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ACCESSING HOUSING: THE STRATEGIES OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN BERLIN

Charlotte Günther

ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to analyse Syrian refugees' access to housing in Berlin. Although there is existing scholarship on the initial reception of asylum seekers in the European Union, there is a lack of research on the refugees' access to housing after their asylum was granted. Once refugees are granted asylum in Germany, they are supposed to find independent housing on their own, financially supported by the state. In a context of housing shortages and increasing rents in the housing market in Berlin, in addition to multiple forms of discrimination, Syrian refugees are obliged to develop strategies to access individual and decentralized housing. Using the notions of *fields*, *habitus*, and *capital* by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, this thesis seeks to investigate what strategies Syrian refugees employ to find housing and how the particular structures in which these individuals are embedded influences their access to housing.

ABSTRACT (GERMAN)

Diese Arbeit untersucht den Zugang von syrischen Flüchtlingen zu Wohnungen in Berlin. Obwohl bereits Forschung zur Erstaufnahme von Asylbewerbern in der Europäischen Union besteht, mangelt es an Forschung über den Zugang von Flüchtlingen zu Wohnraum, nachdem ihr Asyl gewährt wurde. Sobald Geflüchteten in Deutschland Asyl gewährt wird, sollen sie eigenständig wohnen, finanziell unterstützt vom Staat. Vor dem Hintergrund von Wohnungsknappheit und Mietsteigerungen auf dem Wohnungsmarkt in Berlin sind syrische Flüchtlinge neben vielfältigen Formen der Diskriminierung verpflichtet, Strategien für den Zugang zu individuellen und dezentralen Wohnungen zu entwickeln. Mit den Begriffen von Feld, Habitus und Kapital des französischen Soziologen Pierre Bourdieu soll in dieser Arbeit untersucht werden, welche Strategien syrische Flüchtlinge bei der Wohnungssuche anwenden und wie die jeweiligen Strukturen, in denen diese Individuen eingebettet sind, ihren Zugang zu Wohnraum beeinflussen.

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I.   INTRODUCTION

Problem statement

Thousands of refugees were granted asylum in the European Union over the past few years, many of which were women.
 As centres for economic, cultural and social opportunities, cities, especially capital cities have been the preferred destinations of many refugees seeking a new place to live.
Legally, in most countries in the EU, refugees who have been granted asylum are considered *migrants* and are entitled with to the right to work and to find their own accommodation. This phase of settlement (immediately after being granted asylum) is a difficult one, particularly in regard to housing, as it is highly dependent on the housing context of the receiving country.

As stated in a Housing Europe report "especially major cities face a structural housing shortage reinforced by recent waves of migration". (Housing Europe, 2017)
Furthermore, the city network Solidarity Cities claims that "overburdened housing markets and shelter facilities make homelessness and exploitation of migrants particularly problematic" (Eurocities, 2015, 13).
The International Federation of Housing and Planning reported on the housing situation of refugees who were granted asylum in cities, finding that, in general, refugees face different obstacles than local population when they search for housing in the EU.
The study found that current challenges of finding suitable housing for refugees are:
- lower or non-existent housing and social support subsidies
- stigmatisation and discrimination in the housing market
- complex allocation process (International Federation for Housing and Planning, 2015)

The limited availability of public and social housing leads the citie's local government and the refugees themselves to rely on the private rental housing market. This situation results in a condition of dependence where the refugee has to rely on the goodwill of either private landlords or social organisations who are willing to help with the search for housing, with the payment of a deposit or assist with the administrative tasks (International Federation for Housing and Planning, 2015).
In addition to the aforementioned structural housing restrictions, refugees are also faced with a lack of local cultural knowledge, language barriers, and, in most cases, long and arduous bureaucratic procedures before even being granted asylum.

Moreover, the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment in the public discourse has lead to an increase of the discrimination, not only in the public realm but also in the private housing market.
Nevertheless, housing is a basic human need and, arguably, one of the first steps of inclusion into a new society. Therefore, to facilitate their settlement in a new city, refugees take

initiative to develop strategies and establish networks in order to access housing. When faced with unfavourable structural conditions, the agency, tactics, and knowledge implemented to achieve the desired result (in this case, finding housing) become crucial.

Research question and hypothesis

This thesis seeks to answer the following research questions:

> *What are the strategies employed by Syrian refugees in Berlin to access the housing market?*

> *How are the structural conditions shaping these strategies?*

In investigating the strategies of Syrian refugees with granted asylum to access the housing market of Berlin, this thesis seeks to find out which barriers and opportunities refugees encountered during the process of accessing the housing market.

As will be shown in the methodology section, the Syrian interviewees are all under 40 years old. This sample of Syrian refugees is meant to show the early stages of settlement in Berlin for individuals from their young adult years to individuals in their adult years. All of them, though, are potentially economically active. This gives the possibility to compare the strategies developed by individuals that are not too different with regards to access to the housing and labour market.

Structure of the work

The thesis is structured in the following way. The **first chapter** will present a literature review on housing for refugees and on networks and social capital in migration and refugee studies. The **second chapter** is the theoretical framework, outlining the concepts on which the empirical analysis, namely, the notions of Field, Habitus and Capitals from the theory of practice by Pierre Bourdieu. **Chapter three** explains the methodology of the research, including the choice of Berlin as a case study, the methods used, the presentation of the interview partners, and the limitations of the research process.

Chapter four marks the start of the empirical portion of the research and presents the legal framework for refugees in Germany and Berlin. **Chapter five** takes the perspective of the different stakeholders (public officials and social organisations) to explain the complex field of the Berliner housing market.

Chapters six, seven and eight are written from the perspective of the interviewed Syrian refugees. This is a choice made to put the Syrian interviewees in the centre of the analysis and the chapters are structured chronologically in order to display the "typical" trajectory that a refugee with granted asylum undergoes in Germany.

Chapter nine is a discussion of the results of the analysis and concluding remarks.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Housing for refugees

This section provides an overview of recent research concerning housing for refugees. Regarding housing in general, Zavisca and Gerber state: "As a key space for everyday life and family dynamics, a basis for consumer lifestyles, and a point of connection to communities, the home has tremendous potential to shape subjective well-being, family formation decisions, and political orientations and activism." (Zavisca and Gerber, 2016, 348)

Developing a feeling of home is important in the early stages of the settlement of refugees. The early phase of settlement may have an impact on the later integration. (Korntheuer, Pritchard and Maehler, 2017)

Trends that are bringing instability to refugee settlement are:
- short-term accommodations
- insecure tenancies
- forms of dispersal strategies.

Craig also notices, however, that there is a paucity in academic research and literature on housing for refugees (Craig, 2015).

Furthermore, research on housing is often focused on the policies/housing system and less on the individuals/the applicants that should be considered as main actors in the housing field. Different studies and papers have been published in recent years relating housing to social integration (Ager and Strang, 2008; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2013) These are mainly based on the conceptual framework developed by Ager and Strang to understand integration (Ager and Strang, 2008). These studies emphasize the fact that appropriate and stable housing is crucial not only for the structural integration but also for the overall early integration of refugees in the host society. In academic literature on integration, housing is considered as one aspect of the structural integration of refugees. Housing has a well-known positive effect on refugees physical and emotional well-being. (Biehl, 2015). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees report of 2013 offers a comparative view on different housing policies directed at refugees and asylum seekers (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2013).

Another comparative study puts in perspective the structural context of integration in Germany and Canada and focuses a chapter on the access to housing. From this study, it becomes clear how the legal framework for housing is organised in Canada and Germany and how the structural shortage of housing in Germany and particularly in Berlin is preventing refugees to access housing (Korntheuer, Pritchard and Maehler, 2017).

On housing linked to migration or refugees, research has focussed on migration, superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007), and housing in specific neighbourhoods. This research by Biehl which looks at the spaces of living at several scales, from the neighbourhood to the individual homes and analyses these spaces through the lens of superdiversity (Biehl, 2015).

More recent research, published since 2011, has followed Syrians refugees and their settlement in European countries. For example, Wendy Pearlman who looked at the challenges of bureaucracy for Syrians and their settlement in Germany in 2017. She concentrates on three domains that are relevant in the settlement of refugees: housing, legal status and work. Pearlman takes, as a focus of research, the experiences of refugees *themselves*. This perspective is rather rare in refugee studies as they often tend to ignore the personal view of the analysed social group (Pearlman, 2017)

In Germany in particular, a comparative study on the accommodation of refugees has been published in 2014, which interprets the various legal frameworks and standards of accommodations in different federal states (Wendel, 2014).

Nihad El-Khayed and Ulrike Hamann published a study about the access to housing for refugees in Germany. They particularly focused on border regimes and their appearance in different barriers refugees encounter when they search for housing. They contrasted policies, housing market barriers and discriminatory practices with perspectives of refugees and volunteers and their strategies to cope with the structural constraints they are facing. (Hamann and El-Kayed, 2018).

Fouroutan et al. in 2017 studied the potentials present in different housing forms for female refugees in Berlin and Dresden in Germany and which barriers and threats they encountered (Fouroutan *et al.*, 2017). The authors conclude that due to the conditions facing women in refugee shelters (lack of privacy, fear, feel of insecurity) the rapid access to an individual apartment should be the priority when it comes to accommodating refugees who are granted asylum. Furthermore, in order to get access to individual apartments, refugees need intensive support to navigate the structural barriers they encounter in the housing market (Fouroutan *et al.*, 2017).

In summary, most studies published on refugees and housing concentrate more on policies and less on the actors in the housing market. Consequently, this research seeks to close the gap by focusing more on the perspectives of refugees in the housing market and the structural barriers they face. Furthermore, there has been no recent study on the specific strategies that refugees develop in order to access the housing market after they have been granted asylum.

On networks and social capital in migration studies

A large number of studies about migrants and refugees aim to assess the significance of social networks and social capital or ties that migrants establish in the host society. Social capital is defined as a set of resources that can be accessed through social relationship and networks (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998). Some studies assume that the networks and links with the ethnic communities aid the arrival in the new society by giving them trust, opportunities and creating social capital (Boyd, 1989; Portes, 2001).

However, lately, other studies have been trying to deconstruct the meaning of social capital and networks, concentrating more on how the networks are created and how they evolve over time after the arrival in the new society (Ryan *et al.*, 2008; Ryan, 2011). Social capital has been theorized in different ways over the years, most notably by authors such as Bourdieu (1986), and Coleman (1990), and more recently, Putnam (2000). Bourdieu's notion of social capital will be explained further in the theoretical framework that will be used for the analysis of the empirical material.

Migrant networks and migrant social capital is often taken for granted. However, research in migration studies has provided evidence that the participation and access to networks is dependent on factors such as class, gender and ethnicity (Ryan, Erel and D'Angelo, 2015, 5). Anthias looked at the "mobilizability" of social capital (Anthias, 2007) which is linked to the dependence of the access on factors such as class, gender and ethnicity and refers to how much social capital an individual can mobilize.

In his theory, Putnam makes a distinction between bonding and bridging ties. Bonding ties are the links to individuals who are very similar and bridging ties are the links to individuals who are very different (Putnam, 2000). This distinction has been important in migration studies because the bridging ties have been seen as valuable, representing links to the host society, whereas bonding ties have been seen in the scholarship as detrimental due to a fear of the formation of "ethnic enclaves" (Ryan, Erel and D'Angelo, 2015).

> "Rather than following Putnam and differentiating bonding and bridging primarily on the basis of the similarity or dissimilarity of the people involved, a case has been made for focusing instead on the meaning as well as the structure of networks – that is, on the specific relationship between the actors, their relative social location and their available resources" (Ryan, Erel and D'Angelo, 2015, 7)

Coleman's work was centred around the idea of mutual trust and constraint within exclusive networks. In particular he looked at the forms of resources and the range of the availability in relation to norms and constraints in specific networks (Coleman, 1988). However, there has been critique about the positive view that Coleman had towards the "closed networks" he had identified in his research (Ryan, Erel and D'Angelo, 2015).

A recent study looked at the use of social capital by Syrian refugees in Germany in order to enter the German labour market (Gericke *et al.*, 2018). The authors identified forms of vertical and horizontal bonding and bridging social capital. They found a positive value in vertical bridging capital – links to people that are different and with different social backgrounds – and a rather negative value in horizontal bonding social capital – links to people that are very similar and with the same social background (Gericke *et al.*, 2018).

After a review of the current scholarly literature, it appears there is no analysis of the strategies of Syrian refugees accessing the housing market in Berlin with the use of the theoretical framework of Bourdieu and his notions of field, capital and habitus. Hence, this is what this thesis will seek to accomplish.

After having explored two fields of research in refugee and migration studies, namely housing and social networks, the theoretical framework for the analysis will follow in the next section. Here, Bourdieu's theory of practice and more specifically his notions of field, habitus and capitals will be used to analyse the empirical material. While the work of Bourdieu did not focus specifically on the experiences of migrants or refugees, his theory can help us understand the barriers that refugees may encounter when accessing certain networks and fields.

Around the time where Bourdieu developed his theory of practice, Giddens wrote about his theory of structuration which also tries to go beyond the dichotomy of structure and agency in the form of the theory of structuration (Giddens, 1984). However, while Giddens theory is abstract and difficult to apply to specific cases, Bourdieu's theory proves to be more practical and applicable analysing the case of the housing access for Syrian refugees in Berlin.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of strategies

This thesis uses a notion of strategy that has been developed has been first developed as "survival strategies" and looked at how marginalized individuals handle their resources in inventive ways in order to cope with difficult situations (Datta *et al.*, 2007)
"These strategies interconnect in various and multiple ways as a result of internal and external household circumstances, geography and wider economic conditions" (Datta *et al.*, 2007, 406).

Lately, a lot of research on coping and survival strategies has been done in migration studies, focussing on the integration and the well-being of migrants in host societies (Datta *et al.*, 2007). As in the words of Crow: "Individuals, just as any other social actor, may develop strategies, but in doing so they will be influenced by their gender, class, professional mores, and various other key sociological variables." (Crow, 1989, 11)

This thesis thus uses strategies as fluctuating arrangements which are influenced by structural constraints and individual variables such as gender, class, etc. Using such a notion of strategies goes well with the use of Bourdieu's notions of field, habitus and capitals, as the individual strategies are influenced by and further developed through the interaction of the Bourdieusian sociological variables.

Bourdieu's theory of practice

In an effort to reject the dichotomy of objectivism and subjectivism prevalent in the field of social sciences, the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's aim was to analyse the "dialectical relationship between structure and agency". Harker et al. describe Bourdieu's method as "generative structuralism" (Harker, Mahar and Wilkes, 2016). The way Bourdieu developed his ideas was circular: throughout his entire academic carrier, he shifted his focus from theory to empirical work and back to theory again (Harker, Mahar and Wilkes, 2016).

Influenced by, among others, Marx, Durkheim and Weber and developing a "dialectical analysis of practical life" (Harker, Mahar and Wilkes, 2016, 3), Bourdieu seeks to analyse the "interplay between personal economic practice and the 'external' world of class history and social practice" (Harker, Mahar and Wilkes, 2016, 3).

Bourdieu's work is not limited to the analysis of the interactions between actors but rather looks at the origins of social structures and the forms of habitus of the individuals present in these social structures. Concepts which are particularly important in Bourdieu's analytical framework are fields, habitus and capital, concepts he uses to explain practice or strategies

of individual actors. These concepts will be explained further in the following section.

Fields

The field in Bourdieu's theory is a "field of forces, but also a field of struggle for positions within it" (Harker, Mahar and Wilkes, 2016, 8). A field is created when individuals are in a situation in which they try to acquire the dominant position, by acquisition and use of specific capitals, in a certain field of activity.
Agents and institutions in the field interact with each other following specific rules that are particular to the field (Walther, 2014). The rules are incorporated by the agents in order to apply specific practices (Walther, 2014).

The position of an agent of the field depends on the distinct capitals upon which he can draw. To gain a certain position, the agent needs to put in practice individual strategies that will grant him access or secure his position. "*Fields are at all times defined by a system of objective relations of power between social positions which correspond to a system of objective relations between symbolic points*" (Harker, Mahar and Wilkes, 2016, 8). Numerous fields are comprised in the notion of social space defined by Bourdieu. In his own words:

> "*The structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices.*"
> (Bourdieu, 1986, 46)

The housing market thus can be characterized as a field where different individuals put their capitals in use to acquire a position of power and access this specific field. After having guaranteed their access, agents secure their position within the field of the housing market, using their capital and accumulating new capital.
As Bourdieu states: "The structure of the field, i.e., the unequal distribution of capital, is the source of the specific effects of capital, i.e., the appropriation of profits and the power to impose the laws of functioning of the field most favourable to capital and its reproduction." (Bourdieu, 1986, 49)

Actors within the field of the housing market in Berlin analysed in this thesis include the city government, the housing administrations and landlords, the NGOs providing help to find housing and the Syrian refugees themselves. All of these agents hold capitals and resources that they activate in order to secure or change their relative position in the field.

Habitus

Bourdieu's sociology aimed to partly explain the ways in which social actors acquire perceptions and dispositions that vary according to the conditions they are in. The habitus, according to Bourdieu is a set of principles and interiorized rules that generate every thought, perceptions, and actions within a social group at any given time and place (Harker, Mahar and Wilkes, 2016). Thus, the individual is not always acting rationally, nor is he always measuring the consequences of his acts. That said, the action is also not necessarily unconscious; there is a possibility of transforming the social world.

> *"The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them." (Bourdieu, 1990, 53)*

The actor has the capacity of reproducing, innovating and inventing within the framework of the preestablished rules and structure she is operating in.
The habitus can evolve depending on the changing of the conditions of the individuals.
"Habitus is intimately linked to 'capital' in that some habitus (those of dominant social and cultural fractions) act as multipliers of various kinds of capital, and in fact constitute a form of capital (symbolic) in and of themselves" (Harker, Mahar and Wilkes, 2016, 12).
The social actors seem to limit their subjective aspirations to achieve objective ends that they are able to attain. The actor is neither reacting to different situations in a completely spontaneous way nor is he totally restrained by any given structure; rather, he is guided by his habitus that Bourdieu describes (Mounier, 2001). To innovate, invent or act on a situation, the actor uses different forms of capital in accordance to his own habitus.

Bourdieu distinguishes the individual habitus and the class habitus or the group habitus. The group habitus is the collective habitus of a certain group of individuals. The collective habitus is composed of the specific history of this group, and thus tends to homogenise the individual member's habitus. These individuals with a relatively homogeneous habitus form a social class, as define by Bourdieu. While each individual still has an individual habitus based on their personal trajectory, however it is influenced by the collective habitus of the social group the individual is a member of (Mounier, 2001).

The notion of habitus can be related to the Syrian refugees in the sense that they have a certain incorporated individual habitus because of their personal trajectory (study, socio-economical background, gender) but also an incorporated group habitus for being part of a certain social group (Syrians in Europe as refugees). The Syrian refugees thus react to

situations and use different strategies also according to their habitus.

Bourdieu's definition of capital is comprised of *cultural capital* including education or language, *economic capital*, such as monetary resources and *social capital,* which is defined as a set of social relationships.
"The various types of capital can be exchanged for other types of capital – that is, capital is 'convertible'" (Harker, Mahar and Wilkes, 2016, 13)

Economic capital

The capital in Bourdieu's sociological theory is strongly related to the economic notion of capital; that is, capital is cumulable, transmittable, and can be invested to achieve the best possible outcome (Bonnewitz, 1997). To Bourdieu, economic capital is the set of economical resources that an individual can draw from.

Applying Bourdieu's concept to the subject of this research, namely Syrian refugees, one can understand economic capital as the set of economic resources that are mobilizable in the field of the housing market. These resources, are, in most cases relatively limited since most of the interviewed individuals are receiving social benefits from the state and are dependent on the administration for rent allowance.

Still, this reality of economic dependence among Syrian refugees is important to look at; some interesting particularities emerged during this study and will be discussed further in the empirical analysis. Economic capital is seemingly one of the most important capitals to possess in the housing market field for the (obvious) reason of having the financial resources to pay rent and prove financial independence to landlors and housing companies.

Nonetheless, as Bourdieu explains, other forms of capital "*can be derived from economic capital, but only at the cost of a more or less great effort of transformation, which is needed to produce the type of power effective in the field in question*" (Bourdieu, 2011, 51), it is thus valuable to look at other forms of capital, particularly when an individual does not have a significant economic capital on which to draw.

Cultural capital

Cultural capital has three forms:

- The embodied state: the set of knowledge, not only through education but also through the social belonging
- The objectified state: the set of cultural properties

- The institutionalized state: diploma that translate the validation of parts of the cultural capital by an institution (Bourdieu, 1986)

In the case of this research, cultural capital is mainly related to language competencies as resources of communication with the host society. Furthermore, cultural capital can include specific cultural knowledge (way of communicating with landlords and housing companies, knowledge about different websites on where to search for housing) upon which an individual can draw to gain access to the housing market; This form of cultural capital could offer housing opportunities that may differ from those achieved by employing economic capital.

Social capital

Social capital is the set of capitals that an individual can mobilize through his social relations.

> *"Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition." (Bourdieu, 2011, 51)*

This form of capital depends on the mobilisation of networks by an individual and on the amount of capital owned by those who are is part of these social networks (Bourdieu, 2011). In the words of Bourdieu, this means that *"social capital is never completely independent (…) because the exchanges instituting mutual acknowledgment presuppose the reacknowledgement of a minimum of objective homogeneity, and because it exerts a multiplier effect on the capital he possesses in his own right."* (Bourdieu, 2011, 51)

This idea of homogeneity means that agents are connecting socially to individuals that have similar predispositions when it comes to other forms of capital or resources. In Bourdieu's sociological theory, this homogeneity is mostly related to social class but in the case of this research, it can be extended to, for instance, ethnicity or legal status.

Furthermore, Portes states in relation to Bourdieu: "His treatment of the concept is instrumental, focusing on the benefits accruing to individuals by virtue of participation in groups and on the deliberate construction of sociability for the purpose of creating this resource" (Portes, 1998, 3). In this sense, an analysis of Syrian refugees' strategies to access housing for refugees will also shed light on the social networks and social capital of the interviewees their *deliberate construction of sociability* to access the housing market.

Considering the dialectical relationship between structure and agency, the theoretical framework of Bourdieu's theory of practice is useful to analyse the strategies of Syrian refugees to access the field of the housing in market in Berlin within a framework of

constraints that will be explained in the chapters four and five of this thesis.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This master thesis seeks to answer the following research questions: *What are the strategies employed by Syrian refugees to access the housing market in Berlin? How are the structural conditions in Berlin shaping these strategies?* In order to uncover and analyse the strategies of Syrian refugees in Berlin to access the housing market within a given structural and legal framework, a qualitative research approach has been chosen. This chapter will introduce the research process and the methods used to answer the research questions.

Choice of the case

Berlin has been marked by a large influx of Syrian refugees since 2015 on (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018). The German government is providing financial support to every asylum seeker and refugee with granted asylum until an individual is able to sustain herself (BAMF, 2016c). These social welfare benefits are linked to several obligations from the refugees, for instance, attending regular meetings at administrative offices (BAMF, 2017). When the refugee is granted asylum, the state withdrawals its provision of temporary accommodation and expects the refugee to find housing on his own. This feat may prove difficult as the Berlin housing market is characterized by a significant housing shortage and increasing rents, an issue that will be discussed in the following section.

It is at this moment, when refugees are granted asylum, that they no longer receive practical support from the state and are forced to develop strategies to find their own housing. It is for this reason that Berlin offers an interesting location to study the housing strategies of Syrian refugees to access housing: the state is relatively present in the lives of first-arrival by offering social benefits, but then quickly withdrawals its supportive position, leaving the refugees to face the challenge of finding housing within a particularly overheated housing market.

As "qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2013, 40), this thesis is taking an actor-centred approach and puts the Syrian refugees in the centre of the research. This thesis, therefore, seeks to understand refugees; perspectives of their housing experiences in Berlin and the strategies they develop to face this challenging environment.

Methods and data analysis

The main method used in this research were qualitative interviews with different actors. In addition, several legal and policy documents have been reviewed in order to comprehend the asylum procedure and policies on housing applicable to refugees with granted asylum in Berlin.

To understand the housing policies for refugees in Berlin and explore how initiatives in Berlin help refugees with granted asylum to access the housing market, three local organisations that help refugees to find housing have been interviewed. The interviews were semi-structured in order to give the interviewees the chance to talk more about the subjects they found more important.

Eleven interviews with Syrian refugees (four women, seven men) with granted asylum have been conducted in Berlin, including one interview with a female Syrian PhD student in Berlin, who talked about her experiences of searching for a flat, revealing that she encountered similar problems as the Syrians with a refugee status. All the interviews were ranging from semi-structured to unstructured in order to give the interviewee the most space to talk freely about their experiences. The interviews have been conducted in German and English, depending on the preference of the interviewees. The interviewees will be presented briefly at the end of this chapter.

To complement the stakeholder side of the analysis, a written structured interview (by e-mail) has been conducted with the head of the coordination unit for the management of refuges in the Berlin Senate.

In order to make sense about "structures of meaning-making" and "describe issues in the field of structures and processes in routines and processes" (Flick, 2013, 5), all the interviews have been transcribed. However, as Flick states: "There is in fact no transcription notation system capable of providing to the researcher a completely accurate and comprehensive narrative of the original performance: all transcription is in principle *selective* and entails the inevitable risk of systematic *bias* of one kind or another" (Flick, 2013, 66). Nonetheless, the transcriptions were produced in the original language of the interview and quotes were translated (from German to English) to be inserted in the main text.

Transcriptions of the interviews with the NGOs and the Coordinator for the Management of Refugees have been used to describe and understand the housing market in Berlin, the housing policies applicable to refugees with granted asylum, the positions of power held by different actors, and the barriers that refugees encounter in the housing market.

Transcription of the interviews with the ten Syrian refugees and one Syrian PHD student have been coded and categorized to help inform a structured analysis.

The categories used were:
- Knowledge about their own legal status and about the housing market
- Perceived barriers or opportunities to access the housing market
- Quality of housing / Living conditions / Neighbourhood
- Contacts to Germans / Contacts to ethnic community/family
- (In)stability
- Informality
- Language skills
- Aspirations

Choice and presentation of the sample

Several organisations helping refugees to access housing were contacted; three organisations agreed to provide interviews. The participating NGOs, as listed below, were chosen not only based on their consent, but also because of their unique missions and roles in refugee settlement in different neighbourhoods of Berlin:
- AG Wohnungssuche is an organisation working entirely on an honorary basis. The volunteers are offering counselling sessions for refugees once every two weeks in different locations in the neighbourhood of Neukölln. They started their activity in 2015 when they saw that a lot of refugees needed help accessing the housing market. They also offer individual mentoring and financial help (funding coming from donations) in rare cases. They are affiliated to the "*Bündnis Neukölln*" which is an alliance for democracy, respect and diversity in the neighbourhood (Bündnis Neukölln, 2018). The interview was conducted with two volunteers of the organisation, in a cultural centre in Neukölln (June 13th, 2018).
- The working group "housing" of Xenion (psychosocial counselling for politically persecuted individuals) offers one-on-one counselling for refugees in the neighbourhood of Schöneberg in Berlin. Bea Fünfrocken is employed one day a week for these counselling sessions. They also organize tandems where a refugee is accompanied by a German person for the entire process of searching for an apartment (Xenion e.V., 2018). The interview was conducted in Bea Fünfrocken's office in Schöneberg (June 14th, 2018).
- InteraXion is a welcoming office for migrants and refugees located in Treptow-Köpenick in Berlin. The office offers counselling for refugees in the housing research, for social and asylum issues and the integration into the labour market. Katharina Stökl is employed full-time and offers counselling twice a week for the housing-related questions (InteraXion, 2018). The interviews was conducted in Katharina Stöckl's office in Treptow-Köpenick (February 1st, 2018)

Sybill Schulz, the head of the coordination unit for the management of refuges in the Berlin Senate has been interviewed to get the perspective of an employee of the Berlin Senate and an overview of the housing policies that apply to refugees with granted asylum. The coordination unit works towards an improvement of the living conditions of refugees in Berlin by working with institutions, initiatives and housing administrations to provide better housing solutions for refugees.

The Syrian refugees interviewed will be presented below. The author had worked with Syrians in the past, therefore, some of the interviews were conducted with former colleagues. The remaining interviewees were found through acquaintances and Syrian Facebook-pages. Due to some limitations that will be explained more in the next section, the interviewees mainly have a university degree or had been students in Syria. All of them spoke English or German in order to avoid the reliance on a translator. The interviewees are aged from 21 to 39 years old.

This, as explained in the presentation of the research question, gives the possibility to assess the strategies of Syrian refugees who are in intermediate ages and can potentially enter the labour market. Furthermore, the experiences of migration, settlement and inclusion and the mobilization of capital are not too different which makes a comparison between the interviewees possible.

The Syrian refugees interviewed were mainly chosen according to their legal status (granted asylum) and the time they have been in Germany (approximately three years) to be able to draw effective comparisons.

The names of all the Syrian interviewees have been replaced with pseudonyms to maintain anonymity. The choice to use pseudonyms instead of number was made to reflect the mission of the thesis: that refugees are to be viewed as *persons with agency* rather than be reduced to statistical data. Next, the interviewees will be presented individually to provide insight into the different individuals interviewed for this research:

Sanaa is 31 years old and came as a refugee from Damascus in 2015 with her husband and her brother. She was a lawyer in Syria. Sanaa and her husband came to Germany to flee the war, and specifically to Berlin because her brother was already living in the city.

Besher (25) is from Aleppo and studied English Literature in Latakia, Syria. He did not want to do the military service so he left for Turkey to start a new life there. After realizing that it would be hard to find a job without knowing the language and being afraid to lose too much of his savings, he decided to cross the border into Bulgaria, where he stayed for 6 months. After gaining residency status in Bulgaria, he started travelling on the Balkan Road to Germany in 2015.

Anas is 28 years old and he worked as a musician and engineer in Damascus, Syria. Like most of the young men his age, he had to choose between the military service or fleeing from Syria. As he is Palestinian-Syrian, he was not permitted to get a Visa for Turkey. Still, he managed to cross the border illegally to Turkey and made 10 sperate attempts to cross the Mediterranean Sea to reach Greece. Finally, he travelled by plane from Turkey to Europe with forged papers.

Hakim is 27 years old and had studied Economics for two years in Syria He came to Berlin in January 2014 with his family (mother, father and four siblings). The whole family made their way on land and sea to Greece from where they could take a plane directly to Germany.

Arwa arrived in Berlin in 2016 thanks to an approved family reunification demand issued by her husband who was already living in Berlin. She studied economics in Damascus. She is 27 years old.

Asli is a 30 years old PhD student in Architecture. She arrived in Germany with a student Visa and first moved to the city of Cottbus located in a federal state east of Berlin. She then moved to Berlin in 2017 to study at Humboldt University. Although Asli is not in Germany as a refugee, her story is still relevant to gain insight into the female perspective of a housing research and accommodation in Germany.

Othman is 23 and came to Berlin in the summer 2015. He studied Literature at the University of Damascus. He was under surveillance in Syria because he had been helping to flee to Jordan. He then travelled to Turkey where he struggled with language and limited job prospects until finally arriving in Europe.

Mehdi is 21 years old and comes from Aleppo in Syria. In the beginning of our discussion, he emphasized the fact that he is Kurdish but not a nationalist. His family originally comes from Afrin. After waiting one year for a visa in Turkey that never was approved, he travelled by sea to Greece and arrived in Germany in 2015.

Yassin is a 31 years old Palestinian-Syrian. His family flew from Palestine when the state of Israel was created in 1948. As a Palestinian-Syrian, it was complicated for him to travel in the Middle East; he expresses joy for the freedom of movement he gained after obtaining asylum status in Germany. He has a Masters in Applied Linguistics and worked as a university professor. He left Syria to avoid the military service and came to Germany because his siblings were already living there. Germany was also convenient for him due to the opportunity of enrolling in a PhD program. He applied for family reunification for his fiancée, but by the time of the interview, he was still waiting for an answer.

Jamila is 28 years old and comes from Damascus. She studied Business Management and worked for two years as a HR administrator in Qatar. She already had to leave Syria in 2012

due to troubles with the government. The work and living conditions in Qatar were very difficult, so she decided to go to Germany to meet her brother and uncle who were already there.

Nazmi is 39, he is from Syria and arrived Germany in 2015 with his wife. In Damascus, he used to work as a business administrator in a factory and had his owned an import-export company.

Limitations in the research process

The initial idea for this thesis was to adopt a gender-sensitive approach and compare the strategies and barriers encountered on the housing market in Berlin for Syrian female and male refugees. However, the search for women to conduct interviews was more difficult than expected for two main reasons, save for the fact that there are less female refugees living in Berlin than male refugees. First, the majority of the interviews were conducted during the month of June 2018, which was the month of Ramadan for Muslims. As many of the women the author reached out to were Muslim, they were very reluctant to answer interview questions during this month. The most recurring response was they had no time for an interview as they had to prepare for the Iftar (Fast-breaking during Ramadan). Secondly, it was difficult to even get in contact with Syrian women, apart from those related to or known by the male interviewees. Research on Syrian Facebook-groups brought responses only from men. As a result, there are only three female refugees and one Syrian PhD student in the sample of interviewees, so an effective comparison between men and women was difficult to achieve.

The second limitation was the fact that it was almost impossible to access Syrian refugees from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Trying to access interview partners without any initial link (through friends or acquaintances) was difficult because of a lack of trust in the researcher and suspicion of the rather personal interview questions. Asking organisations that work with refugees did not bring any results either, as they did not want to "betray" the trust they had gained with their clients. For these reasons, the interviewees had to be selected mainly from a pre-existing network.
Nevertheless, the sample of Syrian interviewees is diverse in other ways: pre-existing contacts in Germany upon arrival, language skills and pre-existing knowledge about Europe and Germany.

Furthermore, as Creswell states: "Researchers recognize that their own backgrounds shape their interpretation, and they position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their personal, cultural, and historical experiences" (Creswell, 2013, 46). The researcher did her best to be conscious of her own positionality: being European,

having no refugee background, being privileged in many ways in Western society, and being conscious about codes and rules of conduct. In the sense of Bourdieu, the researcher recognized that her specific habitus and different capitals to draw upon were different to those of her Syrian interviewees. To help the interviewees feel at ease, the interviews were all set in places selected by the interviewees themselves. Furthermore, the questions were rather open to give them the opportunity to choose what topics they would like to spend more time. Finally, every interview began with a statement from the interviewer permitting the interviewee to avoid any question at any time the interviewee felt uncomfortable.

V. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Refugees in Germany and in Berlin

According to the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention:

> *"A refugee (…) is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion." (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1951).*

Thus, as Syria is a country at war, Syrians who come to Germany are considered refugees following the 1951 Convention.

Due to the ongoing war and the mandatory military service for young men in Syria, around 610.000 asylum requests from Syrian refugees have been registered in Germany since 2011 (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2018). A significant number of requests (540.000) have been registered after the German Chancellor Angela Merkel suspended the Dublin Protocol (that stipulates that refugees have to stay in the first European country they arrived in) for Syrian refugees in August 2015 (Pearlman, 2017).

In 2017, 38,6% of the total Syrian population in Germany were women (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018). At the end of 2017, there are approximately 35.000 Syrians registered and living in Berlin, 13.000 (37.4%) of which are women (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018).

The structure of the asylum procedure

When asylum seekers arrive in Germany, they are obliged register at the border authority. This authority sends the asylum seeker to a reception centre (EAE, "Erstaufnahmeeinrichtung") which issues the individual's proof of arrival ("Ankunftsnachweis"), enabling her to receive state benefits (BAMF, 2016a).

The federal state where their asylum request will be processed but also where their initial reception centre is located is decided through a distribution tool called EASY. EASY uses the so-called "Königsstein Key" which takes into account the tax income and population size of each federal states (BAMF, 2016b). As a result, asylum seekers have no say in deciding which federal state they will be sent to. The reception centre is responsible for the adequate supply of accommodation. Asylum seekers are granted state benefits of the monthly amount of 135€ for a single person, and 244€ for a couple. Food, accommodation, heating, clothing, medical care are covered as well, outside of the state benefits (§3, AsylbLG, 1997).

On an administrative side, the federal office for Migration and Refugees controls the asylum request with the EURODAC-System to determine if another European country is responsible for the asylum seeker – as it is stipulated in the Dublin protocol that asylum requests are not to be processed by more than one EU-Country (BAMF, 2016c).

After the asylum application has been submitted, the asylum seeker receives a residence permit ("Aufenthaltsgestattung") which is linked to a residency requirement ("Residenzpflicht") in the federal state where the asylum procedure is taking place (BAMF, 2016c). Before 2016, the residency requirement of asylum seekers with high prospects to remain (Syrians included) terminated after three months, after which the individual could move to any other federal state of their choice (BAMF, 2016c). However, since 2016, a new regulation was introduced. The residency requirement ("Wohnsitzauflage") rules that all refugees with granted asylum or subsidiary protection are obliged to live at least three years in the state where their asylum procedure has taken place for, unless they find a job (15 hours a week min.) elsewhere (BAMF, 2018).

As stated in Phillips and Robinson, **"the 'residency requirement' is therefore an extreme example of how refugees are held in designated border zones after their arrival in a nation-state's territory. The regulation restricts the freedom of movement and traps refugees in specific areas – temporarily and, in some cases, for the entire duration of stay – a situation that contradicts several international and European laws and regulations that establish the right of free movement."** (Phillips and Robinson, 2015, 139)

This regulation is seen as a form of prevention against a spatial concentration of refugees in a given area, one with a weaker socio-economic structure (Katz, Noring and Garrelts, 2016). However, in the case of Berlin, which is a city-state, the residency requirement forces refugees to stay in the city of Berlin, as there is no other locality attached to the federal state Berlin.

Shift from temporary to permanent housing

The topic of interest in this thesis is the housing situation of Syrian refugees in Berlin, hence, it is necessary to take a closer look at the legal and administrative side of the matter. As it is stated in the asylum law, asylum seekers with high prospects to remain have to stay at least 6 weeks and no more than 6 months in the reception centre they have been assigned to (§47, AsylG, 1992).

The large influx of refugees to Berlin since 2015 as noted above led to an accommodation crisis in the capital. Many buildings such as sport halls, unused buildings, an old airport, and even an old shopping mall were turned into reception centres to host the large number of people who were waiting for their asylum requests to be processed. (Fouroutan et al., 2017).

Asylum seekers who are coming from a "safe country of origin" (for example Albania, Kosovo, Serbia or Senegal) are obliged to stay in the reception centre until their asylum request is

processed (§47, AsylG, 1992). In general, stricter rules and regulations apply in Germany to all asylum seekers coming from "safe countries of origin" than for Syrians but these are not dealt with in this thesis.

After their initial stay in the reception centre, asylum seekers are assigned to another residence, and again, the individuals have no right to decide to which residence they will be assigned to. The German asylum law stipulates that asylum seekers who are moved from the initial reception centre should live in shared accommodations ("Gemeinschaftsunterkunft"). As Sybill Schulz the coordinator of the Berliner refugee management states: "The goal of the Senate administration for Integration, Employment and Social affairs is a decent and autonomous accommodation for refugees. This includes accommodations of good quality in the shared accommodations provided by the State Office for Refugee Matters" (Translated, I interview Sybill Schulz).

The regulation about the living in shared accommodation is interpreted rather freely by the different federal states. The state of Berlin favours accommodation in rented apartments with no obligation to host asylum seekers in a shared accommodation (Fouroutan *et al.*, 2017). This means Berlin is in favour of decentralized accommodation, which can be explained in the following way:

> "*The term decentralized accommodation is mostly understood in the sense of an accommodation in shared or single apartments, located in both existing buildings and newly-constructed houses, offering private space with good infrastructure.*" (Korntheuer, Pritchard and Maehler, 2017, 76)

As seen before, while many large cities encounter structural housing shortages, the case of Berlin is no different. While finding independent and rental housing in Berlin is a difficult matter for *every* inhabitant of the capital, accommodation is important for newcomers to the city. How is this issue tackled in Berlin and what are the perspectives and approaches of different urban actors? This question will be further explored in the next section.

VI. A COMPLEX FIELD - THE HOUSING MARKET FOR REFUGEES IN BERLIN

This chapter will focus on housing for refugees in particular by mapping the field of the housing market and illustrate the power positions within it, on the basis of academic research articles, an interview led with the Coordinator of Refugee Management and three interviews led with members of organisations that are supporting refugees to find housing.

Housing shortage and increasing rents

To illustrate the severity of the housing shortage in Berlin, some statistical data will be useful. The urban sociologist Andrej Holm calculated that more than 350.000 households in Berlin are in need of an apartment that would fit into the rent limits of the "AV Wohnen", which is the regulation that sets the rent prices acceptable for individuals receiving state benefits (Fouroutan *et al.*, 2017). All the refugees interviewed for this study were receiving social benefits or student grants that are also provided by the state.

Since the beginning of 2018, the rent limit according to the "AV Wohnen" has been raised. An individual household for an "adequate" apartment of 50 sqm will get their rent covered up to 404 € (compared to the prior stipend of 364,50€), and a two-person household for an "adequate" apartment of 60 sqm will receive rent coverage up to 472,20 € (before 437,40 €) covered (Berlin hilft, 2017). At the same time, the rents for private rental apartments are raising every year in Berlin.

The map below (see Figure 1) illustrates the spatial distribution of rent prices in Berlin. From this image we can see that all inner-city neighbourhoods are unattainable for households dependent on social benefits as the rent would be higher than the price limit fixed by the AV-Wohnen. By way of simple calculation, an "adequate" apartment of 50 sqm for an individual household at the Berlin median rent price would cost 507€ (excluding heating and electricity). As it stands now, the rent limit is at 404€ (excluding heating and electricity).
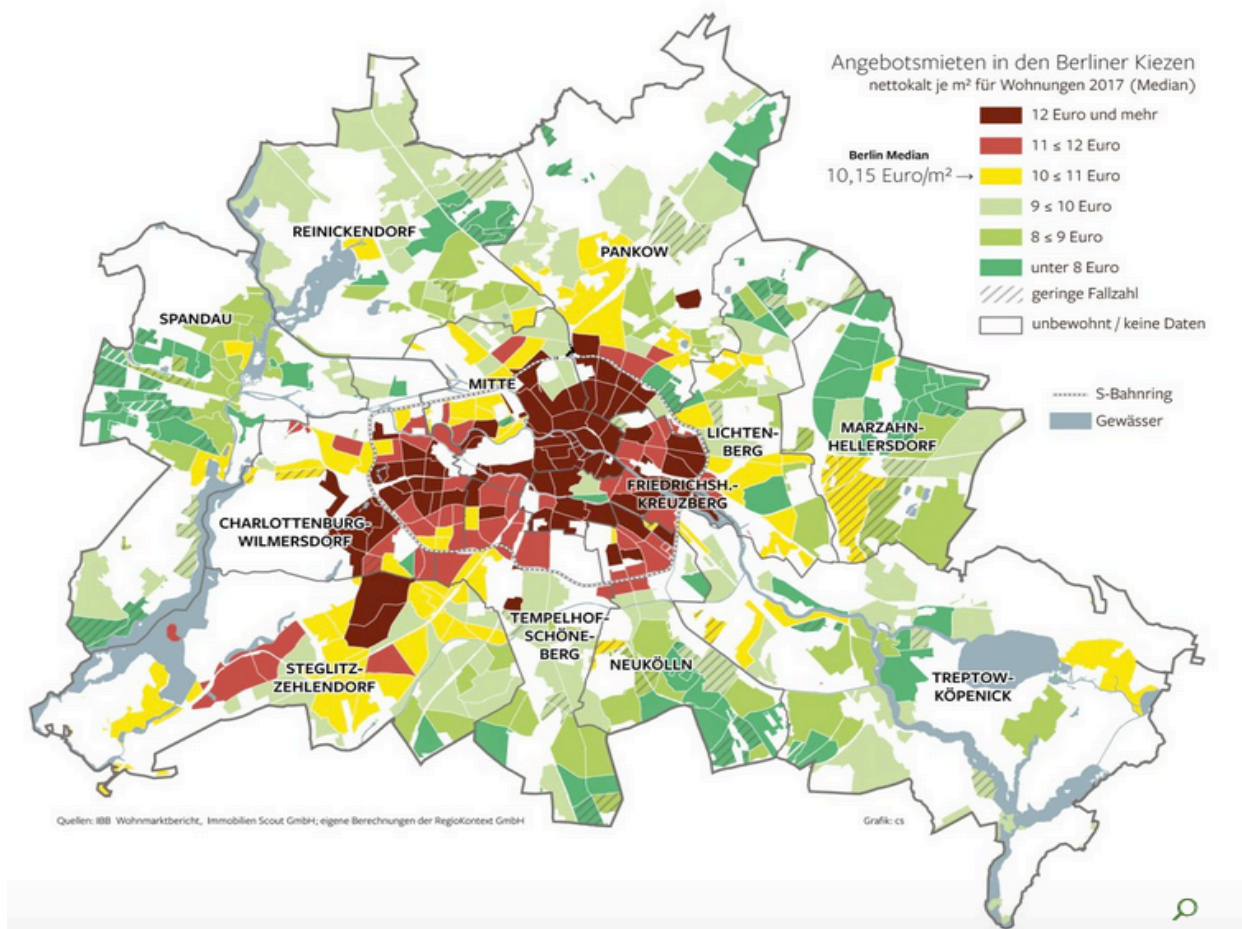
Figure 1: Rent prices (excluding electricity and heating) by neighbourhoods in Berlin, 2017. Dark red-highest, Green-lowest (Jürgens, 2018)

As stated by Hamann and El-Khayed: *"The lack of affordable housing in the city is a major barrier to the Berlin housing market and one that also structurally enables possibilities for discrimination, as landlords and housing companies are able to choose among an increasing number of people applying for apartments."* (Hamann and El-Kayed, 2018, 142)

All interviewees from the refugee housing field confirmed that the housing market in Berlin is a tense one. Affordable apartments are rare and the turn-over of tenants within existing housing is very low (I, Interaxion).

> *„I think the basic problem is that there are not enough apartments. This is a problem which will not be solved quickly*." (translated, I AG Wohnungssuche)

As Sybill Schulz states, the market is especially difficult for refugees as the rents are getting higher and there are only few apartments available (I Sybill Schulz).

The lack of affordable housing can be explained through the redefinition and selling of public housing to the private company "Deutsche Wohnen", a company previously owned by the city of Berlin.

> Interviewee: „Exactly, the apartments are not available. We have to say clearly, Berlin did not build anything in the last 20 years and has sold everything during the Berlin Bank Scandal 25 years ago, so there are not enough social housing estates anymore. This is also very difficult to explain in the counselling sessions. (…)
> Interviewer: "Where do refugees live if they don't find independent housing?
> Interviewee: „In shared accommodations for refugees." (Translated, I xenion)

The prognosis of Sybill Schulz from the Berlin Senate is that the goal of accommodating refugees with granted asylum in independent apartments will not be reached. Therefore, shared accommodations with an increased focus on privacy will be developed to host the refugees who do not find apartments in Berlin (I, Sybill Schulz).

Another interviewee from a housing counselling project noticed an evolution in the housing market since 2015.

> "I have a better overview since three years and I have the feeling that the housing market became even tighter, that you have almost zero chance to find something on the private rental market." (translated, I AG Wohnungssuche)

As the state of Berlin is withdrawing from social housing programs, refugee households have no other choice: they must turn to the private rental market if they do not want to live in shared accommodations provided by the city of Berlin, which often do not offer good living conditions, as will be shown next.

Policies on housing for refugees in Berlin

Different models and policies exist in Berlin to provide housing for refugees. These will be presented in this chapter to give an overview of refugee housing opportunities. As will be demonstrated, however, many policies are not aimed at housing refugees in decentralized housing, as officially stated by the city of Berlin.

To cope with the high number of refugees with granted asylum who do not find decentralized housing, the Senate of Berlin recently selected the strategy of implementing module-based shelters (MUF) and module-based shelters 2.0 (MUF 2.0.). The 28 MUF structures currently being built are made of concrete modules, can be constructed in a relatively short time, and are expected to last up to 80 years. The Berlin Senate for City Development and Housing, the municipal housing associations, the Berlin association for refugee shelters and the evangelic churchyard union are responsible for the implementation of these new shelters. The number

of inhabitants can vary from 200 to 450 and the location of the MUF is chosen based on proximity to social infrastructure (schools, pre-school, doctors) (State office for Refugee Matters, 2018).

This form of accommodation is highly criticized by actors on the housing field and refugee rights organisations (Flüchtlingsrat Berlin e.V., 2018).

> „*Now you have these MUF, that make all the districts unhappy, because they are too big. In Kreuzberg for example, there is a big disaster in an industrial estate. They want to build a MUF with 500 inhabitants in an area where small-scale craft-industry is located. When you put so many people in one place, it is already a problem, instead of making it smaller-scale. There are a lot of protests in the districts of course but the Senate stipulate that every districts has to have this or that many spots but there are not enough free spaces in the city. So weird things are going on.*" (Translated, I Xenion)

The MUF, as an accommodation for refugees, is one of the strategies of the Berlin Senate to host the large amount of people that cannot find apartments in the private rental market. However, by concentrating many refugees in a single structure, this model neither fosters the spatial integration of refugees nor encourages social mix.

> "*Ideally these shared accommodations should be interim solutions but on the practical side they will be there for a while. Sure, shared accommodations are a better form of shelter than the emergency shelters but they are still houses with a whole lot of people in the same situation. That's not the way it is supposed to be, it is not mixed neighbourhood life. These places are big housing estates with a clear characterized inhabitant structure, this has nothing to do with neighbourhood and not with integration, the people are again just parked there. I don't know if anyone is thinking about a sustainable solution. People always talk about residential construction and that it has to be done. These are things, they are gonna take years. I don't have the feeling that people are planning on the long run, it's always about dealing with the emergency and if possible in the legislative period because afterwards they cannot influence it anymore*" (translated, AG Wohnungssuche).

Over 22.000 refugees are currently housed in state-provided accommodations in Berlin (State office for Refugee Matters, 2018), while the remaining 10.000 refugees are living in private apartments or elsewhere. What are the state policies facilitating the access of refugees to the housing market?

The WBS (short for "Wohnberechtigungsschein") is a certificate required to live in apartments that have been subsidized by public funds. Refugees with granted asylum have the right to access this certificate. A new agreement between the Berlin Senate and housing associations

stipulates that 60% of newly released apartments should be rented to households eligible for the WBS, and 25% of the 60% should be rented to special needs groups with a WBS (in which refugees are included). However, only an individual with a minimum of 11 valid months remaining on her residence permit can apply for a WBS. Refugees with a three years residence permit thus cannot apply for WBS in the third year of her residency (Flüchtlingsrat Berlin e.V., 2018).

Hence, the WBS is, on the one hand an opportunity to find an apartment in subsidized or non-subsidized housing estates and yet, on the other hand, some groups of refugees with granted asylum are excluded from this measure simply due to the date of expiration and renewal of their residence permit.

Another measure to enable refugees' accessibility to the housing market in the context of raising rents is the 20% increase in the rent allocations provided by the state. This gives refugees the opportunity to rent an apartment even if it is up to 20% more expensive than the standard allocated rent (Berlin hilft, 2017).

The interviewed organisations are providing counselling for refugees to help them find independent housing. The organisations indicated the barriers that refugees are encountering in the Berliner housing market, while also pointing to the structural issues of housing shortages and high rents. These barriers will be illustrated in the following section.

Barriers in the field

One barrier that refugees encounter in their search for housing is related to their knowledge of the German language. A major issue interviewees of social organisations pointed to is that the employees of the housing administrations or Jobcenters (which is responsible for the rent for refugees with granted asylum) speak only German (I Xenion; I AG Wohnungssuche, I Interaxion).

> *"One thing that is clear is that people cannot search for an apartment alone. The housing administrations, also the ones renting social housing apartments, nobody speaks English, this is a catastrophe for a metropolis like Berlin. It's also a disaster for Spanish, Italian, French and Greek people."* (translated, I Xenion)

Bea Fünfrocken from Xenion also pointed out to the fact that private landlords are often more willing to rent an apartment to a refugee who already speaks German.
However, many refugees do not have the time of resources to learn German which makes language a significant barrier to accessing the housing market.

Sybill Schulz also described the range of barriers that refugees may encounter in the housing market:

> *„Housing shortage and high rental prices are responsible for the lack of available apartments, also for refugees with granted asylum. Moreover, the lack of knowledge about the conventions on the housing market and the tenancy law can be hurdles. (…). Refugees with granted asylum are just as well subject to the known discrimination of people with migration background on the housing market." (translated, I Sybill Schulz)*

Discrimination as: "The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2018) will be touched upon many times throughout this thesis.

The fact that refugees face discrimination in the housing market for different reasons has been confirmed by all interviewees from the participating social organisations. Young men especially seem to have a difficult time as they are subject to prejudices from both landlords and housing administrations.

> *"We have a problem accommodating all these young men. They are at the end of the list on the housing market, they are not considered as vulnerable and there are a lot of reservations, also on the private rental market. I think this is a big problem. This is not a fundamental problem for young men, it's a problem for young male refugees." (Translated, I Xenion) "*

The unwillingness of renting to individuals dependent on social benefits is another barrier and discriminatory practice facing refugees.

> *„It's sad but there are a lot of racist housing administrations, there are a lot of administrations that are saying, we don't rent to people from the Jobcenter, even if it is a really secure way of getting the rent. They probably have prejudices in their head about the particular group of people receiving social benefits: classism, racism, and group-focused enmity." (translated, I interaxion)*

Refugees are thus subject to multiple discriminatory practices due to their refugee status, their foreign origins, and their dependence on social benefits from the state. As a result, not only do refugees struggle to understand the rules of the housing market and the tenancy laws due to language barriers, they also face discrimination in their access to housing.

Power positions within the field

The housing market of Berlin as a field of forces is characterised by different actors enacting power to secure their position. In the beginning of 2018, the Berlin Senate proposed a round table discussion with different actors involved in the field of housing for refugees in Berlin. This round table will take place on four separate occasions throughout 2018. The different actors present include housing administrations, institutions such as the Jobcenter and the State office for refugee affairs, real estate companies and non-governmental organisations.

However, actors in the interviewed social organisations expressed disapproval for the round tables, reporting an exclusion or ignorance on behalf of the Senate of certain organisations that are important in the field of housing.

> *"I think the politics don't want the self organized groups in these meetings. (...) They probably don't take their organisation seriously enough. The Senate don't want people that got together to do something on the level of political exchange. This is in my opinion a disregard of voluntary work.(Translated, I Xenion)*

Most social organisations that are counselling refugees to find housing are working on an honorary basis. This is the case for AG Wohnungssuche which was not invited to the round table, though their field of work is specifically finding housing solutions for refugees. The interviewees from AG Wohnungssuche stated very clearly in the interview that they were not planning on becoming "political" and that they started their organisation with the aim of actively helping people. However, the structural challenges in the housing market forced the group to be more strategic in their planning by forming links to certain housing market institutions to acquire apartments for their clients (I, AG Wohnungssuche).

Furthermore, Katharina Stöckl from InteraXion stated that the recommendations of NGOs from the field have not been heard by the Berlin Senate in the past. Despite the experiences gained by NGOs working directly on the field and the knowledge acquired of the *actual* barriers and opportunities for refugee housing, these organizations have not been integrated in the political discourse or housing sphere.

The other group excluded from the official political scene are the refugees themselves. From what was stated in the interviews, no refugee is invited to the round tables. Only the social organisations can represent the interests of the refugees to explain their difficulties accessing the housing market (I, Xenion).

As landlords and housing administrations receive many applicants for available apartments, these actors are also in a position of power to select future tenants. This power can be wielded in such a way that can increase arbitrariness, racism, and other forms of discrimination (I, Xenion). Arbitrariness was an important issue discussed in the interviews since holding a position of power allows one individual to decide the future of another. In the housing market, refugees are often encountering individuals of power who ultimately decide their fate (I, Xenion).

The interviewed organisations reported the presence of an irregular way to find housing. Families and individuals using the counselling services of organisations would pay for a "broker" to find an apartment for them (I, Xenion, I InteraXion, I AG Wohnungssuche). Katharina Stöckl from InteraXion referred to this practice as a way of exploiting individuals who lack key resources to find housing by other means (I, InteraXion). All NGO interviewees reported they were actively trying to prevent their refugee clients from using "broker" services, if they can avoid it. There have been many accounts of faked contracts for apartments that ultimately do not exist.

> *"There are bribes to get an offer for an apartment and also a lot of fraud cases. Also in our counselling: two families that had already signed a contract, which was fake, the contract was copied and filled. A lot of people are briefed now that they should pay money only after the contract has been signed but in this case there was not an apartment behind the contract. There are a lot of cases. That's why the districts are trying to implement measures to go against these practices. But it's hard because nobody reports these kind of cases"* (translated, I Xenion).

The organisations expressed concern that it was difficult to convince refugees to avoid these services; The hardship experienced by refugees is great and many households see no other options (I, Xenion). While no interviewed organisation had had direct contact with brokers, two reported that they had encountered angry and concerned refugees who had paid bribes to receive apartment offers (I, AG Wohnungssuche). Brokers undoubtedly have a position of power in the housing market as they exploit refugees in precarious situations.

This chapter illustrated the field of the housing market in Berlin. Due to housing shortages, ineffective policies, language barriers, and discriminatory practices, and uneven power dynamics (to name a few), refugees face a daunting task in finding independent housing in the city. Nonetheless, the Syrian refugees interviewed during this research all reported to have found a decentralized housing solution. The following part will show the strategies and practices Syrian refugees employ to access and secure a position of power in the complex field of the Berlin housing market.

There is a clear intention in this thesis to give a prominent role to the opinions of the refugees in their search for housing in Berlin. Thus, the following chapters will present the perspectives

of the Syrian interviewees to reinforce the position that refugees are *active agents* in this work.

VII.   FIRST ARRIVAL

Decision to come to Berlin

Upon their arrival in Germany, asylum seekers are assigned to different federal states following the EASY distribution tool and thus have no say in the decision of the city or federal state they are sent to. Some of the respondents emphasized the fact that it was not their choice and that they were randomly sent to Berlin when they arrived at the borders of Germany. As Yassin states:

> *"Why I came to Berlin, it was not my choice to Berlin, I was received at the borders by the German army, they sent us to Hannover, we stayed there for one month and then we got transferred to Berlin, so here I am."* Yassin

However, some respondents alluded to a certain level of agency or choice in their arrival to the city. The presence of family members already living in Berlin was a main pull-factor to initiate the asylum procedure in Berlin; relatives offered support, valuable information, and had already generated a sense of city-attachment. This decision can be linked to Bourdieu's notion of social capital; Some of the Syrian refugees interviewed decided on Berlin as a destination because they had a pre-established network in the city, a homogeneous network that would offer resources upon which they could draw.

Furthermore, Nazmi, one of the respondents, emphasized the fact of wanting to be in the capital city of Germany after having lived in Damascus, the capital of Syria. Here, the link to the notion of habitus is quite clear. Syrian refugees coming from a capital city will feel more at ease in another capital city as they have an incorporated habitus, a socialization which is linked to the fact of being an "urban" human-being.

> Interviewer: *"What was the reason for you to come to Berlin?"*
>
> Interviewee: *"Yeah, because I used to live in Damascus and Damascus is the capital of Syria. So I feel that in all the world, the capitals are similar. So I feel here I can do something, I can return to my normal life because it is the capital, there are many cultures, many nationalities and it's easy to me because it's my life before."* (I Nazmi)

Many of the interviewees were not sent to Berlin right away, but rather went through their asylum procedure in another federal state before deciding to come to Berlin.
Elements of strategy come into play as well, when refugees get recommendations on where to go to complete the asylum process more quickly. In 2015, information was circulating that the Eastern states of Germany were the better choice; in Berlin people were facing longer wait times for asylum approval.

"First arrival was in Munich, and a guy told me to go to the East, so I went to Schleswig-Holstein because I had finger prints in Bulgaria and then it is a bit hard to get a residence permit and then I got my asylum in 4 months actually, immediately, without getting refused or so." (translated, I Besher)

As explained in the previous chapter, since 2016, recognized refugees are not allowed to move from the federal state in which they lived in during their asylum procedure. All refugees interviewed, however, arrived before this change in the law was put in place. This is the reason why some of the interviewees could choose to move to Berlin from another federal state after receiving their residence permit and their status as recognized refugees. This is the case of Mehdi who left the state of Brandenburg after cases of racist and violent discrimination on the streets.

"I could not stay there in Brandenburg. But why Berlin and not somewhere else? Because my aunt is here. She helped me a lot" (Translated, I Mehdi)

Berlin is home to inhabitants of 190 nationalities, many of them from Arabic or Turkish (Business Location Center, 2015). This situation creates a disputed narrative around Berlin that comes into play in the decisions of refugees:

"Yes, all refugees try to come to Berlin. Because of specialized shops, also the people here, there are a lot of arabs, turks and foreigners." (translated,I Othman)

"Berlin was not a choice for me, I never thought about Berlin because I was listening to the people, too many arabs, no german, not good for the language, super expensive and super hard to find a flat." Anas

While the regulation stipulates that once they cross the German border, asylum seekers are assigned, without choice, to a federal state, narratives of the respondents seem to emphasize a certain level of choice based on preferences, family links, work opportunities, and pace of the asylum procedure. This could be explained by the fact that some asylum seekers were not confronted by police or other authorities upon entry in Germany and thus could continue their journey to the destination of their choice. Furthermore, in 2015, the year when almost all the respondents arrived, there was a general confusion among state officials and border agents due to the high number of refugees arriving in Germany (Spiegel Online, 2016).

Nonetheless, the residency requirement put in place in 2016 restricts the agency and freedom of settlement of recognized refugees concerning their desired abode.

Elements of habitus and capital are evident from the day of the arrival in Germany: the interviewees received information from individuals within their homogeneous networks, they shared similar experiences, and they exchanged advice and resources to achieve desired outcomes. The individual and group habitus are demonstrated by refugees' decisions of where to settle: the choice was either for Berlin, to reap the benefits and familiarities of the capital city, one that is similar to other large cities in Syria; or to avoid Berlin due to the concentration of many individuals sharing the same group habitus, creating a sense of social control over the asylum-seekers.

Instability in the asylum procedure

Once asylum seekers apply for asylum, the administrative machine in underway. If refugees did not apply for their asylum directly in Berlin, they are sent to reception centres in the federal state to which they were assigned. These centres are not only in major cities but are also situated in small and medium-sized towns. If they applied in Berlin, they are sent to a reception centre within the city of Berlin, as it is a city-state.
Applying in another federal state outside of Berlin often means the individual is transferred from one reception centre to the other, depending on the status of one's asylum request.

> *"then in Hamburg I applied for my Asylum. they sent me to Schwerin and from Schwerin, they sent me transfer to Stralsund and there it was like, I have my residence, the permit to stay here for 3 years in Germany." (I Anas)*

> *"At the beginning I was in Eisenhüttenstadt, this was the total catastrophy. Then I moved to a small village named Hertzberg and waited for my residency. I got it, I stayed for approximately 3 months" (Translated, I Jamila)*

The assumption that Eastern federal states processed the asylum request more quickly than other states was confirmed by all the respondents.

> *"The asylum process took really really long, for example my brother was in Brandenburg and he was processed in 3 months. For me it took 14 months, so a year and 2 extra months of uncertainty, whether I'm going to receive the subsidiary protection or the asylum, so that was these big questions in my mind for a whole year." (I Yassin)*

However, the requests of some respondents that applied for asylum in Berlin were also processed in a short amount of time:

> *"When I left the hotel, I got my residence permit. So it took 3 months. It was in November 2015." (Translated, Othman)*

In this process, asylum seekers have to deal with the German administration and several public offices. However, many times employees did not speak any English, let alone Arabic. Translators are hired to support refugees through their meetings in the administrative offices.

Some of the respondents had mixed feelings about the translators working for the administration:

> *"sorry to say this, but most of these guys were not good people, I don't know if it was something done intentionally but they complicated our lives these translators, who worked at the social amt. Some of us, we always tried to analyse why that behaviour was done, said that these guys who come from Arabic speaking countries but who have been in Germany for 20 to 25 years and then when they saw how we came, we were actually told this, some of these guys told us like you guys came in and some of you got processed in a month and got a residence permit while we actually had to wait for 10 sometimes 15 years to get processed so there was this kind of tension, I don't know, when we analysed why some of these guys were doing bad things to us in order to harm our situation we thought that this could be it, this was them feeling jealous. This is why they weren't being helpful for us but some of them were really cool and good and helped everybody, that's in terms of you know speaking the language." Yassin*

Ignoring the issue of jealousy that is apparent in this response, the overarching theme is the lack of independence or autonomy felt by asylum seekers in this process. Having no German language skills, being dependent on translators, being sent from one location to the other without being able to decide can be seen as a loss of control of the situation. Creating cultural capital in the form of German language skills becomes an absolute priority from this phase on. However, some of the respondents took the initiative and became active during their asylum process:

> *" I was just waiting for a letter from BAMF to invite for a hearing, that was the dream back then. Some people didn't take this really well. For me and two other friends, we said, we don't want to be involved in the negativity so we went to German language classes, we applied to the BAMF to allow us to go to classes so they said ok we can go. Believe it or not, I finished the B1 level while I was still waiting for the asylum to be finalize. So I don't know, I did something good out of the horrible experience." Yassin*

These responses show the unstable situation asylum seekers are in when they arrive to Germany. The respondents often pointed out to "the system", "the procedure", "the rules" and that they did not know how to influence or change their situation. This can be related to

the group habitus of the Syrian refugees who arrive from Syria; they must understand the German bureaucracy and learn the rules that are applied to their legal status. This should not mean that a German individual would have less difficulties understanding the difficult legal frameworks applicable to one's case but the lack of cultural capital in the form of German language skills is even more debilitating as refugees are forced to depend on a translator. Although the asylum process can last anywhere from a few months to years, it is nonetheless important to consider this of refugee arrival and settlement.

Living in refugee shelters

The asylum law states that asylum seekers have to stay in the reception centre to which they are assigned for a minimum of 6 weeks and a maximum of 6 months (§47, AsylG, 1992). However, as the asylum procedures usually lasted longer than this allotted period, some respondents stayed in a reception centre for more than 6 months in total.

> *"At first they assigned us to a Heim, and I thought to myself if the situation is going to be like this it's okay because we were 4 people in one room, the three others I came with. That didn't last for long, this only went on for 15 days, less than 15 days and then they said ok, let's go to a different place. And I asked, is it going to be the same thing? And the person who was transferring us said it is going to be better than this. That was a lie. Because they transferred us to a Turnhalle in Schönhauser Allee and that's the place where I stayed in for a year and two months, in a basketball court with 200 other people and that for me was a disaster." Yassin*

The landscape of reception centres in Germany is very diverse. In the summer of crisis in 2015, the city of Berlin implemented many housing solutions to avoid homelessness among asylum seekers. Shelters were established in school buildings, sport halls , historical reception centres (i.e. for GDR refugees), and an old airport hangar (Le blond, 2015).

Other arrangements to host refugees included private rooms in apartments, hostel beds, and hotel rooms (I Mohamed, I Jamila).

Even if homelessness among refugees was avoided in most cases, the conditions of refugee shelters were widely criticized by the respondents even if most of the respondents felt thankful for the services offered by the Germany state.

> *"In the camp, it was so difficult because you have your room but you live with a lot of people in the same place and you need to share a bathroom as example and you need to eat their food and you have the right to cook as example (…) So we cannot say they didn't offer anything, they offered everything. But if you talk about your normal life, it's nothing. But when you talk about what the government offers, I think it's great*

because they can get your health insurance, a place to stay, to look for other places to live and they can take care about a lot of your issues, any questions about you can do. I think as a project, it's very nice and I don't think they are other countries around, they offer this great offers. The problem is, you cannot start your normal life in this situation" (I Nazmi)

For the female interviewees, it seemed to be extremely difficult to live in rooms with other men or to share bathrooms and kitchens with other individuals. Some of them reported that they were crying all the time (I Jamila), others reported the difficulties as women to be sharing their personal space with strangers (I Sanaa, I Arwa). Here, a part of the specific habitus of women, and especially Syrian women, becomes clear; No Syrian male interviewee reported a similar situation concerning the bathrooms or kitchens.
Sanaa who lived in the old airport hangar for a few months, where a thousand people would live all together in one big hanger separated by carboard walls.

> *"Because we don't have this habit to live together like in one place with other people. I have this experience with Tempelhof, it was so hard for me." (I Sanaa)*

Male respondents reported the extreme lack of privacy (I Yassin), the strict time rules that were at odds to their daily rhythm (I Nazmi), the problem of living with a lot of other young male refugees in the same shelter and being subject to judgement (I Anas) or feeling segregated from the surroundings (I Mehdi). All in all, the living situation in a reception centre was extremely challenging for many respondents.

The state of Berlin favours the accommodation of asylum seekers in private apartments (Fouroutan *et al.*, 2017) which means they are allowed to search for a flat after the first 6 weeks in a reception shelter. Some of the respondents were aware of this regulation (I Nazmi,I Sanaa, I Yassin). Yet, finding a flat in this legally precarious circumstance was not possible for any respondent.

> *"Ah it's complicated. (…) You are allowed to find flat but it's not easy before you got your paper. If you talk about law it's ok to find a flat, you can but how? it's so difficult if you have no paper because any company they need to know about you, someone has to be responsible about you or you depend on yourself, they need to know. Without paper, it's so difficult. The camp is just in the beginning when you have no paper but after that when you have paper, you can also stay in the camp but in that case you can look for a place to live and it will also be difficult but no as when you have paper." (I Nazmi)*

It may vary from one place to another, but the overall feeling of uncertainty and instability and the lack of agency concerning the living situation prevented most respondents from learning German, getting to know the city, and settling into a new life in Berlin.

Creating first contacts

Asylum seekers in Germany and especially Berlin, usually lived for several months in emergency accommodations before being able to start searching for a flat. Hence, it is interesting to look at the social contacts individuals managed to create during their time in the shelters, but also in relation to the neighbourhoods they were living in at that time.

Some respondents emphasized the difficulties to create links to the local population in neighbourhoods around their shelters; in part because of the unwillingness of the locals, and in part because of the instability of the asylum process (I Mehdi,I Nazmi). Others talked about loneliness due to a lack of social contacts in general: to the local surroundings as well as to the other inhabitants in the shelter.

However, positive stories emerged when shelter employees or managers made an effort to create links between the refugee inhabitants and the local population:

> *"There was a woman, she was alone and she worked a lot. She helped a lot, yeah, with school and language classes, entertainment possibilities, where to go in the city. (...) she created a contact to the local art school and I met very cool people from the art school then." (translated,I Besher)*

Another form of contact that was positively noted were the students and volunteers coming to the shelters to give German classes.

> *"Some volunteers came to visit the camp and they said we can help you but we cannot give you a certificate or anything, we are just regular people."(I Yassin)*

Hakim said that he created other social contacts to Germans through this initial exposure to the volunteers coming to work in his accommodation. These initial contacts to the local population proved to be beneficial in most cases, especially when searching for an apartment later on. These social contacts with locals, which can be described as heterogeneous networks, are the first elements of social capital that the interviewees can mobilize when needed.

This chapter depicted the Syrian interviewees' first arrival in Germany. The decision to go to Berlin or elsewhere is either led by the "urban" habitus, as was the case for some interviewees, or the information provided by the homogeneous networks with other refugees

or family members already living in Germany. The networks of Syrian refugees arriving in Germany is rather small and limited to contacts within their own ethnic community. The foreign habitus, as well as the lack of cultural capital in the form of German languages skills, makes the understanding of the legal procedures and rules difficult, forcing asylum seekers to be dependent on translators.

The life in refugee shelters was challenging for all respondents. While male refugees had many complaints, shelter life was particularly difficult for Syrian women because of the extreme lack of privacy, especially in sharing the bathroom and kitchen facilities. The initial living situation felt like a total loss of agency as the refugees had no say in the choice of an accommodation. Even if refugees could legally move to an apartment, in practice, it is nearly impossible in practice. Thus, the first contacts outside the homogeneous network of refugees and family are even more important as they open the way to heterogeneous networks that will facilitate the search for housing.

All these factors illustrate the conditions from which Syrian refugees come when they receive their asylum and residence permit, and finally face both the chance and challenge of searching for a new home by themselves.

VIII.   ACCESSING HOUSING

Getting to know the field

Learning about the policies

To start searching for a flat independently, refugees must become familiar with the structure they are in. Hakim, one interviewee compared this situation with swimming in the sea:

> *"Every foreign person here in Germany has a problem. You are in the sea and you have nothing with you, and you swim just like this, you have no way to go." (translated, I Hakim)*

This quote illustrates the sentiment of feeling lost in a new country, a new system and a new society. Hence, one part of the strategy to access the housing market is to get to know the rules, barriers, and opportunities present in the institutional structure and of the Berliner housing market. It is only after understanding the new field that they can accumulate the forms of capital that will be helpful to secure a more powerful position.

What quickly became apparent is that no respondent expected nor received help from the Jobcentres they were assigned too. The Jobcenter is responsible for all financial issues and the attribution of social benefits after the refugees are granted asylum. This administration also issues the authorization to rent a flat according to rent limits. The employees of the Jobcenter are thus in a position of power when it comes to the field of housing. Many respondents asked the employees of their assigned Jobcentre about how to search for housing or if there was any housing available for them.

> *Interviewer: "Was it an option to go to the Jobcenter or LAGESO (*Regional Office for Health and Social Affairs)*?"*
> *Interviewee: "They don't help either, I tried several times, I told them I have a job and all but nothing came out of it." (translated, I Othman)*

Issues of discrimination in contact with the employees of this administrative office were told as well. This again indicates the position of power being held by the employees of such administrative offices:

> *Interviewer: "Did you feel discriminated somehow during your search for housing?"*
> *Interviewee: "Yes, many times. In the housing administrations and in the Jobcentre. One employee talked very fast lately, I had the feeling she did not want us to*

understand what she was saying. I'm listening to German Rap though, I'm prepared (laugh)." (translated, I Mehdi)

One known administrative tool is the WBS ("Wohnberechtigungsschein") available to refugees, which provides access to social housing apartments. However, many respondents were under the impression that only single women, families with children, and individuals considered as "vulnerable" can receive an apartment from the social housing program.

"I think you can apply for WBS. A colleague told me about this WBS. (…) And you have social housing, these would be for families. Grown men, who are alone must take care about themselves and maybe single women, maybe they get helped to find flat, especially if they are with children." (translated, I Besher)

Interestingly, most of the interviewees did not find the bureaucratic processes too complicated or overwhelming, but this may be due to the fact that they were interviewed approximately three years after their arrival in Germany and have since become familiar with the rules and procedures.

Some respondents were conscious about the residency requirement applied in 2016 which would have prevented them to move to Berlin.

"I was allowed to move. Since 2016, you cannot move from your initial federal state anymore. But my asylum was granted in 2015 and I could move to Berlin. As I said, I was lucky." (I, Mehdi)

However, some of them also got frustrated with the state's inability to help practically with their search for housing:

"I have the feeling the state doesn't do anything. There are so many people that go to the municipal office and say "we need a flat, we are in bad living conditions in the mass accommodation. They respond: "It's not our task, you have to search on your own." The people are rather new, they don't know the language, they don't know the system, they also have a cultural shock. When you have a cultural shock, what can you do. You don't trust anyone." (translated, I Hakim)

Arwa, as another example wished for a comprehensive plan by the government to help find housing because she had experienced exploitation from housing companies and landlords (I Arwa).

Again, the sentiment of feeling lost and being abandoned by the state is highlighted here. During the whole asylum procedure, the state takes care of almost everything:

accommodation, food, language courses, legal steps (see chapter 4). However, from the moment, the refugees are granted asylum, the state withdrawals, leaving the refugees on their own. Apart from state provision of rent costs, refugees must access the housing market independently, without any directed structural assistance.

Discovering the housing market

The next step after understanding the rules of the bureaucratic structure, is getting to know the Berliner housing market. The papers that one needs to collect to get access to an apartment were an important theme in the interviews. Some respondents had the feeling of never having all the papers together and being rejected because one paper was missing that they had not known about (I Jamila, I Besher).

The papers usually required to rent an apartment are the following: credit disclosure (SCHUFA), proofs of income (or proof of rent allocation by the Jobcentre), self-disclosure, motivation letter, CV (in some cases), rental payment confirmation (document issued by the former landlord to prove that the individual has no rent debts), and confirmation of a financial guarantee (in case the individual does not have a sufficient income) (Immobilienscout 24, 2018).

For a long-term Berlin resident, putting all these documents together is a usual procedure when looking for a place. However, for Syrian refugees that just arrived in Germany, this can be a confusing task. It is also a matter of habitus; how people are used to navigate in their local housing market and which rules and codes exists. These are different in Syria and in Germany.
One example is the SCHUFA (Credit disclosure) which does not exist in Syria and of which none of the interviewees had known before.

> „Yes, so I think, an apartment, finding a one-bedroom or two-bedroom apartment is very difficult, especially because here you need SCHUFA and salary statements and everything, I had nothing of this. I didn't know what SCHUFA is, I never heard of it. Only here in Berlin." (translated, I Besher)

Nazmi as a counterexample, appreciated the fact that the procedure to sign a contract was so clear and organized. However, he emphasizes the fact that he needed some German skills to be able to understand better.

> "It was so easy because you have here a very nice thing called protocol, you can get everything, all the documents you need for the contract so it's easy. Maybe it's also good that I started to learn German so it was easier to me to understand what was happening."(I Nazmi)

All respondents were aware of the strained housing market in Berlin (as described in chapter 5). This became clear as respondents compared their own situation to that of the local population, stating that the Berlin housing market is extremely difficult, even for locals.

> *"On the internet we did, we contacted some people and we actually went to some housing companies and of course, that was done throughout, you know with the competition of even Germans who actually live in Berlin who want to go for an apartment." Yassin*

The overcrowded housing market in Berlin posed two main challenges for respondents: first, their lack of agency, and second, the arbitrary decision-making process of companies and landlords.

The first one takes place when visiting a single apartment:

> *"When you go see a flat, you go to the appointment, you see the flat but you get a choc because they are lot of people like you waiting for the same. So in this case, you feel, that the owner can choose what he wants. There is no law for them to choose. I don't mean there is a problem inside, I mean there is no clear way how they choose you. So always you feel someone before you is better, so they will give them the flat." (I Nazmi)*

The second one happens when visiting or applying for flat-shares that look for a flatmate:

> *"Like I mean when you are meeting for a WG and there are also 30 people applying like, they are not choosing you, they are choosing who is working, not in Jobcenter and sometimes not Ausländer (translated: foreigners), that's true..."(I Anas)*

This quote leads to another issue encountered widely by the respondents. The issue of discrimination on the housing market. Two female respondents told stories about discrimination they had experienced: One of them felt discriminated because she was Syrian (I Asli) and the other one who was prevented from signing a contract for a confirmed and agreed-upon flat because the employee saw her wearing a veil.

> *"We came to see the flat and we said we want it so we sent an e-mail to tell them. Then we went to the office of the company and the employee saw us, she saw my veil and said: „no the flat needs reparations". We had all the papers and luckily we went to the office with a man who talked to the employee and we could convince them to make us sign the contract. " (tanslated, I Arwa)*

Another barrier encountered on the housing market is the affiliation with the Jobcentre and the dependence on social benefits. Many landlords and housing administrations are reluctant to rent to individuals (be they refugees or not) receiving social benefits. As all the respondents were still in the process of learning German, students or searching for a job, all of them were dependent on social benefits from the Jobcentre, at least partially. Some of the interviewees encountered this barrier in their searching process:

> „When I came to Berlin, I was taking part in an integration class. And people in the housing companies and administrations would always ask me at some point: "what are you doing at the moment?" What can I say, I'm new here, I just learn German and I am at the Jobcenter. "Oh we don't have any flat." (translated, Mehdi)

One of the respondents wanted to get a job to find a flat because she was under the impression that the budget provided by the state and the jobcentre to find an apartment was too little (Jamila).

One barrier, that can also become an opportunity in the right condition, is the fact that many housing administrations want a financial guarantee from the tenant when they are affiliated to the jobcentre, as they cannot provide any German salary statements. One respondent got the possibility to get a financial guaranty from his aunt living in Berlin (I Mehdi). Another one deplored the fact that he did not know anyone in the city who could give him such a guaranty:

> "I don't know anyone in Berlin who is really earning money. Housing administrations want a financial guarantee or a stable salary." (translated, I Othman)

On the field of housing in Berlin, a significant economic capital, either in the form of financial security or in the form of a financial guaranty, simplifies or even open the access to the housing market. Even if all refugees get support from the state if they are not earning money on their own, the fact of getting provided rent by the jobcentre has proved to be a barrier in some cases. Syrian refugees that do not have access to such an economic capital have to rely on other forms of capital to access the field.

One issue that is particularly encountered by refugees because of their legal status is the fact that housing administrations or landlords do not want to rent to refugees because the residency could end from one day to another. This is a fallacy because in the case of Syrian refugees, the asylum status in Germany, when they get it, is rather secure and long-lasting for the moment. Still, this was an argument used by a housing administration to refuse to rent to a Syrian refugee (I Mehdi).

The use of Internet to search for a house is predominant in Berlin. Going to private housing companies and administrations directly is not a thing in this city. However, this is something that was seen as difficult by many respondents because it works differently in Syria and they had to learn how to search for a flat in the Internet in the first place:

"Using Immobilienscout[1] was very hard, I understand the mechanism, we used to do it by people knowing people. It's very hard for a person who comes from a culture that doesn't work this way, the system doesn't work this way, the law doesn't work this way. To understand how these procedures actually obstructing you from getting an apartment, maybe for Germans it's a normal procedure but for us it's not the same. the frustration comes from the misunderstanding of understanding how it works and then you feel frustrated, they are treating me like this, they are not wanting us."(I Asli)

The two previous chapters illustrated how Syrian refugees understand and navigate the structural conditions they are facing. Entering the field of the housing market in Berlin with a foreign habitus is already a challenging situation, procedures work differently than what the people used to. Added to that, the lack of economic capital, being dependent on the rent allocated by the state and various forms of discrimination impedes the access even more. The following parts will concentrate on the strategies to take action within this structural framework.

Building social networks

The importance of networks to build up social capital when it comes to the search for housing has been explained before in this thesis. In the following, the Syrian refugee's perception of their social networks will be displayed and separated in homogeneous networks and social relations with locals as referenced in the theoretical part.

> *"Yes, now I realized, you need a lot of contacts in Berlin to find an apartment, a lot of contacts, a lot of acquaintances." (I Besher)*

Homogeneous networks

In some cases, the fact of knowing people from Syria or other refugees has been a positive way to get information or to access the housing market. These are homogeneous networks as they are connecting individuals with the same sort of resources and capitals. Mehdi as example got to know a housing company that would rent apartments to refugees through a friend that he encountered in the integration class, which is reserved for refugees:

> *"Through a friend. I met him in the integration class. He told me, that he had a friend who found an apartment in Marzahn" (translated, I Mehdi)*

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[1] Immobilienscout is an Internet-based company for housing ads. Private owners and companies can insert on this website and individuals can apply for apartments directly on the website or write a private message to the owner or company.

For another one on the contrary, the Syrian refugees that he got to know when he arrived were of no use for the housing search because they were in the same situation as him.

> "At this point I had no friends and all my friends were Syrian or Kurds and I didn't know anybody that could help me." (translated, Othman)

Others talked about the possibility of moving in with their family because it would be easier to arrange as they already know each other:

> "Maybe yes, with my family, with my brother, if he finds a good flat or a house." (translated, Jamila)

One thing that can be noted here is that the response comes from a Syrian woman and she states "if he finds something". A similar statement came from another woman, Sanaa, who is in Berlin with her husband. She confessed that she does not search for places, that her husband went through all the search procedure alone and that she had no idea on how he searched (Sanaa). A sense of dependency towards close family is noticeable here.

One other woman was very cautious about the fact of living near the Arabic or Turkish community, in Neukölln especially which is the epicentre of the Arabic community in Berlin:

> "I don't wanna live in a place full of arabs because I don't wanna be like observed, cultural cohesion is a good thing sometimes but a lot of times for a girl living alone it's a lot of control and suspicions and talks and actually I'm not in a mood to do this, I'm not in a place where I have to feel I'm culturally bound again to some rules, they were different when you were in your country but now they are imposed more than they are guiding your behaviour so there are just too much extremists, I didn't feel comfortable being around it, you never know what can happen. I don't want to live in a place where there is a lot of suspicion. I didn't want to live in Neukölln, yeah I tried to look for one, you know I was so desperate but there were my least favorites, in places with a lot of turkish or arab communities, I didn't feel so comfortable. Some people do but maybe living alone as a girl is a different situation" (I Asli)

This citation points out to the issue of social control that can be present in cases of homogeneous networks because of cultural norms. The theme of social control and dependency towards family members was only present in interviews with female Syrians. Having a lot of contact with their own ethnic community can also structure the behaviour and lead to a loss of agency. The fact that these responses were formulated mainly by women can presuppose that there is a stronger sense of normative control on women within their own ethnic communities.

On the whole, homogeneous networks do not seem to play a big role in the search for housing. They were more important in the arrival process to get information and support from people from the own ethnic community and they might be important in other parts of life after the arrival in a new society. However, the interviewed Syrian refugees saw more potential in the friendships and contacts with the local population as a way to get access to the housing market.

Heterogeneous networks

It was a priority for a lot of the respondents to get to know Germans or locals that would give them information or help them (I Jamila, I Nazmi, I Asli, I Yassin). For Bourdieu, social networks, in order to generate social capital, must be homogeneous because they presuppose acknowledgement of other forms of capital or of a certain habitus. The interviewed refugees were almost all from large Syrian cities and had all or were all studying in universities. Even if the question has not been asked, a homogeneity can be presupposed in these networks.

However, put in perspective with Bourdieu's theory, Germans have another group habitus but also individual habitus than the Syrian interviewees, therefore they might have other resources and be able to draw upon other sources of capital on the housing market. One form of capital that they at least already have is the cultural capital in the form of language skills. Furthermore, their incorporated habitus can help them to know in which way to interact with housing administrations. One widely employed strategy to find an apartment on the dense Berliner housing market is to ask all friends and acquaintances if they can help. All the interviewees did that.

> *"So is it difficult to find a flat or not? Yes it's difficult, also for germans but if I'm just a foreigner, it's so difficult, it's crazy. But when you have friends, who like you, so in this case, it goes better."* Nazmi

A lot of the interviewees stated that they found their apartment or got information that would help them find one through a contact to a German friend.

> *"The thing that I heard most of was people finding places or apartments through people, that was the end of it. Such an example in my case, through friends I got a place to stay at."* Yassin

Sometimes, German friends would look for an apartment their selves for the refugee or have or know someone who has a direct contact to a landlord and can arrange a meeting. These direct interactions were the most helpful because it has worked every time. Here again, a

German person holds more knowledge on how to act with landlords and housing administration. Also, the fact that a German person is the contact person simplifies the communication of the landlords or employee from the housing administration: they encounter a person with a similar group habitus and can relate to them.

> Interviewee: *"Our friend searched by internet and she find a flat and she come and see the flat and discovered that the owner of the flat was her friend. So we can get this flat because she talked to the owner"*
> Interviewer: *"So, this friend searched an apartment for you?"*
> Interviewee: *"yes"*
> Interviewer: *"Is it a german friend?"*
> Interviewee: *"yes, natürlich [of course]!!"* (I Sanaa)

The option to live in a flat-share to meet local people, create contact and learn the language, only for the interviewed men though, was evaluated both in negative and positive terms.

> Interviewer: *"Did you want to live in a flat-share?"*
> Interviewee: *„Now maybe but back then, when I worked no. I cannot live with people that I don't know. Also culturally, I never lived with strangers.„* (translated, I Othman)

Apart from this negative feeling about living with others, the other respondents were rather positive about the fact of living in a flat-share. However, some did not find any and finally found an apartment on their own instead (I Mehdi, I Yassin).
Others searched for flat-shares through websites offering flat-share ads and German friends but only the latter strategy did bring results in the end.

> *„I tried everything to be honest, I had already heard that it's very hard to find a room in a flat-share. That's why I posted something on Facebook and then on this website I wrote to thousands of people but nobody responded, so I thought ok, I'm not going to find a room. And then I found one through this friend, without her, I would probably have slept on the streets for a few weeks, I was very worried."* (translated, I Besher)

There was also a sense of distinction from other refugees that would not be interested in meeting the German community:

> *„I got to know people you know? The others, they don't know the language, they are not well integrated. I didn't think it was right so I tried to meet people."* Hakim

All in all, the fact of knowing locals was seen as something positive in order to find housing and different strategies were employed to get to know Germans and become friends with them. The fact of knowing Germans opened up opportunities and provided resources to most

of the interviewees. Their German friends drew upon their personal social networks and thus extended the network of social relations of the interviewed Syrian refugees, at least in the case of the search for housing.

The role of social organisations and volunteers

In Berlin, the density of social organisations run by locals to help refugees with issues concerning housing is very high. Since 2015, a lot of organisations were created, ones that are supporting for different issues and others that are concentrating on the search for housing, as the ones presented earlier in this thesis.

However, in the sample of interviewees, nobody tried any of these and some of the respondents did not even know about the existence of such organisations.

> *"No, no, even back in the Turnhalle, we tried the social workers and they said we can't help you with this, they just referred us to phone apps, they helped us with the phone apps and that was it but there was no governmental or non-governmental body that had the name we help people find places to stay. That was not the case" (I Yassin)*

> *"I don't know if there are organisations that can help people in this."(I Sanaa)*

From the responses that the refugees gave about their knowledge and use of existing social organisations helping people to find apartments, there seems to be a mismatch in communication or the sample of interviewees did not have to rely too much on organisations to find housing.
Also as explained before in the thesis, the refugees that are asking for help from these organisations come sometimes with great expectations which can lead to disappointment in the following:

> *Interviewer: "And social organisations?*
> *Interviewee: "I didn't really try because some friends tried and they told me we have nothing" (I Anas)*

The only organisation that appeared to be helpful in the housing trajectories of the Syrians interviewed was the Sharehaus Refugio (see Box 1). However, this is most probably due to the fact that three interviewees lived or had lived there which makes the project more visible than others.

Box 1 - Sharehaus Refugio – an alternative housing project

Since 2015, refugees and locals live and work together in this house in the neighbourhood of Neukölln in Berlin. The inhabitants live in large flat-shares where they share the kitchen. Everyone has an individual room and bathroom.

Furthermore, this house hosts offices of diverse social organisations.

The project is funded by a large caritative organisation "Berliner Stadtmission". The idea is to create social contacts between different groups and an integration into the neighborhood through the house community.

Inhabitants are allowed to live in this house for up to 15 months and three of the respondents live or have lived in the Sharehaus Refugio. As Nazmi states:

"It's just to give you a chance to start your first steps in the city so in this 15 months, you look for a flat and I think this is enough to find." Nazmi

Jamila got the chance to move in because she is a woman and the organisator thought it would be beneficial to have a woman as there was none living there by the time Jamila moved. Nazmi and his wife moved in for one and half year after having lived in a camp for 9 months. Anas moved in after a period of homelessness, sleeping on couches of his family members for about 6 months.

Language skills

To start navigating the housing market and gaining the agency to influence the housing trajectory, the command of German is essential, as seen many times until now. Speaking German is associated here with cultural capital that individuals acquire after arriving to Germany.

> Interviewee*: "So difficult for us to find a flat, we couldn't speak german"*
> Interviewer*: "Do you think german is the only condition?"*
> Interviewee*: "No but it's the first step to find and you know what is the condition for the flat, where is it, etc." (I Sanaa)*

To be able to navigate the bureaucratic procedures and understand what they need to do, the respondents needed German skills (I Jamila). Asli talked about one discriminating experience with a housing administration because of her lack of German language skills:

> *"After I got the keys I heard, the guy who was helping me, by coincidence he was also kurdish, I didn't know until I got the apartment, he told me that the first woman she didn't want to give me the apartment because I didn't speak German so I told myself it's either racist or because she doesn't want to handle all the conversation in English, I mean I told them that I study in english and apparently I can speak good english." (I Asli)*

The ethnic community of an individual can be an important support to start a life in a new society of which the language is still unknown. As Nazmi states, in the beginning it is easy to stay in Neukölln, where the Arabic community is meeting, in order to have less difficulties with language at least:

> "This is important, one year from now, my German was bad so I wanted to be in Neukölln, I didn't want to go outside because in Neukölln it's easy to move and to connect with my society." (I Nazmi)

Once the language skills became better and the individuals were able to orientate themselves within the field of the housing market, the agency seemed to grow and the limitations and barriers seemed lesser. With the gain of cultural capital, the Syrian interviewees were able to rely less on homogeneous networks within their own ethnic community. The individuals were able to use their cultural and social capital to counter their limited economic capital:

> "Now my german is better so it's no problem to find a flat in any place in Berlin. So it's important in the beginning, people want to be in the same place so it's so difficult to find a place. If you are ready to go anywhere in Berlin, in this case no problem for me to go to Lichtenberg, to other place, you get more chances to find a place."(I Nazmi)

Informality

A theme that was present in all the interviews and known by all interviewees was the use of bribes in order to get apartments offers. From the information shared by the interviewed Syrians, it is possible to pay a "makler" (translated: Broker) that will find an apartment for the person. The amount of money can go from 1000 to 12000€ from the stories interviewees were telling. Also there are different theories on how to access the broker and how the deal works.

Almost everyone knew someone who found an apartment that way:

> "Yeah, all my friends found an apartment this way. They pay from 2000 per person." (I Sanaa)

One young Syrian man found his apartment through a broker and explained how the procedure worked for him:

> Interviewer: "How did you find your flat?"
> Interviewee: "Through a broker. (…)I asked a few friends who know how to find an apartment like this and heard that you need to pay an amount of 3000€. So I saved

some money. One friend of mine knows the broker because he is also Syrian. The broker works with a social worker. Then I saw the flat for the first time and got the flat after 2 weeks. (...) It only works if you know a person that knows a broker. (...) I met the Syrian, I mean the broker. The one that does everything is the social worker. He is also Turkish but was born here, I think. I had to pay 500€ first, so that he can look for apartments. I paid them, I didn't see the social worker first. When I paid the 2500€, I gave them to the social worker." (translated, I Othman)

Othman searched for an apartment for 6 months and was living in a refugee shelter during that time. He didn't want to live in a flat-share and had no German connections back then, only Syrian friends. He asked institutions and social organisations for help and never found anything through them. He states that he had no other choice and that it was his only solution in order to find a place (Othman). It took him several months to collect the money in order to pay the broker, he worked on his economic capital in order to cope with the fact that he had a limited heterogeneous network and that the social organisations or the administrative office like the Jobcenter would not offer him any help.

The interviewees that did not find their apartment this way but who knew about this practice found it in general morally unacceptable and very dangerous. Both from the side of the person that hires a broker and from the brokers side:

"I think it's unfair, I mean, that's what I think. But maybe because I know many people and I can speak German and English, maybe I have other opportunities, maybe for the people who don't know anyone, who don't have any language, that's an option. But 3000 or 5000€ are big amounts of money, I don't understand it." (Translated, I Jamila)

„Unfortunately, there are a lot and unfortunately they are Arabs, Syrians or Libanese. Instead of helping, they are using us." (translated, I Mehdi)

From different stories, it appeared that housing administrations and companies are sometimes involved in these informal deals. This is what Anas realized practically with one apartment once:

Interviewee: "Libanese or Turkish. And also it's from the companies, they have contact with someone who is working there and he can control the situation and they are dividing the money between them."
Interviewer: "And the companies are renting companies, they are renting flats?
Interviewee: "yeah like DEGEWO or. Once I saw a flat and I saw it again with someone I can pay for. The same flat. I was super disappointed." (I Anas)

Some of the interviewees had reservations because of the price of this kind of informal deals, as most of the refugees are still supported by the government and receive social benefits:

> " I asked a very logical question, so a person who is funded, who gets social welfare from the state, how can they collect 2000 Euros and especially now we have families who are 3 or 4 members in one family and the prices go higher. I swear that I heard about people paying 5000 euros to find a place, two rooms, sometimes one room. And I gotta ask myself, where do they get the money from? So it did cross our minds but it was not a feasible or practical solution because there is no source of money." (I Yassin)

This informal market opens up the discussion about the reliance on informal networks of help to build a trajectory of housing in a new society. Even if most of the interviewees did not go this way to find housing, it is still a very present subject in most discussions when it comes to housing. It is seen as an easy solution to find housing but is morally charged. The financial aspect of it is also a barrier for many people that would have to save money over months, as Othman did.

It can also be considered as a strategy as well to rely on networks that are already existing and have brought results in the past. However, it also means a withdrawal from the formal structures of the local housing market. As the brokers are often from Arabic countries, the group habitus arguably is a shared one which makes the access to these kind of networks easier for individuals with the same habitus.

Well-Being during the search process

This final part is concerning the search for a house focusses on the feeling of well-being and stability of the Syrian refugees during this process. The framework of the housing market in Berlin makes it extremely hard to find an apartment, especially for refugees because of several factors that have been explained before. The interviewees were really conscious about this reality and adapted their needs and desires to it.

> "Yes, very difficult to find an apartment in Berlin, it's like a dream." (translated, I Jamila)

The fact that refugees at the same time undergo an official "integration process" (German classes, integration courses, study, finding a job, etc.) makes the situation of finding a place even more difficult and puts the individuals in an unstable situation when they have to combine both pathways:

> „It was so terrible. I don't know how I can describe this feeling. You have no stable situation, you are unsecure, you are restless. Yes, I did my language course but it was so

hard, but other things search for an apprenticeship, study, or others like work, you just can't." (translated, I Hakim)

Some of the interviewees did not find an apartment or a room in a flat-share fast enough and luckily had family where they could stay on the couch for a few months before being able to find something (Mehdi, Anas, Hakim). Here again, the homogeneous social network is important, as it gives individuals in a unstable situation to find a hint of stability and avoid homelessness.

When the search starts to become hard, the interviewed Syrians often lowered their expectations concerning housing

> *"I was desperate to find a room, no matter if I live with monsters or with cool people. (…) It was not the best at first. (…) I had no furniture, I slept on the floor, mattress and I had a desk and a chair, that was it."* (translated, I Besher)

Push-factors exist that force people to move out again and go on the search again. After a period of stability, people undergo the search process one or more times (I Sanaa, I Besher). The need for stability was always expressed in the interviews:

> *"I just want to know, I'm staying in this place for 2 years, I know how focussed I can be, study at least, do something. It makes it harder, when you're just starting and looking for an apartment."* (I Asli)i

After leaving the refugee shelter and having to find an apartment by their selves, Syrian refugees are also taking part in the nationally ruled integration program. Having to find a flat without being sure of the success and outcome of the process is already an unstable situation, but to this is added the time structure of the integration program which can be challenging (I Arwa).

It is this framework of restlessness and time-pressure in which the Syrian refugees interviewed for this research are surely in when they are developing strategies to look for housing and cope with the structure.

IX.   A PERMANENT HOME?

Preferring neighbourhoods

When talking about the neighbourhoods they lived in, a lot of interviewees emphasized the centrality and connectivity of their places. Berlin is a city that has many centres, which makes the centrality a relative concept.

> *"And it's close to the S-bahn, 6 minutes walk from the S-bahn but it's very far for a lot of people from the center from Berlin so wherever you think center is so if you think the center is Alexanderplatz it's around 25 minutes ride with the S-Bahn that means 30 minutes from your place."(I Asli)*

> *"It's close to everything. At least in Berlin for any place you want to go, you need half an hour or something like that so for me it's perfect until now, like close to my school, close to everything I want, the food, everything, the doctors, hospital, everything, nearly." (I Anasl*

In the choice and the preference of the neighbourhood within the city, habitus and knowledge about the city become clear. The habitus is expressed in the way that Syrian refugees coming from urban locations may have a preference for centrality, connectivity and accessibility of services when choosing their neighbourhood. Their growing knowledge of the city of Berlin aids them to know about the locations they prefer.

In addition to the connectivity and centrality, the life in the neighbourhood and the locality mattered as well. One prominent example is Neukölln which is the neighbourhood where a lot of the Arabic community meets. There are a lot of speciality shops, Arabic restaurants and cafés, even more since 2015. It is so prevalent that the main street of Neukölln, the Sonnenallee, has been renamed "Arab street" in casual conversations and in media reports (Alkousaa, 2018).

The neighbourhood of Neukölln can be a warm and welcoming place for some, a place where to meet other members of the Arabic community and not to feel like a stranger. A place where a lot of inhabitants share a similar group habitus:

> *"In the first place it's important that I don't feel like a foreigner, or the arab or I don't know what. I feel normal, like a normal human being. Then you have the food, here you have everything, what I want, what I like is here. So everything that I like is here in Neukölln on the Sonnenallee. There are a lot of bars, a lot of night shops, the infrastructure is very good. The location is nice as well, you are near the canal (...) It's also very central." (translated, I Besher)*

Yassin had a negative view on Neukölln, even if he was living in the neighbourhood:

"I like my place (laugh). I don't like, I think you know that this area is mostly densed with Arabic speaking population, especially Sonnenallee which I don't like personally because of the negative image it gives to outsiders. I'm really sensitive about the social dynamics of stereotyping and every single time I go there for something that I need I see something that bothers me, every single time for example somebody who is crossing the red light, somebody who is swearing in public, somebody who is fighting, just being noisy you know, all these things, I feel sensitive about because in my mind, the outsider exists, what will for example a German say when they see something like this and of course stereotyping is much more easier to say it's much more easier than saying, it's just a kid or just one person, it does not represent everybody, in my mind I think it's easier for people to stereotype, I don't like Sonnenallee because of the bad image it gives about who we are." (I Yassin)

Once again, the topic of the distinction from the Arabic community arises. Here, Neukölln which can be considered as an arrival neighbourhood, is described as a place where bad behaviours influence the way the Arabic community is seen in Berlin and a place from which the interviewee must refrain himself in order not to be associated with it.

In a similar vein, Arwa was worried about the fact that more and more Arabic people would move into her neighbourhood, where before there were mainly Germans:

"When I came here, we were the only arabic people in the street, then the company started to rent a lot of apartments to arabic people. Ok, I respect everyone but why is company creating a place with people all from the same origin, why? Here there are Arabic people so this place is not good, so if Arabic people want apartments we send them here. Why? Now there are 10 to 15 arabic people in my street." (translated, I Arwa)

Here the fear of a concentration of one ethnic group in a neighbourhood becomes clear. This apprehension goes in another direction from the idea of an arrival neighbourhood, where the ethnic community can provide support. Arwa is worried that this concentration will end up in giving a bad image of her:

"When you see I'm arabic and this bad Man or this bad woman is also arabic, the others say all the arabic people not good." (translated, I Arwa)

The orientation within the city grew with the time and the contacts the interviewee made. Their knowledge of the city, coupled with social relations to different persons, permitted

them to increase their capacity of choice and agency as they have a larger range of places in Berlin which they can choose and access.

Choosing a form of housing

All of the interviewees were in a more or less permanent living situation when the interviews took place. Anas and Jamila were still living in the Sharehaus Refugio, which is not a permanent housing solution. Sanaa and her husband had to start looking for a new apartment again because their landlord wanted the flat back. Besher was searching for a new flat-share because he was unhappy with the current one. Arwa lived in an apartment with her husband, Yassin was living in a sub-rental which could transform in a permanent housing. Mehdi and Othman both lived in single apartments and Hakim lived in a flatshare that he was really happy with.

Even if their trajectories led to housing at some point, the situation was still somewhat unstable. However, over time the interviewees were living in different housing arrangements and felt more or less stability after having found housing.

For many interviewees it was an important point to finally find an apartment for their selves to live in and to have some privacy after many months of communal living in refugee shelters.

> *"What was important that I have my own flat, without people sharing the kitchen or anything, this what was important but maybe luck that we have this flat in this place because we are in the middle of the city not so far from what we want." Nazmi*

For the individuals living in flat-shares, the most important theme concerning their living situation is the contact with their flat-mates.

> *„I find it very good. You have contact to other people, you can learn to know other cultures, every human thinks differently, even if people are respectful. (…) Our flat-share is very very good, we are an ideal flat-share." (translated, Hakim)*

Living in a flat-share is also a way to cope with the lack of economic capital, as the rent is often cheaper because of the division between different people.

As housing is shaping subjective well-being (Zavisca and Gerber, 2016), it was important to ask about the sense of well-being and stability since the interviewees found more or less stable housing situations. The sense of stability varied a lot among the interviewees, probably because of their different housing arrangements. Jamila, who was still living in Refugio, felt unstable in this situation, even if she was not threatened with loosing her place in the Sharehaus:

Interviewer: "Do you feel stable in your housing situation?"
Interviewee: „mmmh. mhhm (shakes her head)"
Interviewer: „Do you have the feeling, you can influence it somehow?"
Interviewee: „I like to live in the Sharehaus, but this is not like a house, this is not like a private apartment, it's only the first step. It's only the beginning, it's ok. I got to know a lot of people here, and this is only for short time and yes, my contract is temporary, so it is not my ideal apartment. You always search something for the long-term."
(translated, I Jamila)

However, most interviewees reported a sense of stability when they were living in individual apartments, even if these were not secure for an unlimited amount of time or if they were not the principal tenants (I Anas, I Yassin, I Nazmi, I Mehdi)

"It gave me a very very settled kind of state of being, state of mind, again the security thing you were talking about, I feel that. But I always worry, I'm happy in it and now I call it home really but there are in my head these scenarios where I tell myself, what will happen if I got a note to evacuate? (laugh) Like these bad scenarios they always exist in my head but really I like it, I live in it as a home." (I Yassin)

The feeling of being lucky was present in a lot of discussions (I Yassin, I Jamila, I Arwa, I Hakim, I Anas, I Nazmi). It was often said when put in contrast with the difficult housing market in Berlin and the situation of many other refugees in Berlin that are still struggling to find individual apartments or to leave the camps and shared accommodations.

Aspirations

The final part of the result presentation will shortly display the future aspirations that Syrian refugees talked about in the interviews. The situation of a refugee can change in many ways over time. One important personal change that can happen is a family reunification as in the case of Yassin, who is waiting for his Fiancée to get her visa for Germany.

"At this point I'm waiting for my fiancée to join me here, we applied for family reunion so once we are two people in the apartment, the job center would pay more so I think by that time, we can apply for having the contract on our own name and that would be more, like more secure I think somehow. We see how things go." (I Yassin)

Moreover, all the interviewees that were living in a flat-share wished to move into an individual apartment in the future.

"I would never live in a flat-share long-term. Ultimately, I want to live alone somewhere, if I have the chance to find a two-bedroom-flat here for example." (translated, I Besher)

This makes the flat-share a solution for a while, to meet people, save money and still have some privacy in an own room but for the long-term the researched goal is to have a single apartment with more space and privacy. From the interviews, it became clear that living in flat-shares is not a usual thing to do in Syria (I Asli). This again refers to a group habitus and some interviewees chose the flat-share solution because it seemed an easier access to the housing market and it lowered the costs of living (I Besher, I Hakim).

As the housing market is difficult and the interviewees did not always find their ideal living situation, the question was asked if they would consider moving out of Berlin to have better opportunities elsewhere. Most of the respondents wanted to stay in Berlin, because they got used to the city and appreciate it even if the housing situation is not always favourable (I Yassin, I Nazmi, I Mehdi, I Asli, I Othman). Others wanted to move from Berlin but only if a better offer, be it housing or job would materialize in another place (I Jamila, I Besher, I Anas).

X. CONCLUSION

Discussion of the results

After presenting the results of the interviews led with three social organisations, one employee of the Senate of Berlin, seven male Syrian refugees, three female Syrian refugees and, one female Syrian student, a discussion of the results in connection to the initial research questions, hypothesis, theoretical framework will follow.

As a reminder, this thesis sought to investigate the following research questions: *What are the strategies employed by Syrian refugees in Berlin in order to access the housing market? How are the structural conditions shaping these strategies?*

To understand the strategies of Syrian refugees, it was necessary to investigate the structural setting in Berlin's housing market, one marked by housing shortages and increasing rents.
As refugees are subject to multiple forms of discrimination in the housing market, special housing policies for refugees are put in place by the Senate of Berlin to facilitate their access to housing. However, while the official aim of the Berlin Senate is to permit and encourage the housing of refugees in private and decentralized apartments, the policies actually implemented often involve housing solutions in shared accommodations.

Moreover, the Berlin Senate, the housing companies, the landlords and other powerful actors on the housing field are seeking to maintain their position of power by "imposing the laws of functioning" (Bourdieu, 1986, 49) in the field. These powerful actors prevent others from influencing the discourse by excluding particular social organisations or the refugees themselves from discussions within the political sphere. Landlords and housing administrations also hold powerful positions and can make arbitrary decisions determining who is permitted to rent an apartment and who is refused. These practices increase the level of discrimination that Syrian refugees may encounter.

The actors controlling the informal housing market are also in a position of power; they give refugees the access to the housing market through financial means, protecting them from arbitrariness, but exploiting their hardship and often, as stated in the interviews with NGOs, defrauding the refugees.

As the aim of this thesis was to investigate the strategies of Syrian refugees to access housing in Berlin, the focus of this analysis lies on the responses of the Syrian refugees. Their first arrival in Germany and the asylum procedure puts the Syrian refugees in a situation where they lose a lot of their agency; Rules and restrictions are structuring their lives. However, interviewees still seemed to regain agency within this framework of constraint, by, for example, deciding their arrival destination. This unexpected agency is mainly due to a loss of

control by the state in a period of emergency (especially in the summer 2015).

The Syrian refugees first encounter the German bureaucracy and the structural framework directing the arrival process with their individual habitus. Thus, they have to learn about the specificities and acquire knowledge about procedures in order to adapt their practices and strategies.

Refugees' living situations are marked by a complete loss of agency. The lack of privacy inthe shared accommodation and refugee shelters was a burden, particularly for women. In this situation of emergency and uncertainty, the Syrian refugees start to create first links and social contacts outside of their homogeneous networks with other refugees. It is these external links that will become useful later in their housing trajectory. The first elements of strategy are becoming visible here after the acquisition of basic knowledge concerning the legal and administrative context.

After the Syrian refugees receive granted asylum, the process of searching for private accommodation begins. From their previous knowledge of the structural setting, all interviewees already knew that they could not rely on institutions (including the Jobcentre or the State office for Refugee Matters) but would rather have to develop other strategies in order to access the field of housing. This highlights the state's withdrawal from the issue of housing after refugees receive granted asylum. The only practical help the state still offers to refugees is the allocation of the rent for their apartment and other social benefits. Apart from this, refugees must rely on NGOs and their own strategies in order to access the difficult housing market in Berlin.

The following image (See figure 2) seeks to present the results of the interview, within the context of the theoretical framework:
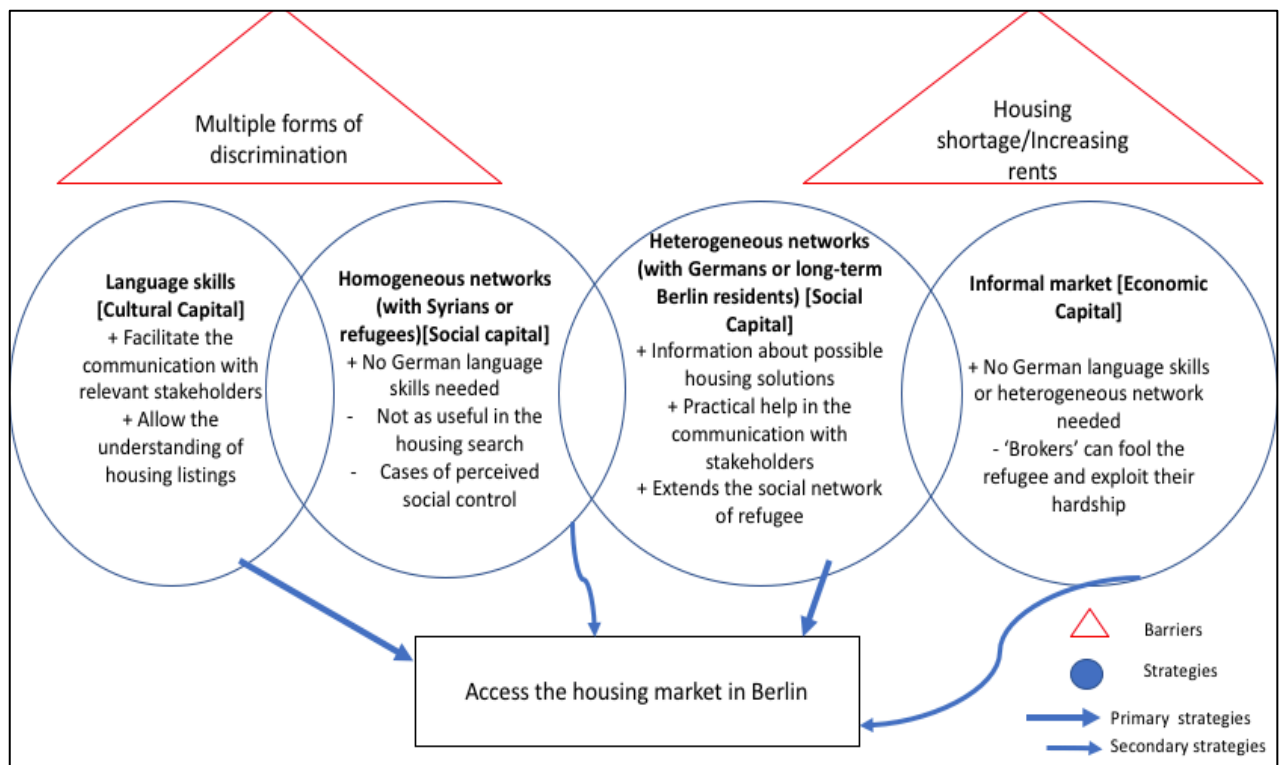
Figure 2: own illustration – The strategies of Syrian refugees to access the housing market in Berlin

The field of housing in Berlin is a new field to navigate as it works following specific rules. As the refugees enter this field with their own foreign habitus, they are seeking to orientate themselves quickly to understand the codes of the housing market. Soon, the barriers to access the housing market become clear. The discrimination touched upon earlier in this part is visible: Syrian refugees are discriminated against based on their legal status as refugees, based on their visible expression of religion (i.e. women wearing veils), and based on their dependence on social benefits, which signals to other housing market actors that they are part of an economically disadvantaged social group. Adding to these barriers, the lack of economic capital, which is a very important form of capital on the housing market in general, put the interviewees in an unfavourable position to access the housing market.

That said, all the Syrian refugees for this research were still able to find independent housing in Berlin. There each developed strategies to access the housing market, despite the barriers that they encountered. This research found out that the Syrian refugees acquired and accumulated different forms of capital and homogeneous and heterogeneous social networks over time to access housing.

Learning the German language, as a form of cultural capital, was an important factor for general orientation in the housing market; languages skills enabled respondents to read housing advertisements and speak in German with employees of housing administrations or landlords. The more this cultural capital was accumulated, the more the Syrian refugees felt reassured in the search process. However, German language skills did not protect the

interviewees from being discriminated against, as their ethnicity, legal situation, and dependence on social benefits remained unchanged.

Economic capital has played a subordinate role in the search for housing in the most cases of the Syrians refugees interviewed. However, the bribe system in the informal housing market, reportedly managed mostly by individuals coming from Arabic speaking countries, gave prominence to economic capital. One interviewee, and many other Syrian refugees discussed in the interviews, took advantage of this informal form of housing allocation. Through an accumulation of economic capital, in the form of a sum of cash, the interviewee could access the housing market without going through the formal circuit. This means, he could rely solely on economic capital (with no need to acquire other forms of capital) and he managed to avoid multiple forms of discrimination encountered by Syrian refugees in the formal circuit. avoided the several forms of discrimination that Syrian refugees reported and did not have Since the "brokers" are mainly from Arabic speaking countries, the language is already shared. His foreign group habitus shared with the one of the brokers allowed him to make contact and to build trust. This way of finding a house was used by the interviewee mainly because he had no other form of capital at his disposal: no German language skills and no social relations with Germans or other locals. However, this way of finding a house was rebuked by most interviewees.

The most important form of capital used to access the housing market was social capital. The homogeneous networks with other refugees or other Syrians tended not to be particularly useful as the individuals involved in these networks often faced the same structural barriers in the housing market. Realizing that homogeneous social networks with other refugees or other Syrians will not be beneficial enough to find housing (except in the case of the "brokers"), the interviewees constructed and relied on heterogeneous social networks.
These networks are mainly composed by Germans and locals who were already Berlin residents, and are considered heterogeneous mainly because the Syrian refugees are creating links to individuals from another nationality than theirs. As in Yassin's case however, he created contact to other academics which gave him access to the housing market. The networks are thus also homogeneous based on social class and educational background, for example. Present here is the idea of homogeneity discussed in the theoretical framework.

As most of the interviewees are from large Syrian cities, there is also a shared habitus of individuals accustomed to large cities. Nonetheless, the social relations with Germans and locals enabled the Syrian refugees to put into practice social capital in order to access the housing market, by being referred to a landlord or receiving advice on how to search effectively.

All in all, the interviewees reported that the process of searching for a house is accompanied by a feeling of uncertainty and instability. The outcomes of this search are different forms of

housing that have been presented in the previous. In addition, the interviewees acquired a sense of orientation of the city and could distinguish between places they would prefer to live in and places they would not. The attachment to a neighbourhood with a large Arabic population, for example, was valued very differently; Some interviewees had a strong attachment to the neighbourhood Neukölln (with the largest part of Arabic population) because of a lowered level of discrimination and "otherness" often felt in different niehgbourhoods. Others agreed that, in neighbourhoods with a high proportion of Arabic population, there was an increased level of social control and decreased opportunities to be integrated in heterogeneous networks with Germans. In these responses, there was both a tendency to create distinction from other refugees or other Syrians, and a greater will to create links to the German population.

This research showed that it is the acquired knowledge of the field that made the actors develop particular strategies in order to cope with the given structure. Parts of these strategies were to acquire different forms of capital employed to attain different goals.
As Harker et al. stated: "The idea of strategy, like the orientation of practice, is not conscious nor calculated nor is it mechanically determined. It is intuitive product of 'knowing' the rules of the game" (Harker, Mahar and Wilkes, 2016, 18).

The research also demonstrated that the Syrian refugees re-evaluated their goals as they learned more about the *rules of the game* in the field of the Berliner housing market. This becomes clear in their trajectories and the way they speak about their search process: the search is not easier, as the housing market is not changing considerably, and the rents are still as high, but the strategies and practices stay similar and the acquired capital can be used in more useful ways.

Concluding thoughts

This research about the strategies used by Syrian refugees with granted asylum to access the tense housing market in Berlin has shown several things. One major outcome has been the realization that the state is withdrawing from the issue of accessing the housing market as soon as the refugees are granted asylum. The Syrian interviewees were very conscious about the fact that they had to find housing independently and could not rely on any practical help from the state, except receiving rent costs and social benefits.
Here lies an important paradox revealed by this research: Both the state and the refugees aim at decentralized and individual housing; However, the state is not facilitating this housing form structurally, and concentrates on the construction of centralized shared accommodations for refugees.

Multiple levels of discrimination have been pointed out as well: on the basis of the ethnicity and religion, especially for women wearing a veil; on the basis of the dependence on social

benefits; and on the basis of the legal status as refugees. These discriminations represent barriers to access the housing market alongside with the structural housing shortage, low level of social housing, increasing rents, and arbitrariness of housing administrations and landlords in the choice of tenants.

These structural conditions in which Syrian refugees with granted asylum find themselves are influencing their strategies to access the housing market. Syrian refugees rely mostly on different forms of capital – cultural, economic and social – in various ways to build their strategy on accessing housing.

Cultural capital, in the form of language skills, is helping the individuals to understand the market conditions and the housing listings (i.e. advertisements). Furthermore, it helps the communication with actors in the housing field that are mostly German-speaking.

Economic capital –arguably one of the most important forms of capital in the field of housing – is a secondary form of capital for refugees because they are helped by the state with the allocation of the rent in the form of social benefits. However, the economic capital is important on the informal housing market – which gives individuals the opportunity to access housing with the help of bribes.

Social capital is the most useful form of capital, according to the Syrian interviewees. Heterogeneous networks with Germans allowed them to access information and get practical help accessing housing. Homogeneous networks with other refugees or other Syrians has been proven less beneficial, at least in the housing field, as other refugees and Syrians are encountering similar barriers in the market.

This research has proven that the Syrian refugees develop different forms of strategies and draw upon different networks and capital to access the field of housing, despite the structural barriers they encounter.

Apart from addressing the problems of housing shortages and increasing rents by fostering social housing construction programs, the city of Berlin needs to put in place mechanisms and rules to protect refugees from multiple forms of discrimination in the housing market. Furthermore, as social networks proved to be the most beneficial form of network in the search for housing, it could be interesting to fund more initiatives and organisations that help refugees to find housing or create buddy-programs to connect refugees and locals.

Further research could explore the need for state-led initiatives and policies to effectively permit the access of refugees with granted asylum to access the housing market and lower the levels of discriminatory practices. Furthermore, the informal housing market needs further investigation, so as to prevent the withdrawal of many individuals from the formal

housing market. Moreover, the role and efficiency of social organisations needs to be assessed in order to provide them the opportunity to develop their activities, gain knowledge, and include them in a general strategy to grant refugees access to the housing market in Berlin.

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APPENDIX

Introduction of the research

Discuss: Interview topics, anonymity and confidentiality, expected duration of interview, permission to record/take notes (if using), interview method

1. Organisation

Could you briefly describe what are the main objectives of your organisation?

How long have you been working with refugees?

Can you talk a bit about the current situation with refugees in Paris, France/Berlin, Germany?

How important do you consider proper housing for the wellbeing of refugees and asylum-seekers?

Does it have any effect and if yes, in what way?

What are the biggest challenges for your organisation?

Would you say that working with refugees has its specificities? If yes, what are those?

2. Network/Cooperation

What are your main actors you cooperate with in Berlin?

Are you connected with actors located in other cities or countries?

How important is or could be a national or cross-national connection for you?

How do you get in contact with your "clients", the people you want to provide help for?

Which national/city policies are important in your daily work?

How are national/urban policies on housing helping or preventing you to do your work?

Gender

From your expertise, which role would you say does gender play in the search for housing of Syrian refugees?

Which differences do you see when a man or a woman looks for a place to live?

Would you say that either man or woman are more discriminated on the housing market? For what reasons?

3. Future plans

Do you have a future vision for your organisation?
Do you have a set of goals you strive to achieve?
If it is a long-term plan, how successful has it been so far?
How do you see the future of housing of refugees with granted asylum, in relation to the city?

4. Final remarks

Ask if they would like to say something else on the interview topics, provide contact details (if not given before), recommend another potential interviewee, etc.

Interview-guide – Coordinator for Refugee Management, Berlin

Could you describe the tasks of the Office for the Coordination for Refugee Management?

How does the living situation of Syrian refugees in Berlin look like?

What is the strategy employed by the city of Berlin to host refugees with granted asylum?

What is the housing situation of women and families especially?

What are the main barriers refugees are experiencing in the housing market?

What are the main challenges concerning the hosting of refugees with granted asylum?

Which actors are you working with in Berlin?

Interview-Guide Refugees

Discuss

Interview topics, anonymity and confidentiality, expected duration of interview, permission to record/take notes (if using), interview method

Background information

Personal history:

Could you tell me a little about you? Where are you from originally? What were you doing in Syria before you left the country?
How long have you been in Berlin?
What is your situation in the process of seeking asylum?
What changed in your situation since you have been granted asylum? Which office is important for you now and what is new for you in relation to housing?
Is your close or extended family in Berlin as well?
Did you know anyone before arriving here?
What was the reason for coming to Berlin for you?

Housing history:

Where did you live just after being granted asylum?
Can you describe all flats that you lived in since your asylum until today?
On what criteria did you chose the different apartments you lived in until today?
Where were these apartments located in the city?
How did you like the neighbourhoods you were living in?
Did these neighborhoods have special features and places that you liked?
Why did you move from one place to the other?
How did the search for housing go?
Have you ever felt discrimination of some kind or other difficulties while searching for an apartment/house?
What kind of help, that you know about, is provided from government side to help you find housing?
Did you personally get help from the government or for what reasons didn't you take the help?
Can you talk a little bit about finances? How are you paying for your housing?
(Follow-up questions: With how many people were you living there and there? Were you satisfied with this housing situation? Why did you move from there to there?)

Factors inducing changes in the housing situation:

What was the most challenging in the process of finding housing here?
Did you get help by certain networks? NGOs, Government, family, friends, Internet?
Did you get help from persons that are not in Germany/France?
What, in your opinion, helped you the most to find housing?

Mind map: Could you draw me your personal actors map of your search for housing? Which actors were important, who helped you? Who is connected to who?

Satisfaction:

How satisfied are you with the way you are living right now?
If not, how do you see the changes in the coming times?
How attached to the place/neighbourhood/city do you feel?

Personal information

Relevance: to be asked only when informant has not already volunteered this information. For contextualisation and sampling purposes.