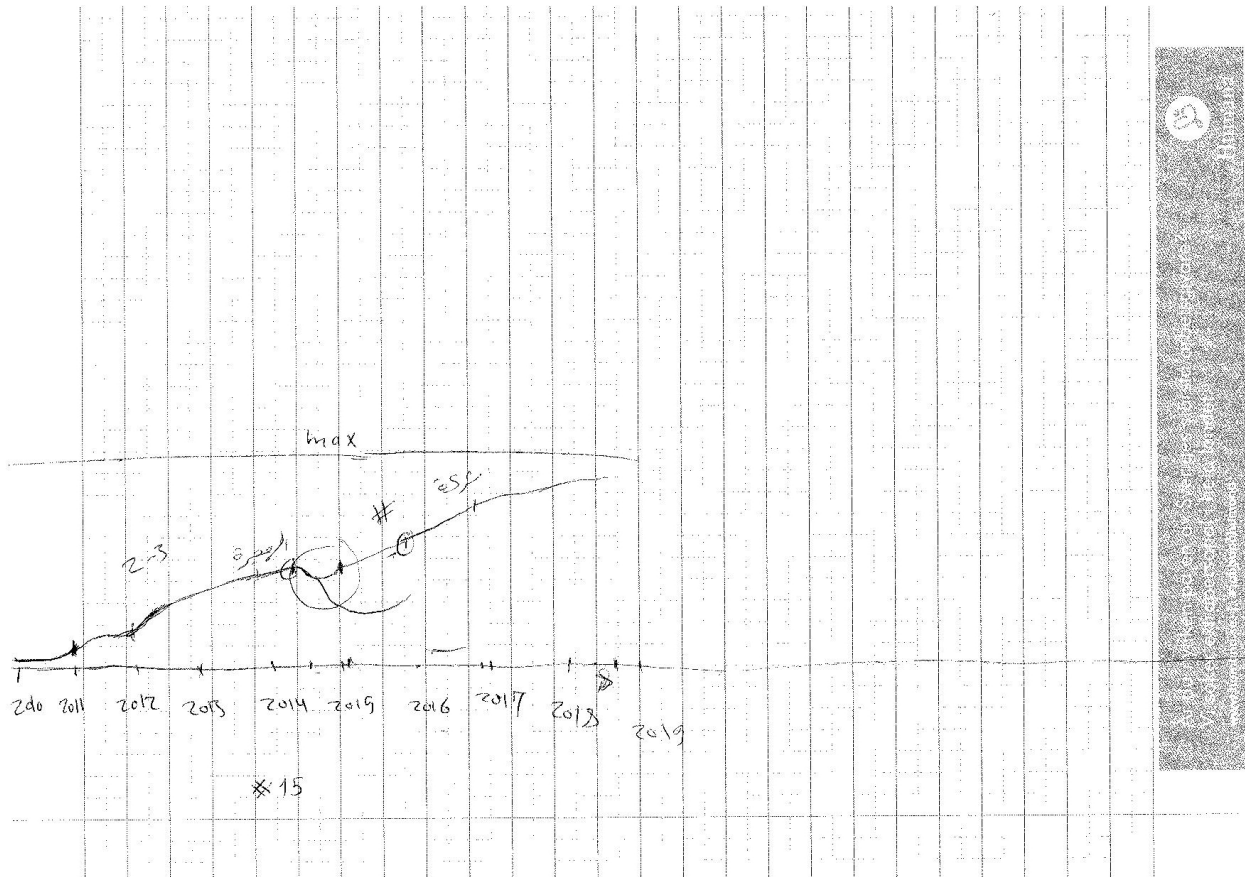


Image 16 (#15 Fateh)

General observations

There are two points worth mentioning here:

The movement and protests in Syria and their effects on self-esteem; Many of the interviewees have participated in the protests and the movement against the regime in Syria. However, the effects of this participation are quite different.

Some of the interviewees' participation gave them a huge boost to their self-esteem and confidence. They described it as a liberating experience and that they did something no one dared to do in tens of years, that they felt a huge pride and self-esteem standing up to the tyrant regime.

#1 Ali said "When I shouted in the first protest, I felt alive for the first time in my life" He also said "We (meaning the participants in the protests) were saying no to that regime that scared us and our fathers for tens of years"

#5 Maha said “We were changing our country; we were building the future for us and our children” and “It was a revolution in every sense.... In the first year or so”

#12 Husain said “It was the time, our time. We were saying no to the biggest tyrant, and we were fearless”

On the other hand, some interviewees stated clearly in the interviews that it did not have a significant effect on them. That they did not see any significance in the movement or that it is not adding anything to them.

#2 Ahmed said “Yeah I participated in some protests... but I did not really feel that much pride... it was something that we did”

Many were torn between the two sides. #4 Hasan said, “I was shocked by the regime actions and supported the rebels” also “They (the rebels) had such high morals at the start, one would wonder if they just got out from Badr battle¹⁶⁹”. Then he continues “But later I saw some actions from them (the rebels) that made me say God bless the days of the regime”. Finally, after he got arrested by the regime and went through degrading time in prison, he said “At that point I realized that I cannot stay in this situation between these two”.

#7 Jad said “My area and neighborhood were against the regime and so was I. However, I worked for the regime as well. So, I was forced to hide what I believe. Unfortunately, because of this difference of where I live and where I work, I was always accused of treason from both sides”.

The second point that is worth mentioning is the effects of the trip to Sweden. There was a huge difference in the experiences of this trip depending on the starting point and the timing of the trip. People coming through Libya told horrific stories about the smugglers and the treatment they faced.

#6 Nour, who came through Libya, said “The smugglers put us in small and crowded houses for two weeks in waiting... then they took us to the beach where we stayed for three days and no one dared say anything as they all were armed... they would do whatever they want and no one could say anything... one of the smugglers sat next to me and held my hand and started to rub it and say (you want to go to Europe, why?) and no one dared to say anything, not even my relatives, my father, my uncles... what can they say to armed men like that!”. She also mentions

¹⁶⁹ Badr Battle, happened at the start of the spread of Islam almost 1400 years ago between the prophet and a very few of his very loyal and pious friends against the tribes in Mecca. it is considered that all participants in that battle are the best muslims of all time.

the wooden boat “It was obvious that the boat cannot take all this number they are trying to get on board, not even half... They put the African migrants in the lower deck and the Syrians on the upper deck, probably because they pay less... by the end of the journey one of the Africans down below dies”

#8 Ziad tells a similar story about the smugglers and the boat “They would not allow anyone to go back, they will kill anyone who wants to go back... we just sat on the beach and waited for hours and we were the lucky ones as we just arrived shortly before the boat left, there were people who have been there for several days when we arrived... I accepted to sit on the lower deck thinking we will be switching throughout the trip, but I got stuck down there... I was barely able to breath and one guy near me actually fainted”

On the other hand, even the worst stories from the people coming through Turkey are still much more acceptable.

#4 Hasan said, “the trip was smooth without any major issues, some complained about the food on the road, but it is a migration road, one will not expect 5 stars food to be available.”

Also, people coming when the borders were opened in Europe, saw the journey as a road trip, while others coming at a different time even though through the same route, had very bad times with the police and borders.

#3 Salma speaking about what she went through in Hungary “We ran, and we actually thought we lost the police, but they were actually waiting on the other side as well and took us all to the holding center... They were shouting at us and not taking one minute to listen to what we had to say... after many pleas they agreed to take a look at the papers we had (she and her sister) and confirmed that our family is in Sweden, that is when they let us go”.

The difference goes to the effects of the trip as well. Specifically, the people who had a hard time on the road, for some of them it was empowering experience, to conquer the odds and reach their goal at the end. While others saw it as a humiliating experience that lowered their self-esteem.

#7 Jad said “After the trip... I needed to take the time and think about my life, was it really worthless to be thrown away in the sea? ... I need to change my life and make it meaningful again”

#2 Ahmed said about how tiring the trip “If you felt tired during this trip ... well ... you are not allowed to feel tired, if you did you would miss the train and get stuck” also “The trip to

Sweden was the worst time for me, the long walk, the condescending looks and bad treatment from the police... all makes you feel worthless”

#5 Maha said “I liked my trip here to Sweden... yes there was a lack of water and food and good place to sleep, but I enjoyed the hope shining at the end of the journey”

#10 Abd said “whenever I finish one more part of the journey, I would feel bigger hope and motivation to continue... every stage I finish would give me more confidence”

Major turning points

Highest and lowest points

When it comes to the highest point, more than $\frac{2}{3}$ of the interviewees put it here in Sweden, when they are well within their integration process in the new land and culture.

#2 Ahmed said “After I got the job just recently, I felt much more confident... now I want to use my work to help me learn the language because I will be forced to speak it”

#4 Hasan said “Here, there is law and it is respected, you do not need to be afraid of anyone here in Sweden because the law protects you... you can be whatever you want and say whatever you want and no one can stop you, freedom” He also said “Here you have stability, security, hope for the future, for you and your children.” the main point in the last comment is repeated by several interviewees, #8 Ziad, #6 Nour, #9 Farah, and #15 Fateh.

#5 Maha said “Your career accomplishments have a real meaning here... if you work and produce, that is appreciated and valued, it has a meaning and it helps your future”

#14 Samer said “I am happy here and now... I feel that I found a good place and I have good friends around me, and my boss loves me”

As for the lowest point, it is not as clear divide as the highest point, with the times in the camp, the time during the war in Syria, and the trip to Sweden getting almost equally the most chosen lowest point. However, even though the time in the camp in Sweden gets chosen by $\frac{1}{3}$ of the interviewees as the lowest point, all of the interviewees indicated a dip in self-esteem during their time in the camp. And almost all of the remaining $\frac{2}{3}$ put it as the second lowest point for them.

The interviewees lost almost all their sense of value in the camp. They cannot do anything, cannot learn the language, cannot work, cannot find a place to live outside of the camp, cannot eat

anything but what is provided in the camp, cannot leave the camp as most camps are in rural and secluded areas with nothing close by to visit and they do not get enough money to afford the expensive transportation costs to further places. Basically, they cannot move forward in life, cannot give anything meaningful to the world. Most interviewees stated that they just sat and waited until they got the resident permit.

#1 Ali said, “Until you get the residency permit, you are nothing, null, undefined”.

#8 Ziad said “A person there is just a number” he also described the situation from his point of view “I was cramped with 5 other guys in a small room, every one of us has his own mood and his own sleeping habits, it is ... something ... I was not used to that” He also mentions the food “the food quality was not good, it was fine, but there was no other way for a person in the camp to get any alternative because the money they give you there is not enough” , #2 Ahmed also mentioned the limited and not varied food.

#15 Fateh said, “I see the camp as a very negative place”. He also said that he only stayed in the camp for three months only, so I asked him:

“Question: let us say you were forced to stay in the camp for a year instead of only 3 months, for example because of delays in your resident permit, how, in your opinion, would that affect the diagram? Answer: Then it would have went down like this (and he draws an extra line on the diagram taking it much lower than it is), and it would have affected the diagram later, as it would have taken me longer to reach where I am now”. He then adds: “I have friends who were more successful than me before but spent longer times in the camp and still until now struggling here in Sweden”.

#12 Husain said “I was under pressure (psychological) all my time in the camp while I was waiting for the decision to be made (about his residency), I was afraid they would send me back to Syria and the war and horror”

#10 Abd, even though he managed to find work during his stay in the camp, he had a difficult time there as well, he said, “When they (migration agency) gave me an appointment after a year (for the case hearing) I was devastated and lost all hope... There was nothing clear and nothing certain neither for me nor for my family”.

#6 Nour said “We stayed in the camp for two years... it was a horrible time... long waiting time for the residency and then to find a suitable home to rent... the camp was filled with

depression with nothing to do... the society there is closed and secluded and the negativity was all around”

#13 Amal said “I could not do anything, no one could, you cannot learn the language because you need a personal number for that, you cannot work... where would you work?... the time there (in the camp) was very similar to the time in Syria (in regard to her self-esteem and uncertainty) ... the whole time there had really negative effect on me and my self-esteem”

War effect

Even though the war in general had a lowering effect on self-esteem, it did not take the self-esteem to its lowest point that often. And even though the war is filled with dangers and death, which might lead the assumption towards putting the war time as the worst time, less than $\frac{1}{3}$ of the interviewees identified the time of war as the lowest point for their self-esteem.

This is clearly reflected in the drawn diagrams. (Image 2) #1 Ali’s diagram, (Image 7) #6 Nour’s diagram, (Image 11) #10 Abd’s diagram, and (Image 13) #12 Husain’s diagram, and in a lower clarity in other diagrams like (Image 3) #2 Ahmed’s diagram and in #14 Samer’s story.

In the interview with #1 Ali, I asked about the lowest point, he points out that it was in the camp in Sweden. So, I asked “How about in Syria during the war and when you left your house and the city?” To which he answered, “That is true, it was a low point in self-esteem and a bad situation, but I was still with my family, I was still in my home country ... I still can speak to the people and they understand me”

Integration

The start of the integration was hard on the interviewees. Some stated that they were met with condescending behavior from the employees in the camps and the employment office, and even from normal people outside.

#13 Amal said “In there (at the migration agency) they did not treat us well, not everyone, but many... they talked with us with superiority as if they do not see us” she also talks about her struggle in learning the language “It is hard for me to learn the language and I struggled with it... because of this, the teacher at school would always look down on me”

#5 Maha talked about her shock when she came to Sweden “I was really shocked when I arrived to Sweden, I had a different image about a country with a high level of development ...

the life here is really slow and they process things slowly ... it is really cold and not just the weather ... on top of that the population is really old ... and worst of all is isolation, they do not connect with each other here” She continues on the last point “The human being needs emotions and this country does not provide them.”

#8 Zaid talks about his struggle with the employment agency “She (talking about the lady responsible for his case) sent me to a faraway place to take courses in computer, man, I am a computer engineer, I studied IT, and she was sending me to take courses in basic things” He tells me that after he went to that course he actually ended up teaching in that center, and the next person responsible for his case saw that he did not need any restrictions so he was allowed to just search for jobs and apply for them. Afterwards and with the third person responsible for him in the employment office, he had a new one because he changed where he lived and thus changed his employment office, about that new person he said, “Now I am back where I started, she is sending me to the same kind of course that I was teaching in that first center... they just refuse to listen ... in simple words your life is in their hands and they decide what you should be doing”

There is also common views among migrants about the reasons Europe accepted large number of migrants, specifically, the views concern the kind of jobs the migrants are supposed to work. #4 Hasan speaks of this specifically “They need workforce for their country and that is why they brought us here, but not to get high level jobs... we are supposed to take “skitjobb”, like teacher assistant, or taking care of the elderly... it is fine but you (meaning a migrant) can break out of this system, you can study and work hard to get a better job and a better place” Then he looks at the corner of the cafe where we were sitting and said “Do you see that man there, he is one of those who broke out... I also will break out, but for now I will work in “skitjobb”, it is a means to live for now until I get to study and accomplish a better place”

Some interviewees had to face weird views about migrants and the Middle East, #8 Ziad describes how he joked with a lady here in Sweden who was shocked that there are computers in Syria, he said “An old Swedish woman asked me," What is your job’, I answered, ‘I am an IT engineer’. She said in a surprised tone ‘do you have computers in Syria?’ so I told her ‘yeah we have very big computers in the size of this room and there is a place where you put coal to fuel the computer to work”

One aspect that is worth mentioning is the change in the world value system around the Syrian migrants, the original world-value system that the interviewees came from is challenged by

the new world-value system where they are now. Religion and belief system, political system, social values, and others. It was already mentioned how some interviewees faced the condescending looks from Swedes or the immigration office workers, and the feeling of being people of lower class, and how their home country is viewed here in Sweden by some people, and what kind of work they are supposed to do here in Sweden, and how they were shocked by Sweden, the cold weather and relations and the slow processing time.

Another indication of this difference comes from #8 Ziad, he said “Everything I did before, my education, my work, all meant nothing in the camp, I was just like the others with no difference”. This reflects one difference in the world value systems, because in Syria, educated people who has/had a position in the society are held in better regard than others without or with lower level of education and position in society. While here in Sweden there is Law of Jante (Jantelagen), which basically means that everyone is equal and no one is better or higher than others, some Swedes even feel embarrassed by an accomplishment.

The aspect of difference in the world value systems emerged at the end of the study, during the analysis phase, which made it hard to find enough support in the interviews for it, even though it was present there in the general sense. Every Syrian migrant in Sweden immediately notices this difference, and as a Syrian myself I saw it as well clearly. One suitable example to highlight this difference is; in Syria, when a girl decides to put on the scarf she is congratulated by the people around her, they literally say “Congratulations for putting on the scarf”, in Sweden, a relative of mine decided to take off the scarf because she thought it would help in her integration in society, she was actually congratulated by a Swedish woman on that.

This example, with the Jantelagen one and the views that the interviewees faced in general and with the different slow and cold culture, give a good picture about the difference in world value systems in Syria and Sweden, most importantly the difference in the actions and behaviors that are rewarded and appreciated in society.

The factors affecting the Self-esteem

Increasing factors

There are many reasons that the interviewees mentioned during the interviews to explain the increase in the levels of their self-esteem at a certain point. However, it is clear that “work”

and “positive and supportive surrounding” take the first and second place on the list of increasing reasons, surpassing the other reasons with a big margin.

For work, #2 Ahmed said “After I got the job just recently, I felt much more confident”

#5 Maha said “when you start to work again you feel like a productive member of society”

#6 Nour said “I just got a job in the same place where I was volunteering and starting next week.” she said it with a smile and clear sense of pride.

#7 Jad talking about the reasons for increased self-esteem after the camp “Work, of course work, when I started working, I did not need any favors or the help of the migration office nor the employment office”

#8 Ziad’s diagram rises when he is in Sweden during one period, and that’s when he got a job “The time when I had a job here in Sweden was almost as the best time in Syria before the events (which he identified as the best times for his self-esteem) ... when I was working here and getting a decent amount of money I started to feel more settled and secure”

#13 Amal said, “I was working in media field even before my graduation, this does not happen usually... and it made me very confident and proud”.

For the positive surroundings, #9 Farah said, “There were many people who supported me ... the migration workers were very nice, they would ask what I need and they always asked me if my brother is bothering me in any way, even though he was younger than me ... and there is a nice old Swedish lady who kept encouraging me and helping ... the Red Cross were very supportive and helped me to learn the language and pushed me forward”

#7 Jad said, “The people in my work are all very respectable people, with high education, and they respected me and supported me ... they always encouraged me to keep working hard and try again”

#6 Nour said “I keep to the Swedes only now, they are very nice and kind and they respect you and help you ... in the church where I volunteer they are very kind and help me with what I need”

#4 Hasan said “I volunteered with the Red Cross and they sent me here to this cafe ... the people here are very nice and kind, I loved them, and they loved me”

Finally, after “work” and “supportive surrounding” comes a group of reasons that also got a lot of mentions. Namely, learning the language and the ability to communicate with society,

restarting studies or accomplishing academic success, the stability and security, having clear future plans, and family related reasons like reunion or marriage or a new child.

Decreasing factors

Even though “war”, which include destruction and crimes and diaspora, and “negative environment”, which include destructive or envious or complaining people, they both come as big reasons for the decline in self-esteem levels. It is “failed or lack of plans for the future” that comes as the most frequent reason for the fall of self-esteem levels.

#1 Ali said “It was very devastating, we left our home (he and his family) I could not graduate, and it seemed the university is gone, then it seemed all future hopes are gone as well”

#10 Abd said “When they (migration agency) gave me an appointment after a year (for the case hearing) I was devastated and lost all hope... There was nothing clear and nothing certain neither for me nor for my family”.

#3 Salma said talking about her current situation “I am broken now, I cannot continue studying, this new law stopped me and hundreds like me, what can I do now? I have no plan! (referring to a law that changed the system for recognizing the foreign diplomats in Sweden)”

#9 Farah said about her time in Lebanon “It was the worst time for me ... there was nothing to do, no way to continue studies or have any plans for the future”

#7 Jad talked about his bachelor when he was studying in Syria “I was not sure which field of work my bachelor can help me enter ... there were not many options and I felt limited”

Other important reasons mentioned by the interviewees include, failed studies, racism, insecurity, the feeling of powerlessness and the inability to do anything to change things around them or help their loved ones, and fear.

Diagram patterns

It is possible to find patterns emerging from the diagrams, even though they are not clear considering the limited number of diagrams present. Nevertheless, there is a base to work with and establish for future studies to build on and find the clear patterns in the changes of migrants’ self-esteem. It seems there are three main patterns for the diagrams representing the changes in self-esteem in Syrian migrants. Even though, not all the diagrams classified under one pattern give exactly the look of that pattern, but rather quite similar shape.

1. “W” shape:

With the middle rise in the diagram is lower than the two sides most of the time, this shape seems to be the most common among the patterns and can be called the average and usual outcome pattern for the change.

Diagrams with this shape are: (Image 3) #2 Ahmed, (Image 5) #4 Hasan, (Image 6) #5 Maha did not continue the drawing, but it seems that a “W” shape was forming, (Image 9) #8 Ziad, (Image 12) #11 Lotfi, (Image 13) #12 Husain, (Image 14) #13 Amal.

2. “V” shape:

This shape is less common. Where the self-esteem goes through a large low phase and then rise up afterwards.

Diagrams with this shape are: (Image 2) #1 Ali, (Image 7) #6 Nour, (Image 10) #9 Farah, (Image 11) #10 Abd.

3. Continuously rising

This shape is also less common and has an ever-rising level of self-esteem, albeit a small dip along the way (most likely at the time in the camp).

Diagrams with this shape are: (Image 8) #7 Jad, (Image 15) #14 Samer, (Image 16) #15 Fateh.

Analysis

Highest self-esteem point here in Sweden

When it comes to the highest point, more than $\frac{2}{3}$ of the interviewees put it here in Sweden, when they are well within their integration process in the new land and culture. Which in general makes sense considering the stability, security, prosperity, and other positive factors available here. Nevertheless, this result can be understood by using Abrams and Hogg proposed self-esteem hypothesis (SEH). Specifically, the first point in the hypothesis which says that constructive separation from one group to another will improve social character, something that appears clearly among the interviewees.

The low self-esteem in the camps in Sweden

It was clear that all the interviewees either indicated their time in the camp here in Sweden as the worst time for their self-esteem or the second worst time. This is a surprising result, especially when these interviewees come from a war zone, and in the camp, they have security and all their basic needs covered.

To understand the very low level of self-esteem the interviewees had in the camps in Sweden, there is a need for an analysis of the two main pillars of self-esteem according to TMT, the “value” and the “meaning”. The value being the value of the person within the world-value system to which he or she belongs. The meaning is the validity of the world-value system in which the person believes in, in that person's eyes and in the surrounding environment.

When it comes to the value, the interviewees lost almost all their sense of value in the camp. They cannot produce or be effective in the society, they cannot learn the language, and they cannot do anything to help their families. Which means the first pillar of self-esteem according to TMT is destroyed.

As for the meaning of the world value system, as mentioned before, the original world-value system that the interviewees come from is challenged by the new world-value system where they are now. Therefore, the interviewees (migrants), who come from a totally different world-value system which they have been using to cope with the anxiety and fear of death that we all have according to TMT. They are suddenly thrown in a totally new world-value system that praises different aspects and values than their original system.

Now, regardless of the results whether the interviewee (migrant) adapt to the new system and takes value and self-esteem from it or stays with the original system and aspire strength and self-esteem from resisting the new system that is being imposed on him/her. what is happening here is that there is a grace period until the internal decision is made and the new adaptation starts, which could last for years. During that time the interviewee (migrant) is lost between two world-value systems that value and encourage different behavior. With this confusion and loss, the interviewee (migrant) suffers from high decrease in self-esteem and appreciation for his or her abilities because he/she cannot use either systems to draw power, strength, or self-assurance. Thus, the second pillar of self-esteem according to TMT is either destroyed or in a fragile state.

Now, when we look at the elimination of any value from the lives of the interviewees (migrants) in the camps, because they are frozen and cannot contribute in any way, coupled with

the huge shock to their world-value system that usually gives them the standards to make sense of their behavior and themselves. It seems clear that the destruction of the two main pillars of self-esteem would cause this huge dip in the levels of self-esteem among the Syrians in the camps here in Sweden.

This also can be seen from the point of view of the previously mentioned Kim, Hogge, and Salvisberg work about the pressure to assimilate into a new culture. Their work clearly concluded that self-esteem was decreased because of the double stress from the two cultures, and this is happening as well in the case of Syrian migrants in Sweden.

War effect

As mentioned before, the war decreased the self-esteem, but not to the lowest level very often. This can be explained with TMT, because the theory says that when people are faced with probable death, they seek to increase their self-esteem to face the anxiety coming from the situation in front of them. Nevertheless, the existential threat is real and has its toll on the self-esteem. Therefore, between the lowering effect of facing an existential threat and the pursuit of higher self-esteem to face the anxiety from that same threat, the level of self-esteem goes down but stays in most cases higher than it should be.

Moreover, the Syrians self-esteem during war times remained relatively higher than the self-esteem level in the camps in Sweden. Here as well, TMT can explain this surprising result. The Syrian self-esteem during the stay in the camp is brought to its lowest point because, as mentioned before, the migrant cannot have real value by producing and contributing to their surrounding in anyway. And their world value system is challenged by the new surroundings. However, during the war in Syria, and even though they also have limited ability to produce and contribute to their surroundings, the Syrian migrants still had their world value system, represented in their home land and family and friends, to help them draw a meaning for their behavior and actions.

Increasing factors affecting the Self-esteem

Work comes as the most mentioned reason for increased self-esteem by the interviewees. Getting a job or starting a company or succeeding in a career, clearly has a positive impact on the

self-esteem as it gives a sense of value and contribution to the society, plus the financial benefits and the sense of independence that help in boosting the self-esteem. This makes it reasonable that “work” is the most important factor in boosting self-esteem.

However, the fact that “supporting environment” gets the second place among those reasons, and much higher than reasons like “the language”, “future plans”, and “studies”, this is a bit of a surprising result. Nevertheless, TMT can explain this. As mentioned before, the huge change in the world-value system around the interviewees, caused a big shock in their standards for what is valuable and appreciated behavior. In these situations, it makes sense that migrants have the need for a surrounding that can help guide them and confirm that their actions are valuable and correct and encourage them to go forward with it, which makes it understandable why many valued having a supportive people around them. Of course, that is until the time when they regain stability in the world-value system and go back to take value and encouragement from it.

The “supporting environment” importance can be explained also by comparison to Cvajner’s work, where she concluded that migrants used network of migrants from their home country for support and “compensatory recognition” to help them cope. In this sense, the supporting environment that the interviewees valued serve a similar function as the migrants’ network in Cvajner’s study. Not only this study but also the study that took place in the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan that saw improvement in the wellbeing and confidence of Syrian women who received help and support, this study as well help explain the positive effects of the “supporting environment” on the self-esteem of Syrian migrants in Sweden.

Finally, Teixeira and Dias’ study help explain the positive effect of the other factors mentioned by the interviewees, especially the clear future plans, since several of them are repeated in their findings.

Decreasing factors affecting the Self-esteem

The fact that “failed or lack of plans for the future” comes as the most frequent reason for the fall of self-esteem levels, even more than “war” and “negative environment”. This might be explained by looking at the self-esteem from the TMT view, which is a reflection of our sense of control over our environment to reduce the continuous subconscious anxiety coming from our inevitable and eventual death. In this way, when a person does not have a plan for the future because of unpredictable and dangerous circumstances or when existing plans fail with no

alternative, that person loses that control, or at least the sense of control, which leads to a decrease in self-esteem and an increase in anxiety from “death” that gets amplified in the context of war and hazardous trips.

In general, the lowering factors seems to be more spread than the increasing factor, this could be because of the different experiences the interviewees lived and trips they took to come to Sweden. It could also be because everyone identified the negative factors in a different way than others.

Diagram patterns

In this analysis, I tried to look at the stories behind every diagram and link them to the pattern in an attempt to see the patterns clearly and see the characteristics of every patterns. In this attempt, and just like when I tried to find the patterns, the characteristics here are not clear also considering the limited number of diagrams and stories present. Nevertheless, there is a base to work with and establish for future studies to build on and find the characteristics of the patterns of the changes of migrants’ self-esteem.

1. “W” shape:

It represents the people who are aware and actively trying to reach a better situation for themselves. #4 Hasan wants to study to get a better job and place in Sweden and not just work in “skitjobb”.

They start at a good place before the war and go down when it escalates. #13 Amal had a job which she loved before the war and #8 Ziad puts the time before the war as the best time for him.

Then they try to make a comeback, but it seems that the comeback is always limited and unsatisfactory for them and their expectations, which leads them to take the trip to Sweden. #12 Husain started working in Turkey but with limited prospects for the future and no way to go back to Syria, he continued his road with his family to Sweden.

However, there always seems to be a shock from the trip or the initial stages of integration, after which the migrant manages to reestablish him/herself. #5 Maha expressed her shock from Sweden, cold, slow, aging.

This pattern can help us understand the reason behind the migrants' trip to the new land after they met half solutions in their home countries that are still in a state of war, or after meeting a disappointing result in their homeland's neighboring countries.

2. "V" shape:

This shape seems to represent the people who just go with the flow of things. The people who had the "V" shaped diagram are people who just kept going with what was presented in front of them, not giving up, so some of them had a strong character. #10 Abd kept working in Syria in the company where he had a job until the company shut down. #6 Nour was going with her family all the way, even though she has a strong personality and volunteered in many places and found a job eventually.

However, they lack determination or awareness to try and make something happen around them. It is most likely that people with "V" shape diagram came to Europe because "everyone" was doing it and they had the chance to do it so "why not".

3. Continuously rising

The people who got this pattern seemed to be the "maker" kind of people, people who get out and make things happen and do not stop trying, very resourceful people with high determination to accomplish something, they just keep looking forward and towards the next step and do not let anything (almost) take them down.

All three interviewees who presented this pattern kept going upwards, #7 Jad went from participating in the protests to work within the media field, and when he came to Sweden he learned the language quickly, found a job, and shortly after got accepted at the university.

#14 Samer was working in electricity, then joined the free Syrian army, then went to Lebanon and found a good job, then went to Turkey and found a better job, then managed to reach Sweden where he tried several jobs. Eventually he found work at a restaurant, got promoted, and now he is buying an apartment.

#15 Fateh, after he came to Swede, he learned the language in a year, found a job at the municipality, established a successful automobile shop, got married and had a child, now studying at the university.

People with this pattern are most likely high achievers, who even when having a successful job keep looking to do better and expand or change to something of higher tier. These people see opportunities more than issues and manage to make the best of their situation, which is why they kept going forward.

There is a chance that the continuous rise is not an actual rise in self-esteem, but it is the way those people see themselves even though that the level of self-esteem stays the same. However, at the end, it does not matter since their continuous push forward give them successes and those in turn feed their self-esteem.

Conclusion

The research shows that the self-esteem of Syrian migrants in Sweden, in general, goes to a very low levels during their stay in the camps while the migrants are waiting for their residency decisions. Afterwards it starts to go up gradually with every integration step that the migrant takes, like learning the language, finding a job, settling down in their own apartment or house, etc.

When it comes to the low levels of self-esteem in the camps, it seems that the limitations put on the migrants during this time limiting their productivity and advancement, like limitation on learning the language, work, finding a suitable apartment, and traveling, along with the significant difference between the world value systems between Syria and Sweden. These two are causing the self-esteem to fall to such low levels.

Self-esteem is in its turn the main internal factor for the migrants' need to cope with discrimination or racism or other negative encounters in their new surroundings instead of facing them. The fall in self-esteem levels explains the migrants' choice to negotiate their identity in the new country instead of choosing to stand strong on their identities and only allowing it to develop naturally. Of course, this is limited, in most cases, to the first year or couple of years after the migrant arrives to the new country, however, this is constituting a big obstacle to the integration process and delaying it significantly.

The research also showed that the main factors increasing the self-esteem are work and positive and supporting surrounding, while the main decreasing factor is failed or lack of plans for the future, followed by the war and the negative and sabotaging surrounding.

Moreover, the research showed that the war had a strong negative effect on the self-esteem. However, it was, in most cases, smaller than the lowering effects of the time in the camp, most of all because the migrant had the world value system around them during the war, while they lost it during the time in the camp.

Finally, the research showed three basic patterns for the changes of self-esteem of migrants with the "W" shape being the most common pattern.

Future studies

A future study can use the findings in this study and build on the diagrams' patterns. It can use a bigger sample of participants, follow up on their development and integration in the new society longer, explore more personality aspects next to self-esteem, and use more advanced psychological tests and questionnaires and observations to note the changes in the personality traits that it is following, for example the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory or the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

The end goal would be to draw conclusions from the repeated patterns, personality traits, and integration levels, to help develop a predictability scheme where we can use a customized personality test to help us predict the integration pattern of the migrant. This would help us develop a customized plan that suits that specific migrant. Alternatively, the government or the responsible authorities can build a couple of established integration tracks that cover the most common integration patterns.

Improved integration plans

The lack of value, valuable contribution to the society and actions that are deemed worthy in the world-value system, along with the conflict of meaning and clash between the original world-value system and the new world-value system. These two together are causing the collapse of self-esteem in migrants in the camps and it is slowing their integration process after leaving the camps.

Now, based on the TMT and the results of the research, we suggest the following system for integration, starting from the camp phase, to help migrants overcome the challenges they face during the initial phases after coming to the host country:

This plan works on two sides; the first is by increasing the value: Starting from the camps, opportunities should be provided to migrants to contribute to the societies around them. These contributions should be real and meaningful and has clear effects on their surroundings. Moreover, it is not enough for those contributions to be effective and valuable, but also, they should be advertised as such in public. Such advertisement would give a clear signal to the migrants that their contributions are valued and appreciated and do have a meaning. On top of that, the advertisement would help the hosting society see the value of the migrants and the importance of

their contributions, which would motivate the hosting society to accept the migrants more and help integrate them into the new society faster and more effectively. Because the integration process needs both sides to take steps towards the other for it to happen, the migrants must step forward and the hosting society must accept and take them.

The second side for the plan is decreasing the meaning clash between the world value systems: When looking closely at the main reasons that caused an increase in self-esteem levels, we can notice that they are common to most world-value systems. We can use that fact to do the classical move when trying to get different people or entities to come closer together, which is focusing on the common aspects among them. The way to do this is to build a temporary transitional world-value system and surround the migrants with it. This world-value system should be a bit basic and focuses on the main common values that most people share, like the value of work and studies, and the importance of honesty and respect. By focusing on these aspects and highlighting them as common places and values between the hosting society and migrants, we can help ease the migrants into accepting the new world-value system, or at least respect it, and negate the inevitability for any conflict by showing the possibility for both world-value systems existing together without a clash. This would also help the hosting society accept the migrants and their original world-value system, if the highlighting of the common grounds is done on a larger scale with the rest of the society.

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Appendices

Appendix I - Info sheet

Highest points

Now in Sweden 9

In Syria at the start and also now 2

In Syria at the very start 2

In between Syria and Sweden 1

In Syria during the events 1

Lowest points

At the very start in Syria 1

In the camp 5

In Syria during the war 4

In between Syria and Sweden 4

Now in Sweden 1

Diagram patterns

Continuously rising 3

W 7

V 4

No clear pattern 1

Increasing reasons

- Work 11
- Family 5
- Language 6
- Studies 6
- Challenges 2
- Stability 6
- Future 6
- Security 6
- Political engagement 2
- Financial stability 2
- Positive and supportive surrounding 9
- Justice and equal opportunities 2
- Doing effective steps and getting tangible results 1
- Having a higher purpose 2
- Independence 1
- Freedom 1

Decreasing reasons

- Negative surrounding 7
- Financial situation 2
- Family 3
- Failed or no plans 9
- Instability 3
- Powerlessness 4
- Worthlessness 1
- Fear 4
- Hopelessness 3
- Insecurity 4
- Death 3
- Studies 5
- Racism 4
- War 7
- Work 3

Appendix II - Interviews' data

Link to the diagrams of the interviews:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1xIBCf6zKvAe9-NY-V-ZZeID94rwflwB?usp=sharing>

Link to the summaries of the interviews:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1IZ_aft5XmlJ1_V1BmaPk1xbHVB4PKKZ?usp=sharing